

# Notes on Luke

2024 Edition  
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## Introduction

### WRITER

Several factors indicate that the writer of this Gospel was the same person who wrote the Book of Acts: First, a man named Theophilus was the recipient of both books (Luke 1:3; Acts 1:1).<sup>1</sup> Second, Acts refers to a previous work by the same writer. Third, both books have several common themes, some of which do not receive the same emphasis elsewhere in the New Testament. Fourth, there are general structural and stylistic similarities, including the use of chiasms and the tendency to focus on specific individuals.<sup>2</sup> Whereas chiasms are not unique to Luke and Acts, the writer used them frequently.

The writer also acquired his knowledge of Jesus' life and ministry from research rather than from eyewitness observations (Luke 1:1-4). So he was not one of the disciples who traveled with Jesus.

The early church identified the writer as Luke (probably a shortened form of Lukios or Lukanos<sup>3</sup>). The heretic Marcion is the earliest witness that we have to Luke's authorship (ca. A.D. 135). The Muratorian Canon (a list of Christian writings that the author considered canonical, ca. A.D. 180) mentioned Luke as the writer too. It described him as the physician who accompanied Paul on his journeys (cf. Acts 16:10-17; 20:5-15; 21:1-18; 27:1—28:16; Col. 4:14; Phile. 24; 2 Tim. 4:11). Irenaeus (ca. A.D. 180-185) also believed that Luke wrote this Gospel, and he called him the inseparable companion of Paul.<sup>4</sup> Jerome wrote that Luke died at the age of

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<sup>1</sup>In these notes I capitalize Gospel when referring to one of the four Gospels and use lowercase gospel when referring to the good news: the gospel message.

<sup>2</sup>A chiasmus is a rhetorical or literary figure in which words, grammatical constructions, or concepts are repeated in reverse order, in the same or a modified form.

<sup>3</sup>A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, 2:ix.

<sup>4</sup>*Against Heresies*, 3:14:1.

84 and was never married.<sup>1</sup> Later church fathers likewise referred to Luke as the writer of this Gospel.

Luke was evidently a Gentile (cf. Col. 4:10-14). However some scholars believe that Colossians 4:11 and 14 do not necessarily mean that Luke was a Gentile, and that he may have been a Hellenistic Jew.<sup>2</sup> Church tradition identified Antioch of Syria as Luke's hometown.<sup>3</sup> But this has not been validated. Philippi also has some traditional support as being his hometown.<sup>4</sup> J. Sidlow Baxter wrote that we know less about Luke than about any other New Testament writer.<sup>5</sup>

### DISTINCTIVE FEATURES

"Whereas the emphasis in Matthew is on what Jesus *said*, and in Mark on what Jesus *did*, here in Luke it is rather on *Jesus Himself*."<sup>6</sup>

The main doctrines of systematic theology that Luke stressed were God,<sup>7</sup> Jesus, salvation (especially redemption), the Holy Spirit, angels, and things to come.

"Luke is the only synoptic evangelist to use the noun 'salvation' (*soteria* four times [1:69, 71, 77, 19:9]; *soterion* twice [2:30; 3:6]) and 'savior' (*soter* [1:47; 2:11]), and he used the verb 'save' (*sodzo*) more than any other book in the New Testament (although this is mainly because of Luke's greater length)."<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, p. 1408.

<sup>2</sup>E.g., R. P. Martin, *Colossians: The Church's Lord and the Christian's Liberty*, p. 146; and John Wenham, "The Identification of Luke," *Evangelical Quarterly* 63:1 (1991):16.

<sup>3</sup>J. Norval Geldenhuys, *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke*, pp. 21-22.

<sup>4</sup>Robertson, 2:x. Cf. John Nolland, *Luke 1—9:20*, p. xxxix.

<sup>5</sup>J. Sidlow Baxter, *Explore the Book*, 5:258.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, 5:232.

<sup>7</sup>See Justin Jackson, "The God Who Acts: Luke's Presentation of God," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 64:1 (March 2021):95-107.

<sup>8</sup>Donald A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, p. 220. The synoptic evangelists are Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

"In the gospel of Luke the phrase *praising God* occurs oftener than in all the rest of the New Testament put together."<sup>1</sup>

There is also much emphasis on the glory of God, prayer, miracles, the divine plan that Jesus fulfilled, Israel, believing, discipleship, forgiveness,<sup>2</sup> and God's Word. About 20 of Jesus' parables are unique to this Gospel. Luke also related certain events in Jesus' life to secular history, and he emphasized Jesus' final trip to Jerusalem.<sup>3</sup>

Luke stressed Jesus' concern for all people, especially for individuals that Jewish society of His day despised, such as Gentiles, the poor, women, children, and "sinners." He wrote "the gospel of the underdog."<sup>4</sup> No other Gospel presents Jesus having dinner with someone as often as this one does. Luke used the Greek term *nomikos*, which means "lawyer," rather than the Hebrew term *grammateus*, meaning "scribe." He emphasized Jesus' practical teachings, such as what He taught about money (cf. chs. 12 and 16).

"In terms of its worldview, its theology, and its practical presentation of principles, this Gospel explains how we can serve God better."<sup>5</sup>

Luke used more medical terms than we find in the writings of Hippocrates, the father of medicine.<sup>6</sup> Luke showed interest in purpose, fulfillment, and accomplishment. He documented the joy that resulted from Jesus' saving and healing works. He stressed Jesus' call for people to become His disciples. He portrayed Jesus as dependent on the Holy Spirit and on the Father through prayer. Finally, Luke recorded many examples of Jesus' power.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>William Barclay, *The Gospel of Luke*, p. xvi.

<sup>2</sup>See Jason Valeriano Hallig, "Literary Function of Forgiveness in the Plot of Luke-Acts Narrative," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 117:708 (October-December 2020):462-80.

<sup>3</sup>For an excellent summary of Luke's theology, see Darrell L. Bock, "A Theology of Luke-Acts," in *A Biblical Theology of the New Testament*, pp. 87-166.

<sup>4</sup>Barclay, p. xvii.

<sup>5</sup>Darrell L. Bock, *Luke*, p. 26.

<sup>6</sup>J. Vernon McGee, *Thru the Bible with J. Vernon McGee*, 4:238.

<sup>7</sup>For other characteristic features of Luke's Gospel, see Alfred Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Luke*, pp. xli-lxvii; W. Graham Scroggie, *A Guide to the Gospels*, pp. 366-81.

"Luke's Gospel gives a reader a more comprehensive grasp of the history of the period than the other Gospels. He presented more facts about the earthly life of Jesus than did Matthew, Mark, or John."<sup>1</sup>

Luke is the longest book in the New Testament (1,121 verses), Matthew is second (1,071 verses), and Acts is third (1,007 verses). John has 879 verses, and Mark has 678 verses. Luke and Acts combined comprise about 27 percent of the Greek New Testament. Furthermore, Luke wrote more verses in the New Testament than anyone else: 2,128 in Luke and Acts. Paul wrote the second largest number of verses (2,032), then John (1,416), then Matthew (1,071), then Mark (678), and finally the lesser contributors.<sup>2</sup>

"The presentation of the facts is fuller in some respects, but is less topical than Matthew's and is more flowing than Mark's."<sup>3</sup>

"The gospel according to St. Luke has been called the loveliest book in the world. ... It would not be far wrong to say that the third gospel is the best life of Christ ever written."<sup>4</sup>

Muslims respect the Gospels, and probably more Muslims have been brought to faith in Christ through Luke's Gospel than any other, because of its emphases.

## PURPOSES

The Gospel of Luke is one of the books of the Bible that states the purpose of the writer. Luke said that he wrote in order to inform Theophilus about the truthfulness of the gospel that Theophilus had heard (1:4).

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<sup>1</sup>John A. Martin, "Luke," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament*, p. 201. See Arno C. Gaebelin, *The Annotated Bible*, 3:1:122-23, for a list of 58 events and principal circumstances reported exclusively by Luke.

<sup>2</sup>See Bock, *Luke*, p. 17.

<sup>3</sup>Merrill C. Tenney, "The Gospel According to Luke," in *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, p. 1028.

<sup>4</sup>Barclay, p. xiii.

In Acts, Luke wrote that he had written previously about the things that Jesus began to do and teach before His ascension (Acts 1:1-2). He then proceeded to narrate the things that Jesus continued to do and teach after His ascension, through His apostles, in Acts. Presumably Luke wrote both his Gospel and Acts with a larger audience than just Theophilus in view.

The distinctive emphases of the Gospel help us to identify secondary purposes. Luke demonstrated a strong desire to convince his readers of the reliability of the facts that he recorded, so that they would believe in Jesus and become Christians. He also emphasized the significance of what God had done in Christ.<sup>1</sup> These concerns are also clear in Acts.<sup>2</sup> Obviously Luke wrote to preserve the record of events that happened during Jesus' earthly ministry, but few ancient writers wrote simply to narrate a chronicle of events.<sup>3</sup> They wrote in order to convince their readers of something, and they used history to do that. Nevertheless, historical accuracy was important to them.<sup>4</sup>

We believe that Luke's Gospel is an accurate account of biblical history that God preserved in Scripture. This Gospel constitutes an apologetic for (defense of) Christianity that would have been of special interest to the Greeks of his day because of Luke's selection of material, vocabulary, and style.<sup>5</sup> It would give them a reason for the hope that was in them (cf. 1 Pet. 3:15).

"Luke's purpose was apparently not to provide an historical foundation for the Christian message. ... He has 'ordered' the events of his narrative so as to bring out their significance, to persuade Theophilus—who is not so much concerned with the issue, Did it happen? as with the queries, What happened? and What does it all mean? By providing a more complete

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<sup>1</sup>Carson and Moo, p. 212.

<sup>2</sup>See I. Howard Marshall, *Luke: Historian and Theologian*.

<sup>3</sup>Walter L. Liefeld, "Luke," in *Matthew-Luke*, vol. 8 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, p. 800.

<sup>4</sup>See A. W. Mosley, "Historical Reporting in the Ancient World," *New Testament Studies* 12 (1965-66):10-26.

<sup>5</sup>See William J. Larkin Jr., "The Recovery of Luke-Acts as 'Grand Narrative' for the Church's Evangelistic and Edification Tasks in a Postmodern Age," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 43:3 (September 2000):405-15, for suggestions for using Luke-Acts in a postmodern age.

accounting of Jesus in his significance, Luke hopes to encourage active faith."<sup>1</sup>

### ORIGINAL AUDIENCE

Evidently Theophilus was a real person.<sup>2</sup> His name is Greek and means "Lover of God." We do not know where he lived. He appears to have been a fairly recent convert to Christianity from Greek paganism, though Richard Lenski believed that he was not yet a Christian.<sup>3</sup> Consequently, it appears that Luke wrote for people such as Theophilus originally. Before his conversion, Theophilus may have been one of the Gentile God-fearers to whom Luke referred several times in Acts. The God-fearers were Gentiles who had a certain respect for, and who wanted to learn more about, the God of the Jews. They came to the Jewish synagogues and listened to the Jewish Scriptures read there. Luke's orientation of his Gospel to the secular world, and his references to Judaism, also suggest that he wrote his Gospel with these people in mind.

"Much about Luke-Acts would well suit Cornelius-like readers [cf. Acts 10—11]."<sup>4</sup>

Luke's use of the Septuagint version of the Hebrew Bible, and his interest in the God-fearers, suggest this too.<sup>5</sup> Many of the Gentile God-fearers had turned from Greek polytheism to Jewish monotheism, but most of them lived outside the Promised Land and were not familiar with the geography and culture of that land. Luke clarified these matters for his readers when necessary. The God-fearers were the Gentiles whom Paul found to be the most receptive soil for the gospel seed. Luke himself may have been one of this group, though there is no way to prove or to disprove that possibility.

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<sup>1</sup>Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, p. 36.

<sup>2</sup>See my comment on 1:3.

<sup>3</sup>Richard C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Luke's Gospel*, pp. 11, 33.

<sup>4</sup>Nolland, p. 10. Cf. pp. xxxii-xxxiii.

<sup>5</sup>The Septuagint, often abbreviated LXX, is the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible (our Old Testament) that was made in the third century B.C.

"[Luke] writes to reassure the Christians of his day that their faith in Jesus is no aberration, but the authentic goal towards which God's ancient dealings with Israel were driving."<sup>1</sup>

By the first century most of the pagan Greeks had stopped believing in the gods and goddesses of their mythology and had abandoned fatalism. Many of them were following Eastern "mystery religions" (religions that professed to offer insight into the unseen world). Those religions competed with Christianity for their allegiance. Both beliefs offered saviors, but the Savior of Christianity was a personal resurrected Lord, whereas the savior of the mystery religions was impersonal and ideal. Luke evidently wrote to persuade these people to believe in Jesus and to give them a solid factual basis for their faith.

"That he wrote for an urban church community in the Hellenistic world is fairly certain."<sup>2</sup>

### LITERARY CHARACTERISTICS

Experts in Greek literary styles acknowledge Luke's style and structure as superb.<sup>3</sup> No one knows Luke's educational background, but clearly he had training in Greek composition as well as medicine, and a talent for writing. Luke used many words that the other Gospel writers did not, and many of them show a wide literary background. He also used several medical and theological terms that are unique. Luke's use of Semitisms shows that he knew the Hebrew Bible well. But his preference for the Septuagint suggests that it was the version that his reader(s) used most. Perhaps Luke was a Gentile who had much exposure to Semitic idioms and theology from Paul and other Jews. He was a skillful enough writer to use chiasms as a major structural device.<sup>4</sup> A chiasmus was a literary device, used by both Jewish and Greek writers, that gave unity to a composition or section of text. Acts also contains chiasms.

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<sup>1</sup>Robert Maddox, *The Purpose of Luke-Acts*, p. 187.

<sup>2</sup>I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, p. 33.

<sup>3</sup>See Henry J. Cadbury, *The Style and Literary Method of Luke*.

<sup>4</sup>See Charles H. Talbert, *Literary Patterns, Theological Themes and the Genre of Luke-Acts*.

Luke also repeated similar stories with variations (cf. 1:80; 2:40; 2:52). This literary device aids learning by repetition while giving additional new insights. He also tended to use a particular term frequently in one or more passages, and then rarely or never after that. This makes the term stand out and calls attention to it where it occurs.<sup>1</sup>

## GENRE

Luke identified the genre of his work as a narrative (an orderly "account," 1:1).<sup>2</sup> It is a historical narrative in that it relates events that happened in the past in story form.<sup>3</sup>

## DATE

Practically all biblical scholars believe that Luke wrote his Gospel before he wrote Acts. Many conservative scholars hold that he wrote Acts during Paul's first Roman imprisonment, during which the book's chronological record of events ends (A.D. 60-62), or shortly thereafter. Luke accompanied Paul during much of that apostle's missionary ministry. At times Luke was not with Paul, but he was ministering as Paul's representative in one or another of the churches that Paul had founded, including the one in Philippi. Evidently Paul was Luke's primary source of information for his Gospel and Acts, as Peter was Mark's primary source for the second Gospel. However, there are indications in both Luke and Acts that Luke received information from other sources as well.

Luke may have written his Gospel during Paul's first imprisonment in Rome, along with Acts. However it seems more likely, in view of how Luke introduced these two books, that he wrote the Gospel some time earlier than Acts. Luke had the most time to write this Gospel during Paul's Caesarean imprisonment (A.D. 57-59, cf. Acts 24:1—26:32). This seems

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<sup>1</sup>See Henry J. Cadbury, "Four Features of Lucan Style," in *Studies in Luke-Acts*, ed. Leander Keck and J. Louis Martyn (New York: Abingdon Press, 1966), pp. 87-102.

<sup>2</sup>Genre refers to the type, kind, or category of a composition.

<sup>3</sup>See Green, pp. 2-6.



to me, and some other writers, to be a possible date of writing.<sup>1</sup> Another possibility is that Luke wrote this Gospel after Paul's death.<sup>2</sup>

"There is nothing to contradict the old tradition that the Gospels were written in the order in which we now have them in the New Testament, specifically that Luke was the third to write. This is the testimony of Irenaeus in the *Church History* of Eusebius (5, 8, 2), and likewise of Origen (6, 25, 3), and of the first sixteen lines of the Muratorian canon."<sup>3</sup>

## OUTLINE

- I. Introduction 1:1-4
- II. The birth and childhood of Jesus 1:5—2:52
  - A. The announcement of John the Baptist's birth 1:5-25
    - 1. The introduction of John's parents 1:5-7
    - 2. The angel's announcement to Zechariah 1:8-23
    - 3. The pregnancy of Elizabeth 1:24-25
  - B. The announcement of Jesus' birth 1:26-56
    - 1. The introduction of Mary and Joseph 1:26-27
    - 2. The angel's announcement to Mary 1:28-38
    - 3. Mary's visit to Elizabeth 1:39-56
  - C. The birth and early life of John the Baptist 1:57-80
    - 1. The naming of John 1:57-66
    - 2. Zechariah's song of praise 1:67-79
    - 3. The preparation of John 1:80

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<sup>1</sup>E.g., J. S. Howson, in *The Life and Epistles of St. Paul*, p. 612; Robertson, 2:xi; Tenney, p. 1028; Mark L. Bailey, "Luke," in *The New Testament Explorer*, p. 102; Kenneth G. Hanna, *From Gospels to Glory*, p. 66.

<sup>2</sup>Plummer, p. xxxi; Lenski, p. 19.

<sup>3</sup>Lenski, p. 15. For additional introductory information, see Earle E. Ellis, *The Gospel of Luke*, and Carson and Moo, pp. 198-224. For a brief discussion of the order in which the Gospels were written, see the introduction to my notes on Matthew.

- D. The birth and early life of Jesus ch. 2
  - 1. The setting of Jesus' birth 2:1-7
  - 2. The announcement to the shepherds 2:8-20
  - 3. Jesus' circumcision and naming 2:21
  - 4. Jesus' presentation in the temple 2:22-38
  - 5. Jesus' development in Nazareth 2:39-40
  - 6. Jesus' visit to the temple as a boy 2:41-51
  - 7. Jesus' continuing growth 2:52
  
- III. The preparation for Jesus' ministry 3:1—4:13
  - A. The ministry of John the Baptist 3:1-20
    - 1. The beginning of John's ministry 3:1-6
    - 2. John's preaching 3:7-18
    - 3. The end of John's ministry 3:19-20
  
  - B. The baptism of Jesus 3:21-22
  - C. The genealogy of Jesus 3:23-38
  - D. The temptation of Jesus 4:1-13
  
- IV. Jesus' ministry in and around Galilee 4:14—9:50
  - A. Jesus' teaching ministry and the response to it 4:14—5:11
    - 1. An introduction to Jesus' Galilean ministry 4:14-15
    - 2. Jesus' teaching in Nazareth 4:16-30
    - 3. Jesus' ministry in and around Capernaum 4:31-44
    - 4. The call of Peter, James, and John 5:1-11
  
  - B. The beginning of controversy with the Pharisees 5:12—6:11
    - 1. Jesus' cleansing of a leprous Jew 5:12-16
    - 2. Jesus' authority to forgive sins 5:17-26
    - 3. Jesus' attitude toward sinners 5:27-32
    - 4. Jesus' attitude toward fasting 5:33-39
    - 5. Jesus' authority over the Sabbath 6:1-5
    - 6. Jesus' attitude toward the Sabbath 6:6-11
  
  - C. Jesus' teaching of His disciples 6:12-49
    - 1. The selection of 12 disciples 6:12-16

2. The assembling of the people 6:17-19
  3. The Sermon on the Mount 6:20-49
- D. Jesus' compassion for people ch. 7
1. The healing of a centurion's servant 7:1-10
  2. The raising of a widow's son 7:11-17
  3. The confusion about Jesus' identity 7:18-35
  4. The anointing by a sinful woman 7:36-50
- E. Jesus' teaching in parables 8:1-21
1. The companions and supporters of Jesus 8:1-3
  2. The parable of the soils 8:4-15
  3. The parable of the lamp 8:16-18
  4. The true family of Jesus 8:19-21
- F. Jesus' mighty works 8:22-56
1. The stilling of the storm 8:22-25
  2. The deliverance of a demoniac near Gadara 8:26-39
  3. The healing of a woman with a hemorrhage and the raising of Jairus' daughter 8:40-56
- G. Jesus' preparation of the Twelve 9:1-50
1. The mission of the Twelve to Israel 9:1-6
  2. Herod's question about Jesus' identity 9:7-9
  3. The feeding of the 5000 9:10-17
  4. Peter's confession of faith 9:18-27
  5. The Transfiguration 9:28-36
  6. The exorcism of an epileptic boy 9:37-43a
  7. Jesus' announcement of His betrayal 9:43b-45
  8. The pride of the disciples 9:46-50
- V. Jesus' ministry on the way to Jerusalem 9:51—19:27
- A. The responsibilities and rewards of discipleship 9:51—10:24
1. The importance of toleration 9:51-56
  2. The importance of self-denial 9:57-62
  3. The importance of participation 10:1-16
  4. The joy of participation 10:17-20

5. The joy of comprehension 10:21-24
- B. The relationships of disciples 10:25—11:13
  1. The relation of disciples to their neighbors 10:25-37
  2. The relation of disciples to Jesus 10:38-42
  3. The relation of disciples to God the Father 11:1-13
- C. The results of popular opposition 11:14-54
  1. The Beelzebul controversy 11:14-26
  2. The importance of observing God's Word 11:27-28
  3. The sign of Jonah 11:29-32
  4. The importance of responding to the light 11:33-36
  5. The climax of Pharisaic opposition 11:37-54
- D. The instruction of the disciples in view of Jesus' rejection 12:1—13:17
  1. The importance of fearless confession 12:1-12
  2. The importance of the eternal perspective 12:13-21
  3. God's provisions for disciples 12:22-34
  4. The coming of the Son of Man 12:35-48
  5. The coming crisis 12:49-59
  6. A call to repentance 13:1-9
  7. A sign of Jesus' ability to affect change 13:10-17
- E. Instruction about the kingdom 13:18—14:35
  1. Parables of the kingdom 13:18-21
  2. Entrance into the kingdom 13:22-30
  3. Jesus' postponement of the kingdom 13:31-35
  4. Participants in the kingdom 14:1-24
  5. The cost of discipleship 14:25-35
- F. God's attitude toward sinners ch. 15
  1. The setting for Jesus' teaching 15:1-2
  2. The parable of the lost sheep 15:3-7
  3. The parable of the lost coin 15:8-10
  4. The parable of the lost son 15:11-32
- G. Jesus' warnings about riches ch. 16

1. Discipleship as stewardship 16:1-13
  2. Jesus' rebuke of the Pharisees for their greed 16:14-31
- H. Jesus' warning about disciples' actions and attitudes 17:1-19
1. The prevention of sin and the restoration of sinners 17:1-4
  2. The disciples' attitude toward their duty 17:5-10
  3. The importance of gratitude 17:11-19
- I. Jesus' teaching about His return 17:20—18:8
1. A short lesson for the Pharisees 17:20-21
  2. A longer explanation for the disciples 17:22-37
  3. The parable of the persistent widow 18:1-8
- J. The recipients of salvation 18:9—19:27
1. The parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector 18:9-14
  2. An illustration of humility 18:15-17
  3. The handicap of wealth 18:18-30
  4. Jesus' passion announcement and the disciples' lack of perception 18:31-34
  5. The healing of a blind man near Jericho 18:35-43
  6. Zaccheus' ideal response to Jesus 19:1-10
  7. The parable of the minas 19:11-27
- VI. Jesus' ministry in Jerusalem 19:28—21:38
- A. The Triumphal Entry 19:28-40
- B. The beginning of Jesus' ministry in Jerusalem 19:41-48
1. Jesus' sorrow over Jerusalem 19:41-44
  2. Jesus' cleansing of the temple 19:45-46
  3. A synopsis of Jesus' teaching in the temple 19:47-48
- C. Jesus' teachings in the temple 20:1—21:4
1. The controversy over authority 20:1-8
  2. The parable of the wicked tenant farmers 20:9-19
  3. The question of tribute to Caesar 20:20-26
  4. The problem of the resurrection 20:27-40

5. Jesus' question about David's son 20:41-44
  6. Jesus' condemnation of the scribes 20:45-47
  7. Jesus' commendation of a widow 21:1-4
- D. Jesus' teaching about the destruction of the temple 21:5-36
1. The setting and the warning about being misled 21:5-9
  2. The need for faithful perseverance 21:10-19
  3. The judgment coming on Jerusalem 21:20-24
  4. The second coming of the Son of Man 21:25-28
  5. The certainty of these events 21:29-33
  6. The concluding exhortation to watchfulness 21:34-36
- E. A summary of Jesus' ministry in Jerusalem 21:37-38
- VII. Jesus' passion, resurrection, and ascension chs. 22—24
- A. The plot to arrest Jesus 22:1-6
1. The leaders' desire 22:1-2
  2. Judas' offer 22:3-6
- B. The preparations for the Passover 22:7-13
- C. Events in the upstairs room 22:14-38
1. The Passover meal 22:14-18
  2. The institution of the Lord's Supper 22:19-20
  3. Jesus' announcement of His betrayal 22:21-23
  4. Teaching about the disciples' service 22:24-30
  5. Jesus' announcement of Peter's denial 22:31-34
  6. The opposition to come 22:35-38
- D. The arrest of Jesus 22:39-53
1. Jesus' preparation in Gethsemane 22:39-46
  2. Judas' betrayal 22:47-53
- E. The trials of Jesus 22:54—23:25
1. Peter's denial of Jesus 22:54-62
  2. The mockery of the soldiers 22:63-65
  3. Jesus' trial before the Sanhedrin 22:66-71
  4. Jesus' first appearance before Pilate 23:1-7

5. Jesus' appearance before Herod 23:8-12
  6. Jesus' second appearance before Pilate 23:13-25
- F. The crucifixion of Jesus 23:26-49
1. Events on the way to Golgotha 23:26-32
  2. Jesus' death 23:33-49
- G. The burial of Jesus 23:50-56
- H. The resurrection of Jesus 24:1-12
- I. The post-resurrection appearances of Jesus 24:13-49
1. The appearance to the disciples walking to Emmaus 24:13-35
  2. The appearances to the disciples in Jerusalem 24:36-49
- J. The ascension of Jesus 24:50-53

### MESSAGE

The first Gospel presented Jesus as the King, the second Gospel presented Him as the Servant, and the third Gospel presents Him as the perfect Man. Matthew wrote to Jews about their King. Mark wrote to Romans about a Servant. And Luke wrote to Greeks about the ideal Man. The title "Messiah" is most fitting for Jesus in Matthew. The title "Suffering Servant" is most appropriate in Mark. And "Son of Man" is the title most characteristic of Luke's presentation of Jesus. G. Campbell Morgan believed that Matthew presented Jesus as King, Mark presented Him as Priest, and Luke presented Him as Prophet.<sup>1</sup>

Luke stressed the saving work of Jesus in his Gospel. He presented Jesus as the Savior of humankind. He also proclaimed Jesus' work of providing salvation for humankind. Observe, first, the Savior that Luke presents, and then the salvation that the Savior came to provide:

Luke presented Jesus as the Savior in three different relationships: He presented Him as the firstborn of a new race (a new family within

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<sup>1</sup>G. Campbell Morgan, *The Unfolding Message of the Bible*, p. 315.

humanity). Second, he presented Him as the older brother in a new family. Third, he presented Him as the redeemer of a lost humanity.

We will consider first Luke's concept of Jesus as the firstborn of a new race. Luke's genealogy (3:23-38) reveals how the writer wanted the reader to regard Jesus. Matthew traced Jesus' lineage back to David and Abraham, in his genealogy, in order to show His right to rule as Israel's Messiah. Luke traced Jesus' ancestry back to Adam. He did this in order to show Jesus' true humanity.

But Luke went back even further than Adam to God. This indicates that Jesus was not just like other human beings who descended from Adam. He was, as the Apostle Paul called Him, the "last Adam" (1 Cor. 15:45). The first Adam that God placed on this earth failed and plunged his race into sin and death. The last Adam that God placed on the earth did not fail, but saved His race from sin and brought it new life. The first man begins the Old Testament, but the "second man," to use another Pauline title (1 Cor. 15:47), begins the New Testament. As Adam headed one race, so Jesus heads a new race. Both "Adams" were real men (cf. Matt. 19:4; Luke 3:38). Thus, both men head real races of humankind. Luke viewed Jesus as succeeding where Adam failed, as atoning for Adam's transgression.

For Jesus to undo the consequences of Adam's fall He had to be more than just a good man. He had to be a perfect man, a sinless man. Therefore Luke stressed Jesus' sinlessness. He did this primarily in his account of Jesus' birth. Luke stressed the virgin conception of Jesus. The Holy Spirit, not a sinful human, fathered Jesus. God regards the male as responsible in the human family. Husbands are responsible for their wives (Eph. 5:23-24). Fathers are responsible for their children (Eph. 6:4). God held Adam, not Eve, responsible for his descendants (Gen. 3:17-19).

Human beings are sinners for three separate reasons: First, we are sinners because we commit acts of sin. Second, even if we never committed one act of sin, we would still be sinners because we inherited a sinful human nature. This nature apparently comes through our fathers (cf. Heb. 7:9-10).<sup>1</sup> Third, we are sinners because God has imputed the guilt of Adam's sin to us because he is the head of the race and we are his descendants. As an illustration of this three-fold influence, consider a child. He is what he is for three reasons: his personal actions, his parents, and his citizenship

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<sup>1</sup>This is the theory of traducianism.



(the country in which he was born). These all make him what he is, not just his actions.

Jesus was not a sinner. He did not commit any acts of sin (cf. 1 Pet. 2:22). Second, He did not inherit a sinful nature from His human father because God was His real Father (Luke 1:35). Third, God did not impute Adam's sin to Jesus because Jesus was the direct descendant of God, the Son of God, and therefore the head of a new race (Luke 1:35). God gave the first Adam life by breathing the breath of life into the body that He had created. Likewise, God gave the second Adam life by implanting His divine life into a body that He had created, namely, Mary's body.

The doctrine of the virgin birth is extremely important because it establishes the sinlessness of Jesus in two of the three ways whereby people become sinners: an inherited sinful nature, and the imputation of Adam's sin. If a virgin did not conceive Jesus, then He was a sinner. If Jesus was a sinner, then He cannot be the Savior of sinners.

One way that a person becomes a sinner is by committing acts of sin. Luke showed that Jesus did not commit sins in his account of Jesus' temptations (4:1-13). In the wilderness, Satan subjected Jesus to the strongest temptations that humans face. Satan directed Jesus' three tests at the three areas of human personality that constitute the totality of human existence. These areas are doing (the lust of the flesh), having (the lust of the eyes), and being (the pride of life). These are the same three areas in which Satan attacked Eve (cf. Gen. 3:1-7).

The first man fell in a garden, which was a good environment conducive to withstanding temptation. The Second Man overcame temptation in a wilderness, which was a bad environment conducive to yielding to temptation. Rather than showing at every turn in Jesus' life that He did not sin, Luke showed that in the supreme test of His life Jesus did not sin. However, he continued to note Jesus' conflicts with Satan, demons, and sin throughout His life. Luke's record of these encounters also demonstrates Jesus' sinlessness.

At the Transfiguration (9:28-36) God declared His Son acceptable to Him. This meant that He was sinless.

Second, not only did Luke present Jesus as the head of a new race, but he also presented Jesus as the older brother in a new family. Since Jesus was

the head of a new race, we might think that Luke would have presented Jesus as a father. Jesus was the first and, therefore, the source of all that follow in the race that He established. But Luke stressed Jesus' likeness with those in the new race. He is like an older brother to us who have new life through Him. This is not to deny His deity. In one sense Jesus is completely different from us, since He is God. However Luke stressed the sense in which He is like us, namely, in His humanity. He is one of us—fully human.

Luke presented Jesus as a man among men. Luke, of all the Gospel writers, wanted his readers to appreciate the fact that Jesus was a real person. There are many small indications of this throughout this Gospel that I have tried to point out in the exposition that follows. Luke did this because he was evidently writing to Greeks. Greeks had a background in polytheism and mythology. Because of their cultural background, they tended to think of gods as superhumans. These gods were not real people, but they had the characteristics of people expanded into superhuman proportions—faults and all. Luke wanted his readers to realize that Jesus was not that type of god. He was fully human, but He was also sinless. He had superhuman powers, but He was not the type of superman that the Greeks envisioned.

Jesus was a fellow human being, albeit sinless. This is very hard for us to imagine. Therefore Luke put much in his Gospel that helps us understand Jesus, from His birth announcements to His ascension into heaven. For example, Luke emphasized Jesus praying more than the other Gospel evangelists. As a man, Jesus was dependent on, and drew His strength from, His Father. We must not be too quick to ascribe Jesus' superior powers to His being God. He laid aside the use of many of His powers in the Incarnation and usually operated as a Spirit-empowered man. Luke helps us to appreciate this about Jesus. He stressed the Holy Spirit's enablement of Jesus. Luke alone recorded, "Now the Child continued to grow and to become strong, increasing in wisdom; and the favor of God was upon Him" (2:40), and "Jesus kept increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and people" (2:52).<sup>1</sup>

Third, Luke presented Jesus as the redeemer of a lost humanity, as well as the head of a new race and the elder brother of believers. Since he was

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<sup>1</sup>Quotations from the English Bible in these notes are from the *New American Standard Bible* (NASB), 2020 edition, unless otherwise indicated.

writing to Greeks, Luke did not identify many allusions to the Hebrew Bible or to Jewish life and history. These allusions are in the text, but Luke did not draw attention to them. One of God's provisions for Israelite life that Luke did not identify as such, but which overshadows his portrait of Jesus, is the kinsman-redeemer. His presentation of Jesus fits the image of the Jewish kinsman-redeemer remarkably.

The kinsman-redeemer had to be the next of kin to the person that he redeemed. Luke presented Jesus as qualifying as our redeemer in this respect. He was a human being, as we are. Therefore He could provide redemption for His needy brothers.

The kinsman-redeemer also had to accept personal responsibility for those that he purposed to save from their miserable estate. Luke presented Jesus as taking personal responsibility for lost sinners. He recorded Jesus saying that He had to go to the Cross (13:33; 17:25; 22:37; 24:26). He viewed the salvation of humankind as something that He needed to accomplish, because He had made a personal commitment to do so. That commitment began in heaven, before the Incarnation (Acts 2:23), but it continued on earth throughout Jesus' life.

The kinsman-redeemer had to overcome those who opposed his brethren. Luke presented Jesus as in conflict with Satan and his hosts. He showed Him interceding for the Father's help for His tempted brethren—Peter, for example (22:32). Jesus won the victory over humankind's great enemy for His brethren.

The kinsman-redeemer had to create an opportunity for his brother's redemption. Luke presented Jesus as doing this. Luke's distinctive presentation of Jerusalem as Jesus' city of destiny contributes to this theme. Jesus deliberately advanced toward Jerusalem and the Cross, because He was creating an opportunity for humankind's redemption. (Similarly, Luke presented the Apostle Paul deliberately advancing toward Rome, his city of destiny, in the Book of Acts.)

The kinsman-redeemer turned his back on his personal rights and privileges in order to provide redemption for his brother. Luke presented Jesus doing this as well. Jesus modeled this frequently for His disciples, as we see in this Gospel. He also taught the importance of disciples doing this so that we can bring salvation to our brothers and sisters.

These major themes are very strong in Luke's Gospel. Jesus is the head of an entirely new race of people: the redeemed. He is the elder brother who provides an example for His brethren to follow, including depending on the Father and being empowered by the Spirit. He is the Savior who has come "to seek and to save that which was lost" (19:10).

We have observed how Luke presents Jesus as the Savior. Now let us turn to consider what he revealed about salvation. The key verse in the Gospel is, I believe, 19:10: "The Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost." We have been looking at "the Son of Man." Now let us look at "to seek and to save that which was lost." I would say that the key verse in Matthew is 27:37: "This is Jesus the King of the Jews," and the key verse in Mark is 10:45: "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many." I would say the key verse in John is 20:31: "These [things] have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that by believing you may have life in His name."

Luke reveals that the Son of Man has redeemed humankind. This Gospel is a record of God's redeeming work through Jesus Christ. Jesus' work on the Cross is the climax of this Gospel, as it is the climax of all the Gospels and of history itself. Jesus was born to die. By His death Jesus purchased humankind's freedom from sin at the cost of His own life. Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper so that His disciples would always keep the memory of the significance of His death freshly before them. The Christian mission is to tell the world about this redemption (24:46-47).

Through redemption God regenerates those who are dead in sin. This is the second step in God's plan of seeking and saving the lost, after providing redemption. Believers receive new life when they believe on Jesus. Comprehending what this new life involves, learning how to live in view of its reality, and appreciating its great potential, are all things that Luke stressed in this Gospel. Jesus' disciples struggled with learning this, as all Christians do. Luke recorded many of Jesus' teachings that are helpful in understanding and appreciating regeneration.

Through regeneration God brings believers into relationship with Himself. This is the third step in this great salvation process. Luke helps the reader to understand the difference between trusting for salvation and serving for rewards. What is our relationship to Jesus as His followers? What are our privileges and our responsibilities? How does prayer enter into our

relationship? Luke has more to say to disciples about the Christian's relationship to the Father and the Son than any other Gospel evangelist.

Then, through relationship with Himself, God prepares believers for life after death as members of a new race. Luke recorded much that is of great help for us as readers on this subject as well. What is the next phase of our life with God going to be like? How should we prepare for it? What is ahead in the future? Luke teaches us what it means to be a member of the new redeemed race of humanity.

In addition to the central teaching of this Gospel, let me also point out what I believe are the reasons for its abiding appeal. These are two: the personality of Jesus, and the presentation of discipleship.

The personality of Jesus, as Luke presents Him in this Gospel, is very appealing. Three things make Him so:

First, we feel that we can identify with the Jesus of Luke's Gospel. This is probably because Luke presented Him as a real man. It may be harder to identify with a King or with a Suffering Servant, to say nothing about God, which is John's emphasis. Even though He is perfect, He is someone with whom we feel a natural kinship, because we share humanity together. Jesus faced what we face, yet He was pleasing to God. This is very encouraging.

Second, the Jesus of Luke's Gospel is attractive because He is different from us. Even though we are of the same kind, He holds a fascination for us because He was the personification of ideal humanity. He was everything that God intended human beings to be. It is thrilling to view someone like that, since we all fall so far short of what we should be.

Third, this Jesus is attractive because He was so compassionate. One of the characteristic features of Luke's Gospel is the many stories that it contains that feature Jesus' concern for the needy, including women, the poor, the sick, and outcasts of society. We read of the social outcasts of Jesus' day flocking to Him and feeling at home in His presence. We see Him welcoming children, and we feel drawn to Him. We see Jesus' compassion in Matthew and in Mark, but Luke stresses Jesus' compassion even more than they do.

Another reason for the appeal of this book is its presentation of discipleship. It contains some of the straightest talk and most challenging demands for followers of Jesus that the New Testament records. We read

Jesus telling us that unless we "hate" our family members, we cannot be His disciples (14:26). He taught that we have to deny ourselves (14:27). We have to renounce all that we have (14:33). Interestingly, these three conditions correspond to the three things that I mentioned earlier that Luke pointed out about Jesus. He did not call His disciples to do anything that He had not done. Let me explain further:

Jesus calls Christians to view our connections with our old race (the whole human race) differently, because we have become members of a new race (a family of believers within the human race). Jesus taught that our spiritual relations are really closer than our physical relations. Therefore we should let these old relations go if they interfere with our participation in the calling of our new race. We should not break contact with unbelievers, of course, any more than Jesus did. But we should put our allegiance to Jesus and our spiritual brethren above our ties to our unbelieving brethren.

Jesus calls us to accept the same responsibility that He accepted, since we are now brothers. He denied Himself and took up His cross for us. Now we are brothers, so we need to do the same for Him. Brothers sacrifice for each other.

Jesus also calls us to give up everything for Him. Having received the benefits of redemption, because of the work of our Kinsman-Redeemer, who paid a great price for us, we need to pay a great price too. The price He calls us to pay is not to earn redemption. He has given that to us as a gift. It is to express our gratitude to Him for His grace, and to advance the mission that He has given us to fulfill. He had a mission from God, and He gave up everything to fulfill it. We too have a mission from God, and we need to give up everything to fulfill it.

Finally, this Gospel has a two-fold application: to the church and to the world.

To the church Luke says: Be witnesses! "You are witnesses of these things" (24:48). We are to be so in view of the relationship that we now enjoy with the Son of Man. We should be witnesses for three reasons: We have experienced redemption, we enjoy His fellowship, and we have a future as members of a new race. We are also to be His witnesses in view of the lost condition of unsaved humankind. Jesus came to seek and to save the lost. Our fellowship with Jesus requires participation in His mission to seek and to save the lost. We can do this for three reasons: He has transformed our

lives, He will open people's eyes with His Word, and He has empowered us with His Spirit (cf. ch. 24).

To the world Luke says: You are lost, but the Son of Man has come to seek and to save the lost. A Redeemer has come. A Brother is available. A new life is possible. Behold the Man! He understands you. Yet He is different from you. And He will receive you.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Adapted from idem, *Living Message of the Books of the Bible*, 2:1:41-54.

## Exposition

### I. INTRODUCTION 1:1-4

Luke introduced his Gospel in a classical literary fashion.

"It was customary among the great Greek and Hellenistic historians, including the first-century Jewish writer Josephus, to explain and justify their work in a preface. Their object was to assure the reader of their capability, thorough research, and reliability."<sup>1</sup>

Luke's introduction contrasts with Matthew's genealogy (Matt. 1:1-17), Mark's title statement (Mark 1:1), and John's theological prologue (John 1:1-14). It would have been what a cultured Greek would have expected to find at the beginning of a reputable historical work. Verses 1 through 4 are all one sentence in Greek.

1:1 The first Greek word, *epeideper* (lit. "Since," or because), occurs only here in the New Testament, though other major Greek writers, such as Thucydides, Philo, and Josephus used it.<sup>2</sup> Luke tells us that when he wrote his Gospel there were already several written accounts of Jesus' ministry, perhaps including the Gospels of Matthew (A.D. 40-70) and Mark (A.D. 63-70). I think it is most probable that Matthew wrote in the late 40s, Mark in the late 60s, and Luke in the late 50s.

There were probably also some uninspired accounts of Jesus' life and ministry that were circulating when Luke wrote his Gospel. Luke's statement here does not imply that the existing accounts were necessarily deficient. He simply wanted to write one that was orderly and based on reliable research (v. 3). "The things accomplished" or fulfilled refer to God's purposes for Jesus' life and ministry.

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<sup>1</sup>Liefeld, p. 821.

<sup>2</sup>Henry J. Cadbury, "Commentary on the Preface of Luke," in *The Beginnings of Christianity*, ed. F. J. Foakes-Jackson and Kirsopp Lake (London: Macmillan and Co, 1920-33), 2:489-510.



1:2 The writer wanted to assure Theophilus (v. 3) that the information that he and other writers had included in their accounts was valid. It had come from the eyewitness testimony of people who had accompanied Jesus from the beginning of His public ministry and who were "servants of the word," namely, servants of the gospel message. These people were the apostles and other eyewitnesses, such as Jesus' mother (cf. Acts 10:39-42). The Greek word *autoptes* ("eyewitnesses") occurs only here in the Greek New Testament.

"It is a medical term which means to make an autopsy. In fact, what Dr. Luke is trying to say is, 'We are eyewitnesses who made an autopsy, and I am writing to you about what we found.'"<sup>1</sup>

"... we typically associate the word 'eyewitness' with a person who has personally observed an event, but this is not always the case in antiquity. ... Rather the historian examined relevant *sites* of historical incidents, gaining firsthand experience of them. ... 'Eyewitnesses' and 'ministers of the word' are parallel descriptions of the same group of people."<sup>2</sup>

William Arndt argued that Luke's sources did not include the Gospels of Matthew and Mark.<sup>3</sup> However, no one knows for sure what sources Luke used.

Luke used the Greek word *logos*, "word," often in his Gospel, especially in the sections that are unique to it.<sup>4</sup> Some have taken this first occurrence of "word" as a reference to Christ, the living Word of God.<sup>5</sup> The NEB translators interpreted it as

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<sup>1</sup>McGee, 4:244.

<sup>2</sup>Green, p. 41. Paragraph division omitted.

<sup>3</sup>William F. Arndt, *St. Luke*, p. 9.

<sup>4</sup>See Lloyd Gaston, *Horae Synopticae Electronicae; Word Statistics of the Synoptic Gospels*, pp. 64, 76; and John C. Hawkins, *Horae Synopticae; Contributions to the Study of the Synoptic Problem*, pp. 20, 43.

<sup>5</sup>E.g., J. N. Darby's translation of *The Holy Bible*; G. Campbell Morgan, *Categorical Imperatives of the Christian Faith*, p. 73.

the gospel message.<sup>1</sup> Paul also claimed to communicate faithfully what others had handed down to him (1 Cor. 11:23; 15:3).<sup>2</sup> This verse is a claim to using reliable sources of information.

1:3 Until now Luke had described the work of previous writers. Now he referred to his own Gospel. He too had done careful research and proceeded to write an orderly account. Significantly, Luke did not describe himself as an eyewitness of Jesus' ministry but as a researcher of it. This is the only Synoptic Gospel in which the writer spoke in the first person.<sup>3</sup>

"In an orderly sequence" (Gr. *kathexes*) does not necessarily imply chronological order (cf. Acts 11:4; 18:23). It probably means that Luke wrote according to a plan that God had led him to adopt.<sup>4</sup> All the Gospel writers seem to have departed from a strictly chronological arrangement of events occasionally for thematic purposes.<sup>5</sup>

This verse is one of the clearest proofs in the Bible that God did not always dictate the words of Scripture to the writers who simply copied them down. That view is the dictation theory of inspiration. He did this with some passages (e.g., Exod. 20:1-17; et al.) but not most.

Theophilus' name means "Lover of God." This fact has led to some speculation about whether "Theophilus" was really a substitute for the real name of Luke's addressee, or perhaps Luke wrote generally to all lovers of God. The addition of "most excellent" (Gr. *kratiste*) suggests that Theophilus was a real person of some distinction (cf. Acts 23:26; 24:3; 26:25). Luke elsewhere reserved the use of the title "most excellent" for

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<sup>1</sup>NEB refers to *The New English Bible with the Apocrypha*.

<sup>2</sup>See Oscar Cullmann, *The Early Church: Studies in Early Christian History and Theology*, pp. 59-75.

<sup>3</sup>Barclay, p. 1.

<sup>4</sup>See Henry Alford, *The Greek Testament*, 1:441; Green, pp.42-44.

<sup>5</sup>For a harmony of the Gospels, see Appendix 1: "A Harmony of the Gospels," at the end of my notes on Matthew; A.T. Robertson, *A Harmony of the Gospels for Students of the Life of Christ*; or E. D. Burton and E. J. Goodspeed, *A Harmony of the Synoptic Gospels in Greek*.

Roman officials in his writings (Acts 24:3; 26:25). Norval Geldenhuys speculated that Theophilus may have been "a procurator or governor in some province or other of the Roman Empire."<sup>1</sup> A few scholars have believed that Theophilus was King Agrippa II (Acts 26).<sup>2</sup> Most interpreters believe that Theophilus was a real person who is otherwise unknown to us. Theophilus' name was common in the Greek world. He may have been Luke's patron or publisher.<sup>3</sup>

Flavius Josephus, another first-century writer, similarly prefaced his *Antiquities of the Jews* (c. A.D. 93), and his *Against Apion* (c. A.D. 100), with a similar statement of purpose addressed to a certain "Epaphroditus," whom he described as: "a lover of all kind[s] of learning."<sup>4</sup>

1:4 Luke did not address Theophilus in a way that enables us to know if he was a believer in Jesus when Luke penned these words. Theophilus had received some information about Christianity, specifically reports of the words and works of Jesus Christ. Neither do we know if Theophilus was in danger of abandoning the faith or if he just needed a strong foundation for immature faith. Luke's introduction promised a factual foundation.<sup>5</sup>

The Christian faith does not require believing things that are contrary to the facts but believing things that are true. Luke wrote his introduction in order to assure his reader(s) that there was a factual basis for their faith. He claimed that his Gospel account was reliable. Luke was not the only

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<sup>1</sup>Geldenhuys, p. 53.

<sup>2</sup>E.g., Alberto S. Valdés, "The Gospel According to Luke," in *The Grace New Testament Commentary*, 1:221-22.

<sup>3</sup>See E. J. Goodspeed, "Some Greek Notes: I. Was Theophilus Luke's Publisher?" *Journal of Biblical Literature* 73 (1954):84. See also Bock, *Luke*, pp. 23, 42-43, for further speculation about Theophilus' identity.

<sup>4</sup>Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, preface, pars. 2 and 3; idem, *Against Apion*, 1:1; 2:1; 2:42. Cf. idem, *The Life of Flavius Josephus*, par. 76.

<sup>5</sup>See Earle E. Cairns, "Luke As a Historian," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 122:487 (July-September 1965):220-26; F. Duane Lindsey, "Lucan Theology in Contemporary Perspective," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 125:500 (October-December 1968):346-51; Merrill C. Tenney, "Historical Verities in the Gospel of Luke," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 135:538 (April-June 1978):126-38; and Nicholas M. van Ommeren, "Was Luke an Accurate Historian?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 148:589 (January-March 1991):57-71.

Gospel writer who stated his purpose at the beginning of his book (cf. 1 John 1:1-4).

"*Reassurance* is the key motive for this Gospel."<sup>1</sup>

## II. THE BIRTH AND CHILDHOOD OF JESUS 1:5—2:52

Chronologically Luke began his Gospel before either of the other synoptic writers (Matthew and Mark) began theirs. Matthew began with Jesus' birth, and Mark began with the commencement of Jesus' public ministry. But Luke began with the predictions of the births of John the Baptist and then Jesus. John, of course, began his Gospel in eternity past (John 1:1).

This section of the book contains material unique in Luke. The only repeated statement occurs in Luke 2:39 and Matthew 2:23. Other unique features are the way in which Luke alternated the reader's attention between John and Jesus, and the joy that several individuals expressed (1:46-55, 68-79; 2:14, 29-32).<sup>2</sup> This section of Luke's narrative contains three intertwining stories of promise leading to fulfillment leading to praise:<sup>3</sup>

Character	Promise	Evidence of Fulfillment	Response
Zechariah	His wife would bear a son.	John is born.	Song of Zechariah
Mary	She would conceive a son.	Unborn John bears witness to unborn Jesus, and Elizabeth blesses Mary.	Song of Mary
Simeon	He would see the Messiah.	He sees Jesus.	Song of Simeon

<sup>1</sup>Darrell L. Bock, *Jesus according to Scripture*, p. 37.

<sup>2</sup>For studies of the structure of this passage, see Robert C. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts*, 1:15-20; R. E. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah: A Commentary on the Infancy Narratives in Matthew and Luke*, pp. 248-53, 292-98, 408-10; J. A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel according to Luke I—IX*, pp. 313-15; and David E. Malick, "A Literary Approach to the Birth Narratives in Luke 1—2," in *Integrity of Heart, Skillfulness of Hands*, pp. 93-107.

<sup>3</sup>Green, p. 48.

This section has a decidedly Semitic style that suits the connections that it has with the Old Testament. Matthew used various fulfillment statements to show that Jesus was the promised Messiah, but Luke was less direct. He showed that Old Testament predictions lay behind these events by describing them in the style and vocabulary of the Old Testament.

"Luke regards his opening chapters as though they were the continuation of the story rooted in the Abrahamic covenant."<sup>1</sup>

Luke also featured Jerusalem and the temple in this section of his Gospel, which provide added connections to the Old Testament. References to the temple form an *inclusio* (i.e., brackets) around this section of text (1:5-23 and 2:41-51).

Luke's alternation between John and Jesus compares and contrasts them (cf. 1 Sam. 1—3).<sup>2</sup> Luke presented them both as prophets in the Old Testament sense, but Jesus was infinitely superior to John: Note the uses of the title "Most High" (1:32, 35, 76).<sup>3</sup>

First, Luke recorded the announcements of John's, and then Jesus' birth (1:5-38). This is a section of comparison primarily. Then he told of Elizabeth blessing Mary and Mary blessing God, a section of contrast primarily (1:39-56). Finally we have the births of John and Jesus, a section of both comparison and contrast (1:57—2:52).

Luke recorded the appearance of angels in this section. Apparently he did so to strengthen the point that Jesus was God's provision for humankind's need. Angels bridge the gap between God and people, and here they rejoiced in God's provision of a Savior for humankind. Frequent references to the Holy Spirit validating and empowering Jesus' ministry increase this emphasis (1:15, 35, 41, 67, 80; 2:25-27).

The theme of joy is present explicitly—in the songs and words of praise and thanksgiving—as well as implicitly in the mood of the whole section. Yet there is a warning of coming pain as well as deliverance (2:35).

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<sup>1</sup>Idem., p. 57. See pp. 53-55, for many parallels between this section of Luke and Genesis 11—21.

<sup>2</sup>See G. N. Stanton, *Jesus of Nazareth in New Testament Preaching*, pp. 55-56.

<sup>3</sup>See H. H. Oliver, "The Lucan Birth Stories and the Purpose of Luke-Acts," *New Testaments Studies* 10 (1963-64):215-26.

Note the similarity of structure that encourages and facilitates comparison of John and Jesus.

	John	Jesus
The introduction of the parents	1:5-7	1:26-27
The annunciation by an angel	1:8-23	1:28-38
The giving of a sign	1:18-20	1:34-38
The mother's response	1:24-25	1:39-56
The pregnancy of a childless woman	1:24	1:42
The birth	1:57-58	2:1-20
The circumcision and naming	1:59-66	2:21-24
The prophetic response	1:67-79	2:25-39
The growth of the child	1:80	2:40-52

This first part of this section (1:5-56) deals with promise, while the rest of the birth and childhood narrative concerns fulfillment (1:57—2:52).

#### **A. THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF JOHN THE BAPTIST'S BIRTH 1:5-25**

The record of the announcement of John the Baptist's birth is unique to Luke's Gospel. There is a strong emphasis in this pericope (section of text) on the fact that angels visited John's parents and announced the birth of John. This would have impressed Greek readers with the supernatural character of John as Jesus' forerunner (cf. Mercury and Zeus at Lystra in Acts 14:11-13). The announcement by angels impresses the modern reader with God's intervention in the lives of two godly people, and it causes us to anticipate something great coming from this supernatural birth. There are striking parallels to this account in the Old Testament: Zechariah and Elizabeth were similar to Abraham and Sarah, to Jacob and Rachel, to Elkanah and Hannah, and to Samson's parents. In each case there was a divine announcement of the birth of an unusual child.

## 1. The introduction of John's parents 1:5-7

1:5 Herod the Great ruled over Judea, the large Roman province that included all of Israel, from 37 B.C. to 4 B.C.<sup>1</sup> Luke sometimes used "Judea" to refer to the land of the Jews (cf. 23:5).

Luke pointed out that both of John's parents had a priestly heritage. The priests in Israel had the great privilege of intimate association with God through their worship and service in the temple in Jerusalem. Zechariah's name means "Yahweh Remembers" and is significant here because the birth of John, whose name means "Yahweh Is [or Has Been] Gracious," was the fulfillment of a prophecy that God would send a forerunner to prepare the way for Israel's Messiah (Mal. 4:5-6). The etymological derivation of Elizabeth's name is unclear, but it may mean "God's Covenant."<sup>2</sup> The combined names of this couple, therefore, highlight the fact that Yahweh remembers His covenant. Normally John would have become a priest and served in the temple, like his father did. But God had a different calling for him.

David had divided the priesthood into 24 divisions and had placed the leader of one priestly family at the head of each group (1 Chron. 24:10; 2 Chron. 8:14).

"Actually only four divisions returned from the Exile (Ezr. 2:36-39), but the four were subdivided to make up twenty-four again with the old names."<sup>3</sup>

"Abijah" was the leader of the division to which Zechariah belonged (1 Chron. 24:10). In Zechariah's day each division

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<sup>1</sup>Harold W. Hoehner, *Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ*, p. 13. See Andrew E. Steinmann and Rodger C. Young, "Dating the Death of Herod and the Reigns of His Sons," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 178:712 (October-December 2021):436-54, for slightly different dates. See Merrill C. Tenney, *The New Testament: An Historical and Analytic Survey*, pp. 33-75, for an explanation of the political world at this time.

<sup>2</sup>Bailey, p. 107.

<sup>3</sup>Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to St. Luke*, p. 68. See also Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and David Brown, *Commentary Practical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible*, p. 988.

served for one week, twice a year, plus during the major festivals (cf. 1 Chron. 23:6; 28:13).<sup>1</sup> Joachim Jeremias estimated the number of priests in Palestine at this time to have been about 8,000.<sup>2</sup> Josephus gave the number as closer to 20,000.<sup>3</sup>

"On Sabbaths the whole 'course' [division] was on duty; on feast-days any priest might come up and join in the ministrations of the sanctuary; and at the Feast of Tabernacles all the twenty-four courses were bound to be present and officiate."<sup>4</sup>

1:6 This verse shows that Elizabeth's childless condition was not the result of sin. In the Old Testament God normally blessed the godly with children (cf. Gen. 1:28; Ps. 127; 128). She and her husband were right with God and followed Him faithfully. Blameless (Gr. *amemptos*) means that they dealt with sin in their lives quickly and as God required, not that they were sinless (cf. Phil. 2:15; 3:6; 1 Thess. 3:13; Heb. 8:7). This Greek word is the equivalent of the Hebrew *tam*, which describes Noah (Gen. 6:9) and Job (Job 1:8). The righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees was typically superficial and hypocritical, but Zechariah and Elizabeth were truly godly.

"Sometimes we are deprived of something because God has better things awaiting us down the road. When we wait patiently on the Lord, he often gives us more than we imagined possible. Zechariah and Elizabeth wanted a child; what they got was a prophet."<sup>5</sup>

1:7 Elizabeth's condition was identical to Sarai's (Gen. 17:16-17; cf. Gen. 16:4, 11; 29:32; 30:1, 23; 1 Sam. 1:5-11; 2:5-8). Her childless state embarrassed her (cf. v. 25), and her advanced age removed the hope of bearing children from her. Whenever the Old Testament said that a woman had no child, it also

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<sup>1</sup>Joachim Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus*, pp. 198-207.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 200.

<sup>3</sup>Josephus, *Against Apion*, 2:8.

<sup>4</sup>Alfred Edersheim, *The Temple*, p. 90.

<sup>5</sup>Bock, *Luke*, p. 55.



recorded that God gave her one later.<sup>1</sup> This statement prepares the reader for a miracle.

Priests were not disqualified from serving in the temple by age, but only by infirmity.<sup>2</sup>

## 2. The angel's announcement to Zechariah 1:8-23

"It seems indeed most fitting that the Evangelic story should have taken its beginning within the Sanctuary, and at the time of sacrifice."<sup>3</sup>

Note the chiasmic structure of this section, which highlights the good news:

- A Service, sanctuary, and people (vv. 8-10)
- B Gabriel's appearance and Zechariah's response (vv. 11-12)
- C The announcement of good news (vv. 13-17; cf. v. 19)
- B' Zechariah's objection and Gabriel's response (vv. 18-20)
- A' People, sanctuary, and service (vv. 21-23)<sup>4</sup>

1:8-9 Zechariah was serving God faithfully by discharging some temple function as a member of his priestly division. According to Josephus there were four courses (divisions) of the priests, and each one had more than 5,000 priests in it.<sup>5</sup> These courses were broken down into 24 smaller sections, each of which would serve in the temple on rotation during two separate weeks each year.<sup>6</sup> When a section was on duty all of its members were responsible to appear in the temple.<sup>7</sup> There were so many priests in Zechariah's day that the great privilege

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<sup>1</sup>Marshall, *The Gospel ...*, p. 53.

<sup>2</sup>Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, 1:135.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 1:144.

<sup>4</sup>Adapted from Green, p. 67.

<sup>5</sup>Josephus, *Against Apion*, 2:8.

<sup>6</sup>See Green, p. 68.

<sup>7</sup>Edersheim, *The Temple*, p. 83.

of offering incense on the golden incense altar in the temple fell to a priest only once in his lifetime.<sup>1</sup>

It was a great privilege to stand before the incense altar in the holy place, because this was as close to the holy of holies as any non-high priest could get. The priests decided who would offer incense at the daily sacrifice, morning and evening, by casting lots. Obviously God providentially arranged for Zechariah's selection (cf. Esth. 3:7; Prov. 16:33). This occasion was undoubtedly a high point in his life and the greatest honor of his priestly career.<sup>2</sup>

"It was the most solemn moment of his life ..."<sup>3</sup>

"... in the Temple of Herod there was neither *Shechinah* nor ark—all was empty ..."<sup>4</sup>

1:10 Many godly "people" (Gr. *laos*) assembled in the temple courtyards for this daily offering, as was customary. *Laos* occurs 36 times in Luke, but only 14 times in Matthew and two times in Mark. Luke used this word as a virtual synonym for *ochlos*, "crowd" or "multitude." This was probably the evening incense offering that was typically offered at about 3:00 p.m. (cf. Dan. 9:21; Acts 3:1). This verse heightens the suspense and prepares the reader for verses 21 and 22. Incense symbolized the ascending prayers of God's people that rise like a sweet fragrance to Him (cf. Ps. 141:2; Rev. 5:8; 8:3-4). Luke stressed prayer more than any of the Gospel writers, and this is his first reference to it.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Mishnah, *Tamid* 5:2; Emil Schurer, *A History of the Jewish People in the Time of Jesus Christ*, 2:284-97. The Mishnah is an authoritative collection of exegetical material embodying the oral tradition of Jewish law and forming the first part of the Talmud: the larger collection of Jewish civil and ceremonial law and legend.

<sup>2</sup>A. B. Bruce, "The Synoptic Gospels," in *The Expositor's Greek Testament*, 1:461.

<sup>3</sup>Plummer, p. 11.

<sup>4</sup>Edersheim, *The Temple*, p. 314. Cf. Josephus, *The Wars of the Jews*, 5:5:5. The *Shechinah* (or *shekinah*) is the visible glorious presence of God symbolized by a bright cloud. The Hebrew word comes from *shakn*, meaning "dwell" or "rest."

<sup>5</sup>See Kyu Sam Han, "Theology of Prayer in the Gospel of Luke," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 43:4 (December 2000):675-93.

"Here, as elsewhere in Luke-Acts, prayer is a prelude to divine revelation; hearing, God speaks and acts (cf. 3:21-22; 9:28-36; 22:39-46; Acts 4:23-31; 10:3-5, 9-16, 30-32; 13:2; 22:17-21)."<sup>1</sup>

- 1:11 This is also Luke's first reference to an angel appearing. He evidently appeared beside the altar as Zechariah performed his duties of burning incense on the altar and prostrating himself in prayer.<sup>2</sup> Obviously God took the initiative, at the time He chose, to reveal what He was about to do. This was an angel from the Lord, not the pre-incarnate Christ (cf. v. 19). The right side of the altar may indicate the side of favor and honor, implying that the angel was bringing good news. Angelic appearances always indicated important events in the Old Testament (cf. Gen. 16:10-11; Judg. 13:3-21). As far as Scripture records, this was the only time that an angel appeared in the temple.
- 1:12 Zechariah's reaction was one of shock, because for the first time, presumably, he met a supernatural person face to face. This was the typical reaction of people in such situations (cf. v. 29; 5:8-10; et al.).
- 1:13 The angel appeared in order to announce God's answer to Zechariah's prayer (cf. Judg. 13:3-5). He told Zechariah not to fear, which is a fairly common command in Luke's Gospel (cf. v. 30; 2:10; 5:10; 8:50; 12:7, 32). Zechariah's prayer may have been a petition (Gr. *deesis*) for a son, which the priest and his barren wife probably offered many times in previous years. But it was probably the petition that Zechariah had just offered as he presented the incense, presumably as he prayed for Israel's salvation (cf. Dan. 9:20). In either case, God's provision of a son, John, was the answer. God named "John" (a shortened form of Jehochanan or Jochanan) indicating His sovereign authority (cf. v. 31). As already noted, John's name means, "Yahweh Is [or Has Been] Gracious."

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<sup>1</sup>Green, p. 71.

<sup>2</sup>Mishnah *Tamid* 6:3.

"Heaven-given names always have etymological significance."<sup>1</sup>

1:14 Joy would replace fear in Zechariah's heart, and it would spread to his wife, and then to all Israel. The coming of Israel's predicted Messiah would be a joyous event according to the Old Testament. The theme of joy is prominent in Luke's Gospel.

1:15 The cause of joy would be John's spiritual greatness ("great in the sight of the Lord"). The same angel also announced that Jesus would be great, without qualification (v. 32). Thus there was a connection between the roles of John and Jesus. The phrase "in the sight of" the Lord indicates God's choice and approval. It translates the Greek word *enopion*, which only Luke among the synoptic writers used. It appears 35 times in Luke and Acts.<sup>2</sup> John used this word once, in John 20:30.

"Filling [with the Holy Spirit] is a general Lucan term for presence and enablement."<sup>3</sup>

The contrast between control by drink and control by the Holy Spirit occurs elsewhere in Scripture (Eph. 5:18). It is difficult, if not impossible, to determine if John was to be a Nazirite (Num. 6:1-12) or simply devoted to God. The priests were to refrain from strong drink before serving in the sanctuary (Lev. 10:1-4, 9-11). There are no other specific indications that John was a Nazirite, though he may have been.<sup>4</sup> His ascetic, self-denying lifestyle was similar to that of many prophets, particularly Elijah (v. 17; 2 Kings 1:8; Matt. 3:4).

"John's greatness is not found in his choice of lifestyle, but in the fact that in understanding his calling, he pursues it fully and carries out God's will faithfully. John's style will be different from that of Jesus. God does not make all people to minister in the same way. That diversity allows different

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<sup>1</sup>Nolland, p. 29.

<sup>2</sup>Martin, p. 204.

<sup>3</sup>Bock, "A Theology ...," p. 98.

<sup>4</sup>See Edersheim, *The Temple*, p. 375.

types of ministry to impact different kinds of people."<sup>1</sup>

The Holy Spirit's influence in John's life was unusual for someone living in Old Testament times. Normally the Holy Spirit empowered people selectively and temporarily then. Luke had a special interest in the Holy Spirit's enabling ministry, which surfaces frequently in his writings (cf. vv. 35, 41, 67; 2:25-27; 3:16, 22; 4:1, 14, 18; 10:21; 11:13; 12:10, 12; and many times in Acts).

1:16 John would turn the hearts of many Israelites back to God, like the prophets had sought to do in Old Testament times.

1:17 None of the Old Testament prophets was more successful or important than Elijah had been. He led the people back to Yahweh after Ahab and Jezebel had pushed Israel's apostasy (departure from God) further than it had ever gone, by instituting Baal worship as Israel's official religion. John would possess the same spirit and power that Elijah had possessed.

Moreover, John would be the predicted predecessor of Messiah (Mal. 4:5-6; cf. Mal. 3:1). Jesus later explained that John fulfilled the prophecy of Messiah's forerunner (Mal. 3:1). He would have completely fulfilled the prophecy of Elijah's return if the Jews had accepted Jesus as their Messiah (Mal. 4:5-6; Matt. 11:10, 14).

"... according to Jewish notions, he [Elijah] was to appear *personally*, and not merely 'in spirit and power.'"<sup>2</sup>

The term "turn back" (Gr. *epistrepho*) became a technical term for Christian conversion (cf. Acts 9:35; 2 Cor. 3:16; 1 Thess. 1:9; 1 Pet. 2:25). Essentially it means to turn from idols to the true God. Turning people to God was the responsibility of every true priest (Mal. 2:6). The Malachi quotation probably means that when this restoration back to God comes, there will be human reconciliation and love, rather than estrangement and

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<sup>1</sup>Bock, *Luke*, pp. 53-54.

<sup>2</sup>Edersheim, *The Life ...*, 1:142.

selfishness.<sup>1</sup> People would clean up their interpersonal relationships in preparation for Messiah's appearing.

Luke spoke often of the "people" (Gr. *laos*) that God was preparing for Himself. These "people prepared for the Lord" included Jewish hearers, but also those who formerly were not "a people" (1 Pet. 2:10), namely, the Gentiles. They are the elect who would compose the church. With this term ("people prepared for the Lord"), Luke constantly reminded his original Greek readers that God's plan included Gentiles who responded to the gospel, as well as Jews.

1:18 When Abraham received the angelic announcement that God would give him the Promised Land, he too requested a confirming sign (Gen. 15:8), which God provided. However Zechariah should have simply believed the angel's announcement and given God thanks for it, as Abraham later did (Gen. 17:17-18)—and as Manoah and his wife did (Judg. 13:2-21). Instead he asked for some verification of the promise, which was probably a sign (cf. 11:29).

1:19 The angel then identified himself as Gabriel, God's special messenger. Probably Gabriel identified himself as he did in order to impress Zechariah with the authenticity of what he was about to tell Zechariah. "Gabriel" (lit. "Man of God" or "Mighty One of God") had appeared twice to Daniel to give him information and understanding (Dan. 8:16; 9:21). He did the same for Zechariah here (cf. vv. 67-79).

"... Gabriel was regarded in tradition as inferior to Michael; and, though both were connected with Israel, Gabriel was represented as chiefly the minister of justice, and Michael of mercy; while, thirdly, Gabriel was supposed to stand on the left, and not (as in the Evangelic narrative) on the right, side of the throne of glory."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Marshall, *The Gospel ...*, p. 60.

<sup>2</sup>Edersheim, *The Life ...*, 1:142. See also Plummer, p. 16.

1:20 Gabriel gave Zechariah a sign, sure enough, but it cost Zechariah inconvenience and embarrassment for nine months (cf. vv. 34, 45). Gabriel could have been harder on Zechariah than he was, but he was not, probably because Zechariah believed for the most part and only wanted confirmation of what Gabriel had said (cf. Judg. 6:36-40; 13:2-21). He was not asking for a sign in order to help him believe.

The sign that God gave, Zechariah's muteness, served to heighten the wonder of what God would reveal and to conceal Gabriel's revelation from the people until the proper time.

"In Luke, God may of his own initiative give a sign (1:36; 2:12), but requests for signs are consistently interpreted negatively (11:16, 29-30; 23:8)."<sup>1</sup>

1:21-22 Zechariah's delay in the temple, and then his inability to speak, impressed the worshippers in the temple courtyard that something supernatural had occurred (cf. Dan. 10:15-17). Normally Zechariah would have pronounced the Aaronic blessing over them (Num. 6:24-26).<sup>2</sup> The people assumed incorrectly that he had seen a vision. Zechariah was unable to communicate to them what had really happened. Luke recorded their reaction in order to impress his readers with the importance of this event.

1:23 Zechariah and Elizabeth lived in a town in the hill country of Judah where Zechariah probably pursued another occupation when not involved in priestly duties (v. 39).

### 3. The pregnancy of Elizabeth 1:24-25

Gabriel's announcement of John's birth occurred even before Elizabeth conceived him (cf. Matt. 1:18-25). This is further evidence that John was a special provision from the Lord. Elizabeth's self-imposed, five-month period of seclusion may have been in order to safeguard the arrival of her child and to preserve her own health as an older woman. Elizabeth gratefully

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<sup>1</sup>Green, p. 79.

<sup>2</sup>Mishnah *Yoma* 5:1; *ibid.* *Tamid* 7:2.

acknowledged God's grace in removing the shame of her childless condition (cf. Gen. 21:6; 30:23; 1 Sam. 1:19-20; 2:1-10; Ps. 113:9).

"... Zechariah and Elizabeth represent two different kinds of righteous people. Zechariah raises doubts about the angel's message, for the prospective parents are now beyond normal childbearing age (v. 18). Sometimes even good people have doubts about God's promise. ... Elizabeth pictures the righteous saint who takes her burden to God and rejoices when that burden is lifted."<sup>1</sup>

"Hardly for the last time in Luke-Acts, a woman is put forward as a recipient of God's favor and as a model of faithfulness to God's purpose."<sup>2</sup>

#### **B. THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF JESUS' BIRTH 1:26-56**

This section of chapter 1 parallels the one immediately preceding it (vv. 5-25). Their forms are so similar that Luke must have arranged them in order to bring out the similarities between them. Gabriel announced the birth of Jesus like he had announced John's birth. Again, the fact of a divinely initiated birth announcement shows the unique significance of the individual to be born. In the preceding section the father was the main figure, but in this one the mother is.

"The birth of the Baptist is parallel to the birth of Isaac; that of the Messiah to the creation of Adam. Jesus is the second Adam."<sup>3</sup>

"Luke presents the theology of the Incarnation in a way so holy and congruent with OT sacred history that any comparisons with pagan mythology [that the original readers may have made] seem utterly incongruous. Instead of the carnal union of a pagan god with a woman, producing some kind of

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<sup>1</sup>Bock, *Luke*, p. 50. Paragraphs division omitted.

<sup>2</sup>Green, p. 81.

<sup>3</sup>Plummer, p. 20.



semidivine offspring, Luke speaks of a spiritual overshadowing by God himself that will produce the 'holy one' within Mary."<sup>1</sup>

"The names of blasphemy bestowed by the Papacy on Mary ["Mother of God," co-redemptorist, etc.] have not one shadow of foundation in the Bible, but are all to be found in the Babylonian idolatry [of the woman and child cult]."<sup>2</sup>

Luke may have obtained some of the intimate information that appears in this section directly from Mary. In this section Luke stressed Jesus' divine sonship (vv. 32, 35) and His messianic role as Ruler over God's kingdom on earth (vv. 32-33). He also stressed God as the Most High (vv. 32, 35; cf. v. 76), the Holy Spirit's power (v. 35), and God's grace (vv. 29-30, 34-35, 38).

### 1. The introduction of Mary and Joseph 1:26-27

The time reference and the same angel, Gabriel, connect this incident directly with what precedes (v. 24).

1:26 "The sixth month" refers to the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy. Luke presented God as taking direct action, not only here, but throughout his Gospel and Acts. He may have generously called Nazareth a "city" (Gr. *polis*) in order to give it status in the eyes of his readers. The Greek language had no word for town, and the alternative would have been to call it a village. Nazareth would have been unknown to almost everyone outside Palestine, so Luke described it as being in Galilee.<sup>3</sup> Gabriel now visited a small town in Galilee, on the northern border of the tribal territory of Zebulun, contrasted with the big city of Jerusalem in Judea, where he had met Zechariah.<sup>4</sup> Because of Gentile influence, the Galilean Jews

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<sup>1</sup>Liefeld, p. 829.

