

24:32 *Learn a parable*- Lk. 13:6-9 records another parable of the fig tree, upon which that in the Olivet prophecy is based. Jesus, the dresser of God's vineyard of Israel, came seeking spiritual fruit on the fig tree, for the three years of his ministry. Because of the lack of it, the tree was cut down. Christ said "Now (i.e. towards the end of the tribulation period?) learn a parable of the fig tree" (Mt. 24:32). It is tempting to read this as effectively meaning 'Now learn *the* parable of the fig tree', seeing that the parable of the Olivet prophecy is so similar to the previous fig tree parable.

When his branch is yet tender- The obvious connection in Jewish minds would be with Messiah as the pre-eminent branch of Israel (Is. 11:1; Jer. 23:5; 33:15; Ez. 17:22; Zech. 3:8; 6:12). Lk. 21 adds the detail that we are to look also at "all the trees". A tender branch, all the trees, the Kingdom of God- these are all themes to be found in Ez. 17:22-24: "Thus says the Lord Yahweh: I will also take of the lofty top of the cedar [the dynasty of the house of David], and will set it. I will crop off from the topmost of its young twigs a tender one, and I will plant it on a high and lofty mountain. In the mountain of the height of Israel will I plant it [the return of Christ to Mount Zion?]; and it shall bring forth boughs, and bear fruit, and be a goodly cedar. Under it shall dwell all birds of every wing; in the shade of its branches shall they dwell [this is the picture of Christ's Kingdom- Mk. 4:32]. All the trees [cp. "the fig tree and all the trees"] of the field shall know that I, Yahweh, have brought down the high tree, have exalted the low tree, have dried up the green tree, and have made the dry tree to flourish. I, Yahweh, have spoken and have done it". This last verse was clearly in the Lord's mind as He was led out to Golgotha (Lk. 23:31). This clearly Messianic language is associated by the Lord with the beginnings of spiritual fruit on the fig tree of Israel. The fig tree has to identify with Him as Messiah, become itself the tender branch, before fruit can be seen upon it.

I mentioned earlier in this exposition the strong parallels between the Olivet prophecy and the upper room discourse. The equivalent of the fig tree parable is in Jn. 15:1-6: "I am the true vine and my Father is the husbandman. Every branch in me that carries no fruit, he prunes away; and every branch that carries fruit, he cleanses it, that it may bear more fruit. Already you are clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. Abide in me and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine, so neither can you, except you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He that abides in me and I in him, the same carries much fruit. For severed from me you can do nothing. If a man does not abide in me, he is thrown out as a branch and withers, and these are gathered and thrown into the fire, and they are burned". Rom. 11:19 in turn alludes here by associating the cut off, rejected branches with natural Israel. The branches are the tree, which is Christ. That same identification of the branch and Christ is made here in Mt. 24:32. Putting together these teachings, the implication would be that for the branches of Israel to again be fruitful, they must be grafted back in, seeing they have been cut

off. And that is the very teaching of Romans 11. “When his branch is yet...” is an attempt to translate a difficult original text. The idea may be ‘If, so long as... the branch is tender, it can yield fruit’. The broken off branches must be grafted back in and only ‘so long as’ that is the case, they can bear fruit. In the first century context, the Lord may be urging Israel to bring forth spiritual fruit- whilst the branch is still tender, whilst it was still connected to the tree, and had not been broken off and burnt as Romans 11 envisaged happening. And yet Israel would not. Hence the Lord’s appeal to His listeners to *learn* this parable. And hence the manner in which He placed this teaching as the conclusion to the Olivet prophecy, because Israel’s repentance is the key precondition in His return. Jn. 15 is saying the same thing by warning that once severed from Christ, then there would be no chance of bearing fruit.

Puts forth leaves- The fig tree was to "shoot forth" (Lk. 21:30) or 'germinate' (Young), witnessed by its putting forth of leaves (Mk. 13:28) and tender branches (Mt. 24:32). When the fig tree puts forth leaves there are often immature, unripe figs amongst them. Thus Jesus inspected the fig tree outside Jerusalem to see if it had any fruit, and cursed it because it did not. It had “leaves only” (Mt. 21:19), but now the Lord seems to be saying that the presence of leaves will be a sign of His return. The obvious point of connection with 21:19 would suggest that He becomes more and more acceptant of *any* sign of spirituality and response in Israel; rather like the parable of the great supper features an increasing desperation on the part of the King to accept anyone who is willing to say “yes” to the invitation. "The time of *figs* was not yet", i.e. it was not reasonable to find fully developed fruit on it. The fig tree referred to the nation of Israel; Jesus expected to find at least the beginnings of some spiritual fruit, but due to the chronic dearth of response to his message, Jesus cursed the nation and dried it up (Mk. 11:13,14,20). This would lead us to interpret the putting forth of leaves on the fig tree as the signs of an initial repentance and indication that real spiritual fruit is developing. It may well be that the whole of the Olivet prophecy has reference to a final three and a half year tribulation of the believers just prior to the second coming, and that during this time there will be a period of zealous witnessing to both Jews and Gentiles. This fits into place with the fig tree parable; this preaching starts to produce some degree of response from Israel, and then "all (is) fulfilled" in the full manifestation of Christ's Kingdom. The parable says that as surely as Summer follows Spring, so those who see the blossoming of the fig tree in the parable, will see the Kingdom. Maybe this is to be taken literally; there may be a literal gap of a few weeks/months (as between Spring and Summer) between the first signs of Jewish repentance, and all being fulfilled. It may well be that the "all" which will be fulfilled in Lk. 21:32 is to be equated with "the times of the Gentiles" being fulfilled (Lk. 21:24). The Greek *kairos* translated “times” is also translated “opportunity”; the Gentiles’ opportunity to hear the Gospel is fast running out. There will be a call to Israel to repent in the last days, and a remnant will respond. This Elijah ministry [and maybe our present witness to Jewry prepares the way for this?] must occur “before the coming of the great and

dreadful day of the Lord”. We could interpret the putting forth of leaves on the fig tree as the signs of an initial repentance and indication that real spiritual fruit is developing.

You know- Lk. 21 “you know in your own selves”. Seeing the repentance of Israel will lead to the faithful perceiving that the end is near. This perhaps alludes to the same idea as in 2 Pet. 1:19, that the day star shall arise in the hearts of the believers just before the Lord comes.

Summer is near- One way to look at this is that summer stood for harvest, obviously so in this context of fruit on a fig tree. But harvest was clearly a metaphor for judgment upon Israel, which is the context and burden of the Olivet prophecy. The Lord has lamented that the fig tree of Israel has nothing but leaves- and because of that, He had uttered judgment upon her (21:19,20). So the Lord could be simply repeating this in parabolic terms. The judgment / harvest / Summer was to come upon the fig tree whilst she had only leaves [and not fruit] on her tender branch. And yet the language of ‘shooting forth’ [Gk. germinating] in Lk. 21:30 suggests that more than mere leaves are in view. Summer will only come once there is fruit to harvest. That seems the point.

The shooting forth of the fig tree is given as the special sign that the Lord will return (Lk. 21:30). This must be understood in the context of the Lord coming to the fig tree in Mk. 11; He sought for at least the beginnings of fruit shooting forth, but found only leaves. And therefore He cursed the fig tree. He evidently saw the shooting forth of the fig tree as a figure of Israel's acceptance of Him, however immaturely. Likewise the parable of Lk. 13:6-9 makes the same connection between fruit on the fig tree and repentance within Israel. "Learn a (the) parable of the fig tree" (Mt. 24:32) may suggest that we are to understand the fig tree parable in the light of these other fig tree parables. And there are several OT links between fruit on the fig and spiritual fruit in Israel (Mic. 7:1 cp. Mt. 7:15,16; Hos. 9:10; Hab. 3:17,18). When the branch of Israel “is now become tender”, i.e. immediately this happens, we are to know that the eternal Summer of God's Kingdom is nigh (Mt. 24:32 RV). The tenderness of the branch is surely to be connected with the hard heart of Israel becoming tender through their acceptance of Jesus and the new covenant. When we see just the beginnings of Israel's repentance, through a remnant responding, we are to know that “He is near, even at the doors” (Mt. 24:33 RV). All this evidence steers us away from the idea that the fig tree became tender through the re-establishment of the nation of Israel- and towards an understanding that this is all about Israel's repentance.

