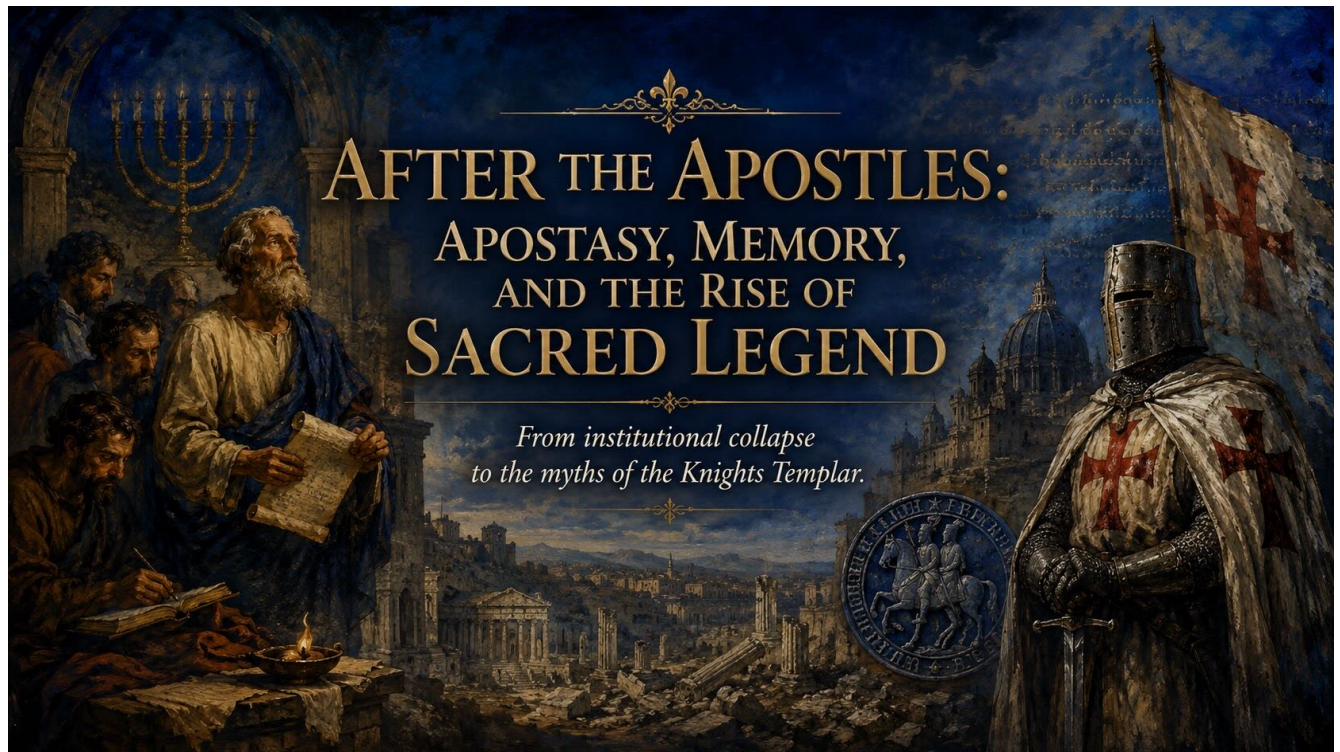




Hi everyone, welcome to our culminating lesson of the New Testament we finally are stepping out of our inherited Christian memory and into the actual historical development of the early church. In the opening New Testament class, we intentionally began with the legendary version of Constantine because that is the story most people inherit today: Christianity collapses, Constantine appears, the church is saved, orthodoxy is established, and the empire becomes Christian. In this lesson, we are going to slow that narrative down and examine how the transition actually unfolded historically. After the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE, the sacred center of Jewish worship disappeared almost overnight, and after the Bar Kokhba revolt of 132–135 CE, when Simon bar Kokhba led a massive Jewish uprising against Rome that ended in catastrophic destruction and the banning of Jews from Jerusalem, the separation between Jewish Christianity and emerging Gentile Christianity deepened dramatically. At the same time, the apostles and first generation witnesses began to die, which meant Christianity increasingly had to preserve sacred memory without the physical temple and without living eyewitnesses to stabilize interpretation. In that environment, temple language migrated into worship, Christology, sacred meals, episcopal order, architecture, liturgy, and eventually into sacred legend itself. This workbook follows that movement from lived temple memory, to institutional preservation, to the symbolic world that later produced relic traditions, monastic secrecy, Grail mythology, and the legends of the Knights Templar. (Hebrews 8–10; Revelation 1–5; Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 3.5; Margaret Barker, *Temple Theology*)

Readings

- [Britannica: Bar Kokhba Revolt](#)
- [BibleHub: Hebrews 8](#)

- [BibleHub: Revelation 4](#)
- [Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy: Gnosticism](#)
- Margaret Barker Temple



Throughout this study of the New Testament we have showed how the early Christian interpretation of Christ’s mission was that He came to fulfill the outward laws so man made temples were no longer necessary. But the evidence of this oversimplified narrative just isn’t there to support it as temples are spoken of in the last days, the apostles continued to attend the temple and even after their deaths temple imagery never disappeared from Christianity even after the destruction of Jerusalem. It migrated upward into heaven, inward into worship, and forward into eschatology. The Letter to the Hebrews presents Christ as the heavenly high priest maintaining the temple imagery of temple corpus through the physical space of temple edifices, Christ is spoken of as ministering in the “true