<sup>2</sup>Alexander Hislop, *The Two Babylons*, p. 85.

<sup>3</sup>See the map "Places Mentioned in Luke's Gospel" at the end of these notes; and J. Dwight Pentecost, *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ*, pp. 516-24, for more information about Galilee and Nazareth.

<sup>4</sup>See P. Winter, "'Nazareth' and 'Jerusalem' in Luke chs. 1 and 2," *New Testament Studies* 3 (1956-57):136-42.

were not as strict in their observance of the Law and Pharisaic tradition as their southern brethren were.<sup>1</sup>

"Where the story of John's origins starts in the temple and moves out, the story of Jesus' origins starts in Galilee and moves to climax in the temple."<sup>2</sup>

1:27 Young Mary also contrasts with old Zechariah and Elizabeth. Mary's name, the equivalent of "Miriam" in the Old Testament, apparently meant "Exalted One."<sup>3</sup> The Greek word *parthenos* ("virgin") refers to a young, unmarried girl, and it implies virginity.<sup>4</sup> It clearly means "virgin" here (cf. v. 34).<sup>5</sup> In this culture betrothal often took place shortly after puberty.<sup>6</sup> Consequently Mary may have been a young teenager at this time, even as young as 12 years old.<sup>7</sup>

"That the birth of the Great Deliverer was to be miraculous, was widely known long before the Christian era. For centuries, some say for thousands of years before that event, the Buddhist priests had a tradition that a *Virgin* was to bring forth a child to bless the world. ... The highest titles were accordingly bestowed upon her. She was called the 'queen of heaven.' (Jeremiah xlv. 17, 18, 19, 25.) In Egypt she was styled Athor—i.e., 'the Habitation of God,' to signify that in her dwelt all the 'fulness of the godhead.' ... In Greece she had the name of

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<sup>1</sup>For information on religious conditions in Galilee, see Sean Freyne, *Galilee from Alexander the Great to Hadrian 323 B.C.E. to 135 C.E.*, pp. 259-97.

<sup>2</sup>Nolland, p. 57.

<sup>3</sup>Marshall, *The Gospel ...*, p. 65.

<sup>4</sup>J. Massingbyrde Ford, "The Meaning of 'Virgin,'" *New Testament Studies* 12:3 (1966):293-99.

<sup>5</sup>See J. Gresham Machen, *The Virgin Birth of Christ*; James Orr, *The Virgin Birth of Christ*; Thomas Boslooper, *The Virgin Birth*; R. E. Brown, *The Virginal Conception and Bodily Resurrection of Jesus*; and Robert Gromacki, *The Virgin Birth: Doctrine of Deity*.

<sup>6</sup>Liefeld, p. 830.

<sup>7</sup>Green, p. 86.

Hestia, and amongst the Romans, Vesta, which is just a modification of the same name ..."<sup>1</sup>

"In Jewish tradition a girl was normally betrothed in the thirteenth year and for legal but not domestic purposes was from that point on considered to be married. Around a year later the girl was taken to the bridegroom's home for normal married life to begin."<sup>2</sup>

During betrothal, a man and a woman were considered as husband and wife, even though they lived apart and did not have sexual relations.<sup>3</sup> If the wife proved unfaithful to her husband during that period, she could be stoned (Deut. 23:24-25). Only divorce or death could terminate the betrothal, and from then on society considered the surviving spouse a widow or a widower.

Luke identified Joseph as a descendant of David. He evidently considered Jesus a legitimate heir to David's throne, since Joseph was Jesus' legal father or guardian (cf. 3:23). In Semitic society it was not necessary to be a blood descendant in order to possess family inheritance privileges (Gen. 15:3; 17:12-13; cf. Gen. 48:5; Exod. 2:10; 1 Kings 11:20; Esth. 2:7). Since Joseph was Jesus' legal guardian, Jesus thereby qualified to inherit from Joseph as his legitimate son. This fact has important bearing on the promise in verse 32b.

## 2. The angel's announcement to Mary 1:28-38

1:28 The fact that Gabriel greeted Mary as he did, and did not greet Zechariah the same way, shows Mary's favored position. Gabriel's greeting was customary: "Greetings!" (Gr. *chaire*, or Hail!). Mary was literally "highly favored" (Gr. *kecharitomene*) because God chose to bestow special grace (favor, Gr. *charis*) on her (cf. Eph. 1:6, the only other New Testament occurrence of *kecharitomene*). She would be the mother of the Messiah,

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<sup>1</sup>Hislop, pp. 76-77.

<sup>2</sup>Nolland, p. 49.

<sup>3</sup>Jeremias, pp. 364-67.

which was an honor that most Jewish mothers prayed would be theirs. God gave this honor to Mary without any special merit of her own (cf. v. 47). Roman Catholic commentators dispute this point, but competent scholars have refuted their arguments.<sup>1</sup> The Lord's presence with Mary guaranteed His help in the assignment from Him that she would have to fulfill (cf. Judg. 6:12; Ruth 2:14-16).

1:29 The angel's unexpected appearance in the temple sanctuary had unnerved Zechariah (v. 12), but it was his unusual greeting that upset and puzzled Mary. Perhaps he appeared at her door and she mistook him for an ordinary visitor.

1:30 Gabriel calmed the fears that he had aroused with the announcement of a special divine blessing (cf. v. 13) by assuring Mary that God was happy with (favored) her (cf. Gen. 6:8; 1 John 4:17-18). Gabriel had come to announce a blessing, not punishment.

"It is necessary here to recall our general impression of Rabbinism: its conception of God, and of the highest good and ultimate object of all things, as concentrated in learned study, pursued in Academies; and then to think of the unmitigated contempt with which they were wont to speak of Galilee, and of the Galileans, whose very *patois* [dialect] was an offence; of the utter abhorrence with which they regarded the unlettered country-people, in order to realize, how such an household as that of Joseph and Mary would be regarded by the leaders of Israel."<sup>2</sup>

1:31 These words would have come as good news indeed to Mary. Not only would she bear a son, but her son would obviously be someone special, in view of the angelic announcement of His birth. Only five other children had been named before their births in Old Testament times: Isaac, Ishmael, Moses, Solomon, and Josiah. John the Baptist was the sixth (v. 13). The words

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<sup>1</sup>See Marshall, *The Gospel ...*, p. 65, for further discussion.

<sup>2</sup>Edersheim, *The Life ...*, 1:144-45.

Gabriel used are very similar to the wording of Isaiah 7:14 in the Septuagint (cf. Gen. 16:11-12). "Jesus" was a common name.<sup>1</sup> It came from "Joshua" (lit. "Yahweh Saves" or "Yahweh Is Salvation"; cf. Matt. 1:21). As with John the Baptist, God exercised His sovereign prerogative by naming Jesus. Both names were significant in the light of salvation history.

"When the angel Gabriel came to this earth to announce the birth of John the Baptist, he came to Zacharias, the FATHER of the child. Six months later, when he came to announce the birth of Jesus, he came to Mary the MOTHER of the babe. The question as to the consistency of Gabriel's action is explained only by the Virgin Birth. Had Joseph been the father of Jesus, doubtless Gabriel would have come to him as he did to the father of John, but Jesus, having no earthly father, the announcement of necessity was made to His mother."<sup>2</sup>

1:32a Like John, Jesus would be great (v. 15). Even more, He would be "the Son of the Most High"—a clear statement of His deity (Ps. 2:7-9; 89:26-29; cf. v. 35). And He would be recognized as such.<sup>3</sup> "The Most High" is a common designation of God in the Old Testament (Heb. *El Elyon*, Gen. 14:18; et al.) and it carried over into the New Testament (vv. 35, 76; 6:35; 8:28; Acts 7:48; 16:17; Heb. 7:1-3). The Greeks also used the title "Most High" in order to describe their gods.<sup>4</sup>

"In Semitic thought a son was a 'carbon copy' of his father, and the phrase 'son of' was often used to refer to one who possessed his 'father's' qualities (e.g., the Heb. trans. 'son of wickedness' in Ps. 89:22 [AV] means a wicked person)."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>See Josephus' works, which refer to many different people named Jesus.

<sup>2</sup>R. I. Humberd, *The Virgin Birth*, p. 24.

<sup>3</sup>Plummer, p. 23.

<sup>4</sup>Marshall, *The Gospel ...*, p. 67.

<sup>5</sup>Martin, p. 205. AV refers to *The Holy Bible: Authorized King James Version*.

1:32b-33 Jesus would also be the long-expected Messiah, since God would give Him the throne of His father David (2 Sam. 7:12-14; Ps. 89:3-4, 28-29). Jesus' divine sonship qualified Him for His messianic role. The messianic rule of the Son would continue forever after it began (Isa. 9:7; Dan. 7:14; Mic. 4:7; et al.).<sup>1</sup>

"Today, Jesus is enthroned in heaven (Acts 2:29-36), but it is not on *David's* throne."<sup>2</sup>

David's throne was an earthly throne. The throne that Jesus occupies today is a heavenly throne. One day He will return and sit on David's earthy throne. He will reign on earth over the nation of Israel and all other nations (cf. Dan. 2:44-45; Rev. 19:11-16).

1:34 Mary, unlike Zechariah, did not ask for a sign that what Gabriel had predicted would happen. The idea that the Messiah would appear soon did not surprise her either. Instead she asked how it would happen. This was not an expression of weak faith but of confusion. Consequently Gabriel did not rebuke her as he had Zechariah. She was unmarried and a virgin. She had not had sexual relations with any man.<sup>3</sup> Evidently Mary assumed that Gabriel meant that she would conceive before she and Joseph consummated their marriage.<sup>4</sup> "Am a virgin" is literally in Greek "do not know a man." The euphemism of "knowing" someone sexually comes from the Old Testament (Gen. 4:1; 19:8; et al.).

1:35 Gabriel explained that the Holy Spirit would be God's enabling agent who would make Jesus' supernatural birth possible (cf. vv. 41, 67, 80; 2:25-27). He would "overshadow" Mary with His personal presence (cf. Exod. 40:38). Beyond this Gabriel was not specific.

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<sup>1</sup>See J. Dwight Pentecost, "The Biblical Covenants and the Birth Narratives," in *Walvoord: A Tribute*, pp. 263-67.

<sup>2</sup>Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, 1:172.

<sup>3</sup>Brown, *The Birth ...*, p. 289.

<sup>4</sup>Ellis, p. 71; G. H. P. Thompson, *St. Luke*, pp. 53-54; et al. Marshall, *The Gospel ...*, pp. 69-70, listed several other explanations, all of which I regard as inferior.

"This delicate expression rules out crude ideas of a 'mating' of the Holy Spirit with Mary."<sup>1</sup>

God settled upon the tabernacle in the wilderness similarly, filling it with His presence (Exod. 40:35; cf. Ps. 91:4). It is interesting that the same Greek word, *episkiazo*, translated "overshadow" here, occurs in all three accounts of the Transfiguration where the cloud "overshadowed" those present (Matt. 17:5; Mark 9:7; Luke 9:34). Then the voice came out of heaven identifying God's Son, but here an angel identified Him as such. The Holy Spirit would produce a holy offspring ("Child") through Mary. The deity and preexistence of the Son of God required a miraculous conception. His virgin birth resulted in His assuming a human nature, without giving up His divine nature.<sup>2</sup>

1:36 Even though Mary had not requested a sign, God gave her one, namely, the pregnancy of Elizabeth. The exact relationship between Mary and Elizabeth is unknown, but they obviously knew that they were relatives. One writer suggested that one of Mary's grandmothers was Elizabeth's sister.<sup>3</sup>

1:37 Gabriel also reassured Mary with one of the greatest statements of God's power that God has recorded in the Bible. This statement undoubtedly comforted Mary in the following months, as it has comforted countless believers faced with difficult ministries ever since. God can do the seemingly impossible (cf. Jer. 32:17, 27). Gabriel was alluding to the angel's words to Sarai, when he announced that she would bear a son in spite of apparently impossible obstacles (cf. Gen. 18:14). This verse should also encourage readers of this story who doubt the possibility of a virgin birth to believe that God can do even this.

"Anything God determines to do He can accomplish, because there is nothing impossible

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<sup>1</sup>Morris, p. 73. For information about ideas of divine beings fertilizing human women that existed in the ancient world, see Marshall, *The Gospel ...*, pp. 72-77.

<sup>2</sup>See Erwin W. Lutzer, *Christ among Other gods*, pp. 64-74.

<sup>3</sup>Monty A. Shanks, "How Mary Was Related to David and Elizabeth and Why It Matters," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 178:711 (July-September 2021):290-308.

with God. But that does not mean He will do everything believers want Him to do, because some things are not included in His plan."<sup>1</sup>

"No *word* of God must be *incredible to us*, as long as no *work* of God is *impossible to him*."<sup>2</sup>

1:38 Mary responded submissively to God's will, like Hannah had done (1 Sam. 1:11, where the same Greek word, *doule*, translated here "bond-servant," occurs in the Septuagint).

"Mary had learned to forget the world's commonest prayer—'Thy will be *changed*'—and to pray the world's greatest prayer—'Thy will be *done*.'"<sup>3</sup>

Even though Gabriel's announcement was good news, it was also bad news. Mary would bear the Messiah, but her premarital pregnancy would bring misunderstanding and undeserved shame on her for the rest of her life (cf. Deut. 22:23-24). Therefore her humble attitude is especially admirable (cf. Gen. 21:1, 7, 12; 30:34). Unfortunately she did not always maintain it (cf. John 2:3-5). In this she was only human.

"There were three miracles of the Nativity [according to Martin Luther]: that God became man, that a virgin conceived, and that Mary believed. And the greatest of these was the last."<sup>4</sup>

"This passage suggests four other important lessons: (1) the certainty that God will perform his promise, since nothing is impossible with him, (2) Mary's example as one chosen to serve God, an example that extends even beyond the willingness to be used to trust God to take us beyond our limitations, (3) the significance of the Virgin Birth of our

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<sup>1</sup>McGee, 4:248.

<sup>2</sup>Henry, p. 1412.

<sup>3</sup>Barclay, p. 7.

<sup>4</sup>Roland H. Bainton, *Here I Stand*, p. 288.



Savior, and (4) the importance of sexual faithfulness throughout our lives."<sup>1</sup>

### **3. Mary's visit to Elizabeth 1:39-56**

This pericope brings the parallel stories of John's birth and Jesus' birth together. The two sons had their own identities and individual greatness, but Jesus was superior. John began his ministry of exalting Jesus in his mother's womb. The virginal conception of Jesus took place between verses 38 and 39.

#### **Mary's arrival 1:39-40**

Apparently Mary left Nazareth shortly after Gabriel's announcement to her. Her trip south to Elizabeth's home, somewhere in the hill country of Judah, would probably have covered 50 to 70 miles, and it would have taken three or four days.

#### **Elizabeth's reception 1:41-45**

The structure of verses 41-45 focuses attention on the fact that Mary would be the mother of the Messiah:

- A John's leaping in Elizabeth's womb v. 41
  - B Elizabeth's blessing of Mary v. 42
    - C Elizabeth's acknowledgment that Mary's child was Messiah v. 43
- A' John's leaping in Elizabeth's womb v. 44
  - B' Elizabeth's blessing of Mary v. 45

1:41-42 When Mary arrived, Elizabeth was at least six months pregnant (v. 36). She regarded the fact that John leaped in her womb as an indication of his joy that Mary, who would bear the Messiah, had come for a visit. The Holy Spirit came upon Elizabeth, prompting her to greet Mary enthusiastically. The Spirit evidently gave her intuitive or revelatory understanding

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<sup>1</sup>Bock, *Luke*, p. 60.

of Mary's role. She proclaimed her benedictions loudly, in joyful praise to God, and because of the Spirit's impelling. "Blessed" means specially privileged because of God's favor. Elizabeth evidently meant that Mary was the most blessed among women. Mary was most blessed because her Son would be most blessed among all people. "Fruit of the womb" is an old figure of speech for a child (cf. Gen. 30:2; Deut. 28:4).

1:43 By "Lord" Elizabeth meant Jesus, not the entire Godhead. The Bible never ascribes the title "Mother of God" to Mary. She was the mother of Jesus, who was Elizabeth's Lord. She was in no sense the "Mother of God," since God had no mother. He is eternal. The title "Mother of God" implies that Mary was superior to Jesus, which she was not.

"... Cyril (bishop of Alexandria, Egypt, 412-444 A.D.) ... applied to the Virgin Mary a term which had long been in current use, *Theotokos* ... 'God bearing,' or as usually translated, 'Mother of God,' a term which, unfortunately, was to become a battle cry in as sharp and bitter a theological conflict as the Church had known."<sup>1</sup>

The cult of Mary continued to grow in the Roman Catholic and Orthodox branches of the Christian church, particularly in the former. In 1854 the immaculate conception of Mary was made official church dogma, and in 1950 Pope Pius XII proclaimed Mary's bodily assumption to heaven as a dogma to be believed by all "the faithful" (i.e., all Roman Catholics).<sup>2</sup>

Luke used the title "Lord" 95 times out of its 166 occurrences in the synoptic Gospels.<sup>3</sup>

"The use of *kurios* in narrative to refer to Jesus is distinctive of Luke."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of Christianity*, pp. 166-67.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 1303; Henry Bettenson, ed. *Documents of the Christian Church*, pp. 271, 280-81.

<sup>3</sup>Gaston, p. 76.

<sup>4</sup>Marshall, *The Gospel ...*, p. 81.

This title has a double meaning. *Kurios* ("Lord") is the Greek word that translators of the Septuagint used to translate the Hebrew name "Yahweh." The New Testament writers used it in the same way: as a name and title of God. Thus "Lord" sometimes implies deity and is equivalent to "God." But *kurios* also means "master," in the sense of a superior person. When someone used "lord" (*kurios*) in reference to Jesus they were not necessarily implying that they believed that Jesus was God. Sometimes people used "lord" as simply a title of respect, acknowledging His superiority over them.

Luke evidently used the term "Lord" frequently because, for Greek readers, the titles "Christ" or "Messiah" had little meaning. The pagan Gentiles referred to Caesar as "Lord Caesar," meaning that he was their divine sovereign. "Lord" had the same connotation for Luke's original readers: Jesus is the divine sovereign for Christians.

Elizabeth considered herself unworthy that the mother of her "Lord" should visit her (2 Sam. 24:21; cf. 2 Sam. 6:2-11). Elizabeth had done nothing to deserve this honor. I think that probably Elizabeth used "Lord" here in the sense of "the Son of God" that Gabriel had told Mary she would bear (v. 35). Even though the text does not say that Mary had told Elizabeth what Gabriel had told her, verse 45 indicates that Elizabeth knew what Gabriel had promised Mary. Her inspired words reflect the great superiority of Mary's child over her own son at least. She probably thought that Mary's child would turn out to be the Messiah.

1:44-45 Elizabeth related to Mary what Luke had already told the reader about John leaping in her womb (v. 41). She then announced Mary's privileged condition: It was not just that she would bear the Messiah, but that she believed that she would bear Him when God announced that to her through Gabriel (cf. Acts 27:25). In other words, Elizabeth commended Mary's faith as well as congratulating her for being the mother of Messiah.

### Mary's song of praise 1:46-55

Mary's response to Elizabeth's words was also an inspired utterance (cf. v. vv. 41-42). This so-called "Magnificat" has strong similarities with Hannah's prayer of thanksgiving in 1 Samuel 2:1 through 10. However it also alludes to at least 12 other Old Testament passages.<sup>1</sup> Mary's familiarity with the Old Testament shows her love for God and His Word.

Structurally the song divides into four strophes (stanzas, sections): verses 46-48, 49-50, 51-53, and 54-55. Mary did not necessarily compose this song on the spot. She was a reflective person (2:51) who may have given it much thought before the Holy Spirit enabled her to share it with Elizabeth. Some students of this passage have concluded that Luke really composed it, but this is unlikely since he gave Mary the credit for it (v. 46).

1:46 In the first strophe (vv. 46-48) Mary praised God for what He had done for her. Verses 46 and 47 are synonymous parallelism in which the second line restates the idea of the first line. The term "Magnificat" comes from the first word in the Latin translation of this song, which in English is "exalts" or "glorifies."

"Mary 'was found with child' (Matt. 1:18). An older member of the family is always indignant in such a case, but Mary's cousin, Elizabeth, cried, 'Blessed art thou among women.' [Luke 1:42] Such a girl always wants to remain in hiding. They never rejoice. But in rapturous joy, Mary cried, 'My soul doth magnify the Lord' (Luke 1:46)."<sup>2</sup>

1:47 Mary focused on God, in whom she rejoiced because He had saved her (Hab. 3:18; cf. 1 Sam. 2:1; Ps. 35:9). The phrase "God my Savior" (v. 47) is the equivalent of "God of my salvation" (Deut. 32:15; Ps. 24:5; 25:5; 95:1; Mic. 7:7; Hab. 3:18).

"Note that in beginning the Magnificat by praising 'God my Savior,' Mary answered the Roman Catholic dogma of the immaculate conception,

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<sup>1</sup>Plummer, pp. 30-31.

<sup>2</sup>Humberd, p. 28. Paragraph divisions omitted.

which holds that from the moment of her conception Mary was by God's grace 'kept free from all taint of Original Sin.' Only sinners need a Savior."<sup>1</sup>

As an Old Testament believer, Mary's hope of salvation rested in God and His promises. Her hope was not in her own ability to make herself acceptable to God.

1:48 Mary's "humble state" probably refers to her lowly social and personal position. She was only the young bride of a humble carpenter in a small village. Again she referred to herself as the Lord's "bond-servant" (v. 38). She believed that all generations of people would regard her as specially favored by God, because He chose her to give birth to His Son. Mary viewed herself as occupying an important role in the history of salvation.

Verses 46 through 48 give the reasons that Mary exalted and rejoiced in God. With Mary, God had begun to exalt the lowly (cf. Gen. 30:13; 1 Sam. 1:11). This exaltation will find full expression in Jesus' messianic reign on the earth.

1:49 The second strophe (vv. 49-50) glorifies God for His power, holiness, and mercy. Here are more reasons that future generations would call Mary blessed. "The Mighty One" had done great things for her (cf. Ps. 24:8; Zeph. 3:17). Furthermore, His name (i.e., His person) is holy. God is holy, or different from humans, in that He is superior to all others, especially in His moral and ethical perfection (cf. Ps. 99:3; 103:1; 111:9; Isa. 57:15).

1:50 God's mercy (Gr. *eleos*) balances His power and holiness (Ps. 103:17; cf. Matt. 23:23). The Greek word *eleos* translates the Hebrew *hesed* (meaning "loyal love," "faithfulness," or "lovingkindness") in the Septuagint. God's mercy refers to His compassion, specifically on those with whom He has entered into covenant relationship. Those who "fear" God reverence and trust in Him.

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<sup>1</sup>Liefeld, p. 836.

1:51-53 The third strophe (vv. 51-53) reflects on God's power in reversing certain social conditions. His favor to Israel is especially in view here. God had dealt with Mary like He had dealt with His people (Ps. 89:13; 118:16). God had reversed their conditions politically (v. 52) and socially (v. 53). A striking feature of this poem is the fact that Mary viewed God as overthrowing established authorities. This would have been of special interest to Luke's original readers. Jesus' appearance and eventual messianic reign would continue these divine works on a universal scale.

"In the ancient world it was accepted that the rich would be well cared for. Poor people must expect to be hungry. But Mary sings of a God who is not bound by what men do. He turns human attitudes and orders of society upside down."<sup>1</sup>

"Luke wrote more on the topic of wealth than any other New Testament writer."<sup>2</sup>

1:54-55 The last strophe (vv. 54-55) recalls God's mercy to Israel and to Mary (cf. Isa. 41:8-9; 42:1; 44:21). He had been consistently faithful to His covenant promises with His people having tempered judgment with mercy (cf. Mic. 7:20). God's past faithfulness gives hope for the future, because He has promised that He will bring many good things to pass.

"One of the important functions of the Magnificat is to provide an initial characterization of the God whose purpose shapes the following story."<sup>3</sup>

### **Mary's departure 1:56**

This verse resumes the narrative interrupted in verse 46. Mary remained with Elizabeth for the duration of Elizabeth's pregnancy. Then she returned to her home in Nazareth. She and Joseph were not yet married, so they did not live together until after Jesus was born.

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<sup>1</sup>Morris, p. 77.

<sup>2</sup>Bock, "A Theology ...," p. 159. See his summary on pp. 159-60.

<sup>3</sup>Tannehill, 1:29.

### C. THE BIRTH AND EARLY LIFE OF JOHN THE BAPTIST 1:57-80

As in the first part of this major section of the Gospel (1:5-56), Luke arranged his material in this one in order to compare and contrast John the Baptist and Jesus (1:57—2:52). In that section there was prediction, but in this one there is fulfillment. Luke's emphasis in his record of John's birth was his naming and his father's prediction of his future ministry.

#### 1. The naming of John 1:57-66

1:57-58 Luke passed over the birth of John quickly (cf. Gen. 25:24). It occasioned great joy for his parents and for all who knew them. Elizabeth's neighbors and relatives shared in the joy of John's birth, like the shepherds did later when they announced Jesus' birth.

1:59-61 As godly Israelites, Zechariah and Elizabeth were careful to circumcise John eight days after his birth (Gen. 17:9-14; cf. Luke 2:21). Normally the head of the household performed this operation.<sup>1</sup> Both parents also faithfully followed Gabriel's instructions and named their son as God had directed, despite opposition from well-meaning friends who attended this special occasion (cf. Ruth 4:17). The Jews customarily named their children when they were circumcised.<sup>2</sup> This custom followed the example of Abraham and Sarah, whose names God changed when He instituted circumcision (Gen. 17:5, 15).<sup>3</sup> Zechariah and Elizabeth named John at his circumcision. Jesus also received His name at His circumcision (2:21).

"... the child [John] was not to be named after any relative, for he was not to pattern after even the greatest and best of them; he was to have a decidedly new and individual name, one that matched his great career."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Marshall, *The Gospel ...*, p. 88.

<sup>2</sup>Samuel J. Andrews, *The Life of Our Lord Upon the Earth*, p. 70.

<sup>3</sup>Alford, 1:451.

<sup>4</sup>Lenski, p. 96.

"Only a name outside the range of all expectation can do justice to the decisive discontinuity in human affairs marked by John's coming."<sup>1</sup>

1:62-63      Apparently Zechariah could neither hear nor speak as a result of his earlier unbelief (cf. v. 20). The visitors had to communicate with him in sign language. The Greek word used to describe his condition, *kophos*, can mean "deaf" as well as "dumb" (cf. 7:22). Zechariah authoritatively settled the argument about his son's name by writing on a tablet: "His name is John." God had, of course, named John before his conception (v. 13). Apparently the neighbors expressed astonishment because no other family member had that name.

"One of the major lessons is that even if all his neighbors do not understand why Zechariah does not do things the way they have been done, he will walk where God tells him to walk."<sup>2</sup>

"... How do we define life? Is it in power and in the ability to 'take control,' or is it in following the one who is in control?"<sup>3</sup>

1:64              God rewarded Zechariah's obedience by removing his temporary disability. His first words were in praise of God (cf. Acts 2:4, 11).

"The first evidence of his dumbness had been, that his tongue refused to speak the benediction to the people; and the first evidence of his restored power was, that he spoke the benediction of God in a rapturous burst of praise and thanksgiving."<sup>4</sup>

1:65-66        Luke stressed the widespread effect that this incident had in the whole hill country of Judea. Everyone concluded that John would be an unusual child because God's hand was with him

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<sup>1</sup>Nolland, p. 79.

<sup>2</sup>Bock, *Luke*, p. 78.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 81.

<sup>4</sup>Edersheim, *The Life ...*, 1:159.



(i.e., God's power was evident in connection with his life). It was also Luke's purpose in emphasizing the naming of John to elicit the same conclusion in his readers. When John began his public ministry there must have been some Jews who submitted to his baptism because they had noted God's hand on him from this event onward (cf. 2:19, 51).

## 2. Zechariah's song of praise 1:67-79

This is the second major song of praise in Luke: the so called "Benedictus." This title comes from the first word in the Latin version of Luke's Gospel, which is translated "blessed" (Gr. *eulogetos*).

The first part of the song praises God for messianic deliverance (vv. 68-75), and the second part rejoices in John's significant role in this deliverance and contains prophecy (vv. 76-79). The chiastic structure of the song emphasizes the words "covenant" and "oath" (vv. 72-73). God's faithfulness to His covenant with Abraham is a dominant theme in the Benedictus. There are at least 16 Old Testament allusions or quotations in this song.<sup>1</sup> Its style and content are similar to Mary's Magnificat (vv. 46-55).

"Where the angel Gabriel's words (vv 15-17) have attributed a preliminary eschatological [end times] role as preparer to John, and the Magnificat (vv 46-55) has hymned the coming of Jesus as the fulfillment of all eschatological hopes, it is left to the Benedictus to speak of both together and to establish the nature of their partnership in the bringing of salvation."<sup>2</sup>

1:67      The Holy Spirit now "filled" (i.e., controlled) Zechariah, as He had Elizabeth (v. 41) and John (v. 15). He enabled the priest to prophesy. Zechariah proceeded to utter a psalm of praise, in which he gave God's explanation of the significance of the events that had begun to happen in fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy.

"Observe that Zechariah's previous doubt and his discipline through loss of speech did not mean the

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<sup>1</sup>Plummer, p. 39.

<sup>2</sup>Nolland, p. 91.

end of his spiritual ministry. So when a believer today has submitted to God's discipline, he may go on in Christ's service."<sup>1</sup>

Zechariah's failure had been relatively minor, so major discipline was unnecessary.

- 1:68 Earlier Mary rejoiced that she was blessed (v. 48). Now Zechariah blessed Yahweh, the God of Israel. When God is the person "blessed" (Gr. *eulogetos*) this word has the virtual meaning of "praised." Zechariah first praised God for visiting His people Israel (Gen. 21:1; Exod. 4:31; Zech. 10:3; cf. Acts 15:14). He had done this most recently by sending Messiah's forerunner. Second, Zechariah praised God for redeeming His people. The great historical demonstration of this had been the Exodus, but now God was moving again to provide ultimate redemption, nationally and personally, through Messiah.
- 1:69-70 Zechariah alluded to God's promise to raise up a "horn" (symbolic of strength) of salvation from David's descendants (i.e., a mighty Savior, Ps. 132:17; cf. Ps. 18:2). He was not speaking of John but Jesus. Zechariah knew of Jesus' coming birth because of Mary's three-month visit (v. 56). The other prophets in view ("His holy prophets from ancient times") are all those who spoke of the coming Messiah.
- 1:71-73 Zechariah alluded to salvation, mercy, and covenant fulfillment. Messiah's salvation would be both political and spiritual (cf. Ps. 106:10). God would be merciful to the fathers by fulfilling His promises to them (cf. Mal. 4:6). The oath that God swore to Abraham refers to Genesis 22:16 through 18, which included promises of victory over enemies and universal blessing (cf. Gen. 26:3; Ps. 106:45). The words "covenant" and "oath" are central in the chiasmic structure of the Benedictus, as mentioned earlier. Note the repetition of other key words or phrases in the chiasm in the surrounding verses. These are "visit" (vv. 68, 78), "His people" (vv. 68, 77), "salvation" (vv.

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<sup>1</sup>Liefeld, p. 839.

69, 71, 77), "prophets" (vv. 70, 76), and "enemies" (vv. 71, 74).

- 1:74-75 God's deliverance through Messiah did not mean that the Israelites could become passive but active, albeit in another form of His service. They could do so without fear of enemy persecution, negatively, and in holiness toward God and righteousness toward man, positively—forever.
- 1:76-77 These verses focus on John and his ministry. This description of John clearly links him with Elijah (cf. Isa. 40:3; Mal. 3:1; 4:5). Even though Luke omitted the conversation about Elijah that followed the Transfiguration (cf. Matt. 17:10-13; Mark 9:11-13), he undoubtedly recognized John's role as the fulfillment of the Elijah prophecy in Malachi 3:1.<sup>1</sup> It is difficult to say if Zechariah used the title "Lord" here of Jesus only in the sense of Messiah, or also in the sense of God, but he probably meant Messiah.

"... although 'Lord' in its transcendent sense appears in the Gospel as a title for Jesus, it occurs thus only in the words of the narrator, who thus gives us his own assessment of Jesus' identity and reveals his own status as a believer. [Footnote 44:] See 7:19; 10:1, 39, 41; 11:39; 12:42; 17:5, 6; 18:6; 19:8a; 22:61 (some mss [manuscripts])."<sup>2</sup>

John would prepare the way (path) for the Lord by giving His people the knowledge (experience) of salvation (cf. 3:3; Acts 4:10-12; 5:31-32; 13:38). Salvation, Zechariah explained, involves the forgiveness of sins. In other words, John would point the way to spiritual salvation, not just physical deliverance, that would come through the Lord.

"We might have expected that Zechariah's song would be all about his little boy. He surprised us by beginning with the Messiah whom God was

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<sup>1</sup>See Walter Wink, *John the Baptist in the Gospel Tradition*, pp. 42-45.

<sup>2</sup>Green, p. 118.

about to send. But he was very pleased about John, and in this part of his song he prophesies the child's future."<sup>1</sup>

1:78 God's loving compassion ("tender mercy") motivated Him to provide "salvation" (v. 77). The reference to God's tender mercy occurs in the middle of this part of Zechariah's song (vv. 76-79), highlighting what moved God to provide salvation.<sup>2</sup> The Greek word *anatole*, translated "visit," can describe the rising of a heavenly body or the growing of a plant shoot. The reference to "Sunrise" or "Dayspring" (AV) is perhaps a double reference to messianic prophecies about the Star arising out of Jacob (Num. 24:17) and the Shoot growing out of Jesse (Isa. 11:1-2).<sup>3</sup>

1:79 This verse continues the allusion to the "Sunrise" mentioned in verse 78 (cf. Isa. 9:1-2; 59:9).

"Within the Third Gospel, 'peace' is metonymic for 'salvation,' ..."<sup>4</sup>

"'Peace' is far more than the *feeling* of calmness, security, and rest, which as such would be deceptive, it is the *condition* of real harmony and friendship between God and us, which was established by Christ and made ours through him. Where this condition exists the feeling has the proper basis, and whether it is always present or not will always return and grow more and more."<sup>5</sup>

"The story [of Zechariah and Elizabeth] is shaped to attract our sympathy to devoted men and women who have waited

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<sup>1</sup>Morris, p. 80.

<sup>2</sup>Green, pp. 118-19.

<sup>3</sup>Marshall, *The Gospel ...*, pp. 94-95.

<sup>4</sup>Green, p. 854. Cf. 2:14, 29; 7:50; 8:48; 10:5-7; 19:38. A metonym is a figure of speech in which the name of one thing is used for that of another thing associated with or suggested by it.

<sup>5</sup>Lenski, p. 113.

long for the fulfillment of Israel's hopes and who now are told that the time of fulfillment has come."<sup>1</sup>

### 3. The preparation of John 1:80

Luke's comment about John's personal development shows his interest in human beings, which characterizes this Gospel (cf. 2:40, 52). John's "spirit" here corresponds roughly to his character and personality (cf. 1 Sam. 2:21).

There has been considerable speculation about whether John became a member of the ascetic Essene community at Qumran because "he lived in the deserts."<sup>2</sup> There is no way to prove or to disprove this theory presently. The factors in favor of his being an Essene are their common eschatological expectations, their use of Isaiah 40:3, and their use of ritual washings. Against his being an Essene is John's connection with the Jerusalem temple through his father, which the Essenes repudiated.<sup>3</sup> Probably John was not an Essene but simply a prophet who went into the deserts in order to commune with God so that he could be free of the distractions of ordinary life.<sup>4</sup>

"If in any of the towns of Judaea one had met the strange apparition of a man dressed wholly in white, whose sandals and garments perhaps bore signs of age—for they might not be put away till quite worn out—but who was scrupulously clean, this man was an Essene."<sup>5</sup>

At this point in Luke's narrative John gives way to Jesus. Similarly, in his ministry John gave way to Jesus.

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<sup>1</sup>Tannehill, 1:19.

<sup>2</sup>See A. S. Geyser, "The Youth of John the Baptist," *Novum Testamentum* 1 (1956):70-75; and J. A. T. Robinson, *Twelve New Testament Studies*, pp. 11-27.

<sup>3</sup>Marshall, *The Gospel ...*, p. 96.

<sup>4</sup>See John C. Hutchinson, "Was John the Baptist an Essene from Qumran?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 159:634 (April-June 2002):187-200.

<sup>5</sup>Alfred Edersheim, *Sketches of Jewish Social Life in the Days of Christ*, p. 246.

## D. THE BIRTH AND EARLY LIFE OF JESUS CH. 2

Luke followed the same pattern of events in telling about Jesus' birth and early life as he did when he narrated those of John. His purpose was to compare and contrast these two important individuals side by side. All of chapter 2 is unique material that appears only in Luke's Gospel.

### 1. The setting of Jesus' birth 2:1-7

In narrating John's birth Luke stressed his naming, but in his account of Jesus' birth he concentrated on its setting.

Luke's brief account of Jesus' birth emphasizes three things: First, he described the political situation in order to explain why Jesus was born in Bethlehem. This set Jesus' birth in a context of world history and anticipated His worldwide significance. Second, Luke connected Bethlehem with David in order to show that Jesus qualified as to be the Messiah. Finally, he presented Jesus' humble beginnings and so introduced the themes of Jesus' identification with the poor and His rejection.

Luke paralleled John's and Jesus' births as he did the announcements of their births, and he stressed Jesus' superiority again. One angel announced John's birth, but a multitude of angels proclaimed the birth of Jesus.

2:1-2 "Those days" refer to the time of John's birth (1:57-79). Augustus was Caesar from 44 B.C. to A.D. 14.<sup>1</sup> Augustus' other name was Gaius Octavius, and he was called in antiquity "the divine savior who has brought peace to the world."<sup>2</sup> Luke presented a superior Savior.

The purpose of a Roman census was to provide statistical data so the government could levy taxes.<sup>3</sup> "All the inhabited earth" means throughout "the entire Roman world" (NIV) or empire.<sup>4</sup> This may have been the first census taken of the whole Roman provincial system, though it was not the first census that the

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<sup>1</sup>Hoehner, p. 12. For a list of the 16 Roman emperors from 30 B.C. to A.D. 180, with their dates, see Scroggie, p. 37.

<sup>2</sup>Green, p. 58.

<sup>3</sup>Andrews, p. 73; Hoehner, p. 13.

<sup>4</sup>NIV refers to *The Holy Bible: New International Version*.

Romans took within the empire.<sup>1</sup> Alternatively, it has been claimed that:

"No single census embraced the whole Roman world, but each particular census was an expression of a consistent policy of the emperor for the whole of his empire."<sup>2</sup>

Quirinius served as governor of the Roman province of Syria twice (3-2 B.C. and A.D. 6-7).<sup>3</sup> However Herod the Great was still alive when Augustus issued his decree (Matt. 2), and, according to Josephus, Herod died in 4 B.C.<sup>4</sup> This incongruity has cast doubt on Luke's reliability as a historian.<sup>5</sup> There is evidence that Augustus issued the type of decree that Luke described in A.D. 6 (cf. Acts 5:37).<sup>6</sup> But there is presently no evidence that he did so earlier.

One solution to this problem is that the decree went out in 3 or 2 B.C., but we have no other record of it.<sup>7</sup> This solves the problem of a census occurring during the governorship of Quirinius, but it does not solve the problem of Herod being alive then. Another possibility is that the word "first" (v. 2, Gr. *prote*) means "prior" or "former" here (cf. John 15:18).<sup>8</sup> Luke's meaning would then be that the census that took Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem was the one that Augustus made prior to the one he took when Quirinius was governor of Syria

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<sup>1</sup>A. N. Sherwin-White, *Roman Society and Roman Law in the New Testament*, p. 168. See also Geldenhuys, pp. 104-6.

<sup>2</sup>Nolland, p. 103.

<sup>3</sup>Hoehner, p. 22. Cf. Josephus, *Antiquities of ...*, 18:1:1; 18:2:1; Eusebius, *The Ecclesiastical History of Eusebius Pamphilus*, 1:5:28; Jack Finegan, *Light from the Ancient Past*, pp. 258-61; Joseph P. Free, *Archaeology and Bible History*, pp. 285-86.

<sup>4</sup>Josephus, *Antiquities of ...*, 18:1:1; 18:2:1.

<sup>5</sup>For defense of Luke's accuracy as a historian, see F. F. Bruce, *Jesus and Christian Origins Outside the New Testament*, pp. 192-94; and I. H. Marshall, *Luke ...*, pp. 98-104.

<sup>6</sup>Josephus, *Antiquities of ...*, 18:2:1.

<sup>7</sup>*Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, s.v. "Quirinius," by E. M. Blaiklock, 5:5-6; *The New Bible Dictionary*, s.v. "Quirinius," by F. F. Bruce, p. 1069.

<sup>8</sup>Nigel Turner, *Grammatical Insights into the New Testament*, pp. 23-24.

(in A.D. 6).<sup>1</sup> This seems to be the best solution. All the evidence points to the birth of Jesus in late 5 or early 4 B.C.<sup>2</sup>

By citing Caesar's decree, Luke helped his readers to see that human decrees, however powerful, fall under and within the divine decree, which ordered the birth of Jesus (1:37).

2:3 Customarily people returned to their own hometowns to register for these censuses.<sup>3</sup> Bethlehem is where the family registers of Joseph and Mary were kept.<sup>4</sup>

2:4-5 It may seem unusual that Joseph took Mary with him to his ancestral home in Bethlehem, which lay some 85 miles south of Nazareth, since she was pregnant. Apparently the Romans required that every adult appear to make a proper assessment of his property.<sup>5</sup> In Syria, which at this time included Israel, a poll (head) tax was levied on women as well as on men.<sup>6</sup> Perhaps Joseph also did this in order to remove Mary from local gossip and emotional stress in Nazareth.<sup>7</sup> In addition, the couple probably knew that the Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem (Mic. 5:2).

One writer suggested that Joseph and Mary lived together as husband and wife, though they did not have sexual relations before Jesus' birth (cf. 1:25). He believed that it is unlikely that Mary would have traveled with Joseph as she did if they were only betrothed.<sup>8</sup> However they could have traveled together without having lived together previously, since their culture regarded engaged couples as virtually married.

"Hillel, the great Pharisee, was of the royal line,  
like Mary, and would perhaps be there that day;  
He was over a hundred years old. His son, Simeon,

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<sup>1</sup>See Nolland, pp. 103-4; Gleason L. Archer, *Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties*, pp. 365-66.

<sup>2</sup>Hoehner, pp. 11-25.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 15-16. See also Adolf Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East*, pp. 270-71.

<sup>4</sup>Robertson, *Word Pictures ...*, 2:22.

<sup>5</sup>Hoehner, p. 15.

<sup>6</sup>Nolland, p. 111.

<sup>7</sup>Liefeld, p. 844.

<sup>8</sup>Marshall, *The Gospel ...*, p. 105.



would also be there. So perhaps would his grandson, Gamaliel, the teacher of Paul. Did this considerable party arrive first and fill the innkeeper's accommodations?"<sup>1</sup>

2:6 Most readers assume that the couple arrived in Bethlehem just before Jesus' birth. But the text neither requires nor rules out this interpretation. They may have been there for some time before Mary went into labor.

2:7 "Firstborn son" implies that Mary had other children. Jesus did have brothers and sisters who were evidently born to Mary after Jesus' birth (cf. Matt. 1:25; 13:55; Mark 3:31-35). Normally in this culture mothers wrapped their newborn babies in wide strips of cloth to keep them warm and to keep their legs straight (cf. 23:53; Ezek. 16:4).<sup>2</sup> Today those assisting mothers at birth normally do the wrapping of the newborn, but here Mary did it herself, possibly suggesting that there was no one there to help her.<sup>3</sup>

Traditionally Christians have believed that the "manger," or feeding trough, in which Mary laid the baby Jesus, was in a cave.<sup>4</sup> However most homes in Israel had two parts: one for the family and another for the household's animals. It is possible that this other section was the location of the manger.<sup>5</sup> An "inn" (Gr. *katalyma*) could have been a guest room in a house (cf. 22:11-12) or any place of lodging. This Greek word has a wider range of meanings than *pandocheion*, which refers specifically to an inn for travelers (cf. 10:34).

"Mary and Joseph, then, would have been the guests of family or friends, but their home would

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<sup>1</sup>E. M. Blaiklock, *Today's Handbook of Bible Characters*, p. 322.

<sup>2</sup>Liefeld, p. 846; *The Nelson Study Bible*, p. 1689.

<sup>3</sup>G. Campbell Morgan, *The Gospel According to Luke*, p. 36.

<sup>4</sup>Justin Martyr, *Trypho*, 78:4; Origen, *Contra Celsum*, 1:15. Cf. W. M. Thomson, *The Land and the Book*, 2:503-7; Andrews, p. 86; Alford, 1:457.

<sup>5</sup>Nolland, pp. 105-6, 111.

have been so overcrowded that the baby was placed in a feeding trough."<sup>1</sup>

One commentator wrote that a *katalyma* was often simply an enclosure with walls—into which travelers could drive their cattle for the night—and water but no food.<sup>2</sup>

The so-called innkeeper has become a villain figure in the Christmas story, but Luke did not present him as such. The writer's contrast was between the royal birthplace that this Son of David deserved, and the humble one that He received. His exclusion from human society at birth anticipated the rejection that He would continue to experience throughout His ministry.

"There is no room for God, and that which is of God, in this world."<sup>3</sup>

We may never know the exact day of Jesus' birth until we get to heaven. But a day in late December or early January is unlikely.

"... it was *not* the custom for the shepherds of Judea to watch their flocks in the open fields *later* than about the end of October. It is in the last degree incredible, then, that the birth of Christ could have taken place at the end of December."<sup>4</sup>

The traditional date of December 25 goes back at least as far as Hippolytus (ca. A.D. 165-235).<sup>5</sup> Probably Jesus was born in

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<sup>1</sup>Green, p. 129.

<sup>2</sup>Morgan, *The Gospel ...*, p. 36.

<sup>3</sup>J. N. Darby, *Synopsis of the Books of the Bible*, 3:293.

<sup>4</sup>Hislop, pp. 91-92.

<sup>5</sup>Hippolytus, *Commentary on Daniel*, 4:23:3. See also Jack Finegan, *Handbook of Biblical Chronology*, p. 248; and Kurt M. Simmons, "The Origins of Christmas and the Date of Christ's Birth," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 58:2 (June 2015):299-324; idem, "A Chronology of the Life of Christ with Emphasis on the Nativity and Epiphany," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 178:709 (January-March 2021):34-69.

the fall of 5 or 4 B.C.<sup>1</sup> Some scholars place the time of Jesus' birth at April 5.<sup>2</sup>

"... the date of the Feast of the Dedication [of the temple by Judas Maccabaeus in 164 B.C.]—the 25<sup>th</sup> of Chislev—seems to have been adopted by the ancient Church as that of the birth of our blessed Lord—Christmas—the Dedication of the true Temple, which was the body of Jesus (John 2:19)."<sup>3</sup>

"The festival of Christmas on December 25 originated in the west, and undoubtedly Rome was its cradle. Here it was observed as early as A.D. 336 under Constantine."<sup>4</sup>

"The eastern festival of the Saviour's birth was Epiphany on January 6. This was perhaps first celebrated early in the fourth century in Egypt, and, by way of Jerusalem, spread rapidly from their all over the east."<sup>5</sup>

Jesus' birthplace was evidently very close to the location of the present Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem.

"The church that now stands over the cave of the nativity was built by the Emperor Justinian upon the site of that built by the Empress Helena, A.D. 330."<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Hoehner, pp. 11-27.

<sup>2</sup>See Alford, 1:457.

<sup>3</sup>Edersheim, *The Temple*, p. 334. See also pp. 333-36.

<sup>4</sup>Hans Lietzmann, *A History of the Early Church*, vol. 3, *From Constantine to Julian*, p. 316.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 317. See pp. 317-22 for how these days were chosen and became traditional.

<sup>6</sup>Andrews, p. 86. Cf. Finegan, *Light from ...*, p. 532.

## 2. The announcement to the shepherds 2:8-20

There is great theological significance in this familiar passage. It comes through mainly in the angel's words and in the symbolism of what happened.

"In 2:8-14 we have a third annunciation scene, which follows the same pattern as the previous two: the appearance of an angel, a response of fear, the command not to fear, the announcement of a birth that brings joy. In this case, however, the announcement is not to a parent of the child to be born, for this birth is not just a family affair. Indeed, the angel stresses that he brings a message of 'great joy which shall be for all the people' (2:10)."<sup>1</sup>

2:8 Shepherds were looked down upon socially in Jesus' day. Their work made them ceremonially unclean, and they had a reputation for being untrustworthy.<sup>2</sup> Thus God first sent the gospel (good news) to the lowly. Luke had a special interest in the lower elements of society. David, of course, had been a shepherd, but God had elevated him to be the ruler of His people (2 Sam. 7:8). Jesus' career would follow the pattern of his ancestor generally. Throughout the Old Testament God used shepherds as symbols of those who cared for His people (Ps. 23:1; Isa. 40:11; Jer. 23:1-4; et al.). Consequently these shepherds represent all people of lowly origin and reputation who receive the gospel by God's grace and proclaim it joyfully to others.

The idea that these shepherds were raising sheep that the people would offer as Passover sacrifices in a few months is possible but not verifiable.<sup>3</sup> There is evidence in the Mishnah, however, that sheep pastured there were destined for temple sacrifice.<sup>4</sup> The shepherds would have been out in the fields

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<sup>1</sup>Tannehill, 1:38.

<sup>2</sup>Liefeld, p. 845.

<sup>3</sup>See Morris, p. 84.

<sup>4</sup>Mishnah *Shekalim* 7:4. See also Edersheim, *The Life ...*, 1:186-87; and idem, *Sketches of ...*, p. 80.

with their sheep at night if the weather was mild, as it apparently was.

2:9 A single angel appeared to the shepherds first—"suddenly." Luke did not identify him by name, perhaps to focus attention on his message. Later a multitude of other angels joined him (v. 13). The sudden appearance of the angel, plus the accompanying manifestation of God's glory, terrified the shepherds (cf. 1:12; 9:34; Ezek. 1; Acts 12:7).

2:10-11 The angel reassured the frightened shepherds (cf. 1:13, 30). His appearing signaled an occasion for rejoicing, not fearing.

Significant terms characteristic of Luke's Gospel occur in the angel's announcement, which indicates its importance. These include: "bring good news" (Gr. *euangelizomai*), "joy" (Gr. *chara*), "people" (Gr. *laos*), "today" (Gr. *semeron*), "Savior" (Gr. *soter*), "Lord" (Gr. *kyrios*), and "glory" (Gr. *doxa*). This angelic announcement, then, is a seedbed for important ideas that Luke traced throughout the rest of this book. The time had come for the fulfillment of Messiah's predicted coming. A similarly worded birth announcement of Caesar Augustus that archaeologists have discovered shows that such terminology was not uncommon.<sup>1</sup> However in Jesus' case, it was a cause for true joy.

The unusual phrase "Christ the Lord," (v. 11) which occurs nowhere else in the New Testament, probably means "Messiah God." "Savior" (v. 11) occurs only here in Luke's Gospel in reference to Jesus.

2:12 The sign that Messiah God had indeed come to save the people would be the baby that the shepherds would find wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger. This was an unusual place for any baby to lie, but especially the divine Messiah. In this case the sign was not an unusual demonstration of divine power, as were the cases of Zechariah's muteness and Elizabeth's conception, but a confirmation of the truth of the angel's

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<sup>1</sup>See Marshall, *The Gospel ...*, p. 109.

message.<sup>1</sup> The term "swaddling clothes" (AV) translates the Greek word *spargano*, meaning "to swathe" or "to wrap." The Jews also wrapped their dead in strips of cloth, just as they did their infants. Thus a birth was a reminder of the death that would inevitably follow one day.

2:13 Frequently God waits a long time before He acts, but then He acts suddenly, as He did here (cf. Mark 13:36; Acts 2:2; 9:3; 1 Thess. 5:3). The sudden appearance of the other angels parallels God's sudden action in providing a Savior. The term "heavenly army" derives from the Old Testament, and here it refers to a large number of angels (cf. 1 Kings 22:19; 2 Chron. 33:3, 5; Ps. 148:2; Jer. 8:2; 19:13; Zeph. 1:5). This army of angels, ironically, announced peace, not war.

"... when a child was born the local musicians congregated at the house to greet him with simple music."<sup>2</sup>

2:14 Only once before had a human heard angelic praise, according to biblical revelation (Isa. 6:3). Now the angels' praise explained the benefits of Jesus' birth. These angels first ascribed "glory" to God in heaven, where He dwells. God revealed His glory by sending His Son. Consequently it is appropriate to ascribe glory and praise to God. The effect of Jesus' coming on humankind is "peace." The biblical concept of peace, rooted in the Hebrew word *shalom*, includes the sum of God's blessings, not just the absence of hostility.

Did the angels mean that peace would come through Jesus to all people, or only to those with whom He is pleased? The AV translation "good will toward men" can be misunderstood. The reader could infer that God will be gracious to people who show good will to others, which would suggest the idea that human merit is the basis of God's favor. The NIV translation "peace to men on whom His favor rests" is better. Those on whom God bestows His favor are those who experience His peace: "people

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<sup>1</sup>Green, p. 135.

<sup>2</sup>Barclay, p. 17.

with whom He is pleased."<sup>1</sup> Probably the angels meant that peace would come through Jesus to all people. If they had meant that it would come only to those with whom God is pleased, their statement would be redundant: People with whom God is already well pleased have no need of peace, because they already have it.

"The angels are speaking objectively of the peace that has been won for the whole earth and is intended for all men."<sup>2</sup>

2:15 The angels went away "into heaven," their dwelling place and God's. Luke showed interest in spatial relationships in his Gospel (cf. 24:51) and in Acts (cf. Acts 1:11).

2:16 The shepherds, on the other hand, hurried off to Bethlehem (cf. 1:39). This has been called "the first Christmas rush." They realized that the angels' message came from the Lord. Contrast the attitude of the religious leaders who, though they heard of Messiah's birth in Bethlehem, did not bother to check it out (Matt. 2:5). Luke did not break the feeling of excitement and swift action in the narrative by describing how the shepherds located the manger. In Luke's account there is no mention of the star that appeared to the wise men.

"It is most likely that these shepherds were in charge of the flocks from which the Temple offerings were chosen. It is a lovely thought that the shepherds who looked after the Temple lambs were the first to see the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world."<sup>3</sup>

2:17 After the shepherds saw Jesus they spread the word as evangelists (i.e., reporters of good news)—the first evangelists in Luke-Acts.

2:18 The response of those who heard their eyewitness testimony was amazement (Gr. *ethaumasán*), not unbelief or belief. They

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<sup>1</sup>See Green, p. 137; Tenney, "The Gospel ...," p. 1032.

<sup>2</sup>Lenski, pp. 135-36.

<sup>3</sup>Barclay, p. 17.

probably thought: I wonder if the Messiah really has arrived. The theme of amazement runs through this Gospel (cf. vv. 33, 47; 4:22; 8:25; 9:43; 11:14, 38; 20:26; 24:12, 41).

- 2:19 In contrast to the shepherds' public proclamation, Mary meditated inwardly on the significance of these events (cf. vv. 19, 51; Gen. 37:11).
- 2:20 The shepherds returned to their flocks glorifying (praising) God (cf. vv. 13-14; 10:17). Luke also stressed praising God as the appropriate response to God's mighty works (cf. 5:25-26; 7:16; 13:13; 17:15; 18:43; 23:47).

### 3. Jesus' circumcision and naming 2:21

The record of this incident, similar as it is to the account of John's circumcision and naming (1:59-66), shows Jesus' identification with John, specifically, and with humankind generally.

"The contrast with the circumcision of the Baptist is marked. Here there is no family gathering of rejoicing neighbours and kinsfolk. Joseph and Mary are strangers in a village far from home."<sup>1</sup>

"... since 'he that is circumcised is a *debtor to do the whole law*' (Gal. 5:3), Jesus thus bore about with Him in His very flesh the seal of a voluntary obligation to do the whole law—by Him only possible in the flesh since the fall."<sup>2</sup>

Jesus' name is very significant, meaning "Yahweh Is Salvation" or "Yahweh Saves." God specified it before His conception, as He had done for John. But on this day Jesus' parents officially gave Jesus His name. Prophecies about John's future followed his circumcision immediately, but they occurred later for Jesus, namely, at His presentation in the temple (vv. 22-24).

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<sup>1</sup>Plummer, p. 62.

<sup>2</sup>Jamieson, et al., p. 993.



#### 4. Jesus' presentation in the temple 2:22-38

The emphasis in this section of text is Simeon's prediction of Jesus' ministry (cf. 1:67-79). He pointed out the universal extent of the salvation that Jesus would bring and the rejection that He would experience.

#### **The presentation of Jesus 2:22-24**

2:22 Under Mosaic Law a woman became ritually unclean when she gave birth to a child (Lev. 12:2).

"In the worship of the Old Testament, where everything was *symbolical*, that is, where spiritual realities were conveyed through outward signs, every physical defilement would point to, and carry with it, as it were, a spiritual counterpart. But especially was this the case with reference to birth and death, which were so closely connected with sin and the second death, with redemption and the second birth. Hence, all connected with the origin of life and with death, implied defilement, and required Levitical purification [cf. Num. 19]."<sup>1</sup>

The Mosaic Law directed that the parents of a male child were to circumcise him on the eighth day after his birth (Lev. 12:3; cf. Gen. 17:12). The mother of a male offspring was unclean for 33 days following her son's circumcision (Lev. 12:4; cf. Lev. 12:5).

Ritual uncleanness was not the same as sinfulness. All sin resulted in uncleanness in Israel, but uncleanness was not always the result of sin. Mary's uncleanness was not due to her sinfulness, but because she had borne a child. The fact that she became unclean when she bore Jesus testifies to the reality of the Incarnation.<sup>2</sup> Jesus was a real human being.

2:23 In the case of a firstborn son, the parents were to present him to the Lord (Exod. 13:2, 12; Num. 18:16; cf. 1 Sam. 1:24-28).

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<sup>1</sup>Edersheim, *The Temple*, pp. 343-44.

<sup>2</sup>F. W. Danker, *Jesus and the New Age*, p. 30.

The parents would normally redeem the son (buy him back from the Lord) by paying five shekels for him (Num. 18:16).

"It could be paid to a priest anywhere (M. Ex. 13:2 (22b)). The facts that the scene of the present incident is the temple, no ransom price is mentioned, and the child is present, show that Jesus is not here being redeemed but consecrated to the Lord."<sup>1</sup>

"In the Court of the Women there were thirteen trumpet-shaped chests for pecuniary [money] contributions, called 'trumpets.' Into the third of these they who brought the poor's offering, like the Virgin-Mother, were to drop the price of the sacrifices which were needed for their purification."<sup>2</sup>

2:24 On the fortieth day after her son's birth, the mother was to present a sin offering to the priest at the sanctuary to atone for her uncleanness (Lev. 12:6-7). Normally this offering was to be a lamb, but if the woman was poor she could bring two doves or two pigeons (Lev. 12:8). Mary apparently offered two birds, suggesting that Mary and Joseph could not afford the more expensive lamb sacrifice.<sup>3</sup> Luke may have mentioned this in order to help his readers understand the Jewish regulations. He did not stress the economic condition of Mary and Joseph.

Mary and Joseph complied with these regulations like observant Israelites.

"Festive seasons were not the only occasions which brought worshippers to Jerusalem. Every trespass and sin, every special vow and offering, and every defilement called them to the Temple."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Marshall, *The Gospel ...*, p. 117. See also *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, s.v. "*paristemi, paristano*," by G. Bertram and Bo Reicke, 5(1967):840-41.

<sup>2</sup>Edersheim, *The Life ...*, 1:196.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, 1:149, 195.

<sup>4</sup>Edersheim, *The Temple*, p. 343.

### The encounter with Simeon 2:25-35

2:25 Simeon was a godly individual who testified publicly to Jesus' significance under divine inspiration. This was part of Luke's purpose of assuring his readers that Jesus was indeed the Lord. Luke used the testimony of credible people to do this. Simeon possessed the three essential characteristics of Old Testament piety: First, he was "righteous and devout." Second, he was one of the believing remnant in Israel who was looking for the appearing of Messiah ("the consolation of Israel").<sup>1</sup> Third, the Holy Spirit was upon him.<sup>2</sup> Many readers have assumed that Simeon was an old man, but the text does not say that, though he may have been old.

"Hillel was the father of Simeon, and Simeon the father of Gamaliel. It has been imagined by some that Simeon was the same old man who took the infant Saviour in his arms, and pronounced the *Nunc Dimittis* [lit. "permission to depart"]."<sup>3</sup>

2:26 God had given Simeon a special revelation that he would not die before he saw God's Messiah ("the Lord's Christ").

2:27 The Holy Spirit led Simeon to be present in the temple courtyard when Mary and Joseph were there to consecrate Jesus to God (cf. 4:1). Luke recorded many similar leadings of the Holy Spirit in Acts.

2:28 Simeon took the infant Jesus in his arms and began to praise God. Again, the presence of Jesus became an occasion for joy and praise of God (1:46-55; 2:14, 20). This was consistently the response of the godly to Jesus in Luke's Gospel.

2:29 As with the Magnificat and the Benedictus, this hymn also has a Latin name: the "Nunc Dimittis." This is the Latin rendering of the opening words of this song of Simeon translated "Now ... you are letting ... depart." Simeon acknowledged that Messiah had come. He felt ready to die since God had fulfilled

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<sup>1</sup>Idem, *The Life ...*, 1:198.

<sup>2</sup>Liefeld, p. 849.

<sup>3</sup>Howson, p. 47.

His promise to him (v. 26). This statement may imply that he was an old man, but it may just be a way of saying that Simeon felt that this was the greatest experience in his life. Simeon properly regarded God as his sovereign, and himself as God's "bond-servant" (Gr. *doulos*).

2:30-31 Simeon equated the Messiah with God's salvation. He also viewed the salvation that Jesus would provide as being worldwide, not just for Israel (cf. Ps. 98:3; Isa. 52:10).

2:32 Luke mentioned the fact that Jesus would provide salvation for Gentiles as well as Jews many times. The word "Gentile" (v. 32) is from the Latin *gens*, meaning "tribe" or "nation." For Israel, Messiah's coming spelled glory (v. 32; Isa. 45:25; 46:13). That glory has yet to appear, but it will come with Jesus' second coming and the establishment of His earthly kingdom.

"Simeon's words echo the universalism of Isaiah (see esp. Isa 42:6; 49:6; 52:10; 60:1-2) and the role of the Servant of the Lord in this universal salvation.<sup>1</sup>

If we only had Matthew's and Mark's Gospels, we might wonder if there were any Jews besides Jesus who understood the Old Testament correctly. Luke presented two so far who did, namely, Zechariah and Simeon.

2:33 Mary and Joseph understood that Jesus was the Messiah. But they had evidently not connected some of the Old Testament revelation about Messiah, to which Simeon referred, with Jesus' ministry. Perhaps they understood Messiah to be mainly a political leader, which was the view of most of their contemporaries. God used a stranger to inform or remind them of their Son's significance for the Gentiles as well as for the Jews.

"If one wonders why they marveled at Simeon's words after what they had heard from Gabriel, Elisabeth, and the Shepherds, he should bear in

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<sup>1</sup>Nolland, p. 124.

mind that every parent is astonished and pleased at the fine things others see in the child."<sup>1</sup>

"... we can ... in some measure, understand why the mystery of His Divinity had to be kept while He was on earth. Had it been otherwise, the thought of His Divinity would have proved so all-absorbing, as to render impossible that of His Humanity, with all its lessons."<sup>2</sup>

2:34 Simeon now prayed for God's blessing on Mary and Joseph, or perhaps he declared them blessed by God (cf. v. 28). He had a special word for Mary, who would suffer more than Joseph (cf. 1 Sam. 2:20-21). He revealed to Mary that Jesus would be responsible for bringing many people in Israel to the point of making an important moral decision. Some of them would reject Him, and so fall spiritually, while others would accept Him, and therefore rise spiritually. He would be "a sign" in the sense that He would be a demonstration that God was at work.

"In himself, therefore, Jesus is the one through whom God points to his salvation and offers proof of its reality."<sup>3</sup>

As the predicted Stone, Jesus would be a source of stumbling to some, but a means of reaching heaven for others (cf. Isa. 8:14-15; 28:16). He would be the instrument of salvation for some but condemnation for others. However, He would pay a price, namely, suffering the antagonism of those who would reject Him.

"Jesus is the magnet of the ages. He draws some, he repels others. This is true of all epoch-making men to some extent."<sup>4</sup>

2:35 Jesus' rejection would wound Mary. The Greek word for the "sword" that would pierce Mary's soul is *rhomphaia*, which

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<sup>1</sup>Robertson, *Word Pictures ...*, 2:29.

<sup>2</sup>Edersheim, *The Life ...*, 1:192.

<sup>3</sup>Marshall, *The Gospel ...*, p. 122.

<sup>4</sup>Robertson, *Word Pictures ...*, 2:29.

describes a long Thracian javelin (cf. Ps. 22:20). Jesus' ministry would cause many people to come to grips with their own condition before God, and it would reveal those conditions to others.

### The encounter with Anna 2:36-38

2:36-37 Anna, whose name is equivalent to the Hebrew "Hannah," was a female prophetess (cf. Exod. 15:20; Judg. 4:4; 2 Kings 22:14; Neh. 6:14; Isa. 8:3; Acts 2:17; 21:9; 1 Cor. 11:5). Her mention reflects Luke's interest in the renewal of prophecy at this time (cf. 1:67; 2:34-35). Perhaps Luke referred to Anna's ancestors in order to validate her Jewishness.

"Curiously enough, the tribe of Asher alone is celebrated in tradition for the beauty of its women, and their fitness to be wedded to High-Priest or King."<sup>1</sup>

"I cannot refrain from saying that there are those who say there are ten lost tribes of Israel (that is, that the ten tribes which went into Assyrian captivity in the eighth century B.C. migrated north rather than returning to the land of Israel). If you search through the Bible from the time Israel returned to the land after the captivity, you can pick up practically all of the tribes. Here Anna is mentioned as a member of the tribe of Asher. Evidently Anna did not get lost!"<sup>2</sup>

Anna's husband had died seven years after their marriage, and she had remained a widow from that time to her present age of 84. Another interpretation is that she had been a widow for 84 years, which would have made her over 100 years old.<sup>3</sup> Luke contains about 43 references to women, four of whom were widows (vv. 36-40; 7:11-15; 18:1-8; 21:1-4). Anna was

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<sup>1</sup>Edersheim, *The Life ...*, 1:200.

<sup>2</sup>McGee, 4:255.

<sup>3</sup>Lenski, p. 156.

a widow who had devoted herself to the worship and service of God in the temple (cf. 1 Tim. 5:5).

2:38 Luke again recorded God's providential timing in bringing this godly woman to Jesus at this time (cf. v. 27). Like Simeon, Anna was anticipating God's deliverance of Israel through Messiah (cf. v. 25). The references to Simeon looking forward to the consolation of Israel, in verse 25, and Anna looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem, in this verse, act as a pair of bookends (*inclusio*) holding the Simeon and Anna episodes together. Luke used "Jerusalem" figuratively (i.e., metonymy) for Israel (cf. Isa. 52:9). God gave Anna prophetic insight into Jesus' identity. The godly in Jerusalem undoubtedly learned about Messiah's birth from reliable Simeon and Anna (cf. 1:68)—two more witnesses (cf. v. 17), this time a male and a female.

"They represent the long history of an expectant people, nourished by God's promise. Zechariah and Elizabeth also fit this character type. They, too, are righteous, careful observers of the law (1:6), old (1:7), and filled with the prophetic Spirit when they recognize the fulfillment of God's promise (1:41, 67). These people represent their faith at its best, according to the values of the implied author, even though Zechariah has temporary doubts. To them the coming of the long awaited salvation is revealed."<sup>1</sup>

### 5. Jesus' development in Nazareth 2:39-40

2:39 Luke again noted Mary's and Joseph's careful obedience to God's will as revealed in the Mosaic Law. He omitted their flight to Egypt, which Matthew recorded. Jesus' family's return to Nazareth was another fulfillment of messianic prophecy (cf. Matt. 2:23). However the fulfillment of prophecy was not as important to Luke as it was to Matthew, so he did not mention that here.

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<sup>1</sup>Tannehill, 1:39.

"There was a general contempt in Rabbinic circles for all that was Galilean."<sup>1</sup>

"Making every allowance for exaggeration, we cannot wholly ignore the account of Josephus about the 240 towns and villages of Galilee, each with not less than 15,000 inhabitants."<sup>2</sup>

2:40 Luke also noted Jesus' normal development as a human being (cf. v. 52; 1:80; 2:52). He was the object of God's grace (help, divine enablement). Luke mentioned Jesus' "wisdom" perhaps in anticipation of the following pericope. This verse describes what happened to Jesus between His presentation in the temple and His return there when He was 12 years old (vv. 41-51). God's favor rested on Jesus as a young boy because He always did what was pleasing to His heavenly Father (cf. John 8:29).

### **6. Jesus' visit to the temple as a boy 2:41-51**

This is the only inspired incident that God has given us that took place during Jesus' youth. Luke stressed Jesus' youthful wisdom here, and His conscious awareness that He was the Son of God, so that his readers would have confidence in Jesus' deity. There is a strong contrast between Jesus' earthly parents and His heavenly Father in this story. Stories of the precocious condition of a great person in his or her youth were and are common. They demonstrate the uniqueness of the individual and his or her superiority over others. Yet Jesus was far more than precocious.

"An episode from the in-between years of Jesus' life is a fitting transition to the main Gospel account which will begin in chap. 3. Here Jesus as a preadolescent for the first time takes an active part. And here that unique relatedness to God which marks his adult life comes into clear focus."<sup>3</sup>

2:41 Again Luke pointed out the godly characters of Mary and Joseph. Jewish males were to go to Jerusalem three times a

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<sup>1</sup>Edersheim, *The Life ...*, 1:225.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 1:224.

<sup>3</sup>Nolland, p. 128.



year: at the feasts of Passover/Unleavened Bread, Pentecost, and Tabernacles. In Jesus' day women usually attended with their husbands or fathers (cf. 1 Sam. 1:7).<sup>1</sup> Those who could not attend all three festivals tried to attend Passover at least.

2:42 Customarily Jewish parents took their young sons with them for a year or two before the boy became "a son of the covenant," usually at age 13.<sup>2</sup>

"Jewish boys became responsible for their actions at thirteen (*m[ishnah]*. *Niddah* 5.6; *m[ishnah]*. *Megillah* 4.6). At the age of twelve the instruction of boys became more intensive in preparation of the recognition of adulthood (*m[ishnah]*. *'Abot* 5.21). The Bar Mitzvah of modern times, however, postdates the time of Jesus by five hundred years ..."<sup>3</sup>

"Supposing the Lord to have been born in 749 [Roman year; 5 B.C.], the year when He went up with His parents to the Passover was 761 [A.D. 8], and the feast began on the 8<sup>th</sup> of April."<sup>4</sup>

2:43 Luke noted that Mary and Joseph stayed for the duration of the eight-day festival, which is another tribute to their piety.

"This was not absolutely incumbent; some went home after the first two days, but such people as Joseph and Mary would do their duty thoroughly."<sup>5</sup>

Luke called Jesus a "boy" (Gr. *pais*, also used of servants) here rather than a "child" (Gr. *paidion*), which was the term he used of Jesus in verse 40.

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<sup>1</sup>*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, s.v. "pascha," by J. Jeremias, 5(1967):896-904.

<sup>2</sup>Edersheim, *The Life ...*, 1:235-36.

<sup>3</sup>Bock, *Luke*, p. 99, n. 1. Cf. Fitzmyer, p. 440.

<sup>4</sup>Andrews, p. 108.

<sup>5</sup>A. B. Bruce, 1:478.

2:44 Mary and Joseph probably did not miss Jesus for a whole day because each may have supposed that He was with the other, since men often traveled with men and women with women.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps they assumed that He was with the other boys, or the other adults, in their caravan of pilgrims going back home. After a day's journey Mary and Joseph began to search for Jesus among their fellow travelers ("relatives and acquaintances").

One of my professor colleagues once left his children at the church where he was the guest preacher and only became aware of their absence when he arrived back home. It seems unlikely that Mary and Joseph would have been this absentminded however.

2:45 On the second day Mary and Joseph returned to Jerusalem (v. 45), which evidently took the whole day.

2:46 Then on the third day they began searching for Jesus and found Him in the temple. He was sitting among the rabbis listening to their teaching and asking them questions. This is not where most boys His age would go or what they would do. One might wonder if first Mary and Joseph searched for Him in the theaters, circuses, parks, sports complexes, shops, and streets of Jerusalem.<sup>2</sup>

The Jews encouraged their children to ask questions of the rabbis.<sup>3</sup> Luke's reference to Jesus being "in the midst" of the teachers suggests His centrality in this august group, though He was then a learner and not a teacher (cf. Ps. 119:99-100).

"Already early in life Jesus values the pursuit of comprehending God, as he increases 'in wisdom and stature' (2:52). His approach to knowing God and seeking understanding pictures how we should pursue the same, even at a young age."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Liefeld, p. 852; Barclay, p. 24.

<sup>2</sup>See Alexander Whyte, *Bible Characters*, 1:164.

<sup>3</sup>Howson, p. 48.

<sup>4</sup>Bock, *Luke*, p. 100.

"It is possible that Gamaliel may have been one of those doctors with whom Jesus was found conversing in the Temple."<sup>1</sup>

2:47 Jesus' understanding and His answers "amazed" (Gr. *existanto*) everyone who was present (cf. 4:32; 9:43). One suspects that some of these rabbis later remembered this incident, when Jesus became a popular teacher Himself. Obviously Jesus already had unusual wisdom and insight into the Scriptures, which were the center of these rabbinic discussions.<sup>2</sup>

"... whether or not Jesus had attended such a [synagogue] school, His mind was so thoroughly imbued with the Sacred Scriptures—He was so familiar with them in their every detail—that we cannot fail to infer that the home of Nazareth possessed a precious copy of its own of the entire Sacred Volume, which from earliest childhood formed, so to speak, the meat and drink of the God-Man. More than that, there is clear evidence that He was familiar with the art of writing, which was by no means so common in those days as reading."<sup>3</sup>

2:48 Mary and Joseph were understandably anxious (Gr. *edynomenoi*) about their Son's safety (cf. v. 35; 16:24-25; Acts 20:38; Rom. 9:2). When they found Jesus, His participation in conversation with the rabbis "bewildered" (Gr. *exeplogesan*) them.