24:33 *See all these things-* The structure of the argument suggests that “these things” specifically refers to the shooting forth of the fig tree:

Mt. 24:32	Mt. 24:33
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When [Gk. <i>hotan</i>]	When [Gk. <i>hotan</i>]
His branch is yet tender and puts forth leaves	You see all these things
You know [Gk. <i>ginosko</i>]	You know [Gk. <i>ginosko</i>]
That summer is near [Gk. <i>eggus</i>]	That it is near [Gk. <i>eggus</i>]; Lk. 21:32 “That the Kingdom of God is near [Gk. <i>eggus</i>]”.

The “Summer” meant ‘harvest’, and that was a metaphor for judgment. Verse 33 parallels this by saying that “it” is near. The “it” may well refer to the destruction of the temple, which is the context of the whole discussion; although Lk. 21:32 supplies “the Kingdom of God”. The Lord is bringing the discourse to a close by returning to the question which provoked it: “When shall these things be?”. And He appears to be saying in the first century context that so long as only leaves remained on the fig tree of Israel, then the Summer of harvest judgment upon her was going to come. And yet the Lord here is using language with two or more meanings, as Scripture often does. In the latter day context, He seems to be saying that once spiritual fruit is beginning on the Israel fig tree, then this is the ultimate sign that the ultimate end is near.

He is near, even at the doors- The idea of Christ at the door is repeated by the Lord Himself in Rev. 3:19,20- where it means that Jesus is asking others to repent and turn to Him. Opening the door means the Lord has granted forgiveness- His being at the door implies surely that He is asking for repentance. *Epi* the doors can carry the sense of ‘about’ or ‘upon’, perhaps an allusion to the Angels of Passover night, which is such a strong type of the second coming. That would explain the plural “doors”. I suggested that Summer / harvest may refer to judgment; being ‘upon the doors’ may likewise suggest the Angel of Death in judgment. This would certainly fit the first century interpretation offered above- that while only leaves are on the fig tree branch, whilst it is still ‘tender’ and attached to the tree before it has been broken off in judgment, then Summer / harvest / judgment is coming for sure, in that very generation. But words have multiple meanings, and this fact is not ignored by God in the way the Bible is written, nor by His Son in the way He spoke. The allusion can equally be to the Passover Angel who as it were restrained the Angel of Death by hovering over the blood-sprinkled doors of the faithful. This would continue the ‘other’ usage of language by the Lord in the fig tree parable, which means that once there is some beginnings of spiritual fruit on the fig tree of Israel, then the repentance of that remnant will mean that the coming of the Lord is literally imminent and He stands *epe* the doors as the fulfilment of the Passover Angel.

24:34 *This generation shall not pass*- This is similar to the Lord’s teaching that some of His generation would not die until they had seen the coming of the Kingdom (Mk. 9:1; Lk. 9:27). His saying may not be linked directly to the fig tree parable, as if to say ‘The generation that sees the fig tree fruit will not pass away until...’. Rather He may be concluding His message by again

making clear that the entire prophecy was going to come true in that generation. Seeing that lifespans were not much over 40 years at that time, even AD70 would not have seen many of that generation alive. He says elsewhere that the actual people He was speaking with would see these things come true and see Him coming in glory. But this potential possibility was disallowed from happening in that generation by the refusal of Israel to repent and the weakness of spirituality and effort to spread the Gospel in those who did apparently believe into Christ. The transfiguration was hardly the main fulfilment of the Lord's words, even though the record of it directly follow the Lord's predictions. Like the events of AD70, it was at best a shadow fulfilment of the final coming of the Kingdom in visible power and glory. The use of "*this* generation" rather than "*that* generation" surely suggests the Lord hoped for and indeed intended a fulfilment of His words literally in that very generation. But that generation passed- because fruit on the fig tree was not found. Israel did not repent, and there was little spiritual fruit on those Jews who did accept Christ. All 38 NT occurrences of *genea*, "generation", clearly refer to the contemporary generation or group of listeners. Any attempt to interpret *genea* as referring to the race or nation of Israel becomes impossible because the text would require that the race or nation of Israel pass away at the Lord's second coming, but Israel are clearly envisaged as existing as a separate entity in the Millennial Kingdom.

Until- If the Lord had meant simply 'until' we would read simply *heos*. But here we have two Greek words- *heos an*, which together denote a sense of conditionality and uncertainty. This is understandable if we understand that the Lord is talking of how His coming *could be* in that generation- but that depended upon some conditions which were beyond Him to fulfil and which depended upon men.

Be fulfilled- There is surely a word play between *ginomai* ["fulfilled"] and *genea* ["generation"]. That generation would not pass until all has 'become'. This is not the usual word used for the fulfilment of prophecies. When Matthew writes of the fulfilment of prophecies (and he does this often), the word *pleroo* is used. But here a much vaguer and more general word is used. Mark's record brings this out- the disciples ask when "all these things" would be "fulfilled" (*sunteleo*), and the Lord concludes the fig tree parable by saying "all these things" would be *ginomai* (Mk. 13:4,30). That would appear purposeful; the Lord held out the definite possibility for His return in the first century and the fulfilment of all things He had spoken of. But He was surely aware that this could be rescheduled, and so He used a word pregnant with the possibility that "that generation" would see the 'coming into being' of the scenario He was presenting. That generation [*ginomai*] could have been the fulfilment [*genea*] of all things, or they could have been at least the coming into being of that fulfilment; even if they failed to respond, they would not be without significance in bringing into being the ultimate fulfilment.

24:35 *Heaven and earth shall pass away*- This could simply be saying to the effect 'Even if heaven and earth could pass, which they cannot, there is even less possibility that My words shall not be fulfilled'. Mt. 5:18 seems to use the term in that sense- "Even until [*heos*, i.e. 'even if'] heaven and earth pass...". In this case, we are not to even bother trying to understand 'heaven and earth' as 'a system of things', although this is certainly how the term is used, especially in the context of the Jewish system. And yet later New Testament allusion to this passage seems to suggest we are justified in seeing some reference to the Jewish, Mosaic system of the first century. Heb. 12:26 speaks as if heaven and earth are to be so shaken by the blood of Christ and the new covenant that they will pass away just as Sinai shook at the inauguration of the old covenant. 2 Pet. 3:7-13 is perhaps the clearest statement- the 'heaven and earth' which "are now" in the first century were to pass away and be replaced by a new heaven and earth in which righteousness dwells. Clearly 'heaven and earth' are not literal, because righteousness already dwells in literal Heaven, and the earth shall not be literally destroyed; this passing of 'heaven and earth' is patterned after the destruction of sinful *society* in Noah's time (2 Pet. 3:5). We note that the Olivet prophecy concludes with a warning that society would become like it was in the days of Noah. Clearly this major changeover did happen in the first century in that the Jewish and Mosaic system did finally pass away in AD70 with the destruction of the temple. And yet Peter's words also seem to demand application to the second coming of Christ and the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth. Clearly the heaven and earth of the Kingdom could have come in the first century, but 'all' that happened was that the Jewish and Mosaic systems were ended; this was in itself created a requirement for a *new* 'heaven and earth' in which dwells righteousness, but that system has evidently not yet physically come on earth. In this sense, what happened in AD70 was a guarantee and a creation of the requirement for the new Kingdom to come- see on :34 *Be fulfilled*.

Earth- The Greek word *Ge* is used often for the 'land' of Israel in the NT. We must remember that although the NT is written in Greek, it strongly reflects Hebrew usage of words. Again, the word commonly refers to the land of Israel. Consider some examples:

- "But I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God's throne: Nor by the earth; for it is his footstool: neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King" (Mt. 5:34,35). This is alluding to the Jewish habit of swearing by their own land.
- "What thinkest thou, Simon? of whom do the kings of the earth take custom or tribute? of their own children, or of strangers?" (Mt. 17:25). The rulers of the earth were those ruling over Israel.
- "That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar. Verily I say unto you, All these things shall come upon this generation" (Mt. 23:35). The blood shed on the earth means that which was shed in the land.