tabernacle”, a polyphasic play on the word tabernacle being referenced. Both the body temple, the microcosm of temple edifices and the world temple as the Tehom and Tiamat. So, while Revelation fills the Christian imagination with temple imagery: lampstands, incense, priestly robes, sealed names, throne-room liturgy, and heavenly worship surrounding the divine throne the lie of early Christian rulers was that the temple was gone. And the reality was that Early Christianity continued to interpret the world through the microcosm of temple liturgy in all forms, covenant mediation, and cosmic worship. The temple remained alive in Christian thought because Christ Himself became the locus of sacred presence, the heavenly veil, and the mediator standing between heaven and earth. (Hebrews 8–10; Revelation 1–5;

Margaret Barker, *Temple Theology*; Crispin Fletcher-Louis, *All the Glory of Adam*) The ritual life of early Christians also preserved strong embodied temple patterns. The Didache preserves baptismal discipline, fasting practices, confession, Eucharistic prayers, and ritual preparation before sacred participation. Tertullian describes Christians turning eastward in prayer, aligning worship physically toward sacred orientation and cosmic symbolism. Archaeological evidence from the Christian house church at Dura-Europos around 232 CE reveals intentionally marked sacred interiors long before imperial basilicas emerged under Constantine. These early communities understood worship as bodily, directional, sacramental, and cosmological. Temple memory survived through baptism, sacred meals, prayer, light, procession, and heavenly imagination. (Didache 7–10; Tertullian, *Apology* 16; Dura-Europos House Church; Larry Hurtado, *Destroyer of the Gods*) This distinction matters historically because the evidence points toward transformation rather than disappearance. The Jerusalem temple ceased functioning as a geographic institution after 70 CE, yet temple concepts continued to shape Christian theology, worship, architecture, and sacred imagination. Christ became the heavenly temple. The Eucharist became sacred participation. Baptism became covenantal passage. Revelation transformed temple worship into cosmic liturgy. Early Christianity preserved temple memory by transposing it into new covenant forms centered on Christ's heavenly mediation and the expectation of divine reunion at the end of the age. (Hebrews 9:11–24; Revelation 21–22; Margaret Barker, *The Gate of Heaven*; N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*)

Readings

- [BibleHub: Hebrews 8](#)
- [BibleHub: Hebrews 9](#)
- [BibleHub: Revelation 4](#)
- [Early Christian Writings: Didache](#)
- [New Advent: Tertullian Apology](#)
- [Yale Art Gallery: Dura-Europos House Church](#)
- Margaret Barker Official Resources