"It is one of the characteristics of Luke to observe the various responses of awe at the words and deeds of Jesus, which is also consistent with

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<sup>1</sup>Howson, p. 52.

<sup>2</sup>See J. W. Doeve, *Jewish Hermeneutics in the Synoptic Gospels and Acts*, p. 105.

<sup>3</sup>Edersheim, *Sketches of ...*, p. 118. See chapter 8 of this volume for more information about education in Jesus' culture.

ancient narratives touching on the observation of wonders."<sup>1</sup>

Mary's question had the force of scolding. It revealed an unwarranted but understandable attitude.<sup>2</sup> Perhaps Mary, rather than Joseph, spoke to Jesus as she did because mother's normally tend to react in situations like this more emotionally than fathers do.

2:49 Mary and Joseph's anxiety contrasts with Jesus' calmness. Mary's reference to Jesus' earthly father also contrasts with Jesus' reference to His heavenly Father. Jesus' first question prepared His parents for His significant statement that followed in His second question. Jesus' response to Mary and Joseph showed that He regarded His duty to His heavenly Father, and His things, as taking precedence over His duty to His earthly father and his things. The Greek phrase *en tois tou patros mou* has been translated "in My Father's house," but it can also be translated "about My Father's business" (NKJV).<sup>3</sup> I believe this second translation more accurately reflects what Jesus meant.

It has been suggested that Jesus may have been hinting that Joseph was not His real father.<sup>4</sup> This was, of course, true, but I doubt that Jesus was in any sense demeaning Joseph.

"Jesus' point is that his career must be about instruction on the way of God, for the temple was not only a place of worship, but was also a place of teaching. Jesus has a call to instruct the nation. Though he is twelve now, a day is coming when this will be his priority."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Liefeld, p. 852.

<sup>2</sup>For a chronological catalog of 103 questions that people asked Jesus in the Gospels and His responses, see Roy B. Zuck, "How Jesus Responded to Questions," in *Integrity of Heart, Skillfulness of Hands*, pp. 108-33.

<sup>3</sup>NKJV refers to *The Holy Bible: New King James Version*.

<sup>4</sup>Humberd, p. 23.

<sup>5</sup>Bock, *Luke*, pp. 100-1.

"Jesus' question should, then, be seen as reflecting genuine surprise and not reproach."<sup>1</sup>

Even as a boy Jesus placed great importance on worshipping God and learning from and about God (being about His Father's business). However Jesus' obedience to God did not involve disobedience to Joseph and Mary.

Did Jesus not owe it to His parents to tell them beforehand that He planned to linger in the temple so that they would not worry about Him? He may have done so, and they may have forgotten, but this was not something that Luke chose to explain. Luke's purpose was to record Jesus' response to Mary and Joseph, which expressed Jesus' awareness of His unique relationship to God and His duty to God.<sup>2</sup>

"Jesus' reply, though gentle in manner, suggests the establishment of a break between himself and his parents, although this will be modified in v. 51. There is thus a tension between the necessity felt by Jesus to enter into closer relationship with his Father and the obedience which he continued to render to his parents."<sup>3</sup>

All committed young believers who live under their parents' authority have struggled with this tension.

These are the first words that Luke recorded Jesus saying in his Gospel, and they set the tone for what follows.

"It is remarkable that the first words of Jesus quoted in the Gospel narrative are these words in which He so clearly refers to His divine Sonship, and in which He points to His life's vocation to be about His Father's business—to serve and glorify Him in all things and at all times."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Nolland, p. 131. See also Alford, 1:466.

<sup>2</sup>See I. Howard Marshall, "The Divine Sonship of Jesus," *Interpretation* 21 (1967):87-103.

<sup>3</sup>Idem, *The Gospel ...*, p. 128.

<sup>4</sup>Geldenhuys, p. 128.

All of Jesus' words and works testified to the priority that He gave to the will of His heavenly Father. "Had to" (Gr. *dei*) reflects a key theme in Luke's Gospel that highlights divine design. This Greek word occurs 99 times in the New Testament and 40 times in Luke-Acts.<sup>1</sup>

- 2:50 Jesus implied that His parents should have understood His priorities, but they did not grasp the true significance of His words.
- 2:51 Jesus' obedience to His heavenly Father included obedience to His earthly parents (Exod. 20:12; cf. Col. 3:20). Luke balanced the former revelation of Jesus' deity with this indication of His humanity. His second reference to Mary meditating on "these things" (lit. these words) continues the implication that his record of these events came from her or from someone close to her (cf. v. 19; Gen. 37:11).

### 7. Jesus' continuing growth 2:52

Usually young people who give God His proper place in their lives develop into normal adults, people of whom God and other people approve (cf. Prov. 3:1-12). This was especially true of Jesus (cf. 1 Sam. 2:26). Jesus' mental, social, and spiritual powers developed along with His physical powers. He was fully man as well as fully God. But He voluntarily set aside some of His divine prerogatives temporarily in the Incarnation (Phil. 2:7). The Greek word translated "kept increasing" or "grew" (NIV, *prokopto*) literally means "to make one's way forward by chopping down obstacles," which is a vivid description of the maturation process (cf. v. 40).

Luke's original Greek readers were familiar with the concept of gods visiting humans. This was common in their mythology. However those gods did not become humans; they remained different from mortals. Luke probably recorded so much information about Jesus' birth and early life in order to help his readers—especially his Greek readers—believe that Jesus became a real human being at the Incarnation.

"The [Greco-Roman] biographical tradition used a combination of birth, family, and boyhood stories to give anticipations

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<sup>1</sup>See Bock, "A Theology ...," pp. 94-95, for further discussion of it.

about the future life of the hero. ... All of these components functioned also as prophecies of the character of the public career of the subject of the biography. If this was their purpose in the Greco-Roman biographies, then this is how a reader/hearer of Luke would most probably have taken the material of a similar nature in Luke 1:5—4:15. Virtually the totality of the material about Jesus in Luke 1:5—4:15 would have been regarded as an anticipation of his later public greatness. ... [This material] would combine to foretell/foreshadow the type of person Jesus would be in his public ministry which began at Luke 4:16-30."<sup>1</sup>

The main point of everything in chapter 2 is to present Jesus as the unique God-man.

"The levels of insight achieved by participants in the infancy events will not recur until after the resurrection, when the fact of the cross enables these vistas to take on quite new meaning. The infancy narratives have created a privileged insiders' status for the readers, but now Luke's actual story begins."<sup>2</sup>

### III. THE PREPARATION FOR JESUS' MINISTRY 3:1—4:13

Luke next narrated events that paved the way for Jesus' public ministry in Galilee and Judea.

"... whereas 1:5—2:52 establishes the *possibility* of Jesus' mission as Son of God, 3:1—4:13 establishes its *probability* before that ministry actually commences with Luke 4:14."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Charles H. Talbert, "Prophecies of Future Greatness: The Contribution of Greco-Roman Biographies to an Understanding of Luke 1:5—4:15," in *The Divine Helmsman: Studies on God's Control of Human Events, Presented to Lou H. Silberman*, p. 137. Paragraph division omitted.

<sup>2</sup>Nolland, p. 139.

<sup>3</sup>Green, p. 49.

## A. THE MINISTRY OF JOHN THE BAPTIST 3:1-20

John's ministry, like Jesus' ministry, did not begin until he was a mature man. This section of the third Gospel shows the vital role that John played as Messiah's forerunner.

### 1. The beginning of John's ministry 3:1-6 (cf. Matt. 3:1-6; Mark 1:1-6)

3:1-2 Luke made detailed reference to the time when John began his ministry in order to establish the reliability of his Gospel as well as to introduce John's ministry.<sup>1</sup> Only the reference to the fifteenth year of Tiberius' reign is necessary to date the beginning of John's ministry, which shortly preceded the commencement of Jesus' ministry. The other references in these verses place these events in a broader historical context.

Pontius Pilate was governor (prefect) of Judea from A.D. 26 to late 36 or early 37. He was ordered to Rome to answer charges against him, but before he arrived, Tiberius died, and soon after that Pilate committed suicide.<sup>2</sup> Herod Antipas ended his reign as "tetrarch"—meaning ruler of a fourth part, specifically a fourth part of Herod the Great's former domain—of Galilee, which began in 4 B.C., by deposition in A.D. 39. His brother, Herod Philip, who ruled territories to the northeast of Galilee from 4 B.C., died in A.D. 34.<sup>3</sup> Ituraea was evidently north and east of Galilee, and Trachonitis was an area south of Damascus. Present historical evidence does not enable scholars to date Lysanias, the tetrarch of Abilene, an area west of Damascus.

Annas was Israel's high priest from A.D. 6 to 15, until the Roman authorities deposed him. However some of the Jews continued to regard him as the high priest, and he retained his

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<sup>1</sup>Compare Thucydides 2:2 for a similarly elaborate chronological synchronism.

<sup>2</sup>Jamieson, et al., p. 995.

<sup>3</sup>See Finegan, *Light from ...*, pp. 255-57. See Steinmann and Young for slightly different dates. See Scroggie, p. 122, for a diagram of the Herodian family tree.



title.<sup>1</sup> His son-in-law, Caiaphas, served as the official high priest from A.D. 18 to the spring of 37.<sup>2</sup>

Thus the general timeframe when John began his ministry was between A.D. 26 and 37. The specific date, "the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar," is harder to pinpoint, but it was probably A.D. 29.<sup>3</sup>

"The ancients did not have our modern system of chronology, the names of rulers as here being the common way."<sup>4</sup>

Then "the word of God came to John ... in the wilderness" where he lived (cf. 1:80), and he began his ministry as a prophet (cf. Isa. 1:1; Jer. 1:1-3; et al.). A distinct particular message ("word," Gr. *rhema*) came upon (Gr. *epi*, translated "to") John from God that he was to deliver.

"The sentence [vv. 1-2] as a whole is reminiscent of numerous prophetic texts—including those that also situate the prophet in an historical context with reference to national leaders, those that declare the coming of the divine word to the messenger, and, as in Luke 3:1-2, those combining both of these elements."<sup>5</sup>

3:3 Luke mentioned John's itinerant ministry in the region "around the Jordan" River, whereas Matthew described it as "in the wilderness of Judea" (Matt. 3:1). These are two descriptions of the same area.

The thing that characterized John's ministry in the minds of his contemporaries was his "baptism of repentance." What marked his baptism distinctively was that it expressed repentance that led to divine forgiveness of sins. When people

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<sup>1</sup>Jeremias, pp. 157-58.

<sup>2</sup>See Finegan, *Light from ...*, pp. 262-63. See the articles on all these individuals and locations in *The New Bible Dictionary*.

<sup>3</sup>Hoehner, pp. 29-37.

<sup>4</sup>Robertson, *Word Pictures ...*, 2:37.

<sup>5</sup>Green, p. 167.

came to John for baptism, they were saying, by coming, that they had repented of their sins. John's different kind of baptism—different from Jewish proselyte baptism—prefigured Jesus' different kind of baptism (cf. v. 16). Luke said little about John's baptizing but stressed his preaching.

"The task of 'proclaiming ... repentance for release of sins' (3:3) remains central throughout Luke-Acts [cf. 4:18; 5:17-32; 24:47]."<sup>1</sup>

One sacramentalist (a person who believes that the Christian sacraments—baptism and the Lord's Supper—play a part in obtaining salvation) wrote that "every such baptism bestowed remission upon the person baptized."<sup>2</sup> In other words, the sacrament of baptism removes sins. Non-sacramentalists believe that water baptism does not remove (remit) sins but is a rite of identification.<sup>3</sup> In the case of Jewish proselyte baptism, it signified the identification of the proselyte with Judaism. In the case of John's baptism, it expressed identification with the company of the repentant. In the case of Jesus' baptism, it indicated His identification with humankind. In the case of Christian baptism, it represents identification with Jesus Christ and His Church.

Is it possible that John meant that his baptism provided forgiveness of sins apart from eternal salvation? The expiatory sacrifices of the Mosaic Law (those that dealt with forgiveness) provided forgiveness of this kind for redeemed Israelites. (The whole Mosaic Law was given to a redeemed people.) John's promise of forgiveness for those who underwent his baptism was not another way for them to obtain forgiveness. It was a way for them to demonstrate that they repented of their sins in anticipation of the coming messianic kingdom of God, specifically, in anticipation of the salvation that the coming King would provide. "Who can forgive sins, except God alone?" (5:21). Not even John the Baptist could.

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<sup>1</sup>Tannehill, 1:48.

<sup>2</sup>Lenski, p. 179.

<sup>3</sup>E.g., H. Lacey, "Baptism," in *The Church: A Symposium*, p. 51.

By the way, in these notes I make a distinction between the messianic kingdom of God and the earthly kingdom of God. I understand the messianic kingdom to be Messiah's rule, which began with Jesus' ministry on earth at His first coming and will continue as long as this earth exists. The last part of the messianic kingdom is the future earthly rule of Messiah, which will begin when He returns to the earth at His second coming and will continue on the earth for 1,000 years (the Millennium).

3:4-6 All three synoptic writers quoted Isaiah 40:3 as the prophecy that John fulfilled, and John the evangelist recorded John the Baptist quoting it of himself (cf. John 1:23). However Luke alone also quoted Isaiah 40:4 and 5. These verses contained the preparations made for a royal visitor that were common in the Greco-Roman world.<sup>1</sup> They also included the fact that the salvation that God would provide would be for all people. One of Luke's main themes was the universal scope of salvation (cf. 2:30; Acts 28:28; et al.).<sup>2</sup> Typically Luke quoted from the Septuagint translation, as he did here. John's ministry consisted of preparing people by getting them right with God so that when Messiah appeared they would believe on Him.

"This quotation from Isaiah not only interprets John's special mission but reveals the purpose of God which underlies the whole narrative of Luke-Acts."<sup>3</sup>

In Luke, John is a "prototype of the Christian evangelist."<sup>4</sup>

"The whole man was a sermon."<sup>5</sup>

"The section on John's ministry begins with a rather lengthy scriptural quotation and ends with

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<sup>1</sup>Robertson, *Word Pictures ...*, 2:38.

<sup>2</sup>Morris, p. 95.

<sup>3</sup>Tannehill, 1:47.

<sup>4</sup>Charles H. Talbert, *Reading Luke: A Literary and Theological Commentary on the Third Gospel*, p. 27.

<sup>5</sup>Plummer, p. 86. He did not identify the source of his quotation.

an arrest that will lead to death. Jesus' ministry will begin and end in the same way."<sup>1</sup>

## 2. John's preaching 3:7-18 (cf. Matt. 3:7-12; Mark 1:7-8)

Essentially John called his hearers to change their minds about their relationship to God—to get right with God—and to demonstrate the genuineness of their repentance with righteous conduct (vv. 7-14). He also promoted Jesus (vv. 15-17). Only Luke included John's enumeration of selected specific changes that the people needed to make in order to demonstrate true repentance (vv. 10-14).

3:7 Luke's introduction of John's message is more general than Matthew's, but his summary of John's preaching is almost identical to Matthew's. However Luke never reported that John said, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt. 3:2). Luke waited to introduce the messianic kingdom theme until Jesus began His ministry (4:43).

Like vipers (poisonous desert snakes) try to escape before an approaching brush fire, so many Jews of John's day were trying to escape God's coming judgment by fleeing to John for baptism.<sup>2</sup> However John sensed that their reason for coming to him was just their safety, not genuine repentance.

"John is as skeptical of their readiness for repentance as Jeremiah had been before him (Jer 13:23)."<sup>3</sup>

"I do not recommend using John's unusual introduction for a sermon ["You brood of vipers"], but I do think it would be appropriate in many churches."<sup>4</sup>

3:8 Righteous behavior would prove true repentance.

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<sup>1</sup>Tannehill, 1:53.

<sup>2</sup>Marshall, *The Gospel ...*, p. 139.

<sup>3</sup>Nolland, p. 154.

<sup>4</sup>McGee, 4:258.

"The Greek verb [*metanoeo*, translated "to repent"] means 'to change one's mind,' but in its Lucan usage it comes very close to the Hebrew verb for repent which literally means 'to turn or turn around' (*sub*). ... A change of perspective, involving the total person's point of view, is called for by this term. In fact, John called for the Israelites to bring forth fruit worthy of repentance (3:8). This passage is significant for it separates repentance from what it produces, and also expresses a link between repentance and fruit. One leads to the other."<sup>1</sup>

"In summary, Luke saw repentance as a change of perspective that transforms a person's thinking and approach to life."<sup>2</sup>

Many of the Jews believed that Abraham's righteousness benefited his descendants.<sup>3</sup> John warned them that, like God had cut Israel out of Abraham, who was a rock spiritually, so He could produce children for Himself from the stones in the wilderness (cf. 19:40).<sup>4</sup> (There is a play on words here in Aramaic, the language that the Jews spoke, involving "stones," *abnayya*, and "children," *benayya*.)

- 3:9 People commonly cut down and burn fruit trees that do not produce good fruit. Likewise God would judge Israel like a fruitless tree unless the Jews repented and started bearing the fruits of repentance (cf. 6:43-45; 13:6-9; Isa. 5:1-7; 10:33-34; 66:24; Mal. 4:1).
- 3:10 The crowds that came to John wanted him to specify what he meant by "fruits that are consistent with repentance" (v. 8). The important question "Then what are we to do?" is repeated later by several others in Luke-Acts (vv. 12, 14; 3:12, 14;

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<sup>1</sup>Bock, "A Theology ...," pp. 129-30.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 132.

<sup>3</sup>W. D. Davis, *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism*, pp. 270-71.

<sup>4</sup>Plummer, p. 90.

10:25; 18:18; Acts 2:37; 16:30; 22:10). It demonstrates a sincere desire to bring forth fruits of repentance.

3:11 Luke's unique inclusion of the specific fruits of repentance not only give specific examples of righteous behavior, but they also demonstrate his concern for social justice. To the sincere in the crowd John recommended generously sharing their possessions with the needy (cf. Gal. 5:22-23). The "tunic" (Gr. *chiton*) was the short undergarment worn under a robe. The Jews often wore two of them at once, if they had two. These undergarments were not what we think of as underwear. They were simply an under layer of clothing.

3:12 John counseled sincere tax collectors to refrain from extorting more money than they had a right to receive (cf. 5:27-32). (Every mention of tax collectors in Luke is negative, by the way; cf. 5:30; 7:34; 15:1; 18:13.)

3:13 John advocated honesty and freedom from greed. He did not suggest overthrowing a system that allowed for abuses, but he prescribed personal morality that would eliminate the abuses. The Apostle Paul followed the same procedure.

"... it is their reputation for involvement in a kind of institutionalized scheme of extortion or robbery that is in view in this context."<sup>1</sup>

3:14 Soldiers were capable, because of their position, of threatening people who resisted their authority, with retaliation, in order to extort money from them. Exactly who these soldiers were is unclear, but it is also unimportant. Most of the soldiers in Israel were Roman soldiers. Thus it appears that Gentiles were also responding to John's call to repentance. Greed appears to have been a special temptation for soldiers, since the wages of soldiers were low. Therefore John called on them to be content with their wages.

Verses 12 through 14 help us see that certain temptations are more prominent in certain occupations than others. However

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<sup>1</sup>Green, p. 179.

material possessions were a source of temptation to all these people, as they still are today.

3:15 John's ministry raised the question in the minds of many Jews as to whether he might be the Messiah.

3:16 John distinguished between his baptism and Messiah's baptism in order to show that he was not the Messiah. John denied that he was the Messiah, and he told the people that someone vastly superior to him would appear. Specifically, whereas John baptized people with water, the coming One would baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire.

The presence of only one article before "Holy Spirit" and "fire" in the Greek text suggests that John was referring to one baptism. This is probably the baptism that Jesus will initiate when He returns to the earth as King, but which He previewed from heaven—as a foreview of that event—on the day of Pentecost (Acts 1:5; 2:3-4; cf. Isa. 44:3; Joel 2:28-32). Another view is that these are two separate baptisms that relate to Jesus' first and second comings.<sup>1</sup> John's water baptism prefigured Jesus' Holy Spirit baptism.

3:17 The coming One would also judge people resulting in the good being saved and the bad condemned. Jesus will be the stronger One ("mightier than" John, v. 16) who will judge (cf. John 5:22). John's reference to "unquenchable fire" implies eternal judgment.

Luke's account of John's preaching about Jesus is the longest in the three synoptic Gospels (cf. John 1:19-25). Matthew's account of these words stressed the importance of Jesus' Jewish hearers repenting personally and nationally. Luke tailored his account to Gentiles and stressed the judgment that Jesus would bring (cf. Isa. 4:4).

3:18 John's preaching was also positive. He preached good news ("the gospel") to the "people" (Gr. *laos*, a potentially responsive group), as well as warning them of coming

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<sup>1</sup> *The Nelson ...*, p. 1693.

judgment. The good news that he preached was that the messianic kingdom was at hand (Matt. 3:2).

"John illustrates how the proclaimer of the Word should perform his task. The preacher must bear good news as well as news that exposes sin. Some preachers in the past tended to emphasize sin so much that one wondered where grace might be found. Today our problem is the opposite: being able to confront people with their accountability and culpability before God."<sup>1</sup>

### 3. The end of John's ministry 3:19-20

Luke concluded his account of John's ministry before he began to narrate Jesus' ministry. This arrangement of material allowed Luke to continue comparing and contrasting the ministries of the two men.<sup>2</sup> One writer argued that Luke took John out of the scene before introducing Jesus in order to minimize John's importance for the Baptist's followers of Luke's day (cf. Acts 19:1-7).<sup>3</sup>

"John's prophetic call, his ministry in fulfillment of Scripture, his preaching to all classes in society, his falling foul of Herod, and his ultimate fate all have their counterparts in the career of Jesus."<sup>4</sup>

John's stern words about sin led to his arrest and imprisonment by Herod Antipas. Matthew and Mark recorded a longer account of what happened to him (Matt. 14:4-12; Mark 6:17-29). Luke recorded references to John's death later (9:7-9, 19-20). Here he stressed John's boldness and the sickness of the society that he confronted.<sup>5</sup> John probably began his

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<sup>1</sup>Bock, *Luke*, p. 117.

<sup>2</sup>C. Talbert, "The Lukan Presentation of Jesus' Ministry in Galilee," *Review and Expositor* 64 (1967):490.

<sup>3</sup>Richard J. Erickson, "The Jailing of John and the Baptism of Jesus: Luke 3:19-21," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 36:4 (December 1993):455-66.

<sup>4</sup>Marshall, *The Gospel ...*, pp. 148-49. Cf. H. Flender, *St Luke: Theologian of Redemptive History*, p. 22.

<sup>5</sup>See Josephus, *Antiquities of ...*, 18:5:4.



ministry in A.D. 29 and remained free for about one year. The next two years he was in prison, and he died in A.D. 32.<sup>1</sup>

**B. THE BAPTISM OF JESUS 3:21-22 (CF. MATT. 3:13-17; MARK 1:9-11; JOHN 1:29-34)**

Luke's account of this significant event is shorter than the parallel passages in the other Gospels. At His baptism Jesus received the anointing of the Holy Spirit for His ministry. It was also the occasion at which His heavenly Father authenticated Jesus as His Son. Luke stressed these two features and did not describe Jesus' actual baptism fully, though he recorded some information that the other evangelists omitted.

"For Luke, Jesus' participation in baptism is his participation in the stage of preparation initiated by John and his identification with the imperatives and expectations of John's ministry."<sup>2</sup>

3:21 Evidently John baptized Jesus after he had baptized many other people. Luke may have wanted to imply by this that Jesus' baptism was the climax of John's ministry.<sup>3</sup> According to Luke, this is the first of many important events that happened while Jesus was praying (cf. 5:16; 6:12; 9:18, 28-29; 11:1; 22:32, 40-44; 23:46). Only Luke recorded that the heavens opened while Jesus was praying. The implication is clear that the revelation from God that followed was a direct response to Jesus' prayer.

"Prayer is an ordinance that *opens heaven*. *Knock, and it shall be opened unto you.*"<sup>4</sup>

Luke had a special interest in Jesus' prayer life. It showed His conscious dependence on His Father as a human being.

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<sup>1</sup>Martin, p. 212.

<sup>2</sup>Nolland, p. 160.

<sup>3</sup>Marshall, *The Gospel ...*, p. 150.

<sup>4</sup>Henry, p. 1423.

"Jesus' baptism, like that of the people, was a single event in time; but his praying continued for his lifetime."<sup>1</sup>

Perhaps this explanation accounts for the different tenses of the Greek verb and the participle in this verse. Luke also may have mentioned Jesus' praying in order to encourage his readers to do the same thing. The opening of the heavens indicated divine intervention into human history with revelation. God Himself had not intervened this way for many centuries. Luke's original readers, with their background in Greek mythology, would have had a special interest in this intervention. The Greek gods supposedly intervened in human affairs occasionally. Moreover, Luke's frequent references to Jesus praying would have helped his original readers realize that Jesus was truly human, and not just a god who had visited humans.

"In Luke-Acts times of prayer and worship are frequently the occasions for divine revelations to characters in the story. This is true of Zechariah (Luke 1:9-11), Anna (2:37-38), Cornelius (Acts 10:2-6), Peter (10:9-16), Paul (9:11-12; 22:17-21), and the prophets and teachers of the church in Antioch (13:2). This is true also of Jesus. Jesus' choice of the twelve is preceded by prayer, indeed, prayer through the whole night (dif. Matthew, Mark), in which Jesus is evidently seeking divine guidance for the choice (6:12). The transfiguration also takes place while Jesus is praying (dif. Matthew, Mark). ... In 22:40-46 also, if vv. 43-44 are an original part of the text, Jesus prays concerning his mission and receives a response through a vision of a strengthening angel."<sup>2</sup>

3:22 This was a theophany: God appearing in corporeal ("bodily") form. All three synoptic evangelists compared God's

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<sup>1</sup>Liefeld, p. 859.

<sup>2</sup>Tannehill, 1:56-57.

appearance to a dove. Matthew recorded that Jesus saw the Spirit descending and settling on Him (Matt. 3:16). Later John the Baptist said that he too saw the Spirit descending and remaining on Jesus (John 1:32-33). A dove did not descend on Jesus, like some paintings portray, but God's Spirit descended on Him "in bodily form." Only Luke wrote that the Spirit came down "in bodily form," thereby giving the theophany more substance. God's Spirit descended like a dove on Jesus. We do not know what the bodily form of God's Spirit that descended on Jesus looked like.

"The Spirit is not a dove, but descends like one in some type of bodily representation."<sup>1</sup>

The dove is a biblical symbol of peace, and the herald or bearer of good news (Gen. 8:8-12; cf. Gen. 1:2). Primarily the comparison of God's Spirit to a dove signified the coming of God's peaceful Spirit in order to empower Jesus for His ministry (Isa. 42:1; cf. Isa. 64:1). Secondly the dove comparison suggested the peace that Jesus would impart to those who believed on Him.<sup>2</sup>

The voice from (out of) heaven identified Jesus as God the Father's "beloved Son" (cf. 1:32; Exod. 20:1; Ps. 2:7; Isa. 42:1). God was announcing that His favor rested on Jesus, not that He as the Father felt delight in His Son, though that was undoubtedly true too.<sup>3</sup> With this guarantee of divine enablement, Jesus was ready to begin His ministry.

"The risen Jesus connects the beginning of the apostles' mission with the coming of the Spirit upon them (Luke 24:46-49; Acts 1:8), and the Pentecost scene shows that the coming of the Spirit leads immediately to the first preaching and expansion of the community. Thus in both Luke and Acts the descent of the Spirit initiates the

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<sup>1</sup> *The NET2 Bible* note on verse 21. *The NET2 Bible* refers to *The NET2 (New English Translation) Bible*, 2019 ed.

<sup>2</sup> See L. E. Keck, "The Spirit and the Dove," *New Testament Studies* 17 (1970-71):41-67.

<sup>3</sup> Morris, p. 100.

central sequences of events which dominate these writings."<sup>1</sup>

"The primary application of this text comes in its Christology. Many in our culture respect Jesus, regarding him as a religious teacher of great significance and even placing him among the top religious teachers of all time. Others even acknowledge him as a prophet, giving him a seat in a rather limited club of divine revealers. But as high as these notes of respect are, they pale in comparison to the biblical portrait. Luke shows that Jesus is not like anyone who came before him or anyone since. The Hall of Religious Fame into which he is placed has only one portrait in it—his. There have been other great teachers, prophets, and kings, but there is only one who has combined all of those roles as God's Son."<sup>2</sup>

### C. THE GENEALOGY OF JESUS 3:23-38 (CF. MATT. 1:1-17)

Why did Luke place his genealogy of Jesus at this point in his Gospel? Probably he did so because this was the beginning of Jesus' public ministry. Specifically, it is where Jesus' role as Son of God empowered by the Holy Spirit begins.<sup>3</sup> Matthew recorded Jesus' genealogy in order to show that He had a legitimate right by birth to occupy the Davidic throne. Consequently he placed his genealogy at the very beginning of Jesus' public ministry. Luke wanted to show the ancestry of Jesus who now began His ministry as the authenticated Son of God.

"Genealogies serve as indicators of (inherited) status ..."<sup>4</sup>

There are several other distinct differences between the two genealogies in Matthew and Luke: They proceed in different directions, Matthew's starting with Abraham and ending in Jesus, and Luke's beginning with Jesus and working back to Adam and God. Matthew's list stressed Jesus' place in the Jewish race, by recording Jesus' ancestry back to Abraham, the father

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<sup>1</sup>Tannehill, 1:57.

<sup>2</sup>Bock, *Luke*, pp. 119-20.

<sup>3</sup>Nolland, p. 173.

<sup>4</sup>Green, p. 188.

of the Jews. Luke's perspective was broader, tracing Jesus all the way back to Adam, and showing Him to be a member of the human race.

Matthew grouped his names into three groups of 14 names each, whereas Luke simply listed 78 ancestors. It is possible to divide Luke's list into 11 groups of 7 names each, plus God's name.<sup>1</sup> But Luke did not draw attention to his divisions like Matthew did. Matthew recorded Jesus' descent from Joseph through Solomon, but Luke traced other ancestors from Joseph to David's other son, Nathan. Matthew apparently gives Jesus' legal line of descent from David by naming the heirs to his throne, but Luke gave another branch of David's family tree that some have felt was Joseph's bloodline.<sup>2</sup> A similar possibility follows:

"The most credible harmonization is based on Jewish customs in the case of the marriage of heiresses: it may well be that Mary had no brothers and that, therefore, on her marriage to Joseph, her husband was adopted by Mary's father, whose genealogy is thus reflected in the Lukan text (cf. Ezra 2:61; Num 32:41 cf. 1 Chr 2:21-22, etc.)."<sup>3</sup>

Matthew mentioned several women in his genealogy, but Luke mentioned none. Finally, Luke's list is considerably longer than Matthew's.<sup>4</sup>

"That the genealogy is recorded at all shows Him to be a real man, not a demi-god like those in Greek and Roman mythology. That it goes back to David points to an essential element in His messianic qualifications. That it goes back to Adam brings out His kinship not only with Israel but with the whole human race. That it goes back to God relates Him to the Creator of all. He was the Son of God."<sup>5</sup>

"By extending the genealogy in this way, Luke makes his most important point in this section. Adam as son of God comes after the baptismal address of Jesus as Son of God (Luke 3:22)

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<sup>1</sup>E.g., Marshall, *The Gospel ...*, p. 160.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 158; Alford, 1:473; A. B. Bruce, 1:485; Machen, pp. 202-9, 229-32.

<sup>3</sup>Nolland, pp. 173-74. See also Lenski, pp. 218-21; Gaebelien, 3:1:134.

<sup>4</sup>See Scroggie, pp. 505-10, for further discussion of the two genealogies.

<sup>5</sup>Morris, p. 101.

and before the tempter's beguiling suggestions to Jesus as Son of God (4:1-13, and esp. vv 3, 9)."<sup>1</sup>

"The concatenation, or chain of causes, represented by the repetition of 'son of,' is rare in biblical genealogies (though cf. 1 Chr 3:10-24; 6:16-30), but serves an important function. It not only links together these members of Jesus' family line, but especially provides for a kind of crescendo culminating in the acknowledgment of God as the originator of Jesus' ancestral line."<sup>2</sup>

3:23 Luke probably mentioned the rounded number "about 30" to describe Jesus' age when He launched His ministry because many significant Old Testament characters began their service of God when they were 30 (cf. Gen. 41:46; Num. 4:3, 23; 2 Sam. 5:4; Ezek. 1:1). This included Israel's priests (Num. 4). Some people regard 30 as the age at which a person reaches maturity.<sup>3</sup> Evidently Jesus was 32 years old when He began His ministry.<sup>4</sup> Luke also clarified that Jesus was commonly believed to be the son of Joseph. But, of course, He was not really Joseph's physical son (1:35).

3:24-38 Matthew traced Joseph's line back to David through Joseph's father Jacob and David's son Solomon. Luke traced Joseph's line back to David through Joseph's father Eli (or Heli, NIV) and David's son Nathan. Is there a mistake in the text? Is one of these genealogies really the genealogy of Mary rather than Joseph, or did Joseph have two fathers?

The two lines of Joseph proceed back through two entirely different sets of names. Therefore there does not seem to be an error in the text regarding the name of Joseph's father. Luke did not even mention Mary in his genealogy, and Matthew seems clearly to have been describing Joseph's ancestors (Matt. 1:16). Consequently it appears unlikely that one of the

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<sup>1</sup>Nolland, p. 174.

<sup>2</sup>Green, p. 189.

<sup>3</sup>E.g., Morgan, *The Gospel ...*, p. 51.

<sup>4</sup>Hoehner, pp. 37-38.

genealogies is Mary's. As strange as it may seem, Joseph appears to have had two fathers.

One solution to this problem is that the custom of levirate marriage in the ancient Near East permitted the widow of a childless man to marry his (unmarried) brother. It was common to consider the child of the second marriage as the legal son of the deceased man, in order to perpetuate that man's name. In genealogies, the ancients sometimes listed such a child as the son of his real father, but at other times he was listed as the son of his legal father. This may be the solution to the problem of Joseph's fathers. This is a very old explanation that the third-century church father Africanus advocated.<sup>1</sup>

Evidently either Jacob or Eli (Heli) was Joseph's real father, and the other man was his legal father. This may also be the solution to the problem of Shealtiel's two fathers (Matt. 1:12; Luke 3:27). This is only an adequate explanation, however, if Jacob and Eli were half-brothers, specifically the sons of the same mother but not the same father. Jacob's father was Matthan and his grandfather was Eleazar, whereas Eli's father was Matthat and his grandfather was Levi.

Another solution to this problem is that Matthew provided a list of heirs (actual or potential) to the Davidic throne, and Luke listed Joseph's physical father and forefathers.<sup>2</sup> According to this view, Matthew showed that Jesus had a legitimate right to rule as Messiah, since He was in the royal line through His legal guardian Joseph. Luke showed that Jesus was a real blood descendant of David. A problem with this view is that Luke had already showed, in chapters 1 and 2, that Jesus was not the biological son of Joseph.

Advocates of this view point out that Luke was careful to state that Jesus was only commonly believed to be the son of Joseph (v. 23). However, if He was not the physical son of Joseph, what is the point of tracing Joseph's ancestors to

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<sup>1</sup>See Eusebius, 1:7:31-35.

<sup>2</sup>Machen, p. 209; *The New Bible Dictionary*, s.v. "Genealogy of Jesus Christ," by F. F. Bruce, pp. 458-59.

prove Jesus' humanity? This criticism applies to the former view as well. One proposed answer is that probably in the eyes of the Greeks Jesus' connection with Adam through Joseph would have been adequately convincing.

Another view is that the genealogy is Joseph's, but Luke did not mean that Joseph was Jesus' physical father.

"In the eye of the law Jesus was the heir of Joseph; and therefore it is Joseph's descent which is of importance."<sup>1</sup>

Yet the purpose of the genealogy seems to be to trace Jesus back to the first man in order to prove that He was a real son of Adam.

"... it is added for the sake of Gentile readers, to remind them of the Divine origin of the human race,—an origin which they share with the Messiah. It is a correction of the myths respecting the origin of man, which were current among the heathen."<sup>2</sup>

The obvious problem with the view that Luke recorded Mary's genealogy, a fourth view, is that he did not refer to Mary but wrote that his genealogy was Joseph's. Advocates of this view explain the lack of reference to Mary this way: It was not customary among the Romans or the Jews to include the name of a woman in such a list.<sup>3</sup> However Matthew listed four women in his genealogy, and Luke showed more interest in women than any of the other evangelists.<sup>4</sup> It seems unlikely that he would have refrained from using Mary's name if he meant that this genealogy was hers.

"... while the early Church generally ascribed both tables to Joseph, many since the Reformation have strenuously maintained that Luke gives the

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<sup>1</sup>Plummer, p. 103.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 105.

<sup>3</sup>Geldenhuys, p. 151. See also Baxter, 5:228; McGee, 4:259-60.

<sup>4</sup>See Tannehill, 1:132-39.



genealogy of Mary. And this view has not a little in its favor."<sup>1</sup>

Most of the scholars are not dogmatic about the solution to this problem.

"It is only right, therefore, to admit that the problem caused by the existence of the two genealogies is insoluble with the evidence presently at our disposal."<sup>2</sup>

My tentative opinion is that Luke gave this particular line of Joseph's ancestors because, even though Joseph was not Jesus' blood father, he was His earthly father. And since Joseph was commonly regarded as Jesus' father, this genealogy shows the human, as opposed to the regal, ancestry of Jesus.

From David to Abraham (vv. 32-34) Luke's list parallels Matthew's quite closely (Matt. 1:2-6). The list from Abraham to Adam (vv. 34-38) is very similar to the one in Genesis 11:10-26 (cf. Gen. 5:1-32; 1 Chron. 1:1-26).<sup>3</sup>

The presence of Shealtiel and Zerubbabel in the lists of both Solomon's and Nathan's descendants is another problem (Matt. 1:12; Luke 3:27). King Jeconiah, a descendant of Solomon, may have adopted Shealtiel, a descendant of Nathan who was Zerubbabel's father, into his line (cf. 1 Chron. 3:17; Jer. 22:30). Then Zerubbabel's descendants continued the two lines of Solomon and Nathan, one branch of the family perpetuating the legal line of Solomon and the other the bloodline of Nathan.<sup>4</sup> Another possibility is that there were two

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<sup>1</sup>Andrews, p. 63.

<sup>2</sup>Marshall, *The Gospel ...*, p. 159. Cf. Morris, p. 101. See Pentecost, *The Words ...*, pp. 33-39, for further discussion of the genealogies.

<sup>3</sup>For a study of the differences and several ways of reconciling them, see M. S. Mills, "A Comparison of the Genesis and Lukan Genealogies (The Case for Cainan)" (Th.M. thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1978); Andrew E. Steinmann, "Challenging the Authenticity of Cainan, Son of Arpachshad," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 60:4 (December 2017):697-711.

<sup>4</sup>See Plummer, p. 104.

sets of fathers and sons named Shealtiel and Zerubbabel: one set in Joseph's legal line, and the other in his bloodline.

"Jesus is only the apparent son of Joseph; in fact his identity as Son of God need not be traced back through Joseph to Adam at all, but rests on his miraculous conception. Thus, the genealogy provides Jesus with the legitimation needed in the world in which he will carry out his mission."<sup>1</sup>

#### D. THE TEMPTATION OF JESUS 4:1-13 (CF. MATT. 4:1-11; MARK 1:12-13)

Luke stressed how the Spirit who had come upon Jesus at His baptism guided and empowered Him in His temptation, and how Jesus, God's approved Son, pleased His Father by His obedience. Jesus overcame the devil, who opposed God's plans. This story is also edifying because it helps believers understand how to recognize and overcome Satan's attacks. We do so as Jesus did: by obeying God's will as revealed in Scripture. Jesus drew His responses to Satan from Old Testament passages that relate to Israel in the wilderness (Deut. 8:3; 6:13, 16).<sup>2</sup> Jesus succeeded, in the wilderness no less, where Israel had failed.<sup>3</sup>

"In the final analysis Jesus is tempted neither as second Adam, nor as true Israel, but as Son. There is a touch of Adamic typology and considerable exodus typology, but that is because the experiences of Adam and Israel are paradigmatic cases of the testing of God's Son."<sup>4</sup>

It is generally assumed that Jesus was alone during his 40 days in the wilderness, mainly because there are no references to anyone else being with Him. Martin Luther wrote the following:

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<sup>1</sup>Green, pp. 189-90.

<sup>2</sup>See *ibid*, pp. 192-93, for development of the parallels between Israel as God's "Son" and Jesus as God's Son.

<sup>3</sup>See R. T. France, *Jesus and the Old Testament*, pp. 50-53; G. H. P. Thompson, "Called — Proved — Obedient," *Journal of Theological Studies* NS11 (1960):1-12; and B. Gerhardsson, *The Testing of God's Son*.

<sup>4</sup>Nolland, p. 182.

"Eve got into trouble when she walked in the garden alone. I have my worst temptations when I am by myself."<sup>1</sup>

Luke recorded the same three temptations as Matthew did, but he reversed the order of the second and third incidents. Apparently Luke arranged the order to stress Jesus' victory in Jerusalem. Luke viewed Jerusalem as the center toward which Jesus moved in this Gospel, and the center from which the gospel radiated to the uttermost part of the earth in Acts (Acts 1:8). Matthew, on the other hand, concluded his account of the temptation with a reference to the messianic kingdom, which was his particular interest.

"Matthew presents the three temptations in their historical order; Luke makes a climax of the places: desert—mountain—Jerusalem and the Temple. The fact that Matthew has the historical order appears from the command that is issued after the third temptation which orders Satan to leave."<sup>2</sup>

This rearrangement of incidents illustrates the fact that the Gospel writers sometimes changed the order of events in their narratives in order to emphasize particular points that were in harmony with their purposes and messages.

Another view is that since Luke stressed Jesus' humanity, he presented the temptations so that they correspond to the nature of man: body, soul, and spirit.<sup>3</sup> These temptations affected Jesus personally, socially, and spiritually.<sup>4</sup>

"The temptations man has to go through in life are clearly seen here. In youth it is the lust of the flesh; in manhood the lust of the eyes, to possess and to enjoy; in old age the pride of life."<sup>5</sup>

Greek readers had an interest in the idea of the Son of God, which is explicitly present in two of the temptations. They also had an interest in miracles, which appear in one if not two of them, and Satan, who appears in all three.

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<sup>1</sup>Quoted in Bainton, pp. 284-85.

<sup>2</sup>Lenski, p. 222.

<sup>3</sup>Gaebelein, 3:1:135.

<sup>4</sup>Morgan, *The Gospel ...*, p. 57.

<sup>5</sup>Gaebelein, 3:1:135.

4:1-2 Reference to Jesus' being "full of the Holy Spirit" links this incident with Jesus' baptism (3:22). There seems to be a deliberate comparison between Israel as God's son (Exod. 4:22-23; Hos. 11:1) and Jesus as God's Son in this story. Both sons experienced temptation in the wilderness for 40 periods of time: Israel for 40 years and Jesus for 40 days (cf. Gen. 7:4; Exod. 24:18; 1 Kings 19:8; Jon. 3:4; Mark 1:13). Perhaps God regarded a period of days as the appropriate counterpart for a man, compared to years for a nation.<sup>1</sup> Moses also went without food for 40 days in the wilderness (Deut. 9:9). Israel failed, but Jesus succeeded. God's Spirit led both sons around in the wilderness (cf. Deut. 8:2). God tested Israel there, and God allowed the devil to test Jesus there. Note that the temptation lasted 40 days, not just one day at the end of the 40 days.

Satan tempts people to depart from God's will, but God never does this (James 1:13). People tempt God by making unreasonable demands on Him (Num. 14:22; Deut. 6:16; Ps. 106:14). God tests, but does not tempt, people (Exod. 16:4; 20:20; Deut. 8:2; 13:1-3; Judg. 2:22; 3:4; 2 Chron. 32:31). All three types of testing occurred in Israel's temptation in the wilderness and in Jesus' temptation there: the tempting of people, the tempting of God, and the testing of people.<sup>2</sup>

Jesus proved to be completely pleasing to God in His trials, but Satan was displeasing to Him. Jesus, filled with the Spirit, sided with God, whereas Satan, not filled with the Spirit, opposed Him.<sup>3</sup> Jesus was physically hungry, but He was full of the Spirit. Thus the importance of Spirit control is obvious in this passage, as is the importance of familiarity with, and fidelity to, the Scriptures. Jesus had been fasting (Matt. 4:2; cf. Exod. 34:28; Deut. 9:9). The text does not say whether He went without food completely or whether He fasted only during the daylight hours. Evidently Jesus experienced temptation all 40

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<sup>1</sup>Gerhardsson, pp. 41-42.

<sup>2</sup>Liefeld, p. 863.

<sup>3</sup>See Sydney H. T. Page, "Satan: God's Servant," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 50:3 (September 2007):449-65.

days, but the three instances that Luke recorded happened at the end of that period (cf. Mark 1:13).

- 4:3 All three of the tests recorded enticed Jesus to abandon His dependence on God. The first one was a temptation to *gratify* Himself, but not by doing something wicked, since eating is necessary. The devil attacked Jesus where (and when) He was vulnerable, since He was then (after 40 days) hungry (v. 2). To continue to exist in the wilderness, Jesus, and the Israelites before Him, had to believe that God's word was trustworthy (Deut. 8:3). God had revealed a plan for both that assured them that they would not die in the wilderness. Satan assumed that Jesus was the Son of God, as is clear from the first class condition in the Greek text ("If [meaning "Since"] You are" (cf. 3:22). This title, without the definite article preceding, as here, emphasizes Jesus' relationship to God, not His office of Messiah.<sup>1</sup>

"The Devil suggests that Sonship is a privilege to be exploited. Jesus is tempted to order his own affairs and provide for his own needs, rather than being nourished in filial dependence on God."<sup>2</sup>

- 4:4 Human welfare does not depend primarily on food or even physical provisions. It depends mainly on obedience to God's will, even though that may mean physical deprivation. By applying Deuteronomy 8:3 to Himself, Jesus put Himself in the category of a genuine man (Gr. *anthropos*). Luke had special interest in the testing of Jesus' humanity, and he presented Jesus as the example for the Christian to follow.

"This is the first word recorded as spoken by Christ after his instalment in his prophetic office; and it is a quotation out of the Old Testament. The word of God is our *sword*, and faith in that word is our *shield*; we should therefore be *mighty in the scriptures*."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Robertson, *Word Pictures ...*, 2:50.

<sup>2</sup>Nolland, p. 179.

<sup>3</sup>Henry, p. 1424.

4:5-7 The devil also took Jesus up on a mountain (Matt. 4:8; cf. Deut. 32:49; 34:1-3). Evidently he showed Jesus "all the kingdoms of the world" in a vision, since He saw them all "in a moment of time." This was a temptation to *exalt* Himself. Satan was, in effect, asking Jesus to renounce His identity as God's Son and to become Satan's son.<sup>1</sup> Jesus could not enter into His glory without suffering first, according to God's will (24:26).

"It is likely ... that the worship of Satan to which Jesus is enticed is the temptation to pursue his task in the ways of the world ... to gain glory for himself in this world by compromise with the forces that control it ... and to become indebted to Satan in the manner that every successful man of the world is."<sup>2</sup>

4:8 Jesus' response was that of the perfect Man, the second Adam (cf. Rom. 5:19). He worshipped and served God alone (Deut. 6:13).

4:9-11 Next Satan tempted Jesus to *glorify* Himself. Satan quoted Psalm 91:11-12.

"The central motif [feature or dominant idea] of this temptation is the facing of death in Jerusalem. This temptation occupies the climactic third position because just such a facing of death in Jerusalem represents the climax of Jesus' ministry (Luke 9:51; 13:32-33)."<sup>3</sup>

4:12 Jesus responded with Deuteronomy 6:16. The Deuteronomy passage applied to Satan as well as to Jesus. Jesus refused to repeat Israel's sin in the wilderness: the sin of putting God to the test by forcing His hand. The Israelites had wondered if God was still with them (Exod. 17:7). Jesus, on the other hand, committed Himself to simply following God's will in God's time.

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<sup>1</sup>Green, p. 194.

<sup>2</sup>Nolland, p. 180.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 181.

"... the faithful man does not seek to dictate to God how he must express his covenant loyalty and fulfill his promises. That would be to put God to the test and a failure to believe that God will do well by his son."<sup>1</sup>

"... it is never right to do anything just in order to see whether God will keep His Word or not."<sup>2</sup>

4:13 The devil only left Jesus temporarily; he continued to tempt Him later. However Luke viewed Jesus' victory here as significant. His lack of reference to the fact that angels then ministered to Jesus (Matt. 4:11; Mark 1:13) impresses the reader with Jesus' personal victory over Satan.

"Satan questioned the Father's love when he tempted Jesus to turn stones into bread. He questioned His hope when he offered Jesus the world's kingdoms this side of the Cross (see Heb. 12:1-3). Satan questioned the Father's faithfulness when he asked Jesus to jump from the temple and prove that the Father would keep His promise (Ps. 91:11-12). Thus, the enemy attacked the three basic virtues of the Christian life—faith, hope, and love."<sup>3</sup>

Notice also the parallels between Satan's temptation of the first Adam and his temptation of the second Adam (Christ): The first Adam failed in a garden and brought sin and death on humanity. The Second Adam succeeded in a wilderness and brought forgiveness and life to humanity.

The First Adam	The Second Adam	The Appeal
"The tree was good for food." (Gen. 3:6)	"Tell this stone to become bread." (Luke 4:3)	"The lust of the flesh" (1 John 2:16)

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 181.

<sup>2</sup>Harry A. Ironside, *Addresses on the Gospel of Luke*, 1:122-23.

<sup>3</sup>Wiersbe, 1:183.

"It was a delight to the eyes." (Gen. 3:6)	"He (Satan) ... showed Him (Jesus) all the kingdoms of the world." (Luke 4:5)	"The lust of the eyes" (1 John 2:16)
"The tree was desirable to make one wise." (Gen. 3:6)	"Cast yourself down from here." (Luke 4:9)	"The pride of life" (1 John 2:6)

"The temptations are important evidence of the true humanity of Jesus, for, as James tells us, 'God cannot be tempted with evil' (Jas. i. 13). The fact that He was subjected to real temptations shows that the incarnation was a real assumption of manhood, and not a playing with the human frame."<sup>1</sup>

"Moses fasted in the middle, Elijah at the end, Jesus at the beginning of His ministry. Moses fasted in the Presence of God; Elijah alone; Jesus assaulted by the Devil. Moses had been called up by God; Elijah had gone forth in the bitterness of his own spirit; Jesus was driven by the Spirit. Moses failed after his forty day's fast, when in indignation he cast the Tables of the Law from him; Elijah failed before his forty day's fast; Jesus was assailed for forty days and endured the trial. Moses was angry against Israel; Elijah despaired of Israel; Jesus overcame for Israel."<sup>2</sup>

#### IV. JESUS' MINISTRY IN AND AROUND GALILEE 4:14—9:50

Luke began his account of Jesus' public ministry with His return to Galilee following His temptation, which evidently took place in the wilderness of Judea. This section of his Gospel ends with Jesus' decision to leave Galilee and to travel to Jerusalem and the Cross (9:51). Luke did not give as much information about Jesus' Galilean ministry as the other synoptic writers did (cf. Matt. 4:12—16:12; Mark 1:14—8:26). He chose, rather, to emphasize

<sup>1</sup>Leon Morris, *The Lord from Heaven*, pp. 49-50.

<sup>2</sup>Edersheim, *The Life ...*, 1:294.



Jesus' ministry as He traveled from Galilee to Jerusalem (9:51—19:27), which the other synoptic evangelists did not highlight as much.

The name "Galilee" comes from the Hebrew *galil*, meaning "Circle." It was apparently so called because, originally, non-Jewish nations encircled the area.<sup>1</sup>

### A. JESUS' TEACHING MINISTRY 4:14—5:11

This section of the third Gospel records some of Jesus' initial preaching and various responses to it. Much of the material appears only in Luke. Interspersed are instances of Jesus performing mighty works. Luke, like the other evangelists, stressed the essential message that Jesus proclaimed. Joel Green saw 4:14 and 15 and 4:42 through 44 as forming an *inclusio* around 4:16 through 41.<sup>2</sup>

#### 1. An introduction to Jesus' Galilean ministry 4:14-15 (cf. Matt. 4:17; Mark 1:14-15)

4:14 Luke again drew his readers' attention to the fact that Jesus was under the control of the Holy Spirit as He began His public ministry (cf. 1:35; 3:22; 4:1). The Spirit empowered and enabled Jesus in His words and deeds. Luke attributed Jesus' success to His orientation to the Spirit, not His essential deity. Consequently, Jesus is a model that all believers can and should copy. Luke continued to stress the Holy Spirit's ministry in Acts.

4:15 Luke would stress Jesus' teaching ministry. Everyone who had contact with Jesus praised Him, not just the Jews. This was the initial popular response to Him, and it is the normal initial response that Spirit-directed believers experience.

"First a rumour [Gr. *pheme*] of Him began to spread everywhere; in a little time a rumour became a roar [Gr. *echos*], the whole countryside was moved; and at last the thing became

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<sup>1</sup> *The New Bible Dictionary*, s.v. "Galilee," by J. H. Paterson, pp. 449-50.

<sup>2</sup>Green, p. 203.

intelligent; it became a *logos*, a word, a distinct message."<sup>1</sup>

## 2. Jesus' teaching in Nazareth 4:16-30

In contrast to most people, the inhabitants of Jesus' hometown did not praise Him. When Jesus began to speak of God extending salvation to the Gentiles, which was a particular interest of Luke's, the Jews in Nazareth opposed Him violently. Perhaps Luke meant this incident to represent a classic case of rejection, in which Nazareth symbolized all of Israel.<sup>2</sup> If so, this is another instance of metonymy: Nazareth standing for all Israel. He may have also intended that it become a model for the church's ministry, as well as a typical example Jesus' ministry.<sup>3</sup>

Many students of the Synoptics take this pericope as parallel to Matthew 13:53 through 58 and Mark 6:1 through 6. However the differences between Luke's account and the account in Matthew and Mark seem to indicate two separate incidents. Luke's incident probably occurred early in Jesus' Galilean ministry, whereas the one that Matthew and Mark recorded happened later.

4:16 Luke reminded his readers that Jesus had grown up in Nazareth, where this incident took place.

"It is quite wrong to think of Jesus as being brought up in a backwater; He was brought up in a town in the sight of history and with the traffic of the world almost at its doors."<sup>4</sup>

Luke also drew attention to Jesus' piety by noting His regular habit of attending synagogue services, where He likely taught as well as worshipped. Synagogues were primarily places where people went for instruction (cf. 13:10; John 18:20; Acts 13:27; 15:21; et al.). Jesus probably attended the synagogue

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<sup>1</sup>Morgan, *The Gospel ...*, p. 63.

<sup>2</sup>Marshall, *The Gospel ...*, p. 178.

<sup>3</sup>Bo Reicke, "Jesus in Nazareth — Lk 4, 14-30," in *Das Wort und die Wörter*, pp. 51-53.

<sup>4</sup>Barclay, p. 44. See Finegan, *Light from ...*, pp. 298-301, for more information about Nazareth.

that the Roman centurion, whose beloved servant Jesus later healed, had built for the Jews of Capernaum (cf. 7:2-10).

"It was our Lord's custom to attend public worship, a custom His followers should imitate today (Heb. 10:24-25). He might have argued that the 'religious system' was corrupt, or that He didn't need the instruction; but instead, He made His way on the Sabbath to the place of prayer."<sup>1</sup>

"From the start of His public ministry, the Lord made a habit of attending the synagogue worship (Luke 4:16), and he continued that practice to the end of his earthly life. His example speaks to individuals who excuse themselves from attending corporate worship because they 'get nothing out of the service.' No defender of public worship should ever try to make his case on the basis of the ability of the preacher. We worship to meet God."<sup>2</sup>

4:17 One of the synagogue rulers (Jairus? cf. Mark 5:22; Luke 8:41) may have asked Jesus to read the Scriptures, since Jesus was a popular teacher. Customarily Jewish teachers stood up to read the Scriptures, out of respect for them, and then sat down to expound them.<sup>3</sup> No one knows for sure if someone asked Him to read this particular passage or if He chose to do so, but the context favors the second alternative by stressing Jesus' initiative.

"This is the only occasion on which we are told that Jesus read."<sup>4</sup>

4:18 The passage that Jesus read was Isaiah 61:1 and 2a (cf. Isa. 58:6). This passage prophesied the mission of Messiah. It is appropriate that Jesus should have read it at the beginning of

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<sup>1</sup>Wiersbe, 1:184.

<sup>2</sup>Ryrie, p. 149.

<sup>3</sup>Martin, p. 214. See Edersheim, *The Life ...*, 1:430-50, for explanation of synagogue worship and arrangements.

<sup>4</sup>Plummer, p. 119.

His ministry, and that Luke should have recorded it here. Isaiah predicted that, as the Servant of the LORD (Yahweh), which the context of the Isaiah passage contributes, Messiah would possess the Spirit. He would also be the bearer of good news (1:19; cf. Deut. 18:18; Isa. 40:9; 41:27; 52:7). Luke highlighted Jesus' prophetic ministry of proclamation (v. 24; 7:16, 39; 9:8, 19; 13:33; 24:19). Moreover, Messiah would bring release to the oppressed (cf. 7:22).

"The poor" to whom He was sent were not just the economically poor, or the spiritually impoverished, but people of low status in society: "for those excluded according to normal canons of status honor in [the] Mediterranean world."<sup>1</sup> Likewise, "the blind" refers to those who need to receive revelation and experience salvation.

4:19 The reference to "the favorable year of the LORD" is an allusion to the year of jubilee, when all the enslaved in Israel received their freedom (Lev. 25). It points to the earthly messianic kingdom, but it is more general and includes God's favor on individual Gentiles as well as on Israel nationally.

Jesus stopped reading before He read the words "And the day of vengeance of our God" in Isaiah 61:2b. This is a reference to the Tribulation, among other judgments. The omission highlights the gracious nature of Messiah's ministry at that time compared with its judgmental character in the future.<sup>2</sup> One writer listed many passages, in addition to Isaiah 61:1 and 2, that contain prophecies with a nearer fulfillment of some statements, and a more distant fulfillment of others.<sup>3</sup>

4:20 Probably Luke narrated these events step by step because most of his Gentile readers would have been unfamiliar with synagogue worship. His description also heightens the sense

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<sup>1</sup>Green, p. 211.

<sup>2</sup>See Gary Yates, "The Use of Isaiah 61:1 (and 58:6) in Luke 4:18-19," *Exegesis and Exposition* 2:1 (Summer 1987):13-27.

<sup>3</sup>J. Randall Price, "Prophetic Postponement in Daniel 9 and Other Texts," in *Issues in Dispensationalism*, pp. 159 and 160.

of anticipation in the story. The people present were alert and expectant, waiting to hear Jesus' comments on the passage.

4:21 When He announced the fulfillment of this passage, Jesus revealed that He Himself was the predicted Messiah, and that the time for God's gracious deliverance had arrived.<sup>1</sup> This is one of only two instances in which Luke recorded the fulfillment of Scripture by Messiah, the other being in 24:44. These occurred at the beginning and at the end of Jesus' ministry. They constitute an *inclusio*, implying that the whole of Jesus' ministry was a fulfillment of messianic prophecy. Jesus began preaching the gospel that enriches the poor (the marginalized), releases bound people, enlightens the spiritually blind, and gives the downtrodden freedom. He also announced that the messianic kingdom was at hand (cf. Matt. 4:17; Mark 1:15).

4:22 Jesus' gracious words (cf. Acts 14:3; 20:24) evoked a positive response from His hearers. They were glad to hear these things. But they balked at Jesus' claim to be the Messiah. They did not understand how He could be the Messiah, since He had grown up with them and seemed so similar to them.

4:23 Jesus had been ministering in Capernaum before this incident (cf. vv. 14-15). The accounts of Jesus in Nazareth, in Matthew 13:53 through 58 and Mark 6:1 through 6, also follow instances of His doing miracles in Capernaum (Matt. 4:13; Mark 1:21-28).<sup>2</sup> This has convinced some interpreters to regard this passage in Luke as parallel to the others in Matthew and Mark. But this is probably incorrect, as noted above.

Jesus' decision to refrain from doing miracles in Nazareth apparently led some of the Nazarenes to question His ability to do them at all. This cast further doubt on His messiahship in their minds. They thought that if He was the Messiah, then He should bring blessing to Nazareth and demonstrate signs there too.

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<sup>1</sup>See Daniel Doriani, "The Deity of Christ in the Synoptic Gospels," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 37:3 (September 1994):333-50.

<sup>2</sup>See Appendix 6 "The Miracles of Jesus" at the end of my notes on Matthew.

Both at the beginning of Jesus' ministry and at the end, people mocked Jesus by calling on Him to deliver ("heal" here, and "save" later) Himself (cf. 23:35; Matt. 27:40; Mark 15:30).

4:24 Luke recorded Jesus saying "Truly I say to you" six times (4:24; 12:37; 18:17, 29; 21:32; 23:43).<sup>1</sup> This phrase always introduces a significant and authoritative comment, as it also does in the other Gospels. The Greek word *dektos*, translated "welcome," is the same one that occurs in verse 19, where it is translated "favorable." Perhaps Jesus used this word in verse 24 in order to indicate that even though God wanted to accept the people, they would not accept the Prophet whom He had sent to tell them of His grace.<sup>2</sup> Prophets were not welcome in their hometowns, because hometown folks hardly ever fully trust one of their own who leaves town, becomes famous, and then returns home. In saying what He did, Jesus was again claiming to be a prophet.

"People are always more ready to see greatness in strangers than in those they know well."<sup>3</sup>

4:25-27 Jesus did not say that Elijah and Elisha went to Gentiles because the Jews rejected them, but because God sent them there to Gentiles. God sent them there, to Gentile territory, even though there were many needy people in Israel. This happened because Israel at that time was in an apostate condition; they had forsaken Yahweh and were worshipping Baal. The three and one-half years of drought was a period of divine judgment on Israel (cf. Dan. 7:25; 12:7; Rev. 11:2-3; 12:6, 14; 13:5).

"The period of three years and a half, = 42 months or 1260 days, had an ominous sound in the ears of an Israelite, being the time of this famine, and

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<sup>1</sup>See J. C. O'Neill, "The Six Amen Sayings in Luke," *Journal of Theological Studies* NS10 (1959):1-9; and J. Strugnell, "'Amen I say unto you' in the Sayings of Jesus and in Early Christian Literature," *Harvard Theological Review* 67 (1974):177-90.

<sup>2</sup>Liefeld, p. 869.

<sup>3</sup>Morris, *The Gospel ...*, p. 107.

of the duration of the desolation of the temple under Antiochus."<sup>1</sup>

The reason for these two illustrations—of the widow of Zarephath and Naaman—was to show that God had sent His prophets (including Jesus) to Gentiles as well as to Jews. The Nazarenes, therefore, should not expect preferential treatment. Jesus ministered to Jews first, but He also ministered to Gentiles. These examples would have encouraged Luke's original Gentile readers, since they had a similar mission.

"This remark [of Jesus'] is strong for two reasons: (a) It compares the current era to one of the least spiritual periods in Israel's history, and (b) it suggests that Gentiles, who were intensely disliked among the Jews, were more worthy of ministry than they were."<sup>2</sup>

Kenneth Yates pointed out that Luke mentioned two military men, at the beginning and at the end of Jesus' earthly ministry. This is in harmony with Luke's interest in military people and Gentiles. These two references—the first being to Naaman the Syrian (v. 27; cf. 2 Kings 5:1-27) and the second being to Julius the centurion (23:47)—form an *inclusio* around the ministry of Jesus. They show that God reaches out to Gentiles within their pagan backgrounds, and they imply that Luke's readers should do the same.<sup>3</sup>

"Elsewhere in the Third Gospel, Jesus conducts his ministry in the synagogues ... but nowhere else does Luke include a report of the content of his teaching. Hence, here we have an exemplar of the sort of message Jesus proclaimed in synagogues throughout his public ministry."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Wordsworth, quoted by Alford, 1:480.

<sup>2</sup>Bock, *Luke*, p. 138.

<sup>3</sup>Kenneth W. Yates, "Military Leaders and Jonah in the Writings of Luke, Part 1," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 173:691 (July-September 2016):324-36.

<sup>4</sup>Green, p. 207.

4:28-30 Jesus allowed the enraged crowd to drive Him out of town and to the crest of the hill on which Nazareth stood. Later He allowed another crowd to drive Him out of Jerusalem and nail Him to a cross. However this was not the time for Him to die, and Nazareth was not the place. Luke did not give the details that explain how Jesus escaped His neighbors' wrath. We need not suppose that His deliverance came through some supernatural act or intervention. The description of His escape does picture Jesus in sovereign control of the situation, however.<sup>1</sup>

There were two forms of punishment for religious offenses that were common in the Judaism of Jesus' day, in addition to punishments that came directly from God. People could be whipped with 39 stripes (cf. 2 Cor. 11:24), or they could experience what the rabbis referred to as a rebel's beating. It was the latter of these two that Jesus almost experienced here (cf. John 8:59; 10:31; Acts 7:58; 21:31). If anyone were caught in supposed open defiance of some positive precept, either of the Mosaic Law or the traditions of the elders, the observers were allowed to punish him or her on the spot, without a trial.<sup>2</sup>

This pattern of violent Jewish rejection continued, and mounted, throughout Jesus' ministry. One writer referred to Jesus' rejection at Nazareth as a "dress-rehearsal" for His passion.<sup>3</sup> It is significant that rejection began at the start of Jesus' ministry because of a revelation of God's desire to bless His people. Ironically, when Jesus announced the arrival of the year of God's favor (v. 19), He received no favor from His townspeople.<sup>4</sup>

"Thus in the first scene in the narrative of Jesus' mission, Jesus announces 'words of grace' but encounters the violent rejection which prophets can expect in their homeland. The

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<sup>1</sup>A. B. Bruce, 1:491.

<sup>2</sup>Edersheim, *The Temple*, pp 66-68.

<sup>3</sup>Nolland, p. 200.

<sup>4</sup>Green, p. 217.



good news which Jesus preaches is already shadowed by a conflict that will persist to the end of Acts."<sup>1</sup>

"The visit to Nazareth was in many respects decisive. It presented by anticipation an epitome [embodiment] of the history of the Christ. Jesus came to His own, and His own received Him not. The first time He taught in the Synagogue, as the first time He taught in the Temple, they cast Him out. On the one and the other occasion, they questioned His authority, and they asked for a 'sign.' In both instances, the power which they challenged was, indeed, claimed by Christ, but its display, in the manner which they expected, refused. The analogy seems to extend even farther—and if a misrepresentation of what Jesus had said when purifying the Temple formed the ground of the final false charge against Him (Matt. 26:60-61), the taunt of the Nazarenes: 'Physician, heal thyself!' found an echo in the mocking cry, as He hung on the Cross: 'He saved others, Himself He cannot save.' (Matt. 27:40-42)"<sup>2</sup>

"In all this we have a commentary on the third temptation. The people tried to put Jesus into the position Satan had suggested. But He did not let them."<sup>3</sup>

"It is important to appreciate how central good teaching is to ministry. In an era when feelings and interpersonal relationships are high on the agenda, it is wise to reflect on why Jesus spent so much time instructing people."<sup>4</sup>

Kenneth Hanna pointed out that the following sections of narrative alternate between miraculous events and disciple preparation.<sup>5</sup> However all of Jesus' miracles were in a sense disciple preparation.

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<sup>1</sup>Tannehill, 1:73.

<sup>2</sup>Edersheim, *The Life ...*, 1:451.

<sup>3</sup>Morris, *The Gospel ...*, p. 108.

<sup>4</sup>Bock, *Luke*, p. 139.

<sup>5</sup>Hanna, p. 75.

Miracles 4:31-44		Miracles 5:12-26		Miracles 6:1-11	
	Disciples 5:1-11		Disciples 5:27-39		Disciples 6:12-16

### **3. Jesus' ministry in and around Capernaum 4:31-44**

"As the Nazareth-account was a programmatic instance of Jesus' activity in Galilee, so the narration of his Capernaum ministry illustrates and develops the nature of his ministry."<sup>1</sup>

The people of Nazareth rejected Jesus because they did not believe that He was the Messiah or the Son of God. Luke next gave many proofs of Jesus' messiahship and deity. He chose incidents from Jesus' ministry in and around Galilee in order to demonstrate this.

Jesus followed a pattern of ministering in Capernaum, then traveling away from Capernaum for ministry, returning to Capernaum to minister, etc.<sup>2</sup> The first four incidents happened in Capernaum and its environs. Even though these incidents involved miracles, they occurred in a broader context of teaching.

**The exorcism of a demoniac in the Capernaum synagogue 4:31-37 (cf. Mark 1:21-28)**

4:31 Jesus had to go down from Nazareth, which stood approximately 1,200 feet above sea level, to Capernaum, that lay almost 700 feet below sea level. This notation, and the mention that Capernaum was a city of Galilee, were undoubtedly for Luke's original readers' benefit, many of whom were unfamiliar with Israel's geography. Again Luke recorded that Jesus was teaching in the synagogue (cf. v. 16).<sup>3</sup> There He demonstrated the liberating work that Isaiah wrote that Messiah would do (v. 18).

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<sup>1</sup>Green, p. 222.

<sup>2</sup>See Andrews, pp. 243-45 and 319-20, for a summary based on his chronology.

<sup>3</sup>See Ironside, 1:140-41, for the story of the archaeological discovery of a synagogue in Capernaum.

"Teaching [Gr. *didache*] in Luke-Acts is seen as a broad term encompassing much more than the offer of the gospel, whereas preaching [*kerygma*] in Luke-Acts [only in Luke 11:32] tends to be limited to the salvation message."<sup>1</sup>

4:32 Jesus' unusual authority "amazed" (Gr. *exeplessonto*) those present (cf. Deut. 18:18). Later Jesus' works drew the same response (9:43). It was particularly Jesus' word or "message" (Gr. *logos*, cf. 1:1-4) that impressed them here. As a prophet, Jesus spoke directly from God and for God. The people of Capernaum recognized Jesus' authority, but the Nazarenes did not.

"... the very thing that the devil promised to give Jesus, 'authority,' has come to Jesus as a consequence of his resisting the devil ..."<sup>2</sup>

4:33 Messiah's appearance served notice on the demon world that He purposed to destroy their work. Consequently the demons began to oppose Jesus immediately. Jesus continued this holy war throughout His ministry, and His disciples extended it (9:1-2; 10:9-10, 17). The Gospel writers used the adjectives "evil" and "unclean" interchangeably, combined with "spirit," in order to describe demons. They were evil in their intent, and they produced uncleanness, in contrast to the goodness and holiness that the Holy Spirit produces in those whom He inhabits.<sup>3</sup> Possibly Luke specified that this was an unclean demon because the Greeks thought there were good and evil demons.<sup>4</sup>

"The Scriptures distinguish clearly between all forms of ordinary disease and the peculiar affliction of demoniacal possession."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Bock, "A Theology ...," p. 119.

<sup>2</sup>Green, p. 221.

<sup>3</sup>See *Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, s.v. "Demon, Demoniac, Demonology," by R. K. Harrison, 2:92-101; Merrill F. Unger, *Demons in the World Today*, pp. 101-21.

<sup>4</sup>*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, s.v. "*daimon*," by W. Foerster, 2(1964):9.

<sup>5</sup>Lenski, p. 263.

- 4:34 "Leave us alone!" translates an expression of indignant surprise.<sup>1</sup> "What business do You have with us?" means something like: Why this interference?<sup>2</sup> The demon testified to Jesus' messianic and divine character. He was "the Holy One of God," in contrast to the unclean demon. The demon probably spoke for the forces of evil when he said: "What business do You have with us?"
- 4:35 Jesus may have silenced the demon in order to prevent a premature movement to recognize Him as simply a political Messiah. Another reason follows:
- "Our Lord ever refused testimony from devils, *for the very reason why they were eager to give it*, because He and they would thus seem to be one interest, as His enemies actually alleged."<sup>3</sup>
- Jesus' authority is obvious in His command here to "Be quiet!" Jesus also expelled the demon on His own authority, not by invoking the name of some other power. Luke, who consistently showed interest in people's physical conditions, noted that even though the demon exited violently, he did not hurt the man. Jesus caused the release of one whom Satan had held captive, and He did it completely (v. 18).
- 4:36 Again Luke noted the "amazement" of the observers (Gr. *thambos*, wonder mixed with fear). The people questioned, out of curiosity and wonder, the powerful word ("message," Gr. *logos*, v. 32) of Jesus, marked as it was by "authority" (Gr. *exousia*) and "power" (Gr. *dynamei*) over unclean spirits. Perhaps Luke stressed the word of Jesus because the Greeks put much stock in the power of a great person's words—people such as the great Greek orators.
- 4:37 The reports of this miracle spread Jesus' fame farther into the surrounding areas.

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<sup>1</sup>J. M. Creed, *The Gospel According to St. Luke. A Commentary on the Third Gospel*, p. 30.

<sup>2</sup>Danker, p. 61.

<sup>3</sup>Jamieson, et al., p. 997.

This incident established the authority that Jesus had claimed in Nazareth. Testimony to His deity from the spirit world should have convinced many of Jesus' hearers. Luke probably recorded the incident in order to heighten Jesus' greatness in the minds of his readers.

**The healing of Peter's mother-in-law 4:38-39 (cf. Matt. 8:14-15; Mark 1:29-31)**

Luke's account does not include some details that Matthew and Mark recorded, but it stresses the immediacy of Jesus' healing.

4:38 Luke did not introduce Peter ("Simon") to his readers, perhaps because they knew about him before reading this Gospel.

"Undoubtedly, the key disciple in Luke's writings is Peter. He was the representative disciple, as well as the leading apostle.<sup>1</sup>

Doctor Luke (cf. Col. 4:14) alone wrote that the woman had a high fever.