- Heaven and earth passing away (Mt. 24:35) follows on the Lord speaking of how all tribes of the earth / land would mourn in repentance (:30). He was speaking in the common OT idiom that used 'heaven and earth' for Israel. The nation would pass away in AD70, but His words would not.

My words- The Lord uses *logos* here rather than any other term for 'words', perhaps because He perceived that it was the essence of what He was saying that would be fulfilled, rather than necessarily the very letter.

There seems a parallel with :34. "My words shall not pass away" is parallel with "This generation shall not pass away"; "Heaven and earth shall pass away" is parallel with "All these things [being] fulfilled". 'Heaven and earth' passing is therefore in the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth in fulfilment of all that was prophesied by the Lord. But there is then a parallel between "My words" and "this generation". The intention may be to show that that generation were to be identified with the Lord's words, and thereby with Himself. For whenever He elsewhere uses the term "My words", it is always in parallel to 'I Myself' (Mk. 8:38; Jn. 12:48; 14:23; 15:27). He was His words; He was the quintessential *logos*. And that generation were to be identified with them. If they did so, if the tender branch of the fig tree became one with the Messianic branch of the Old Testament prophecies, then all would be fulfilled in that generation (see on :32).

24:36 *That day*- *Hemera* can refer to a period rather than a specific calendar day; it occurs often in the prophecy: "Those days" (:19), "those days should be shortened" (:22), "the tribulation of those days" (:29), "the days of Noah" (:37), "the days that were before the flood" (:38). So the Lord isn't necessarily saying that there is a calendar day and hour within that day when He will return. He may even be implying that God has given us conditions to fulfil, and not a calendar date. There is no calendar date discernible from our side, because it is conditional. The Lord repeats this teaching in 25:13 when He says that we must watch exactly because "you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man comes". When the disciples later asked to know this date, the Lord replied that "the times or seasons" have been "set within [the Father's] own authority" (Acts 1:7 RV). This sounds like God has set up required preconditions, and the actual moment of the Lord's return is somehow within frames of reference which His own authority alone has determined. But the Lord goes straight on to remind them of their calling to take the Gospel worldwide (Acts 1:8); for that was one of the major preconditions. Instead of trying to discern a specific date ahead of time, they were instead to refocus upon the spreading of the Gospel. If all the mental effort put into trying to discern the calendar date had been put into simply spreading the Gospel, then perhaps the Lord would be here by now. However, there is

also the possibility that in the very last days, the last generation *will* in fact know the day and hour- see below on *Knows no man*.

Knows no man- There's a major theme of knowing / seeing / perceiving in the Olivet prophecy. *Eido*, translated "knows", carries the essential idea of 'seeing' or perceiving. We are to "see" / know / perceive the abomination of desolation (:15), and when we "see" / know / perceive "all these things, know that it is near" (:33). And yet, despite that, we can not know, at least at this stage, the day nor the hour of the Lord's coming. The reason is made crystal clear in :42: "Watch *therefore* because you do not know [s.w.] what hour your Lord comes". 25:13 repeats this: "Watch *therefore* because you do not know [s.w.] neither the day nor the hour in which your Lord comes". The 'watching', therefore, is the watching of ourselves and for the welfare of others; *not* the activity of seeking to match world events with Bible prophecies. So our watching is exactly because we do not know the day and hour. God in His wisdom made it like this- so that we should watch all the time. If we knew when the Lord were coming, then we would not watch for Him until that time. Such is human nature. If a man knows what day and hour the thief is coming, he will watch for him at that time (:43). But if he doesn't know, then he must watch all the time. So, looking at it from that point of view, it is absolutely necessary that we do *not* know the day and hour. And yet it seems so many have seriously misunderstood this. They think that they *can* work out the day and hour, and their 'watching' is not so much a personal readiness for the Lord's coming at any moment as an extended scouring of the media in an attempt to slot various international happenings into Bible prophecies. Indeed it is observable that personal watchfulness often apparently comes to be excused because of 'watching' the "signs of the times".

It is commonly thought that even the Lord Jesus doesn't know the time of his return, only the Father does. During his mortality, the Lord said exactly this (Mk. 13:32)- at the time he was speaking to the disciples, he himself didn't know. But after his resurrection and glorification, the Lord made two statements to the disciples which he surely intended to be connected: "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth... it is not for you (the inquisitive eleven standing on Olivet) to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power" (Mt. 28:18; Acts 1:7,8). But *all* the Father's power has been given to His glorified Son, and this therefore includes knowledge of the "times and seasons" of the second coming. In the exalted Lord "are hid all the riches of wisdom and knowledge" (Col. 2:3); it is thereby inconceivable that the Father would still keep back some knowledge from the Son. The point of all this is that when the Lord Jesus said that "of that day and that hour knoweth (present tense) no man, no, not the angels... neither the Son" he was not laying down a general principle for all time. He was speaking of the situation at that time: 'You can't know now, indeed at the moment even I don't know; but these are the signs which will tell the believers when I'll come'. By implication he was saying 'You can't understand them, although I'm giving them to you, but in the future some will understand them, because these signs will accurately pinpoint my return'. This was exactly the spirit of what the Angel told Daniel when he too wished to know when Messiah would come in

glory; he was basically told 'It's not for you to understand, but in the last days understanding of these things will be increased among God's people; they will know the time, but you can't'. There are so many connections between the Olivet prophecy and Daniel that perhaps it is legitimate to think that the Lord was alluding to the Angel's refusal to tell Daniel the time of Messiah's coming. That the Lord was primarily referring to the twelve when he spoke of them not knowing "when the time is" (Mk. 13:33) is confirmed if we appreciate that the Lord Jesus sometimes uses "the time" as a reference to the appointed time for his own death (Mt. 26:18; Mk. 14:35; Jn. 7:6,8). The disciples were fascinated with the time of his return, and the Lord was giving them the signs. But knowing his death was only days away, inevitably he had in mind "the time" of his passion. And he knew that as they didn't know the time of his return, so they didn't understand the time of his death. Having pointed out that they knew not "the time", in words surely reminiscent of his criticism of Jewry generally for not knowing "the time" of his coming and death (Mt. 16:3; Lk. 19:44), the Lord went on to tell the story of the man (himself) who left his household (the disciples) and told them to watch, with warnings as to what would happen if they didn't. Every one of those warnings, and some other language in the Olivet prophecy, came true of the disciples in the next few days, in the context of "the time" being the time of Christ's death:

They shall deliver you up to	the councils	As Christ to the Sannhedrin
Beaten		Christ buffeted
rulers and kings for a testimony		Chief priests, Herod, Pilate
...brother shall betray the brother		Judas; Peter's denial?
...turn back to take up his garment		John Mark's linen garment
...false Christs...		An echo of 'Barabbas'?
the sun shall be darkened...		As at the crucifixion
Watch		"Watch with me"; Gethsemane
pray...		
at even...		Last Supper
at midnight...		Gethsemane
at the cock crowing		Peter's denials
in the morning		trials and crucifixion
find you sleeping		disciples in Gethsemane

And at the end of the prophecy, He hammered this home again: "When (the trees) now shoot forth, ye see it, and know of your own selves that Summer is now nigh at hand. So likewise ye, when ye see these things... know ye" (Lk. 21:30,31 RV). The very personal feeling within us that Summer is near is likened to our knowledge of the imminence of the Lord's coming; you can't be told by anyone else that Summer's coming, you see the signs, and you know within your own self.

Not the Angels- A clear indication of their limited knowledge, which helps explain their 'testing' of God's servants in some Old Testament incidents, apparently in order to obtain more knowledge about them.

24:37 *But as-* The similarity with Noah's days is logically linked to the Lord's word about not knowing the day nor the hour. In the digression about this, I suggest that the very last generation may in fact know the day and hour. And that would be similar to Noah. There is no indication that he knew exactly when the flood would come- until he was told right at the end of the period, that the time had come and he must enter the ark.