TEMPLE MEMORY IN EARLY CHRISTIAN WORSHIP AND IMAGINATION



HEBREWS 8–10

- Christ our High Priest
- Ministering in the “true tabernacle”
- Entered “heaven itself,” not man-made shrines

REVELATION 1–5, 7–8

- Lampstands
- Incense offerings
- Priesthood & robes
- Heavenly liturgy
- Worship around the throne

RITUAL LIFE PRESERVED

- Didache: baptism, fasting, confession, Eucharist
- Sacred meals as covenant practice
- Community discipline & consecration

SACRED DIRECTION

- Tertullian: Christians turn east in prayer
- Orientation toward the rising Light
- Echo of temple & cosmic order

SACRED SPACE IN THE EARLY CHURCH

- Dura-Europos house church (c. 232 CE)
- Marked sacred interior before Constantine
- Worship without monumental temples

TEMPLE MEMORY TRANSFORMED

- Not by animal sacrifice, but by transposition
- Baptism = washing
- Eucharist = sacrifice
- Heaven = true sanctuary

THE CONTINUITY OF SACRED MEMORY

Temple ceased as a geographic institution

↓

Temple reality re-coded in Christ, worship, sacraments, & eschatology

↓

Heavenly temple becomes the center

THE TEMPLE DID NOT DISAPPEAR. IT WAS TRANSFIGURED.

CONSTANTINE: PRESERVER AND TRANSFORMER



PRESERVER OF CHRISTIANITY

- Legalized Christianity
- Restored confiscated property
- Funded church-building projects
- Commissioned Bible copies
- Supported bishops & clergy
- Summoned ecumenical councils

KEY DATES

313 CE	321 CE	325 CE	336 CE	337 CE
Edict of Milan Toleration & restoration of Christian property	Sunday Legislation Honors the Lord's Day	Council of Nicaea Condemns Arius Homousios: “of one substance”	Earliest Evidence of Dec 25 Celebration in Rome	Constantine Dies Baptized near end of life

NICAEE: UNITY WITH IMPERIAL INVOLVEMENT

- A dispute already existed (Arius vs. orthodox teaching)
- Nicaea affirmed Christ's full divinity
- Arianism continued for decades
- Theology became an imperial concern, not only a local matter

“Constantine did not invent the faith. He secured it—and changed how it was lived.”

ARCHITECTURAL SHIFT

FROM HOUSE CHURCH...



Dura-Europos House Church c. 232 CE

Small-scale sacred interior in domestic space

...TO IMPERIAL BASILICA



Roman Basilica 4th Century

Large civic space for liturgy, processions & congregation

THE IMPACT

From fragile house-based worship → To public, imperial sacred architecture → More visible church → Greater imperial influence

CHRISTIANITY SURVIVED. THE EMPIRE SHAPED IT.

A realistic history of Constantine still maintains him as one of the most important transition points in Christian history because his reign really does mark the movement of Christianity from the persecuted ritual movement into a fully funded and imperially protected public institution. The agreement is what is

known as the Edict of Milan in 313 CE which legalized Christianity throughout the Roman Empire and restored confiscated Christian property after generations of intermittent persecution. Constantine then began supporting the church through imperial patronage. He funded church construction projects, granted privileges to clergy, financially supported bishops, commissioned copies of Christian scriptures, and treated Christianity as an institution connected directly to Roman identity. Christianity entered the fourth century as a marginalized religious movement and emerged within a generation as a religion publicly protected and financially supported by the emperor himself. (Eusebius, *Life of Constantine*; Britannica, “Constantine I”; Lactantius, *On the Deaths of the Persecutors*) when we arrive at the Council of Nicaea in 325 CE we hit a new major turning point in how Christianity handled theological disagreement. Before this moment Constantine allowed small clergy to work out interpretations locally. And while Constantine did not invent the divinity of Christ at Nicaea, the council was called precisely because debates surrounding Christ’s relationship to the Father had already spread throughout the empire. Arius taught that the teachings of Christ was the He, the Son was subordinate and separate from the Father. In response, the council pushed away from this and adopted the term *homoousios*, meaning “of one substance,” to affirm the full divinity of Christ. The debates continued for decades afterward and Arianism remained a continued popular notion across the empire. What is important to understand is the scale of the conflict changes at this turning point. Earlier Christian disagreements were local, fragile, and decentralized. Under imperial Christianity, theological disputes were resolved through empire, politics, councils, bishops, and imperial intervention. (Council of Nicaea 325 CE; Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*; Britannica, “Council of Nicaea”)