4:39 Luke described Jesus as standing over Peter's mother-in-law like a doctor would, perhaps suggesting Jesus' role as the Great Physician. He also wrote that Jesus rebuked the fever. We need not infer that a demon had produced it and that Jesus was rebuking the demon. Luke may have just been personifying the fever to show the power of Jesus' words. Peter's mother-in-law's ability to serve others testified to the complete recovery that Jesus accomplished (cf. v. 35). Luke showed special interest in women in his Gospel, and this is another indication of that (cf. Elizabeth, Mary, Anna, et al.). He apparently wanted his Greek readers, who held women in high esteem, to realize that Jesus also honored them.

Luke's emphasis in this healing was the miraculous element in Jesus' great power and authority over sickness.

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<sup>1</sup>Bock, "A Theology ...," p. 148.

### Jesus' healing of many Galileans after sundown 4:40-41 (cf. Matt. 8:16-17; Mark 1:32-34)

Having recorded two individual healings, Luke now mentioned a group of people whom Jesus healed. Again Luke omitted some details that the other synoptic writers included but added others in order to stress other points for his particular readers.

4:40 The Jewish crowds waited to come to Jesus until the Sabbath ended at sundown. Luke did not draw attention to the Sabbath, but he noted that the sun was setting as the background for what followed. Luke distinguished between the sick and the demon-possessed. He did not think demons were responsible for all disease, as some Greeks did. However he would have acknowledged that sin is responsible for all sickness ultimately. Luke alone also mentioned Jesus laying His hands on those who came to Him for healing. This demonstrates Jesus' compassion for the afflicted and the fact that the healing came from Him. It was common in pagan Hellenistic accounts of supposedly miraculous healings for healers to lay their hands on the sick.<sup>1</sup> The "hand of God" is an Old Testament metaphor that emphasizes God's power (cf. 1 Sam. 5:11; 2 Chron. 30:12; Job 19:21; Eccles. 2:24; 9:1).

"Jesus did not heal *en masse*, but one by one, tender sympathy going out from Him in each case."<sup>2</sup>

4:41 Only Luke recorded that the demons called Jesus "the Son of God." This was another testimony to His true identity. Again Jesus told the demons to keep quiet (cf. v. 35). He wanted people, not just demons, to believe that He was the Son of God. Yet the testimony of demons could appear suspect to the people present, since evil spirits are known to serve the "father of lies." Note that Luke equated "Son of God" and "Christ" (Messiah), which many of Jesus' followers had difficulty comprehending and acknowledging.

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<sup>1</sup>Marshall, *The Gospel ...*, p. 196.

<sup>2</sup>A. B. Bruce, 1:493.

The demons' witness to Jesus' identity seems to be the point of this story.

### **Jesus' first preaching tour of Galilee 4:42-44 (cf. Mark 1:35-39)**

Luke again stressed the wide ministry that Jesus purposely carried on. This pericope records what happened on the morning following the previous incident (cf. v. 40).

4:42 The people of Nazareth had wanted Jesus to leave, but the people of Capernaum begged Him to stay. Jesus wanted to reach as many people as possible with His message.

4:43 The words "must," "kingdom of God," and "sent" are all unique to Luke's narrative here. Luke's concept of the kingdom of God is the same as that of the other Gospel writers, namely, the rule of God through David's descendant: Messiah.

"Along with 'preach,' these words constitute a programmatic statement of Jesus' mission and also of Luke's understanding of it."<sup>1</sup>

"Christ is the great Apostle of God to men."<sup>2</sup>

4:44 "Judea" evidently refers to the whole Roman province that included Galilee, not just to southern Israel.

Verses 31 through 44 contain representative incidents from Jesus' Galilean ministry that illustrate what He did and the reactions of people to Him (cf. Acts 10:38). Note that Jesus' teaching ministry was primary and His healings were secondary. His miracles served to authenticate His message. This was true of the apostles' preaching and miracles in Acts too.

### **4. The call of Peter, James, and John 5:1-11 (cf. Matt. 4:18-22; Mark 1:16-20)**

"The sharp Christological focus of 4:14-44 now broadens; in this section [5:1—6:16] the individual people who personally respond to Jesus become important. Sinners find a new life;

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<sup>1</sup>Liefeld, p. 874.

<sup>2</sup>Robertson, *Word Pictures ...*, 2:67.

apostles are called to join Jesus in his task; Pharisees prefer to stay with their old but false righteousness."<sup>1</sup>

John Nolland noted a structural unity to 5:1 through 6:16, and I have retitled his seven sections as follows, though I have not adopted his categories in the notes below:

- The call of Peter, James, and John 5:1-11
- The cleansing of a leper 5:12-16
- The healing of a paralytic 5:17-26
- The call of Levi and his banquet 5:27-32
- The Sabbath controversy over eating 6:1-5
- The Sabbath controversy over healing 6:6-11
- The call of the Twelve 6:12-16

Luke's account of the call of Peter, James, and John is the longest of the three that the synoptic writers recorded. Some scholars believe that this was a calling prior to the one recorded in Matthew and Mark.<sup>2</sup> Luke drew attention to Peter and omitted any reference to Andrew, his brother (Matt. 4:18; Mark 1:16). (In Luke's Gospel, the disciples have only a little role to play.<sup>3</sup>) Luke characteristically focused on single individuals that Jesus touched wherever possible, in order to draw attention to Jesus. He also stressed the sovereignty and holiness of Jesus, as well as these disciples' total abandonment of their possessions to follow Jesus. Jesus repeated the lesson of this incident after His resurrection (John 21:1-14).

Luke placed this account in his Gospel after the Capernaum incidents rather than before them, as Mark did (Mark 1:14-28). He probably arranged his material this way in order to stress Jesus' sovereignty over people, having already established the general program of Jesus' ministry.<sup>4</sup> The emphasis on Jesus' sovereignty continues through chapter 5. This was not the first time that Jesus had talked with Peter and the other disciples mentioned. Andrew had told his brother Peter that he had found the Messiah (cf. John 1:41). However these disciples thought of the Messiah as their contemporaries did: They expected a political deliverer who was less than God Himself. Jesus had to teach them that He was God as well as Messiah.

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<sup>1</sup>Nolland, p. 218.

<sup>2</sup>E.g., Alford, 1:484.

<sup>3</sup>Green, p. 228.

<sup>4</sup>Liefeld, p. 876.



This lesson and its implications took all of Jesus' ministry to communicate. Verses 1 through 3 give the setting for the incident.

5:1 Luke pointed out again that the crowd was listening to the word of God that Jesus was proclaiming (v. 1; cf. 4:32, 36). The people were so interested that they pressed upon Jesus.

Luke described the Sea of Galilee as a "lake," as most of His readers would have thought of it. Gennesaret was the town and the plain on the lake's northwest coast from which the lake of Galilee received its other name.

5:2 Luke's characteristic attention to detail is obvious in that he referred to two boats, thus setting the stage for verse 7. Evidently the fishermen had used large dragnets (Gr. *diktau*) when they had fished all night, which Zebedee, James, and John were now washing and mending (Matt. 4:21; Mark 1:19; Luke 5:2). These nets were made of linen and were visible to fish during the day. So they were used at night only and they needed washing each morning.<sup>1</sup> Peter and Andrew were using a smaller round casting net (Gr. *amphibleston*), throwing it into the water from close to shore (Matt. 4:18; Mark 1:16).

"It was a busy scene; for, among the many industries by the Lake of Galilee, that of fishing was not only the most generally pursued, but perhaps the most lucrative."<sup>2</sup>

5:3 Jesus put some distance between them and Himself by teaching from a boat not far off shore.

"... Jesus is fishing from the boat to catch men ..."<sup>3</sup>

5:4 Luke alone specified that Simon and his companions were "fishermen" (Gr. *halieus*, v. 2). Consequently Jesus' command

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<sup>1</sup>David Bivin, "The Miraculous Catch: Reflections on the Research of Mendel Nun," *Jerusalem Perspectives* 5:2 (1992):7-10.

<sup>2</sup>Edersheim, *The Life ...*, 1:473.

<sup>3</sup>Nolland, p. 221.

to launch out into the deep water for another try at fishing contrasts Jesus' authority with the authority of these men.

"Success was doubly improbable: it was day, and in deep water; fish were got at night, and near shore. The order, contrary to probability, tempts to symbolic interpretation: the deep sea the Gentile world; Peter's indirect objection symbol of his reluctance to enter on the Gentile mission, overcome by a special revelation (Acts x.)."<sup>1</sup>

5:5 Peter's compliance shows his great respect for Jesus, which led to his obedience—and ultimately to a large catch of fish. "Master" (Gr. *epistata*) is Luke's equivalent for "teacher" or "rabbi." Luke never used the term "rabbi," probably because it would have held little interest or significance for most Greek readers. "Master" is a term that disciples or near disciples used of Jesus (8:24, 45; 9:33, 49; 17:13), and it indicates submission to authority. Luke is the only Gospel evangelist who used this term, and wherever it appears it refers to Jesus.

5:6 Luke first stressed the gathering of very many fish (cf. Ps. 8:6, 8; John 21:6). The details give the narrative the ring of truth.

5:7 "Partners" (Gr. *metochois*) probably refers to partners in business (cf. v. 10; Heb. 1:9; 3:1, 14; 6:4; 12:8). A similar word (Gr. *koinonos*, v. 10b) also means partners.

"Both terms are here employed of the two pairs of brothers [Peter and Andrew, and James and John] who have a business company under Simon's lead."<sup>2</sup>

5:8 Luke's other emphasis was Peter's response to this miracle. The catch so amazed (Gr. *thambos*) Peter that he knelt before Jesus, evidently in the boat. Peter now addressed Jesus as "Lord" (Gr. *kyrios*) instead of "Master." "Lord" expressed more respect than "Master." In view of later developments in Peter's life, it is difficult to say that Peter viewed Jesus as God when

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<sup>1</sup>A. B. Bruce, 1:495.

<sup>2</sup>Robertson, *Word Pictures ...*, 2:70.

he called Him "Lord" here. He may have done so and then relapsed into thinking of Him as only a mortal later.

In either case, Peter expressed conviction of sin in Jesus' presence, indicating that he realized that Jesus was a holy Man, very different from himself (cf. Isa. 6:5). Peter's confession of his sinfulness was essential, not only for his salvation, but also for his becoming a disciple and servant of Jesus (cf. Exod. 4:10-17; Judg. 6:11-23; Isa. 6; Jer. i:4-10; Ezek. 1—3; Dan. 10; Acts 9:3-9; Rev. 1:13-20). "Go away from me" expresses Peter's feeling of uncleanness in Jesus' presence. Jesus' superior ability to catch fish caused Peter to sense that he was a sinner, one who fell short. Sinner or "sinful man" (Gr. *hamartolos*) is one of Luke's characteristic words. Of the 22 occurrences of this word in the Synoptics, 15 are in Luke.

"Luke does not use the term pejoratively [expressing contempt or disapproval] but compassionately, as a common term applied to those who were isolated from Jewish religious circles because of their open sin, their unacceptable occupation or lifestyle, or their paganism. Luke shows that these sinners are the objects of God's grace through the ministry of Jesus."<sup>1</sup>

"We observe in Peter at this time that mixture of good and evil, of grace and nature, which so frequently reappears in his character in the subsequent history."<sup>2</sup>

"What Peter does not realize is that admitting one's inability and sin is the best prerequisite for service, since then one can depend on God. Peter's confession becomes his résumé for service. Humility is the elevator to spiritual greatness."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Liefeld, p. 877.

<sup>2</sup>A. B. Bruce, *The Training of the Twelve*, p. 15.

<sup>3</sup>Bock, *Luke*, p. 155.

Some have felt that Peter's confession here was a result of his having gone back to fishing after Jesus had called him to be His disciple, as recorded in Matthew 4:18 through 20 and Mark 1:16 through 18.<sup>1</sup> However it seems more probable that this incident is Luke's account of the same calling that Matthew and Mark recorded.

5:9-10a The fishermen were all amazed at what had happened. Here we learn that James and John were partners in the fishing business with Peter.

5:10b Jesus does not depart from nor reject sinners who feel conviction because of their sin. He draws them to Himself and sends them out to serve Him. Jesus used the fish to represent people that Peter would draw into the messianic kingdom of God and into the church (cf. Acts 2; 10:9-48). This seems to be a reference to "catching" in the sense of saving, rather than in the sense of judging and destroying.

"Fishermen caught live fish to kill them, but the disciples would be catching people who were dead to give them life."<sup>2</sup>

"It is not for nothing that the promise here clothes itself in language drawn from the occupation of the fisher, rather, for instance, than in that borrowed from the nearly allied pursuits of the hunter. The fisher more often take his pray alive; he draws it *to* him, does not drive it *from* him; and not merely to himself, but draws all which he has taken to one another; even as the Church brings together the divided hearts, the fathers to the children, gathers into one fellowship the scattered tribes of men. Again, the work of the fisher is one of art and skill, not of force and violence ..."<sup>3</sup>

5:11 Peter and his three companions immediately abandoned their life as fishermen to become Jesus' disciples full-time (cf.

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<sup>1</sup>E.g., Morgan, *The Gospel ...*, p. 74.

<sup>2</sup>Bailey, p. 112.

<sup>3</sup>R. C. Trench, *Notes on the Miracles of Our Lord*, p. 146.

14:33; 18:22). Only Luke recorded that Jesus had contact with Peter before He called Peter to follow Him (cf. 4:38). These fishermen left the greatest catch of their career, perhaps, because of what it showed them of Jesus.<sup>1</sup>

"But at the time of their call they were exceedingly ignorant, narrow-minded, superstitious, full of Jewish prejudices, misconceptions, and animosities."<sup>2</sup>

This catch of fish probably enabled Peter and his fellow fishermen to provide at least partially for their dependents before beginning their lives as itinerate disciples of Jesus.<sup>3</sup>

"Luke did not lay particular stress on the thought of giving up all to follow Jesus (Mk. 1:18, 20): the accent is on v. 10 with its call to mission."<sup>4</sup>

"The likelihood is that the married disciples, like married soldiers, took their wives with them or left them at home, as circumstances might require or admit. Women, even married women, did sometimes follow Jesus; and the wife of Simon, or of any other married disciple, may occasionally have been among the number. At an advanced period in the history we find the *mother* of James and John in Christ's company far from home; and where mothers were, wives, if they wished, might also be."<sup>5</sup>

The general emphasis in this incident is on the authority of Jesus. His words had powerful effects. The only proper response to them was submission to Jesus. Blessing would follow in the form of participation in Jesus' mission. There are parallels between this section and that of Isaiah's commission

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<sup>1</sup>Morris, *The Gospel ...*, p. 114.

<sup>2</sup>A. B. Bruce, *The Training ...*, p. 14.

<sup>3</sup>Geldenhuis, p. 182.

<sup>4</sup>Marshall, *The Gospel ...*, p. 206.

<sup>5</sup>A. B. Bruce, *The Training ...*, p. 17.

(Isa. 6:1-10): both contain an epiphany, a reaction, reassurance, and a commission.<sup>1</sup>

"The major application in the miracle of the catch of fish centers around Jesus' instructions and Peter's responses. In the midst of teaching many, Jesus calls a few people to more focused service. Peter is one example of such a call. Everyone has a ministry, and all are equal before God, but some are called to serve him directly. Peter has the three necessary qualities Jesus is looking for. He is willing to go where Jesus leads, he is humble, and he is fully committed."<sup>2</sup>

This whole first section that describes Jesus' teaching mission (4:14—5:11) focuses on Jesus' authority and the proper response to it.

## **B. THE BEGINNING OF CONTROVERSY WITH THE PHARISEES 5:12—6:11**

One of Luke's purposes in his Gospel, and in Acts, appears to have been to show why God stopped working particularly with Israel and began working with Jews and Gentiles equally.<sup>3</sup> The Jewish leaders' rejection of Jesus was a major reason for this change. The conflict between Jesus and the religious leaders is an important feature of this Gospel.

This section of the Gospel includes six incidents. In the first one, Jesus served notice to the religious leaders in Jerusalem that the Messiah had arrived. In the remaining five incidents, the Pharisees found fault with Jesus or His disciples. Mark stressed the conflict that was mounting, but Luke emphasized the positive aspects of Jesus' ministry that led to the opposition.<sup>4</sup>

### **1. Jesus' cleansing of a leprous Jew 5:12-16 (cf. Matt. 8:1-4; Mark 1:40-45)**

This miracle was to be a testimony to the religious leaders about Jesus' person (v. 14). It authenticated His person and His teaching. It also shows the blessings that Jesus brought to people, specifically the spiritual

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<sup>1</sup>Green, p. 233.

<sup>2</sup>Bock, *Luke*, p. 163.

<sup>3</sup>Liefeld, p. 879.

<sup>4</sup>Marshall, *The Gospel ...*, p. 206.

cleansing of those whom sin had polluted (cf. 4:18). It alerted the religious leaders to Messiah's presence in Galilee.

"Like sin, leprosy ["a defiling skin disease" TNIV] is deeper than the skin (Lev. 13:3) and cannot be helped by mere 'surface' measures (see Jer. 6:14). Like sin, leprosy spreads (Lev. 13:7-8); and as it spreads, it defiles (Lev. 13:44-45). Because of his defilement, a leprous person had to be isolated outside the camp (Lev. 13:46), and lost sinners one day will be isolated in hell. People with leprosy were looked on as 'dead' (Num. 12:12), and garments infected with leprosy were fit only for the fire (Lev. 13:52)."<sup>1</sup>

5:12 "One of the cities" refers to one of the cities of Galilee, in view of the context. Luke revealed his particular interest in medical matters again by noting that leprosy covered this man completely. There could be no doubt that he was a leper. As Peter had done, this man fell before Jesus (cf. v. 8). Like Peter, he also appealed to Jesus as "Lord" (v. 8). This address was respectful and appropriate when addressing someone with special power from God.<sup>2</sup> The leper was very bold in coming to Jesus, since his leprosy separated him from normal social contacts. His conditional request cast doubt on Jesus' willingness to heal him, not His ability to do so. It may express his sense of unworthiness to receive such a blessing.

5:13 By stretching out His hand and touching the leper, Jesus was doing the unthinkable (Lev. 13). He probably did this in order to express His compassion for the man, as well as to identify Himself, beyond any possible doubt, as the source of his healing (cf. Exod. 4:4; 6:6; 14:16; 15:12; Jer. 17:5; Acts 4:30). Jesus' words offered him reassurance (cf. v. 10). Jesus' authority extended to power over disease and ceremonial uncleanness. Doctor Luke again noted an immediate cure (cf. 4:35, 39).

"Since the uncleanness of leprosy was communicable, it is especially significant that

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<sup>1</sup>Wiersbe, 1:186. TNIV refers to The Holy Bible: *Today's New International Version*.

<sup>2</sup>G. Vermes, *Jesus the Jew*, pp. 122-23.

Jesus responds by touching the man: not that Jesus violates the rules of cultic cleanliness; rather, the uncleanness retreats before the touch and command of Jesus (cf. at 4:40, 41). The touch of Jesus represents a 'welcome back' to the isolated leper."<sup>1</sup>

"The most significant lesson from the cleansing of the leper story is that even outsiders can experience God's healing grace."<sup>2</sup>

5:14 The healing of lepers was a messianic act (cf. 7:22). Therefore the man's testimony about his cleansing amounted to an announcement of Messiah's arrival. Jesus did not want this man to fail to go to Jerusalem and present the required offering for the healing of leprosy (Lev. 14:1-32). If the man had broadcast his healing, he may never have reached the priests there, and the crowds may have mobbed Jesus even worse than they were already doing. Furthermore, it was inappropriate for the man to announce his healing before a priest examined him and made an official announcement that he was clean (Lev. 14:57). Jesus was careful not to usurp this priestly authority.

5:15 Luke omitted the fact that the man disobeyed Jesus (cf. Mark 1:45), perhaps because this would have undermined his emphasis on Jesus' authority. Instead he stressed the spread of the "news" (lit. "word," Gr. *logos*) concerning Jesus. The spread of the good news concerning Jesus is a major theme of both this Gospel and the Book of Acts. This healing increased Jesus' popularity.

"... honour is like a shadow, which flees from those that pursue it, but follows those that decline it."<sup>3</sup>

Luke did not mention the fact that increased popularity hampered Jesus' activities (cf. Mark 1:45). But he wrote that Jesus' fame was spreading and that large crowds were

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<sup>1</sup>Nolland, p. 229.

<sup>2</sup>Bock, *Luke*, p. 165.

<sup>3</sup>Henry, p. 1429.



gathering to hear Him teach and to be healed. The order of Luke's words "hear Him and to be healed" reflects the priority of Jesus' preaching over His miracles.

5:16 Jesus' response was not to rest on popular approval but to renew His dependence on His Father by praying in a deserted place.

"... the mainspring of his life was his communion with God, and in such communion he found both strength and guidance to avoid submitting to temptation."<sup>1</sup>

## **2. Jesus' authority to forgive sins 5:17-26 (cf. Matt. 9:1-8; Mark 2:1-12)**

Luke documented Jesus' authority in yet another area of life by showing His power to forgive sins. In this incident the miracle is secondary, and the issue of Jesus' authority is primary. Jesus claimed to be God by forgiving a paralyzed man's sins. Forgiving sins is something that only God can do.

5:17 Again Luke stressed the priority of Jesus' teaching ministry. The Pharisees and teachers of the Law (the scribes) had come to hear what He was teaching. These men, first appearing in Luke in this chapter, were the guardians of Israel's orthodoxy. The Pharisees were a political party in Israel noted for their strict observance of the Mosaic Law as traditionally interpreted by the rabbis. Some of these teachers of the law were probably Pharisees, but perhaps not all of them were.

The phrase "Pharisees and teachers of the Law" is a literary figure called a *hendiadys*. A hendiadys is a figure of speech in which someone expresses a single idea by naming two entities and linking them with "and." Thus "scribes and Pharisees" or "Pharisees and teachers of the Law" means religious leaders.

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<sup>1</sup>Marshall, *The Gospel ...*, p. 210.

But this does not mean that other religious leaders such as the Sadducees were absent.<sup>1</sup>

"In the past an unduly negative portrait of the Pharisees of the NT period has been produced by an almost exclusive concentration on the criticisms found in the synoptic record. At best this produces a caricature, at worst it produces anti-Semitism and serious misunderstanding of the NT criticisms themselves, which in many cases gain their proper force only when it is recognized that they are directed at what was probably the most highly respected group in Jewish society."<sup>2</sup>

"Only one intimately acquainted with the state of matters at the time would, with the Rabbis, have distinguished Jerusalem as a district separate from all the rest of Judaea, as St. Luke markedly does on several occasions (Luke v. 17; Acts i. 8; x. 39)."<sup>3</sup>

Luke viewed the power of God as extrinsic to Jesus (cf. John 5:1-19). Jesus did not perform miracles out of His divine nature. He laid those powers aside at the Incarnation. Instead, He did His miracles in the power of God's Spirit—who was on Him and in Him—as a prophet.

"Why would Luke say that 'the power of the Lord was present for him to heal' if Jesus could heal at any time, under any condition, and solely at his own discretion? This statement only makes sense if we view healing as the sovereign prerogative of

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<sup>1</sup>For a discussion of the religious leaders, see Steve Mason, "Chief Priests, Sadducees, Pharisees and Sanhedrin in Acts," in *The Book of Acts in Its First Century Setting; Vol. 4: The Book of Acts in Its Palestinian Setting*, pp. 134-47.

<sup>2</sup>Nolland, p. 233.

<sup>3</sup>Edersheim, *Sketches of ...*, p. 73.

God the Father, who sometimes dispenses his power to heal and at other times withholds it."<sup>1</sup>

In Acts, Luke stressed that the same Spirit is on and in every believer today, and He is the source of the Christian's power as He was the source of Jesus' power.

5:18-19 This incident happened in Capernaum (Mark 2:1), though that fact was irrelevant for Luke. Other details in his account add the touch of reality to it.

"The roof is only a few feet high, and by stooping down, and holding the corners of the couch—merely a thickly-padded quilt, as at present in this region—they could let down the sick man without any apparatus of ropes or cords to assist them. ... They had merely to scrape back the earth from a portion of the roof over the *lewan* [porch], take up the thorns and short sticks, and let down the couch between the beams at the very feet of Jesus. The end achieved, they could speedily restore the roof as it was before. I have the impression, however, that the covering, at least of the *lewan*, was not made of earth, but of materials more easily taken up. It may have been merely of coarse matting, like the walls and roofs of Turkman huts, or it may have been made of boards, or even stone slabs (and such I have seen), that could be quickly removed."<sup>2</sup>

5:20 The zeal with which the four friends of the paralytic sought to bring him into Jesus' presence demonstrated their faith, namely, their belief that Jesus could heal him. However the sick man also appears to have had faith in Jesus, or he would not have permitted his friends to do what they did. Perhaps Luke did not mention the paralytic's faith explicitly because to do so might have detracted from his emphasis on Jesus' power.

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<sup>1</sup>Jack Deere, *Surprised by the Power of the Spirit*, p. 59. Cf. J. I. Packer, "The Comfort of Conservatism," in *Power Religion*, p. 289.

<sup>2</sup>Thomson, 2:7-8. Paragraph division omitted.

God responds to the faith of others, when they bring their needy friends to Him, in prayer as well as in person.

"... it is impossible to think that the man's sins were forgiven if he had no faith of his own."<sup>1</sup>

We should not regard physical healing and spiritual forgiveness as an "either or" proposition. Rather, true forgiveness includes full restoration in every area of life. Jesus graciously did "both and" for this man, though often God does not restore people to complete physical health until after death.

"In many traditional, non-Western societies, the domain of biological medicine is not differentiated from that of religion, politics, and broader social life, with the result that healing may include or require the resolution of spiritual and social disorder. Hence, we should not be surprised that Jesus refers to the man's new psychosocial state and spiritual condition rather than to his physiological presentation, nor should we imagine that forgiveness was in some way (only) preparatory to the cure that would come."<sup>2</sup>

"Miracle becomes a metaphor for salvation. All Jesus' miracles should be seen in this light."<sup>3</sup>

5:21      The religious leaders were correct. Only God can forgive sins. But they were unwilling to draw the conclusion that Jesus was God.

"Whenever Luke reports what someone is thinking, instruction from Jesus usually follows."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Morris, *The Gospel ...*, p. 117.

<sup>2</sup>Green, p. 241.

<sup>3</sup>Bock, "A Theology ...," p. 126.

<sup>4</sup>Idem, *Luke*, p. 158.

"Luke, incidentally, is rather fond of questions which begin with 'Who?' and refer to Jesus (7:49; 8:25; 9:9, 18, 20; 19:3)."<sup>1</sup>

"Blasphemy against another human being means to speak evil of him (see 1 Corinthians 4:13; Titus 3:2; 2 Peter 2:2; Jude 8). But blasphemy against God involves not merely cursing his name, but also attempting to usurp the rights that belong only to the creator."<sup>2</sup>

"What is expressed here is an objection in the strongest terms to Jesus' act of making that declaration of the forgiveness of God which in their understanding God had reserved as his own prerogative for the final day."<sup>3</sup>

- 5:22-23 As a prophet Jesus may have had special insight into what His critics were thinking (cf. Matt. 9:3; Mark 2:6). It was easier to say, "Your sins are forgiven you," because no one could disprove that claim. In another sense, of course, both claims were equally difficult, because healing and forgiving both required supernatural power.
- 5:24 Jesus did the apparently more difficult thing in order to prove that He could also do the apparently easier thing. This is the first time that Luke recorded Jesus calling Himself "the Son of Man." Luke used this title 26 times, and in every case Jesus used it to describe Himself (except in Acts 7:56 where Stephen used it of Him). This was a messianic title with clear implications of deity (Dan. 7:13-14). Since the Son of Man is the divine Judge and Ruler, it is only natural that He would have the power to forgive. It was only consistent for Jesus to claim deity, since He had just demonstrated His deity by forgiving the man's sins. He would prove it by healing him.

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<sup>1</sup>Morris, *The Gospel ...*, p. 117.

<sup>2</sup>Charles C. Ryrie, *The Miracles of our Lord*, p. 50.

<sup>3</sup>Nolland, pp. 235-36.

5:25 The paralyzed man responded in faith "immediately" (Gr. *parachrema*) to Jesus' command. The stretcher had carried the man, and now the man carried the stretcher.

"The ability of the paralyzed man to resume his walk of life is a picture of what Jesus does when he saves. His message is a liberating one."<sup>1</sup>

5:26 Everyone present glorified God because of what Jesus had done. One of Luke's objectives was to glorify God, and to encourage his readers to do the same, in this Gospel and in Acts (cf. 2:20). The amazed reaction of the crowd recalls the same response of the people on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:11-12; cf. Luke 7:16; 13:17; 18:43; Acts 3:9; 8:8). Perhaps Luke meant to draw the reader's attention to "today," the last word that is also the first word that Jesus spoke when He announced the fulfillment of Isaiah 61:1-2a (4:21). The day of the Messiah's appearing had arrived, and the witnesses of this miracle testified to it, albeit unknowingly.

Luke's emphasis in his account of this incident was on Jesus' authority and the people's acknowledgment of it. They said, "We have seen remarkable [Gr. *paradoxia*, paradoxical] things today." They meant that they had witnessed events that led them to an apparently illogical conclusion: that Jesus was different from an ordinary human being. Luke also stressed Jesus' ongoing mission (cf. Acts).

"Three quest stories appear early in the narrative of Jesus' ministry, in Luke 5 and 7. Three reappear toward the end of Jesus' journey to Jerusalem, in Luke 17, 18, and 19. Thus they appear early and late in the narrative of Jesus' ministry prior to his arrival in Jerusalem. The tendency to bracket Jesus' ministry with this type of story suggests the importance of these encounters in Jesus' total activity."<sup>2</sup>

A "quest story" is one in which someone approaches Jesus in search of something very important to human well-being. Of the nine quest stories in the Synoptics, seven are in Luke, and four of these are unique to Luke.

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<sup>1</sup>Bock, *Luke*, p. 158.

<sup>2</sup>Tannehill, 1:118.

**3. Jesus' attitude toward sinners 5:27-32 (cf. Matt. 9:9-13; Mark 2:13-17)**

Luke resented Jesus bestowing messianic grace on a variety of people: a demoniac, a leper, a paralytic, and now a tax collector. He liberated these captives from a malign spirit, lifelong uncleanness, a physical handicap, and now social ostracism and materialism. The Pharisees were again present. In Levi's case, Jesus not only provided forgiveness but fellowship with Himself. The incident shows the type of people whom Jesus called to Himself, and it justifies His calling of them. Jesus' attitude toward sinners was positive and contrasts with the religious leaders' negative attitude toward them.

5:27 Levi (Matthew) was a tax collector ("publican," AV). However, he was not a chief tax collector, as Zaccheus was (19:2), nor does the text say that he was rich, though he appears to have been. Nevertheless the Pharisees, and most of the ordinary Jews, despised him because of his profession. He collected taxes from the Jews for the unpopular Roman government, and many of his fellow tax collectors were corrupt. Tax collectors were the social equivalent of "pimps and informants."<sup>1</sup>

"The tolls collected by Levi may have been either on highway traffic, or on the traffic across the lake."<sup>2</sup>

"It is of importance to notice, that the Talmud distinguishes two classes of 'publicans': the tax-gatherer in general (*Gabbai*), and the *Mokhes*, or *Mokhsa*, who was specially the *douanier* or custom-house official. Although both classes fall under the Rabbinic ban, the *douanier*—such as Matthew was—is the object of chief execration [loathing]."<sup>3</sup>

5:28 Jesus' authority is apparent in Levi's immediate and unconditional abandonment of his profession in order to follow Jesus. Levi obeyed Jesus, as he should have, and in so doing

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<sup>1</sup>Green, p. 246.

<sup>2</sup>A. B. Bruce, "The Synoptic ...," 1:498.

<sup>3</sup>Edersheim, *The Life ...*, 1:515.

gave Luke's readers a positive example to follow (cf. 5:11). Luke's terminology stresses Levi's decisive break with his former vocation ("left everything behind"), and his new life of continuous discipleship. This decision undoubtedly involved making financial and career sacrifices.

"He had grown weary of collecting revenue from a reluctant population, and was glad to follow One who had come to take burdens off instead of laying them on, to remit debts instead of exacting them with rigor."<sup>1</sup>

5:29-30 The joy of Levi and his outcast guests contrasts with the grumbling of the Pharisees and scribes. Shared meals, in the Mediterranean world, symbolized shared lives.<sup>2</sup> The religious leaders objected to Jesus and His disciples' eating and drinking with these tax collectors and sinners, because of the supposed risk of ceremonial defilement that they ran by doing so.<sup>3</sup> They focused their criticism on Jesus' disciples rather than on Jesus, perhaps because Jesus was so popular. "Sinners," to the Pharisees, were those who lived unfaithful to God: irreligious and/or immoral people.

"In effect, Jesus is being cited for a breach of convention, when it is the Pharisees and their scribes whose behavior—raising an unseemly point of discussion—is out of bounds."<sup>4</sup>

5:31-32 Jesus used a proverb to summarize His mission (cf. ch. 15). He used the word "righteous" in a relative sense, and perhaps a bit sarcastically, since no one is completely righteous—though the Pharisees considered themselves especially righteous. A person must acknowledge his or her need for Jesus, and His righteousness, before that one will benefit from the Great Physician's powers. This acknowledgment of need is

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<sup>1</sup>A. B. Bruce, *The Training ...*, p. 24.

<sup>2</sup>See Green, pp. 244-50, for an explanation of banquets (Greco-Roman symposia) in Luke.

<sup>3</sup>For a discussion of the eating motif in Luke's Gospel, see Jason Valeriano Hallig, "The Eating Motif and Luke's Characterization of Jesus as the Son of Man," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 173:690 (April-June 2016):203-18.

<sup>4</sup>Green, p. 245.



what Jesus meant by "repentance." Repentance leads to joy in Luke, as well as to life (cf. 15:7, 10, 22-27, 32). Luke stressed the positive call of sinners to repentance both in this Gospel and in Acts. He referred to repentance more than Matthew or Mark did (cf. 3:3, 8; 10:13; 11:32; 13:3, 5; 15:7, 10; 16:30; 17:3-4; 24:47).

"The connection between 5:32 and 19:10 suggests that they form an inclusion. That is, we have similar general statements about Jesus' mission early and late in his ministry, statements which serve to interpret the whole ministry which lies between them."<sup>1</sup>

#### **4. Jesus' attitude toward fasting 5:33-39 (cf. Matt. 9:14-17; Mark 2:18-22)**

The setting of this controversy is the same as the previous one: Levi's banquet. Jesus' attitude toward fasting stressed that His presence anticipated the day of earthly messianic kingdom rejoicing.

5:33        The religious leaders (v. 30; Mark 2:18) and John's disciples (Matt. 9:14; Mark 2:18) raised the question of fasting. They did so because it was another practice, besides eating with sinners, that marked Jesus and His disciples as unusual (cf. 7:34). Since Jesus preached repentance (v. 32), why did He not expect His followers to demonstrate the accepted signs that indicated it? These questioners made Jesus and His disciples appear to be out of step by negatively contrasting their behavior with that of John the Baptist's and the Pharisees' disciples.

The Old Testament required only one day of fasting, namely, the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16:29). But over the years additional fasts had become traditional (cf. Zech. 8:19). Evidently John and his disciples fasted periodically. The Pharisees fasted every Monday and Thursday (cf. 18:12), as well as on four other days in memory of Jerusalem's

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<sup>1</sup>Tannehill, 1:107.

destruction (Zech. 7:3, 5; 8:19).<sup>1</sup> Jesus did not oppose fasting, but He criticized its abuse (4:2; 22:16, 18; Matt. 6:16-18).<sup>2</sup>

Luke alone mentioned Jesus' questioners' reference to prayer. He probably did this in order to clarify the circumstances in which fasting happened for his readers. The questioners implied that Jesus' disciples neglected prayer as well as fasting.

- 5:34 Jesus compared the situation to a wedding, which calls for joy. He meant that He was the bridegroom, who had come to claim His bride: Israel (cf. Isa. 54:5-8; 62:5; Jer. 2:2; Hos. 2:19-20, 23; Ezek. 16). His disciples were His friends ("attendants") who rejoiced at this prospect with Him. Therefore to compel them to fast was inappropriate. Thus Jesus rebuked His questioners.
- 5:35 However Jesus implied that the bridegroom would die (be "taken away from them"). This was one of Jesus' early hints at His death, perhaps the first.<sup>3</sup> When He died, His disciples would fast. They probably did this after His crucifixion but before His resurrection. They also do it after His ascension and before His return to the earth (cf. John 16:16-24).
- 5:36 Jesus next illustrated with parables the fact that His coming introduced a radical break with former religious customs. He did not come to patch Judaism up but to inaugurate a new order. Had Israel accepted Jesus, this new order would have been the earthly kingdom, but since the Jews rejected Him, it became the church. Eventually it will become the earthly kingdom. Simply adding His new order to Judaism would have two detrimental effects: It would have damaged the new order, and it would not preserve the old order. It would also appear incongruous. Only Luke's account includes the first effect: that it would damage the new order. Luke evidently included this to

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<sup>1</sup> *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, s.v. "nestis," by J. Behm, 4(1967):930.

<sup>2</sup> See Bill Thrasher, *A Journey to Victorious Praying*, pp. 141-60, for a good discussion of fasting.

<sup>3</sup> Plummer, p. 162.

help his Christian readers see that Judaism and Christianity are distinct.

"The real point is the incompatibility of the two pieces of cloth, and the contrast of new and old is implicit. ... Whereas in Mk. the deficiencies of Judaism cannot be mended simply by a Christian 'patch', in Lk. the emphasis is on the impossibility of trying to graft something Christian onto Judaism."<sup>1</sup>

Another less popular interpretation understands the old to represent Jesus' conduct as the fulfillment of God's desire, and the new as the Pharisees' deviant position.

"In effect then, Jesus interprets his behaviors, which are questionable and innovative to some onlookers, as manifestations of God's ancient purpose coming to fruition, while the concerns of the Pharisees are rejected not only as innovative but also as quite inconsistent with God's program."<sup>2</sup>

- 5:37-38 The second illustration adds the fact that the new order, which Jesus had come to bring, has an inherently expanding and potentially explosive quality. The gospel and Christianity would expand to the whole world. Judaism simply could not contain what Jesus was bringing, since it had become too rigid due to centuries of accumulated tradition. Here Luke's account is very close to Mark's.
- 5:39 Only Luke included this statement. Jesus' point was that most people who have grown accustomed to the old order are content with it and do not prefer the new. They tend to assume that the old is better because it is old. This was particularly true of the Jewish religious leaders, who regarded Jesus' teaching as new and inferior to what was old: the traditional teachings of the rabbis.

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<sup>1</sup>Marshall, *The Gospel ...*, p. 227.

<sup>2</sup>Green, p. 250.

"There is in religious people a kind of passion for the old. Nothing moves more slowly than a Church."<sup>1</sup>

"We should never be afraid of new methods. That a thing has *always* been done may very well be the best reason for stopping doing it. That a thing has *never* been done may very well be the best reason for trying it. ... Let us have a care that in thought and in action we are not hidebound reactionaries when we ought, as Christians, to be gallant adventurers."<sup>2</sup>

Jesus contrasted four pairs of things that do not mix in this pericope. They are: feasting and fasting, a new patch and an old garment, new wine and old wineskins, and new wine and old wine. His point was that His new way, and the old way that the Jewish leaders followed and promoted, were unmixable. The religious leaders refused to even try Jesus' way, believing that their old way was better.

#### 5. Jesus' authority over the Sabbath 6:1-5 (cf. Matt. 12:1-8; Mark 2:23-28)

The final two instances of confrontation with the Pharisees that Luke recorded in this part of his Gospel involved Sabbath observance. The Sabbath was one of Judaism's main institutions, and Jesus' violation of traditional views on Sabbath observance brought the religious leaders' antagonism toward Him to a climax. Here was a case in point that Jesus' new way could not exist with Judaism's old way. Sabbath observance had its roots not only in the Mosaic Law but in creation. Furthermore its recurrence every seventh day made it a subject of constant attention. Jesus' authority over the Sabbath showed that He was "Lord of the Sabbath"—and therefore God.

"The interesting thing about Jesus' approach is that He was not simply arguing that repressive regulations should be relaxed and a more liberal attitude adopted: He was saying that His opponents had missed the whole point of this holy day. Had they understood it they would have seen that deeds of mercy

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<sup>1</sup>Barclay, p. 64.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., pp. 65, 66.

such as His were not merely permitted—they were obligatory (*cf.* Jn. 7:23f.)."<sup>1</sup>

- 6:1 The Mosaic Law permitted people to glean from the fields as they passed through them (Deut. 23:25). Luke alone mentioned the disciples "rubbing" the ears of grain "in their hands," probably in order to give his readers a more vivid picture of what really happened.
- 6:2 The Pharisees chose to view the disciples' gleaning as harvesting, and their rubbing the grain in their hands as threshing and winnowing, and thus preparing a meal. The Pharisees considered all these practices inappropriate for the Sabbath. Mark recorded that the Pharisees directed their question to Jesus, but Luke wrote that they asked Jesus and His disciples (plural "you" in the Greek text).
- 6:3-4 Jesus responded to their question. Thus Luke showed his readers Jesus' position as the Master who comes to the defense of His disciples. Jesus drew an analogy from Scripture (*cf.* 1 Sam. 21:1-9). The Pharisees had obviously read the story of David, but they had not seen what it meant.

"It is possible to read scripture meticulously, to know the Bible inside out from cover to cover, to be able to quote it verbatim and to pass any examination on it—and yet completely to miss its real meaning. Why did the Pharisees miss the meaning—and why do we so often miss it? ... When we read God's book we must bring to it the open mind and the needy heart—and then to us also it will be the greatest book in the world."<sup>2</sup>

Jesus' point was twofold: first, that ceremonial traditions are secondary to divine service. What David did was contrary to the Pharisees' understanding of what the Mosaic Law required (Lev. 24:9), yet Scripture did not condemn him for what he did (*cf.* 2 Chron. 30:18-20). What Jesus' disciples did was not

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<sup>1</sup>Morris, *The Gospel ...*, pp. 121-22.

<sup>2</sup>Barclay, p. 68. Paragraph division omitted.

contrary to the divine intent of the Mosaic Law, so the Pharisees should not have condemned them for what they did.

Why did the Scriptures not condemn David for what he did? They did not because David was meeting a human need. God permitted him to violate what, to the Pharisees, appeared to be the letter of the law, but not the true intent of the law, without condemnation.

"Just as, when David acted in this way, it is to be understood that he interpreted the true intention of the enscripturated will of God, so also it should be understood that when the Son of Man makes provision for his disciples on the Sabbath, he is not violating the Sabbath but as Lord of the Sabbath revealing its true significance."<sup>1</sup>

Suppose you are sitting in your vehicle at a stoplight waiting for it to change from red to green. As you glance in your rearview mirror, you notice a large truck bearing down on you from behind. It seems inevitable that the driver cannot stop in time to avoid plowing into you and pushing you into the unoccupied intersection. You have to make a quick decision: Will you simply sit there and wait for the inevitable collision, or will you drive ahead, through the red light, and avoid an accident. The Pharisees would say you should stay where you are, because you must not drive through a red light—it's the law! Jesus would say you should drive through and get out of the way of the oncoming truck, because human welfare is more important than obeying a stoplight—if you have to choose between one or the other.

"The point the Lord Jesus was emphasizing is this that man is more important in the eyes of God than any ritual observance."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Nolland, p. 258.

<sup>2</sup>Ironside, 1:182.

"God cares more for the proper spiritual condition of the heart than for the outward observance of his own ceremonial regulations."<sup>1</sup>

6:5 Jesus' second point was that the Son of Man (cf. 5:24), because of who He is ("Lord of the Sabbath"), had the right to set aside a Pharisaic tradition, not a divine law, in the service of God.

Jesus was not violating the Sabbath by doing what He did, but He had the right to do so. This was another claim to divine authority, an emphasis that we have seen running through this part of Luke's Gospel. God is greater than the laws that He has imposed, and He can change them when He chooses to do so.

"David did not allow cultic regulations to stand in the way of fulfilling his divine calling of becoming king of Israel. Jesus has a similar mission which makes him 'Lord of the Sabbath,' one who is authorized to decide when Sabbath regulations must be set aside to fulfill a greater divine purpose."<sup>2</sup>

This incident should elevate the readers' appreciation of Jesus' authority to new heights in Luke.

This is the first of seven incidents that the Gospel evangelists recorded in which Jesus came into conflict with the Jewish religious leaders over Sabbath observance. The chart below lists them in probable chronological order:

SABBATH CONTROVERSIES				
Event	Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
The disciples plucked ears of grain in Galilee.	12:1-8	2:23-28	6:1-5	

<sup>1</sup>Lenski, p. 325.

<sup>2</sup>Tannehill, 1:174-75.

Jesus healed a paralytic at the Pool of Bethesda in Jerusalem.				5:1-18
Jesus healed a man with a withered hand in Capernaum.	12:9-14	3:1-6	6:6-11	
Jesus referred to the Jews circumcising on the Sabbath.				7:22-23
Jesus healed a man born blind in Jerusalem.				9:1-34
Jesus healed a woman bent over in Judea.			13:10-17	
Jesus healed a man with dropsy in Perea.			14:1-6	

**6. Jesus' attitude toward the Sabbath 6:6-11 (cf. Matt. 12: 9-14; Mark 3:1-6)**

Luke evidently placed his account of this incident here in his narrative because it builds on the idea of Jesus' authority over the Sabbath, and it advances it even further than the previous pericope does. As the authoritative Son of Man, Jesus declared that it was lawful to do good on the Sabbath. Both incidents involved a controversy about the question: What is more important, ceremonial law or human need?

The Pharisees believed that it was unlawful to do virtually anything on the Sabbath, though they hypocritically did good for themselves but not for others. They did, however, permit life-saving measures, midwifery, and circumcision on the Sabbath.<sup>1</sup> Jesus' attitude toward the Sabbath showed that the attitude of the religious leaders was wrong. They really had little compassion for needy people. They did not love their neighbors as themselves.

6:6            This incident happened on a different Sabbath from the one in the preceding pericope. Note the similar terms that Luke used

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<sup>1</sup>Mishnah *Yoma* 8:6, and Mishnah *Shabbath* 18:3 and 19:2.



to introduce both events. Luke again noted the primacy of Jesus' teaching over His performing miracles (cf. 4:15-16, 31-33). He also mentioned that it was the "right hand" of the man that was useless, which was a detail of particular interest to a doctor. This detail shows the seriousness of the man's case. Most people are right-handed.

6:7 By now the religious leaders were looking for an occasion to criticize Jesus publicly, believing that they had a case against Him.

6:8 Jesus probably "knew what they were thinking" at least because their intentions were now clear (cf. 5:22). Or He could have known their thoughts because He was a prophet. Morris believed that Luke was emphasizing Jesus' deity by writing that He knew their thoughts.<sup>1</sup> Jesus consciously provoked conflict by calling the man forward for healing. His initiative demonstrates His authority and His sovereignty.

6:9 Jesus' question had two parts: He first asked if it was lawful to do good on the Sabbath or if it was lawful to do evil. The obvious answer was that doing good was lawful but doing evil was not lawful. God had instituted the Sabbath for the welfare of humankind. God's attitude of love should have characterized the scribes and Pharisees as they observed the day. They too should have made it a special day for the blessing of people.

The second part of Jesus' question particularized it and pointed to its ultimate consequences. Obviously Jesus was speaking about saving a "life" (Gr. *psyche*) from physical destruction, not saving a soul from eternal damnation.

"Jesus' approach to Sabbath keeping is governed by the conviction that love of God is inseparably linked to love of neighbor (Luke 10:25-37). Therefore, that which dishonors my neighbor cannot honor God, and that which leaves my neighbor in his suffering can only be evil."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Morris, *The Gospel ...*, p. 123.

<sup>2</sup>Nolland, p. 262.

6:10 There was only one answer that the religious leaders could give. It was lawful to do good and unlawful to do evil on the Sabbath. But they refused to answer because their answer virtually would have given Jesus their approval to heal the man. They did not want to do that because they wanted to maintain their traditional abstinence from Sabbath activities.

Jesus proceeded to do good and healed the man's hand, but He did so without performing any physical work. There was nothing that the critics could point to, as an act that Jesus performed, for which they could condemn Him. This method of healing pointed to Jesus being a prophet sent from God, at least, and to His being God, at most.

Even though most Christians do not observe the Sabbath the way the Jews did, most Christians do set aside a day, or a portion of a day, in which they worship the Lord. Jesus' practices on the Sabbath should help Christians understand how we should observe a special day of worship and rest.

"Jesus' words and actions teach us quite plainly that we should every Lord's day (and indeed on every other day) place ourselves wholly at His disposal to perform works of love and mercy wherever and in whatever way it may be possible. We may not consecrate the day of rest in a merely passive manner, but must be active in His service and thus through Him be of use to those who suffer and need help, spiritually as well as physically."<sup>1</sup>

6:11 Understandably, the response of Jesus' critics was violent. "Senseless rage" translates the Greek word *anoia*, which refers to want of understanding, folly (cf. 2 Tim. 3:9).

"He humiliated the religious leaders and healed the man all at the same time without even breaking the Pharisees' law. It is no wonder that the

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<sup>1</sup>Geldenhuys, p. 203.

religious establishment was furious and sought a way to get rid of Him."<sup>1</sup>

Verse 11 is the climax of Luke's section that describes the beginning of Jesus' controversy with the religious leaders (5:12—6:11). This event occurred nearly two years before Jesus' crucifixion.<sup>2</sup> Luke did not say that this incident led the religious leaders to plot Jesus' death, as Matthew and Mark did. The intensity of the conflict did not interest Luke as much as Jesus' sovereign authority over His enemies.

### C. JESUS' TEACHING OF HIS DISCIPLES 6:12-49

Luke gave his readers an overview of Jesus' ministry (4:14—5:11) and then presented Jesus' relationship to His opponents (5:12—6:11). Next Luke described Jesus' relationship with His disciples (6:12-49). He arranged his material by identifying the disciples first, and then he summarized what Jesus taught them.

There is some similarity between Luke's narrative and the account of Moses ascending Mt. Sinai, when he received the Law from God, and then descending and teaching it to the people (Exod. 19; 32; 34).<sup>3</sup> Perhaps Luke intended the reader to recognize the fulfillment of Deuteronomy 18:18 in this similarity.

#### 1. The selection of 12 disciples 6:12-16 (cf. Mark 3:13-19)

Luke prefaced Jesus' teaching of His followers with an introduction of His most intimate disciples.

"It is clear that for Luke an important stage in the founding of the church is to be seen here, the choice of those from among the company of Jesus' companions from the beginning of his ministry who were to be in a special sense the witnesses to his resurrection and the messengers of the gospel."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Martin, p. 219.

<sup>2</sup>Robertson, *Word Pictures ...*, 2:83.

<sup>3</sup>Ellis, p. 113.

<sup>4</sup>Marshall, *The Gospel ...*, p. 237.

6:12 Jesus' choice of the Twelve followed His conflict with the Jewish leaders. Luke implied that that hostility played a part in Jesus' decision to spend the night in prayer before selecting these apostles. In view of mounting hostility, it was imperative that Jesus receive direction from His Father in this choice. A mountain (or hill) was a traditional place to pray, since it provided seclusion, and its elevation gave the person praying a special sense of nearness to God. Luke alone mentioned Jesus' all-night prayer vigil. It shows Jesus' conscious dependence on God the Father, which is a special emphasis in the third Gospel. The early church followed Jesus' example of praying (Acts 13:2; 14:23; cf. Acts 1:2, 24-26; 6:6).

"Nowhere else is such a sustained period of prayer attributed to Jesus. Acts 1:2 establishes an equivalence between prayer here and the guidance of the Spirit."<sup>1</sup>

6:13 Jesus selected the Twelve from the larger group of learners who followed Him around (cf. Matt. 10:2-4; Acts 1:13).

"It is probable that the selection of a limited number to be His close and constant companions had become a necessity to Christ, in consequence of His very success in gaining disciples."<sup>2</sup>

Only Luke mentioned that Jesus called the Twelve "apostles" (lit. sent ones, i.e., authorized representatives), though Matthew and Mark both referred to the Twelve as apostles. Luke used this term six times in this Gospel (6:13; 9:10; 11:49; 17:5; 22:14; 24:10) and 28 times in Acts. Each of the other synoptic evangelists used it only once. This fact reflects Luke's continuing interest in the mission that Jesus began and continued through these apostles and the whole church (Acts 1:1-2).

6:14-16 The fact that Jesus chose 12 apostles at this time, probably suggests continuity in God's plan of salvation, because the 12

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<sup>1</sup>Nolland, p. 269.

<sup>2</sup>A. B. Bruce, *The Training ...*, p. 29.

apostles in one sense replaced the 12 sons of Israel (Jacob). However, I believe the many points of discontinuity with Israel are just as important and make the equating of Israel and the church impossible (cf. Eph. 2).

Luke's list contains the same individuals as those that Matthew and Mark have given us, with some variation in the order. Also, some men evidently had two names (Simon/Peter; Thaddaeus/Judas, the son or brother of James; and Simon the Cananaean/Simon the Zealot). Only Luke called Judas Iscariot "a traitor."

	<b>Matt. 10:2-4</b>	<b>Mark 3:16-19</b>	<b>Luke 6:14-16</b>	<b>Acts 1:13</b>
1.	Simon Peter	Simon Peter	Simon Peter	Peter
2.	Andrew	James	Andrew	John
3.	James	John	James	James
4.	John	Andrew	John	Andrew
5.	Philip	Philip	Philip	Philip
6.	Bartholomew	Bartholomew	Bartholomew	Thomas
7.	Thomas	Matthew	Matthew	Bartholomew
8.	Matthew	Thomas	Thomas	Matthew
9.	James, son of Alphaeus	James, son of Alphaeus	James, son of Alphaeus	James, son of Alphaeus
10.	Thaddaeus	Thaddaeus	Judas, son or brother of James	Judas, son or brother of James
11.	Simon the Cananaean	Simon the Cananaean	Simon the Zealot	Simon the Zealot
12.	Judas Iscariot	Judas Iscariot	Judas Iscariot	

"It does not take a great man to make a good witness, and to be witnesses of Christian facts was the main business of the apostles.<sup>1</sup>

"Far from regretting that all were not Peters and Johns, it is rather a matter to be thankful for, that there were diversities of gifts among the first preachers of the gospel. As a general rule, it is not good when all are leaders. Little men are needed as well as great men; for human nature is one-sided, and little men have their peculiar virtues and gifts, and can do some things better than their more celebrated brethren."<sup>2</sup>

## 2. The assembling of the people 6:17-19 (cf. Matt. 5:1-2)

The similarities between the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5—7, and what Luke recorded in 6:20-49, seem to suggest that Luke condensed that Sermon. However, the introductions to the two sections have led many students of these passages to conclude that Jesus gave two different addresses on two separate occasions. Harmonization of the introductions is possible, and this would point to one sermon that Luke edited more severely than Matthew did.<sup>3</sup>

6:17-18 Matthew wrote that Jesus was on a mountainside when He delivered this address (Matt. 5:1), but Luke said that He was on "a level place." Consequently, some prefer to call this teaching the Sermon on the Plain. "Judea" here refers to the whole Roman province of Judea (cf. 3:1; 4:44). The place where Jesus gave this sermon is the major problem in harmonizing the two accounts.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 39.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Robertson, *Word Pictures ...*, 2:85; Lenski, p. 340.

<sup>4</sup>See J. Manek, "On the Mount - on the Plain (Mt. V. 1 - Lk. VI. 17)," *Novum Testamentum* 9 (1967):124-31.

Apparently Jesus went up on a mountain near Capernaum to pray all night (v. 12). There, in the morning, He selected the Twelve (v. 13; cf. Mark 3:13-14). Then He descended to a level place where He met a large crowd that had come to hear Him and to receive healing (vv. 17-19). Luke tells us that they came from all Judea and from as far away as Jerusalem to the south, and the coastal region of Tyre and Sidon to the north. Such a site as Luke described exists near Capernaum.<sup>1</sup> Next, Jesus apparently went back up the mountainside to get away from the huge crowd (Matt. 5:1a). There His disciples came to Him and He taught them (Matt. 5:1b-2). Another possibility is that the place where Jesus preached may have been a level place in a mountainous region (cf. Isa. 13:2; Jer. 21:13).<sup>2</sup> I believe the two sermons were really one and that Luke provided a condensed version of it.

As the sermon progressed, more people made their way up the mountainside and began listening to what Jesus was teaching (Matt. 7:28; Luke 7:1; cf. Matt. 7:24; Luke 6:46-47).<sup>3</sup> Luke recorded that "a large crowd of His disciples" (many more than just the 12 named previously) plus "a great multitude of the people" (people who were not disciples but who were looking to Jesus for help of various kinds) were present.

6:19 "Power was coming from Him" refers to the power of the Holy Spirit that was manifested in Jesus' ministry. People mobbed Jesus and tried to touch Him so that His power would heal them. Jesus' healing ministry was not limited to those who believed on Him.

Luke's emphasis in this section was on Jesus' widespread appeal, together with His willingness to give of Himself freely to help those who came to Him in need.

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<sup>1</sup>J. A. Findlay, "Luke," in *Abingdon Bible Commentary*, p. 1037.

<sup>2</sup>Bock, *Luke*, p. 187; Donald A. Carson, "Matthew," in *Matthew-Luke*, vol. 8 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, p. 129.

<sup>3</sup>Martin, p. 219.

### **3. The Sermon on the Mount 6:20-49**

Luke's version of this important address, which was primarily aimed at Jesus' disciples, is much shorter than Matthew's (Matt. 5:3—7:29). Luke presented Jesus' instruction of His disciples (6:20-49) as immediately following His selection of the Twelve (6:12-16), verses 17 through 19 being transitional. Matthew's account contains 137 verses, whereas Luke's has only 30. Both accounts begin with beatitudes, contain the same general content, and end with the same parables. However Luke omitted the teachings that have distinctively Jewish appeal, specifically Jesus' interpretations of the Mosaic Law, which were legal matters. These parts had less significance for an audience of predominantly Gentile Christians.

"Luke's including the Sermon in a form that relates to Gentiles shows the message is timeless."<sup>1</sup>

"The sermon on the mount sets forth the principles that should control the disciples during the time of His absence, while still rejected by the world. It would be foolish to say that it only applies to the millennium, because it predicates conditions which will not prevail then."<sup>2</sup>

#### **The choices of disciples 6:20-26**

Matthew recorded nine beatitudes, but Luke included only four. Matthew gave no woes, but Luke recorded four. The four beatitudes precede the four woes, and the beatitudes parallel the woes in thought. The beatitudes are positive and the woes are correspondingly negative (cf. Ps. 1; Isa. 5:8-23).

Two types of disciples are in view throughout this section of the sermon: the poor and oppressed, and the rich and popular. The first type can anticipate God satisfying their needs, but the second type should expect divine judgment. The comparisons call on the disciples to consider which group that they want to be in. Matthew's beatitudes are more ethical in principle, and they describe what a disciple of Jesus ought to be. Luke's beatitudes describe the actual condition of the two types of disciples, and the consequences of those conditions. A beatitude is an acknowledgment of a fortunate state of being (cf. Ps. 1:1; Prov. 14:21; 16:20; 29:18). They

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<sup>1</sup>Bock, "A Theology ...," p. 114.

<sup>2</sup>Ironside, 1:192.



disparage the world's values by exalting what the world despises and rejecting what the world admires.<sup>1</sup>

### The Beatitudes 6:20-23 (cf. Matt. 5:3-10)

6:20 Clearly Jesus' disciples were the primary objects of His instruction in this sermon (cf. vv. 13-19).

"Blessed" (Gr. *makarios*) in this context describes the happy, contented condition of someone to whom God has granted His special favor.<sup>2</sup> Luke's original Greek readers would have been familiar with the word.

"Originally in Greek usage the word described the happy estate of the gods above earthly sufferings and labors."<sup>3</sup>

"Poor" disciples are those who have given up what the world offers in order to follow Jesus faithfully (cf. Deut. 33:29; Ps. 2:12; 32:1-2; 34:8; 40:4; 84:12; 112:1). Some of Jesus' disciples had already done this (cf. 5:11, 28). Such disciples characteristically look to God for their needs, rather than to themselves or the world. The parallel passage in Matthew clarifies that spiritual poverty, namely a recognition of one's spiritual need, is at the root of this physically poor disciple's thinking ("poor in spirit"; Matt. 5:3).

"They rely on God and they must rely on Him, for they have nothing of their own on which to rely ... The rich of this world often are self-reliant"<sup>4</sup>

The second part of each beatitude explains why the person in view is blessed (or happy). Disciples who forego the wealth of the present world order, in order to follow Jesus faithfully, have Jesus' promise that they will enjoy the benefits of the coming world order, namely, the earthly messianic kingdom. Jesus'

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<sup>1</sup>Morris, *The Gospel ...*, p. 126.

<sup>2</sup>See *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, s.v. "*makarios, et al.*," by F. Hauck and G. Bertram, 4(1967):362-70.

<sup>3</sup>Martin, p. 220.

<sup>4</sup>Morris, *The Gospel ...*, pp. 126, 127.

disciples are better off poor now, yet having a part in His kingdom, than being rich now and having no part in that kingdom.

"Human society perpetuates structures of injustice and exclusion, but God intervenes on the side of the oppressed. The disruptive effect of this intervention is often presented in Luke as a reversal of the structures of society: those with power, status, and riches are put down and those without them are exalted. This reversal was proclaimed in the Magnificat (1:51-53). A similar overturn of the established order was anticipated in Simeon's prophecy that Jesus 'is set for the fall and rising of many in Israel' (2:34)."<sup>1</sup>

"At face value, it appears that Jesus was making a blanket promise of salvation and blessing to anyone and everyone below the poverty line (6:20). Some have adopted just such an interpretation and have felt a special call to aim their ministries at the downtrodden. In this view, the poor are seen as God's chosen people. Though they suffer in this world, and perhaps because they suffer now, they can expect glorious blessing in the world to come. And the adherents of this view believe that while in this world the people of God should do everything possible to alleviate the suffering of the poor. In this way the kingdom of God is extended."<sup>2</sup>

6:21 Following Jesus as His disciple also involved feeling hungry occasionally. But Jesus promised ultimate satisfaction to those who chose discipleship. To those less fortunate, discipleship then and now sometimes involved and involves giving away some money that one might use for food or other necessities. Sometimes students preparing for ministry have to live on

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<sup>1</sup>Tannehill, 1:109.

<sup>2</sup>*The Nelson ...*, p. 1701.

meager rations in order to pay other bills associated with their commitment to study God's Word and serve Him.

Likewise discipleship involves weeping and sorrow, but laughter will come eventually. Messianic kingdom conditions are again in view. In one sense a disciple is to rejoice always (1 Thess. 5:16). But in another sense the sin that surrounds us, and the hardness of the hearts of some people with whom we share the gospel, are constant sources of sorrow. Hunger and weeping often accompany poverty (v. 20).

6:22-23 Various forms of persecution will give way to ultimate reward and consequent joy. Note the logical progression in verse 22: from hatred, to ostracism (i.e., excommunication and social exclusion<sup>1</sup>), to insults, and finally to character assassination. Luke recorded in Acts that all these forms of persecution overtook the early Christians. The New Testament epistles also warn Christians about them (e.g., 1 John 3:13; 1 Pet. 4:14; James 2:7). Not just the prophets of old, but also Jesus Himself experienced these persecutions. Disciples of Jesus can expect the same. God will vindicate them eventually and reward them for their faithfulness (cf. 12:37, 42-44; 18:1-8).

The use of the title "Son of Man" here (v. 22) is significant, since it combines the ideas of Jesus as God and as man. Discipleship involves commitment to Jesus as the God-man. The disciples who first heard this beatitude had not yet experienced much persecution for Jesus' sake, but they would shortly. "In heaven" (v. 23) focuses on the ultimate destiny of the disciple. "Heaven" is an alternative expression for "God," which Luke and Jesus used frequently. To be in heaven is to be with God.

### The Woes 6:24-26

6:24 The woes contrast with the beatitudes, both in content and in the structure of the passage (cf. 1:53). They address those disciples who are tempted to refuse to give up all in order to follow Jesus, or who face the temptation to draw back from

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<sup>1</sup>Robertson, *Word Pictures ...*, 2:88.

following Him faithfully (cf. vv. 46-49). This section of the sermon begins with a word of strong contrast: "But" (Gr. *plen*). "Woe" means "Alas," (NEB) or "How terrible," (TEV) and it introduces an expression of pity for those who are under divine judgment.<sup>1</sup>

Disciples who choose present riches over identification with the Son of Man are pitiable, because they can expect no greater riches from His hand in the future. The context clarifies that Jesus was not condemning the rich simply for being rich. He was warning those who were choosing present riches at the expense of total commitment to Him as His disciples. Wealth tempts people to think that they need nothing beyond money (cf. 12:19).

"Riches almost inescapably (18:25) ensnare those who possess them in a false set of values and loyalties which involve a foreshortened perspective in which love for the things of this world proves to be greater than desire for the kingdom of God (18:23)."<sup>2</sup>

- 6:25 Similarly, eating well and laughing are not wrong in themselves. But if a person decides not to follow Jesus because he prefers a fuller stomach and greater happiness than he believes that he would have if he followed Jesus, he makes a bad choice. He is a fool for giving up what he cannot lose, to get what he cannot keep (cf. Isa. 65:13-14; James 4:9).
- 6:26 The opposite of experiencing persecution (vv. 22-23) is having everyone speak well of you. Disciples who discover that everyone thinks that all they are doing is just fine, need to examine their commitment to Jesus Christ. Unbelievers naturally disagree with and oppose—to some extent—those who follow God's will faithfully, because they hold different values. Jesus' experience (rejection, opposition, persecution, deprivation) is what all of His faithful disciples can expect to

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<sup>1</sup>Marshall, *The Gospel ...*, p. 255. TEV refers to *Good News for Modern Man: The New Testament in Today's English Version*.

<sup>2</sup>Nolland, p. 287.

relive to some extent. False prophets often win wide acclaim (cf. Jer. 5:31).

### The conduct of disciples 6:27-38 (cf. Matt. 5:43-48; 7:1-2)

Jesus' explanation of the importance of true righteousness was the heart of the Sermon on the Mount, as Matthew narrated it (Matt. 5:17—7:12). The need of love is the heart of this sermon according to Luke. Matthew reported that Jesus spoke of true righteousness in relation to three things: the Scriptures (Matt. 5:17-48), the Father (Matt. 6:1-18), and the world (Matt. 6:19—7:12). Luke omitted Jesus' teaching on the relationship of true righteousness to the Father, which included instruction about showiness (Matt. 6:1), alms-giving (Matt. 6:2-4), praying (Matt. 6:5-15), and fasting (6:16-18). The first of these sections laid down a basic principle, and the last three dealt with the so-called "three pillars of Jewish piety."<sup>1</sup> Luke recorded some of Jesus' teachings on these subjects elsewhere in his Gospel.

In the section dealing with the relationship of true righteousness to the Scriptures, Luke recorded only one of Jesus' revelations. He combined Jesus' teaching about God's will concerning love (Matt. 5:43-47), and the importance of loving the brethren (Matt. 7:1-5). At this point Luke passed over Jesus' explanation of His view of the Old Testament, and His revelations about God's will concerning murder, adultery, divorce, oaths, retaliation, and His summary of the disciple's duty.

As we have noted previously, one of Luke's main concerns, as is clear from his selection of material, was his concern for people. He did not present Jesus' teaching about love contrasted with rabbinic distortions of the Old Testament, as Matthew did (Matt. 5:43-44). Rather he stressed Jesus' positive command, the Golden Rule, which Matthew included later in his version of the sermon (Matt. 7:12). Luke recorded Jesus identifying seven actions that reveal true love in a disciple. These are all impossible to produce naturally; they require supernatural enablement. Demonstration of this kind of love reveals true righteousness in a disciple: righteousness imparted by God and enlivened by His Spirit.

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<sup>1</sup>C. G. Montefiore and H. Loewe, *A Rabbinic Anthology*, pp. 412-39; G. F. Moore, *Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era*, 2:162-79.

"Verses 27-31 identify behaviors becoming those who have fully embraced Jesus' message, while vv 31-38 summarize those behaviors and develop their motivational bases."<sup>1</sup>

6:27 "Love" (Gr. *agape*) involves demonstrating genuine concern for the welfare of another person, regardless of that one's attractiveness or ability to return love (cf. Rom. 12:14-21). The "enemies" in view would be people who oppose disciples because of their commitment to Jesus.

"The call for love of enemy is in itself not as uniquely Christian as is sometimes maintained."<sup>2</sup>

Nolland and Barclay cited numerous examples of this call to love one's enemies in the Old Testament and in secular sources before the time of Jesus.<sup>3</sup>

6:28 To "bless" (Gr. *eulogeite*) here means to wish someone well, contrasted with cursing or wishing someone evil. "Pray" (Gr. *proseuchesthe*, the general word for prayer) in this context means asking God to do them good when they do you evil.

6:29 Disciples should not resist the violent attacks of their opponents. The attack may be an insult (cf. Matt. 5:39) or a violent punch on the jaw (Gr. *siagon*).<sup>4</sup> In either case, this is an attack on the disciple's person. An attack against his family members might require their defense, though not with more than defensive action against the attacker. Disciples need to guard themselves against pride, which sometimes masquerades as chivalry, while at the same time defending those in their care and trying not to overreact against the attacker.

Taking the outer "cloak" (Gr. *himation*) implies that the setting is a street robbery. In legal disputes, the undergarment (Gr. *chiton*, cf. Matt. 5:40) more often went to the victor. Luke pictured a robber taking an outer garment. The person being

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<sup>1</sup>Green, p. 270.

<sup>2</sup>Nolland, p. 294.

<sup>3</sup>See *ibid.*, pp. 294-96; Barclay, p. 77.

<sup>4</sup>Morris, *The Gospel ...*, p. 129.

attacked should offer the robber his undergarment (undershirt) also. Matthew conversely pictured a lawsuit, in which an enemy sues the disciple for his undergarment, and the disciple offers his outer garment. In this whole section Luke described what was more typical in the Gentile world, and Matthew what was more common among Jews.

6:30 In refraining from doing evil, the disciple may suffer evil. This is how Jesus behaved and what He experienced (23:34; cf. 1 Pet. 2:20-24). It is what He taught His disciples to do, and to expect as well.

"The teaching of the passage as a whole relates not so much to passivity in the face of evil as to concern for the other person."<sup>1</sup>

"The Christian should never refrain from giving out of a love for his possessions."<sup>2</sup>

6:31 This command summarizes the duty of a disciple regarding love of enemies—and all people for that matter. We should be willing and ready to sacrifice ourselves, and what we have, for the welfare of others. This "Golden Rule" was not original with Jesus, though He made it positive and strengthened it (cf. Tobit 4:15; Lev. 19:18).<sup>3</sup>

"In Hellenistic discussion of ethics, it [the Golden Rule] was ordinarily contextualized within an ethic of consistency and reciprocity: act in such-and-such a way so that you will be treated analogously [the same way]."<sup>4</sup>

6:32-34 Jesus next compared the courtesies that non-disciples extend to others with those that His disciples should extend. He proceeded from the general concept of loving (v. 32), to the more concrete expression of it, as doing good (v. 33), to the specific example of lending (v. 34). His point was that disciples

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<sup>1</sup>Liefeld, p. 893.

<sup>2</sup>Morris, *The Gospel ...*, p. 130.

<sup>3</sup>Cf. Mishnah *Shabbath* 31a; and *Epistle of Aristeas* 207.

<sup>4</sup>Green, p. 273.

should not only love their enemies, but also love and express their love to their friends—more than other people do.

The seven actions that Jesus commanded in verses 27 through 31 are the following: (1) Love your enemies; (2) do good to those who hate you; (3) bless those who curse you; and (4) pray for those who mistreat you. (5) Do not retaliate when others attack you; (6) give freely to those who ask of you; and (7) treat others the way you would want them to treat you. This type of love makes a disciple stand out as distinctive (vv. 32-34), and it is the type of love that God demonstrates and enables the disciple to demonstrate (v. 35).

6:35 "But" (Gr. *plen*) introduces another strong contrast (cf. vv. 24, 27). Rather than loving, doing good, and lending, as other people do with a desire to receive in return, the disciple should do these things with no thought of receiving back. That is how God gives, and it is therefore how His children should give. Jesus promised a great reward for disciples who do this.

"Within Luke's world, the question of making a bargain with God would hardly have been in the foreground in discourse about the ethic outlined here. Of much greater significance would be the way Jesus has just subverted a key organizing factor of the Roman Empire—namely, patronal ethics. The Empire was an intrusive, suffocating web of obligation, with resources deployed so as to maintain social equilibrium, with the elite in every village, town, city, and region, and of the Empire as a whole given esteem due them in light of their role as benefactors. If God, and not the emperor, is identified as the Great Benefactor, the Patron, and if people are to act without regard to cycles of obligation, then the politics (legitimation, distribution, and exercise of power) of the Empire is sabotaged."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 274.



The children of God can demonstrate their relationship to "the Most High" by behaving as He behaves. The use of this name for God highlights the disciple's exalted position.

6:36 Mercy toward all people should typify disciples' attitudes and actions—despite the ingratitude, wickedness, and hostility of the recipients—just as it typifies God's, who continually gives rain to the unjust, not only to the just. This emphasis accords with Luke's concern for people in need (cf. 10:25-37). Matthew's interest, on the other hand, was in God's perfect righteousness (cf. Matt. 5:48; 19:21).

6:37 This verse and the next explain what it means to "be merciful, just as your Father is merciful" (v. 36). The first two examples are negative. A judgmental attitude is not merciful. However, some judging is necessary, so Jesus clarified that He specifically meant condemning other people. Judgment and condemnation are essentially God's functions, not man's. In contrast to condemning, a merciful person pardons others. Throughout the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus was addressing interpersonal behavior, not the judicial system.

6:38 The second two examples are positive. Giving to others is also merciful behavior. What a person sows, he or she will normally reap—for evil or for good (cf. Gal. 6:7). Disciples will discover that they will receive back the same treatment that they have dispensed abundantly, from God if not from other people.

"The saying here may appear to speak in terms of strict retribution, but the thought is rather that human generosity is rewarded with divine generosity, not with a precisely equivalent gift from God."<sup>1</sup>

"Jesus' followers give freely, without dragging others and especially those in need into the quagmire of never-ending cycles of repayment and liability."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Marshall, *The Gospel ...*, p. 267.