The days- "The days" are parallel with "the coming" of the Lord. The scenario outlined earlier in these notes is of the Lord 'coming' for the faithful, them consciously choosing to go to meet Him, and then their 'coming' along with Him in judgment upon the unfaithful and Israel's immediate enemies. Therefore a period of time is made parallel with the Lord's "coming". See on :36 *That day*. The "days of Noah" may refer to the way in which God told Noah of the flood, but in Gen. 7:1,4 told him that now there were "yet seven days" until the flood actually came, and he must now enter the ark. The gathering of the animals was done within those seven days (Gen. 7:1-3). In this lies the similarity with the last days. We know the outline picture- that judgment will come, and there are reasons and signs of that. But only a few days before judgment breaks will the faithful be invited to go to meet the Lord, to enter the ark. And in that period the Gospel will be spread to all nations, the last final appeal will be made. Just as Noah filled the huge ark, which could have saved so many people, with any animal willing to agree to come onboard. The shutting of the door of the ark would then directly correspond with Mt. 25:10; Lk. 13:25: "The door was shut". Just as desperate people would've knocked on the shut door of the ark, so the unfaithful will knock on the door which the Lord has now closed. In this life we can knock on the closed door, recognizing our condemnation- and it will be opened (Lk. 11:7; Rev. 3:8). But after the Lord has 'come' in the sense of inviting us into the ark, to go forth and meet Him, the door will be shut.

The days of Noah- A number of passages describe the AD70 judgments of Israel in terms of the flood; which suggests that they also have reference to the last days:

- 2 Peter 3 is a clear example, describing the destruction of the Jewish system in AD70 as being by fire as opposed to water used in Noah's time. Yet the chapter also has reference, e.g. through its links with the new Heavens and earth of Is. 65, with the destruction of the present age at the Lord's return.

- Nahum 1 describes the coming judgements on Israel in terms of mountains and hills splitting, and there being a great flood; all Genesis flood language.

- Dan. 9:26 describes the Romans in AD70 destroying "the city and the sanctuary; and the end thereof shall be with a flood", the LXX implying with a sudden flood, as in Noah's time.

- Is. 54:9 describes the judgments on Israel being "as the waters of Noah". The end of the flood, the end of Israel's judgments, therefore typifies the second coming.

- In the light of this the Lord's parable about the man building on sand whose house was destroyed when the heavy rain came (Mt. 7:25,27) must have primary reference (as so many of the parables do) to the judgement on the Jewish house in AD70. Those who built on sand as a result of not hearing Christ's words were the Jews- also described as shoddy builders in Mt. 21:42; Acts 4:11; 1 Pet. 2:7; Mic. 3:10; Jer. 22:13.

- The flood waters were upon the earth for 5 months. The siege of Jerusalem in AD70 lasted for the same period, coming after 3 years of the Roman campaign against Israel which started in AD67. The three and a half year suffering of Israel which culminated in AD70 may well point forward to a similar period in the last days; in which case the flood would typify the final months of that period, during which the judgments will be poured out most intensely. The five month tribulation of Rev. 9:10 may also have some relevance here.

Thus the state of Israel in AD70 was typified by the world of Noah's time, which therefore looks forward also to the last days, in the light of the evident connections between that period and our last days which are made in 2 Pet. 3 and the Olivet prophecy.

The coming of the Son of Man- This commonly used phrase (16:28; 24:27,30,39; 26:64) clearly quotes from Dan. 7:13: "One like the Son of Man came with the clouds of heaven". This prophecy clearly speaks of the giving of the Kingdom to the Lord Jesus and His people at the end of the dominion of the fourth beast and its related horns. The prophecy could have been fulfilled in the first century- but it was rescheduled. This is another example of the conditionality in Daniel's prophecies which we discussed in an earlier digression. Dan. 7:13 speaks of how the Son of Man comes with the clouds of Heaven *before the Ancient of Days* and is given the Kingdom. What is in view is not so much the coming of Christ to earth but His coming to receive the Kingdom from the Father. Dan. 7:26,27: "The judgment shall sit, and they shall take away his dominion, to consume and to destroy it to the end. The kingdom and the dominion, and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole Heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High: His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey Him". "The Son of Man" is here interpreted as "the people of the saints of the Most High". The

Son of Man, therefore, refers not just to the Lord personally but to all those in Him. Having chosen to go out to meet Him once they hear the trumpet call, they are snatched away to meet Him in the air and the Lord comes with them in judgment. This is the picture presented in 1 Thess. 4:16,17 and elsewhere. This is why His “coming” is parallel with a period of time- see on *The days*.

24:38 *The days that were before the flood*- See on :37, perhaps a reference to the immediate seven days before the coming of the flood. *Pro* ("before") would suggest 'immediately before', something standing directly in front of something else. Perhaps those seven days were a period of feasting in the world around Noah, just as there will be a brief period of hedonistic prosperity in the world before Christ's coming, perhaps because of some international agreement which offers prosperity to the entire planet in return for some nominal acceptance of false religion [Islam?]. We note the period of "seven days" used for funeral celebrations (Gen. 50:10; 1 Sam. 31:13), wedding celebrations (Jud. 14:12,17) and general feasting (Esther 1:5; Job 1). The people around Noah were doing this right up until the last day of the seven days. Passover, a clear type of the final deliverance of God's people at the Lord's second coming, required a similar seven days preparation period (Ex. 12:19; 13:6) followed by a "day of the Lord", the actual feast, and "a solemn assembly" (Neh. 8:18). Indeed, the feasts of Yahweh all required a seven day period (Lev. 23), and each of them was in some way typical of the second coming.

Eating and drinking- Lk. 21:34 is specific: "And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, so that day come upon you unawares". It could fairly be asked 'Why is there this warning, if the believers of the last days are to be actively persecuted?'. This verse implies that the world will be in a materially prosperous state in the last days; it will be possible for us to become so preoccupied with it that we do not prepare for the time of tribulation, so that it comes as a sudden surprise. Of if "that day" is the day of Christ's coming, then it may be that by opting out of the persecution, we will be able to continue to enjoy the materialism of the world, in which case we will be caught unawares by the second coming. Thus while the saints are persecuted, the world enjoys a time of prosperity as it did in the times of Lot and Noah.

Noah entered- Mt. 25:10 continues the Noah allusion by saying that the faithful 'enter in with Him' (s.w.), and the door is shut, just as it was with the ark.

24:39 *Knew not until*- The implication is that they did “know”, but tragically too late. In the moment of their condemnation they saw it all, so clearly; just as the process of condemnation so often results in men ‘knowing Yahweh’, but all too late. They will proclaim blessing on Jesus as

Messiah next time they see Him, i.e. at judgment day (Lk. 13:35). But all too late. This is the basis for the gnashing of teeth in anger with oneself which :51 speaks of.

The flood came- Gk. *erchomai*. This is effectively the same word as used in :38 about Noah "entering" or 'coming into' the ark (*eis-erchomai*). The coming of the flood represents the coming of Jesus to the world- *erchomai* is so often used in the context in that connection (24:30,42,43,44,46,48; 25:6,10). The 'coming in' of Noah into the ark (cp. the response of the faithful to the call to go out and meet the returning Lord Jesus) is essentially the coming of the Lord, even if His public 'coming' may be a few days after the 'coming' to the believers. Keil translates Dan. 9:26,27: "The city, together with the sanctuary, shall be destroyed by the people of the prince who shall come, who shall find his end in the flood; but war shall continue to the end, since destruction is irrevocably decreed. That prince shall force a strong covenant for one week on the mass of the people, and during half a week he shall take away the service of sacrifice, and borne on the wings of idol abominations [cp. Ps. 18:10, where the true God is also borne on wings] shall carry on a desolating rule, till the firmly decreed judgment shall pour itself upon him as one desolated" (*Commentary* p. 373). Antichrist's destruction with *the* flood [note the definite article] comfortably connects with the Lord's usage of the flood as a symbol of the latter day judgment upon His enemies (Mt. 24:39). The person spoken about will be involved in war until the end of his days; he will die at the end of his military campaign against God's people. This was certainly not true of Titus in AD70.

And took them all away- The 'coming' of the flood represents the 'coming' of the Lord; just as the unbelieving world were 'taken away', so :40 continues that theme, that one shall be "taken" and another left. The 'taking away' of the one in the field is therefore 'taking away' in condemnation rather than the snatching away of the faithful to meet the Lord. The Greek *airo* definitely means to be taken *up*. Upward movement into the air is definitely in view. It could be that the Lord has in view the responsible. Those who respond to the call and want to go and meet their Lord will be confirmed in that by being caught up to meet Him (1 Thess. 4:16,17). Those who delay, the foolish virgins who go to buy oil, will all the same be gathered to judgment by being snatched away- but just a short time later.

