A HARMONY OF THE SYNOPTIC GOSPELS — CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Matthew 23–25, Mark 12–13, and Luke 20–21 Woven Into One Continuous Narrative

Based on the American Standard Version (ASV, 1901) — Public Domain

2026

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Preface: Continuation of the Harmony

This volume continues the harmony through Jesus's final public discourse in the Temple and the great eschatological discourse on the Mount of Olives. Chapter fourteen covers the material in Matthew 23–25, Mark 12–13, and Luke 20–21 — what scholars call the Olivet Discourse or the Little Apocalypse — along with the woes against the scribes and Pharisees, the widow's offering, and the great parables of eschatological readiness: the Ten Virgins, the Talents, and the Sheep and the Goats.

This chapter represents the end of Jesus's public ministry. When he leaves the Temple at the close of Matthew 23, he never returns to teach publicly again. The Olivet Discourse delivered on the hillside overlooking the city is the last extended discourse in the Synoptic tradition before the Passion narrative begins.

Each section is identified by its source Gospel in brackets:

[Matt] = Matthew

[Mark] = Mark

[Luke] = Luke

[Matt / Mark], **[Matt / Luke]**, **[Mark / Luke]**, or **[Matt / Mark / Luke]** = parallel passages

The translation throughout is the **American Standard Version (ASV, 1901)**, a public domain text of high scholarly accuracy. No words are invented or paraphrased; all text is drawn directly from the ASV.

Chronological ordering follows the scholarly consensus of A.T. Robertson's *A Harmony of the Gospels* (1922), Kurt Aland's *Synopsis Quattuor Evangeliorum*, and Orville Daniel's *A Harmony of the Four Gospels* (2nd ed., 1996).

Part Thirteen: The Last Public Teaching and the Olivet Discourse

Section 151 — The Woes Against the Scribes and Pharisees [Matt 23:1–36 / Mark 12:38–40 / Luke 20:45–47]

Then spake Jesus to the multitudes and to his disciples, saying, The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat: all things therefore whatsoever they bid you, these do and observe: but do not ye after their works; for they say, and do not.

Yea, they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with their finger.

But all their works they do to be seen of men: for they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments, and love the chief place at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues, and the salutations in the marketplaces, and to be called of men, Rabbi.

But be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your teacher, and all ye are brethren. And call no man your father on the earth: for one is your Father, even he who is in heaven. Neither be ye called masters: for one is your master, even the Christ.

But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant. And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be humbled; and whosoever shall humble himself shall be exalted.

But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because ye shut the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye enter not in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering in to enter.

Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte; and when he is become so, ye make him twofold more a son of hell than yourselves.

Woe unto you, ye blind guides, that say, Whosoever shall swear by the temple, it is nothing; but whosoever shall swear by the gold of the temple, he is a debtor. Ye fools and blind: for which is greater, the gold, or the temple that hath sanctified the gold?

Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye tithe mint and anise and cummin, and have left undone the weightier matters of the law, justice, and mercy, and faith: but these ye ought to have done, and not to have left the other undone. Ye blind guides, that strain out the gnat, and swallow the camel.

Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye cleanse the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full from extortion and excess. Thou blind Pharisee, cleanse first the inside of the cup and of the platter, that the outside thereof may become clean also.

Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which outwardly appear beautiful, but inwardly are full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness. Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but inwardly ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity.

Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye build the sepulchres of the prophets, and garnish the tombs of the righteous, and say, If we had been in the days of our fathers, we should not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets. Wherefore ye witness to yourselves, that ye are sons of them that slew the prophets.

Ye serpents, ye offspring of vipers, how shall ye escape the judgment of hell?

Section 152 — The Lament over Jerusalem [Matt 23:37–39]

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, that killeth the prophets, and stoneth them that are sent unto her! how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!

Behold, your house is left unto you desolate. For I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.

Section 153 — The Widow's Offering [Mark 12:41–44 / Luke 21:1–4]

And he sat down over against the treasury, and beheld how the multitude cast money into the treasury: and many that were rich cast in much.

And there came a poor widow, and she cast in two mites, which make a farthing.

And he called unto him his disciples, and said unto them, Verily I say unto you, This poor widow cast in more than all they that are casting into the treasury: for they all did cast in of their superfluity; but she of her want did cast in all that she had, even all her living.