The earlier church at the Dura-Europos level reveals Christians worshipping inside adapted homes whose teachings centered on baptism, sacred meals, and communal ritual life. Under Constantine, Christianity moved into Roman basilicas, large civic structures capable of housing processions, elaborate liturgies, growing congregations, and increasingly stratified sacred space. The basilica allowed Christianity to become public, visible, ceremonial, and architecturally imperial. This shift helps us understand temple development in Christianity because sacred space itself became increasingly centralized and connected to imperial order. Interpretations of the gospel moved from intimate domestic worship into the monumental sacred architecture tied to the authority of bishops and emperors. (Smarthistory, “Early Christian Architecture”; Old St. Peter’s Basilica; Larry Hurtado, *Destroyer of the Gods*)

Two dates show just how rapidly Christianity changed during the fourth century. By 336 CE, Christians in Rome were formally celebrating the birth of Christ on December 25. Then Constantine himself died in 337 CE after receiving baptism near the end of his life, pushing with it an import on the common late antique practice in which some believers delayed baptism until later years because of the seriousness attached to post-baptismal sin. These details help situate Constantine historically as a ruler navigating the transformation of Christianity into an imperial religion while Christianity itself continued developing structurally, liturgically, and theologically across the Roman world. (Eusebius, *Life of Constantine* IV.61–64; Britannica, “Christmas”; Britannica, “Constantine I”)

Readings

- [Britannica: Constantine I](#)
- [Britannica: Council of Nicaea](#)

- [New Advent: Nicene Creed](#)
- [Smarthistory: Early Christian Architecture](#)
- [Fordham Sourcebook: Edict of Milan](#)
- [New Advent: Eusebius Life of Constantine](#)



One of the most important ideas for understanding the development of Christianity after the apostles is the movement from living sacred memory into symbolic sacred memory. Early Christianity originally functioned through what we might call primary memory: communities gathered around living ritual in temples, through recognized leaders, using repeated sacred practice, oral teaching, Eucharistic participation, baptismal identity, and a shared sacred worldview embodied together in real time. The apostles, bishops, prophets, martyrs, and ritual communities acted as living carriers of sacred continuity. Over time, however, Christianity increasingly relied upon what we might call secondary memory: texts, relics, shrines, sacred geography, saint traditions, idealized origins, liturgical reenactment, and retrospective legends that preserved fragments of sacred meaning after the original ritual world became more distant historically. Later Christianity became invested in relics, sacred sites, apostolic succession, monastic preservation, and eventually legendary histories surrounding older institutions. (Didache 7–10; Ignatius of Antioch, *Letter to the Smyrnaeans*; Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*)

Sacred legend became so powerful in medieval Christianity. Legends as symbolic vessels would carrying sacred memory across generations. They preserved collective hopes, fears, anxieties, ideals, and perceptions of lost authority. By the medieval period, Christians increasingly imagined hidden sacred continuity surviving beneath political collapse, institutional corruption, crusader defeat, and shifting kingdoms. Stories surrounding relics, Grail traditions, hidden monasteries, secret teachings, sacred bloodlines, and ancient temple mysteries became ways of imagining continuity with a sacred past that felt increasingly distant. Sacred legend therefore operated less as random fantasy and more as symbolic preservation of older religious longings rooted in temple memory, covenant continuity, divine authority, and heavenly order. (Malcolm Barber, *The New Knighthood*; Umberto Eco, *History of Legendary Lands*; Jacques Le Goff, *The Medieval Imagination*)

