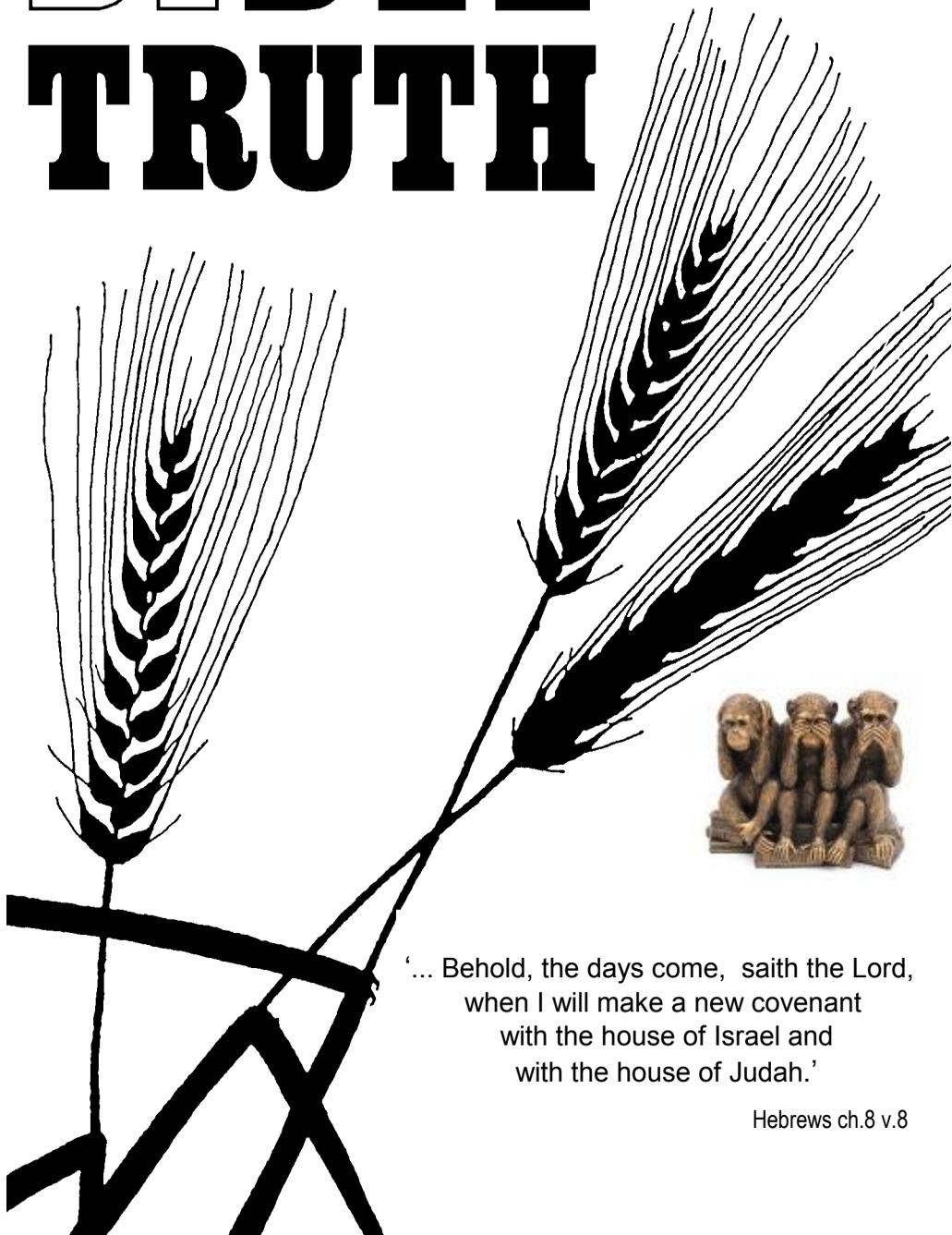


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‘... Behold, the days come, saith the Lord,
when I will make a new covenant
with the house of Israel and
with the house of Judah.’

Hebrews ch.8 v.8

Parable of the Wise Virgins

by Paul Boyd-Lee



*'Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened
unto ten virgins,
which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom.'*

Matthew ch.25 v.1

The fact that the Bible is divided into chapters sometimes conceals an ongoing theme and this is the case here. This parable is in the middle of half a dozen others that actually start in the previous chapter. In addition to a simple explanation, parables often have a deeper meaning so we would do well to heed the advice of 15th c. Bishop Miles Coverdale to help us unravel it. He said,

*'It shall greatly help you to understand Scripture,
If you mark not only what is spoken or written,
But of whom, and to whom, with what words,
At what time, where, to what intent, with what circumstances,
Considering what goes before and what follows'.*

- We have just read 'what was spoken', by Jesus, and later 'written' down by Matthew, a disciple.
- As to 'of whom', you might want to put yourself in their position and see if you fit.
- Next, 'to whom' ? The answer to this is found in the first verse of the previous chapter. Namely the disciples, and it is unlikely that anyone else was there because it says in ch.24 v.3, 'the disciples came unto him privately'.

- Not only that, but the next piece of Coverdale's advice is 'at what time, where, to what intent?'

The time was but a few days prior to the Lord's betrayal, crucifixion, resurrection and ascension, but the disciples thought that the Lord's coming in glory was imminent.

However, Jesus pointed them away from this to His work, yet to do.

- 'Where' was this said? Verse three also tells us that at that moment Jesus sat on the Mount of Olives, the very place from where He would ascend a few weeks later (Acts ch.1 v.12), the same location that He would return to in glory at the end of the age, as says Zechariah and other scriptures.

- Let us pass on to 'what goes before and what follows'

Before the parable was spoken the disciples were eager to know how long it would be before Jesus exerted His power over a desperately unruly and cruel regime, the great Roman Empire.

Cruelty and ungodliness may be in different hands these days but there are similarities are there not?

- The 'what follows' is all to do with the actual coming again of Jesus in glory which is written much about elsewhere in scripture. But the in between, the core of the parable, starts to answer a central part of Coverdale's instruction, namely,
- 'To what intent'.

The parable centres on half the virgins who were wise & made provision for the night, symbolic of great spiritual ungodliness. They are the ones that win through to the end.

The recurring theme throughout these parables is twofold.

1. To wisely use resources for the master's service, rather than hoard the gifts that He gives us.

'Watch therefore for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come'
Matthew ch.24 v.42

The intention behind the 'watch' is to 'watch out, be careful' rather than just watch with complacency.

Summary

Three things to note which all have relevance to us in our day.

1. The parable's message is particularly directed to the disciples. That is important to us as we endeavour to serve the Lord to our utmost, as disciples. The more we can understand the nature, the calling and tasks given to the disciples, from scripture the better equipped we should be for what lies ahead.
2. The resources that God has entrusted to us, whether they be people, property, finance, and so on, all need to be used; and wisely.
3. Several times these parables teach the disciples to 'Watch out', that is to be careful, the perilous times to come having already been outlined to them in the previous verses. But also to 'Watch for', in the sense of being ready, for the Lord's return. The reality of which is a debatable issue for many today whether within the churches or outside of them.

It says that just prior to the bridegroom's coming,

'... they all slumbered and slept', even those who had oil (symbolic of the Holy Spirit) in their lamps (v.5).

That is a rather sobering thought. Does it include us we may well ask? Does it mean they were exhausted with waiting for good times to come, or the length of the night? I.e. The opposition facing them?

Finally, half the virgins in reality had oil and light at the crucial moment and it was they who were welcomed to feast with the Lord.

How is your oil supply? It's cheap at the moment, free actually.