Section 154 — The Prediction of the Temple's Destruction [Matt 24:1–2 / Mark 13:1–2 / Luke 21:5–6]

And Jesus went out from the temple, and was going on his way; and his disciples came to him to show him the buildings of the temple.

But he answered and said unto them, See ye not all these things? verily I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down.

Section 155 — Signs of the End: The Beginning of Birth Pangs [Matt 24:3–14 / Mark 13:3–13 / Luke 21:7–19]

And as he sat on the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?

And Jesus answered and said unto them, Take heed that no man lead you astray. For many shall come in my name, saying, I am the Christ; and shall lead many astray.

And ye shall hear of wars and rumors of wars; see that ye be not troubled: for these things must needs come to pass; but the end is not yet. For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; and there shall be famines and earthquakes in divers places. But all these things are the beginning of travail.

Then shall they deliver you up unto tribulation, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all the nations for my name's sake. And then shall many stumble, and shall deliver up one another, and shall hate one another. And many false prophets shall arise, and shall lead many astray. And because iniquity shall be multiplied, the love of the many shall wax cold. But he that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved.

And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world for a testimony unto all the nations; and then shall the end come.

But before all these things, they shall lay their hands on you, and shall persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues, and prisons, bringing you before kings and governors for my name's sake. It shall turn out unto you for a testimony. Settle it therefore in your hearts, not to meditate beforehand how to answer: for I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which all your adversaries shall not be able to withstand or to gainsay.

Section 156 — The Great Tribulation and the Coming of the Son of Man [Matt 24:15–31 / Mark 13:14–27 / Luke 21:20–28]

When therefore ye see the abomination of desolation, which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (let him that readeth understand), then let them that are in Judaea flee unto the mountains: let him that is on the housetop not go down to take out things that are in his house: and let him that is in the field not return back to take his cloak.

But woe unto them that are with child and to them that give suck in those days! And pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on a sabbath: for then shall be great tribulation, such as hath not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, nor ever shall be.

And except those days had been shortened, no flesh would have been saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened.

Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is the Christ, or, Here; believe it not. For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders; so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect.

And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he shall send forth his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

But when ye see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that her desolation is at hand. Then let them that are in Judaea flee unto the mountains; and let them that are in the midst of her depart out; and let not them that are in the country enter therein. For these are days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled.

And there shall be signs in sun and moon and stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, in perplexity for the roaring of the sea and the billows; men fainting for fear, and for expectation of the things which are coming on the world: for the powers of the heavens shall be shaken. And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. But when these things begin to come to pass, look up, and lift up your heads; because your redemption draweth nigh.

Section 157 — The Parable of the Fig Tree [Matt 24:32–35 / Mark 13:28–31 / Luke 21:29–33]

Now from the fig tree learn her parable: when her branch is now become tender, and putteth forth its leaves, ye know that the summer is nigh; even so ye also, when ye see all these things, know ye that he is nigh, even at the doors.

Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass away, till all these things be accomplished. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.

Section 158 — No One Knows the Hour [Matt 24:36–44 / Mark 13:32–37]

But of that day and hour knoweth no one, not even the angels of heaven, neither the Son, but the Father only.

And as were the days of Noah, so shall be the coming of the Son of man. For as in those days which were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and they knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall be the coming of the Son of man.

Then shall two men be in the field; one is taken, and one is left: two women shall be grinding at the mill; one is taken, and one is left.

Watch therefore: for ye know not on what day your Lord cometh. But know this, that if the master of the house had known in what watch the thief was coming, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken through. Therefore be ye also ready: for in an hour that ye think not the Son of man cometh.

Section 159 — The Parable of the Ten Virgins [Matt 25:1–13]

Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, who took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom. And five of them were foolish, and five were wise.

For the foolish, when they took their lamps, took no oil with them: but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps.

Now while the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept. But at midnight there is a cry, Behold, the bridegroom! Come ye forth to meet him. Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil; for our lamps are going out.

But the wise answered and said, Peradventure there will not be enough for us and you: go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves.

And while they went away to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage feast: and the door was shut.

Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us. But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not.

Watch therefore, for ye know not the day nor the hour.

Section 160 — The Parable of the Talents [Matt 25:14–30]

For it is as when a man, going into another country, called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods. And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one; to each according to his several ability; and he went on his journey.

Straightway he that received the five talents went and traded with them, and made other five talents. In like manner he also that received the two gained other two. But he that received the one went away and digged in the earth, and hid his lord's money.