24:40 *One shall be taken, and one left-* The 'taking away' is in judgment / condemnation / destruction, just as the unbelieving world were 'taken away' (:39). The idea of not being 'left' is what the Olivet prophecy started with- not one stone would be "left" (s.w., 24:2). But there will not be the total destruction of all persons on the earth at this time. The unworthy responsible will be 'taken away'- see on :39 *And took them all away-* and those not responsible to judgment will be "left". The Greek has a wide range of possible meanings here- the word is translated

'forgiven', 'sent away', and perhaps there is here the hint that they will be preserved to hear the Gospel of the Kingdom. In this sense we must remember the Lord's definition that "the field is the word" (13:38). And earlier in the Olivet prophecy He has foreseen that the faithful who are called away will be "in the field" (:18). The parable of the prodigal son likewise features the two sons, both in a field (Lk. 15:15,25 s.w.). The prodigal leaves the field and goes to the Father. The older son refuses to ultimately leave the field and go in to the Father. Legalism and judgmentalism is therefore quite enough to warrant being 'taken away' to condemnation.

Taken... left- The present tense is used here. Therefore the RV gives "One is taken, the other is left". Perhaps this was to heighten our sense that the essence of judgment is now; the call of the Gospel is a call to journey to judgment day. The same arresting use of the present tense [in the Greek] is to be found in :41 and :43- perhaps for the same reason.

24:41 *Two women-* So much of the Lord's teaching sensitively gives examples including men, and then including women. He was so very far ahead of His time in being so gender inclusive.

Grinding at the mill- Using millstones, which are always used in the Bible as symbolic of condemnation. These people were working out their own condemnation. One [the responsible] would be taken away to destruction, the other [not responsible to Divine judgment] would be "left". See on :40.

24:42 *Watch-* Throughout Christ's discourses concerning his return, "watch" is the key-word (Mt. 24:42; 25:13; Mk. 13:33-37; Lk. 12:37; 21:36). There are at least ten New Testament allusions to Christ's command for us to "watch" in the last days, and thus be found loving the appearing of Christ; this alone indicates how our lives should be characterized by this spirit of watching. I would go so far as to say that generally we seem almost unaware of this emphasis. "Watch... watch... watch" is the cry that comes out from our Lord himself. It seems almost unknown to us that we are *commanded* by the Lord Jesus Christ himself, with a great sense of urgency, to live in this spirit of watchfulness for His return. It is easy to think that the command to watch means that we should scan Bible prophecies and compare them with current world events, and thereby see the coming of Christ approaching. However, this is not the idea behind the word "watch". We are told to watch precisely because we do *not* know the time of Christ's appearing; therefore Jesus cannot be telling us (in this command) to watch political developments as pointers towards the date of His return. "Watch" nearly always refers to watching our personal spirituality, and concerning ourselves with that of others'. The Hebrew word translated "watch" carries the idea of defending, holding on as a matter of life or death, enduring with stamina, being awake. Thus Habakkuk speaks of "watching", i.e. being spiritually sensitive, to what God is going to tell him (Hab. 2:1). Doing a study of New Testament allusions to Christ's command to "watch" yields conclusions which may seem unpleasantly negative to some. In Greek, the verb 'to watch' is related to the noun 'watch', referring to soldiers guarding something, or the period of guard duty.

The idea behind 'watching' is definitely defensive rather than aggressive. In the same way as the gate keeper of a large house has to watch, to guard and protect, so should we in the last days (Mk. 13:34-37). Lk. 21:36 defines watching as praying always, concentrating our faith upon the fact that ultimately we will stand acceptably before the Lord Jesus at the day of judgment, and by His grace be saved from the great judgments which will surely come upon this world. The ideas of watching and praying often occur together (Lk. 21:36; Mk. 14:38; Mt. 26:41; Eph. 6:18; 1 Pet. 4:7). Prayer for our forgiveness, for acceptance by our Lord, must therefore characterize our watching in these last days. We must "watch" in the sense of being on our guard against the possibility of personal and communal apostasy from the faith (Acts 20:31); "watching" is standing fast in the doctrines of the one faith (1 Cor. 16:31), exhorting and encouraging others in the household of faith (1 Thess. 5:6,11), holding fast in ecclesias swamped by apathy and apostasy, strengthening what remains (Rev. 3:2,3; 2 Tim. 4:3-5), keeping the oil of the word burning in our lamps even though others have let it burn out (Mt. 25:13).

The blessedness of the 'watching' is not that they have an accurate timeline in place; we must watch exactly because we *don't* and *can't* know the exact time of the Lord's return. We cannot, therefore, have a detailed timeline which tells us *for sure* that Jesus will return after event x or y. We can speculate, of course, but we cannot say for sure. The message is to be ready, to love Him and His return, just because we *don't* know when exactly He is coming (Mt. 24:42; 25:13). 'Watching' means holding to our faith and repenting of our weaknesses in Rev. 3:3- not interpreting latter day prophecies. This of itself won't make us spiritual people. The Greek word translated "watch" is usually translated "imprison" - the idea is of guarding oneself and ones' faith, "vigilantly" watching out against the [Biblical] devil [same word in 1 Pet. 5:8], rather than searching for the understanding of latter day prophecy.

We do not know the exact calendar date of the appearing of Christ; and yet we should be watching for his coming with the same intensity *as if* we did know the day and hour. This seems to be the message behind Mt. 24:42,43, where Jesus reasons that if the manager of a wealthy house knew when the thief was coming, he would have watched carefully; 'And that', Jesus continued, 'Should be the intensity of expectancy *you* should have towards my return, even though you don't know the exact date'. Now this is quite something. If we knew the exact date of the Lord's return, we can imagine how we might behave the day before. It seems Christ is asking us to imagine that scenario; and then He asks us to live like this all the time. This is truly a high challenge. Our attitude to God's word, entertainment, hobbies, money, relationships; all these areas of life would probably be somewhat different to what they are now if we really took on board this idea: that we should live *as if* we expect the imminent return of Christ. This idea makes sense of two apparently contradictory strands in the Lord's teaching: that we do not know

the exact time of His return (Mt. 24:36,42,44; 25:13; Acts 1:7), and yet He tells us clearly it will come “soon” (Rev. 1:1,3 and many other passages). Perhaps the implication is that we should read coming ‘soon’ as meaning ‘as *if* you know He is coming soon’. For, we ourselves cannot know the exact time.

24:43 Am. 5:18 and Mal. 3:1,2 warn that just desiring the coming of the Lord isn’t enough; for what end will it be, if we don’t *truly* love His appearing? Yet Amos goes on to say that Israel “put far away” the reality of the day of the Lord, in their minds (Am. 6:3). And yet they desired it. We can study prophecy, but not really love His appearing in seriously preparing ourselves for that day. Indeed, we can subconsciously put it far from us. When we grasp for a fleeting moment how *very near* is the second coming for us; can we dwell upon it, retain that intensity? Or would we rather put it “far away”? This is surely why the Lord brings the list of signs of His coming to a close with some chilling parables concerning the need for personal watchfulness. It’s as if He could foresee generations of believers straining to interpret His words carefully, correctly matching them with trends in the world... and yet missing the essential point: that we must watch and prepare ourselves for His coming, whenever it may be for us. Having given so many indicators of His soon appearing, the Lord then says that His coming will be unexpected by the believers (Mt. 24:36,44). He wasn’t saying ‘Well, you’ll never properly interpret what I’ve just said’. He meant rather: ‘OK you’ll know, more or less, when my return is imminent; but all the same, *in reality* it will be terribly unexpected for most of you unless you prepare yourselves. You need to make personal changes, and be watchful of yourselves; otherwise all the correct prophetic interpretation in the world is meaningless’.

But know this- Our focus should be on ‘knowing’ that we don’t ‘know’ the time of His coming; and therefore watching at all times, living *as if* His return is imminent. This would be one explanation of why Paul and Peter write in their letters as if the Lord’s return is imminent when in fact He did not return in the first century.