<sup>2</sup>Green, p. 275.

### The character of disciples 6:39-49

In the previous sections of the sermon Jesus addressed the choices that disciples make and their conduct. In this section He spoke of the character from which those things spring. He used five parables (comparisons) in order to teach these lessons.

#### The parable of the blind guide 6:39-42 (cf. Matt. 7:3-5)

6:39 In this parable the leader evidently represents a disciple and the person led is someone whom the disciple is seeking to guide into the way of life. If the disciple is blind, he will not be able to help other blind non-disciples find their way. Both disciple and non-disciple will stumble tragically. On another occasion Jesus called the Pharisees blind guides (Matt. 15:14). But here He compared His disciples to blind guides. The disciples could become blind guides if they did not follow Jesus' instructions about loving (vv. 27-38).

"This is the only use of the term parable concerning the metaphors in the Sermon on the Mount. But in both Matthew and Luke's report of the discourse there are some sixteen possible applications of the word."<sup>1</sup>

6:40 Changing the figure momentarily, Jesus compared a disciple of His to a teacher. It is normally true that a pupil does not rise above his teacher in knowledge. The fact that some pupils do excel their teachers is an exception to the rule. The people whom the disciples would instruct in the truth that Jesus taught them would normally advance no further than the disciples themselves. This was especially true before the widespread availability of books.<sup>2</sup> Therefore it was imperative that the disciples pay careful attention to Jesus' teachings about love—and apply them. The progress of the disciples' learners depended on it.

6:41-42 Jesus returned to the figure of limited perception (v. 39). It would be easy for a disciple to criticize those that he was

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<sup>1</sup>Robertson, *Word Pictures ...*, 2:93.

<sup>2</sup>Morris, *The Gospel ...*, p. 133.

instructing, and fail to realize his own faults, since he was in the position of a teacher (v. 40). It would be not only dangerous but hypocritical to try to help a learner overcome his deficiencies without first dealing with one's own failings. If a disciple tried to teach his learner the importance of loving as Jesus taught, but did not practice that kind of love himself, he could not remove his learner's knowledge deficiency. His sin would be greater than his learner's ignorance.

"That simply means that we have no right to criticize at all, because 'there is so much bad in the best of us and so much good in the worst of us that it ill becomes any of us to find fault with the rest of us.'"<sup>1</sup>

Thus Jesus stressed the importance of His disciples applying the truths that He had taught them before they tried to teach them to other people. Their failure to do so would make them the spiritual equivalent of blind eye surgeons. They would be judging others but not themselves (v. 37; cf. Rom. 2:1-3).

#### **The parable of the two trees 6:43-44 (cf. Matt. 7:15-20)**

Jesus' point in this parable was that a person of bad character cannot normally produce good conduct (cf. Matt. 12:33-35). Therefore His disciples needed to clean up their lives before they could minister for Him effectively. Like a pupil follows the example of his teacher (v. 40), so fruit from a tree follows the nature of that tree. In the Matthew parallel Jesus applied the parable to false teachers, but here it stands by itself and applies in this context to disciples of His. Conduct follows character as surely as fruit follows root, for good and for bad (cf. James 3:12). The conduct of Christians is sometimes bad, rather than good, because their character is still sinful. Disciples are not totally good or totally bad.

"The text indicates that although fruit may not be a certain indicator, it can be a suggestive one."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Barclay, p. 79.

<sup>2</sup>Bock, *Luke*, p. 200.

"In Luke's (pre-Freudian) world, a person's 'inside' is accessible not through his or her psychology but through his or her social interactions."<sup>1</sup>

### **The parable of the two men 6:45 (cf. Matt. 12:35)**

This short parable makes more explicit the same point about human conduct that Jesus had just made with trees (cf. Matt. 12:35). The conduct of people typically follows from their character, for good or for bad (cf. 3:7-9). The man's "treasure" is his heart. What makes the heart good is proper orientation to Jesus as a disciple. The good man has chosen to follow Jesus faithfully as His disciple, but the evil man has decided to pursue worldly wealth and happiness. A person's speech normally expresses what fills his or her heart.

### **The parable of the two claims 6:46 (cf. Matt. 7:21-23)**

This is a very brief condensation of a parable that Matthew recorded more fully. Matthew's interest in it connects with the mention of false teachers that occurs in the context of his account of the sermon. Luke simply lifted the main point of the teaching out and inserted it in his account. His interest was primarily Jesus' warning to disciples to apply His teaching to their lives. Profession of discipleship is one thing, but what identifies a true disciple of Jesus is actually doing God's will (cf. James 1:22-25).

A disciple cannot legitimately refer to Jesus as his or her "Lord" and ignore what He teaches. The double title ("Lord, Lord") was common in Judaism to strengthen the form of the address (cf. Gen. 22:11; 46:2; Exod. 3:4; 1 Sam. 3:10). Here it implies great honor. "Lord" was a respectful address, as we have noted, but in view of who Jesus was it came to imply the highest respect. Used intelligently it implied deity, messiahship, and sovereignty. However everyone who used this title, even Jesus' disciples, did not always imply all of this when they used it, especially before Jesus' resurrection and ascension.

### **The parable of the two builders 6:47-49 (cf. Matt. 7:24-27)**

This final parable is an appeal to the hearers, who were primarily Jesus' disciples (v. 20), to obey His teaching that they had heard (cf. James 1:21-

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<sup>1</sup>Green, p. 277.

25; Ezek. 13:10-16). As such, it is a conclusion to the whole sermon. Luke omitted the response of the people, which Matthew mentioned.

6:47-48 Jesus compared a disciple who heard His teachings, and then put them into practice, to a house built on a solid foundation ("rock"). Luke stressed the digging of a proper foundation. Perhaps he had Hellenistic houses with basements in mind.<sup>1</sup> The floodwaters represent the forces of enemies and temptations that threaten to move the disciple away from these moorings, perhaps even divine testing.

6:49 The disciple who does not both hear and apply Jesus' teachings, specifically what He had just taught about commitment choices and loving conduct, could anticipate ruin. It is as foolish to hear Jesus' teachings without obeying Him as it is to build a house without first laying a solid foundation.

"... in Matthew the difference between the two men is that they chose different sites on which to build; here they differ in what they do on the sites."<sup>2</sup>

"In every decision in life there is a short view and a long view. Happy is the man who never barter future good for present pleasure. Happy is the man who sees things, not in the light of the moment, but in the light of eternity."<sup>3</sup>

Throughout this sermon, Jesus was not contrasting believers and unbelievers, but disciples who followed Him and those who did not. The Gospel writers were not too concerned about identifying the moment when a person placed saving faith in Jesus and passed from death to life. This became a greater concern to the writers of the New Testament epistles. However, even they were not as interested in nailing down the moment of regeneration as some modern Christians sometimes are. Jesus and the Gospel writers put more emphasis on the importance of people making decisions to follow Jesus, to learn from Him, to place their trust in Him, and to become wholehearted participants with Him in His mission. That was

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<sup>1</sup>J. Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus*, p. 27, n. 9.

<sup>2</sup>Morris, *The Gospel ...*, p. 134.

<sup>3</sup>Barclay, p. 81.

particularly Luke's interest in relating what Jesus taught His disciples in the Sermon on the Mount. I am not depreciating the vital importance of trusting in Jesus in a moment of saving faith. But normally learning from Jesus precedes that moment. In view of the disciples' backgrounds they needed to be prepared to recognize and acknowledge Jesus for who He was and to place saving faith in Him. The same is true of most people.

#### **D. JESUS' COMPASSION FOR PEOPLE CH. 7**

This section of Luke's Gospel records Jesus revealing Himself further to people. Luke presented Him as the fulfillment of prophecies about God's gracious intervention into earthly life (e.g., Isa. 61:1-2a; cf. Luke 4:18). Jesus met many needs of people, both physical and spiritual. Luke pictured Jesus showing compassion on a Gentile, a widow, and a sinful woman. The multitudes generally regarded these gracious acts as evidences of a divine visitation. But the Pharisees viewed them with suspicion. The unifying theme of this chapter is Jesus' compassion for people.

"In his ministry Jesus intervenes on the side of the oppressed and excluded, assuring them that they share in God's salvation and defending them against others who want to maintain their own superiority at the expense of such people. The groups for whom Jesus intervenes are not sharply defined and delimited. They include a number of partly overlapping groups. In his ministry Jesus helps the poor, sinners, tax collectors, women, Samaritans, and Gentiles. Each of these groups was excluded or subordinated in the society to which Jesus spoke, and the Lukan narrator seems to be especially interested in Jesus' ministry to these people."<sup>1</sup>

#### **1. The healing of a centurion's servant 7:1-10 (cf. Matt. 8:5-13)**

This incident shows Jesus extending grace to a Gentile through Jewish intermediaries. This story would have helped Luke's original Gentile readers appreciate that Jesus' mission included them as well as the Jews. It is another case in which Jesus commended the faith of someone (cf. 1:45; 5:20). Luke continued to stress Jesus' authority and the power of His word

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<sup>1</sup>Tannehill, 1:103.

(cf. 4:32, 36). The similarities between this incident and the conversion of Cornelius are striking (cf. Acts 10).

"His story is thus an example of the fact that God is willing to accept all men alike and that everyone who fears him and performs righteousness is acceptable to him ( Acts 10:34f.)."<sup>1</sup>

The good relations between the Jews and this Gentile show their compatibility, which was an important lesson for early Christians, since there were Jewish-Gentile tensions within the early church. Jesus also noted the unbelief that characterized the Jews generally, which is another important reality that the early church had to deal with. In his account of this healing, Matthew, writing to Jews, stressed the inclusion of Gentiles in God's plan, but Luke, writing to Gentiles, emphasized the importance of Gentiles loving Jews.<sup>2</sup>

- 7:1 This verse is transitional. It helps us readers appreciate the fact that "people" generally (Gr. *laos*), not just disciples, were listening to the Sermon on the Mount—at least the last part of it (cf. Matt. 7:28). The Greek word that Luke used to describe the completion of Jesus' teaching on that occasion is *eplerosen*, which means "fulfilled" He thus implied that this teaching was a fulfillment of prophecy about the Messiah, perhaps that He would preach good news to the poor (4:18; 6:20; Isa. 61:1). The centurion illustrates the proper response to Jesus' authoritative words.
- 7:2 These verses are unique to Luke's account. They give detail about the character of the centurion, who would normally have commanded about 100 soldiers.<sup>3</sup> He had a personal concern for his slave whom he honored and respected ("highly regarded," Gr. *entimos*), which was unusual and commendable. This affectionate regard is also clear in his use of the Greek word *pais* to describe the servant (v. 7). This word elsewhere sometimes describes a son (John 4:51).

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<sup>1</sup>Marshall, *The Gospel ...*, p. 277.

<sup>2</sup>Edersheim, *The Life ...*, 1:544.

<sup>3</sup>Robertson, *Word Pictures ...*, 2:97.

7:3 The centurion also enjoyed the respect of the Jews in Capernaum, so much so that he felt free to ask some of the local Jewish elders to approach Jesus for him (cf. 1 Tim. 3:7).

"This is a very ancient and common custom. Everything is done by mediation [cf. Num. 22:15-16]."<sup>1</sup>

Normally the Jews did not like the Roman soldiers who occupied their towns.<sup>2</sup> The slave was evidently too sick to bring to Jesus. Luke described him as about to die. Matthew described him as paralyzed and in great pain (Matt. 8:6).

"Likely the centurion was a proselyte of the gate, which meant that he had not yet been baptized and circumcised, nor could he yet offer a sacrifice. Had he been a full proselyte to Judaism he would not have sent the Jewish elders to plead his case."<sup>3</sup>

7:4-5 The village leaders explained to Jesus why they were interceding for the centurion. Their affection for him is obvious and quite untypical, as was a Roman soldier's affection for the Jews. Any person in this centurion's position could have enriched himself honestly.<sup>4</sup> Consequently the fact that he was so generous with the Jewish residents of Capernaum shows his selfless concern for their welfare. Of course by building their synagogue, the centurion had placed the Jewish residents in his debt, which in that society was expected to require repayment in some form.<sup>5</sup> Early Jewish Christian readers should have concluded that, since Jews thought this Gentile worthy of Jesus' help, they should see no problem with accepting similar people into the church.

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<sup>1</sup>Thomson, 1:313.

<sup>2</sup>See Nolland, pp. 316-18, for the view that this centurion was not a Roman but part of Herod Antipas' Gentile army.

<sup>3</sup>Ryrie, p. 60.

<sup>4</sup>B. S. Easton, *The Gospel according to St. Luke*, p. 95.

<sup>5</sup>Green, p. 285.



The New Testament writers referred to nine centurions all together, and they all appear in a favorable light. They are: (1) this one, (2) the centurion at Jesus' crucifixion (Matt. 27:54), (3) Cornelius (Acts 10), (4) the centurion to whom Paul revealed his Roman citizenship (Acts 22:25-26), (5) the centurion to whom Paul spoke about his nephew (Acts 23:17-18), (6 and 7) the two centurions who prepared for Paul's transfer from Jerusalem to Caesarea (Acts 23:23-24), (8) the centurion whom Felix charged to keep Paul in custody in Caesarea (Acts 24:23), and (9) Julius, who treated Paul kindly on his way to Rome (Acts 27:1, 3, 43).

7:6-7 It seems unusual that the centurion would send for Jesus and then tell Him not to come. Apparently his humility moved him to do so (cf. 3:16). He felt unworthy that Jesus should enter his house. He understood that Jews customarily avoided entering the homes of Gentiles because they considered them ritually unclean. He may also have wished to spare Jesus the embarrassment of entering a Gentile's house, since many Jews would have criticized Jesus for doing so.<sup>1</sup> He even felt unfit (spiritually, morally, religiously) to meet Jesus outside his house.

7:8 However, the main point of the centurion's words was his recognition of Jesus' authority. He viewed Jesus' relationship to sickness as similar to his own relationship to his subordinates. He saw both men as operating in a chain of command—under the authority of others, but also in authority over others. Jesus could therefore bid sickness to come, to go, and to behave ("Do this!"), like this soldier ordered other people around. Jesus therefore only needed to issue an authoritative command, like the centurion gave orders, and the sickness would depart. All these men had to do was say the word and things happened. This man not only viewed Jesus as having authority over sickness, but he even believed that Jesus' spoken word would be sufficient to heal.

7:9 Jesus' comment did not slander the faith of the Jews. One would expect them to have faith, since they had the

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 284.

prophecies about Messiah in Scripture, but the Gentiles did not have that light. The centurion believed that Jesus could heal his servant, not that He would heal him. The only two instances of Jesus marveling at people are here, on account of faith, and at Nazareth, because of unbelief (Mark 6:6). The centurion's belief in Jesus' authority was unusual, apparently because it rested on reports, and perhaps personal observation, of Jesus' previous ministry.

7:10 Jesus rewarded his faith by healing his servant.

"Here was one, who was in the state described in the first clauses of the 'Beatitudes,' and to whom came the promise of the second clauses; because Christ is the connecting link between the two, and because He consciously was such to the Centurion, and, indeed, the only possible connecting link between them."<sup>1</sup>

Jesus did not limit His healing ministry to people who believed that He was the divine Son of God. He evidently healed some people who expressed no understanding of His true identity, simply because He felt compassion for them and chose to bless them (cf. vv. 11-17; 6:19; John 9:11; Acts 10:38). Even the Twelve did not understand that Jesus was both God and man until God revealed that to Peter and he confessed it at Caesarea Philippi (Matt. 16:16). It may therefore be incorrect to conclude that this centurion became a believer in Jesus' deity here, though he may have. He did believe that Jesus was at least a prophet of God, and probably he believed that Jesus was the Jewish Messiah (cf. 2 Kings 5:1-14). Jesus rewarded his faith because he responded, as he should have, to the information about Jesus that he had. That is essentially what Jesus had been teaching His disciples to do in the Sermon on the Mount. And that is what Luke wanted his readers to do too.<sup>2</sup>

"Faith is always cultivated by looking at its object; faith is always weakened by looking at itself. When we come to Christ for salvation, we are told to believe him. We are exhorted to

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<sup>1</sup>Edersheim, *The Life ...*, 1:549.

<sup>2</sup>See Zane C. Hodges, "The Centurion's Faith in Matthew and Luke," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 121:484 (October-December 1964):321-32.

live the Christian life by walking by faith in him. If we look at our faith, we will be discouraged; if we look at him, our faith will be strengthened."<sup>1</sup>

## 2. The raising of a widow's son 7:11-17

This miracle lifted the popular appreciation of Jesus' authority to new heights. Luke also continued to stress Jesus' compassion for people, in this case a widow whose son had died, by including this incident in his Gospel. She is the epitome of the "poor" to whom Jesus came to bring good news (cf. 4:18). The importance of faith in Jesus is not strong in this pericope. But the motif of the joy that Jesus brings recurs. The incident also sets the stage for Jesus' interview by John the Baptist's disciples that follows (vv. 18-23).

7:11 Jesus may have gone directly from Capernaum (7:1-11) to Nain (meaning "Pleasant"). Nain was only about 20 miles southwest of Capernaum. It lay on the northern slope of the Hill of Moreh, which stood at the eastern end of the Jezreel Valley. It was six miles south and a little east of Nazareth, and it was easily visible across the valley from Nazareth. The Hill of Moreh was a significant site, because on its south side stood Shunem, where Elisha raised the son of the Shunammite woman (2 Kings 4:18-37). Luke distinguished two groups of people who accompanied Jesus, namely, His disciples, and a large crowd of presumably non-disciples.

"Near the eastern gate of Nain, along the road to Capernaum, are rock tombs. Jesus, approaching from Capernaum, may have met the funeral procession coming out of the city on the way to these tombs."<sup>2</sup>

7:12 Friends were carrying the corpse out through the city gate in order to bury it outside the town, as was customary.

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<sup>1</sup>Ryrie, p. 62.

<sup>2</sup>Tenney, "The Gospel ...," pp. 1039-40.

"As the funeral procession passed, every one was expected, if possible, to join the convoy."<sup>1</sup>

"Cremation was denounced as a purely heathen practice, contrary to the whole spirit of Old Testament teaching."<sup>2</sup>

The fact that the widow now had no surviving husband or son meant that she was in desperate circumstances, economically as well as emotionally (cf. 1 Kings 17:10). She would probably have become destitute without someone to provide for her needs. The large retinue of mourners was common, though it suggests that she had friends.<sup>3</sup>

7:13 This is Luke's first narrative use of the term "the Lord" for Jesus (cf. v. 19; 10:1, 39, 41; 11:39; 12:42; 13:15; 17:5, 6; 18:6; 19:8; 22:61; 24:3, 34). It anticipates the title that the early Christians gave Him (e.g., Acts 2:36), and in this story it anticipates the remarkable demonstration of His sovereignty that follows.

Luke noted Jesus' compassion for the woman, which was one of his characteristic emphases. The Lord's words expressed His compassion, but they proved to be far from merely hollow words of comfort. He would shortly give her a reason not to weep but to rejoice.

7:14 The "coffin" (Gr. *sorou*) was a litter that carried the shrouded corpse. The Jews did not bury their dead in wooden coffins but wrapped them in cloth.<sup>4</sup> By touching this bier (a movable frame on which a coffin or a corpse is placed before burial), Jesus expressed His compassion (Num. 19:11, 16). Probably His action told the bearers that He wanted to do something. So they stopped walking. Undoubtedly the residents of Nain knew Jesus, and His reputation was probably another reason they stopped. This was the first time that Jesus restored to life someone who had died, according to the Gospel records.

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<sup>1</sup>Edersheim, *Sketches of ...*, p. 168.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 169.

<sup>3</sup>See Josephus, *The Wars ...*, 3:9:5.

<sup>4</sup>Lenski, p. 400.

Again, the simple but powerful word of the Lord proved sufficient to affect the miracle.

A testimony to the fact that people continue to exist as themselves after death is that, on each of the three occasions in which Jesus raised the dead (here, Jairus' daughter, and Lazarus), Jesus spoke to the dead as though they could hear Him. He did not recreate them but called them back from where they were to life on earth as they had previously known it.

"It is worth noting that nearly all recorded instances of raising the dead were performed for women (1 Kings xvii. 23; 2 Kings iv. 36; Jn. xi. 22, 32; Acts ix. 41; Heb. xi. 35)."<sup>1</sup>

7:15 Luke probably wrote that the dead man sat up and spoke in order to authenticate the resuscitation. Luke drew additional attention to the parallel incident of Elijah raising a widow's son by noting that Jesus gave the young man back to his mother (cf. 1 Kings 17:23). He had given him to her once at birth, but now He gave him to her again. This act further illustrates Jesus' compassion for the widow and His grace.

7:16 Again Luke noted that the result of Jesus' ministry was that "fear" (Gr. *phobos*) gripped the people (cf. 1:12; 5:26). This is a natural human reaction to a demonstration of supernatural power. They also praised God that this act of power had such a beneficial effect (cf. 2:20; 5:25-26; 18:43; 23:47).

The people undoubtedly remembered the life-restoring miracles of Elijah and Elisha in that very neighborhood centuries earlier. But no one in the Old Testament had raised the dead simply with a word. The people quickly concluded that God had sent them another "prophet" similar to Elijah and Elisha (cf. 1 Kings 17:17-24; 2 Kings 4:18-37). However calling Jesus "a great prophet" was not the same as acknowledging Him as Messiah, much less God.

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<sup>1</sup>Plummer, p. 198.

Their second exclamation, "God has visited His people," did not necessarily mean that they acknowledged Jesus as God. This is an Old Testament expression meaning that God had sent help to His people (Ruth 1:6; cf. Luke 1:68). Some of the people may have concluded that Jesus was Immanuel: "God with us" (Isa. 7:14), but their words allow a broader meaning.

7:17 Luke concluded this pericope with a notation that the news (Gr. *logos*, word, "report") about this incident radiated over that entire area of Galilee (cf. 4:14, 37). The "surrounding region" probably refers to the area beyond Judea, which included Perea, where John the Baptist heard of Jesus' mighty works (v. 18).

"Jesus' amazing healings and exorcisms contribute to the very rapid spread of his fame. Comparison of the following statements shows how the narrator conveys an impression of rapidly growing fame: After the exorcism in the synagogue of Capernaum, 'a report about him was going out to every place of the neighboring area' (4:37). After the healing of the leper, 'the word about him was spreading more' (5:15). In the next scene Pharisees and teachers of the law are present 'from every village of Galilee and Judea and Jerusalem' (5:17). This is surpassed in 6:17-18, where we hear of 'a great multitude of the people from all the Jewish land and Jerusalem and the seacoast of Tyre and Sidon, who had come to hear him and be healed.' We reach the climax of this development in 7:17: 'And this statement about him went out in the whole Jewish country and all the neighboring region.'"<sup>1</sup>

In Acts the spread of the news about Jesus would go from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8).

This incident doubtless became the basis for many people concluding that Jesus was either the fulfillment of the prophecy about Elijah's return (Mal.

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<sup>1</sup>Tannehill, 1:85-86.

4:5-6), or Elijah himself (9:8). Hopefully it brought others to saving faith in Him.

What were some of Luke's purposes in including the raising of the widow of Nain's son? They appear to include the power of Jesus' word (as in the previous pericope), the life and joy that Jesus provides, and Jesus' ability to do what only the greatest prophets and God can do.

### **3. The confusion about Jesus' identity 7:18-35**

It was only natural that all the people who heard what Jesus was doing would have questions about who Jesus really was. Was He a prophet? Was He Elijah? Was He another former prophet? Was He "the Prophet" that Moses had predicted (Deut. 18:18)? Was He the Messiah? Was He Immanuel, "God with us" (Isa. 7:14)? Even John the Baptist began to have questions. On the one hand, Jesus was fulfilling prophecy that indicated that He was the Messiah. He was preaching righteousness, healing the sick, casting out demons, forgiving sins, and even raising the dead. However He was not fulfilling other Messianic prophecies such as freeing the captives (John the Baptist was one), judging Israel's enemies, and restoring the Davidic dynasty to power.

Luke included much about the widespread controversy over Jesus' identity because it authenticates Jesus' identity and strengthens the confidence of disciples in their Savior. As witnesses of Jesus Christ, Luke's readers faced many hostile challengers of Jesus' identity. This section enables disciples to counter their challenges more effectively.

#### **Jesus' response to John the Baptist's inquiry 7:18-23 (cf. Matt. 11:2-6)**

7:18 "These things" probably refer to the activities of Jesus that Luke had recorded, including the healing of the centurion's servant and the raising of the widow's son.

7:19 John the Baptist evidently had second thoughts about Jesus, because Messiah was supposed to release prisoners (Isa. 61:1), and Jesus claimed to fulfill that prophecy. However He had not released John who was in prison (Matt. 11:2; cf. Luke 3:20). Moreover, the fact that Jesus was apparently fulfilling the prophecies about Elijah's coming may have made John wonder if Jesus was the Messiah or Elijah.

7:20 Luke apparently reported John's question twice, in verses 19 and 20, in order to emphasize that this was the issue at stake.

"Disappointment often calls us to a deeper, less self-focused walk with God."<sup>1</sup>

7:21-22 Luke recorded several messianic works that Jesus just finished doing (cf. Isa. 29:18-19; 35:5-6; 42:7; 61:1). And Jesus told John's disciples to report to John what they had seen and heard. Isaiah did not predict that Messiah would cleanse lepers. Perhaps Jesus mentioned that because His ministry fulfilled Elisha's ministry, and Elisha cleansed a leper (cf. 2 Kings 5). Acts of judgment are conspicuously absent from this list, since this was not the time for Jesus to bring judgment. Apparently in Jesus' day, the Jews believed that Messiah would not claim to be the Messiah before He performed many messianic works.<sup>2</sup>

7:23 Jesus pronounced "blessed" those who accepted the evidence that He presented and concluded that He was the Messiah, rather than stumbling over it. John was in danger of stumbling, that is, drawing the wrong conclusion and thereby falling into a trap (Gr. *skandalisthe*, cf. Isa. 8:13-14). Stumbling (taking "offense") is the opposite of believing here.

"There is a difference between doubt and unbelief. Doubt is a matter of the mind: we cannot understand what God is doing or why He is doing it. Unbelief is a matter of the will: we refuse to believe God's Word and obey what He tells us to do."<sup>3</sup>

Luke probably made much of the question of Jesus' identity, which John the Baptist's question raised, in order to highlight the seriousness of rejecting Jesus.

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<sup>1</sup>Bock, *Luke*, p. 215. See also Philip Yancey, *Disappointment with God*.

<sup>2</sup>R. Longenecker, *The Christology of Early Jewish Christianity*, pp. 71-74.

<sup>3</sup>Wiersbe, 1:196-97.



### Jesus' testimony to John's identity 7:24-28 (cf. Matt. 11:7-11)

Evidently Jesus spoke these words, praising John, because John's question about Jesus' identity made John look like a vacillator, a reed blowing in the wind. Jesus assured His hearers that that was not what John was. John's testimony to Jesus' messiahship was reliable.

7:24-26 John was not reed-like, nor was he soft or effeminate. John did not serve an earthly king but the heavenly King, and his clothing identified him as a prophet of God. Jesus said that John was not only a prophet but even "more than a prophet."

7:27 These verses are almost identical to Matthew 11:10-11. By "more than a prophet" Jesus was referring to John's role as the forerunner of Messiah who was predicted in Malachi 3:1.

"Thee [AV; "you", NASB, NIV, et al.] in the original of the quoted text reads 'me,' and refers to God, who speaks these words, adding, 'and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in.' By implication, then, Jesus is identified with **the Lord** of Malachi, and his deity is affirmed."<sup>1</sup>

7:28 As Messiah's forerunner John enjoyed a role greater than any other prophet, even those who gave messianic prophecies. However even the most insignificant participant in the messianic kingdom is superior to ("greater than") John, because John only anticipated Messiah's kingdom.

"Being least in the kingdom is better than being the best anywhere else."<sup>2</sup>

Jesus was not saying that John the Baptist was not in the kingdom of God. Since John was a believer in Jesus, he was in the kingdom. His point was that being in the kingdom is far better to being the announcer that the kingdom was at hand.

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<sup>1</sup>Tenney, "The Gospel ...," p. 1040. Bold font his.

<sup>2</sup>Bailey, p. 117.

**Jesus' condemnation of His unbelieving generation 7:29-35 (cf. Matt. 11:16-19)**

John had questioned Jesus' identity, and Jesus had defended John's identity. Jesus now warned His hearers who rejected John's identity and Jesus' identity.

7:29        Verses 29 and 30 do not appear in the Matthew parallel account. They reveal a deep division among the people, and they set the scene for Jesus' comments that follow (vv. 31-35).

Many of the common people, even tax collectors, had responded to John's message and had undergone his baptism (3:12, 21). When they heard Jesus' preaching, these people responded positively to it. They acknowledged God's justice when they heard Jesus speaking highly of John. That is, they accepted God's ways as they were and did not try to force Him to behave as they might have preferred. Jesus' words about John vindicated their earlier decision to submit to John's baptism.

7:30        However, the Pharisees and lawyers (experts in the Mosaic Law) did not submit to John's baptism. This showed that they had rejected God's purpose, namely, that they should humble themselves and be baptized.

7:31-32    Jesus' present generation of unbelievers was similar to faithless Israel in the past (cf. Deut. 32:5, 20; Judg. 2:10; Ps. 78:8; 95:10; Jer. 2:31; 7:29). They too were subject to God's wrath. They were behaving no better than fickle children who become upset when their peers refuse to cooperate with them. Jesus pictured the religious leaders as children sitting down in the market place and calling out to others to march to their tune. But their believing peers would not cooperate, so the religious leaders criticized them.

7:33        These unbelieving religious leaders did not like John because he was too much of an ascetic. He would not "dance" (v. 32) to their tune. Because John ate locusts and wild honey, instead

of bread and wine, the unbelieving Pharisees and lawyers accused him of having a demon.

7:34 Jesus, on the other hand, took part in feasts, eating and drinking freely. So the hypocrites accused Him of gluttony and drunkenness. The Old Testament described an Israelite who was a gluttonous man and a heavy drinker as deserving of stoning (cf. Deut. 21:20). Furthermore, Jesus ate and drank with people whom the Jewish leaders regarded as apostates.

"People who want to avoid the truth about themselves can always find something in the preacher to criticize."<sup>1</sup>

John and Jesus were both living parables. John taught the importance of repentance, and Jesus modeled grace, joy, and blessing. However the Jewish religious leaders missed the points of both their messages, because John and Jesus did not dance to their tunes. Jesus probably referred to Himself as "the Son of Man" here because this title always stresses His deity (Dan. 7:13-14). This would heighten the seriousness of the religious leaders' rejection of Him.

7:35 Despite the rejection of the Jewish leaders, those who accepted God's purpose for themselves (v. 30), as John and Jesus announced it, demonstrated its rightness. Their lives were testimonies to the truthfulness of what they had believed, which John and Jesus had proclaimed. Jesus stated this truth as a principle. The behavior of good "children" (i.e., disciples) normally points to their having wise parents (i.e., John and Jesus). John and Jesus had also behaved like good "children" of God, and had vindicated His wisdom by their behavior.

Luke's account of these condemning words is fuller than Matthew's. Luke focused on the religious leaders' rejection, whereas Matthew applied Jesus' words to all the unbelieving Israelites that He faced more generally.

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<sup>1</sup>Wiersbe, 1:197.

#### 4. The anointing by a sinful woman 7:36-50

This incident appears only in Luke's Gospel. It may have taken place in Nain (cf. vv. 11, 37). There are some similarities between this story and the one about Mary anointing Jesus' feet in Simon the leper's house, but that was a different incident (cf. Matt. 26:6-13; Mark 14:3-9; John 12:1-8). Here is a case in point of what Jesus had just described happening (v. 34).

"The touching display of affectionate gratitude shown to Jesus by this woman off the street well illustrates the claim of v 35 that Wisdom is justified by her children."<sup>1</sup>

Jesus reached out to a sinful woman only to receive criticism from an inconsiderate Pharisee. The love that the woman lavished on Jesus contrasts with Simon the Pharisee's lack of love for Him. How ironic and paradoxical that a sinner lavished love on Jesus, but a religious leader treated Him with not even polite consideration. Again Luke featured a woman in his narrative, which shows Jesus' concern for women.

"... the story of the sinful woman in the Pharisee's house reminds us of the previous conflict over Jesus' authority to release sins, suggesting that this is a continuing conflict. This reminder may also help readers to recall Jesus' basic claim of authority to release sins in 5:24."<sup>2</sup>

7:36 We should not overlook the fact that Jesus accepted an invitation to dinner from a Pharisee. He did not cut all the religious leaders off simply because most of them rejected Him. He dealt with people as individuals. Simon, perhaps, had not yet formed an opinion about Jesus. If so, in this he was like Nicodemus (John 3). The story presents Simon as insensitive, but not hostile or antagonistic.

7:37 Social custom allowed needy people to visit such meals and to partake of some of the leftovers.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, it was not unusual for people to drop in when a rabbi was visiting.<sup>4</sup> Luke gallantly omitted describing why the woman was a sinner, though the

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<sup>1</sup>Nolland, p. 353.

<sup>2</sup>Tannehill, 1:106.

<sup>3</sup>Liefeld, p. 903.

<sup>4</sup>Martin, p. 224.

commentators love to guess. One writer called her "a prostitute by vocation, a whore by social status."<sup>1</sup> Some have assumed that the woman was Mary Magdalene, but this is pure speculation. The point was that she was a member of the social class called sinners (irreligious and/or immoral people) whom the Pharisees regarded as treating the law loosely. The liquid perfume that the woman brought with her was in an expensive alabaster vial. Jewish women frequently wore such vials suspended from a cord around their necks.<sup>2</sup>

7:38 Jesus was probably reclining on a mat as He ate, with His head and arms close to the table and His feet stretched out away from it, as was customary at important meals. The woman's sacrificial gift, and her tears, raise questions that the text does not answer. Was she grateful to Jesus for some act of kindness that He had showed her, or was she seeking His help? By constantly "kissing" (Gr. *katephilei*, the imperfect tense in Greek) Jesus' feet the woman was expressing her affection, respect, and submission to Jesus (cf. 1 Sam. 10:1).

"Kissing the feet was a common mark of deep reverence, especially to leading Rabbis ..."<sup>3</sup>

Normally people anointed a person's head, not the feet.

"Letting her hair down in this setting would have been on a par with appearing topless in public, for example. She would have appeared to be fondling Jesus' feet, like a prostitute or a slave girl accustomed to providing sexual favors."<sup>4</sup>

7:39 Simon deduced that Jesus could not be a prophet, since if He were, He would not permit a sinful woman to do what this woman was doing. The touch of a "sinner" brought ceremonial defilement, in the overly scrupulous minds of the Pharisees.

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<sup>1</sup>Green, p. 309. See also Plummer, p. 210.

<sup>2</sup>Morris, *The Gospel ...*, pp. 146-47.

<sup>3</sup>Plummer, p. 211.

<sup>4</sup>Green, p. 310.

"See how apt proud and narrow souls are to think that others should be as haughty and censorious as themselves."<sup>1</sup>

- 7:40 Simon had no reason to expect that Jesus' words to him would have anything to do with what he had been thinking. He had concluded that Jesus could not tell sinners from non-sinners. Simon would now learn that Jesus knew exactly what was in his heart (cf. 5:22). He politely addressed Jesus as "Teacher" (Gr. *didaskale*, Luke's equivalent of Rabbi, cf. 9:38; 20:21, 38; 21:7; 22:11)—less than even a prophet.
- 7:41 Jesus proceeded to tell His host a parable about two debtors.<sup>2</sup> A denarius was worth one day's wage for an agricultural laborer. Regardless of the buying power of the money in view, obviously both men owed considerable debts, but one man's debt was 10 times greater than the other's.
- 7:42 The moneylender cancelled both men's debts. Jesus asked Simon which of the two men would love the moneylender more.
- 7:43 The answer to Jesus' question may have been obvious to Simon, though he seems to have known very little about forgiveness and love. However he apparently knew that Jesus sometimes used questions to lure His critics into a trap. So he replied with uneasy reluctance, allowing the possibility that the answer might not be as obvious as it appeared to be. Jesus commended Simon for answering correctly
- 7:44-46 Jesus probably surprised Simon by making the woman the focus of His parable, and by contrasting her with Simon. Even worse, Jesus made her the heroine and Simon the villain, the opposite of what Simon thought. The woman was guilty of sins of commission, but Simon was guilty of sins of omission. All the things that Simon had failed to do for Jesus were common courtesies that hosts frequently extended to their guests. Simon may not have acted discourteously deliberately. He had just not performed the commonly expected acts of hospitality

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<sup>1</sup>Henry, p, 1436.

<sup>2</sup>See Jamieson, et al., p. 1079, for a chronological table of Jesus' parables.

for Jesus.<sup>1</sup> The scented "oil" in view would have been olive oil, which was both plentiful and inexpensive. The woman, however, had gone far beyond courtesy and had made unusual sacrifices for Jesus out of love. Simon appears in the incident as the greater sinner of the two.

"... Christ does notice neglect, and He does appreciate devotion."<sup>2</sup>

7:47 Jesus next drew a conclusion from what He had just said. The woman's great love showed that she had appreciated being forgiven greatly. Jesus did not mean that she had earned great forgiveness with her great love. Her love was the result of, not the reason for, her forgiveness.<sup>3</sup> This is clear from the parable (vv. 42-43) as well as from Jesus' later statement that it was her faith, not her love, that had saved her (v. 50). The intensity of one's love tends to be proportionate to his or her perception of the greatness of his or her forgiveness rather than to the actual amount forgiven.

"Because he [Simon] trivialized his sin, he misunderstood what God's forgiveness meant."<sup>4</sup>

7:48 Jesus now confirmed to the woman what had already taken place. This was a word of assurance. Jesus used the perfect tense in Greek (*sosoken*). We could translate it: Your sins have been forgiven and remain forgiven. This was true in spite of the Pharisee's slur (v. 39). She had evidently obtained God's forgiveness sometime before she entered Simon's house. Jesus was not now imparting forgiveness to her for the first time. He was commenting on her forgiven condition. This is clear because throughout the story Jesus consistently regarded the woman as a forgiven person.

The sinful woman's acts of love sprang from her sense of gratitude for having received forgiveness. Jesus had earlier forgiven the sins of the paralytic man in Capernaum (5:20).

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<sup>1</sup>A. E. Harvey, *The New English Bible: Companion to the New Testament*, p. 244.

<sup>2</sup>Morgan, *The Gospel ...*, p. 105.

<sup>3</sup>Robertson, *Word Pictures ...*, 2:109; Lenski, p. 432.

<sup>4</sup>Gary Inrig, *The Parables*, p. 56.

But in this story He was not actively forgiving the sins of the sinful woman. He announced authoritatively that they had in fact already been, and were still, forgiven.

7:49 Some of the people present mistakenly assumed that Jesus was forgiving the woman's sins. This again raised the question of who He was (cf. v. 39; 5:21). Jesus did not answer their question, nor did Luke. Those present, and the readers, could and can draw their own conclusion, which should have been and should be obvious by now. Jesus is God.

7:50 Jesus concluded the incident by giving the woman a further word of encouragement and clarification. It was her faith, not her love, that had resulted in her salvation, of which her forgiveness was a part. Consequently she could depart in peace about her condition, even though others might continue to regard her as a sinner (cf. 8:48; 17:19; 18:42). Here salvation has the larger meaning of spiritual deliverance. This is clear because of Jesus' previous comments about forgiveness and the lack of reference to physical deliverance (i.e., healing).

Likewise, the common Jewish farewell, "go in peace" (Judg. 18:6; 1 Sam. 1:17; 2 Sam. 15:9; 1 Kings 22:17; Acts 16:36; James 2:16), assumes a larger meaning when connected with spiritual salvation. This woman was able to go into a lasting condition of peace because of her faith (cf. Rom. 5:1).

"... 7:36-50 is the first of three reported occasions (see 11:37-54; 14:1-24) on which Jesus is invited to dine at a Pharisee's house, and each of the three is a comparatively lengthy scene. This type-scene repetition suggests that this is a characteristic situation during Jesus' ministry and one of special interest to the narrator. Each of these scenes is an occasion of conflict."<sup>1</sup>

"Jesus' parable of the two debtors and His comments to Simon and the woman teach a number of lessons: (a) Salvation is the result of God's gracious work received by faith. (b) God

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<sup>1</sup>Tannehill, 1:178.



graciously forgives the debt of sin that no one can repay. (c) Peace with God is possible because of the forgiveness of sins. (d) The more one understands forgiveness, the more love he will have for Christ. (e) Humble service stems from a heart of gratitude for God's grace."<sup>1</sup>

### **E. JESUS' TEACHING IN PARABLES 8:1-21**

This section of Luke follows the same basic pattern as the former one: There is a block of teaching (8:1-21; cf. 6:12-49) followed by another account of Jesus' mighty works (8:22-56; cf. ch. 7). This sequence is common in Luke and in Matthew.

#### **1. The companions and supporters of Jesus 8:1-3**

Luke's account of Jesus' activities and companions emphasizes that concern for the multitudes motivated Jesus' mission. Mark, on the other hand, presented opposition from the Jewish religious leaders as a reason for His activities. Matthew stressed Jesus' desire to present Himself as the Messiah to the Jews. All of these were factors that shaped Jesus' ministry.

8:1 This verse is Luke's summary of Jesus' next preaching tour. Like the first summary statement (4:43-44), this one also states Jesus' ministry as consisting of itinerant preaching primarily. Luke noted the presence of the Twelve with Jesus in order to qualify them as reliable witnesses of His teaching, death, and resurrection. This is the first occurrence in Luke of the term "the Twelve."

8:2-3 Luke's mention of the women in this section anticipates his citing them as witnesses of Jesus' resurrection later (cf. 23:49, 55; 24:6, 10; Acts 1:14). This is Luke's third recent reference to women who benefited from Jesus' ministry to them, several of whom responded by ministering to Him (cf. 7:12-15, 36-50). Their actions provide a positive example for female, as well as male, readers of Luke's Gospel.

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<sup>1</sup>Bailey, p. 117.

"This is the first woman's missionary society for the support of missionaries of the Gospel."<sup>1</sup>

"... traveling around with a religious teacher conflicts strongly with traditional female roles in Jewish society. [Footnote 55:] B. Witherington III, *Women in the Ministry of Jesus*, p. 117. [End of footnote.] Such behavior neglects a husband's rights and a wife's responsibilities to her family. It would probably arouse suspicion of illicit sexual relationships. In his later teaching Jesus will repeatedly tell his disciples that his call requires a break with the family (Luke 9:57-62; 12:51-53; 14:26; 18:28-30). The last two of these passages speak of leaving 'house' and 'children,' which could apply to either a man or a woman, but these statements are male-oriented in that they also speak of leaving 'wife' but not husband. [Footnote 56:] However, 12:53 indicates that the division in the family caused by someone becoming a disciple will involve women as well as men. [End of footnote.] Nevertheless, 8:2-3 refers to women who have evidently taken a drastic step of leaving home and family in order to share in the wandering ministry of Jesus. The discipleship of women is conceived as radically as for men—perhaps even more radically, since women of that time were very closely bound to the family—involving a sharp break with social expectations and normal responsibilities."<sup>2</sup>

Many people have concluded that Mary Magdalene had been a prostitute. However the Gospels provide no basis for this idea. They simply say that seven demons had indwelt her. In other cases of demon possession in the Gospels, the results were typically mental disorders rather than immoral conduct. "Magdalene" evidently refers to her hometown of Magdala (lit. "Tower"). It stood on the west side of the Sea of Galilee, south

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<sup>1</sup>Robertson, *Word Pictures ...*, 2:111.

<sup>2</sup>Tannehill, 1:138.

of Gennesaret and north of Tiberius. (Though Tiberius was one of the greatest cities of Galilee,<sup>1</sup> the Gospel writers never mentioned it. Herod Antipas I built this city and named it in honor of Tiberius Caesar.<sup>2</sup>)

Joanna, the wife of Chuza, who was Herod's "steward", was present at Jesus' crucifixion and empty tomb (23:55-56; 24:1, 10). She is the first of Jesus' disciples identified as connected with Herod Antipas' household. Chuza ("Little Pitcher") was evidently Herod's manager or foreman: some high-ranking official who was employed by Herod (cf. Matt. 20:8; Gal. 4:2). He may or may not have been the royal official who came to Jesus in Cana and requested that Jesus come to Capernaum to heal his son (John 4:46-53).

"It may be that the special knowledge of Herod and his court reflected in Lk. came through him [Chuza]; he and his wife [Joanna] are no doubt named as well-known personalities in the church and are evidence for the existence of Christian disciples among the aristocracy."<sup>3</sup>

"It is an amazing thing to find Mary Magdalene, with the dark past, and Joanna, the lady of the court, in one company. It is one of the supreme achievements of Jesus that He can enable the most diverse people to live together without in the least losing their own personalities or qualities."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Josephus, *The Life ...*, par. 25.

<sup>2</sup>Idem, *Antiquities of ...*, 18:2:3.

<sup>3</sup>Marshall, *The Gospel ...*, p. 317.

<sup>4</sup>Barclay, p. 96.

Richard Bauckham argued that Joanna adopted the Latin name Junia and that she is the Junia mentioned in Romans 16:7.<sup>1</sup> Esther Ng argued against this identification.<sup>2</sup>

Susanna ("Lily"), otherwise unknown to us, may also have been of special interest to Luke's original readers. The support of these and other similar unnamed disciples explains how Jesus was able to continue His ministry financially. These women, and probably some men, provided money by giving sacrificially out of love for Jesus and what He had done for them (cf. 7:36-50). It was apparently unusual for Jesus to have female followers (cf. John 4:27), though this was more common in the Hellenistic world than in the land of Israel.<sup>3</sup> However there is no indication in the Gospels that these women were the target of the religious leaders' criticism of Jesus.

"Luke establishes a deliberate parallel between the apostles and the women (his gospel is marked by such paralleling of men and women: Zechariah and Mary in Luke 1—2; the woman of Zarephath and Naaman in 4:25-27; perhaps the demoniac and Simon's mother-in-law in 4:31-39; the centurion and the widow of Nain in 7:1-17; the man with sheep and the woman with coins in 15:3-10; perhaps the vindicated widow and the justified tax-collector in 18:1-14)."4

"It is a fact in which women might take deep satisfaction that, although in the four Gospels there are references enough to the ministrations and loyalty of the women, there appears no single example of a woman hostile to Christ."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Richard Bauckham, *Gospel Women: Studies of the Named Women in the Gospels*, pp. 109-202.

<sup>2</sup>Esther Yue L. Ng, "Did Joanna Become Junia? *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 65:3 (September 2022):523-34.

<sup>3</sup>Liefeld, p. 905.

<sup>4</sup>Nolland, pp. 365-66.

<sup>5</sup>Blaiklock, *Today's Handbook ...*, p. 352.

## 2. The parable of the soils 8:4-15

Luke's account of Jesus' so-called "parables by the sea" is the shortest of the three, and Matthew's is the longest. Luke limited himself to recording only two parables, namely, the parable of the soils, and the parable of the lamp. He thereby stressed the importance of hearing, obeying, and proclaiming the Word of God.

"Unlike Mark 4 and Matthew 13, where entire chapters are devoted to kingdom teaching via parables, Luke concentrates on the one theme of faith both here and in the two short passages that follow (8:16-21)."<sup>1</sup>

"The present phase of the kingdom is the sphere of Christian profession—that which we call Christendom."<sup>2</sup>

### **The giving of the parable 8:4-8 (cf. Matt. 13:1-9; Mark 4:1-9)**

As in the other Synoptics, Jesus gave the first parable to the crowds and then interpreted it for His disciples.

8:4 Luke omitted reference to the setting for this teaching. It was the shore of the Sea of Galilee. Instead, he mentioned the large and diverse crowd that Jesus addressed. Perhaps he wanted to picture the crowd as the various types of soil that Jesus referred to in this parable.

8:5 The main focus of this parable—in all the Synoptics—is not on the sower (Jesus and His disciples) or the seed (the Word of God), as important as these are. The focus is on the soils on which the seed falls. Evidently in Jesus' day, at least in some situations, sowing preceded plowing.<sup>3</sup> Consequently it is not unusual that the sower scattered his seed where he did. Only Luke mentioned that people trampled the seed underfoot (v. 5), perhaps in order to highlight people's contempt for God's Word (cf. Heb. 10:29).

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<sup>1</sup>Bock, *Luke*, p. 228.

<sup>2</sup>Ironside, 1:242.

<sup>3</sup>Liefeld, p. 906; Fitzmyer, p. 703; Morris, *The Gospel ...*, p. 151.

- 8:6 Rocks under the surface would only become visible when the farmer plowed the seed under. His unique reference to lack of moisture (v. 6, cf. Jer. 17:8) explains why some plants had no root (Matt. 13:6; Mark 4:6).
- 8:7 The presence of thorn seeds would not discourage the sower from sowing good seed among them if he knew that they were there.
- 8:8 Luke probably omitted the smaller harvests, and mentioned the largest yield, in order to encourage Jesus' disciples with the ultimate predicted result of His and their work. A tenfold yield was typical in Canaan.<sup>1</sup> Jesus' final appeal urged careful listening.

**The reason for using parables 8:9-10 (cf. Matt. 13:10-17; Mark 4:10-12)**

- 8:9 Luke focused the disciples' question on the one parable that he recorded so far. Matthew and Mark had the disciples asking Jesus why He was speaking to the people in parables (plural).
- 8:10 "Mysteries" were secrets previously unknown about the kingdom of God (the messianic kingdom; cf. Dan. 2:20-23, 28-30). The Greeks had their mystery religions, the secrets of which only the initiated knew. Consequently Luke's original readers would have had no trouble understanding Jesus' meaning. The parables intentionally revealed some truth to everyone who heard them, but only Jesus' disciples, who took a serious interest in their meaning, could understand the deeper significance of what they taught. "So that" indicates divine purpose more than result.

One of the principles of spiritual growth is that when a person studies revelation (scriptural truth), God gives him or her the ability to understand more truth. However, when one does not seek to understand it, God hides further truth from him or her (v. 18; Isa. 6:9; cf. Exod. 8:32; 9:12; Rom. 9:17-18).

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<sup>1</sup>Bock, *Jesus according ...*, p. 200.

### The meaning of the parable 8:11-15 (Matt. 13:18-23; Mark 4:13-20)

Jesus now gave His disciples information that enabled them to understand the deeper teaching of the parable. The proclaimed Word of God does not in itself yield a uniform response of faith. Human response to it is all-important.

- 8:11 Jesus explained to His disciples (v. 9) that "the seed" in His parable represents "the word of God."
- 8:12 Jesus also explained who the seed "beside the road" represented. Luke alone wrote, "So that they will not believe and be saved." This phrase reflects his intense interest in salvation. Luke viewed the preaching mission of Jesus and His disciples as essentially calling people to salvation. Satan's purpose is the exact opposite of God's purpose (cf. 2 Pet. 3:9). In Jesus' ministry, the "word" (Gr. *logos*) of God that saved people was the message that Jesus was the God-man. When people trusted in Him as such, they experienced salvation.
- 8:13-14 In both the seed that fell in rocky soil and among thorns, there was some initial faith in Jesus, and later a turning away from Him in unbelief. Jesus said that they believed: they were saved. Jesus did not say they lost their salvation. That is impossible (cf. John 10:28; Rom. 8:31-39). He said they turned away in unbelief, that is, they believed for a while and then stopped believing.

"Believers are held by the promise of God, not by their own faithfulness or by the endurance of their faith. ... Eternal salvation occurs the moment that a person believes the promise of the gospel. Thus it cannot and does not depend on continuing to believe the gospel."<sup>1</sup>

In Jesus' day some people genuinely believed on Him and then had doubts (e.g., John the Baptist). Jesus used the phrase "fall away" (Gr. *skandalizomai*) of "anyone" in 7:23: Anyone is capable of doing this. Luke used a different Greek word here (8:13, *aphisteme*), but only because he preferred it, not

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<sup>1</sup>Robert N. Wilkin, *Confident in Christ*, p. 28.

because it has a different meaning.<sup>1</sup> Today true believers sometimes stop believing what they previously believed because of information they receive that convinces them that their former faith was wrong (e.g., youths who abandon their faith in college, believers who believe false doctrine, etc.; cf. 2 Cor. 11:3). Luke's treatment of this passage shows his concern about apostasy (i.e., departure from the truth), especially as a result of persecution.

Those of us who have grown up in "Christian" countries sometimes fail to appreciate the fact that genuine Christians have renounced their faith in Jesus under severe persecution (e.g., Peter, though his failure was short-lived). We may tend to think that people who do this were never genuine believers. That may be true in some cases. But we need to remember that for every Christian martyr who died refusing to renounce his or her faith, there were other believers who escaped death by renouncing it. To say that their behavior showed that they never truly believed is naive and lacks biblical support (cf. 19:11-27; 2 Tim. 2:12-13; 4:10a).

The people in view in verse 13 stop believing because of adversity, but those in verse 14 do so because of distractions (cf. Matt. 6:19-34; Luke 11:34-36; 12:22-32; 16:13). Notice that Jesus said that these believers ("they believe," v. 13) produce no mature fruit (cf. John 15:2). In the light of this statement we need to examine the idea that every true believer produces fruit, and that if there is no fruit the person must be lost. Fruit here is what appears on the outside that other people see. It is what normally, but not always, manifests life on the inside. It is possible for a fruit tree to produce no fruit and still be a fruit tree. Most fruit trees bear no fruit for the first few years after their planting, some stop bearing fruit after a while, and others never bear fruit. Olive trees sometimes take 20 or so years to bear olives.

In today's world the lifestyles of many Christians would lead onlookers to conclude that they are not believers, because they do not produce much external evidence of the divine life

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<sup>1</sup>See Schuyler Brown, *Apostasy and Perseverance in the Theology of Luke*, p. 30-31.



within them. Nevertheless Jesus allowed for the possibility of true believers bearing no mature fruit because they allow the distractions of the world to divert them from God's Word (cf. John 15:2; Heb. 2:1). Worries and riches are two things—at the opposite ends of the spectrum of experience—that tend to hinder fruitfulness. The poor have worries that other people do not have, and the wealthy have riches that others do not have. However most people struggle with these temptations. Luke alone mentioned the "pleasures of this life," which were a special problem for his Greek readers and are, perhaps, even more so today.

8:15 Luke described this believer ("good soil") as having a good and virtuous heart, thereby stressing the character of the individual. He adapted an ancient Greek phrase that denotes singleness of purpose.<sup>1</sup> Richard Trench described such a person as follows:

"... one [like Nathanael; John 1:47] of a simple, truthful, and earnest nature; who had been faithful to the light which he had, diligent in the performance of the duties which he knew, who had not been resisting God's preparation in him for imparting to him at the last his best gift, even the knowledge of his Son; who with all this, knowing himself a sinner, did not affirm that he was just."<sup>2</sup>

Matthew described this person as "understanding," in keeping with his emphasis on comprehending the mysteries of the messianic kingdom (cf. Matt. 13:11, 14-15, 19, 23, 25). The kind of person Luke describes will follow Jesus faithfully, and produce fruit with perseverance.

"Jesus' emphasis here is not so much on whether a person perseveres but on the kind of person who does persevere."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Liefeld, pp. 907-8.

<sup>2</sup>R. C. Trench, *Notes on the Parables of Our Lord*, pp. 81-82.

<sup>3</sup>Liefeld, p. 908.

In summary, verse 12 seems to view the lost, verses 13 and 14 both the lost and the saved, and verse 15 the saved. However in each case the emphasis is on their present response to the Word of God, be that belief or unbelief—not the ultimate outcome of their response, namely, their eternal salvation. Jesus encountered all four types of responses during His ministry, and so do modern disciples of Jesus. Some people refuse to believe at all (cf. most of the Pharisees). Others follow Jesus temporarily, but because of persecution or love for other things, they stop following Him (cf. John 6:66; Luke 18:18-30). The salvation of these people is the most difficult to evaluate. Still others believe and continue following faithfully (cf. vv. 1-3).

### **3. The parable of the lamp 8:16-18 (cf. Mark 4:21-25)**

Jesus continued to speak to His disciples (cf. vv. 9-10).

- 8:16 This was evidently a favorite saying of Jesus', because He repeated it several times (cf. Matt. 5:15; Mark 4:21; Luke 11:33). In view of the context here, the lamp refers to a person who has the light of God's Word within him or her. Such a person has a responsibility to let the light illuminate those around him, rather than concealing it from them.
- 8:17 Jesus next commented on the parable of the lamp and explained its significance: Disciples should not assume that because God had previously kept the truth secret, which truth Jesus was now revealing to them, that God therefore wanted it to remain hidden. He wanted it declared publicly now.
- 8:18 Jesus concluded by urging His disciples to listen carefully to what He taught them. If they believed what He told them, God would give them more truth. But if they disbelieved, God would remove from them the truth that they had once thought that they understood. Perhaps Jesus meant that they would forget it, though He spoke of this as a divine judgment.

#### **4. The true family of Jesus 8:19-21 (cf. Matt. 12:46-50; Mark 3:31-35)**

Apparently Luke moved this incident to this place in his narrative—from Jesus' earlier controversy with the Pharisees over His teaching about authority (cf. Matt. 12:22-50; Mark 3:19-35)—in order to provide a conclusion for this section of His teaching. It continues the theme of the importance of obedience that has been dominant in the preceding context.

Luke's narration of this incident is simple and straightforward. It needs little clarification. Probably Luke omitted "and sister" (v. 21), which Matthew and Mark included, simply for brevity. His account of this incident is the most concise of the Synoptics.

Jesus was not dishonoring His human family members but He was honoring those who obey God. Some people feel close to God when they read the Bible, pray, hear a certain type of music, contemplate nature, or sit in a great cathedral. However Jesus taught that the way to get close to God is to listen to and obey God's Word (cf. 6:46-49; James 1:22-23). Obedience brings the believer into an intimate relationship with Jesus (cf. John 15:14). Jesus' saying would have helped Luke's original readers understand that Jewish blood did not bring believers into a closer relationship to Jesus than Gentile blood did.

#### **F. JESUS' MIGHTY WORKS 8:22-56**

This section is quite similar to Mark's account. Luke chose miracles that demonstrated Jesus' power over nature, demons, and illness and death, in order to show Jesus' authority as the divine Savior. Again he stressed the powerful word of Jesus. These miracles also revealed Jesus' compassion and willingness to save people in need.

#### **1. The stilling of a storm 8:22-25 (cf. Matt. 8:18, 23-27; Mark 4:35-41)**

"The remainder of the section 8:1—9:20 is strongly oriented to the question: Who is Jesus? (esp. 8:25; 9:9, 18-20; but also 8:28, 37, 39, 56)."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Nolland, p. 399.

This story pictures Jesus in complete control of Himself and His environment. Its climax is not the stilling of the storm, but the disciples' question about Jesus' identity (v. 25). This is the first miracle that Luke recorded that did not involve a person. It showed that Jesus had the same power over nature that God demonstrated in the Exodus (Exod. 14; cf. Ps. 89:8-9; 93:3-4; 106:8-9; 107:23-30; Isa. 51:9-10). The disciples turned to Jesus for deliverance at sea, just as many people have called on God for salvation in similar situations.

"This is the first of a series of four mighty works (8:22—9:17), the first and fourth of which are especially focused on the question of Jesus' identity, while the middle two also provide a pattern for the activity of the Twelve (9:1-2)."<sup>1</sup>

- 8:22 Evidently Jesus mentioned crossing the lake to His disciples both before and after He entered the boat (cf. Matt. 8:18; Mark 4:35). Jesus' suggestion to cross constituted a guarantee that they would arrive safely. The other side was the east side (cf. v. 26).
- 8:23 Luke introduced the fact that Jesus fell asleep before he referred to the storm breaking, perhaps in order to heighten the contrast between Jesus' peaceful condition and the stormy weather. This is the only passage in which we read that Jesus slept. Luke stressed the severity of the storm by mentioning the wind three times (vv. 23, 24, 25) as well as by describing its effect: the dangerous swamping of the boat.
- 8:24 This time of testing was a challenge to the disciples' faith in Jesus' word (cf. v. 13). They stopped believing momentarily (v. 25). Their double address, "Master, Master," reveals their panic and desperation.
- 8:25 Jesus reminded them of their unbelief with His question. Luke recorded a milder rebuke than Mark did (Mark 4:40), perhaps to demonstrate that faith is a dynamic quality that grows and shrinks (cf. vv. 13-15). The disciples' question to one another showed their lack of perception of Jesus' true identity (cf. 9:20). They had believed that He was the Messiah, but they

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 401.

had thought of Him only as their contemporaries did, at least on this occasion. Now they saw, again, that He could perform works that only God could do (cf. Ps. 107:23-30; cf. Acts 27:13-14, 25, 34). The disciples should have trusted in Jesus' word and remembered Psalm 107, which is a psalm that describes Yahweh rescuing people from many troubles.

"Assuredly, no narrative could be more consistent with the fundamental assumption that He is the God-Man."<sup>1</sup>

Christians have often seen this storm as typical of the storms of life that we encounter that test our faith (cf. James 1:6).

"The point of connection is not in the precise situation the disciples face in the boat, but in the feelings of helplessness they have about where Jesus has led them. Events in our lives sometimes leave us feeling at risk, whether it be in a job situation that calls us to take a stand, in the severe illness of a loved one, in an unexpected tragedy, or in the breakdown of a relationship. Any of these can be a storm in which we doubt God's goodness. We may feel God has left us to fend for ourselves."<sup>2</sup>

Experiencing deliverance in such situations should expand our appreciation for Jesus.

## **2. The deliverance of a demoniac near Gadara 8:26-39** **(cf. Matt. 8:28-34; Mark 5:1-20)**

The raging of this demoniac was even worse than the raging of the waters of the Sea of Galilee (cf. Ps. 65:7). Demonic power was evident in the Hellenistic world of Luke's original readers. The fact that this incident happened in predominantly Gentile territory suggests that Luke may have seen in it a preview of the church's ministry to Gentiles (cf. Acts 26:18). In his account of this incident Luke stressed the saving of the man (v. 36), the fear of the spectators (v. 37), and the Abyss as the temporary destiny

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<sup>1</sup>Edersheim, *The Life ...*, 1:600.

<sup>2</sup>Bock, *Luke*, pp. 237-38.

of the demons (v. 31). As Jesus had calmed the sea, He now calmed this demon-afflicted man.

8:26 Mark and Luke called this area the country of the Gerasenes, but Matthew called it the country of the Gadarenes. Gergesa (also referred to as Gersa, Kersa, and Kursi) was a small village about midway, north to south, on the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee. Gadara, one of the Decapolis cities, was a larger town six miles southeast of the lake's southern end.<sup>1</sup> This incident apparently happened somewhere near both towns, on the southeast coast of the lake. A third town with a similar name, Geresia, was probably the same as Jarash, which was farther to the south and east.<sup>2</sup>

8:27 As Luke described the situation, the demoniac met Jesus and His disciples as they arrived at the shore. He was one of two demoniacs, but Luke and Mark only mentioned one of them (cf. Matt. 8:28-34). Doctor Luke mentioned several symptoms of this man's demon-possession. These included disregard for his personal dignity (nakedness), social isolation, and retreat to an unclean shelter.

8:28 When the man recognized Jesus he cried out, knelt before Him, and spoke loudly to Jesus. He said, literally, "What to me and to you," which was an ancient idiom that has been translated "What business do you have with me?" The man acknowledged that Jesus was the "Son of the Most High God" (cf. 1:32, 35; Gen. 14:18-22; Num. 24:16; Isa. 14:14; Dan. 3:26; 4:2; Acts 16:17). He was not worshipping Jesus as God, but was appealing to Him as his Judge for mercy. He wanted to escape premature torture in the abyss (v. 31; cf. Matt. 8:29; Rev. 20:1-3, 10). Though the man spoke these words, it was quite clearly a demon inside him that was speaking through him. This man was under the control of spiritual powers totally opposed to Jesus and God's will.

8:29 Luke added that the preceding words of the man actually followed Jesus' command to the demon to come out of the

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<sup>1</sup>Jack Finegan, *The Archaeology of the New Testament*, p. 62.

<sup>2</sup>Bailey, p. 119.

man. Luke also added more information about what the demon had done to the man before he met Jesus.

"Note how the very presence of Jesus is already much more effective in restraining the man than all the efforts of his fellow countrymen."<sup>1</sup>

8:30 Jesus probably asked for the name of the demon who indwelt the man for His disciples' benefit. "Legion" was not a proper name but the designation of a Roman military unit that consisted of about 6,000 soldiers. The improvised name "Legion" communicated that thousands of demons indwelt the man (cf. 8:2; Mark 5:13).

8:31 The "abyss" refers to the final confinement place of the devil and his angels (demons; cf. Rom. 10:7; Rev. 9:1-3; 11:7; 17:8; 20:1-3). The Jews thought of it as a watery pit deep below the earth (cf. 2 Pet. 2:4; Jude 6). Only God can send demons to the abyss. The demons' request is another indication that they recognized Jesus as God. The disciples should have learned from them.

8:32-33 Jesus granted the request of the unclean demons to go into unclean pigs, which was only fitting. This involved a temporary stay of execution for the demons, thus demonstrating Jesus' mercy. We do not know what happened to the demons after the pigs drowned. Probably they sought other people to afflict. There is no evidence that demons live in water or that they are capable of dying. Their final judgment is still future (Rev. 20:1-3).

"Jesus' agreement to the request has troubled modern readers of the text, especially in light of the fate of the animals. In the (Jewish) perspective of the story, the pigs are of no value: to put the demons there is to put them safely out of the way, at least for the moment."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Nolland, p. 409.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 414.

If the pig-farmers were Jews, Jesus was punishing the farmers for raising pigs by sending the demons into the pigs.<sup>1</sup> Pigs were unclean to the Jews, and the fact that there were about 2,000 pigs (Mark 5:13) indicates that raising pigs was big business in this region. However the larger segment of the population of the Decapolis was Gentile, so the presence of many pigs there makes sense.

8:34 News of what Jesus had done spread quickly in that region thanks to the testimony of the herdsmen.

8:35 Many of the people who heard what had happened came to see what had happened and to see Jesus. They saw that the latter condition of the formerly demon-possessed man was entirely different from his former state. He now sat at Jesus' feet like a disciple, clothed and in his right mind. The power that Jesus possessed to affect such a transformation terrified the people.

8:36 Luke's use of the Greek word *sozo* ("made well," lit. saved), suggests that the man became a believer and a disciple of Jesus.

8:37 Fear of Jesus led the residents to reject Him, unfortunately.

"Their fear may have been a superstitious reaction to the supernatural power that had so evidently been in operation. It may also have been associated with the material loss involved in the destruction of the pigs. If so, they saw Jesus as a disturbing person, more interested in saving men than in material prosperity. It was more comfortable to ask Him to go."<sup>2</sup>

"This scene is thus proleptic in its anticipation of both the power of the gospel and the opposition it will attract in the Gentile world."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Lenski, pp. 474-75.

Morris, *The Gospel ...*, p. 157. See also Ryrie, pp. 80, 81.

<sup>3</sup>Green, p. 336.



"The world beseeches Jesus to depart, desiring their own ease, which is more disturbed by the presence and power of God than by a legion of devils."<sup>1</sup>

Thus Luke showed his reader-disciples that such were the results that they could expect.

8:38-39 The man begged Jesus to allow him to follow Him. His desire was admirable, but Jesus ordered this disciple to remain where he was, as a witness to Jesus' person and power, at least temporarily. The man responded as an obedient disciple, and spread the gospel in this Gentile area. Luke probably intended the reader to identify "what Jesus had done" with what God had done. Luke's words, "what great things Jesus had done for him" are a restating of Jesus' words, "what great things God has done for you," making Jesus and God one and the same. The man more than obeyed Jesus by proclaiming what Jesus had done for him throughout the nearby city. He is, therefore, a good model for Gentile converts to emulate. Witness should start where we are, then God will cause it to expand (cf. Acts).

"The story is a paradigm of what conversion involves: the responsibility to evangelize."<sup>2</sup>

"A more transparent anticipation of the ministry of Jesus' followers in Acts could hardly be found at this early stage in the Lukan narrative."<sup>3</sup>

### **3. The healing of a woman with a hemorrhage and the raising of Jairus' daughter 8:40-56**

Luke, like the other synoptic evangelists, recorded this double miracle in its historical sequence. These are the only intertwined miracles in the Gospels. One miracle involved providing deliverance from disease, and the other involved providing deliverance from death. Both of them demonstrated the power and compassion of Jesus, and the importance of putting one's faith

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<sup>1</sup>Darby, 3:340.

<sup>2</sup>Marshall, *The Gospel ...*, p. 341.

<sup>3</sup>Green, p. 342.

in Him. The tension created in the Jairus story, by the interruption of the woman, challenged the faith of Jairus and the disciples on the one hand, and their compassion on the other.

Both incidents also deal with females for whom the number "12" was important. This number was important in each of the female's lives for reasons explained below, but it probably has no typological significance. Jesus' willingness to cleanse unclean people at the risk of His own ceremonial defilement also recurs (cf. 7:11-17). This showed His superior power compared to the defiling power of sin, sin being at the root of all conditions that resulted in defilement. These two miracles, like the preceding two, revealed the identity of Jesus clearly.

### Jairus' request 8:40-42a (cf. Matt. 9:18-19; Mark 5:21-23)

8:40 Jesus returned from the southeast side of the lake of Galilee to its northwest side, where this incident took place. Multitudes welcomed Jesus, because He had become popular in that area as an authoritative teacher and powerful miracle-worker.

8:41 Jairus' position as a synagogue ruler proves that some influential Jewish leaders had believed on Him—at least they believed in His miracle-working power. Jairus' name, interestingly, means "He [i.e., God] Will Awaken." He may have been one of the Jewish elders whom the centurion had previously sent to ask the Lord to heal his servant (7:3). Jairus invited Jesus to his house.

8:42a Luke alone wrote that the girl was Jairus' "only" (Gr. *monogenes*, cf. John 3:16) daughter. This detail adds to the pathos of the story. At about 12 years of age a Jewish girl was on the brink of becoming a young lady of marriageable age.<sup>1</sup> She was apparently going to die just as she was about to begin to live as an adult, which was a further tragedy.

"More and more, then, Jesus will be found in homes rather than in synagogues, a condition that

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<sup>1</sup>Liefeld, p. 916.

will be recapitulated in the mission of the early church according to Acts."<sup>1</sup>

**The healing of the woman with a hemorrhage 8:42b-48 (cf. Matt. 9:20-22; Mark 5:24-34)**

8:42b-43 The crowd, which Luke described graphically as pressing against Jesus and almost crushing Him, created the scene in which the woman approached Jesus. The exact reason for her continual bleeding ("a chronic flow of blood") is unknown and irrelevant. This condition resulted in her discomfort, inconvenience, ritual uncleanness, and embarrassment (shame). She was, therefore, one of the "poor" (marginalized) to whom Jesus had come with good news (cf. 4:18-19; 7:22; 8:1-2, 10).

Some commentators believe that Luke's omission of the fact that this woman had spent all her money on doctors who could not cure her was his attempt to guard the reputation of his profession. But it may have been a simple omission of a detail that he felt was unimportant in view of his purpose. The point is that no other doctor had been able to heal the woman for 12 years, but Jesus both could and did heal her—in an instant.

8:44 The woman touched the tassel ("fringe," Gr. *kraspedon*, cf. Num. 15:38-40) on one of the four corners of Jesus' *tallith*: the shawl ("cloak") that He wore over His outer garment. Her superstition, that touching Jesus' clothing would heal her, has created problems for some readers. However God honored even stranger expressions of faith than hers (cf. Acts 5:15; 19:11-12). Even though her knowledge was imperfect she believed that Jesus could heal her, and Jesus honored that faith.

"She sought it [healing], though in error, yet *in faith*. And she obtained it, because this faith was known and recognized by the Lord."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Green, p. 346.

<sup>2</sup>Alford, 1:521.

8:45 Jesus' question did not reveal lack of knowledge but the desire to identify the woman so that He could strengthen and encourage her faith. It was for the woman's sake, not His own sake, that He asked the question. Occasionally Jesus chose to heal people who expressed no faith in Him. Here, though, someone with faith drew on His power without His conscious selection of her. Luke alone identified Peter as the spokesman of the disciples on this occasion, perhaps in order to make the narrative more concrete and vivid.

8:46 Evidently God healed the woman through Jesus without Jesus' awareness. The Holy Spirit was the power at work (cf. 5:17-19; 6:19). Similarly, God sometimes brings blessing to individuals through His other children (believers), without those "conduit" believers even being aware of it, by His Spirit.

In saying "I was aware that power had left Me" Jesus meant that some of God's power had proceeded from Him to another person, not that He consequently suffered a deficit of power.

"It is evermore thus in his [Christ's] Church. Many '*throng*' Christ; with the sacraments and ordinances of his Church; yet not *touching* Him, because not drawing nigh in faith, not looking for, and therefore not obtaining, life and healing from Him, and through these."<sup>1</sup>

"It was good for her, indeed it was necessary for her that her cure be widely known. All her acquaintances must have been aware of her permanent state of ceremonial uncleanness. If she was to be received back into normal religious and social intercourse, it was necessary that her cure become a matter of public knowledge. So Jesus took steps to see that people knew what had happened."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Trench, *Notes on the Miracles ...*, p. 205.

<sup>2</sup>Morris, *The Gospel ...*, pp. 159-60.

8:47 The woman's fearful reaction upon being discovered was undoubtedly due to her illness and to her boldness in mingling with a crowd while being ritually unclean. Her falling at Jesus' feet recalls the sinful woman in Simon the Pharisee's house (7:36-50) who had a kindred spirit of thankfulness. Another reason that Jesus insisted on identifying the woman was to secure her public confession of faith in Him. Perhaps Luke included this public confession that followed a private deliverance in order to provide a good example for his readers to follow (cf. Rom. 10:9-10).

8:48 Jesus then prevented a possible misunderstanding—that her healing might have been the result of magic—by ascribing it to her faith.

"It was the grasp of her faith, not of her hand, that wrought the cure."<sup>1</sup>

By calling her "daughter," Jesus affirmed her new position in the family of God. Jesus' benediction ("go in peace") also ties this story in with the earlier one involving the sinful woman (cf. 7:50).