Now after a long time the lord of those servants cometh, and maketh a reckoning with them. And he that received the five talents came and brought other five talents, saying, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me five talents: lo, I have gained other five talents.

His lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will set thee over many things; enter thou into the joy of thy lord.

And he also that received the two talents came and said, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me two talents: lo, I have gained other two talents. His lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will set thee over many things; enter thou into the joy of thy lord.

And he also that had received the one talent came and said, Lord, I knew thee that thou art a hard man, reaping where thou didst not sow, and gathering where thou didst not scatter; and I was afraid, and went away and hid thy talent in the earth: lo, thou hast thine own.

But his lord answered and said unto him, Thou wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I did not scatter; thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the bankers, and at my coming I should have received back mine own with interest.

Take ye away therefore the talent from him, and give it unto him that hath the ten talents. For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not, even that which he hath shall be taken away.

And cast ye out the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness: there shall be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth.

Section 161 — The Sheep and the Goats [Matt 25:31–46]

But when the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the angels with him, then shall he sit on the throne of his glory: and before him shall be gathered all the nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as the shepherd separateth the sheep from the goats; and he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left.

Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was hungry, and ye gave me to eat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink; I was a stranger, and ye took me in; naked, and ye clothed me; I was sick, and ye visited me; I was in prison, and ye came unto me.

Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee hungry, and fed thee? or athirst, and gave thee drink? And when saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? And when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee?

And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of these my brethren, even these least, ye did it unto me.

Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into the eternal fire which is prepared for the devil and his angels: for I was hungry, and ye did not give me to eat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink; I was a stranger, and ye took me not in; naked, and ye clothed me not; sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not.

Then shall they also answer, saying, Lord, when saw we thee hungry, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee?

Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not unto one of these least, ye did it not unto me.

And these shall go away into eternal punishment: but the righteous into eternal life.

Appendix: Notes on Chapter Fourteen

On the Seven Woes

Matthew 23 (Section 151) contains the most sustained and unsparing prophetic indictment in the Synoptic Gospels — seven formal woes (*ouai*, the Hebrew *hoy* of prophetic denunciation) directed at the scribes and Pharisees in the Temple precincts. The passage is unique to Matthew in its full form, though Mark and Luke contain shorter versions of the scribal critique (Section 151). The woes are not a blanket condemnation of Pharisaism as such — Jesus explicitly acknowledges that the scribes and Pharisees sit on Moses's seat and that their teaching should be heeded (23:2–3). The indictment is of the gap between teaching and practice, between the outward performance of religion and its inward reality.

The most famous images in the passage — phylacteries broadened for show, the strain of the gnat and the swallow of the camel, the whitened sepulchres beautiful on the outside and full of dead men's bones — are among the most vivid metaphors in the Gospel tradition. Each woe

follows the same pattern: the charge of hypocrisy, the specific practice criticized, and the exposure of the interior reality beneath the exterior performance. The cumulative effect is not contempt for religion but a devastating analysis of what religion becomes when it loses its interior life and becomes a social performance.

The closing address — *"Ye serpents, ye offspring of vipers, how shall ye escape the judgment of hell?"* — is the harshest language in the Synoptic Gospels, and it is immediately followed by one of the most heartbroken: the lament over Jerusalem.

On the Lament Over Jerusalem

The lament over Jerusalem (Section 152) is the emotional counterweight to the woes that precede it. The shift from denunciation to lamentation in a single breath — from *"how shall ye escape the judgment of hell?"* to *"how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings"* — is one of the most dramatic tonal transitions in the Gospel tradition. The image of the hen gathering her chicks is an image of maternal, self-giving love: the hen spreads her wings to shelter her brood at cost to herself.

"And ye would not." The four Greek words — *kai ouk ēthελήσατε* — are the theological center of the passage. The refusal is not God's; it is Jerusalem's. The city that kills prophets has been sought; it has refused to be found. The desolation that follows is not punishment imposed from outside but the natural consequence of the city's own rejection of its moment of divine visitation — the phrase Jesus used when weeping over the city at the Triumphal Entry (Luke 19:44).

On the Widow's Offering

The widow's two mites (Section 153) appear between the woes against the scribes and the Olivet Discourse in both Mark and Luke, and the placement is significant. The scribes have just been condemned for "devouring widows' houses" (Mark 12:40). Now Jesus sits and watches the treasury: the rich cast in large amounts from their abundance; a destitute widow casts in two lepta — the smallest coins in circulation, together worth a tiny fraction of a day's wage. His verdict inverts every economic calculation: she has given more than all of them, because she has given all that she had to live on.