The householder- The Lord is drawing a parallel between the householder watching, and the disciples / believers watching, being aware of the possibility of the Lord's return at any moment. He will only come unexpectedly, as a thief, to those who are not watching and are caught unprepared. But almost every usage of *oikodespotes* in the parables is concerning the Lord Jesus (10:25; 13:27; 20:1,11; 21:33; Lk. 13:25). As so often, the Lord was speaking to the disciples but not forgetting to speak also to Himself. He was soon to ask them in Gethsemane to watch and pray *with Him* (26:38); as if His watchfulness was to be theirs. In 13:52 He does also use this term about every scribe instructed in the things of the Kingdom. We are all the master of the house in the sense that we are to all be watching out for the household as a whole; the work of

the Lord Jesus is to be our work. 'Watching' is thereby defined as not only watching ourselves, but watching out for the rest of the household. This is being presented here as the supreme way of not becoming unwatchful. By watching out for others we are watching for the Lord's return, living with the imminence of His coming over before us.

Would come- Gk 'is coming'. See on 24:40 *Taken... left*.

He would have watched- The point is surely that if we were to know when the Lord is coming, then we would watch for Him *at the time of His coming*; just as a householder would watch out for a thief if he knew ahead of time when the thief was coming. Because we do not know when the Lord is coming, we must watch for His coming all the time, living *as if* He is coming imminently even though we do not *know* for sure whether He is or not. Therefore our living as if He is about to come is to be done independently of any hunches we may have that He is about to return, based as they usually are upon prophetic interpretations. Lk. 12:35-38 repeats the same teaching, but with the metaphor of men keeping watch all night so that they might open to the Lord immediately.

His house- This is the key; recognizing that the household of God is in fact our household, and we are to watch out for it as we would for our very own family. Indeed, it *is* our family.

Broken up- The connection is to 23:38 "*Your house* is left unto you desolate". Here, "*his house*" is "broken up". The Lord is saying that they were in the status of condemnation already. The physical breaking up of the temple would be the result of the elders of Israel not 'watching' as intended.

24:44 *Be you also ready-* The Lord was initially speaking to the disciples, the future elders of the church. The elders, represented by "the goodman of the house", have a special responsibility in this watching, so that the Lord's return is not thief-like to the 'house' of their ecclesia (Mt. 24:43). They "watch for your souls" (Heb. 13:17). But in a sense, the duty of watching falls to each of us: we're all elders (Lk. 12:41-46). All believers are called to watch, and that watching involves watching for others. The connection with 1 Thess. 5:2,6 therefore suggests that one of the reasons for the unworthy experiencing the second coming "as a thief" will be the lack of awareness by their elders concerning the spiritual trials of the last days. The reverse is also true. A good latter-day elder will have to give his very soul to the work of watching over the flock, fully aware of the many dangers they face in the last days. It is difficult to see how this vital role can be filled by those who have sold their souls to demanding employers. This work

can't be simply left to others. This passage teaches that the servant who must feed the household with appropriate food represents each of us; he must watch for the Lord's return and be diligent in feeding the household; yet (it must be stressed), this parable is intended for each of us (cp. Mk. 13:37). If he doesn't do this, he is rejected. We are set a high standard here. Christ is "the goodman of the house" (Mt. 20:11), but here "the goodman of the house" represents each of us (Mt. 24:43; Lk. 12:39,40). We are in Him, and therefore we must try to share his level of concern for his household. He carried his cross for us, for our salvation. And he asks us to share His cross, i.e. His devotion to the body of believers, even unto death. If we are in Him, we too must devote ourselves to the saving of the body.

Ready- The very same word and idea is repeated in 25:10. Those who were "ready" and responded immediately to the news of the Lord's return were accepted. The 'readiness' is in being constantly ready to leave all and go to be with the Lord. We shouldn't be so surprised, therefore, that life in this world is so unbearable for the believers; for we are being led to a point where we will be ready and eager to leave all for the sake of being with the Lord.

Because in such an hour as you think not- The fact we do not know the date of the Lord's return is what makes us live in a spirit of constant readiness for His coming. The point is that we should be "ready" even when we "think not" that the Lord's coming is near. The contrast is being drawn between on one hand our 'readiness', and on the other, our 'thinking', our computing, our calculations, the seeming to us, that the return of Christ is near.

The Son of Man comes- The present tense is used, whereas "Be... ready" would properly require the future tense. There may be here a hint at the theme discussed in the digression on *The Upper Room Discourse (John 14-16) and the Olivet Prophecy*; that the future coming of the Son of Man in essence is ongoing in the life of the believer.

24:45 *Who then-* Translated "What manner of man?" in Mk. 4:41; Lk. 1:66.

Servant- The Lord has just likened us to the master of the house, but now He explains further. We have responsibility for the house and act in the role of the householder because He has given us that responsibility. Our 'watching' is to be expressed in terms of ensuring that all the household have their food at the appropriate time. In Mk. 13:34,35 the Lord expands on this parable in saying that each of the servants are given a different work, but He wants us to be like the doorkeeper [AV "porter"], whose job it was to simply watch- and "You, watch, therefore!".

Putting together the various images, we see that we are likened to the very master of the house; then to the chief steward who was to provide food for the household; and then to the lowest doorkeeper. We are thoroughly representative of the Lord Himself, the steward of the household, and the lowest servant, the doorkeeper. But throughout the analogies, we are to above all mirror the way in which they watched / looked out for the wellbeing of the household. Being occupied with this is what makes a person ready and watching for their Lord's return.

Faithful and wise servant- This is the “good and faithful [s.w.] servant” of 25:21,23 who is commended for trading his Lord's goods and making increase of them. Here, the duty of the faithful servant is to care for the household. These are different metaphors for the same reality- spiritual care for others is a way of increasing the overall wealth of the Lord and the progress of His household. We have been delegated a huge amount, and the Lord is ‘absent’, not in the sense that He is not spiritually with us, but in that He will not intervene in how we carry on His work. The salvation and spiritual prosperity of others is therefore in our hands. By laziness and unwise behaviour we can seriously damage them and limit the progress of the Lord's business; and He being ‘absent’ will not forcibly intervene to stop us, in this life. The “wise servant” is likewise to be connected with the “wise [s.w.] virgins” of the very next parable (25:2,4,8,9). The connection is, however, slightly odd. The wise servant is to provide food for the others in the household. The wise virgins were unable to provide oil for the weaker members of the household, because they were themselves weak and had fallen asleep when clearly they were intended to remain awake. If the connection with the next parable is indeed purposeful, then we are left with the picture of the wise virgins being wise only in that they *intended* to provide for others, although in reality they were too weak themselves to follow through with that intention in practice. But their intention to do so was counted to them as wisdom.

Has made ruler- This parable is repeated with the same Greek words in Lk. 12:42,43 but with a change in tense: “Who then is the faithful and wise steward whom his master shall set over his household to give them their portion of food in due season? Blessed is that servant, whom his master, when he comes, shall find so doing”. The idea is surely that if we are doing that now, we shall do it eternally. If we are found ‘doing’ care and provision for the household, then we shall be empowered to eternally do this in essence. The important thing is that when the Lord comes, He finds us engaged [at least mentally] with what we shall eternally be doing, living the essence of the Kingdom life now. We have been made ruler over the household now; we shall be set over it eternally if when the Lord comes He finds us doing what He has appointed us to do. See on 24:47 *Shall make him ruler*.

To give them food in due season- When the Lord comes, He finds the servant either smiting the servants (:49), or feeding and caring for them (:45). Our attitude to our brethren in the moment of our Lord's coming will decide our eternal future. The structure of the parable allows of no half way position. The purpose of any authority given to any of us within the household is in order to feed others. If that, in the end, is not being done, then we are abusing the trust and authority given us by the Lord. The "food" is called their *sitometron* in Lk. 12:42, their "portion of food", or ration. The impression is given of a steward providing the right food ['nourishment'] for the right persons at the right time. This is the essence of all care for others. *Kairos*, "due season", means literally 'time', and is often used about 'the time' of the Lord's return (8:29; 13:30; 16:3; 21:34). Indeed it is used in the Olivet prophecy for this moment: "You know not when the time is" (Mk. 13:33). The idea seems to be that instead of worrying about calculating "the time" of the Lord's coming, we are instead to be concerned with feeding others in the household at that *kairos* or time. This is the sign of our preparedness and watchfulness, and not our [apparent] skill in matching world events to Bible prophecies.