This framework becomes especially important when approaching the Knights Templar. Historically, the Templars were a military monastic order founded in the early twelfth century to protect Christian pilgrims traveling to Jerusalem after the First Crusade. Over time, however, the Templars accumulated enormous symbolic power within the Christian imagination. Later legends transformed them into guardians of hidden wisdom, protectors of sacred relics, preservers of temple secrets, custodians of apostolic bloodlines, and survivors of suppressed sacred knowledge. These stories tell us less about the actual medieval order itself and far more about the spiritual imagination of later generations searching for continuity with a sacred world they feared had been lost. Once students understand the difference between historical institution and symbolic afterlife, the Templar traditions stop feeling disconnected from church history and instead become part of the larger Christian struggle to preserve sacred memory after the collapse of earlier forms of sacred continuity. (Britannica, "Knights Templar"; Malcolm Barber, *The Trial of the Templars*; Chinon Parchment Studies)

Readings

- [Early Christian Writings: Didache](#)
- [New Advent: Ignatius to the Smyrnaeans](#)
- [New Advent: Eusebius Ecclesiastical History](#)
- [Britannica: Knights Templar](#)
- [History.com: Knights Templar Overview](#)
- [Library of Congress: Chinon Parchment](#)



The Knights Templar sit right at the intersection of history, sacred memory, Jerusalem symbolism, and medieval imagination, which is exactly why they matter for this class. After the First Crusade captured Jerusalem in 1099, Christian pilgrimage into the Holy Land expanded rapidly, and the roads leading into the city became dangerous for travelers. Around 1119 or 1120, a small group of knights led by Hugh de Payns formed a religious brotherhood dedicated to protecting pilgrims journeying toward Jerusalem. King Baldwin II established them near the area associated with the former Temple of Solomon, which is where the order received its name: the Poor Fellow-Soldiers of Christ and of the Temple of Solomon. From the very beginning, the Templars carried deep symbolic connections to sacred geography, temple memory, covenant protection, and the longing for Christian continuity with biblical Jerusalem. (Britannica, “Knights Templar”; Malcolm Barber, *The New Knighthood*; First Crusade histories)

What makes the Templars so fascinating historically is that they combined two worlds medieval Christianity usually kept separate: monasticism and warfare. Templars took vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience like monks, while simultaneously functioning as soldiers defending pilgrimage routes and Crusader territory. Over time the order expanded across Europe and the Levant, accumulating land, castles, wealth, political influence, and eventually one of the earliest large-scale banking systems in medieval Europe. In 1139, Pope Innocent II issued the papal bull *Omne Datum Optimum*, granting the order extraordinary privileges, including exemption from local bishops and direct accountability to the pope alone. That level of autonomy made the Templars incredibly powerful and increasingly difficult for kings and political rulers to control. The order eventually became one of the most influential religious institutions in medieval Christendom. (*Omne Datum Optimum* 1139 CE; Helen Nicholson, *The Knights Templar*; Britannica, “Knights Templar”)

The destruction of the Templars unfolded during a moment of enormous instability inside medieval Europe. After the fall of Acre in 1291, which marked the collapse of the final major Crusader stronghold in the Holy Land, the military role of the Templars became far less clear while their wealth and independence continued growing. King Philip IV of France carried massive debt and increasingly viewed the order as both politically dangerous and financially threatening. On Friday, October 13, 1307, Philip ordered the simultaneous arrest of Templars across France under accusations of heresy, idol worship, blasphemy, and sexual misconduct. Modern historians broadly agree that many confessions emerged through torture and political coercion. Under tremendous royal pressure, Pope Clement V dissolved the order in 1312, and Jacques de Molay, the final Grand Master of the Templars, was executed in 1314 after publicly retracting earlier confessions and defending the innocence of the order. This is one of the most important moments in medieval Christian history because it shows how fragile sacred institutions could become once political power, economic pressure, and religious authority collided together. (Malcolm Barber, *The Trial of the Templars*; Britannica, “Knights Templar”; Fordham Medieval Sourcebook, Templar Trials)