"*Go in peace;*" this is not merely, 'Go with a blessing,' but, 'Enter into peace, as the element in which thy future life shall move ...'"<sup>2</sup>

### **The raising of Jairus' daughter 8:49-56 (cf. Matt. 9:23-26; Mark 5:35-43)**

8:49 News of his daughter's death reached the synagogue ruler while Jesus was blessing the woman He had just healed. Note that those who brought the news referred to Jesus as "the Teacher." This was evidently the common perception of Jesus at this time in Capernaum: He was "the rabbi."

8:50 Jesus' words of encouragement, as well as His recent demonstration of power, prepared Jairus for what followed. He had just witnessed Jesus overcome ceremonial defilement and

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<sup>1</sup>Plummer, p. 236.

<sup>2</sup>Trench, *Notes on the Miracles ...*, p. 207.

disease. He needed to believe that Jesus could overcome ceremonial defilement and death. Luke stressed the sad finality of the occasion by using the perfect tense Greek verb translated "has died," and by placing the verb in the emphatic first position in the sentence. The messenger's command also implied that there was no hope, but Jesus immediately fortified Jairus' faith.

"Whereas the woman's faith needed bolstering because it was shy, Jairus's faith needs to be calmed, persistent, and trusting."<sup>1</sup>

"We often struggle to understand God's timing. In fact, much of faith is related to accepting God's timing for events."<sup>2</sup>

8:51      Jairus' faith is evident in his continuing on with Jesus and allowing Him to enter his house. Perhaps Jesus allowed only Peter, John, and James (cf. 9:28; Acts 1:13) to accompany Him and the girl's parents because the girl's room was probably small. Perhaps Luke used this order for these disciples' names because of Peter and John's prominence and partnership in the leadership of the early church. Another reason Jesus admitted only these few people may have been to make the little girl feel less conspicuous when she awoke.<sup>3</sup> More significantly, Jesus' command to keep this incident a secret (v. 56) indicates that He did not want the unnecessary publicity that would inevitably accompany a second resuscitation (cf. 7:11-17).

8:52      By saying, euphemistically, that the girl was "asleep" (Gr. *katheudei*), Jesus was implying that her death was only temporary (cf. John 11:11; 1 Thess. 4:13-14). Jesus was expressing God's view of death, not man's.

"Jesus' remark is directed toward the future and not the past. It is prognosis, not diagnosis. Her

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<sup>1</sup>Bock, *Luke*, p. 248.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 249.

<sup>3</sup>Morris, *The Gospel ...*, p. 161.

state is sleep and not death because of what Jesus intends to do for her."<sup>1</sup>

Obviously the girl had died because her spirit had departed from her body (v. 55).

8:53 It is interesting that these mourners, who knew of Jesus' prophetic powers and gift of healing, refused to allow the possibility that He might be right: she would awaken. This attitude shows their lack of faith.

This miracle was originally for the primary benefit of Jairus' family and Jesus' disciples. It was a strong proof of Jesus' deity, because Daniel had written that God would raise the dead in the future (Dan. 12:2), and here was Jesus raising the dead. Jesus even described the dead as Daniel did: as asleep—perhaps in order to help these witnesses make the connection.

8:54 Evidently Jesus extended His hand to the girl in order to assist her in sitting up, not to transfer divine power to her. He addressed her lovingly as "Child" and "forcefully" (lit. loudly) commanded her "arise" (cf. 1 Kings 17:21; Acts 9:41).

8:55 Luke wrote that the girl's spirit returned to her body, she got up off her deathbed "immediately," and was able to eat—actions that rule out a gradual, or only spiritual, restoration (cf. 4:39).

8:56 Her parents' amazement (Gr. *exestesan*) also witnessed to the reality of this miracle. As was usual when Jesus performed a miracle in Galilee, He instructed the parents to tell no one what had happened. But in view of the other responses to this command, this one was probably also not obeyed.

"The Gospels record three such resurrections, though Jesus probably performed more. In each instance, the person raised gave evidence of life. The widow's son began to speak (Luke 7:15), Jairus' daughter walked and ate food, and Lazarus was loosed from the graveclothes (John 11:44).

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<sup>1</sup>Nolland, p. 421.

When a lost sinner is raised from the dead, you can tell it by his speech, his walk, his appetite, and his 'change of clothes' (Col. 3:1ff). You cannot hide life!"<sup>1</sup>

This double miracle brings this section on Jesus' mighty works to a climax. The point that Luke was emphasizing throughout was the identity of Jesus, whom he presented as exercising the prerogatives and power of deity (cf. Ps. 146:7-9).

"The most fundamental lesson in this passage is the combination of characteristics tied to faith. Faith should seize the initiative to act in dependence on God and speak about him, yet sometimes it must be patient. In one sense faith is full speed ahead, while in another it is waiting on the Lord. Our lives require a vibrant faith applied to the affairs of life, but it also requires a patient waiting on the Lord, for the Father does know best."<sup>2</sup>

#### **G. JESUS' PREPARATION OF THE TWELVE 9:1-50**

In this last major section that describes Jesus' ministry in and around Galilee (4:14—9:50), Luke stressed Jesus' preparation of His disciples for the opposition that lay ahead of them. This was the climax of Jesus' ministry in Galilee, and these events formed a bridge to Luke's unique major section that reports on Jesus' journey to Jerusalem (9:51—19:10).

Previously Luke recorded Jesus teaching and authenticating His teaching with miracles, mainly among and to the Jews generally. Jesus did so with power and compassion. During that time the Twelve appeared in this Gospel as Jesus' companions. Now Jesus began to minister to the Twelve more specifically. The focus of this training was initially and predominantly the identity of His person. Two other themes dominate this section: the sufferings that Jesus would endure, and the necessity of His disciples' following the same path of service that would result in suffering for them too.

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<sup>1</sup>Wiersbe, 1:204.

<sup>2</sup>Bock, *Luke*, p. 250.



**1. The mission of the Twelve to Israel 9:1-6 (cf. Matt. 9:35—11:1; Mark 6:6b-13)**

This is another "sandwich" or chiasmic section in design (cf. 8:40-56). This structural device usually gives unity to a whole section and focuses attention on the central part of it. First, Jesus sent the Twelve on an evangelistic mission throughout Galilee. Second, Luke filled in the period of their mission proper with information about how Herod Antipas and the people perceived Jesus. Third, the writer recorded the return of the Twelve to their Master. The whole mission prefigured the later mission of these and other disciples to the ends of the earth, which Acts records.

"As the rejection in Nazareth is a kind of dress rehearsal for the passion of Jesus, so this mission is something of a dress rehearsal for the post-Pentecost role of the Twelve."<sup>1</sup>

The lessons that Jesus taught about dependence on God and rejection by people apply directly to the church's mission in the present dispensation. Jesus' instructions to His missionaries, rather than the activities of the missionaries, are the core of this pericope. However the reader must carefully distinguish the basic principles that Jesus taught from the specific directions that He meant for this particular mission and no other.

9:1 Luke alone recorded that Jesus gave the Twelve both "power" (Gr. *dynamis*, ability) and "authority" (Gr. *exousia*, the right to exercise power). These are the same two qualities that Luke earlier wrote about that the people of Nazareth attributed to Jesus (4:36). The parallel Gospel accounts refer only to authority. In both his Gospel and in Acts, Luke emphasized the validation of gospel preaching with signs and wonders.

No prophet was ever able to bestow the power to do miracles on someone else, but Jesus did. Only God can give people this power. Therefore Jesus must be God.

Since false teachers could do powerful miracles as well, presumably by Satan's power (cf. Acts 13:6-10; 19:13), it was consequently necessary that Jesus' disciples could validate their preaching with powerful miracles, as Jesus did. The

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<sup>1</sup>Nolland, p. 426.

Twelve received authority over "all the demons." None would prove too powerful for them.

9:2 The disciples' primary duty was to preach the messianic kingdom of God, and their way of showing the Jews that God was behind their preaching was to perform miracles. Thus they followed Jesus' precedent (cf. 8:26-56; 9:11). They, like He, were to demonstrate concern for people's souls, but also their bodies.

9:3 The Twelve were to trust God to provide their food, protection, and shelter daily (cf. 8:14). They were not even to take a walking "staff" (Gr. *hrabdos*), which was commonly used on a long journey by foot (cf. Matt. 10:10). Mark, on the other hand, wrote that Jesus commanded the Twelve to take a staff (Mark 6:8). The solution to this apparent contradiction may be that Jesus originally either permitted or prohibited the taking of a staff and later did the opposite. The prohibition suggests a mission of relatively short duration, and the permission was a concession for comfort.

Jesus also forbade taking a "bag" (Gr. *pera*, a beggar's bag<sup>1</sup>) that would hold their necessities: food, money, or an extra undergarment (or tunic, Gr. *chiton*). In view of these restrictions it appears that Jesus anticipated a brief mission for the Twelve (v. 10). They could live like this temporarily but not permanently. Furthermore, their simple lifestyle suggested the immanency of the messianic kingdom that they announced. Jesus did not want them to go out as beggars, like the promoters of other religions behaved, but as His representatives.<sup>2</sup>

“The orders which Jesus issues to the apostles are to teach them absolute dependence upon their Lord who sends them out. They are to take nothing along for the road because Jesus will see that they are provided for. After this lesson had once been thoroughly learned, they would be

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<sup>1</sup>Deissmann, p. 109.

<sup>2</sup>Tenney, "The Gospel ...," p. 1043.

ready for their world-wide mission so that whether they had something with them or not, their dependence on their Lord would always be the same.”<sup>1</sup>

9:4 The disciples were to accept the hospitality that others offered them, but they were not to move from house to house in a village unnecessarily. Moving from house to house would probably imply that they were seeking better accommodations, and this would insult their hosts. People who entertained the Twelve would be demonstrating support for Jesus, since His disciples were representing Him (cf. 3 John 5-7).

9:5 Jewish travelers often shook the dust off their feet when they returned from a journey in Gentile territory in order to reject, symbolically, the Gentiles' uncleanness.<sup>2</sup> When the Twelve did this it represented rejection of the unbelievers who had not received them and their message (cf. Acts 13:51; 18:6). It symbolically suggested that Israelites who rejected the disciples' preaching were no better than unbelieving Gentiles. Evidently Jesus meant this not only as a sign of individual, but primarily citywide, rejection (cf. Matt. 10:14-15).

“This act is sometimes, however, misinterpreted. It is unsatisfactory to call it an act of contempt for the city and the people; or to speak of the dust as defiling the apostles as that of heathen places did; or to say that the apostles will have absolutely nothing to do with the place; or to regard the act as equal to exclusion from the kingdom.”<sup>3</sup>

9:6 Luke summarized the mission of the Twelve briefly. "Everywhere" means everywhere in that region of Galilee (cf. Matt. 10:5-6). Luke probably used this word so that his

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<sup>1</sup>Lenski, p. 497.

<sup>2</sup>Marshall, *The Gospel ...*, p. 354.

<sup>3</sup>Lenski, pp. 499-500.

Christian readers would see the parallel with the Great Commission.

Thus Jesus' disciples made a tour of Galilee two by two (Mark 6:7) like Jesus had made a tour of Galilee with them. They did the same work as He had done: preaching and healing (cf. Acts).

## **2. Herod's question about Jesus' identity 9:7-9 (cf. Matt. 14:1-3; Mark 6:14-16)**

The crucial issue in the preaching of Jesus and the Twelve, during their mission in Galilee, was the identity of Jesus. Luke showed the centrality of this issue by placing the present pericope in the center of his account of the Twelve's mission. It highlights the controversy over Jesus' identity. Herod Antipas voiced the crucial question in verse 9: "who is this man?" This section also prepares the way for Peter's confession (vv. 18-20) and Jesus' instruction of His disciples on this subject that followed. Moreover, it introduces Jesus' contacts with Herod that Luke referred to later (13:31-32; 23:6-12).

9:7-8 Evidently everyone in Galilee was talking about Jesus, including the highest Roman government official. But people were concluding different things about Jesus' identity, which Luke recorded. Obviously many of the Jews believed in the possibility of physical resurrection (v. 7).

9:9 Mark wrote that Herod believed that Jesus was John the Baptist raised from the dead (Mark 6:16). But Luke said that Herod questioned who Jesus might be. It may be that Herod deliberated first and then decided that Jesus was John. By including Herod's question in his narrative Luke implied that the answers that people were giving to Herod's question were inadequate. Herod appeared unable to make up his mind, like many others. Only Luke included that Herod kept trying to see Jesus. As later incidents revealed, curiosity and animosity motivated him rather than faith.

### 3. The feeding of the 5,000 9:10-17 (cf. Matt. 14:13-21; Mark 6:30-44; John 6:1-13)

This is the only miracle that all four Gospel evangelists recorded. It is important because it is the climax of Jesus' miracles that authenticated His person as deity (cf. Ps. 146:7).<sup>1</sup> And it was perhaps the most forceful demonstration of Jesus' deity to the disciples.

"Framed as it is by Herod's puzzlement and Peter's confident assertion, the feeding account is intended by Luke to make a special contribution to the disciple's insight into the identity of Jesus."<sup>2</sup>

Jesus performed this miracle primarily for the benefit of His disciples, though also out of compassion for the people. Luke recorded no crowd reaction to it. His account contrasts the inadequacy of the disciples with Jesus' ability to help the crowd.<sup>3</sup>

9:10 This transitional verse marks the end of the special mission of the Twelve (vv. 1-6). Luke now called them "apostles" (missionaries) again (cf. 6:13), probably in anticipation of their ministry in Acts as Jesus' authorized representatives. They reported to Jesus as their authority (cf. Acts 14:26-28).

"What a wonderful thing it would be if the Church returned to this apostolic method. If it would say: We are not going to publish any report of what we are doing; all reports shall be given to Jesus, and not to the world."<sup>4</sup>

Jesus then took the Twelve privately to the region of Bethsaida for rest (Mark 6:31) and for further instruction. This town stood near the northeast shore of Lake Galilee, just east of the Jordan River.

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<sup>1</sup>Edersheim, *The Life ...*, 1:677.

<sup>2</sup>Nolland, p. 445.

<sup>3</sup>Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 439-40.

<sup>4</sup>Morgan, *The Gospel ...*, p. 120.

"As the popular speaker Vance Havner used to say, 'If we don't come apart and rest, we'll just come apart.'"<sup>1</sup>

- 9:11 Luke is the only evangelist who wrote that Jesus welcomed the crowds that came to Him. By doing so he pictured Jesus as the ever-available Savior who was ready and willing to help those who came to Him (cf. Heb. 13:8). Yet note again that Luke emphasized Jesus' teaching ministry before His healing ministry, implying it priority.
- 9:12 It was natural and thoughtful for the Twelve to be concerned about the multitude. But it was inappropriate for them to tell Jesus how to handle the situation, in view of who Jesus was. The non-local people would need lodging for the night, a detail that only Luke recorded.
- 9:13 Jesus undoubtedly ordered the Twelve to give the multitude something to eat as a teaching device: in order to confront the Twelve with the inadequacy of their resources, so that they would turn to Him for help (cf. 2 Kings 4:42-44). They failed this test and only thought instead of buying food.
- 9:14-17 Luke's account here does not differ from the other Gospels significantly. The miracle shows that when believers become partners with Jesus in the execution of His mission, He can enable them to provide greater blessing for others than they can by themselves. And He takes good care of His servants: each disciple received a basket of leftover broken pieces.

"Twelve baskets: one for each of the Twelve, none for Jesus, which means that he who had created all this bounty made an opportunity of the Twelve to share their abundant portions with him. From all that he gives to you, you are privileged to give a little back to him."<sup>2</sup>

The absence of reference to the crowd's reaction to the miracle in the synoptic accounts focuses attention on the

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<sup>1</sup>Wiersbe, 1:205.

<sup>2</sup>Lenski, p. 509.

results of the miracle. It must have elicited another question: Who is Jesus?

"In a remarkable way, that feeding is a parabolic illustration of the method by which those who serve Him are to reach the needs of humanity. Their duty is to yield all they have to Him, and then to obey Him, no matter how mere prudence and worldly wisdom may question the method."<sup>1</sup>

#### **4. Peter's confession of faith 9:18-27**

Luke alone recorded Peter's confession of faith right after Jesus' feeding of the 5,000. This arrangement of the material emphasizes Jesus' identity. Herod explicitly (9:9), and the 5,000 implicitly (9:10-17), had questioned Jesus' identity. This identity motif is very prominent in Luke because Jesus is the central character.

The story is told of a very old woman who used to sit in the front row of her church. She believed that every preacher should exalt Jesus when he preached. So she would talk to whoever was preaching during his sermon. At the very beginning of his message she would shout out, "Get Him up!" meaning, "Lift up Jesus!" If he failed to do so, she would call out again, "Get Him up!" If the preacher did not have too much to say about Jesus, he was in for a long, hard time from this sister, because she would continue to call out, "Get Him up!" That is pretty good advice for any preacher. We need to make sure that we make Him the main thing.

"The section 8:1—9:20 now reaches its final goal: now at last for the first time there is a human response that corresponds to the presentation God had made of his envoy ahead of time in the infancy gospel (1:4—2:52). This is to be the platform on which Luke will erect the remainder of his narrative, with its new focus from this point on the coming suffering in Jerusalem."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>G. Campbell Morgan, *An Exposition of the Whole Bible*, p. 435.

<sup>2</sup>Nolland, p. 453.

Luke's account of this incident contains three parts: Jesus' question and Peter's reply; Jesus' prediction of His passion; and Jesus' explanation of the implications of His passion for the disciples.

**Jesus' question and Peter's reply 9:18-20 (cf. Matt. 16:13-16; Mark 8:27-29)**

Luke omitted several incidents here that the other evangelists included (cf. Matt. 14:22—16:12; Mark 6:45—8:26; John 6:16-66). By doing so he connected the questions by Herod and the multitude, about Jesus' identity, with Peter's answer to that question. This selection of material helps the reader see that the question of Jesus' identity was very important to Luke. It should be to every modern evangelist.

9:18        The fact that this incident happened near Caesarea Philippi (Matt. 16:13; Mark 8:27) was insignificant to Luke. He may have viewed it as a distracting detail, even though the event transpired in Gentile territory.

Luke alone mentioned that Jesus was praying. Luke may have done so in order to tie this incident to the feeding of the 5,000, when Jesus also prayed (v. 16). Thus he presented the feeding and the revelation to Peter as coming in response to prayer. Jesus' exemplary dependence on His Father is one of Luke's unique emphases (cf. 3:21; 6:12; 11:1; et al.). He showed Jesus praying before many important events in His ministry. He was evidently praying privately on this occasion, though the disciples were with Him (cf. 11:1).

Jesus focused attention on the crucial issue of His identity with His question "Who do the people say that I am?" He wanted the disciples to tell Him who the "people" (lit. crowds, Gr. *ochloi*, the uncommitted masses) believed Him to be. He meant: What role do the crowds believe that I fulfill?

9:19        The disciples responded with the views that Luke had already revealed: John the Baptist, Elijah, or one of the other Old Testament prophets (cf. vv. 7-8).

9:20        Then Jesus asked: "But who do you say that I am?" Speaking for the other disciples, Peter answered that Jesus was the Messiah ("Christ"), whom God had sent (Ps. 2:2; Dan. 9:26; cf.



Isa. 9:6-7; 11:1-16): "the Christ of God." In saying this Peter rejected the notion that Jesus was just a prophet, even one of the greatest prophets. Moslems view Jesus as one of the greatest prophet—but nothing more. Peter, however, believed that Jesus was the Messiah promised in the Old Testament.

It is not difficult to know just what Peter's concept of the Messiah was when he made this confession of faith. When Peter's brother first invited him to come and see Jesus, Andrew referred to Jesus as the Messiah (John 1:41). However most of the Jews of Peter's day believed that the Messiah would be a descendant of David who would overthrow the Romans and establish the kingdom of God on earth. They did not view Him as deity.

Matthew recorded Peter's full confession including, "the Son of the living God" (Matt. 16:16). This is a clear statement of Jesus' deity. Why did Luke not include that phrase, since it would have clarified what Peter meant? Probably he did not see that as necessary, since the title "Christ" had become synonymous with a divine Messiah among the Gentiles to whom Luke (and Mark) wrote (cf. 1 John 5:1). Thus Luke appears to have assumed that his readers would understand Peter's confession of Jesus, as the Messiah, as a confession of His deity.

### **Jesus' prediction of His passion 9:21-22 (cf. Matt. 16:17-23; Mark 8:30-33)**

Luke omitted Jesus' prediction of the church (Matt. 16:17-19), Peter's rebuke of Jesus (Matt. 16:22; Mark 8:32), and Jesus' counter-rebuke of Peter (Matt. 16:23; Mark 8:33). These omissions enabled him to focus on Jesus' prediction of His sufferings, and His call to the disciples to take up their cross and follow Him. The fate of Jesus is primary in this short pericope.

9:21 Evidently Jesus urged the disciples not to publicize His true identity because this would have resulted in unnecessary pressure from the Jewish multitudes. He would publicly proclaim His messiahship at the proper time, namely, in the Triumphal Entry.

"... Jesus never proclaimed Himself openly to the multitude as the Messiah; and here, when He does to the Twelve, He explains the nature of His Kingdom, and strictly forbids them to make His Messiahship known. The nearest approach to exceptions to this practice are the Samaritan woman (Jn. iv. 26), and the outcast from the synagogue (Jn. ix. 37)."<sup>1</sup>

9:22 Jesus gave His first clear prediction of His passion on this occasion (cf. 2:35; 5:35). In view of what Jesus needed to teach the disciples, they needed to hear that rejection, death, and resurrection lay ahead for Him. Every time Jesus told His disciples that He would die, He also told them that He would be raised up again. He added hope to each announcement of His death. Yet the disciples consistently failed to understand what He meant.

Jesus' use of the divine title "Son of Man" (Dan. 7:13-14) supports the fact that Peter recognized Jesus' deity. It was appropriate to use this title when speaking of His rejection, because the Old Testament predicted the Son of Man's glorious reign (Dan. 7:13-14). The disciples had seen Jesus raise at least two people from the dead: the widow of Nain's son, and Jairus' daughter. Their failure to understand that Jesus would die and rise from the dead was, therefore, not due to its actual impossibility, but to its improbability—from their viewpoint—since Jesus was the Christ.

**The implications for the disciples 9:23-27 (cf. Matt. 16:24-28; Mark 8:34—9:1)**

Jesus proceeded to explain the consequences of His rejection for disciples who choose to follow Him faithfully.

9:23 The "all" to whom Jesus spoke must be the disciples, in view of the context (v. 18). "To come after Me" means to become a disciple (follower) of Jesus. Denying "himself" (or herself) is more fundamental than denying things. It involves forsaking

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<sup>1</sup>Plummer, p. 247.

one's personal ambitions and desires in order to fulfill the will of God. It means living for His sake rather than for oneself. Criminals going to crucifixion normally carried the crosspiece (Gr. *patibulum*) of their own cross.<sup>1</sup> Carrying one's own "cross," therefore, implied bearing the reproach and burden associated with one's chosen way of life. To do this "daily" (Gr. *arato*, aorist tense) meant enduring these things as a disciple of Jesus day after day with no guarantee of release in this life. Jesus meant that His disciples had to bear a particular burden that non-disciples did not have to bear.

"The wicked have many sorrows (Ps. 32:10) but no crosses. The cross is that suffering alone which results from our faithful connection with Christ (6:22)."<sup>2</sup>

"It [the cross] represents, therefore, not so much a burden as an instrument of death, and it was mentioned because of its familiar associations."<sup>3</sup>

It is particularly the consequences associated with choosing to follow Jesus wholeheartedly that are in view in cross-bearing. Jesus' disciples must keep following Him daily (Gr. *akoloutheito*, present tense) and bear the consequences of their choice, which will involve loss (vv. 24-25) and shame (v. 26) for them. The implication is that disciples need to do this with the real possibility of laying down their lives clearly in view (cf. Gen. 22:6).

"Now 'to follow him' is not just a Jewish way of talking about being a disciple of a master, but a challenge to have one's whole existence determined by and patterned after a crucified messiah."<sup>4</sup>

There is another way that followers of Christ bear their so-called crosses, but that is not what Jesus was talking about

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<sup>1</sup>Marshall, *The Gospel ...*, p. 373.

<sup>2</sup>Lenski, p. 518.

<sup>3</sup>Plummer, p. 248.

<sup>4</sup>John Nolland, *Luke 9:21—18:34*, p. 482.

here. It is by enduring the trials and tribulations that God allows His disciples to experience (cf. James 1:3-5; 1 Pet. 1:6-7).

9:24-25 Verses 24 through 26 expand the ideas of loss and shame that are implied in the illustration of bearing one's cross (v. 23). The contrast is, first, giving up what the world can provide in order to gain what only God can provide. It involves going without, now, with the faith that God will abundantly reward any sacrifice that a disciple makes to follow Him faithfully. In addition, it involves giving up oneself (one's earthly ambitions, glory, honor) now, in order to gain something for oneself, either now or later.

6:26 The second contrast is between glory (a good reputation) now, in the eyes of the world, versus glory (a good reputation) in the future, in God's eyes.<sup>1</sup> Jesus glorified the glory available to faithful disciples in the future by associating it with the glory of the Father and the holy angels.

"Not long before this the disciples had been actively engaged in telling the nation about the Messiah and His kingdom program. No doubt many thought the disciples were throwing their lives away. They had given up their sources of income and were in danger because they associated with Jesus. Jesus assured His disciples that they were doing the right thing. They had chosen the proper values ..."<sup>2</sup>

"What is gained in Christ far outweighs all that is lost for Christ."<sup>3</sup>

9:27 In view of the following incident, the Transfiguration, the "some of you" in this verse appears to refer to some of the Twelve, namely, Peter, John, and James (cf. v. 28). The Transfiguration was a preview of the earthly kingdom of God, in which three disciples saw Jesus in the glorified state (cf. v.

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<sup>1</sup>See Zane C. Hodges, *The Hungry Inherit*, pp. 66-80.

<sup>2</sup>Martin, pp. 229-230.

<sup>3</sup>Bailey, p. 121.

26) that will be His in the earthly kingdom (cf. 2 Pet. 1:16-18).

Jesus' reference to tasting death here connects with what He had just implied about the disciples possibly having to die for their testimonies (vv. 23-25). The introductory "but" implied that many disciples would die before they saw the earthly kingdom. Jesus was anticipating His rejection (v. 22) and the consequent postponement (delay) of the earthly kingdom.

Other views of what Jesus meant by "some ... will ... see the kingdom of God" include, first, His resurrection. However most of the disciples present saw Jesus after His resurrection, and that event did not initiate the earthly kingdom. Others, secondly, believe that Jesus referred to the day of Pentecost (Acts 2). Yet most of the disciples present saw Pentecost, and Pentecost did not begin the earthly kingdom. A third view is that Jesus meant the destruction of Jerusalem.<sup>1</sup> But that event did not initiate the earthly kingdom either.

A fourth view is that Jesus meant that the disciples would simply live to see the inauguration of the earthly kingdom. Yet the earthly kingdom did not begin within the lifetime of any of those disciples. Another, fifth, view is that "some of you" refers to the people present who believed in Jesus, and the rest are unbelievers, who will not see the earthly kingdom. The problem with this view is that unbelievers are not in view in the context, and the earthly kingdom did not begin during the lifetime of any of those disciples. People who hold these views have to redefine the earthly kingdom as God's present rule over His own.

#### **5. The Transfiguration 9:28-36 (cf. Matt. 17:1-8; Mark 9:2-8)**

This event is a climax of the identity of Jesus motif in all the Synoptics. John's Gospel does not include it. Here three disciples saw and heard who Jesus really was. Luke's particular emphasis was the sufferings of Jesus that lay ahead of Him. This comes through in his description of Jesus'

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<sup>1</sup>E.g., Plummer, p. 249; Lenski, p. 525; Geldenhuys, p. 277.

conversation with Moses and Elijah (vv. 30-31), and his interpretation of what the heavenly voice said (v. 35). The whole scene recalls God's appearance to Moses on Mt. Sinai (Exod. 24), and it anticipates the second coming of Christ. There is a recurrence of the three themes of Jesus' identity (v. 20), His passion (v. 22), and glory (v. 26) from the previous pericope, but in reverse order (vv. 29, 30, 35). These are the main points that the reader should identify as significant in Luke's narrative. The Transfiguration previewed, for the inner circle of disciples, the future glorified state of the Messiah whom they had now confessed as the God-man.

"The transfiguration narrative confirms the importance of listening to Jesus, as he sets for himself and his followers a suffering fate; but it also confirms his anticipation of the glorious outcome of traveling this difficult road."<sup>1</sup>

9:28        Matthew and Mark wrote that the Transfiguration happened after six days (Matt. 17:1; Mark 9:2), but Luke wrote that it happened "about eight days after these sayings." Luke's reference is less precise and may reflect a Hellenistic way of referring to a week. Again Luke reversed the more frequent order of James and John, perhaps to link Peter with John as the leaders of the apostolic church in the Roman province of Judea (cf. 8:51; cf. Acts 3—4).

Luke's use of the definite article "the" with "mountain" suggests a specific mountain, but he did not identify it. Perhaps the Mount of Transfiguration was so well known when he wrote that he did not need to identify it but only mentioned it as the mountain on which this event happened. Another idea is that he referred to the mountain this way in order to identify it in some special, symbolic way: as similar to Mt. Sinai and/or Mt. Olivet.<sup>2</sup> Playing down the specific identity of the mountain has the effect of magnifying Jesus.

In view of Jesus' geographical movements with His disciples, it seems to me that the mountain was probably Mt. Hermon,

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<sup>1</sup>Nolland, *Luke 9:21—18:34*, p. 497.

<sup>2</sup>Liefeld, p. 926.

which was just north of Caesarea Philippi.<sup>1</sup> Other possibilities are Mt. Tabor, Mt. Arbel, and Mt. Meron.<sup>2</sup> Mt. Tabor is the traditional site, but it is too far from Caesarea Philippi, and its summit was apparently occupied by a group of people at this time.<sup>3</sup>

Again Luke referred to Jesus praying. The implication is that the Transfiguration was an answer to His prayer. Frequently in Old Testament times revelations came to people after they prayed (e.g., Dan. 9; et al.; cf. Acts 22:6; 26:13), though this one came to the disciples, not to Jesus who was praying.

"The Transfiguration does not set forth the deity of Christ, but the humanity of Christ. Transfiguration is the goal of humanity. When you see the Lord Jesus Christ transfigured there on the mount, you are seeing exactly what is going to take place in that day when we are translated. The dead shall be raised, and those who are alive shall be *changed*; that is, they shall undergo metamorphosis. Then they will all be translated and brought into the presence of God."<sup>4</sup>

Whereas the Transfiguration does give us a foreview of believers' glorified state, it was primarily a revelation of Jesus in His glorified state.

9:29 The fact that Jesus experienced a change "while He was praying" also implies the subjective effect that prayer can have on people. It can transform them as surely as it did Him. Luke avoided the term "transfigured," which Matthew and Mark used, probably in order to avoid giving his Greek readers, who were familiar with stories about gods appearing to men, the idea that this change in Jesus was the same as what the Greeks were familiar with. Jesus was much more than a Greek god. Instead Luke simply described the change in Jesus that

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<sup>1</sup>Plummer, p. 250.

<sup>2</sup>See Walter L. Liefeld, "Theological Motifs in the Transfiguration Narrative," in *New Dimensions in New Testament Study*, p. 167, footnote 27.

<sup>3</sup>Morris, *The Gospel ...*, p. 172.

<sup>4</sup>McGee, 4:287.

suggests a metamorphosis into a glorified condition (cf. Exod. 34:29-35; 2 Cor. 3:7, 13). The vision is of a Righteous One who has come through suffering and has entered into His glory (Dan. 3:12-25; cf. Rev. 3:5).<sup>1</sup> The three disciples evidently saw Jesus as He will appear in His glorified state at His second coming.

"In OT and Jewish tradition, one's countenance is a mirror of one's heart and a manifestation of one's relationship to God (cf. Exod. 34:29-30; 1 Sam. 1:9-18; Ps. 34:5-6; Dan. 10:6; Acts 6:15; ...). Throughout Luke-Acts, clothes are a signifier of status, dazzling clothes denoting heavenly glory ( cf. 24:4; Acts 1:10). Luke's point, then, is not that Jesus experienced an internal adjustment of some sort that led to his transformed appearance, but that his inner being was made transparent to those who accompanied him."<sup>2</sup>

"Some people ask the silly question, 'Are we going to wear clothes in heaven?' I think we will, but I do not believe we will need them because we will be clothed in this glory-light such as clothed our Lord."<sup>3</sup>

9:30 Jesus' association with Moses and Elijah probably should have suggested to the disciples Jesus' continuation of the redemptive work of the Exodus to its eschatological (end times) consummation. Moses was the original redeemer of God's people. Elijah was the prophet whom God predicted would turn the hearts of the people back to Himself—in the future—as he had in the past (Mal. 4:4-6; cf. Deut. 18:18). These men were the only two individuals in Scripture who met with God on Mt. Sinai (also called Mt. Horeb; Exod. 24; 1 Kings 19). The facts that no one could find Moses' corpse (Deut. 34:5-6), and that Elijah ascended into heaven while still alive

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<sup>1</sup>Danker, p. 116.

<sup>2</sup>Green, p. 380.

<sup>3</sup>McGee, 4:287.



(2 Kings 2:11-12, 15-18), prefigured Jesus' resurrection and ascension.

However Moses and Elijah had not undergone transfiguration as Jesus had. Luke described them as "men" (Gr. *andres*). This fact suggests Jesus' superiority to the two greatest men in Israel's spiritual history. Moses established Yahweh worship in Israel by giving the Law, and Elijah preserved Yahweh worship in Israel when the nation was closest to abandoning it. Moses was also the foreview of Jesus (Deut. 18:18), and Elijah was His forerunner (Mal. 4:5). Even though John the Baptist was in one sense the greatest prophet, he did not have the lasting effect on Israel that Moses and Elijah did.

How did the disciples know who Moses and Elijah were? Evidently God gave them this insight. Even though the saints in heaven do not have bodies, God apparently made them visible, as He did when He sent angels to appear to people living on the earth.

9:31 Luke described Moses and Elijah as appearing "in glory" or "glorious splendor" (NIV). They evidently basked in the reflected glory of Jesus.

The disciples observed them speaking with Jesus about His coming "departure" (Gr. *exodos*). Luke alone mentioned the subject of their conversation. The use of *exodos* points to a larger significance of Jesus' death: It was more than just His departure from the earth. It would involve a journey through rejection and death to exaltation. It would be unusual, like Moses' and Elijah's departures had been. Moreover, it would accomplish redemption, like the Exodus from Egypt had done, but on a cosmic scale.<sup>1</sup> Jesus' exodus would open up a whole new wilderness experience—for the church to trek across—like Moses' Exodus did for the Israelites (cf. Acts 13:24).

Luke also recorded that this exodus would happen at Jerusalem. This is the first of his several references to that city as the place to which Jesus now began to look as His city of

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<sup>1</sup>See J. Manek, "The New Exodus in the Books of Luke," *Novum Testamentum* 2 (1955):8-23.

destiny (cf. v. 51, 53; 13:33; 17:11; 18:31). Referring to Jesus' departure as an accomplishment suggests that it was the fulfillment of Jesus' destiny as the Suffering Servant, which Scripture predicted.

"Much of Luke's Gospel from here through chapter 19 concerns preparation of the disciples for ministry in light of his [Jesus'] departure."<sup>1</sup>

"The purpose of the Transfiguration was to strengthen the heart of Jesus as he was praying long about his approaching death and to give these chosen three disciples a glimpse of his glory for the hour of darkness coming. No one on earth understood the heart of Jesus and so Moses and Elijah came. The poor disciples utterly failed to grasp the significance of it all."<sup>2</sup>

9:32 The information in this verse is also unique to the third Gospel. Evidently the three disciples, "overcome with sleep," had either been sleeping or had almost fallen asleep while Jesus was praying (v. 29; cf. 22:45). Obviously they were awake or they could not have heard the discussion between Jesus, Moses, and Elijah. But they were not spiritually ready for what they experienced. Perhaps the Transfiguration happened at night.<sup>3</sup> If Jesus found it necessary to pray then, they should have followed His example. Their improper response comes out in the next verse. They apparently did not understand the significance of the discussion about Jesus' exodus. The vision before them, however, awakened them fully.

9:33 Peter appears to have wanted to prolong this great experience, but his suggestion was inappropriate. By offering to build three shelters, Peter put Jesus on the same level as Moses and Elijah. Even worse, by suggesting their construction, Peter was inadvertently—though nonetheless effectively—proposing something that would delay Jesus' departure to Jerusalem. He

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<sup>1</sup>Bock, *Luke*, p. 271.

<sup>2</sup>Robertson, *Word Pictures ...*, 2:131.

<sup>3</sup>Jamieson, et al., pp. 968, 1002.

naturally viewed Jerusalem as a place to avoid, knowing the possibility of danger there. Peter may have thought that the earthly kingdom had arrived, and there was no reason for Jesus and His disciples to go to Jerusalem.

The "tabernacles (sacred tents)" that Peter suggested building were probably the same kind that the Jews erected at the yearly Feast of Tabernacles in order to commemorate the wilderness wanderings and to anticipate the earthly kingdom (Lev. 23:42-43; Neh. 8:14-17; Zech. 14:16-21).

"Peter suggested that they build three booths probably because of the prophecy in Zechariah 14:16 that the Feast of Tabernacles (Booths) would be celebrated when Christ reigns on the earth. Apparently Peter thought that with Moses, Elijah, the three disciples, and Christ all present, this must be the beginning of the earthly kingdom."<sup>1</sup>

Later, in the Garden of Gethsemane, the disciples also fell asleep while Jesus was praying, and when they awoke Peter again reacted inappropriately (22:39-50).

9:34 The cloud that formed and began to overshadow Jesus, Moses, and Elijah was undoubtedly the *shekinah*: the visible vehicle for God's localized presence during the wilderness wanderings (Exod. 13:21-22; 16:10; 24:16; 40:34-38). It was predicted to accompany the Son of Man's coming (Isa. 4:5; Dan. 7:13). Its presence is another indication that the Second Coming is in view. The Greek word *episkiazo* ("overshadow") translates the Hebrew word *shakan* in the Septuagint, from which the term "shekinah" comes. Thus the reader has two hints that God was drawing near: the bright (Gr. *photeine*) cloud (Matt. 17:5) and its overshadowing (Gr. *episkiazo*) presence. Evidently the cloud enshrouded ("enveloped," NIV) Jesus, Moses, and Elijah, and the disciples became very fearful (cf. Matt. 17:5-7).

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<sup>1</sup>Bailey, p. 121.

9:35 For a second time God spoke from heaven identifying Jesus as His "Son" (cf. 3:22). Previously God had identified Jesus to Jesus as His "beloved Son." This time He identified Jesus to the disciples as "My Son, My Chosen One." God's words of official approval here show that Jesus was God the Father's obedient Son, and that He possessed divine authority. Therefore the disciples were to listen to what Jesus was telling them about His and their future. The words recall Psalm 2:7, Isaiah 42:1, and Deuteronomy 18:15 and 18. Thus this divine vindication identified Jesus as the Son of God, God's chosen Servant, and the eschatological Prophet.

"Our culture desires to assemble a religious hall of honor from as many religious traditions as possible, all in honor of our commitment to religious toleration. But Jesus does not ask for a booth alongside the others."<sup>1</sup>

Many students of this verse have seen in it a divine warning against giving human wisdom precedence over divine revelation.

"The heavenly voice which declares that Jesus is God's Son recalls the scene of Jesus praying after his baptism in 3:22. In that scene Jesus was preparing for his ministry. In the transfiguration scene he is preparing for the crisis in Jerusalem. To prepare him, Jesus is given an anticipatory experience of the goal of his life and death, the heavenly glory which he will enter when exalted to the right hand of God (see Luke 24:26; Acts 7:55-56)."<sup>2</sup>

9:36 The scene ends with Jesus alone—the center of the disciples' attention. The disciples told no one what they had seen, because Jesus told them to keep it quiet (Matt. 17:9; Mark 9:9). Luke simply recorded the disciples' silence and omitted

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<sup>1</sup>Bock, *Luke*, p. 273.

<sup>2</sup>Tannehill, 1:225.

the discussion about Elijah that followed (Matt. 17:10-13; Mark 9:10-13), thus highlighting Jesus' authority.

The major emphasis in Luke's account of the Transfiguration is that the glorious Son of God had to suffer, but that glory lay farther ahead.

**6. The exorcism of an epileptic boy 9:37-43a (cf. Matt. 17:14-20; Mark 9:14-29)**

The effect of Luke's omission of the conversation that Jesus had with the disciples about Elijah is clear. This healing (by exorcism) appears as the work of the Son of God, whom the Transfiguration presented.

"It is the Jesus who has been transfigured who now appears to help men at the foot of the mountain; what the disciples cannot do, he can do. He appears like a visitor from another world who has to put up with the unbelief of men."<sup>1</sup>

Luke also omitted Jesus' teaching on the importance of faith that He gave His disciples at the end of this story (cf. Matt. 17:19-20; Mark 9:28-29). All of Luke's emphasis falls on Jesus' authority. This is the first of four incidents that show, respectively: the disciples' lack of faith, slowness to learn, pride, and intolerance.

9:37 Luke is the only Gospel writer who mentioned that the descent from the mountain happened on the day following the Transfiguration. This notation has the effect of contrasting the glorious manifestation on the mountain with the mundane world of sin and unbelief below. Some commentators thought that Luke's comment implies that the Transfiguration happened at night, but none of the Gospel writer explained whether it happened in daytime or nighttime.

9:38 The man in the crowd addressed Jesus as "Teacher" (Rabbi). In view of what Luke just revealed about Jesus' true identity, this title reminds the reader of the common understanding of who Jesus was. Nevertheless the man had enough faith in Jesus to bring his son to Jesus for healing. Luke alone mentioned that the boy was the "only" (Gr. *monogenes*, cf.

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<sup>1</sup>Marshall, *The Gospel ...*, p. 389.

8:42; John 3:16) son of his father. Typically fathers were particularly anxious about the welfare of their only sons because they were their heirs.

9:39 Luke did not refer to the boy's condition as epilepsy, as Matthew did (Matt. 17:15). He probably wanted his readers to understand clearly that it resulted from demonic influence (v. 42). A demon produced the symptoms of epilepsy in this boy, though not every case of epilepsy is the result of demon affliction. Unfortunately, throughout history, some people have equated epilepsy with demon possession because of the similar symptoms. Doctor Luke described this boy's symptoms more fully than the other Gospel writers.

9:40 The failure of the disciples set the stage for a great demonstration of Jesus' unique power and authority (v. 42). In this instance they were no better than the physicians who failed to help the woman who suffered from chronic bleeding (8:43).<sup>1</sup> Compare the failure of Elijah's disciple Gehazi to heal in 2 Kings 4:31.

9:41 Jesus' statement to the father and the crowd recalls Deuteronomy 32:20, where God rebuked the unbelieving Israelites in the wilderness. Jesus went on to express disappointment with these people's lack of faith.

“‘Generation’ applies to the people of Jesus’ time as a whole.”<sup>2</sup>

9:42 By omitting the further conversation between Jesus and the father—in which Jesus stressed the importance of faith in Him (cf. Mark 9:21-24)—Luke focused attention on Jesus' power. Luke also stressed Jesus' compassion by noting that He gave the boy back to his father (cf. 7:15).

9:43a In conclusion Luke drew attention to the reaction of the crowd. Jesus' miracle "amazed" (Gr. *exeplesonto*, cf. 4:32) the

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<sup>1</sup>Green, p. 388.

<sup>2</sup>Lenski, p. 538.

people. They recognized it as a demonstration of God's great power (cf. 5:25; 7:16, 18; Acts 2:11; 19:17; 2 Pet. 1:16).

This sign should have convinced the crowd that Jesus was God, because only God can overcome Satan and his demons. There is no record of any prophet casting out demons in the Old Testament. Even though the disciples could cast out demons, it was only in connection with Jesus that they could do that.

### 7. Jesus' announcement of His betrayal 9:43b-45 (cf. Matt. 17:22-23; Mark 9:30-32)

Luke's narrative joins this event with the preceding one thematically. However the other Synoptics indicate that this conversation took place sometime later (Matt. 17:22; Mark 9:31). Luke's construction has the effect of contrasting the amazement of the people with their rejection, which resulted in Jesus' sufferings and death. Luke also stressed the fulfillment of God's purpose in Jesus' passion.

"Luke establishes a sharp contrast between the all-powerful exorcist of the previous episode and the Son of Man who is soon to find himself subject to the hostile wills of men. The contrast is much the same as that which we have seen between the glorified Christ of the transfiguration and the one who must be heard when he talks of going to suffering and death, and when he defines a discipleship path which leads to the same. The Man of Destiny goes to his destiny in a way that defies human comprehension. Here Jesus underlines the importance of this path of destiny and seeks in vain to make his disciples accept his teaching."<sup>1</sup>

9:43b-44 The reaction of the crowd to Jesus' exorcism (v. 43a) was typical of the reaction of the multitudes as He continued to minister, especially as He performed miracles (v. 43b). In the context of this popular approval, Jesus revealed again to His disciples that He would not continue to be popular. He prefaced His announcement with a demand for attention ("let these words sink into your ears"), which highlights the disciples' incomprehension more strikingly. This announcement

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<sup>1</sup>Nolland, *Luke 9:21—18:34*, p. 515.

contained new information about His passion, namely, that someone—a human being, but ultimately God—would hand Jesus over to His enemies (cf. Rom. 4:25; 8:31-32). Jesus' use of the title "Son of Man" (v. 44) intensified the horror of such a prospect.

9:45 Jesus' announcement did not make sense to the disciples. This was probably because of the popular view of the Messiah that still influenced them, the glorious prophecies about the Son of Man in the Old Testament, and Jesus' great popularity. They did not understand because their conventional thinking blocked this revelation off from them (cf. 18:34; 24:16; Mark 9:32). That is, they understood the words but could not understand how this would happen, partly because of their limited faith. They remembered Jesus' words, but they only understood the prediction after Jesus' resurrection. Perhaps they were afraid to ask Jesus to clarify what He said because they feared hearing what they suspected: that Jesus would indeed die soon.

"Some interpreters understand the statement, 'It was hid from them that they might not understand it,' as indication that God prevented the disciples from understanding. [Footnote 39:] See, e.g., R. J. Dillon, "Previewing Luke's Project from His Prologue (Luke 1:1-4)," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 43 (1981):216. [End of footnote.] While the passive formulation may hint at divine involvement, I would caution against the assumption that human resistance is not an important factor at this point in the narrative. If a divine purpose is involved, it is a purpose which works in and through human resistance, for which humans remain responsible."<sup>1</sup>

Thus there was a "suffering secret" as well as a "messianic secret" in Jesus' ministry.<sup>2</sup> The "messianic secret" was the fact that Jesus was the divine Messiah, which He revealed only gradually before the Triumphal Entry. He

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<sup>1</sup>Tannehill, 1:227.

<sup>2</sup>Marshall, *The Gospel ...*, p. 393.



withheld this information to preclude superficial and premature acceptance of Himself by the multitudes. The "suffering secret" was the information about Jesus' passion, which God revealed to the disciples only gradually before the Resurrection.

### **8. The pride of the disciples 9:46-50**

In contrast to the humble attitude of Jesus, demonstrated in His willingness to submit to betrayal and death as God's will, the disciples manifested pride. They had their own ideas about the coming earthly kingdom, and they wanted to secure their own futures in it. This spirit of self-seeking was also obvious after Jesus made His first revelation of His death (Mark 8:32-33). Now the disciples showed a greedy desire, first for position, and then for prestige, in the earthly kingdom. Their inappropriate attitudes are instructive for all Christian disciples.

"The disciples who were intoxicated with the anticipation of the glory that was to be theirs through their link to the Christ of glory were as little ready to find glory in the service of the humble as they had been to see the point in Jesus' talk of the Son of Man's betrayal."<sup>1</sup>

#### **The glorification of self 9:46-48 (cf. Matt. 18:1-5; Mark 9:33-37)**

Luke again omitted several historical details and thereby focused the reader's attention on the essential issues and the contrast with the previous pericope. Since the disciples did not understand Jesus' role as the Suffering Servant, they could not see its implications for them as His disciples.

9:46        The Twelve were thinking about rank in the earthly kingdom. They wondered which of them would have the highest position and the most prestige.

"Ambition of honour, and strife for superiority and precedence, are sins that most easily beset the disciples of our Lord Jesus."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Nolland, *Luke 9:21—18:34*, p. 518.

<sup>2</sup>Henry, p. 1443.

9:47 Jesus used little children on different occasions as object lessons in order to teach different lessons. On one occasion He used a child to teach that no act of kindness for one of His suffering disciples, whom the child represented, will pass without God's reward (Matt. 10:40-42). On the present occasion Jesus used a child to illustrate two lessons. By standing the child—possibly the child He had just restored to health—beside Him, Jesus gave the child honor. Mark wrote that Jesus took the child in His arms (Mark 9:36). Evidently Jesus did both things. The first lesson that Jesus used this child to illustrate was that His disciples should be as humble as little children (Matt. 18:4, 6). Luke did not mention that lesson.

9:48 The second lesson was that acceptable service involves caring about people, even insignificant people such as children (Matt. 18:5; Mark 9:37). That is the lesson Luke included in his account of this teaching. It reflects his interest in neglected people. A child was the least significant person in Jewish and in Greco-Roman culture.<sup>1</sup> A woman or one of the servants dealt with the children; the men could not be bothered with them.<sup>2</sup>

"'To welcome' people would be to extend to them the honor of hospitality, to regard them as guests (cf. 7:44-46), but one would only welcome a social equal or one whose honor was above one's own. Children, whose place of social residence was defined at the bottom of the ladder of esteem, might be called upon to perform acts of hospitality (e.g., washing the feet of a guest), but normally they would not themselves be the recipients of honorable behavior. Jesus thus turns the social pyramid upside down, undermining the very conventions that led the disciples to deliberate over relative greatness within the company of disciples and, indeed, that had led the

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<sup>1</sup> *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, s.v. "*pais, et al.*," by Albrecht Oepke, 5(1967):639-52.

<sup>2</sup> Nolland, *Luke 9:21—18:34*, p. 519.

disciples away from any proper understanding of Jesus' status."<sup>1</sup>

Jesus meant that instead of seeking status for themselves, His disciples should give their attention to the needs of people who have no status—people like children. The disciple who ministers to a person with no status, as though he or she was ministering to Jesus, does in fact minister to Jesus and to God the Father, because that person has status with God. The principle here is that the disciple who is willing to sacrifice personal advancement in order to serve insignificant people, as the world evaluates people, is truly great in God's estimation (cf. Matt. 25:35-40; Mark 9:41).<sup>2</sup>

### **The exclusion of others 9:49-50 (cf. Mark 9:38-40)**

Disciples need to be aware of their attitude toward believers who are outside their circle of fellowship, as well as their attitude toward those within that circle. As in previous cases, Luke's account of this incident omits details in order to cut through to the heart of the matter.

9:49        This incident exposed an attitude of rivalry among the Twelve that existed toward other disciples of Jesus. This was not a problem of orthodoxy; the exorcist believed in Jesus. It was rather a problem of fellowship or association: he was not one of the Twelve. He appears to have been on the fringe of Jesus' followers. John, speaking for the Twelve, wanted to exclude him, but Jesus wanted to include him. The disciples had set up a boundary on the basis of conventional notions of perceived honor.<sup>3</sup>

9:50        Jesus' reply was proverbial. He had stated the reverse truth earlier (Matt. 12:30). Disciples should regard people who do not oppose them as associates rather than as enemies.

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<sup>1</sup>Green, pp. 391-92.

<sup>2</sup>For an outstanding example of such a person, see Mrs. Howard Taylor, *Borden of Yale*.

<sup>3</sup>Green, p. 392.

This incident concludes the section of Luke's Gospel that records Jesus' ministry in and around Galilee (4:14—9:50). Its major emphasis has been the identity of Jesus.

#### V. JESUS' MINISTRY ON THE WAY TO JERUSALEM 9:51—19:27

This large section of the Book of Luke has no counterpart in the other Gospels, but some of the material in it occurs in other parts of the Gospels (cf. Matt. 19—20; Mark 10).

"In contrast with only two chapters in Matthew and one in Mark, it [the record of Jesus' ministry on the way to Jerusalem] extends through no less than *ten* chapters in Luke, thereby forming the longest part of the story (ix. 51—xix. 44)."<sup>1</sup>

Like a good teacher Jesus repeated some of His lessons on different occasions. This section consists largely of instruction that Jesus gave His disciples with only brief references to geographic movements. Luke de-emphasized the topographical data in this section, except those relating to Jerusalem.<sup>2</sup> We have already noticed that Luke had more interest in lessons than in details of geography and chronology.

The skeletal references to Jesus' movements show a general shift from Galilee toward Jerusalem (e.g., 9:52; 10:38; 13:22, 32-33; 17:11; 18:31, 35; 19:1, 28-29). His journey was not direct (cf. 10:38; 17:11). Jesus visited Jerusalem more than once, but this section records Jesus leaving Galilee and arriving in Jerusalem for the last time before His passion. Luke presented what were really three trips to Jerusalem as one.<sup>3</sup> John told us more about those three trips in his Gospel.

The ministry of Jesus during this journey was not just different because of where it took place. It took on new characteristics. His ministry to the disciples seems to have occupied His primary attention, though Luke featured this less than Mark. We have noted a strong emphasis on Jesus' identity (Christology) in the previous chapters. Now the disciples' mission becomes the dominant theme. There are many words of warning to the rich

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<sup>1</sup>Baxter, 5:230.

<sup>2</sup>Carson and Moo, p. 200, n. 1.

<sup>3</sup>Edersheim, *The Life ...*, 2:128.

and the complacent, as well as to the Pharisees, in this section. Many students of Luke and Acts have noticed the common emphasis on travel that characterizes both books, and they have pointed out some significant comparisons. Jerusalem was for Jesus the destination toward which He pressed, as Rome was for Paul.

The literary structure of this section is a chiasm (inverted parallelism). The framing sections both deal with rejection (9:51-56 and 19:41-44). The central, focal sections, where the emphasis falls, are the growth of the messianic kingdom to include Gentiles as well as Jews (13:18-21) and the judgment coming on Israel for the Jews' rejection of Jesus (13:22-35).<sup>1</sup>

Luke gave us a total of 37 parables of Jesus (cf. Matthew's 34; Mark's 12; and John's 0).<sup>2</sup> There are 23 parables in 9:51—19:27. This is over half of all the parables in Luke's Gospel. Jesus gave most of the parables in this section to His disciples, but other non-disciples, who were following Him to Jerusalem to get help of various kinds from Him, were also present. Jesus used parables to teach His disciples and to hide information from the unresponsive: to reveal and to conceal truth.<sup>3</sup>

<b>PARABLES IN LUKE 9:51—19:27</b>	
The good Samaritan	10:30-37
The shameless friend	11:5-8
The strong man's house	11:21-22 (cf. Matt. 12:29; Mark 3:27)
The rich fool	12:16-21
The faithful servants	12:36-38
The two servants	12:42-42 (cf. Matt. 24:45-51)
The barren fig tree	13:6-9

<sup>1</sup>See Bailey, p. 123, for a diagram of this large chiasm.

<sup>2</sup>See Appendix 4 "The Parables of Jesus," at the end of my notes on Matthew, for a chart of them.

<sup>3</sup>See Baxter, 5:234, for a list of 29 sayings, parables, and incidents that are unique to this section of Luke's Gospel.

The mustard seed	13:18-19 (cf. Matt. 13:31-32; Mark 4:30-32)
The yeast hidden in meal	13:20-21 (cf. Matt. 13:33)
The seats at the wedding feast	14:7-11
The great banquet	14:15-24
The tower builder	14:28-30
The king going to battle	14:31-33
The lost sheep	15:4-7 (cf. Matt. 18:12-14)
The lost coin	15:8-10
The prodigal son	15:11-32
The shrewd manager	16:1-9
The rich man and Lazarus	16:19-31
The unworthy servant	17:7-10
The one taken and the one left	17:34-35 (cf. Matt. 24:40-42)
The persistent widow	18:1-8
The Pharisee and the tax collector	18:9-14
The minas	19:11-27

#### **A. THE RESPONSIBILITIES AND REWARDS OF DISCIPLESHIP 9:51—10:24**

This part of the new section of Luke continues to focus attention on Jesus' disciples (cf. vv. 1-50). The problem of their attitude toward other people also continues (cf. vv. 46-50). There is also further instruction on the cost of discipleship (vv. 57-62; cf. 6:20-49). The heart of this part of the Gospel

is Jesus' preparation of the disciples for their second mission. The contrast between disciples and non-disciples becomes stronger, and the duties and privileges of discipleship emerge more clearly in this part of Luke.

Whereas the Gospel writers used the term "disciple" (lit. learner) to describe a wide variety of people who sought to learn from Jesus—believers and unbelievers alike—as Jesus moved toward the Cross, His discipleship training focused increasingly on His believing disciples.

### **1. The importance of toleration 9:51-56**

The first verse of this section of text sets the agenda for all that follows until Jesus' Triumphal Entry. It was now time for Jesus to begin moving toward Jerusalem and the Cross. As He did so He immediately encountered opposition (cf. Acts 20:3; 21:4, 11-14), but He accepted it and refused to retaliate against His opponents. Jesus' attitude here recalls His reaction to the opposition that He encountered in Nazareth at the beginning of His Galilean ministry (4:16-30), and it previews His attitude in His passion. It also contrasts with the disciples' attitude toward others, and it provides a positive example for reader disciples who sometimes encounter antagonists similar to the Samaritans.

"Jesus' resolution is writ large in this episode, and there is a prefiguring of the fate that awaits him in Jerusalem, but also of the spirit in which he will receive that final rejection."<sup>1</sup>

It is difficult to make this incident fit into its Lukan context chronologically. Probably Luke was not following a strict sequence of events here but inserted this incident where he did for thematic purposes.

9:51        The time had come for Jesus to begin moving toward Jerusalem for His final visit that culminated in His crucifixion (cf. Gen. 31:21; Jer. 21:10; 44:12). Luke looked beyond His passion there to His ascension. In this Gospel Luke presented the ministry of Jesus before His ascension, and in Acts He reported what Jesus did after His ascension through His disciples (cf. Acts 1:2). By focusing on the Ascension Luke reminded his readers of the glorious outcome of the passion and the continuing ministry of Jesus' disciples. Jesus'

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<sup>1</sup>Nolland, *Luke 9:21—18:34*, p. 537.

resoluteness, in spite of the suffering that lay ahead of Him, also provides a positive example for readers.

9:52 The messengers that Jesus sent ahead were apparently to arrange overnight accommodations for Jesus and the rest of His disciples. They were not on a preaching mission. These messengers were to prepare people for Jesus' arrival, which had been John the Baptist's mission earlier (7:24, 27). Normally Jewish pilgrims on their way from Galilee to Jerusalem passed through Samaria.<sup>1</sup> But they were unwelcome visitors. A trip directly from Galilee to Jerusalem would have taken about three days.

The Jews had regarded the Samaritans as apostates and half-pagans since the Babylonian Exile. The Samaritans were descendants of the poor Israelites who remained in the land when the Assyrians captured the northern kingdom of Israel in 722 B.C. The Jews believed that the Samaritans were the descendants of Israelites who intermarried with the non-Jews that the Assyrian kings imported into the land (2 Kings 17:6, 24-26). But they may have been the pure-blooded descendants of the Israelites who remained in the land.<sup>2</sup> After the Exile the Samaritans rejected the Jewish Scriptures—except for the Pentateuch. The two groups of people were still mutually hostile in Jesus' day (cf. John 4:9).<sup>3</sup>

9:53 The Samaritans whom the messengers contacted refused to accept Jesus and His followers, because they were on their way to Jerusalem, evidently to worship there. The Samaritans rejected Jerusalem as a legitimate site of worship (cf. John 4:20). Evidently they did not reject Jesus because He claimed to be the Messiah, but simply because He was a Jew.

"The Samaritans did not object to people going north away from Jerusalem, but did not like to see them going south towards the city ..."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Marshall, *The Gospel ...*, p. 406.

<sup>2</sup>*Zondervan Pictorial Bible Encyclopedia*, s.v. "Samaritans," by J. L. Kelso, 5:244-47.

<sup>3</sup>Jeremias, *Jerusalem in ...*, pp. 352-58.

<sup>4</sup>Robertson, *Word Pictures ...*, 2:228.



9:54 The attitude of James and John was typically hostile. They may have been thinking that Jesus would react to the Samaritans like Elijah had reacted to his opponents (2 Kings 1:9-12). Their question suggests that Jesus' disciples saw strong similarities between Jesus' ministry and Elijah's (cf. v. 19). They were willing to play Elijah's part by calling down judgment. They were not asking Jesus to do so.

"How startling, again, to think of this same John, a year or two after the date of this savage suggestion, going down from Jerusalem and preaching the gospel of Jesus the crucified in 'many of the villages of the Samaritans,' [Acts 8:25] possibly in this very village which he desired to see destroyed!"<sup>1</sup>

It seems unlikely that Jesus gave James and John their nickname "Boanerges" ("Sons of Thunder") because of this incident (Mark 3:17). All the other disciples' nicknames were positive rather than derogatory, and this one probably was too. The nickname probably reflected their forceful or perhaps volatile personalities.

9:55-56 Jesus strongly disapproved of James and John's attitude, and He "rebuked" them (Gr. *epetimesen*, cf. 4:35, 41; 8:24). Jesus' mission did not call for Him to bring judgment yet. Jesus and His disciples, therefore, proceeded to another presumably Samaritan village where they found lodging.

The point of the story is Jesus' toleration of rejection without retaliation (cf. 6:36). His attitude contrasts with the disciples' attitude, which did not grow out of righteous indignation but the Samaritans' rejection of the Messiah.

## 2. The importance of self-denial 9:57-62 (cf. Matt. 8:19-22)

Luke turned from a presentation of people who rejected Jesus to one in which three individuals wanted to become His disciples. Each of them

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<sup>1</sup>A. B. Bruce, *The Training ...*, p. 242.

underestimated the degree of commitment that Jesus required. Jesus' words clarify the cost of discipleship (cf. vv. 23-26). Note the recurrence of the key word "follow" in verses 57, 59, and 61. The first two incidents evidently happened during Jesus' previous ministry in Galilee (cf. Matt. 8:18), and perhaps the third one did too. Luke probably grouped them here because they all deal with the same issue that Luke developed in this context, namely, discipleship.

9:57           Matthew wrote that this volunteer for discipleship was a scribe (Matt. 8:19), but Luke generalized the reference, probably so every reader could identify with the man. The man professed willingness to follow Jesus anywhere as His intimate disciple.

9:58           Jesus did not rebuke him, but He clarified for him what that would involve so that he could count the cost intelligently. He would need to be willing to accept homelessness and physical discomfort. Jesus' disciples had experienced these things traveling through Samaria (vv. 51-56). By using the title "Son of Man," Jesus heightened the irony of His sufferings. If the Son of Man experienced these things, how much more would His disciples.

9:59           The first man came to Jesus requesting permission to follow Him. The second one received a command from Jesus to follow Him—in exactly the same words as Jesus used to call the Twelve (e.g., 5:27). The first man was a volunteer, and the second man was drafted. Matthew's account has this man approaching Jesus, but this was evidently after Jesus called him.

"The expression 'to follow' a Teacher would, in those days, be universally understood as implying discipleship."<sup>1</sup>

Was the man's father dead already, or was he in danger of dying? The text is not clear, and an answer to this question is not really important. Clearly the man wanted Jesus to approve his postponement of obedience in either case. Perhaps the

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<sup>1</sup>Edersheim, *The Life ...*, 2:133.

man's father was still living, since in Israel people were usually buried on the same day that they died.<sup>1</sup>

"But the words have an even greater urgency if the father was dead. The Jews counted proper burial as most important. The duty of burial [according to Jewish tradition] took precedence over the study of the Law, the Temple service, the killing of the Passover sacrifice, the observance of circumcision and the reading of the Megillah (*Megillah* 3b)."<sup>2</sup>

Elijah allowed Elisha to return to his home to say farewell to his parents before following him as his disciple (1 Kings 19:19-21). By not allowing this man to honor his father in a traditional way, Jesus was probably emphasizing the comparatively more important mission that He was on, compared to that of Elisha. God did not allow Ezekiel to mourn the death of his wife (Ezek. 24:15-24). That was very unusual and also reflected a high calling.

9:60 The dead, whom Jesus said should bury the dead, probably were the spiritually dead who did not believe in Jesus. Jesus probably meant: let the spiritually dead bury the physically dead, but let the spiritually alive follow Me.

"Contemporary Jewish funerary customs make possible another reading. The practice of primary burial (in which the corpse is placed in a sealed tomb) followed by secondary burial (following a twelve-month period of decomposition the bones were collected and reburied in an ossuary or 'bone box') is well attested, with the additional twelve months between burial and reburial providing for the completion of the work of mourning. According to this reckoning, Jesus' proverbial saying would refer to the physically dead in both

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<sup>1</sup>Robertson, *Word Pictures ...*, 2:141; Barclay, p. 133; Morgan, *The Gospel ...*, p. 131; Bailey, p. 124; Tenney, "The Gospel ...," p. 1045.

<sup>2</sup>Morris, *The Gospel ...*, p. 180.

instances: 'Let those already dead in the family tomb rebury their own dead.' In either case, Jesus' disrespect for such a venerable practice rooted in OT law is matched only by the authority he manifests by asserting the priority of the claims of discipleship in the kingdom of God."<sup>1</sup>

The mission of believers was even more important than discharging customary family obligations, when these conflicted with discipleship responsibilities. It is hard to imagine how Jesus could have set forth more forcefully the importance of immediate and wholehearted participation in God's program. It seems that Jesus' statement borders on hyperbole.

9:61 Luke alone recorded this third conversation. It appears anticlimactic at first, but it is not, because the man was asking Jesus for a lesser concession than his predecessor (vv. 59-60). A "good-bye" would only take a few minutes, whereas burying a father would take a much longer time. Perhaps this man thought that if Elijah permitted Elisha to say farewell to his parents before he followed Elijah, Jesus would surely permit him to do the same (1 Kings 19:19-21). Yet even this concession was not one that Jesus would grant. Jesus' mission was more important than Elijah's.

9:62 Jesus' answer was again proverbial (cf. v. 50). It may also be hyperbolic. That is, Jesus may have been overstating the demands of discipleship in order to emphasize their importance.

Discipleship involves hard work and sacrifice, like plowing. A farmer who does not concentrate on his plowing is not a fit farmer. Likewise a disciple who allows life to distract him from his duties as a disciple is unfit for the messianic kingdom (cf. Phil. 3:13; Heb. 6:7; 12:1-2). The disciple of Jesus must continue to follow Him faithfully and single-mindedly.

These "hard sayings" clarify the demands of discipleship. Jesus' followers must be willing to share His homelessness, to place participation in God's

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<sup>1</sup>Green, pp. 408-9.

program above the claims that family and customary duty impose, and to persevere in their calling. Luke probably recorded the responses of these three individuals so the reader would see himself or herself in the story and realize the importance of making the proper response personally.

"Mr. Too Hasty was too concerned with the comforts of this life, Mr. Too Hesitant was too concerned with the cares of this life, and Mr. Too Homesick was too involved with the companions of this life. Those three kinds of people can't be used effectively for Jesus Christ."<sup>1</sup>

### 3. The importance of participation 10:1-16

The theme of discipleship training continues in this group of verses. The 70 disciples that Jesus sent out contrast with the three men that Luke just finished presenting (9:57-62). This was a second mission on which Jesus sent a group of His disciples, the first being the mission of the Twelve (9:1-6, 10). Only Luke referred to it, though there are similarities with other Gospel passages (cf. Matt. 9:37-38; 10:7-16; 11:21-23). It is not surprising to find this incident in this Gospel, because Luke had an interest in showing the development of God's mission from a small beginning. He presented it as growing to a worldwide movement in Acts. His emphasis was again the instruction that Jesus gave these disciples in preparation for their ministry (cf. 9:1-6).

10:1 "After this" shows Luke's basic chronological progression, but he deviated from it often, as did the other Gospel writers. Luke's use of "Lord" here stresses Jesus' authority, which is an important emphasis in a section of text dealing with His directions to His followers.

The number of the messengers is a problem. Both 72 (NASB, NIV, TNIV, NET2, ESV, NEB, JB, CEV) and 70 (AV, NJKV, RSV, NRSV, HCSB) have good textual support.<sup>2</sup> Commentators usually favor one or the other based on the reason they believe

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<sup>1</sup>Mark Bailey, *To Follow Him*, p. 105.

<sup>2</sup>Other English translations not previously identified are: ESV, *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*; JB, *The Jerusalem Bible*; CEV, *The Holy Bible: Contemporary English Version*; RSV, *The Holy Bible: Revised Standard Version*; NRSV, *The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version*; and HCSB, *The Holy Bible: Holman Christian Standard Bible*.

Jesus selected 70 or 72 disciples, since the textual evidence is so equal. Those who favor 70 usually do so because they believe that Jesus was following an Old Testament precedent: There were 70 descendants of Jacob who went to Egypt with him (Exod. 1:1-5). There were also 70 elders in Israel (Exod. 24:1; Num. 11:16-17, 24-25) and in the Sanhedrin. People in Jesus' day viewed the world as having 70 nations in it (Gen. 10).<sup>1</sup> Some scholars believe that one or more of these factors influenced Jesus.

Other scholars, who favor 72, think that the table of nations in the Septuagint version of Genesis 10 that lists 72 nations influenced Jesus.<sup>2</sup> Another view is that the 72 translators of the Septuagint influenced Him.<sup>3</sup> Bock wrote that there is "slightly better" textual evidence for 72.<sup>4</sup> I prefer 70 mainly because I think it is likely that Jesus was prefiguring a mission to the whole world here. However this textual problem has no significant bearing on the meaning of the rest of the story.

The scope of this mission was broader than the mission of the Twelve. The Seventy were to go to all the towns that Jesus planned to visit, apparently not just Jewish towns but also those in the Samaritan and Gentile areas of Israel. Evidently these disciples were to do what John the Baptist had done through his verbal witness, namely, prepare the people for the coming and preaching of Messiah (cf. 7:27). Their task was not just to arrange accommodations for Jesus, as had been the task of the messengers in the preceding pericope (cf. 9:52). Sending messengers two by two was a common practice (cf. 7:18-19; Mark 6:7; Acts 13:2; 15:27, 39-40; 17:14; 19:22). It assured companionship, protection, and the double witness that the Jews required (Deut. 17:6; 19:15).<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, s.v. "hepta, et al.," by K. H. Rengstorf, 2(1964):634-35.

<sup>2</sup> E.g., Marshall, *The Gospel ...*, p. 415; Morris, *The Gospel ...*, p. 181.

<sup>3</sup> S. Jellicoe, "St Luke and the Seventy-two," *New Testament Studies* 6 (1960):319-21; Tannehill, 1:233.

<sup>4</sup> Bock, *Jesus according ...*, p. 251, n. 6.

<sup>5</sup> J. Jeremias, *New Testament Theology*, p. 235.

10:2 Jesus' first instruction to the Seventy was that they pray (cf. 1 Tim 2:1-8). Jesus gave His disciples the same instructions on another occasion (cf. Matt. 9:37-38). The harvest figure is common in Scripture, and it pictures God gathering His elect to Himself (cf. Matt. 13:37-43; et al.). In this context it referred to gathering believers in Jesus out from the mass of unbelievers to whom the Seventy would go.

When Jesus said that the harvest was plentiful He meant that there was much work to do in order to bring the gospel of the messianic kingdom to everyone. His disciple messengers were few in proportion to the large task. Therefore the disciples needed to pray ("plead with") the Lord of the harvest to send every qualified messenger out into the harvest, and that none would fail to participate in this mission. Thus this verse expressed Jesus' desire for more workers and for full participation by the workers who were available.

"This may sound strange to you, but I do not consider it my business to harvest. My business is sowing. If you have ever been a farmer, you know there is a vast difference between sowing seed and harvesting the crop after the seed has matured. Someone counters, 'But the Lord said that the harvest is great and the laborers few.' We must remember *where* Jesus was when He made that statement. He was on the other side of the cross at the time, and an age was coming to an end. At the end of every age is judgment. The judgment that ends an age is a harvest, and the age itself is for the sowing of seed. I believe that we are sowing seed today, and that at the end of this age there will be a harvest [cf. Matt. 13:30]."<sup>1</sup>

10:3 The importance of participation in the harvest continues in Jesus' imperative command to the Seventy to "Go" (Gr. *hypagete*, cf. Matt. 28:19). The lambs among wolves figure was evidently a favorite one for Jesus (cf. Matt. 10:16). It

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<sup>1</sup>McGee, 4:290-91.

pictures the dependent and vulnerable position of His disciples among hostile adversaries. They needed to trust in and pray to God, therefore, as they ministered. Jesus sent them out (Gr. *apostello*) as apostles, in the general sense of that word: They were to serve as missionaries. Jesus was speaking as the Shepherd of His sheep.

10:4 The mission of the Seventy would be relatively brief, so these apostles needed to travel lightly (cf. 9:3; Mark 6:8). The implication of their not carrying a money belt was that they should depend on the hospitality and gifts of believers to sustain them, but most importantly they should depend on God. In view of the hostility of the world (v. 3) the disciples might have expected Jesus to prepare them to be self-sufficient, but He did the opposite. He instructed them, instead, to follow His own example of vulnerable dependence on the Father.

In ancient Near Eastern culture people often gave very long greetings and extended hospitality that tied them up sometimes for days (cf. Judg. 19:4-9; 2 Kings 4:29). Jesus did not mean that His disciples should be unfriendly or unsociable but that they should not allow these customs to divert them from their mission. They were to pursue their work and not waste their time on lesser things.