24:46 *Blessed is that servant-* The only other reference by the Lord to blessed servants is in Lk. 12:37,38,43 where He teaches the blessedness of the servant who is found awake / watching when his Lord returns. 'Watching' is a major theme here in Mt. 24, but the blessing in view here is for "doing", actually providing nourishment for the household. Again we see the parallel between watching and doing. Watching can never be an academic interest in Bible prophecies. It has to be active, or else it isn't 'watching' in the sense intended.

When He comes shall find... - Again we find emphasized the eternal importance of our attitude of mind at the moment of the Lord's coming. If the ideas presented in the Digression about *With Jesus to Judgment* are correct, then this is understandable- because those who want to go to the Lord and confirmed in their desire by being snatched away to meet Him, whereas those who don't have that immediacy of desire will be left behind, to be forcibly gathered to Him later.

24:47 *Shall make him ruler-* See on :45 *Has made ruler*. If we are doing what we have been empowered to do for the household now, then we shall be appointed to eternally do this.

All that He has- The state of perfection in the Kingdom is described as us (the complete church of all ages) having reached, "a perfect man... the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ", having grown up into Christ, who is the head of the body (Eph. 4:13,15). When Christ comes, we will each individually be made ruler over *all* that He has, we will each individually be fully righteous, fully manifesting the Lord Jesus. There seems to be marked connection with the fact (brought out in the parable of the talents) that we will each have *all* the Master's goods, and the

description in the next parable of those goods being distributed between us in this life (Mt. 24:47; 25:15). In the Kingdom we will no longer know partially, as a result of seeing parts of the whole picture; we will see face to face (1 Cor. 13:9,12 Gk.).

In this life, the servant was ‘made ruler over’ [s.w.] the household, his job was to feed his fellow servants. If he is found so doing at the Lord’s return, he will be made ruler over literally all that his master owns, “all his goods” (AV) is literally ‘all that He has’. This is a profound insight into the nature of eternity. All that God has will be put under us. God has not subjected the world to come to the Angels but to us (Heb. 2:5). This is because “all things” are to be put in subjection under the Lord Jesus (Heb. 2:8), and all that is true of Him is true of us. But that being part of Him is dependent upon our serving of our brethren within the household. See on :43 *The householder*- He is the householder, but we also are, because we are in Him.

24:48 *Evil servant*- The next parable likewise features two types of servant; the “faithful” servant [s.w.], and the equivalent of this “evil servant” is the “wicked and lazy servant... the unprofitable servant” (25:26,30). That servant who did nothing is paralleled with the servant who proactively got drunk, thought his Lord delayed, and beat his brethren. Despite all that bad behaviour, the real issue was that he did nothing positive for his Lord. So often, the fellow servants are effectively beaten because of the sins of omission, inaction, refusal to stand up for the abused.

Say in his heart- The Bible knows nothing of a personal, cosmic Satan. Rather the real adversary is presented as the human heart, and therefore a huge amount of attention is given to the state of the human heart and the significance of our self-talk. Nobody consciously says ‘The Lord is delaying, great, now I can drink and abuse my brethren’. But the Lord puts His finger on the self-talk that goes on in our deep subconscious, and He does so in the context of warning against having a specific date in mind for the second coming.

My Lord- There is no turning to atheism or rebellion against the Lord, but rather the root cause of the misbehavior is placed by the parable upon the man’s mentality that because he knows the date of his Lord’s coming, he can just ensure he’s behaving properly when He comes. And this is the purpose of the parable- to challenge that idea and explain why the date must be left unknown by us. This is the same idea as the foolish virgins not taking oil with them in the next parable. The idea is simply that the foolish take no oil because they are certain they know the day and hour of the bridegroom’s coming; whereas the wise recognize that they do not know the exact day and hour, and therefore act accordingly by taking more oil in case there is a delay. This is exactly the point being made in the Lord’s teaching at the end of chapter 24. Those who are

convinced they know the day and hour, for whom the idea of flexibility or delay in the Lord's purpose is anathema, are in fact those who fall asleep and are caught unprepared.

Delays- The Lord Jesus / bridegroom "tarries" (Mt. 25:5), the same Greek word translated 'delay' in "my Lord delays His coming". The Lord *does* delay His coming- the man's mistake was in acting inappropriately because of this. God's judgments likewise "waited", or delayed, in Noah's time (1 Pet. 3:20)- presumably for the 120 year period of Gen. 6:3. In a similar way, the judgment on Nineveh preached by Jonah also delayed- it came in the end, but their repentance meant that it delayed at that time. In the first century, all things were ready for the Supper- supper time had come. But the start of the supper has been delayed 2000 years by Israel's rejection of the invitation to participate (Lk. 14:17). The evil servant misbehaved because he thought the Lord had delayed and therefore he could misbehave, so long as he got his act together at the time of the Lord's coming. This parable is therefore an explanation of why we must recognize that we don't know the date of the Lord's return; if we do think we know it, then this will lead us into misbehaviour. Those with a determinate, black and white view of God and His prophetic style have often shown us the truth of this parable. They thought the Lord would return at a certain date, or once certain conditions had been fulfilled. These things happened, and the Lord didn't come- and their behaviour went seriously downhill.

Moses' sprinkling of Israel with blood and then going away for forty days (the period of probation), returning after a perceived delay to a people lost in revelry with only a faithful minority, must point forward to our Lord's ascension to the Father's presence after the blood sprinkling of the cross, and His subsequent return. Christ's words of Mt. 24:48,50 suggest he read this incident along these lines: "That evil servant shall say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming (cp. "Where is the promise of his coming?" and the people feeling Moses had delayed to return); and shall begin to... eat and drink with the drunken (cp. "the people sat down to eat and drink", 1 Cor. 10:7); the Lord of that servant shall come... in an hour that he is not aware of, and shall cut him asunder" - recalling the Levite's sudden massacre of the people on Moses' return. If the return of Moses from the mount is indeed typical of the second coming, then it would follow that the majority of the new Israel will be unprepared at the Lord's return also.

"The Lord (Jesus- v.15,18) is not slack concerning his promise (to return- of Jn.14:3,18,28), as some men (in the ecclesia) count slackness" , but is longsuffering (2 Pet. 3:9). The Greek for "slack" here means 'delay'; this is assurance that God is not 'delaying' as men dilly-dally in the execution of their plans, but is rather postponing this for a good reason. There's an allusion here to Is. 30:17-19, which records how Israel would suffer for their sins, but then God would wait for a certain time until they cried to Him in repentance, before bringing about a time of blessing on the earth based around the Lord's presence in Jerusalem: "One thousand shall flee at the rebuke

of one (Dt. 28 language)... till ye be left as a tree bereft of branches (how Paul describes what happened to Israel in the first century, Rom. 11)... and therefore (i.e. because you are such sinners) will the Lord wait, that He may be gracious unto you, and therefore will He be exalted (through your repentance), that He may have mercy upon you: for the Lord is a God of judgment: blessed are all they that wait for Him. For the people shall dwell in Zion at Jerusalem: thou shalt weep no more (the language of Is. 65:17-25, quoted in 2 Pet. 3:13): He will be very gracious unto thee at the voice of thy cry (of repentance): *when* He shall hear it, He will answer thee". Not only is God delaying the Kingdom until there is repentance in Israel, but such is His *mercy* that He will not bring it about until such repentance. His purpose should not be seen, therefore, just in terms of the cold equation 'Repentance in Israel= second coming', but the supreme *mercy* and *love* which this arrangement shows should be appreciated. "And *therefore* will He be exalted" Isaiah comments- by those who understand these things. Rom. 11:32-36 is a marvellous example of this.