The saying does not prescribe this as a general rule of giving; it is an observation about the nature of sacrifice. The rich man's large gift costs him nothing of his security; the widow's tiny gift costs her everything. The measure of giving, Jesus implies, is not the amount given but the proportion of one's life that the gift represents.

On the Olivet Discourse

The Olivet Discourse (Sections 155–158) is the most complex and most debated passage in the Synoptic Gospels. All three Synoptics present it as a private discourse delivered to the disciples on the Mount of Olives after leaving the Temple, prompted by their admiration of the Temple buildings and Jesus's prediction of their total destruction. The discourse addresses two questions that the disciples conflate into one: when will the Temple be destroyed? and what will be the sign of Jesus's return and the end of the age?

The scholarly debate centers on whether Jesus's answers address one event (the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 C.E.) or two (70 C.E. and a future final coming), or whether the discourse deliberately interweaves the near and far horizons as a single prophetic vision in the manner of Old Testament prophecy. Three major interpretive positions have been held: preterism (all fulfilled in 70 C.E.), futurism (the great tribulation language refers to a still-future event), and the dual-fulfillment view in which the destruction of Jerusalem is a type and anticipation of the final consummation.

Several details in the discourse point specifically to the events of 70 C.E. with striking precision: the armies surrounding Jerusalem (Luke 21:20), the exhortation to flee to the mountains (fulfilled when the Jerusalem church fled to Pella), the warning not to pray that flight be "on a sabbath" (a uniquely Jewish concern). Other details — the cosmic signs, the gathering of the elect from the four winds, the Son of Man coming on the clouds — exceed anything that could be fulfilled in the historical events of 70 C.E. and point to a horizon beyond them.

What is not in dispute is Jesus's statement in Section 158: *"But of that day and hour knoweth no one, not even the angels of heaven, neither the Son, but the Father only."* This absolute qualification — unique among Jesus's teachings in its ascription of ignorance to the Son himself — establishes that the Olivet Discourse is not a date-setting document but a call to watchfulness precisely because the time is unknown.

On the Three Eschatological Parables

Matthew 25 contains three parables of eschatological readiness that bring the Olivet Discourse to its conclusion and the entire pre-Passion teaching ministry to a close.

The Ten Virgins (Section 159) turns on the distinction between wisdom and foolishness in preparation. All ten sleep — the wise and the foolish alike — and all ten are awakened by the same midnight cry. The difference is not wakefulness but the preparation made before sleeping: oil that cannot be borrowed or shared at the last minute. The door shuts and does not reopen. *"I know you not"* is the same verdict given in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 7:23) to those whose religious works had no relationship behind them.

The Talents (Section 160) parallels the Parable of the Pounds in Luke 19 (Section 139) but with significant differences in detail. The master distributes different amounts to different servants according to their ability — five talents, two, one — and expects proportional return. The condemnation of the one-talent servant is not for losing the talent but for burying it in fear — for treating the master's gift as a burden rather than an opportunity. The remedy he proposes at his own judgment — the bank, with interest — is modest but was at least possible; his failure was not inability but unwillingness rooted in a distorted view of his master's character.

The Sheep and the Goats (Section 161) closes the entire pre-Passion teaching ministry with the most universally applied and morally concrete of all the judgment parables. The criterion of judgment is not doctrinal precision, ecclesiastical membership, or religious performance but the response to concrete human need: food, water, hospitality, clothing, care for the sick, visitation of prisoners. The identification of the Son of Man with the least of his brothers — *"Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of these my brethren, even these least, ye did it unto me"* — is the most radical identification of the divine with the vulnerable in the Gospel tradition. Both groups — the sheep

and the goats — are equally surprised by the verdict; neither knew that in their response to human need they were responding to or rejecting Jesus himself.

The parable ends with two destinations: eternal life and eternal punishment. The Greek *aionios* (eternal, age-lasting) modifies both, underscoring the parallel and permanent character of both outcomes. Matthew places this as the last word of Jesus's public teaching ministry. It is a fitting end: the entire Sermon on the Mount's ethics — love of enemy, mercy, peacemaking, care for the poor — here meets its ultimate ground and its ultimate consequence.

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