One of the most fascinating discoveries connected to the Templars is the Chinon Parchment, rediscovered in the Vatican archives in the early twenty-first century. The document records that papal investigators formally absolved leading Templar officials, including Jacques de Molay, and restored them to communion after their interrogations. That discovery dramatically complicates the traditional narrative surrounding the destruction of the order because it reveals tension between the papal investigation and the political pressure being applied by Philip IV. The Chinon Parchment does not prove every accusation was false, and it does not support modern conspiracy claims surrounding hidden Vatican secrets, yet it does reveal how deeply political the suppression of the Templars truly was. Once students see this complexity historically, the story becomes far more interesting than the simplified conspiracy versions that dominate popular culture today. (Library of Congress, “The Chinon Parchment”; Vatican Secret Archives Publications)

The legendary afterlife of the Templars became even larger than the historical order itself. Over time, later generations transformed the Templars into guardians of hidden wisdom, protectors of sacred relics, preservers of ancient temple mysteries, keepers of Grail traditions, secret initiatory orders, and even carriers of sacred bloodlines. These legends tell us something important about the medieval and modern religious imagination. People long for continuity with sacred origins. They long for hidden authority surviving beneath political collapse, institutional corruption, and historical fragmentation. The Templars became symbolic vessels carrying those longings forward through story and myth. Even the modern superstition surrounding Friday the 13th became loosely attached to the Templar arrests centuries later, although historians generally view that connection as part of a much later legendary development rather than a historically established medieval belief. The Templars therefore become one of the clearest examples of what happens when institutional memory evolves into sacred legend. (Umberto Eco, *History of Legendary Lands*; Britannica, “Knights Templar”; History Channel, “Friday the 13th”)

Readings

- [Britannica: Knights Templar](#)

- [World History Encyclopedia: Knights Templar](#)
- [History.com: Knights Templar Overview](#)
- [Britannica: First Crusade](#)
- [Encyclopedia.com: Omne Datum Optimum](#)



We are ending with the parable of the ten virgins as it captures the exact issue Christianity faced after the apostles: how do you encapsulate the issue of accepting the higher lessons of the Hidden knowledge with the clear sacred readiness during their long period of delay? Matthew puts the parable directly inside his larger eschatological discourse in chapters 24 and 25, where Christ emphasizes endurance or a better translation would be militarily pushing through the bombardment and rejection of the more complex teachings that require the code of teaching in parables. Because of their inability to be prepared, vigilant, and understanding the meaning in the covenants while awaiting the coming of the Son of Man without accepting Lady Zion. One of the most important details in the story is that all ten virgins fall asleep. But the contrast is therefore centered on preparation and not wakefulness. The wise or the priestesses of Wisdom are emphasized as the requirement for being prepared for a delay that lasted longer than expected, because of the foolish who carried the concept of the anointing oil only enough for the immediate moment of understanding. That detail is important for understanding the symbolic force of the parable because the story begins asking what survives spiritually when sacred expectation stretches across generations. (Matthew 24–25; Working Preacher, Matthew 25 Commentary; Craig Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew*)