10:5 The Seventy were to pronounce a benediction (a spoken blessing; good words of divine favor, as from God) on any household that offered them hospitality. "Peace" (Heb. *shalom*) was a common Jewish blessing that wished the fullness of Yahweh's blessing on the recipient (cf. John 14:27). One could almost consider it a metonym for "salvation" (cf. 1:79; 2:14, 29; 7:50; 8:48; 19:38, 42; 24:36).<sup>1</sup>

10:6 As the disciples ministered it would become clear whether the host really believed their message or not. If the host turned out to be "a man of peace" (cf. 5:34; 16:8; 20:34, 36; Acts 4:36), namely, a man marked by the fullness of God's blessing on his life, the disciple's benediction would result in God's

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<sup>1</sup>Green, p. 413.



further blessing on the host. If the host proved unbelieving, God would not bring the fullness of His blessing on him, but the host would forfeit it (cf. Matt. 10:11-13; Mark 6:10-11). Alford described "a man of peace" as someone who received the disciples' message of peace.<sup>1</sup>

10:7 The Seventy, like the Twelve (cf. 9:4), were normally to remain with their hosts and not move around in one neighborhood trying to find better accommodations (cf. Matt. 10:11; Mark 6:10). This would result in their wasting time and possibly insulting their hosts. Going "from house to house" also implied engaging in a social round of activity and being entertained long after they had done their work.<sup>2</sup>

"The reason is very obvious to one acquainted with Oriental customs. When a stranger arrives in a village or an encampment, the neighbors, one after another, must invite him to eat with them. There is a strict etiquette about it, involving much ostentation and hypocrisy, and a failure in the due observance of this system of hospitality is violently resented, and often leads to alienations and feuds among neighbors; it also consumes much time, causes unusual distraction of mind, leads to levity, and every way counteracts the success of a spiritual mission. On these accounts the evangelists were to avoid these feasts ..."<sup>3</sup>

As servants of the Lord the Seventy were to eat and drink what their hosts provided. They could expect sustenance, and they needed to be content with what they were offered, even though it might not necessarily be what they preferred. The principle of the laborer being "deserving of his wages" goes back to creation, where God blessed Adam and Eve by allowing them to eat of the fruit of the garden that they had been charged to rule over (Gen. 1:28-30). Jesus and the apostles

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<sup>1</sup>Alford, 1:538.

<sup>2</sup>Morris, *The Gospel ...*, p. 182.

<sup>3</sup>Thomson, 1:534-35.

reaffirmed this principle for the present inter-advent age (cf. Matt. 10:10; 1 Cor. 9:3-18; 1 Tim. 5:18; 3 John 5-8).

10:8 Taken broadly, the food set before the disciples, in whatever town they might visit, could possibly include ceremonially unclean food. Jesus was already dispensing with the clean/unclean distinction in foods (cf. 11:41; Mark 7:19; Rom. 10:4). Peter's scrupulous observance of the Jewish dietary laws may not have characterized all the disciples (cf. Acts 10:14). The practice of eating what the Jews regarded as unclean food continued to disturb the early church (cf. 1 Cor. 8). Undoubtedly Luke included this reference with his original Gentile readers in mind.

10:9 The Seventy were to continue the ministry of Jesus (7:21-22; 9:11; Matt. 4:17; Mark 1:14-15; 6:12) and the Twelve (9:1-2). This verse gives the positive content of these messengers' ministry. Healing the sick here amounts to restoring any who needed restoration.<sup>1</sup> The order of healing before preaching suggests that the miracles provided an opportunity for the preaching, as well as validating it. Their message was that the Messiah had appeared and, therefore, the messianic kingdom had come near to them (cf. Matt. 3:2). If the people had believed in Jesus, the earthly kingdom would have begun shortly.

"In truth, the long-awaited Kingdom of Old Testament prophecy had come so near to the men of that generation that they had actually seen the face of the King and also had witnessed the supernatural works, which were the predicted harbingers of His Kingdom."<sup>2</sup>

10:10-11 The Seventy were to declare publicly two things to the towns (i.e., the people of the towns) that rejected them and their message: They were to pronounce a symbolic rejection for their unbelief (cf. 9:5; Matt. 10:14; Mark 6:11), and they were to remind the rejecters of the reality of the messianic kingdom

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<sup>1</sup>Green, pp. 414-15.

<sup>2</sup>Alva J. McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom*, p. 273.

offer that they had spurned. This second action was a virtual sentence of judgment.

10:12 The common characteristic of Sodom and these Christ-rejecting cities was failure to repent when given a warning by God (cf. Gen. 19:24-29; Matt. 10:15; 11:20-24; Rom. 9:29; 2 Pet. 2:6; Jude 7). The fate of the people of Sodom had become proverbial (cf. Isa. 1:9-10). The Sodomites had the witness of Lot, but these cities had the witness of forerunners and eyewitnesses of the Messiah. The Sodomites could have saved their city by repenting, but the residents of these cities could have entered the messianic kingdom. So their guilt was greater than that of the people of Sodom.

"The association of the Sodomites with inhospitality is also in view in the current co-text [i.e., "the string of linguistic data within which a text is set"]: They are symbolic of any town that refuses welcome to Jesus' agents, and are thus guilty of refusing hospitality to God's emissaries."<sup>1</sup>

10:13-14 The traditional site of Chorazin (the name of which may be the name of a fish<sup>2</sup>) is at the north end of the Sea of Galilee.<sup>3</sup> Bethsaida ("Fish Town") was its neighbor (cf. 9:10). Thus the contrast that Jesus presented was between two villages at the north end of the Sea of Galilee and two towns at the south end of the Dead Sea: Sodom and Gomorrah. Both Chorazin and Bethsaida, used here as representatives for many other similar towns, had received much of Jesus' ministry.

Tyre and Sidon, two Phoenician cities on the Mediterranean coast, had suffered severe judgment for rejecting God and His people (cf. Isa. 23:1-18; Jer. 25:22; 47:4; Ezek. 26:1—28:23; Joel 3:4-8; Amos 1:9-10). But they had also welcomed Elijah and Jesus (cf. 1 Kings 17:8-24; Mark 7:24-30). The responsiveness of these rebellious Gentile towns, in

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<sup>1</sup>Green, p. 416. His definition of "co-text" is quoted from p. 13.

<sup>2</sup>Josephus, *The Wars ...*, 3:10:8.

<sup>3</sup>Finegan, *The Archaeology ...*, pp. 57-58.

comparison to the unresponsive Jewish towns named, would have encouraged readers of Luke's Gospel who were witnessing to Gentiles. However Jesus' point was the dire fate that would come on people who spurned His offer of salvation (cf. Matt. 11:21-22). Sitting in ashes while wearing sackcloth made of goat hair, or sitting on sackcloth, expressed great sorrow connected with sin in the ancient Near East (cf. 1 Kings 21:27; Job 2:8; 42:6; Esth. 4:2-3; Isa. 58:5; Jon. 3:6-8).

These verses show that there will be degrees of suffering in hell.

“The greater the grace spurned, the more terrible the damnation incurred.”<sup>1</sup>

10:15 Capernaum had been the center of Jesus' ministry in Galilee. While it was more responsive than Nazareth (4:23), it was still less responsive than it should have been in view of the witness that it had received. Jesus' words of judgment may have stemmed from God's condemnation of the king of Babylon's pride (Isa. 14:13-15; cf. Matt. 11:23). Evidently the people of Capernaum expected that God to treat them with special favor because Jesus had done many miracles there (cf. 13:26). Jesus pictured Hades (i.e., Old Testament "Sheol," the place of departed spirits) as opposite to heaven spatially. Hades was a place associated with humiliation and punishment, whereas heaven was the place of joy and blessing. Jesus was contrasting the height of glory and the depth of degradation.

Verses 13 through 15 constitute a condemnation of the rejection of the ministry of the Seventy. These strong statements helped the disciples appreciate the importance of their mission as they went out. The contrast between Sodom and Gomorrah to the south of where Jesus spoke these words, and Tyre and Sidon to the north, with Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum in the middle, pictures Galilee as worse than both its southern and northern neighbors. These comparisons form

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<sup>1</sup>Lenski, p. 578.

something of an *inclusio* indicating that all Israel was worse than the Gentiles.

10:16 Jesus added further importance to the mission of these missionaries by explaining that acceptance or rejection of the Seventy amounted to acceptance or rejection of Himself and God the Father: the One who had sent Jesus (cf. Matt. 10:40; Mark 9:37). Jesus was authorizing these disciples to act for Him (cf. John 20:21).

"Prayer walks" have become popular in some parts of Christianity in recent years.<sup>1</sup> This is the practice of praying as one walks around a town, usually, asking God to bring salvation to its people. Undoubtedly the Seventy prayed as they conducted their mission trip, but they also preached. Jesus did not only tell them to pray for God to make the people responsive but also to preach the gospel to them. Neither did He tell them simply to go out and do good works. Praying for the lost and preaching to the lost should go hand in hand whenever possible.

This ends Jesus' briefing of the Seventy for their unique mission. Luke recorded nothing about the mission itself. His concern was Jesus' instructions and their applicability to his readers in view of their mission (Acts 1:8).

#### 4. The joy of participation 10:17-20

Luke stressed the joy that the Seventy experienced from participating in God's program (cf. Phil. 1:3-5). As we have noted before, Luke often referred to the joy that Jesus brought to people (cf. 1:14, 46; 24:52; et al.). In view of Jesus' preparatory instructions (vv. 1-16), we might have expected the Seventy to feel miserable and glad that the experience was over. But that is not normally the result of serving Jesus, regardless of the hardships involved. As he did in the preceding pericope, Luke focused on Jesus' words to the messengers in this one.

10:17 These disciples undoubtedly experienced the same opposition and rejection that Jesus did, but their overwhelming feeling was "joy" (Gr. *charas*). They had experienced supernatural enablement and power because they trusted and obeyed the

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<sup>1</sup>See Paul Cedar, *A Life of Prayer*, pp. 201—3.

Lord (cf. 9:1; Matt. 10:8). They quite naturally rejoiced, especially in the spectacular display of God's power that was evident in their control of demons. Jesus exorcized demons with a command, but His disciples had to command demons in Jesus' name, namely, on the basis of His authority.

10:18 Jesus described the humiliation of Satan's demons as though it was a repetition of Satan's actual fall from heaven that happened before Creation. Isaiah's description of the king of Babylon's fall was similar (Isa. 14:12). Many Bible students believe that Isaiah was describing the fall of Satan, but the context argues for a human king. Jesus may have been alluding to this passage.<sup>1</sup> However He appears to have been describing a current fall or humiliation that had resulted from the subjection of the demons to His authority. This is also more probable than that He described a vision that He had. Satan will experience similar humiliations in the future during the Tribulation (Rev. 12:7-10, 13), at the end of the Tribulation (Rev. 20:2), and at the end of the Millennium (Rev. 20:10). Jesus' victory over Satan gave Him, as well as His disciples, cause for rejoicing.

"To the casual observer all that had happened was that a few mendicant preachers had spoken in a few small towns and healed a few sick folk. But in the gospel triumph Satan had suffered a notable defeat."<sup>2</sup>

"To the extent that Christ's Kingdom is upbuilt, Satan with his power falls ..."<sup>3</sup>

10:19 The power that Jesus had given the Seventy—to escape injury physically—paralleled their ability to overcome Satan and his demons spiritually (cf. Rev. 12:13-17). Thus the connection with the previous verse is clear. Jesus may have referred to snakes and scorpions here because they represented these

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<sup>1</sup>Alford, 1:540-41.

<sup>2</sup>Morris, *The Gospel ...*, p. 185. "Mendicant" means "given to begging." These disciples had not been beggars. Perhaps a better word would be "traveling" or "itinerant."

<sup>3</sup>John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1:14:18.

spiritual foes (cf. Gen. 3:15). So perhaps He was speaking figuratively rather than literally.

On the other hand this may have been a special protection that Jesus gave His disciples during this mission. Jesus may have given it again to His disciples following His resurrection (cf. Mark 16:18. This verse is in the debated long ending of Mark's Gospel: 16:9-20). This protection apparently lasted only a fairly short period of time (cf. Acts 28:1-6). Jesus' disciples since that period ended have experienced injury, so it was evidently a limited provision in view of the unique ministry of Jesus' original disciples and apostles. Even during the apostolic age many disciples did not escape injury or death (Acts 7:60; 12:2; 2 Tim. 4:20).

10:20 As great as victory over injury and demons was, a greater cause for rejoicing was the Seventy's assurance that God would reward them with heaven itself. In other words, the greater cause of the disciples' rejoicing was not to be the power manifested by their use of Jesus' name but the presence of their names in God's book of life. God makes note of those who commit themselves to participating in His mission. Jesus' comparison helps all disciples to keep His blessings in proper perspective.

There appear to be several records that God keeps in heaven: There is the book of the living, namely, those who are presently alive on the earth (Exod. 32:32-33; Deut. 29:20; Ps. 69:28; Isa. 4:3). There is also a book containing the names of the lost and their deeds (Rev. 20:12). There is a book with the names of the elect in it (Dan. 12:1; Rev. 13:8; 17:8; 20:15; 21:27). A fourth book evidently contains the names of faithful followers of the Lord (Mal. 3:16; Phil. 4:3; Heb. 12:23; Rev. 3:5). In view of the context, it was apparently to the third record that Jesus referred here. Obviously God needs no literal ledgers to write records in, since He knows everything. "Recorded in heaven" is a figurative way of saying that He remembers.

This whole pericope deals with the joy that disciples who participate in God's mission for them experience. The greatest and most fundamental

reason for rejoicing, for any disciple, is his or her personal salvation (v. 20). Yet there is additional joy for disciples who take part in God's program and advance His will in the world. It involves seeing a preview of the final victory over the forces of evil (cf. Matt. 16:18). This joy more than compensates for the sacrifices and rejection that discipleship entails. Non-participating believers know nothing of this joy.

### 5. The joy of comprehension 10:21-24

This incident followed the preceding one immediately (v. 21). The subject of joy continues, and the section on the responsibilities and rewards of discipleship reaches its climax here. Jesus expressed His joy to His Father, in prayer—for revealing to His as yet immature disciples what they had learned, particularly Jesus' victory over Satan. This understanding constituted a unique privilege that Jesus pointed out to them.

The two parts of this section occur elsewhere in Jesus' ministry (vv. 21-22 in Matt. 11:25-27, and vv. 23-24 in Matt. 13:16-17). This suggests that Jesus said these things on more than one occasion.

10:21 The Holy Spirit's role in Jesus' ministry was another special interest of Luke's. The record of Jesus' similar prayer in Matthew 11:25 and 26 lacks the references to joy and the Holy Spirit.

"Nowhere else in the New Testament is it said that Jesus rejoiced, but that He did so on more occasions cannot be doubted (cf., e.g., His words where He speaks of His joy in John xvii. 13)."<sup>1</sup>

The phrase "rejoiced greatly in the Holy Spirit" probably means that the Holy Spirit was the source of Jesus' joy (cf. Acts 13:52). He gave it to Jesus. This notation strengthens the force of what Jesus proceeded to say. All three members of the Trinity appear in this verse. The Son empowered by the Spirit addressed His Father. This too points to a very significant statement that follows.

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<sup>1</sup>Geldenhuys, p. 306.



Jesus praised God for something that the Father had done. He addressed God intimately as "Father" (Gr. *pater*, the equivalent of the Aramaic *abba*, cf. 11:2). The title "Lord of heaven and earth" was a common one for Jews to use. It came from Genesis 14:19 and 22, and it draws attention to God's sovereignty. This allusion was appropriate in view of what Jesus thanked God for. Jesus probably meant that He praised God that, although He had hidden the good news of the messianic kingdom from the humanly wise and intelligent, He had, nevertheless, revealed it to infants, namely, the poor, uneducated, and/or humble (cf. 1:48-55; 8:10; 1 Cor. 1:18-31). The wise and understanding people that Jesus had in mind were probably the Jewish religious leaders, and the babes were His disciples. Jesus rejoiced in the privilege that these disciples had received of understanding God's ways as they participated in His mission.

10:22 This verse at first glance appears to be a statement to the disciples rather than a continuation of Jesus' prayer, but verse 23 specifically identifies the beginning of His words as "to the disciples." Therefore we should probably understand verse 22 as part of His prayer. Apparently Jesus spoke these words for the disciples' benefit as much as for His Father's.

The "all things" in view probably include divine revelation and divine power, in view of the context. The second and third clauses indicate that the Father and the Son know each other intimately. Consequently only the Son can reveal the Father. There are only two incidents that the synoptic evangelists recorded in which Jesus referred to Himself as "the Son" (Matt. 11:27, the parallel passage to this one, and Mark 13:32), but John recorded many such incidents. Jesus concluded by saying that the Son bestows knowledge of the Father according to the Son's will. By saying these things Jesus was claiming to have an exclusive relationship with God and to be the sole mediator of the knowledge of God to humankind (cf. 4:32; 1 Tim. 2:5).

10:23 Now Jesus addressed the Seventy directly. He congratulated them on having received this revelation. The blessings that humble disciples experience contrast with the judgment that

proud people who disregard the knowledge and power that Jesus revealed will experience (cf. 13-15; 1:52-55; 6:20-26; 1 Cor. 2:9-10). Those who saw the things that these disciples saw were "blessed" or fortunate. What they saw were the signs that the Messiah had arrived and the messianic kingdom was at hand (v. 17).

10:24 The Old Testament prophets typically looked forward to the fulfillment of the things that they predicted (1 Pet. 1:10-12). "Kings" probably represent the most important people of their day. Even they, with all their advantages, could not see and hear what Jesus' humble disciples could. What they saw were the signs of the advent of Messiah, and what they heard was the good news that the messianic kingdom was at hand.

Jesus' teaching in this pericope glorified the privilege of being a disciple of His. Too often the responsibilities of discipleship make following Jesus appear very threatening and unattractive, but the rewards of discipleship far outweigh its costs (cf. Rom. 8:18). In view of this revelation, disciples of Jesus should feel encouraged to participate wholeheartedly and fully in God's mission for them. For Christians that means participation in the execution of the Great Commission, which all four of the Gospels writers recorded (24:44-49; Matt. 28:19-20; Mark 16:15-16; John 20:21-23; Acts 1:8).

## **B. THE RELATIONSHIPS OF DISCIPLES 10:25—11:13**

The three incidents that compose this section of Luke's Gospel all concern various aspects of the life of disciples. Luke continued to focus Jesus' teaching on discipleship by his selection of material. All three incidents are unique to Luke's Gospel, though again there is evidence that Jesus taught similar lessons, and made similar statements, at other times, which the other evangelists recorded in other contexts.

### **1. The relation of disciples to their neighbors 10:25-37**

The question that a lawyer put to Jesus provided the opportunity for another lesson. Jesus answered the question, but then He followed up His answer with a parable that illustrated the point of His teaching on the subject. The parable amplified the second great commandment (v. 27). It

is not just enough to know the right thing to do. One must then do it. The teaching that followed the parable (10:38—11:13), while not addressed to the lawyer, expounded the first great commandment (v. 27). The present section also reminds the reader of Jesus' allegiance to the Old Testament Scriptures, which He viewed as authoritative. Thus it balances Jesus' former words about Him revealing the Father (v. 22), with the importance of Scripture in that process.

### The lawyer's question and Jesus' answer 10:25-29

The incident that Mark recorded in Mark 12:28 through 34 is quite similar to this one, but the differences in the accounts point to two separate situations. In view of the question it is easy to see how people might have asked it of Jesus many different times. Furthermore, this particular question was of great concern to the scribes, who studied Jewish law professionally. The fact that the Holy Spirit recorded the same lesson twice in Scripture is a testimony to His greatness as a Teacher, since great teachers deliberately repeat themselves. And the repetition stresses the importance of the lesson.

"... in the first century A.D. in Palestine the only way of publishing great thoughts was to go on repeating them in talk or sermons."<sup>1</sup>

10:25      Lawyers (scribes) were experts in the Mosaic Law. The Greek word translated "test" (*ekpeirazon*) does not necessarily imply hostility (cf. 4:12). The man simply could have been wanting Jesus' opinion. He addressed Jesus as a teacher or rabbi. This title tells us nothing about his motivation, only that he viewed Jesus as less than a prophet, the Messiah, or God. He assumed that people had to do something to obtain eternal life (cf. 18:18). The term "inherit" had a particular significance for Jewish readers because for them it distinguished a special way of receiving eternal life (cf. Matt. 5:5; 19:29; 25:34). However Gentiles readers, for whom Luke wrote, would have regarded it as synonymous with obtaining eternal life (cf. Mark 10:17). "Eternal life" is the equivalent of spiritual salvation, and it included entrance into the messianic kingdom.

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<sup>1</sup>T. W. Manson, *The Sayings of Jesus*, p. 260.

10:26 Rather than answering the lawyer's question outright, Jesus directed him to the authority that they both accepted: the Old Testament (Hebrew Bible). Moreover by asking this counter-question Jesus put Himself in the position of evaluating the lawyer's answer, rather than having the lawyer evaluate His answer.

"Many ask good questions with a design rather to *justify themselves* than to *inform themselves*, rather proudly to show what is good in them than humbly to see what is bad in them."<sup>1</sup>

10:27 This lawyer gave virtually the same answer that Jesus Himself gave to the same question on another occasion (Matt. 22:37-40; Mark 12:29-31).

"To love the neighbor as oneself does not mean to love the other as much as you love yourself, but it does mean to love the neighbor *in the way you would* love yourself. The call is to behave toward the other with the same consideration and concern that one naturally (and properly under most circumstances) shows about one's own welfare (as Eph 5:29)."<sup>2</sup>

"... we could not possibly like everyone with whom we come in contact. We could not embrace and kiss some vicious individual, but we can love (*agapan*) him with the intelligence that comprehends his evil state and with the noble and true purpose of altering that state."<sup>3</sup>

10:28 Jesus affirmed that the lawyer had answered "correctly" (Gr. *orthos*, from which we get the word "orthodox"). But He proceeded to caution the lawyer that he needed wholehearted compliance with the Law in order to gain eternal life by doing

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<sup>1</sup>Henry, p. 1448.

<sup>2</sup>Nolland, *Luke 9:21—18:34*, p. 585.

<sup>3</sup>Lenski, p. 601.

something. And that, of course, is impossible. Jesus quoted the Law in order to drive this point home (Lev. 18:5).

10:29 The lawyer realized that the only way that he could possibly fulfill the Law's demand was to limit its demand. He should have acknowledged his inability to keep these commands and asked Jesus what he should do. Instead he tried to justify himself (i.e., to declare himself righteous) by limiting—by redefining—the demand of the Law, and then showing that he had fulfilled that limited demand.

His question set up a distinction between neighbors and non-neighbors. The word "neighbor" (Gr. *plesion*) means "one who is near" (cf. Acts 7:27). The Hebrew word that it translates, *rea*, means a person with whom one has something to do. The Jews interpreted the word in a limited sense to mean a fellow Jew, or someone in the same religious community. They specifically excluded Samaritans and Gentiles from this category.<sup>1</sup>

"If there is a neighbor I must love, is there also a non-neighbor I do not need to love? Do I have to love everyone? Where do I draw the line? ... These are hardly irrelevant questions in a world where 'compassion fatigue' has reached epidemic proportions."<sup>2</sup>

### The parable of the good Samaritan 10:30-37

Jesus told this parable in order to correct the lawyer's false understanding of who his neighbor was and to clarify his duty to his neighbor.<sup>3</sup> Beyond that, Jesus wanted this lawyer to see how far short he fell of keeping the Law so that he would realize his need of righteousness.

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<sup>1</sup>Robertson, *Word Pictures* ..., 2:152; Tenney, "The Gospel ...," p. 1047. See John Bowman, "The Parable of the Good Samaritan," *Expository Times* 59 (1947-48):151-53, 248-49.

<sup>2</sup>Inrig, pp. 34-35.

<sup>3</sup>For some inappropriate lessons to be drawn from this parable, see Amy-Jill Levine, "The Many Faces of the Good Samaritan—Most Wrong," *Biblical Archaeology Review* 38:1 (January/February 2012):24, 68.

"This parable episode takes up the neighbor half of the command to love of God and neighbor of vv 25-28. Vv 38-42 will take up, more indirectly, the God half."<sup>1</sup>

10:30 The "man" in view may have been a real person, and the incident Jesus described could have really happened. Yet the fact that Jesus told this story as He did, similarly to other parables, has led most students of the passage to conclude that He invented it in order to teach a lesson.

Jesus left the man's race and occupation unspecified, though His hearers would have assumed that he was a Jew. The 17-mile desert road that descended about 3,300 feet from Jerusalem to Jericho was treacherous, winding, and a favorite haunt of robbers.<sup>2</sup> Clothing was a valuable commodity in Jesus' society, and this fact probably explains why the bandits took the man's clothes. Perhaps the man resisted his attackers, which would have been a common reaction, and so suffered a near fatal beating.

10:31 Jesus described the priest as happening by coincidence to take the journey that brought him into contact with the unfortunate victim of robbery. The fact that this was a coincidental meeting in no way excused the priest's failure to show love, but it may suggest that from the priest's viewpoint his discovery was accidental. Jesus simply recounted the priest's unloving act of passed by on the other side of the road without complicating the story with his motivation. For whatever reason, and the reason is unimportant, the priest failed to act in love, even though common courtesy demanded that he stop and render aid. However a priest, of all people, should have shown compassion. He served in a so-called "helping occupation," and he had frequent contact with the Scriptures and their demands. Moreover, this priest had recently been in Jerusalem, the center of worship and spiritual influence.

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<sup>1</sup>Nolland, *Luke 9:21—18:34*, p. 597.

<sup>2</sup>Liefeld, "Luke," p. 943; Marshall, *The Gospel ...*, p. 447. See also Finegan, *Light from ...*, pp. 314-15.

"According to Jewish tradition, half of each of the twenty-four 'courses,' into which the priesthood were divided, were permanently resident in Jerusalem; the rest scattered over the land. It is added, that about one half of the latter had settled in Jericho, and were in the habit of supplying the needful support to their brethren while officiating in Jerusalem."<sup>1</sup>

"Jericho, the second city of Judea, was a city of the priests and Levites, and thousands of them lived there."<sup>2</sup>

Since Jewish lawyers were often priests, this lawyer may have seen himself in this character in Jesus' parable.<sup>3</sup>

10:32 The Levite repeated the priest's act. He was a less likely person to offer help since his duty, assuming he fulfilled it, involved just assisting the priests in the mundane affairs involved in Jewish worship. By omitting his motives, Jesus again focused attention on the man's unloving act.

"... the Levites ... had no clerical dress at all [when they assisted the priests in temple service], but only wore the white linen (2 Chron. 5:12) ..."<sup>4</sup>

"Involvement with 'problem people' often entangles us in embarrassing, difficult, and even dangerous situations."<sup>5</sup>

"Was it fear for his own safety (the robbers may still be in the vicinity), a fear of defilement, a fear of entanglement? For whatever reason, he too 'passed by on the other side.'"<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Edersheim, *The Temple*, p. 83.

<sup>2</sup>Jamieson, et al., p. 1004.

<sup>3</sup>Green, p. 427.

<sup>4</sup>Edersheim, *The Temple*, p. 145.

<sup>5</sup>Inrig, p. 37.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

- 10:33 The Samaritan was the least likely of the three travelers to offer help, yet he did so (cf. 9:52). By placing "Samaritan" in the emphatic first position in the Greek sentence, Jesus stressed the contrast between him and the other two travelers. The compassion that the Samaritan felt overcame any racial prejudice that he may have had against Jews. Jesus explained his attitude, but not his other motives, which again were irrelevant. The Samaritan's compassion contrasts with the callousness of the priest and the Levite toward one of their own neighbors.
- 10:34 The Samaritan's compassion moved him to take action to help the sufferer. Oil soothed the victim's wounds, and wine disinfected them.<sup>1</sup> Combined, these were household remedies for wounds.<sup>2</sup> But they were not cheap.<sup>3</sup> The Samaritan's love was obvious in his willingness to inconvenience himself and in his making generous and costly sacrifices for the other man's good (cf. 2 Chron. 28:8-15).
- 10:35 The genuineness of the Samaritan's love is clear from his provision of further care the next day. It cost about one twelfth of a denarius to live for a day, so the Samaritan's gift exceeded the man's need many times.<sup>4</sup>
- 10:36 Jesus then applied the teaching of the parable to the lawyer by asking him which of the three passersby behaved like a neighbor. He reversed the lawyer's original question (v. 29) and focused attention where it should have been: on the person showing love rather than the person receiving it. The priest and the Levite had avoided contamination and ritual uncleanness, while the Samaritan had contracted it. Yet the two Jews had not shown compassion, whereas the true neighbor had.
- 10:37 The answer to Jesus' question was simple and obvious. The lawyer seems to have understood the point of the parable,

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<sup>1</sup>Jeremias, *The Parables ...*, p. 204.

<sup>2</sup>Plummer, p. 288; Robertson, *Word Pictures ...*, 2:153.

<sup>3</sup>Trench, *Notes on the Parables ...*, p. 317.

<sup>4</sup>Jeremias, *Jerusalem in ...*, p. 122.



because he did not describe the true neighbor as the Samaritan but as the one who showed mercy. On the other hand, he may have avoided the use of the word "Samaritan" out of disdain. Showing mercy was the key issue, not the nationality of the neighbor. Racial and religious considerations were irrelevant.

Jesus ended the encounter by commanding the lawyer to begin to follow the Samaritan's example. This is what he needed to do if he wanted to earn eternal life (cf. v. 25). If he treated everyone with whom he had any dealings with compassion and mercy, he would be loving his neighbor in the sense that God commanded (v. 27; Lev. 19:18). Thus Jesus showed that the real test of love is action, not just profession (cf. James 2:15-16; 1 John 3:17-18). He also faced the lawyer with a humanly impossible obligation. Hopefully the man finally realized that and turned to Jesus for salvation (v. 29).

This parable obviously teaches that people should help other people who are in need when they encounter them, even though they may not have anything in common but their humanity. It is also a powerful polemic (argument) against prejudice and for compassion. Jesus Himself was the great example of the attitudes and actions that He advocated in this parable. The parallels between Jesus and the Samaritan are striking.<sup>1</sup> However it seems clear that Jesus did not give this parable to draw attention to Himself but to teach His disciples and the lawyer what it means to love one's neighbor as oneself.

"Love is not a sentimental feeling. Rather it is sacrificial action. It means interrupting my schedule, expending my money, risking my reputation, ruining my property, even for a stranger, so that I can do what is best for him."<sup>2</sup>

The disciples also learned that, properly understood, God's demands are impossible to keep perfectly. So one must cast oneself on God's mercy if he or she hopes to obtain eternal life.

"The Parable implies not a mere enlargement of the Jewish ideas, but a complete change of them. It is truly a Gospel-

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<sup>1</sup>See Trench, *Notes on the Parables ...*, pp. 318-23.

<sup>2</sup>Inrig, p. 42.

Parable, for the whole old relationship of mere duty is changed into one of love. Thus, matters are placed on an entirely different basis from that of Judaism. The question now is not 'Who is my neighbour?' but 'Whose neighbour am I?'"<sup>1</sup>

"This parable of the Good Samaritan has built the world's hospitals and, if understood and practiced, will remove race prejudice, national hatred and war, class jealousy."<sup>2</sup>

"With the Samaritan, we were given a model of compassionate behavior to imitate. With the priest and the Levite, we were warned against allowing religious duty to make us unloving. From the man in the ditch, we learn the lesson of our need to be willing to receive help."<sup>3</sup>

A popular definition of a parable is "an earthly story with a heavenly meaning." This is a good descriptive definition, but the Greek word *parabole*, translated "parable," means something placed alongside something else for the sake of comparison. Consequently the word "parable" has both a general and a technical meaning. Generally, it means any comparison, including illustrations, likenesses, similes, and metaphors. Technically, "parable" usually refers to a story that makes a comparison. These two uses of the word account for the fact that some students of the Gospels view some of Jesus' comparisons as parables while others do not. Some define parables differently than others and so come up with different lists of them. Usually these differences involve the length of the comparison.

## 2. The relation of disciples to Jesus 10:38-42

This is another incident involving women who became disciples of Jesus (cf. 8:1-3; et al.). Like the parable of the Good Samaritan, it shows Jesus overcoming prejudice. As the former parable illustrated the meaning of the second commandment, this one clarifies the first commandment. Jesus had claimed to be the revealer of God to humankind (v. 22). Now the disciples learned again the importance of listening to Him (cf. 8:1-21; et al.).

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<sup>1</sup>Edersheim, *The Life ...*, 2:239.

<sup>2</sup>Robertson, *Word Pictures ...*, 2:155.

<sup>3</sup>Craig L. Blomberg, *Preaching the Parables*, p. 64.

"He [Luke] may have placed it immediately after the preceding parable as a safeguard against any of his readers coming under the misapprehension that salvation is by works. He makes the point that waiting quietly on the Lord is more important than bustling busy-ness."<sup>1</sup>

10:38 Luke's reference to travel keeps the travel theme in view. We continue to see Jesus moving toward Jerusalem and the fulfillment of His mission. It also explains the reason for Martha's and Mary's hospitality. Luke did not mention it, but this incident happened in Bethany (cf. John 11:1; 12:1). He probably omitted this detail in order to keep his readers from becoming too preoccupied with Jesus' exact movements, which Luke viewed as relatively unimportant.

Luke presented Martha as the primary hostess. Her name derives from the Aramaic *mar* meaning "mistress," which is appropriate since she appears to have been the head of her household. Her eagerness to receive Jesus contrasts with the Samaritans, who had not welcomed Him (9:53).

10:39 Mary (or Miriam, cf. 1:27; et al.) took the traditional place of a disciple, seating herself at Jesus' feet in order to listen and learn (cf. Acts 22:3). Normally rabbis did not permit women to do this in Jesus' day.<sup>2</sup> The title "Lord" further stresses the authority of Jesus, to which Mary symbolically submitted by sitting at His feet.

Notice how Luke described Mary: She "was also seated at His feet, and was listening to His word." Mary served as well as Martha, but she also sat at Jesus' feet in order to listen to Him. She combined service with worship.<sup>3</sup> This seems to be a better interpretation than that Martha sat at Jesus' feet, and Mary also sat at His feet, in view of the context.

10:40 Martha's duties as a hostess drew her attention away from Jesus, whom she evidently wanted to sit near and listen to also

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<sup>1</sup>Morris, *The Gospel ...*, p. 191.

<sup>2</sup>Liefeld, "Luke," p. 944.

<sup>3</sup>Morgan, *The Gospel ...*, pp. 140-41.

(cf. 1 Cor. 7:35).<sup>1</sup> She expressed concern that Jesus did not discourage Mary from sitting at His feet. She wanted Him to tell Mary to help her with her hostess duties. Martha reproached Jesus for monopolizing Mary to her own (Martha's) inconvenience.<sup>2</sup> Though she addressed Jesus as Lord, Martha wanted Him to assist her in her plans, rather to learn of His plans from Him, like Mary was doing. Martha was a bossy woman, and she even bossed Jesus!

10:41 Jesus showed concern for Martha's anxiety (cf. 1 Cor. 7:32-35), but He did not do what she asked. The "many things" that worried and distracted Martha were her excessive preparations for the meal (cf. 12:29). She had allowed her duties as hostess to become too burdensome (cf. 8:14; 12:22, 26). Apparently she wished to honor Jesus with an elaborate meal, but a simpler one that would have allowed her some time to listen to her Guest would have been better.

10:42 The one necessary thing was listening to Jesus' teachings, which reflects an attitude of dependence on Him.

"For the Third Gospel, to listen to the word is to have joined the road of discipleship (e.g., 6:47; 8:11, 21; 11:28) ..."<sup>3</sup>

Jesus was telling Martha that the one thing that Mary had chosen was more important than the many things that Martha had chosen to do. The implication was that Martha should listen to Jesus more and labor for Him less. The "good part" that Mary would not lose was the blessing that comes to those who pay attention to the teachings of Jesus with an attitude of dependence on Him (i.e., disciples).

"Few things are as damaging to the Christian life as trying to work for Christ without taking time to commune with Christ."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>H. K. Luce, *The Gospel according to S. Luke*, p. 208.

<sup>2</sup>Robertson, *Word Pictures ...*, 2:156.

<sup>3</sup>Green, p. 435.

<sup>4</sup>Wiersbe, 1:213.

"So often we want to be kind to people—but we want to be kind to them *in our way*, and should it happen that our way is not the necessary way, we sometimes take offence and think that we are not appreciated. If we are trying to be kind the first necessity is to try to see into the heart of the person we desire to help—and then to forget all our own plans and to think only of what he or she needs."<sup>1</sup>

"If serving Christ makes us difficult to live with, then something is terribly wrong with our service!"<sup>2</sup>

"The episode is concerned to show that even when domestic service has been harnessed to the purposes of the kingdom of God, the danger remains that its concerns will take possession of us."<sup>3</sup>

This then was a lesson in priorities for Martha and all Jesus' disciples. Jesus' point was not that a contemplative life is better than an active life, or that studiousness is preferable to domesticity. Giving humble attention to Jesus' words is of primary importance. This is the better way to serve Him.

This passage should be a warning to disciples who tend to be too active in Christian service and neglect the Word of God. It should also remind us that busyness, even with legitimate pursuits, can hinder our relationship with Christ. Disciples must make time to listen to and learn from Jesus. Everything that He says is important.

"This passage is also a key discipleship text—not in the comparison between Martha and Mary's tasks, but in how Martha has wrongly judged Mary's inaction and worries too much about what others are doing [cf. John 21:21]. The text has two distinct emphases: Martha's consumption with assessing others as she performs what she is called to do, and Mary's wisdom in seeking some time at the feet of Jesus. Both

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<sup>1</sup>Barclay, p. 145.

<sup>2</sup>Wiersbe, 1:213.

<sup>3</sup>Nolland, *Luke 9:21—18:34*, p. 605.

qualities, one negative and the other positive, are at the heart of discipleship."<sup>1</sup>

"A Church full of Marys would perhaps be as great an evil as a Church full of Marthas. Both are needed, each to be the complement of the other."<sup>2</sup>

Some time ago I received a letter from a former student who wrote the following: "Although I had lived overseas before, when I was in the Army—I was stationed in Korea for two years—the culture shock here [in India] was great. I found myself at first very discouraged and defeated, and spent almost two months very spiritually low. I was really even questioning God's guidance in my life. I felt useless here, not knowing the language and just tagging along with other Christian workers. I began to equate happiness with the comfortable life in the U.S., and I'd catch myself daydreaming about my return there this June. However, one needs to find joy, no matter what the circumstances, where God has him. I remember how, in the Gospels class, you told us that our hearts have to be set, not on doing God's work or sharing God's Word, but on loving God. Otherwise it would be easy to leave this physically and spiritually harsh environment quickly. Loving God deeply is hard here, for me, but it's what I'm aiming to do. I must love God more than the easy American life. That was a good point that you made, and I just thought you'd like to hear some feedback on it." I did indeed.

### **3. The relation of disciples to God the Father 11:1-13**

Jesus continued to point out the disciples' proper relationships. Having explained their relation to their neighbors (10:25-37) and to Himself (10:38-42), He now instructed them on their relation to their heavenly Father. This pericope, like the former one, clarifies the meaning of the first commandment (10:27).

This whole section consists of teaching on prayer. Luke presented prayer as a major subject on which Jesus instructed His disciples, whereas in Matthew prayer instruction is incidental to other themes. The teaching in the present section of this Gospel gives help to disciples who need to learn how to pray plus encouragement that God will hear and answer their

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<sup>1</sup>Bock, *Luke*, p. 305.

<sup>2</sup>Jamieson, et al., p. 1005.

prayers. The disciples' request for instruction on how to pray (v. 1) resulted in Jesus giving them a pattern prayer (vv. 2-4). He then gave them a parable that illustrates God's willingness to answer (vv. 5-8), a promise that God would answer (v. 9), and further assurance showing God's readiness to answer their prayers (vv. 10-13). Prayer is a discipline of dependence on God, and, as such, it is the life breath of every disciple of Jesus.

### **The Lord's Prayer 11:1-4 (cf. Matt. 6:9-13)**

Luke's record of Jesus' teaching of the Lord's Prayer differs significantly enough from Matthew's account that we can safely conclude that Jesus gave similar teaching on separate occasions. This repetition illustrates the importance that Jesus attached to the subject of prayer.

11:1 This verse gives the setting for the teaching that follows. This is the fifth time that Luke referred to Jesus praying (3:21; 5:16; 6:12; 9:18, 28; cf. 22:32, 40-44; 23:46). It was apparently Jesus' frequent praying that alerted His disciples to its importance and made them feel their need for His help in their praying. This is the only time that the Gospel writers recorded that someone asked Jesus to teach them something, which is another indication of the importance of this instruction.

The disciples seem to have felt a greater need for help in learning how to pray than in learning how to preach. But the disciples were not asking for instruction on the subject of prayer theoretically. They wanted help in their actual praying. Evidently they wanted Jesus to give them a prayer that they could use that would be appropriate in view of their distinctive relationship to God as believers in Jesus. Other Jewish groups, such as John's disciples, had their own distinctive prayers.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps being in the area of John's former ministry brought him to the disciples' minds. And some of Jesus' disciples had been John's disciples.

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<sup>1</sup>Marshall, *The Gospel ...*, p. 456.

"Prayer is a necessity of spiritual life, and all who earnestly try to pray soon feel the need of teaching how to do it."<sup>1</sup>

11:2 Jesus' introduction to this prayer implied that He intended the disciples to repeat it verbatim. His introduction to the teaching that Matthew reported implied that He was giving them a model or sample prayer (Matt. 6:9). "When" (Gr. *hoten*) implies that they would pray this prayer frequently.

"In the 'Lord's Prayer' our Saviour gave us not merely an inexhaustible source of enlightenment in prayer, but also a perfect prayer which we must often address to God."<sup>2</sup>

Jesus first focused attention on the person of God. The term "Father" (Gr. *pater*, Aramaic *abba*) is both an intimate and a respectful title. By using it the disciples were expressing the relationship that they enjoyed with God because of their relationship with Jesus (cf. John 20:17; Rom. 8:14-17; Gal. 4:6). The closeness of their relationship with Jesus is apparent in that they could now address God as their Father, just like Jesus addressed God as His Father (cf. 10:21). This does not mean, of course, that disciples enjoy exactly the same relationship with the Father that the Son of God enjoys with the Father. We do not.

"The use of the intimate form was the amazing new thing that Jesus wished to teach his disciples, initiating them into the same close relationship with the father that he enjoyed ..."<sup>3</sup>

The concept of God as the Father of the believer does appear in the Old Testament (e.g., Ps. 68:5; 89:26; 103:13).

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<sup>1</sup>A. B. Bruce, *The Training ...*, p. 52.

<sup>2</sup>Geldenhuys, p. 322.

<sup>3</sup>Marshall, *The Gospel ...*, p. 456.



Two sets of petitions follow. Two petitions relate to God's cosmic purposes, and three relate to the disciples' personal needs.

The clause "hallowed be Your name" means: may everyone regard your name as holy (cf. Lev. 22:32; Ps. 79:9; 111:9; Isa. 29:23). God's "name" is essentially the sum of His attributes, and effectively it is His reputation among people. This petition is as much an expression of worship as it is a petition. It asks God to act so that people will regard Him as holy—to cause situations in which they will reverence and obey Him rather than blaspheming and sinning against Him.

"The aorist tense here suggests that a specific time of fulfillment is in mind. This may be the coming of the kingdom."<sup>1</sup>

This view finds support in the recurrence of the Greek aorist tense and a specific reference to God's kingdom in the second petition. However the first petition is also a prayer for the honor of God's name generally.

The coming of the earthly kingdom is a desirable condition, because it will result in universal blessing as well as great honor for God. This second petition addresses God's program.

"Thus, in harmony with all Old Testament prophecy, the prayer taught by our Lord suggests not only that His kingdom is to be prayed for, but also that its coming to the 'earth' will be a definite crisis in history, not a long and gradual process of evolution. This is in sharp contrast with the Universal Kingdom which has always been present in the world, on earth as well as in heaven."<sup>2</sup>

This was a typically Jewish prayer so far, except for the addition of "Father." Both petitions were concerns of the Jews as they anticipated the arrival of the messianic kingdom.

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<sup>1</sup>Liefeld, "Luke," p. 947.

<sup>2</sup>McClain, p. 36.

11:3 The third petition—the first one in the second group of petitions—deals with the disciples' provisions. The parallel request in Matthew has the Greek aorist tense, indicating a simple act of giving (Matt. 6:11). But this one has the present tense, suggesting a continuing daily provision. The ideas are complementary rather than contradictory.

Matthew's prayer also has "give us this day," stressing the present need, whereas Luke's prayer has "give us each day," pointing to the disciples' continuing need for God's supply. "Each day" (Gr. *epiousion*) not only means "day by day" but also carries the connotation of sufficient or necessary.<sup>1</sup>

"Bread" (Gr. *artos*) frequently represents food in general, not only in the Bible but also in common usage, and it probably does here too (cf. 7:33; John 13:18; 2 Thess. 3:8). Thus it is improbable that Jesus meant that disciples should only request the barest necessities of life.

The Jews in the wilderness learned to trust God for their food day by day (Exod. 16:4; Deut. 8:6-10). People in Jesus' day normally received their pay daily, so they understood this need too. It may be harder for us to remember that we are dependent on God for our daily sustenance, since most of us do not live from hand to mouth so literally. Nevertheless we live in a state of continual dependence on God (cf. John 15:5). This petition should remind us of that.

11:4 The fourth petition requests God's pardon. Luke used the simple word "sins" (Gr. *hamartia*), rather than the Jewish idiom "debts" (Gr. *opheilemata*), which Matthew employed. The believer in Jesus has already received eternal forgiveness for the legal guilt of his or her sins (cf. 5:20; 7:47; Rom. 5:1; 8:1; Eph. 1:7). Therefore the forgiveness that Jesus spoke of here is the forgiveness that is necessary for the maintenance of fellowship with the Father (cf. 1 John 1:5-10).

A person's unwillingness to forgive others who have wronged him or her may indicate that he or she knows nothing of God's

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<sup>1</sup>Edwin M. Yamauchi, "The Daily Bread Motif in Antiquity," *Westminster Theological Journal* 28 (1965-66):147-56.

forgiveness (cf. 7:47). Conversely, one's willingness to forgive other people shows that one recognizes his or her own need for forgiveness (cf. Eph. 4:32).

"The prayer Jesus teaches his followers embodies the urgency of giving without expectation of return—that is, of ripping the fabric of the patronage system by treating others as (fictive [i.e., imagined]) kin rather than as greater or lesser than oneself (cf. 6:27-38)."<sup>1</sup>

The fifth petition requests divine protection. This request does not imply that God might entice us into sin, which He never does (cf. James 1:1-15). But God does allow people to undergo "temptation" (Gr. *peirasmos*) in order to test their faithfulness and to strengthen their faith (4:1-12; cf. Deut. 6—8; Job). This petition expresses the disciple's awareness of his or her need for God's help in avoiding excessive temptation and enduring all temptation. It is essentially a request for help in remaining faithful to God (cf. 22:40).

"That is, recognizing our weakness, we pray not to be exposed to a test too great for us."<sup>2</sup>

"He who sincerely seeks and entreats forgiveness of sins, longs to be able to sin no more."<sup>3</sup>

The unusual reverse form of this petition is due to its being a figure of speech (i.e., litotes), in which the writer expressed a positive idea by stating its negative opposite. Luke made frequent use of litotes in the narrative portions of Acts (cf. Acts 12:18; 15:2; 17:4, 12; 19:24; 27:20). This construction accentuates the contrast with the preceding fourth petition.

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<sup>1</sup>Green, p. 443.

<sup>2</sup>Ironside, 1:364.

<sup>3</sup>Geldenhuys, p. 321.

Note that these petitions cover all of our earthly life: the present (the need for daily bread), the past (forgiveness for previous sins), and the future (protection from coming trials).<sup>1</sup>

### The parable of the shameless friend 11:5-8

Having helped His disciples to pray, Jesus now gave them an incentive to pray. He contrasted the character of God and the character of the reluctant neighbor in His story (cf. v. 13; 18:1-8). This parable contains a very helpful and encouraging revelation of God's character (cf. 10:22). Understanding the character of God removes many of the problems that most people have with prayer.<sup>2</sup> This parable also encourages disciples to pray in spite of receiving no immediate answers. It addresses the common feeling that prayer may be useless since God does not grant answers as one might expect Him to.

"The point of the parable is clearly not: Go on praying because God will eventually respond to importunity [persistence]; rather it is: Go on praying because God responds graciously to the needs of his children."<sup>3</sup>

"This is not an illustration of perseverance in prayer; that is presented in 18:1, etc. ... This illustration is a strong encouragement to prayer, to let nothing deter us from praying; and the encouragement lies in the implied promise that our praying will receive its answer even as Jesus states explicitly in v. 9."<sup>4</sup>

11:5-6 Hospitality was a sacred duty in the ancient Near East. When visitors arrived, the host would normally provide lodging under his roof and food to eat. The host in this parable did not have enough bread for his guest, so he shamelessly appealed to his neighbor for some. The fact that he came knocking on his friend's door at such a late hour as midnight indicates the

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<sup>1</sup>See also Thomas L. Constable, "The Lord's Prayer," in *Giving Ourselves to Prayer*, compiled by Dan R. Crawford (Terre Haute, Ind.: PrayerShop Publishing, 2005), pp. 70-75.

<sup>2</sup>See C. Samuel Storms, *Reaching God's Ear*, for a fuller development of this truth.

<sup>3</sup>Marshall, *The Gospel ...*, p. 462.

<sup>4</sup>Lenski, pp. 625-26.

extent of his shamelessness. He was not too proud to ask his neighbor for help.

"In hot climates travelling was largely done during night ..."<sup>1</sup>

"In the east no one would knock on a shut door unless the need was imperative. In the morning the door was opened and remained open all day, for there was little privacy; but if the door was shut, that was a definite sign that the householder was not to be disturbed."<sup>2</sup>

The host was willing to admit that he needed his neighbor's help, even though this caused the host some embarrassment. Jesus did not explain why the man came so late, and the reason is immaterial.

11:7 In the typical one-room Israelite home, the whole family, and often even the household animals, all slept near each other. In the parable the man who came knocking was willing to suffer shame in the eyes of his neighbor—and probably in the eyes of all his neighbors, once his behavior became known.

11:8 The fact that the man was willing to humble himself and ask for help moved the neighbor to get up and give his friend some bread. But friendship alone was not enough to move the neighbor to action. It was the fact that the man was willing to shamelessly admit his need and ask for help—at such an inconvenient hour—that moved the neighbor to give him what he needed. The Greek word *anaideia* means "shameless," or avoidance of shame; it does not mean "persistence" (cf. Gen.

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<sup>1</sup>A. B. Bruce, "The Synoptic ...," 1:547.

<sup>2</sup>Barclay, p. 148.

18:13-33; Matt. 15:22-28).<sup>1</sup> Green interpreted the phrase "because of his shamelessness": "in order to avoid dishonor."<sup>2</sup>

"*Persistence* here [in the NKJV, NRSV, and HCSB] refers to shameless boldness more than to tenacity."<sup>3</sup>

Jesus was contrasting, not comparing, God's attitude with the neighbor's attitude (vv. 9-13).<sup>4</sup> God's attitude toward His children is the opposite of the attitude of the neighbor toward his knocking friend. God will grant answers to prayer if we will simply ask Him for help. But His disciples have to humble themselves and ask for His help. Often we think that we can handle a particular situation on our own, and thus we do not pray for God's help. In these cases, we will receive no special help from our Father. But if we humble ourselves and ask Him for help, He will help us.

Some time ago I noticed that the door on our kitchen pantry was beginning to pull away from its frame, because I had mounted a rack on the inside of the door that we use to store heavy jars and cans. The door was not latching properly, and I saw that it would not be long before we would be unable to close it. Being a do-it-yourselfer, I planned to fix it. It seemed to me that I would have to take the door off the hinges and plane it. I might also have to remove the frame, repair it, reinstall it, and re-plaster and repaint around it. Then I remembered my friend Merton, who had built and repaired houses most of his long life. I humbled myself and gave him a call, asking for his help. He fixed the problem with one screw in five minutes. That is what praying shamelessly looks like. It

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<sup>1</sup>See Alan F. Johnson, "Assurance for Man: The Fallacy of Translating *Anaideia* by 'Persistence' in Luke 11:5-8," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 22:2 (June 1979):123-31; Trench, *Notes on the Parables ...*, p. 330; Alford, 1:550; Plummer, p. 299; Nolland, *Luke 9:21—18:34*, p. 625.

<sup>2</sup>Green, p. 445.

<sup>3</sup>*The Nelson ...*, p. 1716.

<sup>4</sup>See Kenneth E. Bailey, *Poet and Peasant: A Literary-Cultural Approach to the Parables in Luke*, pp. 125-33.

is admitting that we need God's help and asking for it. The alternative is to try to get something done on our own.

### Encouragements to pray 11:9-13

Jesus continued His instruction by providing further encouragement to ask God for what we need in prayer.

#### A promise from Jesus 11:9-10

11:9 Jesus introduced this promise with a phrase that underlined its reliability and gave His personal guarantee ("I say to you"). Everyone (v. 10) who asks of God will receive from Him, not just the persistent (cf. Matt. 7:7-8). In the context "everyone" is every one of the Father's children (vv. 10, 13). God is more than a friend of believing disciples; He is their Father (v. 2).

Jesus urged His disciples to pray. He probably meant that we must ask in order to receive (cf. James 4:2). Those who seek God's attention and response in prayer will find it (cf. Jer. 29:12-13). Those who knock on the door of God's heavenly house will find that He will open to them, and give them what is best (cf. v. 7).

"In other words, don't come to God only in the midnight emergencies, but keep in constant communion with your Father."<sup>1</sup>

The tense of the three verbs "ask," "seek," and "knock," in Greek, is the present tense, implying continuing action. Some interpreters have understood this to mean that Jesus was teaching the disciples to be persistent: Keep on asking, keep on seeking, and keep on knocking. I tend to think that He meant: Don't give up asking, seeking, and knocking, when answers to your prayers are not forthcoming. Rather than the present tense being a condition for answered prayer, it was probably intended to be an encouragement not to give up praying. We should not lose heart, but keep on praying.

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<sup>1</sup>Wiersbe, 1:215. Author's italics removed.

"Ask for what you do not possess; seek for what is not apparent; knock that obstacles may be removed."<sup>1</sup>

11:10 This verse gives the justification for the promise in verse 9. It sets forth the absolute certainty of what Jesus just said. God will definitely respond to the prayers of His children. A stronger promise is difficult to imagine (cf. Isa. 65:24).

"Using language from everyday life, he [Jesus] teaches that, because God will arise and act on behalf of those in need, they ought to bring their requests to him."<sup>2</sup>

The response of many Christians to this promise is: I asked but did not receive. I sought God but did not feel that I got through to Him. I knocked at His door, but He did not admit me. However the unusual strength with which Jesus gave this promise should encourage us to believe Him in spite of appearances. We may not have received yet. We may not feel that we got through to God, but Jesus said we did. We may feel that we are knocking on doors of iron, but Jesus promised that God will let us into His presence.

### An argument from logic 11:11-13

11:11-12 Two examples further enforce the point that God will respond to our prayers, and they stress that He will do so kindly (cf. Matt. 7:9-10). Since God is our heavenly Father, He will certainly do no less than a normal earthly father would do. Even a good earthly father would not give his son who asked for a fish or an egg, a snake or a scorpion. A snake can look like a fish, and scorpions sometimes breed in eggshells.<sup>3</sup> Scorpions are known to pierce an egg, eat what is inside, and then use the shell as their home. A small white scorpion, with its tail folded up, would look like a small egg.<sup>4</sup> Such a response from an earthly father would be cruel rather than loving, since the

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<sup>1</sup>Tenney, "The Gospel ...," p. 1048.

<sup>2</sup>Green, p. 449.

<sup>3</sup>Edersheim, *The Life ...*, 2:242.

<sup>4</sup>Thomson, 1:379; Plummer, p. 300.



substitution would involve no real giving but deception—and even danger.

These verses help us to see that when God does not give us what we ask for in prayer it is because it is better for us not to have it—then or possibly ever.

11:13 Jesus drew His climactic conclusion (cf. Matt. 7:11). Since God is the perfect Father of His children, He will do much more than a sinful earthly father would do for his children.

When Jesus gave this teaching, the Holy Spirit did not yet indwell every believer (Acts 2:33; cf. Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4). The greatest blessing that God could give a believer at that time was the possession of His Spirit. Thus the gift of the Holy Spirit was God's greatest possible gift for the disciples who first heard this teaching. In effect Jesus was saying that the heavenly Father would give the very best gifts to those who ask Him (cf. Matt. 7:11). Believers today do not need to ask God to give them the Holy Spirit, because He does this when they trust in His Son (Rom. 8:9).

The fact that God gives only good gifts to His children explains why He does not give us everything we ask for—even things that look good to us. Thus we need to understand Jesus' promise—that God will give us what we ask (vv. 9-10)—as referring only to things that are good for us. The great lesson of this teaching on prayer is that God will without fail give only what is best to His children who request of Him in prayer.

"There is no such thing as unanswered prayer. The answer given may not be the answer we desired or expected. Even when it is a refusal of our wishes it is the answer of the love and the wisdom of God."<sup>1</sup>

In this important teaching on prayer Jesus gave His disciples a distinctive prayer to pray that expressed appropriate concerns for them based on their unique relationship to God. Then He showed how eager and ready God was to answer their prayers. Finally He promised that God would definitely

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<sup>1</sup>Barclay, p. 149.

respond to their prayers, but only by giving them what was truly best for them. Throughout He stressed the character of God and the disciples' privileged relationship to Him.<sup>1</sup>

### C. THE RESULTS OF POPULAR OPPOSITION 11:14-54

Luke recorded the climax of the rejection of Jesus and His message and then narrated Jesus' instructions to His disciples about how they should live in view of that rejection.

#### 1. The Beelzebul controversy 11:14-26 (cf. Matt. 12:22-37; Mark 3:19-30)

The placement of these events in Luke's Gospel again raises the question of whether Luke recorded the same incident as Matthew and Mark did, or if this was a similar but different one. I, along with many other students of the passages, believe that it was probably a different occasion in view of the differences in the accounts.

The connecting idea with what precedes is the Holy Spirit (v. 13). Luke had stressed the Spirit's empowering influence in Jesus' life and ministry, but the religious leaders rejected that possibility, concluding rather that Satan controlled Jesus.

"To understand the significance of Jesus' miraculous work, especially his exorcisms, one must understand 11:14-23."<sup>2</sup>

11:14 Luke again first presented the setting for the confrontation that followed. Jesus cast a demon out of a man whom it had made mute. This sign of His power amazed the multitudes that observed it (cf. 4:36; 9:42-43; et al.).

11:15 Some of the people attributed Jesus' power to the head demon: "Beelzebul, the ruler of the demons," whom Jesus proceeded to identify as Satan (v. 18). The spelling "Beelzebul" is most common in the Greek text. "Beelzebub"

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<sup>1</sup>For a biblical theology of prayer, see Thomas L. Constable, *Talking to God: What the Bible Teaches about Prayer*, or idem, "The Doctrine of Prayer," (Th.D. dissertation, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1969).

<sup>2</sup>Bock, *Luke*, p. 317.

(NIV) has come down to us from the Latin translation manuscript tradition. "Beelzebul" probably came from the Hebrew *baal zebul* meaning "prince Baal." Baal was the chief Canaanite deity, and the Jews regarded him as the personification of all that was evil and Satanic (cf. Matt. 10:25). Another possible meaning of "Beelzebul" is "lord of the dwelling."

11:16 Other observers demanded from Jesus an even more powerful sign than demon exorcism to validate His messianic claim. This unwarranted request constituted a "test" or provocation of Jesus.

"The narrator previously distinguished between the attitudes of the scribes/Pharisees and the crowd or people (7:29-30). Now the opposition to Jesus characteristic of the former is emerging in the latter."<sup>1</sup>

11:17 Jesus at least knew the thoughts of his critics by their request for a greater sign (v. 16), if not by prophetic insight.

"Luke shows a specific interest in Jesus' uncanny awareness of what goes on in people's minds ..."<sup>2</sup>

Jesus argued, first, that the head of an army would hardly work with his enemy against his own troops. Neither a kingdom nor a household that was disunified was strong, and it would ultimately fall apart.

11:18 Likewise if Satan was disunified—using Jesus to cast out Satan's agents, the demons—Satan's kingdom would ultimately fall apart. Satan would be working a cross purposes to himself. This was the logical conclusion if Jesus was casting out demons by Beelzebul. Jesus believed in a real devil who heads a kingdom that is strong and united (cf. Eph. 2:1-3; 6:10-18).

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<sup>1</sup>Tannehill, 1:150.

<sup>2</sup>Nolland, *Luke 9:21—18:34*, p. 638.

- 11:19 Jesus used a second argument to rebut the charge against Him. If Satan was behind Jesus' exorcisms, it was logical to conclude that he was behind the exorcisms that some recognized Jewish exorcists ("your sons") performed. Jewish exorcists practiced incantations against demons effectively (cf. Acts 19:13-14). Jesus' antagonists would have been unwilling to concede that Satan was behind these Jewish exorcisms. They viewed them as acts of God. They wanted to maintain a double standard, believing that their approved exorcists operated with God's power, but Jesus used Satan's power. By "they will be your judges" Jesus meant that the case of the Jewish exorcists would show that He did not cast out demons by Beelzebul.
- 11:20 Jesus' allusion to "the finger of God" goes back to Moses' miracles in Pharaoh's court (Exod. 8:19). There the Egyptians confessed that "the finger [i.e., active, undeniable power] of God" was at work when they could no longer reproduce Moses' miracles. Jesus claimed the same divine source of power for His miracles. His miracles indicated the coming of the Messiah and the presence of His kingdom.
- ""The kingdom of God is come upon you' means that it was among them in the presence of the person of Jesus who had the credentials of the King."<sup>1</sup>
- 11:21-22 The "strong man" in this parable is Satan, and the stronger man ("someone stronger") is Jesus. Satan had amassed much booty in terms of human captives, and he had kept these people imprisoned under his power. Jesus had come, had attacked Satan in the instances of His exorcisms, and had overpowered him. He had removed Satan's "armor," namely, his demons, and had set free those whom he had taken captive.
- 11:23 Continuing the figure of battle, Jesus reminded His hearers that whoever was not on Jesus' side was on His enemy's side. Changing the figure to reaping and herding, Jesus made the

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<sup>1</sup>McGee, 4:297.

same point again. Laborers in God's field, and among God's flock, who do not gather people—like sheaves and sheep into the barn and fold of His messianic kingdom—with Jesus, scatter them abroad. There is no neutral ground. People either support Jesus or oppose Him.

11:24-26 These verses were probably a word of warning to Jesus' critics who were scattering without Him rather than gathering with Him (v. 23).<sup>1</sup> If so, they climax Jesus' argument.

Jesus warned against casting out demons, which some of the Jews were doing (v. 19), without replacing them with something stronger, namely, the life of God that entered those who believed in Jesus. A formerly demon-possessed person who did not believe on Jesus was in greater danger after his exorcism than he was before it. The expelled demon could return to inhabit his or her spiritually empty spirit along with additional demons.

These final words then carried Jesus' warning further. Not only was it bad to oppose Jesus and attribute His works to Satan, but it was worse to exercise God's expulsive power without also preaching the gospel to people.

"Reformation is no good, friends. If everyone in the world would quit sinning right now, there would not be more Christians. To stop sinning does not make a Christian. Reformation is not what is needed. Regeneration is what is needed."<sup>2</sup>

## 2. The importance of observing God's Word 11:27-28

Instead of attacking Jesus' works, His critics should have received and obeyed His words. A woman's comment, shouted out from the crowd, triggered this response from Jesus that provides a fitting conclusion to the previous incident.

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<sup>1</sup>Marshall, *The Gospel ...*, p. 479.

<sup>2</sup>McGee, 298.

"Apparently this refers to the parable about the demons. Perhaps the woman, who doubtless was a mother, had had experience of a lapsed penitent in her own family."<sup>1</sup>

11:27 The woman expressed how wonderful it must have been for Mary to have given birth to such a son as Jesus. This was an indirect way of complimenting Jesus.

"Such praise must have been peculiarly unwelcome to Christ, as being the exaltation of only His Human Personal excellence, intellectual or moral. It quite looked away from that which He would present: His Work and Mission as the Saviour. Hence it was, although from the opposite direction, as great a misunderstanding as the Personal depreciation of the Pharisees."<sup>2</sup>

11:28 His response did not reflect unfavorably on Mary, nor did it bestow special status on her. Her privilege as the mother of the Messiah was great indeed (cf. 1:45). However those who heard God's word of salvation through Jesus and His disciples, believed it, and acted upon it, had an even greater position. The implication that His hearers should do this was obvious. In the immediate context, "the word of God" was the teaching that Jesus had been giving. Jesus' words here should also warn us against venerating Mary too highly.

"Something very impressive is present in Jesus, but to be impressed is not enough. What counts is committed response to the message that Jesus brings."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Plummer, p. 305.

<sup>2</sup>Edersheim, *The Life ...*, 2:202.

<sup>3</sup>Nolland, *Luke 9:21—18:34*, p. 649.

### 3. The sign of Jonah 11:29-32 (cf. Matt. 12:38-42; Mark 8:11-12)

This teaching responded to the request of Jesus' critics for a sign (v. 16; cf. Matt. 16:1-4). It is the second main part of His answer to these opponents.

11:29 Luke's reference to the crowds increasing ties this verse in with the previous incident involving Jesus' source of power (vv. 14-26). Jesus referred to His generation as a wicked generation because the people kept asking Him for a special sign that would make absolutely clear who He really was. They were not content to observe His miracles or to listen to His claims. They wanted a spectacular sign from heaven. But Jesus refused to give them that kind of sign. The only sign that He would give them was "the sign of Jonah."

11:30 Jonah himself was the sign of impending judgment to the Ninevites. His supernatural appearance and preaching triggered widespread repentance. Likewise the supernatural appearance and preaching of Jesus and the repentance that accompanied it signified impending judgment. The difference was that the positive response to Jonah's ministry, by Gentiles no less, postponed God's judgment. But the negative response to Jesus' ministry did nothing to postpone God's judgment on Israel. This judgment consisted of the postponement (delay) of the earthly kingdom and the destruction of Jerusalem. The rejection of Jesus' preaching was even more serious because miracles accompanied it. The title "Son of Man" presents Jesus as superior to Jonah.

Luke did not mention Jesus' reference to Jonah's three days and nights in the great fish, though that would be a sign that Jesus had come from God after the Resurrection (cf. Matt. 12:40).

"*The sign of Jonah* here refers to his prophetic call to repentance rather than to the resurrection

foreshadowed by Jonah's return from the belly of the great fish."<sup>1</sup>

"Jonah was a sign to the Ninevites, because he appeared there as one sent by God after having been miraculously saved from the great fish (as it were raised from the dead) as a proof that he was really sent by God. So also Jesus will by His resurrection prove conclusively that he has been sent by God as the Christ, the promised Redeemer."<sup>2</sup>

11:31 The Queen of the South (i.e., the Queen of Sheba) traveled a great distance to hear Solomon's wisdom (1 Kings 10:1-13), yet the people of Israel ("men of this generation") paid little attention to Jesus' wisdom. This was true even though the Son of Man was a greater king than Solomon. Therefore their judgment was inevitable.

11:32 Similarly, the people of Nineveh repented at the preaching of Jonah, yet Jesus' hearers did not repent at His preaching despite His superiority to Jonah as a prophet. Furthermore, the Queen and the Ninevites both responded to spoken messages without any authenticating miracles.

The neuter "something" greater may refer generally to the authority of the Son of Man, but it may also refer specifically to His superior wisdom, in the first comparison, and to His preaching, in the second. Another view is that the "something" refers to God's action in Christ.<sup>3</sup> Significantly for Luke's original readers, the people who responded so admirably to the two Old Testament characters that Jesus cited were Gentiles. By comparing Himself to the most wise and glorious Israelite king, and the most effective Jewish prophet (in terms of audience response), Jesus taught His superiority in both roles.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Nelson ...*, p. 1718.

<sup>2</sup> Geldenhuys, p. 334.

<sup>3</sup> Morris, *The Gospel ...*, p. 202.



#### **4. The importance of responding to the light 11:33-36**

This exhortation concluded the controversy about signs (vv. 16, 29-33), like Jesus' teaching about the importance of obeying God's Word (vv. 27-28) concluded the controversy about casting out demons (vv. 14-26). Both conclusions called on Jesus' hearers to respond to His teaching rather than continuing in the darkness of ignorance and rejection.

##### **The parable of the hidden lamp 11:33 (cf. Matt. 5:15)**

This was another parable that Jesus evidently used repeatedly during His itinerant teaching ministry. In Matthew's Gospel He used it to encourage the disciples to bear witness publicly (cf. Luke 8:16). Here He used it to illustrate His own role as someone who dispels darkness.

"... the ministry of Jesus was no hidden and obscure thing. It shines out brightly for all who would find their way by means of its brightness."<sup>1</sup>

##### **The parable of the bad eye 11:34-36 (cf. Matt. 6:22-23)**

11:34 Jesus also used this parable, at least the negative part of it, in the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus compared the human eye to a lamp in both situations, not in the sense of being sources of light but as vehicles through which illumination comes. In Matthew's Gospel He taught that a person's attitudes can affect his ability to "see" (i.e., comprehend spiritual truth), with the emphasis on the eye itself. Here the emphasis is on the light, and the point is the importance of admitting the light, in this case the gospel message—by accepting Jesus' teaching. Failure to receive Jesus' teachings results in spiritual blindness. The "clear" or healthy eye represents the ability to comprehend truth as it is, to "see" clearly, whereas the "bad" eye represents the inability to do so.

Another, albeit less popular, interpretation understands the eye as allowing light to go out of the body rather than allowing it to come in. A person's eyes often reveal one's inner feelings. They are lights in this respect.

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<sup>1</sup>Nolland, *Luke 9:21—18:34*, p. 659.

"According to a physiology prevalent in Greco-Roman antiquity, the eyes do not function by allowing light to come in but by allowing the body's own light to go out. The eye is the conduit or source of the light that makes sight possible."<sup>1</sup>

11:35 If a person rejects Jesus' "light" (truth) for another so-called light, he or she will discover that the other light brings no true illumination, but "darkness." Normally people's eyes respond to light by admitting it, and the result is their illumination. That is how Jesus wanted His hearers to respond to His teaching, because the result would be spiritual illumination.

"Faith, when diseased, becomes the darkness of superstition; just as the eye, when diseased, distorts and obscures."<sup>2</sup>

11:36 This verse presents the alternative to the situation described in the preceding verse. It concludes Jesus' exhortation on a positive note. Jesus, of course, used the body to represent the whole inner person, the personality, in this parable. The point is that person who believes all of Jesus' teaching will experience full illumination.

#### **5. The climax of Pharisaic opposition 11:37-54 (cf. Matt. 23:1-36; Mark 12:38-40)**

The theme of opposition to Jesus continues in this section, but the source of opposition changes from the people generally to the Pharisees and, even more particularly, to their lawyers (scribes). Jesus' responses also changed from warnings and exhortations to denunciations. Jesus condemned the teachings of the Pharisees, the light that was darkness (v. 35), rather than the Pharisees and the lawyers themselves.

The differences in the Matthean account of Jesus' condemnation of the Pharisees (Matt. 23:1-36) raise questions about what Jesus really said and how the evangelists recorded what He said.

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<sup>1</sup>Green, p. 465. Cf. Nolland, *Luke 9:21—18:34*, p. 659.

<sup>2</sup>Plummer, p. 308.

"We know from his practice elsewhere that Matthew combines material from several sources and rearranges the order, whereas on the whole Luke does not conflate [mix] his sources or re-order his material. It is, therefore, unlikely that Matthew has preserved the original order here ..."<sup>1</sup>

Probably we are again dealing with two different teaching occasions. This is Jesus' last address to the Pharisees that Luke recorded.

### The question of true cleanliness 11:37-41

"Bitter as was the enmity of the Pharisaic party against Jesus, it had not yet so far spread, nor become so avowed, as in every place to supersede the ordinary rules of courtesy."<sup>2</sup>

- 11:37 Many of Jesus' teaching opportunities arose during meals (cf. 14:1-24; Matt. 15:1-20; 23:1-36; Mark 7:1-22). This was one such occasion.
- 11:38 Jesus undoubtedly offended His host by not washing ritually before eating. Luke omitted an explanation of the Jewish custom of washing before eating (cf. Matt. 15:1-9; Mark 7:1-4) and only recorded the reason for the Pharisee's objection. The Mosaic Law did not demand this washing (Gr. *baptizo*), but it had become customary, and the Pharisees viewed it as a safeguard against ritual defilement.
- 11:39 Jesus did not criticize this Pharisee and his religious brethren for washing their hands before eating or for observing ritual purification beyond what the law required. He used His host's objection as an occasion to point out the hypocrisy involved in Pharisaic teaching and practice. Those present would have understood Jesus' action as a breach of courtesy.<sup>3</sup> Evidently Jesus was willing to take this action because it was important for Him to issue these warnings to the Pharisees.
- 11:40 The Pharisees typically neglected more important things while at the same time stressing the necessity of much less

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<sup>1</sup>Marshall, *The Gospel ...*, p. 492.

<sup>2</sup>Edersheim, *The Life ...*, 2:204.

<sup>3</sup>Green, p. 471.

important things (cf. 6:27-36; 10:25-37). By washing ceremonially, they were only doing half of what God expected of them. They needed to purify themselves internally as well as externally. To wash the outside of a person, and not cleanse the inside, is as foolish as only washing the outside of a bowl without washing the inside.

"The way to clean up a dirty vocabulary is not to brush your teeth but to cleanse your heart."<sup>1</sup>

11:41 Jesus' point was that giving to the poor would demonstrate that the person had cleansed himself inwardly and adequately. He may have been continuing the metaphor and speaking of a dish or vessel, which the NIV has supplied, but He was thinking of a person. He may have meant that the Pharisees should give food as an act of charity, but the giving out of what was theirs was the important thing.

### Three woes against the Pharisees 11:42-44

Jesus now specified two examples of the Pharisees' spiritual nearsightedness (vv. 42-43), and then He compared them to something similar that defiles (v. 44). Emphasis on externals leads to error. When people "concentrate on the trivial they are apt to overlook the important."<sup>2</sup>

11:42 Jesus announced His condemnation with the use of "woe." The Pharisees typically tithed scrupulously, even their garden herbs, two of which Jesus specified (cf. Lev. 27:30-33; Deut. 14:22-29; 26:12-15).

"Rue is mentioned in the Talmud as a herb for which no tithe need be paid."<sup>3</sup>

This tithing was acceptable to Jesus, but the Pharisees typically neglected giving more important things to God, including justice and love.

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<sup>1</sup>Wiersbe, 1:217.