24:49 *Shall begin*- The idea is that only soon after he has begun his misbehaviour, the Lord comes. This highlights the point that because the man was sure that he knew the exact time of the Lord's coming, and that time was not right now, *therefore* he did these bad things. The whole point of the parable is to explain *why* we do not and should not ever think we know the date of His coming. For it is this which is portrayed in the parable as the root reason why he begins beating the fellow servants and being self-indulgent, mixing with the unbelievers rather than the believers.

To smite his fellow servants- Smiting the fellow servants is related to keeping other company-with the drunken. It could be that this parable is intended to have a specific latter day fulfilment, in that it speaks of the last few days or little while before the Lord's return. For the evil servant has only just begun to beat, eat and drink, when his Lord comes. The 'smiting' might suggest that the evil servant joins in the persecution of the Lord's servants which will be ongoing in that final period of tribulation.

The idea of the steward of the house smiting the fellow servant (Mt. 24:49) is referred to by Paul (in the Greek text) in 1 Cor. 8:12, concerning *wounding* the conscience of weak brethren. Paul's vision of the latter day ecclesia was therefore that materialistic elders would act with no thought as to their effect on the consciences of the flock, and thereby many would stumble. The Lord's only other reference to fellow servants is in 18:28-33, where the deeply indebted servant 'beat' a fellow servant who owed him a relatively small amount. The beating of the fellow servants may therefore be intended to be understood in terms of refusing to forgive, and demanding what is due.

Eat and drink- His duty was to feed his fellow servants, but instead he became obsessed with feeding himself. The Lord has just spoken of 'eating and drinking' as characterizing Noah's

world (:38)- and also Lot's world (Lk. 17:28). There's nothing wrong with any of the things Noah's world were doing in themselves, but they were indulged in to the point of obsession. The man called to go in to the ark and care for those within it had instead gone outside into the world and engaged with them in their way of life. The next verse continues allusions to Noah's time.

Drink with the drunken- Lk. 12:45 adds that the man himself becomes drunk; he is influenced by the company he now keeps. Mt. 24:49 is alluded to in 1 Thess. 5:3-7, where the picture is graphically created of a man who has been hard drinking for a whole evening, now at home stupefied, late at night. It is then that the thief comes; whilst dimly aware of his coming, the man is quite unprepared to meet him and keep his (spiritual) house intact. This will be the tragic position of those who through belief and practice are unready for their Lord. It seems that a materialistic eldership, uncommitted to the real needs of the household, indifferent to guarding the house, will contribute to our latter day apostasy as a community. And note the correspondence between those who are harsh on their brethren being those who are also caught up in the things of the world. The drunken servant starts to beat the fellow servants, using a Greek word which means to punish (Lk. 12:45). This creates the picture of a worldly ecclesial elder over-disciplining others. No wonder there will be so much friction and disunity amongst spiritual Israel of the last days.

24:50 *Day... hour-* The implication is that the unfaithful servant should have 'known' and 'been aware of' his Lord's coming. He should have lived every moment as if *this* were the day and hour of the Lord's coming; even whilst recognizing that he does not finally know it. There is another possibility, discussed in a separate digression- and that is simply that the faithful in [literally] the very last few days *will* in fact know that the day and hour. The language of the Olivet prophecy brims with certainty as to the faithful *knowing* the time: "When ye shall see these things come to pass, *know* that it is nigh... ye *know* that Summer is near... *when* ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then *know* that the desolation thereof is nigh... when ye therefore shall *see* (same Greek translated "know") the abomination of desolation... when ye *see* (Gk. know, understand, perceive) all these things come to pass, *know* ye that the Kingdom of God is near". The idea is that we will understand clearly certain signs, and know *therefore* that the Lord is imminent. This all seems in marked contrast to the Lord's conclusion to the prophecy: "of that day and that hour *knoweth* no man". There is a marked connection here with the fact that he has just been saying that it will be possible to know once the signs are seen and understood. Surely he must be talking specifically to the twelve; *they* didn't *then* know the time, neither could they; but those who saw the signs by implication *would* know. In the context of these words about them not *then* knowing the day and hour, the Lord said that the believer *at the time of his return* who didn't know the day and hour of his coming would be found unprepared (Mt. 24:50). This is surely proof enough that the last generation *will* in some way know the day and hour, i.e. the appointed time (cp. Rev. 9:15), of the Lord's return. This point is a very powerful one.

Not aware of- This is *ginosko*, used of how the world of Noah's day did not "know" until all too late (:39). We are to "know" the time (:33 "know that it is near", "know this" :43; Lk. 21:31).

And yet we cannot know the time in terms of a calendar date. Therefore we are to “know” the time in living according to the principle that the Lord *could* come imminently, at this very moment.

24:51 *Cut him asunder*- Gk. ‘to cut him in two’, literally ‘to dichotomize’. This unreal and severe punishment- to cut a slave in half as punishment- emphasizes the extreme nature of the wrongdoing. This may also allude to the idea of cutting a covenant. The parties to the covenant passed between the pieces of the covenant sacrifice and thereby proclaimed that they should be cut in two if they broke the covenant. These condemned persons, in this particular teaching, would therefore refer to those who had already entered covenant with God and are being judged for it. And the hint is that they broke that covenant because they preferred to be hypocrites, to look good in the eyes of men when their heart was somewhere else. The evil servant will be "cut asunder", i.e. his hypocrisy will be openly revealed for the first time (remember, he was an ecclesial elder in mortal life, according to the parable). There will be a public dimension to the judgment process, for the whole purpose of it is for the learning of those present at it, rather than for God’s benefit. What we have spoken in the Lord's ear will be revealed by him openly ("from the housetops") at the judgment (Lk. 12:3). When the righteous receive their inheritance (i.e. at the judgment), then the fool will be held up to shame (Prov. 3:35 NIV).

Appoint him his portion with the hypocrites- Christ "will appoint (the wicked servant) his portion with the unbelievers" (Lk. 12:46), his portion with the hypocrites (Mt. 24:51), reminiscent of a "goat" in the later parable being told to go to the group of goats at the left hand side- "the unbelievers", i.e. those responsible but lacking in real faith (the word is used concerning this group in Jn. 20:27; Mt. 17:20; Rom. 11:20; Heb. 3:12; Tit. 1:15; Rev. 21:8). Note the parallel between hypocrisy and faithlessness. It is faith which is the real power against hypocrisy; if we believe that the Lord sees and knows all things, we will not act in the eyes of some. We will be ourselves, because we believe in Him and His grace and love towards us. The Lord’s self-indulgent servant will be cut asunder at judgment day- revealed for who he really is- and then be appointed his portion with the [other] hypocrites (Mt. 24:41). The Lord used almost identical words earlier in His ministry, but with the conclusion that such a servant would be appointed his portion with *the unbelievers* (Lk. 12:46). The rejected servants, who appeared to believe but who only play-acted, are in fact unbelievers. They have as little faith as the unbelieving world, although they think they believe and serve the Lord.

With the hypocrites- Just as the man had chosen to be “with [*meta*] the drunken” (:49), so the Lord’s judgment of him will reflect the decisions he himself made, and the position in which he was found at the Lord’s coming- he will be “with” [*meta*] the hypocrites.

Weeping and gnashing of teeth- This phrase is recorded seven times on the Lord's lips, but six of them are in Matthew (8:12; 13:42,50; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30). The awful prospect clearly gripped Matthew, and in presenting the Gospel he felt it his duty to remind people graphically of the future they might miss, and the eternal consequence of rejecting God's Son.

The Olivet prophecy doesn't finish at the end of Mt. 24; the chapter break with chapter 25 is unfortunate. The context runs straight on. The Lord spoke a number of parables at the end of the prophecy, which teach us the need for watchfulness against his coming. Each of them speak of his "coming" and the state of his ecclesia. They refer back to various parts of the Olivet prophecy. *Without any doubt* their main relevance is to the second coming; whatever minor relevance they may have to AD70, when they speak of the Lord coming and judging us, they speak of his second coming. They are a further elaboration on the things of which he had been speaking in the prophecy: and therefore the prophecy must basically concern his second coming and the state of the ecclesia at the time of the end.

Notes

(1) Martin Hengel, *Studies In The Gospel Of Mark* (London: SCM, 1985) p. 28.

(2) R. C. Sproul, *The Last Days According to Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI, 2000: Baker Books), p. 36.