The Greek vocabulary inside the parable adds depth to the scene. Matthew describes “δέκα παρθένοις” *deka parthenois* carrying their “λαμπάδας” *lampas* as they go out “εἰς ἀπάντησιν τοῦ νυμφίου” *apantēsis*. The term *parthenoi* refers to maidens or virgins participating in the wedding procession but has priesthood roots. As the emphasis rests primarily on their ceremonial role within the

wedding and not on abstract sexual purity. The word *lampas* refers to a torch or processional light and not the later interpretations of small domestic lamp, immediately giving the parable a public, priesthood, and ceremonial atmosphere. The noun *apantēsis* refers to going out to meet or escort an arriving dignitary or honored figure as they are what ushers in the Savior. Altogether, the language shows the procession, sacred expectation, movement toward encounter, and ritual participation surrounding the arrival of the bridegroom. Matthew's language is clear in its teachings of priesthood female attendants participating in sacred procession with torchlight and consecrated oil, linguistically choosing words connected to temple preparation, covenant readiness, wisdom traditions, and the liturgical threshold symbolism within Second Temple Judaism and early Christianity and not later abstract virginity (Matthew 25:1–13; Exodus 27:20; Proverbs 8; Sirach 24; BDAG Lexicon; Margaret Barker, *Temple Theology*; Craig Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew*). In fact the entire story shows linguistics tied to light, priestly procession, covenantal preparation, and entrance into a sacred communal celebration. (BDAG Lexicon; Mounce Greek Dictionary; Matthew 25:1–13)

The contrast between the women becomes even clearer in verse 2. Matthew calls five of them *phronimoi*, the women of Wisdom, and the other five *morai*, foolish or lacking discernment of said Wisdom. The distinction is practical of the emphasized gnosis debate of the contemporary lost gospel texts. The women of Wisdom bring light or knowledge of the perceived extra oil of the spirit while the foolish carry only enough for the immediate need of interpretation for the bridegroom. The Greek term *elaion* refers literally to the sacred anointing of the Holy Spirit's olive oil, the symbolic fuel used for lamps and torches throughout the ancient world. Across biblical tradition, this oil is associated with consecration, anointing, healing, sacred king and queenship, the divine presence, and temple preparation. That symbolic understanding of the time is important as the oil in the parable is identified as polysemic. Historically, it fuels the lamps. Theologically, it points toward the inner reserves required to sustain covenant faithfulness across an unexpectedly long night of waiting that only half are ready for. Scholars have connected the oil to faith, endurance, mercy, righteous action, the Spirit, and covenantal perseverance. The story itself leaves the symbol intentionally open enough to carry all of those resonances together. (Matthew 25:2–9; BDAG Lexicon; Craig Blomberg, *Interpreting the Parables*) This is exactly why the parable works so well as the theological climax about apostolic collapse, temple memory, Constantine, and sacred legend. These women of Wisdom preserve the issue then and now. They preserve the sustaining presence. The foolish still possess lamps, titles, processional identity, and expectation of the bridegroom, yet they lack the reserves, the deeper knowledge necessary to carry them into the millennium of accepting Lady Zion. The phrase is traditionally translated "how often I would have gathered," in the Greek imagery is and always has been maternal and should be rendered, "how often she would have gathered her children beneath her wings," preserving the nurturing covenant symbolism embedded in the image of the sheltering bird of Lady Zion (Matthew 23:37; Psalm 91:4; Ruth 2:12). That image maps directly onto the historical development of Christianity after the apostles. Institutions remain. Sacred architecture remains. Liturgies remain. Names remain. Traditions remain. The deep is lost, but the reserve oil of living sacred continuity still burns within some. Through that linguistic lens, the parable is more than the later moral lesson about preparedness. It was first a meditation on covenant endurance of deeper truths, sacred memory, and the preservation of the divine presence across generations waiting in the darkness needed for the return of the bridegroom. (Matthew 25:1–13; Margaret Barker, *Temple Theology*; N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*)

Readings

- [BibleHub: Matthew 25](#)
- [STEP Bible Greek Text of Matthew 25](#)
- [BibleHub Greek Lexicon: παρθένος](#)
- [BibleHub Greek Lexicon: λαμπάς](#)
- [BibleHub Greek Lexicon: ἔλαιον](#)
- [BibleHub Greek Lexicon: ἀπάντησις](#)
- [Margaret Barker Resources](#)

<https://bibleproject.com/videos/heaven-and-earth/>