<sup>2</sup>Morris, *The Gospel ...*, p. 204.

<sup>3</sup>Plummer, pp. 311.

- 11:43 Normally a leader of the synagogues occupied the front seat of honor, so Jesus was criticizing the Pharisees' love of position and glory. Respectful personal greetings in public places pandered to their pride too.
- 11:44 The Pharisees scrupulously avoided touching graves in order to avoid ritual defilement. But they defiled other people who contacted them, like hidden graves defiled those who unknowingly walked over them (cf. Num. 19:16). While trying to remain ritually pure themselves, they were spiritually defiling many other people who were unaware of the Pharisees' evil influence on them. Their sins contaminated the whole nation. The Jews usually whitewashed graves to warn people away from them.<sup>1</sup>

### Three woes against the lawyers 11:45-52

- 11:45 The lawyers (or scribes) were a distinct group, though most of them were Pharisees. The scribes and Pharisees often acted together. The lawyer who spoke up on this occasion wanted to distinguish his group as less guilty than the Pharisees, but Jesus refused to allow that, because the scribes were as hypocritical as the Pharisees. The lawyers involved themselves more in the interpretation of the Jewish laws, whereas the Pharisees generally advocated and enforced those interpretations. The former group was a professional class, and the latter was a religious party.
- 11:46 By interpreting the Jewish traditions strictly, the scribes placed heavy moral burdens on the Jews. But they had cleverly found ways of escaping their own responsibility to keep the Mosaic Law, while at the same time giving the impression that they were obedient. This reflected lack of love for the rest of the Jews who had to labor under their demands. The Pharisees appear to have been offering little or no help or compassion for their fellow Jews who tried to follow their rules.

"The Mishnah lays it down that it is more important to observe the scribal interpretations

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<sup>1</sup>Robertson, *Word Pictures ...*, 2:167.

than the Law itself (*Sanhedrin* 11:3). The reasoning is that if it was a serious matter to offend against the Law which was sometimes hard to understand, it was a much more serious matter to offend against the interpretation which, the scribes thought, made everything clear."<sup>1</sup>

11:47-48 It was not morally wrong for the lawyers to take the lead in building new tombs to replace the older tombs of Israel's prophets. But Jesus saw in this practice an ironic testimony to their opposition to God's recent prophets, specifically John the Baptist and Himself. By building these tombs the lawyers appeared to be honoring the prophets, but they were also walling them in and sealing them off from the people. They effectually did this when they turned the people away from the prophets whom God had recently sent to Israel. In this they were following in the footsteps of their ancestors who killed the prophets.

"The attitude of the Scribes to the prophets was paradoxical. They professed a lip service and a deep admiration for the prophets. But the only prophets they admired were dead prophets; when they met a living one they tried to kill him."<sup>2</sup>

"The martyrs of one generation become the heroes of the next."<sup>3</sup>

The relatives of a guilty criminal have sometimes given money to the family members of the victim of the criminal's crimes, "blood money," in order to atone for their shared guilt. Perhaps the lawyers were building the prophets' tombs with the same motivation.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Morris, *The Gospel ...*, p. 205.

<sup>2</sup>Barclay, p. 162.

<sup>3</sup>Tenney, "The Gospel ...," p. 1049.

<sup>4</sup>J. D. M. Derrett, "'You Build the Tombs of the Prophets' [Luke 11:47-51; Matt. 23:29-31]," *Studia Evangelica* 4 (1968):187-93.

11:49 The lawyers claimed the greatest wisdom in Israel by declaring that their interpretations of Scripture were the correct ones. But Jesus cited a greater Source of wisdom: God Himself.

The "wisdom of God" is a title for Jesus that the Apostle Paul adopted later (cf. 1 Cor. 1:24, 30; Col. 2:3).<sup>1</sup> However it seems unusual for Jesus to refer to Himself as the wisdom of God. Besides, what follows is Old Testament revelation. The wisdom of God could mean God in His wisdom—making God the source of the words that follow (NIV).<sup>2</sup> God is definitely the ultimate source of wisdom and the wisdom that follows in the context, but this is an interpretation of the text rather than a translation of it. Another possibility is that it means divine wisdom and refers to Wisdom personified (cf. Prov. 1:20-33; 8).<sup>3</sup> However what follows is not a revelation of the wisdom literature of the Old Testament that such a personification would imply.

The words that follow (vv. 49-51) are not a quotation from the Old Testament. Rather they embody the essence of Old Testament revelation about the fates of the prophets and those who oppose them. Perhaps they allude to 2 Chronicles 24:18 through 22.<sup>4</sup> I tend to think that "the wisdom of God" refers to the Old Testament that Jesus here summarized and added to (i.e., fulfilled, established). The content of this revelation was that God's people would typically reject the prophets and messengers (cf. 9:1-6; 10:1-16) that He sent them.

11:50 The result would be that God would hold the present generation of rejecters responsible. This last rejection would be "the straw that broke the camel's back." It was the rejection of God's own Son, not just His servants (cf. 20:9-19). That would prove to be the rejection that would add the last measure of guilt that would result in God pouring out His wrath (Jerusalem's destruction in A.D. 70 and Israel's

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<sup>1</sup>Geldenhuis, p. 346.

<sup>2</sup>Danker, p. 146; Manson, p. 102.

<sup>3</sup>Marshall, *The Gospel ...*, p. 503.

<sup>4</sup>Alford, 1:559.

scattering) for all those unjustified murders throughout history.

11:51 Abel was the first righteous martyr (Gen. 4:8), and Zechariah the prophet was the last (cf. Matt. 23:35; 2 Chron. 24:21-22). There had been other victims since Zechariah (e.g., Uriah, Jer. 26:23), but Zechariah's murder was the last one in Old Testament history.<sup>1</sup>

11:52 Jesus' woe against the lawyers condemned them for taking the key of spiritual knowledge away from the people. This "key" is probably a reference to Jesus' teachings. Jesus called this "the key of knowledge," not "the keys of the kingdom" (cf. Matt. 16:19). The scribes professed to have the key to the understanding of the Hebrew Bible. The people viewed them as experts in it. However they rejected Jesus' teachings and therefore did not enter into the knowledge that acceptance of His teachings would have opened to them. In addition, they opposed Jesus and thereby discouraged the people who were entering into that knowledge.

Apparently Jesus viewed His teaching as the key that, if appropriated, would admit one into the messianic kingdom. The Pharisees had kept this key from the people by rejecting Jesus' teaching. And they had kept others from entering the kingdom by discouraging them from accepting Jesus' teaching. Some interpreters view this verse as a clear statement that the messianic kingdom was a present reality when Jesus spoke these words.<sup>2</sup>

This last woe is the climax of the six (vv. 42-52), and it revealed the most serious offense of Israel's religious leaders.

### **The hostility of the Pharisees and lawyers 11:53-54**

These inflammatory words of criticism and condemnation fanned the smoldering embers of Pharisaic hostility into an inferno of hatred and hostility. Jesus had challenged the Pharisees' expertise. Now they sought

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<sup>1</sup>For discussion of the identity of Zechariah, see my note on Matt. 23:35 in my notes on Matthew.

<sup>2</sup>E.g., Alford, p. 507.



to defend themselves by discrediting Him. They were plotting against Him and were seeking to trip Him up and trap Him. They also tried to get Him to say something wrong, unwise, or inappropriate. This antagonism escalated shortly after the encounter that Luke just described (vv. 37-52). These two verses document the Jewish religious leaders' official rejection of Jesus (cf. Matt. 12; Mark 12).

Luke's original readers would have learned the importance of accepting and believing Jesus' teachings as a result of Luke's selection of material in this section (11:14-54). To fail to do so results in dire consequences. Listening to the Word of God continues to be a major emphasis in this section. Furthermore, the hypocrisy that characterized the Pharisees and scribes can also infect disciples of Jesus, if they elevated ritual observance above real worship. Jesus developed this idea in the next pericope (12:1-12).

"The issues Jesus raises here [vv. 37-54] are dangers that those of a conservative theological bent always face. In pursuit of truth and the way of God, far too many people conduct their zeal for righteousness by making sure that every 'i' is dotted and every 't' crossed, and by watching over others to make sure they are acting properly. On the other hand, these same people have often lost sensitivity to God's call for justice. God wants us to care about those whose plight is less fortunate than our own (Rom. 12:16)."<sup>1</sup>

#### D. THE INSTRUCTION OF THE DISCIPLES IN VIEW OF JESUS' REJECTION 12:1—13:17

Teaching of the disciples continues as the primary emphasis in this part of the third Gospel (9:51—19:10). Jesus' words to them at the beginning of the present section (12:1—13:17) broadened to include the crowds toward the end. Verses 12:1 through 13:9 are essentially one continuous discourse, with emphasis on vigilance in the face of crisis.<sup>2</sup>

"The coming judgment and the need for proper preparation are the threads that tie all of chapter 12 together."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Bock, *Luke*, p. 333.

<sup>2</sup>Green, p. 476.

<sup>3</sup>M. Bailey, "Luke," p. 129.

**1. The importance of fearless confession 12:1-12 (cf. Matt. 10:19-20, 26-33)**

Jesus used His condemnation of the Pharisees' hypocrisy as an occasion to warn His disciples against being hypocritical. The context of this teaching in Matthew's Gospel is Jesus' instruction of the Twelve before He sent them on their mission. Luke recorded that He also taught His disciples the importance of fearless witness under persecution as they moved toward Jerusalem.

**The leaven of the Pharisees 12:1-3**

12:1 Luke set the scene for the following teaching by explaining that it happened when Pharisaic hostility had become intense (11:53-54). What Jesus proceeded to tell His disciples had opposition and persecution in view. In spite of Pharisaic antagonism Jesus had a very large following (Gr. *myriadon*, lit. ten thousand, but used here as a superlative, cf. Acts 19:19; 21:20). According to A. B. Bruce, this is the largest crowd mentioned anywhere in the Gospels, though hyperbolic.<sup>1</sup> Evidently the crowd's size kept increasing (cf. 11:29). However the lesson that follows was for Jesus' disciples (cf. 20:45).

"Leaven" or yeast (Gr. *zymes*) has a pervasive effect and therefore is a good illustration of the influence of hypocrisy. Elsewhere Jesus warned the disciples of the teaching of the Pharisees, which He compared to leaven (Matt. 16:6, 12; Mark 8:15). Here he used leaven as an example of their hypocrisy. Hypocrisy, like leaven, starts small but expands and affects everything it touches.

"What is this yeast? Jesus defines it as 'hypocrisy,' an unfortunate transliteration of a Greek lexeme [i.e., a lexical unit of language], the meaning of which in Luke is closely aligned with the usage in the LXX; there it describes 'a person whose conduct is not determined by God and is thus "godless."' ... Hence, Jesus' point is not that

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<sup>1</sup>A. B. Bruce, "The Synoptic ...," 1:555.

they are play-acting, but that Jesus regards them as misdirected in their fundamental understanding of God's purpose and, therefore, incapable of discerning the authentic meaning of the Scriptures and, therefore, unable to present anything other than the impression of piety."<sup>1</sup>

"Leaven in Scripture is generally a type of *evil* which corrupts and spreads, disturbing, puffing up and souring that which it influences. The parable of the Leaven (xiii. 20, 21; Mt. xiii. 33) is almost the only exception."<sup>2</sup>

- 12:2      What is now unknown because of hypocrisy will one day become known. This is a general principle. On the human level there are exceptions to this principle, but Jesus undoubtedly had God, who knows all secrets, in mind.
- 12:3      Jesus' statement here should probably be understood as a positive encouragement rather than an ominous threat. He used it that way in the other contexts in which He made this statement (cf. 8:17; Matt. 10:26-27; Mark 4:22). If so, He meant the good news witness, which the disciples might try to hide because of the threat of persecution, would come out into the open eventually.

### Preparing for judgment 12:4-12

"The teaching about the Pharisees and the judgment leads naturally into a more general section on judgment and the importance of being prepared for it."<sup>3</sup>

- 12:4      Jesus identified what followed as particularly important (cf. 6:27; 11:9; 12:5, 8). The unusual address "My friends" (Gr. *philois*) added a further encouragement to represent Jesus boldly, in spite of opposition, even though it might result in death. This word "friends" expressed confidence in the disciples, and approval of them as those entrusted with His

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<sup>1</sup>Green, pp. 480-81.

<sup>2</sup>Plummer, p. 318.

<sup>3</sup>Morris, *The Gospel ...*, p. 208.

secrets and those who do His will. It contrasts with the rejection they faced in the world. This is the only place in the Synoptics where Jesus called His disciples His friends (cf. Matt. 12:48-50; John 15:13-15). Friends are not just people with whom we share common life but those with whom we also share common commitments and goals. The writer of Hebrews made a similar distinction when he wrote of the Lord's "partners" (Gr. *metochoi*, Heb. 1:9).

12:5 Rather than fearing their persecutors, the disciples should fear God more.

"... when Cromwell was asked the basis for his courage and fearlessness, he replied that he had learned that if he feared God he would fear no man. That is exactly what our Lord is saying in this passage."<sup>1</sup>

God has the power to affect eternal, not just temporal, destiny. Jesus was not implying here that the disciples would end up in hell if they proved unfaithful (cf. John 10:27-28; 2 Tim. 2:11-13). He was warning them about the possibility of losing an eternal reward. He was citing God's punitive power in order to discourage hypocrisy. This is Luke's only reference to "hell" (Gr. *gehenna*), but elsewhere it is described as a place of eternal torment (cf. Matt. 5:22; 18:8-9; Mark 9:43-48; James 4:12; 1 Enoch 27:2).

"Jesus taught the reality of hell unambiguously."<sup>2</sup>

"This verse thus dispels the popular myth that the devil has charge of hell."<sup>3</sup>

"...we are not in Scripture told to fear Satan, but to resist him courageously (Jas. iv. 7; 1 Pet. v. 9)."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>McGee, 4:300.

<sup>2</sup>Liefeld, "Luke," p. 959.

<sup>3</sup>Valdéz, 1:289.

<sup>4</sup>Plummer, p. 319.

12:6-7 The point of these two illustrations was that God is aware of more insignificant things than the disciples, yet He has concern for these things. It is an argument from the lesser to the greater (cf. 11:13). Since God knows about and has concern for these less important things, He will surely care for the disciples who are more valuable.

Sparrows were a cheap food source for the poor, and the *assarion* was a Roman coin worth about one sixteenth of a denarius, which was a day's wage (cf. Matt. 10:29).<sup>1</sup> These illustrations balance Jesus' singular warning to fear God (v. 5) with a double assurance of His fatherly concern for Jesus' disciples. However the Father's intimate acquaintance with their lives also constitutes a warning against hypocrisy.

In Matthew 10:29 Jesus said, "Are two sparrows not sold for an assarion?" Here Luke recorded that Jesus said, "Are five sparrows not sold for two assaria?" Jesus probably used this illustration on several different occasions, sometimes referring to the price of two sparrows and at other times referring to the price of five.

"They [sparrows] were sold in the market either by the pair or in fives, the pair being the smallest, and five the next smallest quantity sold ... The market price in the time of Jesus was a 'farthing' (=about a halfpenny of our [English] money) a pair, or two 'farthings' (=about a penny of our money) for five."<sup>2</sup>

"Somebody has said God goes to every sparrow's funeral!"<sup>3</sup>

Does God really know how many hairs are on each person's head, or was Jesus speaking hyperbolically? Since God knows everything, I think His statement as literally true.

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<sup>1</sup>Nolland, *Luke 9:21—18:34*, p. 678.

<sup>2</sup>Deissmann, p. 273.

<sup>3</sup>Ironside, 2:402. See J. B. Phillips, *Your God Is Too Small*, pp. 36-39.

12:8-9 Another special preface ("Now I say to you") indicated the certainty and importance of what followed (cf. vv. 4-5). Confessing the Son of Man (i.e., Jesus as the divine Messiah) publicly (cf. Acts 7:55-56), or denying Him publicly, were the disciples' options (cf. 9:26).<sup>1</sup> Confessing (Gr. *homologesei*) and denying (Gr. *arnesetai*) are polar expressions. In polarization, extreme terms highlight the alternatives. The disciples had to make a choice. Their choice would determine Jesus' acknowledgment, or lack of acknowledgment, of them before the angels and the heavenly Father (cf. 7:28; Matt. 10:32-33; 11:11).

The time of God's judicial action will evidently be when He evaluates people's lives as they stand before Him. For Christians this will be at the judgment seat of Christ (1 Cor. 3:10-15). More or fewer rewards are the outcome of this judgment. Jesus appears to have been viewing the totality of a disciple's witness, not every instance of it, since He spoke of a final heavenly evaluation.

12:10 Criticism of Jesus was forgivable, but rejection of the Holy Spirit's testimony that Jesus was the Christ was not (cf. Matt. 12:31-32; Mark 3:28-29). This warning continued the preceding cautions against denying Jesus. Jesus implied that His disciples might face temptations to renounce faith in Him. To deny Him publicly was bad, but to abandon one's faith in Him was worse. Jesus did not mean that God would withhold pardon from the disciple who did this, or that he would lose his salvation. He presented the alternative, not as a real possibility for disciples necessarily, but as a warning that showed the seriousness of that type of denial in order to discourage apostasy. To blaspheme someone means to speak ill or abusively of him or her.<sup>2</sup> Jesus' enemies were speaking ill of the Holy Spirit by attributing Jesus' works to the power of Satan rather than to the power of the Holy Spirit.

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<sup>1</sup>See Geldenhuys, pp. 352-53, for a discussion of the title "Son of Man."

<sup>2</sup>See Darrell L. Bock, "The Son of Man Seated at God's Right Hand and the Debate over Jesus' 'Blasphemy,'" in *Jesus of Nazareth: Lord and Christ*, pp. 184-85.

"To blaspheme against the Holy Ghost in that age was to refuse to accept the Holy Ghost's witness to the Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is the same today. The one sin that never can be forgiven is the final rejection of the Holy Ghost's testimony to the Lord Jesus."<sup>1</sup>

12:11-12 Some of the disciples could anticipate having to confess their belief in Jesus before hostile religious and political bodies, both Jewish and Gentile. They should not become anxious about the wording of their testimonies on those occasions. The situations themselves would provide enough intimidation. Jesus promised the Holy Spirit's help in formulating the proper defense then. The same Holy Spirit, whom they might feel pressure to blaspheme against (v. 10), would help them if they remained faithful to Him (cf. 21:14-15; Matt. 10:19-20).

Jesus was not speaking about normal preaching situations but about giving oral defense under the pressure of persecution.<sup>2</sup> Luke recorded many instances of this in Acts (e.g., Acts 4:8; 6:10; 7:55; et al.). Modern persecuted disciples have also testified to the Spirit's supernatural assistance of them that Jesus promised here.<sup>3</sup>

The total effect of this teaching was to encourage the disciples to testify of their faith in Jesus boldly when faced with the temptation to remain silent or to deny their faith (cf. Rom. 10:9-10). All disciples need this encouragement frequently.

"Luke 12:4-34 is tied together by word links which highlight central themes. In addressing the disciples, Jesus is trying to counter two kinds of fear (note *phobeomai* in 12:4, 5, 7, 32) or anxiety (*merimnao* in 12:11, 22, 25, 26). Threatening opposition may cause fear (12:4, 7) and anxiety (12:11). Lack of provision for food and clothing may cause anxiety (12:22, 25, 25) and fear (12:32)."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Ironside, 2:404.

<sup>2</sup>Tenney, "The Gospel ...," p. 1050.

<sup>3</sup>Check out the website of The Voice of the Martyrs.

<sup>4</sup>Tannehill, 1:244.

## 2. The importance of the eternal perspective 12:13-21

Jesus continued to teach His disciples the importance of following Him faithfully. Responding to a request from someone in the crowd, presumably not a disciple, Jesus warned against greed. Greed is one of the greatest temptations that disciples, as well as other people, face. It has lured many disciples from the path of faithfulness.<sup>1</sup>

"If in the earlier section the hypocrisy of the Pharisees introduced teaching for the disciples on avoiding hypocrisy and being fearless in confession, Jesus now uses the avarice of the crowd to introduce teaching for the disciples on trust in God and freedom from greed for material possessions (12:22-34)."<sup>2</sup>

### The temptation of greed 12:13-15

12:13 Evidently the person who made this request viewed Jesus as an ethical authority ("teacher," Gr. *didaskale*, cf. 7:40) that his brother would respect. His request appears to have been strictly materialistic with no spiritual overtones. The man voiced a legitimate concern, and his request provided the setting for the teaching that followed.

12:14 "You there" is a forceful address, but it was not insulting (cf. 5:20; 22:58, 60). By asking His question, Jesus forced the man to consider who Jesus was. This was the fundamental issue for this man. He was appealing to Jesus as a judge, just as the Jews often appealed to rabbis to settle such disputes.<sup>3</sup> Jesus was in essence asking the man if he realized what He was doing. Ironically, God had appointed Jesus as this man's Judge, as well as everyone else's Judge. Hopefully the man faced the question of Jesus' authority over him and became a believer, but this was not Luke's concern in recording this incident.

By answering as He did, Jesus was also refusing to pass judgment on the situation the man had presented to Him. He was competent to deal with it, but He refused to do so

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<sup>1</sup>See Timothy Keller, *Counterfeit Gods*, ch. 3: "Money Changes Everything," pp. 48-71.

<sup>2</sup>Marshall, *The Gospel ...*, p. 521.

<sup>3</sup>Morris, *The Gospel ...*, p. 212.



because He wanted to deal with another issue, namely, the man's materialism. Jesus always declined to interfere in the affairs of secular life but instead dealt with the spiritual and moral issues that ultimately shape secular life.<sup>1</sup> Would that more of His servants would follow this example.

"He [Jesus] came to bring men to God, not to bring property to men."<sup>2</sup>

12:15 Jesus warned the man and the crowd, including His disciples, against every form of greed.

"Greed is the desire to have more, to get one's hands on whatever one can, to acquire without reference to one's own specific needs or the situation of others. The greedy person is confused about life, since a humanly meaningful and satisfying life has very little to do with how extensive one's possessions are."<sup>3</sup>

Greed is wrong because it exalts possessions to a place of importance that is greater than the place they occupy in life. Quality of life is not proportionate to one's possessions. There is more to life than that. Even an abundance of possessions does not bring fullness of life. The man had implied by his request that his life would be better if he had more possessions. Jesus said that was not necessarily so. People should seek God rather than riches, because God does bring fulfillment into life (cf. Col. 3:1-4).

"Jesus warns people far more often about greed than about sex, yet almost no one thinks they are guilty of it."<sup>4</sup>

"John Wesley's rule of life was to *save* all he could and *give* all he could. When he was at Oxford he had an income of £30 a year. He lived on £28 and

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<sup>1</sup>See Trench, *Notes on the Parables* ..., p. 334.

<sup>2</sup>Morris, *The Gospel* ..., p. 212.

<sup>3</sup>Nolland, *Luke 9:21—18:34*, p. 688.

<sup>4</sup>Keller, p. 53.

gave £2 away. When his income increased to £60, £90 and £120 a year, he still lived on £28 and gave the balance away."<sup>1</sup>

### The parable of the rich fool 12:16-21

- 12:16-18 Jesus told the parable of the rich fool in order to illustrate His point (v. 15). He presented the rich man as an intelligent farmer. The farmer did only what was reasonable. Jesus was not faulting him for his plans. Likewise the materialistic man's concern about his inheritance was a legitimate concern (v. 13).
- 12:19 The rich man's folly lay in what he failed to consider, not in the plans that he made. His words to himself indicate that he thought his life consisted in the abundance of his possessions alone. But there was more to life than he realized, namely, life beyond the grave. The man used a common form of address in speaking to himself: "self" (cf. Ps. 42:5).
- 12:20 God said something different to the man than he had said to himself. This contrast shows the error of the rich man's thinking. In the Old Testament a fool is essentially someone who disbelieves or disregards God (e.g., Ps. 14:1; cf. Luke 11:40). That is precisely what this man had done. He had thought that he would be comfortable for many years to come (v. 19), but God took his life that very night (cf. James 4:13-16). This loss of life contrasts with his accumulation of possessions. Now he had nothing left, and his possessions would pass to his heirs (cf. Eccles. 2:18-19). This fact could not have escaped the notice of the man who posed the question about his inheritance (v. 13). Even if he got part of his brother's inheritance, he might not keep it very long.
- 12:21 Jesus drew the application. A person who only enriches himself with physical possessions, and does not store up treasure in heaven, is a fool (cf. Matt. 6:19; 1 Tim. 6:6-10; James 1:10). "For himself" contrasts with "in relation to God." This translation preserves the form of the contrast in the Greek

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<sup>1</sup>Barclay, p. 168.

text. The point of the contrast is the difference between riches on earth and riches in heaven (cf. Matt. 6:19-21).

"The man in the story was called a fool for confusing time with eternity, his body for his soul, and what was his for what was God's."<sup>1</sup>

"... as the grim Spanish proverb has it, 'There are no pockets in a shroud.'"<sup>2</sup>

In this teaching, with its illustrative parable, Jesus taught His disciples and the multitude to beware of a foolish attitude toward material possessions. The wrong attitude is that the richness of life depends on the richness of earthly wealth. Disciples need to be aware of this viewpoint because the desire to increase wealth can draw them away from following Jesus faithfully (cf. 8:14). This is especially true since Jesus promised them opposition and persecution rather than wealth and comfort. Material possessions cannot provide the quality of life that intimacy with God can. Christian disciples should live with what God has revealed about life beyond the grave—specifically with reward or loss of reward clearly in view—rather than living for the present.

Augustine is reported to have said: God does not want you to lose your riches, but to change their place.<sup>3</sup> In other words, rather than accumulating more and more (in savings accounts, investments, etc.), the Christian should distribute more and more (to the spiritually and physically needy).

"A test of our heart is how we give. Are we generous or are we hoarders? This is a test that we have to engage in privately before the Lord. No one can tell someone else exactly how to answer such questions, for there is no magic percentage that is to be reached."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>M. Bailey, "Luke," p. 129.

<sup>2</sup>Barclay, p. 169.

<sup>3</sup>Cited in Trench, *Notes on the Parables ...*, p. 338.

<sup>4</sup>Bock, *Luke*, p. 346.

### 3. God's provisions for disciples 12:22-34 (cf. Matt. 6:25-34)

This pericope continues the subject of life and possessions (cf. "treasure" in vv. 21, 34). What Jesus implied in the parable of the rich fool He explicitly taught in these verses. His disciples should not think or act like the pagan world (v. 30), which the rich fool typified. From emphasis on greed and selfishness Jesus moved to worry, which is related.

"The flip side of not hoarding possessions and caring only for oneself involves how a person will watch out for life's necessities. So this unit takes up that question."<sup>1</sup>

12:22-23 Jesus addressed the following words more particularly to the disciples (cf. vv. 1, 13). It is foolish to store up material possessions with no regard for God. Therefore Jesus urged His disciples, who had considered God, to refrain from undue concern about possessions. The "life" (Gr. *psyche*) in view is the physical life that needs fuel. The body is the outward shell that needs covering. Food and clothing are just the needs of the present life. Consequently disciples should treat these needs as secondary and not become anxious over them. There is more to life than these things. Formerly Jesus had warned against greed when one does not have possessions (v. 15). Now He warned against anxiety as a result of having them. Anxiety ("worry") is foolish because life consists of more than what one eats and wears (cf. 4:4).

12:24 The ravens illustration shows that God provides for His creatures. The implication is that God will provide for people, and even more for His disciples, since they are more important to Him than the birds. Jesus' choice of a raven for His illustration is remarkable, since ravens were rapacious and unclean birds of prey (Lev. 11:15), and they are infamous for not feeding their own young. Yet God makes sure that the young ravens eat. Birds do not and cannot provide for themselves like humans do and can (by saving for the future),

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<sup>1</sup>Idem, *Jesus according ...*, p. 267.

but God still provides for them. Again Jesus argued from the lesser to the greater (cf. vv. 6-7).

12:25 Did Jesus have age or stature in mind when He made this comparison? Some translators have rendered the Greek *pechys* as "cubit" and *helikia* as "life's span," interpreting Jesus' statement as a metaphor describing age. Other translators translated *pechys* as "hour" and *helikia* as "life." Both translations present Jesus speaking about the lengthening of life, not stature. This is understandable in view of verses 19 and 20. The rich fool could not extend his life. However, *pechys* means "cubit." It is a measure of distance rather than time. Probably Jesus used it metaphorically to refer to the least possible length of increase (cf. Ps. 39:5). The idea of wanting to increase one's height by 18 inches is ludicrous if taken literally. Hardly anyone would want to do that, though many people would like to lengthen their lives a little.

Jesus' point was that worry cannot prolong life any more than it can provide for life (v. 24). Worry can actually reduce one's lifespan.

12:26 Jesus drew the conclusion by arguing from the lesser to the greater again. If it is futile to worry about small matters that lie outside our control, it is even more foolish to worry about larger matters that lie even further outside our control.<sup>1</sup> The smaller matters include living longer, and the larger ones include all of life and its needs.

12:27 Jesus turned from birds (v. 24) to flowers in order to illustrate further the futility of worrying about material possessions. The "flowers" (Gr. *krinon*) cannot do anything whatsoever to provide for their own needs. They are totally dependent on God. Still He provides for them, and He does so magnificently. He gives every common flower more glorious clothing than Solomon, Israel's most glorious king, could provide for himself. Laboring and spinning to provide clothing seems to be in view. This was women's work in Jesus' day, in contrast to providing for the young (v. 24), which was men's work. Thus Jesus

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<sup>1</sup>Liefeld, "Luke," p. 963.

implied that His teaching was applicable to both male and female disciples.

12:28 "Grass" is a common term for all types of plant life. People burn the common vegetation for warmth, yet God has made it beautiful. How much more will God provide for people, who have a longer existence and serve a higher purpose than the grass.

The disciples were men of "little faith" because they worried about the necessities of life rather than trusting God to provide these for them.

12:29 Obviously people have a responsibility to provide for their own needs (Gen. 1:29-30; 2 Thess. 3:10). Jesus was forbidding worrying over these things. He used hyperbole (i.e., overstatement for the sake of the effect) in order to make His point. The Greek word translated "worrying" here is *meteorizesthe*, meaning "to raise up" or "to suspend." The idea is of a person in suspense or "up in the air" or "hung up" with anxiety about his or her needs.

"A little bit of reflection helps us to recognize that most worry is about things that can't be changed (the past), things that can't be controlled (the present), or things that might not happen (the future)."<sup>1</sup>

12:30 The reason worry about these things is wrong is that it is a pagan practice that is unsuitable for people who have a heavenly Father. The gracious heavenly Father knows that His children need these things. Therefore the believer should rely on Him to provide what is necessary.

"The materialistic world is like a group of passengers frantically scurrying to get the best deck chair on a sinking ship."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Inrig, p. 105.

<sup>2</sup>*The Nelson ...*, p. 1722.

12:31 Rather than seeking after material possessions, Jesus' disciples should seek the lasting things associated with His messianic kingdom. This includes preparing oneself for the earthly kingdom and becoming an active participant in God's program leading up to it. Jesus promised that God would provide the material provisions of those who do so.

This is a conditional promise (cf. Matt. 6:33). The paratactic construction suggests a condition. Parataxis (literally a placing side by side) is the literary device of setting clauses side by side without indicating, with connecting words, the co-ordinate or subordinate relationship between them. Here, as in 10:28b for example, the first clause contains the condition for the realization of what the second clause contains.

However we need to understand this promise in the larger context of life in a fallen world. We must realize that sometimes disciples get caught up in the consequences of sin and suffering, as do non-disciples. Even though God knows every sparrow that falls to the ground, He allows some to fall (Matt. 10:29-31). By the same token, He allows some of His disciples to experience privation and to die without intervening.

12:32 Jesus' command to turn attention from the acquisition of material provisions to seeking messianic kingdom concerns undoubtedly created some uneasiness in His disciples. Likewise the hostility of the Pharisees and other enemies doubtless disturbed them. Therefore Jesus, speaking as the Good Shepherd of the "little flock" for which He would provide, urged them not to fear. They could release their hold on material things with the full assurance that the blessings of the messianic kingdom, and eventual reward, would be theirs one day (cf. Dan. 7:27). The description of God as their Father giving them something ties in with the earlier thought of receiving an inheritance (v. 13; cf. 11:13). Faithful disciples will receive an inheritance eventually.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>For helpful studies of the New Testament teaching about believers' inheritances, see Joseph C. Dillow, *The Reign of the Servant Kings*, pp. 61-110; and William E. Brown, "The

12:33 In view of this prospect, Jesus' disciples needed to cut back and live simply so that they could lay up treasure in heaven without unnecessary materialistic distractions. By selling their possessions and giving to charity they were in effect preparing to receive their reward. Jesus pictured this as making money belts in anticipation of receiving something to put in them, namely, eternal rewards. Such money belts would not wear out, in contrast to the money belts that hold material wealth. Furthermore, their treasure in heaven would be secure, rather than vulnerable to theft and destruction (cf. 1 Pet. 1:3-4).

"The generosity this text calls for has often been questioned. Are we really called to sell all our possessions? Jesus' point is that we must give up viewing what we call ours, as if it were a private possession to be hoarded."<sup>1</sup>

"The command to 'sell' and 'give' (or 'distribute') is not obsolete after Jesus' ascension, for the narrator portrays the life of the Jerusalem church in such a way as to indicate a particular kind of fulfillment of Jesus' command. ... The descriptions of this arrangement feature the words 'sell' and 'distribute' (using *piprasko* and *diamerizo* in Acts 2:45, *poleo* and *diadidomi* in 4:34-35), which correspond to the commands of Jesus in Luke 12:33 (*poleo* and *didomi*) and 18:22 (*poleo* and *diadidomi*)."<sup>2</sup>

12:34 As a principle, people think about and long for the place where their treasure resides, whether on earth or in heaven. Investing in heaven draws one's affections ("heart") in that direction, but if one's riches are on earth, he or she will think more about temporal things.

Jesus wanted His disciples to be free from unnecessary anxiety as they faced opposition and persecution for their faith. To remove it from them,

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New Testament Concept of the Believer's Inheritance" (Th.D. dissertation, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1984).

<sup>1</sup>Bock, *Luke*, p. 352.

<sup>2</sup>Tannehill, 1:247-48.



He reminded them first that life consists of more than material possessions (vv. 22-24). Second, He told them that worry is foolish because it cannot produce objective change (vv. 25-28). Third, He noted that worry characterizes pagans (vv. 29-31). Then He encouraged them with an incentive not to fear because God would give them the messianic kingdom (v. 32). Finally, He urged them to transfer their assets from earth to heaven. This would give them immediate peace as well as eventual reward (vv. 33-34).

#### **4. The coming of the Son of Man 12:35-48**

Jesus' teaching of the disciples continued without a break. But the subject shifted from ceasing to be anxious about material possessions to being ready for the Son of Man's coming. Freedom from anxiety can lead to laziness. Jesus did not want His disciples to be lazy but to prepare for His return. He taught this lesson with two parables. This teaching is the first indication in Luke that Jesus would leave His disciples and then return to them later.

#### **The importance of readiness 12:35-40**

Jesus pictured His disciples as servants waiting expectantly for their master's return (cf. Mark 13:33-37). He promised them a reward beyond imagination for their faithfulness. The parable of the 10 virgins is similar to this one in its teaching (cf. Matt. 25:1-13).

#### **Jesus' encouragement 12:35**

The word "treasure" occurred at the beginning and the end of the preceding teaching and indicated its subject (vv. 21, 34). In like manner, the words "prepared" and "ready" serve the same function in this pericope (vv. 35, 40). Disciples need to be ready for service and ready to dispel the spiritual darkness, both in the future and in the present.

#### **The parable of the faithful servants 12:36-38**

12:36 In this parable the master returns from a wedding feast. Perhaps Jesus had the heavenly marriage supper of Jesus with His bride, the church, in view (cf. Rev. 4—5). A marriage supper in heaven will precede His second coming to the earth (Rev. 19). Jesus was not referring to the messianic banquet in

verse 36, since that will follow the Second Coming. The disciples in view are on earth and Jesus is returning from heaven. Thus this parable is most directly applicable to disciples living on the earth during the Great Tribulation. It also teaches Christian disciples to be ready for the Lord's coming at the Rapture (1 Thess. 4:13-18). Jesus could have returned as soon as seven years after His ascension, so the disciples who first heard Him speak these words also needed to be ready. However the "wedding feast" may refer to neither of these eschatological events but just to any joyful wedding feast.

"The sort of alertness Jesus counsels is not understood best as a set of activities but rather as a state of mind and heart. Disciples are to be the kind of people who are always on the alert."<sup>1</sup>

12:37 The blessing that Jesus promised was that the master would prepare himself to serve His servants and wait on them. This was unthinkable in Jesus' world (cf. John 13:3-8). But Jesus enforced its certainty with a strong affirmation that Luke did not record Him using since 4:24 ("truly I say to you"). The messianic banquet on earth, at the beginning of the Millennium, may be in view here. Or this may simply be a general picture of how Christ will honor His servants in the future.

"Eschatological fulfillment, and specifically sharing in God's reign, is repeatedly pictured in terms of a festive meal in Luke. This association must be considered when interpreting the meal scenes and references to a future meal in the gospel, which have an unusually prominent place in Luke's account of the ministry of Jesus."<sup>2</sup>

Messiah will serve and honor His slaves who stayed alert and anticipated His coming.

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<sup>1</sup>Green, p. 501.

<sup>2</sup>Tannehill, 1:218. Cf. 13:28-29;14:15-24; and 22:16, 18 and 30.

12:38 The "second watch" was from 9:00 p.m. to midnight, and the "third" watch was from midnight to 3:00 a.m. by Jewish reckoning. These periods represent the present world as a place (and time) of darkness, in which a disciple tends to sleep rather than bear witness.<sup>1</sup>

### **The importance of watchfulness 12:39-40**

12:39 Jesus chose another illustration of the importance of preparedness. He compared His return to the coming of a thief in this one. The point is that those whom He visited would not expect His return (v. 40). This illustration gives a warning, whereas the previous one provided encouragement. The previous one presented the possibility of delay, whereas this one features sudden and unexpected arrival.<sup>2</sup>

12:40 Jesus concluded by applying the illustrations. By using the title "Son of Man," Jesus may have been implying that the coming of the "Son of Man" that Daniel had predicted was in view (Dan. 7:13-14). That prophecy dealt with His coming in glory to judge and to rule. Elsewhere Jesus said that He did not know the time of His return (Matt. 24:36). However it will be unexpected because the exact day and hour are unknown, and His return will surprise many people (cf. Matt. 24:36, 42, 44; 25:13; Mark 13:32-33, 35).

### **The importance of faithfulness 12:41-48**

Faithfulness is important for disciples in view of the Lord's return, in addition to readiness.

#### **Peter's question 12:41**

Peter asked a clarifying question. He wanted to know if Jesus was aiming His warnings to be ready at the disciples alone or at the disciples plus the crowd that was present and listening (v. 1).

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<sup>1</sup>E. Lövestam, *Spiritual Wakefulness in the New Testament*, pp. 84-91.

<sup>2</sup>Marshall, *The Gospel ...*, p. 538.

### The parable of the two servants 12:42-48 (cf. Matt 24:45-51)

- 12:42 Jesus answered Peter's question with one of His own. The answer to Jesus' question would give Peter the answer to his own question. Obviously the faithful and sensible steward pictures a disciple. Jesus' question also taught that He would give faithful stewards authority over other servants of His in the future. Evidently the words "give them their rations at the proper time" meant that faithful disciples, or loyal stewards, will be given positions of authority over fellow servants, by Christ, in the earthly millennial kingdom (cf. 22:30; Matt. 19:28). It was common in Jesus' day for some servants to have authority over other servants within a household (cf. Matt. 18:21-35).
- 12:43-44 Disciples who faithfully serve their fellow servants of the Lord during His absence can count on receiving greater responsibility ("in charge of all his possessions") after He returns. These faithful disciples will become Jesus' chief administrators in the kingdom (cf. Dan. 7:27). Authority in the earthly kingdom is in view.
- 12:45-46 However the unfaithful disciple who disregards Jesus' warnings to be ready for His return, and who is abusive, self-centered, and self-indulgent, will end up "with the unbelievers."<sup>1</sup>

"One of the most dangerous days in a man's life is when he discovers the word to-morrow."<sup>2</sup>

The judgments at the beginning of the messianic kingdom immediately following the Second Coming may be in view (Matt. 25:31-46). Since these slaves perish eternally, they probably correspond to the religious leaders of their day who professed to serve God but were unbelievers in Jesus. Their horrible end is appropriate, since they had great privilege and responsibility but failed in their duty.

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<sup>1</sup>See Karl E. Pagenkemper, "Rejection Imagery in the Synoptic Parables," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 153:610 (April-June 1996):191-94.

<sup>2</sup>Barclay, p. 172.

12:47-48 Jesus clarified the standard by which He would judge these unfaithful slaves (cf. Matt. 10:15; 11:22, 24; Rom. 1:20—2:16; Heb. 10:28-29). The extent of their knowledge of their Master's will would affect their punishment (cf. Num. 15:30; Deut. 17:12; Ps. 19:13).

"The language suggests degrees of punishment."<sup>1</sup>

Privilege increases responsibility (cf. 11:29-32; Rom. 2:12-13; James 3:1). This fact should not discourage disciples from discovering God's will, but it should motivate them to maintain their faithfulness as they increase in knowledge. All of God's servants have a responsibility to know their Master's will as fully as they can—since they are His servants—and to do it.

"This concern to admonish the leaders of the church also appears in Jesus' farewell discourse the night before his death (22:24-38) and in Paul's farewell address to the Ephesian elders (Acts 20:18-35). These passages mention various abuses of position by church leaders."<sup>2</sup>

### 5. The coming distress 12:49-59

Jesus' teaching on the same occasion continued. He clarified next that His disciples could anticipate a period of intense persecution. This is the reason He urged them to be faithful (vv. 41-48).

"In Luke 12:49—14:24, Jesus is calling on his audience to note the nature of the time—a time when God is making divisions among people, a time when people should be able to see what God is doing through Jesus, and a time when Israel had better respond before becoming nationally culpable [blameworthy] for rejecting God's messenger."<sup>3</sup>

#### **Division over Jesus 12:49-53 (cf. Matt. 10:34-36)**

Jesus addressed these words to His disciples primarily (cf. vv. 41-42).

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<sup>1</sup>Tenney, "The Gospel ...," p. 1050.

<sup>2</sup>Tannehill, 1:250.

<sup>3</sup>Bock, *Luke*, p. 363.

- 12:49 In view of the context, Jesus' reference to fire must be as a symbol of judgment primarily, rather than purification, which is its other common meaning in Scripture. Another view is that the fire is the gift of the Holy Spirit.<sup>1</sup> Jesus had just spoken of judging unfaithful (i.e., pretending, unbelieving) disciples (vv. 45-48). Now He explained that one of the purposes of His incarnation was to bring judgment to the earth (cf. 3:16). Perhaps Jesus wished that this aspect of His ministry was taking place already because it would result in the purification of His people and would usher in the earthly kingdom.
- 12:50 However, before Jesus' ministry of judging could begin, He Himself would have to undergo judgment, which He pictured as a baptism. This baptism would overwhelm Him—like water overwhelms a person being immersed in water—but only temporarily. He would rise from it like a person experiencing water baptism rises out of the water. The prospect of His baptism (i.e., the Cross) distressed Him, because it involved bearing God's wrath for the sins of humankind.
- "What Jesus anticipates here is no mere fate or accident but a destiny, which God has set for him to fulfill."<sup>2</sup>
- John wrote that God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world (John 3:17). That was not Jesus' purpose at His first coming. But when He returns at His second coming, He will exercise judgment.
- 12:51 Evidently Jesus meant that He did not only come to bring peace on earth but also division. Jesus' earthly ministry began this division.
- 12:52-53 From the time that Jesus appeared preaching publicly, even households, which are the tightest social units, began to experience division. The many differences of opinion that divided people were caused by people's personal beliefs about Jesus' person and work. This situation would continue. No

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<sup>1</sup>Alford, 1:570.

<sup>2</sup>Nolland, *Luke 9:21—18:34*, p. 710.

familial relationship would escape the possibility of this division (cf. Mic. 7:6). This situation posed a crisis for the future.

"Since detachment from family is another repeated theme in Jesus' teaching about discipleship (see 9:57-62; 11:27-28; 14:26; 18:28-30), the inclusion of 12:51-53 helps to make Luke 12 a comprehensive discourse on central themes of Jesus' teaching to his disciples."<sup>1</sup>

### Decision for Jesus 12:54-59

Jesus again focused His teaching on the multitudes (cf. v. 13). He urged the people to discern the significance of the present times. This was important in view of the coming judgment and the present division of opinion concerning Himself.

Luke did not indicate a chronological connection between this section and the preceding one, though there may have been one. He may have inserted this teaching here because of its logical connection with what precedes. In effect, Jesus was calling on the people to join the ranks of His faithful disciples before it was too late.

12:54-55 Rain clouds normally moved east from the Mediterranean Sea to the west, and they usually indicated showers. Southerly winds usually brought hot weather from the desert that lay to the southeast. One commentary described this wind as: "a furnace blast of desert air (common in late spring) that can raise the temperature thirty degrees in an hour."<sup>2</sup>

12:56 The people could predict future weather from present signs, but they could not see that the events associated with Jesus' ministry indicated the arrival of Messiah and his kingdom (cf. Matt. 16:2-3). The present time was one of change and crisis. By calling His hearers "hypocrites," Jesus was saying He perceived that their professed inability to recognize Messiah's appearance was artificial. It was not that they could not see

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<sup>1</sup>Tannehill, 1:252.

<sup>2</sup>Bruce J. Malina and Richard L. Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels*, p. 362.

that He was the Messiah, but they did not want to see it in spite of the evidence.

"They understood the winds of earth, but not the winds of God; they could discern the sky, but not the heavens."<sup>1</sup>

12:57 Jesus urged His hearers to come to a decision before it was too late (cf. Matt. 5:25-26). They needed to judge what was right and believe on Jesus before God judged them and condemned them for their unbelief.

12:58 Jesus reminded them of the wisdom of settling their disputes with one another before they went to court and a judge made the decision for them (cf. 1 Cor. 6:1-11). The result of not settling out of court might be condemnation and confinement in a Roman debtors' prison, from which they could not escape easily. Jesus' point was that the unbelievers in the crowd needed to get things right with their adversary (Jesus) before the judge (God) sent them to prison (hell).

12:59 The fact that Jesus presented the person in the illustration as escaping from prison by paying his debt does not mean that people can escape from hell by paying their way out. This false interpretation might lead one to pay money to the church in order to get his or her friends and/or relatives out of hell (or purgatory). Elsewhere Jesus taught that hell is a place of eternal torment from which no one can escape (Dan. 12:2; Matt. 25:46; John 5:29; Acts 24:15).

Probably the man imprisoned, in Jesus' illustration, was not given an eternal sentence because it was an earthly prison, where a person could pay off his debt to be released. The parallels between divine judgment, and the human judgment that Jesus described in His illustration, are not exact. A "lepton" was the smallest Greek copper coin and was worth about 1/128 of a laborer's daily wage.

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<sup>1</sup>Morris, *The Gospel ...*, p. 220.



## 6. A call to repentance 13:1-9

Another comment by some people in the crowd led Jesus to give further teaching that He illustrated with another parable. The connecting idea with what precedes is judgment.

### The need for repentance 13:1-5

- 13:1 Luke linked this incident chronologically with the preceding one. Apparently messengers from Jerusalem had just arrived with news about Pilate's act. This is the usual force of the Greek verb *apaggello*, translated "reported." Some Galileans had been in Jerusalem offering sacrifices at the temple. This may have been at Passover, since only at that time of year did non-priests offer sacrifices.<sup>1</sup> Pilate, the Roman governor of the province of Judea, may have killed them beside the altar in the temple courtyard. However the way that Luke described Pilate's action—Pilate mixed their blood with their sacrifices—permits a somewhat looser interpretation. That is, the two slayings may not have been closely connected. Pilate may have killed some Galileans when they were in Jerusalem to offer sacrifices. No extra-biblical references to this event have been found so far.<sup>2</sup>
- 13:2 Many of the Jews in Jesus' day believed that a tragedy or "accident" was the direct result of some personal sin (cf. John 9:1-3). Thus they concluded that the Galileans who had perished must have been great sinners. They based this view on a faulty theory of divine retribution, namely, that any divine judgment is the direct result of sin (cf. Job 4:7; 8:20; 22:4-5).
- 13:3 Jesus repudiated this theory and viewed the death of the Galileans as the consequence of sin generally. Jesus stressed the error of their view by placing the word "No" (v. 3; Gr. *ouchi*) first in the sentence for emphasis (cf. v. 5). He then drew a conclusion: Everyone needs to repent because everyone is a sinner, all sin brings judgment eventually, and all who do not repent will perish.

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<sup>1</sup>J. Jeremias, *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus*, p. 207, footnote 4.

<sup>2</sup>See Finegan, *Light from ...*, p. 157.

- 13:4 Jesus reinforced His point by citing another apparently recent tragedy and repudiating the common view of judgment again. The pool of Siloam lay in the southeastern quarter of Jerusalem (cf. John 9:7, 11).<sup>1</sup> Evidently a tower near the pool had fallen on 18 people and killed them. The Greek word *opheiletai* ("offenders") means debtors. The Jews used this term as a synonym for sinners (cf. Matt. 6:12; 18:24).
- 13:5 Jesus again asserted that people who experience calamities are not necessarily worse sinners than people who do not. More important, all people will face God's judgment unless they repent.

### The parable of the fruitless fig tree 13:6-9

This parable illustrated the need for repentance, but it also drew attention to God's grace in allowing time for repentance. This parable should not be confused with the incident in which Jesus cursed a fig tree as He and His disciples walked into Jerusalem (Matt. 21:19; Mark 11:13-14), or the shorter parable that He told about a fig tree (Matt. 24:32).

- 13:6 This parable as a whole is very similar to Isaiah 5:1 through 7, though there the plant in view was a grapevine. The fig tree was another popular symbol of Israel (cf. Hos. 9:10; Jer. 8:13; 24:1-8; Mic. 7:1). By referring to a fig tree and a vineyard together, Jesus left no doubt that He was alluding to Israel. However, some interpreters believe that He was speaking of individuals.<sup>2</sup> What was true of Israel can also apply to individuals.
- 13:7 God expected to find the fruit of repentance in Israel, but He found virtually none. He had not found fruit in it for a long time, so He planned to judge it. It was not fulfilling its purpose.

"A fig tree was often given some time to bear good fruit since its root structure was complex

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<sup>1</sup>Josephus, *The Wars ...*, 5:4:2. See the diagram "Jerusalem in New Testament Times" at the end of these notes.

<sup>2</sup>E.g., Henry, pp. 1461-62.

and took time to develop. Three years would have been enough for the tree to yield some fruit."<sup>1</sup>

13:8-9 God was gracious with Israel and gave it more time to bear fruit. The implication seems to be that Israel was in this grace period during the ministry of Jesus. His ministry stirred up the nation and infused elements that should have resulted in fruit (repentance). Israel's response to Him would determine her national fate. Therefore repentance was crucial immediately, since the grace period was relatively short. God was giving Israel a last chance to fulfill its purpose by accepting Jesus as her Messiah.

"The most searching question we can be asked is, 'Of what use were you in this world?'"<sup>2</sup>

Perhaps Paul had this parable in mind when he compared Israel to an olive tree and revealed Israel's fate further (Rom. 11:17-24).

### 7. A sign of Jesus' ability to affect change 13:10-17

There are several thematic connections that tie this pericope with what just preceded and that show its role in the development of Luke's argument. Jesus had just called the nation to repentance (vv. 3, 5). Now He showed that change was possible with His power. He had pictured Israel in need of fruit (vv. 6-8). Now He illustrated His restorative powers. He had called the people to believe in Him (12:54-59). Now He gave them a sign that He was the Messiah. He had called the multitudes hypocrites because they refused to respond to the clear evidence before them (12:56). Now He called them hypocrites again, because they refused to act to relieve suffering on the Sabbath (v. 15).

"While in 4:31—8:40 there seemed to be a clear distinction between the crowd, which was favorable toward Jesus, and the scribes and Pharisees, who were not, Jesus begins to issue harsh warnings to the crowd in Luke 11—13, and, as Jesus approaches Jerusalem, the crowd's attitudes are hardly distinguishable from those of the scribes and Pharisees, who

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<sup>1</sup> *The Nelson ...*, p. 1724.

<sup>2</sup> Barclay, p. 180.

reject Jesus' teaching on riches (16:14), think that proclaiming Jesus as king deserves a rebuke, and grumble when Jesus associates with tax collectors and sinners."<sup>1</sup>

"In two sets of units set in sequential parallelism (13:10-35; 14:1-35), Luke explores a series of reversals and paradoxical inversions associated with the manifestation of the kingdom of God ..."<sup>2</sup>

- 13:10-11 The Greek phrase *kai idou* (v. 11, "and behold," which are not translated in the NASB and NIV) suggests that Jesus may have suddenly become aware of a certain woman as He was teaching in a synagogue.<sup>3</sup> As usual, Luke noted the extent and duration of a physical affliction in order to highlight the greatness of Jesus' cure. Evidently a demon played some part in the woman's suffering. This meant that Jesus' healing involved overcoming supernatural as well as natural forces.

"There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them. They themselves are equally pleased by both errors and hail a materialist or a magician with the same delight."<sup>4</sup>

The woman's physical condition was similar to Israel's spiritual condition (cf. 4:18-19). She may have had *spondylitis ankylopoietica*, a fusing of the spinal bones (vertebrae), or *skoliosis hysterica*, a hysterically induced paralysis, or some other condition.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Tannehill, 1:157-58.

<sup>2</sup>Nolland, *Luke 9:21—18:34*, p. 721.

<sup>3</sup>Liefeld, "Luke," p. 971.

<sup>4</sup>C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*, p. 9.

<sup>5</sup>See J. Wilkinson, "The Case of the Bent Woman in Luke 13:10-17," *Evangelical Quarterly* 49 (1977):195-205.

- 13:12 Perhaps Jesus called the woman over to Himself, rather than going to her, so everyone present would see what He was about to do. Again Jesus healed a woman with a word.
- 13:13 His touch communicated compassion and linked the cause with the effect visually. Her recovery was instantaneous, and she began glorifying God, who was the Source of her blessing (cf. 2:20; 5:25-26; 7:16; 17:15; 18:43; 23:47; Acts 3:8-9). She therefore recognized that Jesus was God's instrument of blessing.
- 13:14 As previously, Jesus' works proved controversial and provided another opportunity for Him to teach. The synagogue official showed more concern for Sabbath observance than for human suffering (cf. the previous Sabbath controversies in Galilee [Matt. 12:9-13] and in Jerusalem [John 5:16]). Instead of praising God with the woman, he criticized both her and Jesus—indirectly. Perhaps he felt safer addressing the people than Jesus. His advice to the assembled crowd amounted to hindering them from entering the kingdom of Messiah (11:52).<sup>1</sup>
- 13:15 Jesus called the synagogue leader and his sympathizers "hypocrites." A hypocrite is someone who either pretends to be what he is not (as here), or disguises what he really is (cf. 12:1-2). These critics of Jesus were hypocrites because they did not understand God's purpose or the meaning of the Scriptures, though they professed to, and whose piety was therefore a sham.<sup>2</sup> Jesus then argued from the lesser to the greater again: A person is much more important than an animal (cf. 14:5).
- 13:16 The Jews regarded women as less important than men. Jesus viewed her as a "daughter of Abraham," a very exalted title that described a female descendant of the revered patriarch. Perhaps the Jews had denied the woman this title, concluding that her affliction was due to some great sin that she had committed (cf. vv. 2-5). It is possible that "daughter of

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<sup>1</sup>Martin, p. 240.

<sup>2</sup>Green, p. 524.

Abraham" means that she was a spiritual daughter of Abraham, namely, that she had saving faith like Abraham did.<sup>1</sup> Jesus freed the woman from her alien master ("Satan"), who had kept her physically bound for 18 long years. Jesus' compassion refused to allow her to suffer one more day. Since the Sabbath was a day of worship and rejoicing, it was appropriate that Jesus healed her that very day.

"If Jesus had postponed the healing of this woman until the morrow no one could have criticized Him; but Jesus insisted that suffering must not be allowed to continue until to-morrow if it could be helped to-day."<sup>2</sup>

"As a result of Jesus' command, the fever 'released her.' While the verb *apheken* ('released') is shared with the parallel accounts, in Luke it is placed in a context where it has the full force of release from an oppressive confinement and illustrates the 'release (*aphesin*) for captives' of which Jesus spoke in 4:18."<sup>3</sup>

13:17 Jesus' action caused a double reaction: His opponents were shamed ("humiliated") because Jesus obviously had divine power and compassion, but they had been opposing Him (cf. Isa. 45:16). But the entire crowd was rejoicing, because they appreciated Jesus' use of His power for the welfare of the woman, despite their hypocritical leader's opposition (cf. Exod. 34:10).

This miracle is a concrete example of Jesus' authority and the truthfulness of His assessment of the spiritual condition of Israel and her religious leaders.

This concludes Luke's section of material that records Jesus' instruction of His disciples in view of His rejection (12:1—13:17). The general movement of Jesus' teaching was from lessons about personal discipleship, and

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<sup>1</sup>Ironside, 2:444.

<sup>2</sup>Barclay, p. 183.

<sup>3</sup>Tannehill, 1:84.

disciples' responsibilities, to lessons about the future aspects of His kingdom.

### **E. INSTRUCTION ABOUT THE KINGDOM 13:18—14:35**

The larger division of the Gospel that records Jesus' ministry on the way to Jerusalem—and the Cross—continues with more teaching about the future aspects of the messianic kingdom. The parables of the messianic kingdom that begin this section (vv. 18-21) introduce this section. The difference in Jesus' teaching in the present section is a matter of emphasis rather than a radical change. The subtlety of this distinction is observable in that the commentators differ over where they believe the sections divide. Jesus' discipleship training also continues in this section.

#### **1. Parables of the kingdom 13:18-21**

The connection with what has preceded, that Luke's "So" (v. 18) suggests, is probably the reaction of the multitude (v. 17). Since the multitude reacted positively to Jesus, He taught them about the messianic kingdom. His previous comments about coming judgment made this teaching appropriate.

These parables occur in Matthew and Mark in a different context. Luke therefore may have reported Jesus' same teaching based on a different occasion, or he may have moved Jesus' teaching on the occasion that Matthew and Mark reported to this place in his Gospel. The former alternative seems more probable.

#### **The parable of the mustard seed 13:18-19 (cf. Matt. 13:31-32; Mark 4:30-32)**

The kingdom of God that John the Baptist and Jesus announced as being at hand is the kingdom of Messiah, the rule of the Son of David, which the Hebrew prophets predicted. It would begin with Messiah's appearance and include Messiah's reign on earth for 1,000 years (the Millennium, Rev. 20:4-6). The messianic kingdom is similar to a mustard seed in that it had a small beginning during the preaching of Jesus, but it would grow to be a very large entity. It will eventually encompass the whole earth and the entire human race (Ps. 2; Dan. 2:44; et al.). Luke did not mention its small beginning, only its large final form.

"The Jews had a proverb: 'Small as a mustard seed.'"<sup>1</sup>

The reference to the birds nesting in its branches may simply be an insignificant detail. But it is probably an allusion to the tree that Nebuchadnezzar saw in his dream, in which the birds evidently represent the unbelieving Gentile nations that benefit from the tree (Dan. 4:7-23). Several Old Testament passages use a tree, with birds flocking to its branches, to illustrate a kingdom that people perceive as great (Judg. 9:15; Ps. 104:12-13; Ezek. 17:22-24; 31:3-14). Here Jesus' meaning seems to be that unbelievers will benefit from the messianic kingdom.

The main point of the parable is the final largeness of the messianic kingdom contrasted with its small beginning. In this context, Luke probably wanted his readers to connect the great power of Jesus, manifested in the woman's healing (vv. 10-17), with the power that results in the tree's unusual growth into a worldwide kingdom. The messianic kingdom would begin with such seemingly inconsequential acts as the healing of an ill woman who lived on the margin of society.<sup>2</sup>

#### **The parable of the yeast hidden in meal 13:20-21 (cf. Matt. 13:33)**

Jesus' similar introduction of this parable (cf. v. 18) suggests a similar point, but the fact that He gave a different parable implies a slightly different emphasis. Obviously the pervasive growth idea is present in both parables, but the second parable stresses the hidden nature of the transforming power (potency) more than the first one did. The idea of mysterious growth also carries over. The messianic kingdom will imperceptibly, but powerfully, spread through humanity. Though not stated, the Holy Spirit is God's agent in working, imperceptibly, to cause the messianic kingdom to grow. The Book of Acts demonstrates this. Another view is that the leaven represents "Christ and his gospel."<sup>3</sup>

"It is perhaps worth noting also that yeast works from inside: it cannot change the dough while it is outside. But it is also important that the power to change comes from outside: the dough does not change itself."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Robertson, *Word Pictures ...*, 2:189. Cf. Mishnah *Niddah* 5:1.

<sup>2</sup>Cf. Green, p. 527.

<sup>3</sup>Lenski, p. 744.

<sup>4</sup>Morris, *The Gospel ...*, p. 225.



"It is the task of Christianity to make, not new things, but new men. And once the new men are created the new world will surely follow. This is why the Church is the most important institution in the world, for it is the factory where *men* are produced."<sup>1</sup>

Some interpreters believe that the "mystery form of the kingdom," to use their phrase, is in view in these parables, not the messianic kingdom, which they view as entirely future (i.e., the Millennium). Some of these interpreters see the growth of this mystery form of the kingdom in the development of the professing church throughout history (i.e., Christendom) before the Second Coming, and they interpret the leaven as the evil that spreads increasingly through it during that time (cf. 1 Tim. 4; 2 Tim. 4).<sup>2</sup> But the Scriptures do not speak of a mystery form of the kingdom but of mysteries of the kingdom.

## 2. Entrance into the kingdom 13:22-30

Another question led to the teaching that follows. The thematic connection, with Jesus' words implying the small beginning of the messianic kingdom (vv. 19, 21), should be obvious. As elsewhere, Luke recorded Jesus teaching lessons and using illustrations and expressions that the other Gospel writers recorded Him using in other contexts. Jesus' repetition is understandable in view of the traveling nature of His ministry and His great skill as a teacher.

13:22 Luke employed similar geographical summary statements in Acts also in order to indicate divisions in his narrative (e.g., 12:25; 14:27-28; 16:4; et al). They give a sense of movement and progress in material that is essentially didactic (teaching). Jesus' general movement was toward Jerusalem and the Cross, as Luke presented it, though Jesus seems to have proceeded without haste and with many pauses for teaching. The goal is the important feature, not how Jesus reached it. He gave the following teaching on the way.

13:23 Luke did not identify the questioner, who could have been a disciple or a member of the ever-present crowd. The

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<sup>1</sup>Barclay, p. 187.

<sup>2</sup>See, for example, Ironside, 2:449-56.

questioner evidently wanted to know if he or she was correct in concluding, from Jesus' previous teaching (e.g., Mark 10:23-26), that only a few people would experience salvation. For the Jews, and probably for the questioner, salvation meant entering the messianic kingdom as well as entering heaven. The identity of the people to whom Jesus responded is indefinite and unimportant.

13:24 Jesus did not answer the question directly. Instead of giving an impersonal answer, He explained how a person could enter the messianic kingdom. A narrow door pictured an unpopular and difficult entryway (cf. Matt. 7:13). Jesus meant the door was the way into the messianic kingdom that He taught, in contrast to the more popular way that the Jewish religious leaders taught. Striving referred to believing Jesus despite the intrinsic difficulty of believing and the opposition of others (cf. John 10:9). Many people would seek to enter the messianic kingdom through ways other than the narrow door, but they would be unable to enter.

One writer argued that the striving in view involves submitting to Christ's Lordship (i.e., submitting completely to Jesus' mastery over one's life).<sup>1</sup> But submitting to Christ's Lordship in this sense is nowhere a condition for entrance into the messianic kingdom. Only faith in Jesus is. Submitting to Jesus as the Master of one's life is an important step in discipleship (Rom. 6:13; 12:1-2), but it is not a condition for salvation.

13:25 The revelation that God would soon shut the narrow door of opportunity—to enter heaven eventually and the messianic kingdom immediately—should have moved Jesus' hearers to believe in Him at once. In one sense, anyone can believe as long as he or she is alive. In another sense, it becomes more difficult to believe as one procrastinates and as one grows older. However in view of Jesus' illustration of the banquet that follows, it is more likely that He was thinking of the beginning of the earthly kingdom. When the earthly kingdom began it would be impossible for unbelievers to change their minds and be saved. Therefore, in view of the earthly kingdom's

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<sup>1</sup>John F. MacArthur Jr., *The Gospel According to Jesus*, pp. 182-83.

imminence—when Jesus uttered this warning—His hearers needed to believe without delay.

13:26-27 When the earthly kingdom began, no amount of appeal—based only on friendship or familiarity with Jesus—would avail. Jesus had extended fellowship to His hearers, and He had taught them the way of salvation. But they had rejected His offers. In Matthew, Jesus clearly identified the person who shut the door as Himself (cf. Matt. 7:22-23). He will also be the person who will utterly forsake and pronounce judicial rejection on unbelievers for their lack of righteousness (cf. Ps. 6:8).

13:28 The phrase "weeping and gnashing of teeth" elsewhere describes eternal punishment in hell (Matt. 8:12; 13:42, 50; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30).<sup>1</sup> There is no reason to conclude that it means something else here. Weeping expresses sorrow (cf. 6:25; Acts 20:37; James 4:9; 5:1), and gnashing or grinding the teeth pictures deep regret, anger, and hatred (cf. Job 16:10; Ps. 35:16; 37:12; 112:10; Lam. 2:16; Matt. 8:12; 13:42, 50; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30; Acts 7:54).<sup>2</sup> These feelings will arise in people outside the earthly kingdom as they view others within it. Those who go to hell will gnash their teeth in anguish and remorse because they will realize what they have forfeited by not honoring and loving the Person to whom we owe absolutely everything.<sup>3</sup>

Jesus said that many Jews would not enter the earthly kingdom (cf. Matt. 8:10-12). Many of Jesus' hearers were undoubtedly trusting in their Jewish blood and heritage to get them into the messianic kingdom, so Jesus' words would have shocked them. The judgment at the beginning of the earthly kingdom is in view. Evidently God will raise dead Old Testament saints to life then—to enter the earthly kingdom (Isa. 26:19; Dan. 12:2).

13:29 The Old Testament revealed that Gentiles would also participate in the messianic banquet that will inaugurate

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<sup>1</sup>See Pagenkemper, pp. 183-86, 188-90.

<sup>2</sup>See David H. Wenkel, "The Gnashing Teeth of Jesus's Opponents," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 175:697 (January-March 2018):83-95.

<sup>3</sup>See Lee Strobel, *The Case for Faith*, p. 181.

Messiah's earthly reign (cf. Isa. 25:6-7; 60; 62:2-9; 65:13-14; Ezek. 34:12-14; 39:17-20). Believers will come from the four compass points (all over the world) to participate in this banquet.

- 13:30 The people who are "last" in this context probably refer to Gentiles, whom the Jews regarded as least likely to enter the messianic kingdom (cf. Matt. 19:30; 20:16; Mark 10:31). The ones who are "first" were the Jews. They considered themselves to be superior to Gentiles in many ways, especially since they were the physical descendants of the patriarchs. They were also the first and the foremost objects of Jesus' ministry.

### 3. Jesus' postponement of the kingdom 13:31-35

Another comment triggered teaching of a similar nature. The continuing theme is the messianic kingdom.

- 13:31 This incident followed the former one chronologically. Therefore it is probable that Jesus' words about Jews not entering the messianic kingdom and Gentiles entering it had caused the Pharisees to gnash their teeth in anger against Him. Luke's presentation of the Pharisees has been consistently antagonistic, so it is reasonable to assume that their suggestion had a hidden, destructive motive. They may have wanted to scare Jesus into retreating rather than continuing on toward Jerusalem where Herod awaited Him. Or perhaps Herod was using the Pharisees to pass on a death threat to Jesus.

"The incident is remarkably parallel to the attempt of Amaziah, priest of the golden calf at Bethel, who first denounced the Prophet Amos to Jeroboam II, and then tried to frighten Amos out of Israel into Judah, equally in vain (Amos vii. 10-17)."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Plummer, p. 349.

Did Herod Antipas really want to kill Jesus? He kept trying to see Jesus (9:9), and when he finally did, he was very glad for the opportunity, hoping that Jesus would perform a miracle (23:8). However he proceeded to mock Jesus and to treat Him with contempt (23:11).

It appears that the Pharisees were overstating Herod's hostility at this time. Herod ruled Perea, where Jesus was at present, and Herod had killed John the Baptist in Perea. The Pharisees were implying that Jesus might suffer the same fate as John the Baptist if He remained in Perea. Their warning posed a temptation for Jesus to depart from His Father's will for Him, but He did not yield to it.

13:32 Jesus' reply to the Pharisees shows that He viewed them as Herod's messengers. They were as antagonistic to Him as they claimed that Herod was. A "fox" is, of course, a proverbially dangerous animal that destroys and scavenges (cf. Song of Sol. 2:15; Lam. 5:17-18; Ezek. 13:4; 1 Enoch 89:10, 42-49, 55). Jesus walked in the light, but foxes went hunting in the dark. In Jesus' day, foxes were also insignificant animals (cf. Neh. 4:3; Song of Sol. 2:15). Foxes are also cunning (deceiving, evading). Jesus viewed Herod similarly.

"Herod's craftiness lay in his trying to get rid of an influential leader and disquieting preacher of righteousness by a threat which he had not the courage to execute. He did not wish to bring upon himself a second time the odium of having slain a Prophet."<sup>1</sup>

Jesus explained that He would not run from Jerusalem but would continue moving toward it and continue ministering as usual as He went. He would reach Jerusalem in three days. This may have been a reference to three literal days, in which case it appears to refer to Jesus' second visit to Jerusalem rather than to His third and final visit.<sup>2</sup> This seems unlikely in view of Jesus' statement about visiting Jerusalem in verse 35.

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>Hoehner, p. 62.

Probably this was an idiomatic expression indicating a relatively short, limited period (cf. Hos. 6:2).<sup>1</sup> In this case, the three days would refer to the time of present opportunity, culminating in the end of that opportunity.<sup>2</sup>

- 13:33 Jesus spoke of the city as His "goal" (v. 32) because it would be in Jerusalem that He would reach the goal of His ministry, namely, His passion (His suffering and death). He acknowledged that He would die there. He viewed dying outside Jerusalem as inconsistent and incongruous with the tradition of prophets who had died in the city at the hands of the Jews (1 Kings 18:4, 13; 19:10; Jer. 26:20-23; Neh. 9:26; cf. Acts 7:52). Jesus obviously did not mean that all the prophets died in Jerusalem. John the Baptist, for example, had died at Machaerus. He meant that, since Jerusalem had killed so many prophets, it was appropriate for Him to die there too. Jesus Himself, of course, died outside the city walls of Jerusalem, so He probably meant outside the vicinity of Jerusalem.
- 13:34 Jesus' double reference to the city ("Jerusalem, Jerusalem"), following as it does the name of the city at the end of verse 33, draws attention to it. It was the city of Jesus' destiny and the pathetic, unresponsive object of His love. Jesus' lament, in a kind of soliloquy, recalls Jeremiah's lamentation over Jerusalem's destruction by the Babylonians (cf. Jer. 12:7; 22:5; Lam.). The city was heading for a similar fate under the Romans for rejecting Jesus.
- 13:35 The "house" left "desolate" is perhaps the temple (cf. 1 Kings 9:7-8), though this could be a reference to the nation as a whole (a synecdoche), the city, or the Davidic dynasty (the royal house of David, cf. Jer. 22:1-8).<sup>3</sup> Actually all of these "houses" were left desolate by Israel's rejection of her Messiah.

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<sup>1</sup>Marshall, *The Gospel ...*, pp. 571-72.

<sup>2</sup>Liefeld, "Luke," p. 974.

<sup>3</sup>Synecdoche is a figure of speech in which a part (here Jerusalem) is used to represent the whole (here Israel), or the whole is used to represent a part.

"The great expectations in the birth narrative for the redemption of Israel and Jerusalem are not being realized in the anticipated way and with the anticipated fullness, because Jerusalem is failing to recognize the time of its visitation. The great expectations aroused at the beginning contribute to the tragic effect of this turn in the plot, for we feel the loss more keenly in contrast to these great hopes."<sup>1</sup>

Jerusalem would not see Jesus until His triumphal entry into the city (Ps. 118:26; Matt. 21:1-9; Luke 19:28-38). However, the final and true fulfillment of the prophecy of the people of Jerusalem hailing the arrival of their Messiah is still future (Matt. 23:39). Jesus gave two predictions of the fulfillment of Psalm 118:26: The one here was fulfilled at the Triumphal Entry. The second one, which He gave after the Triumphal Entry (Matt. 23:39), will be fulfilled at the Second Coming.

Jesus' lament (vv. 34-35) constituted a formal rejection of Israel for her rejection of Him as her Messiah (cf. Matt. 23:37-39). Jesus used "Jerusalem" figuratively for the whole nation. However, Jesus rejected Israel with a broken heart. He continued to offer Himself to the nation and to the individuals within it, but its fate was now irreversible. His rejection was not permanent, however (cf. Rom. 11). God's prophecies concerning Messiah's rule on the earth, with His headquarters in Jerusalem (cf. Jer. 3:17; 30:16-17; 31:6, 23; Ezek. 43:5-6; Joel 3:17; Mic. 4:7; Zech. 8:2-3), must be fulfilled because God is faithful to His promises.

#### **4. Participants in the kingdom 14:1-24**

This section of verses contains the record of several incidents that happened when Jesus was the dinner guest of a leading Pharisee. It records Jesus' table-talk. Jesus had just announced that He would leave Jerusalem desolate (13:35). The present section justifies Jesus' condemnation by showing that the root of Israel's problems lay with her leaders, represented

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<sup>1</sup>Tannehill, 1:160. See also idem, "Israel in Luke-Acts: A Tragic Story," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 104 (1985):69-81.

here by the Pharisees. It also gives the rationale for Jesus excluding many Jews from the messianic kingdom and admitting Gentiles (13:28-30).

### The healing of a man with dropsy 14:1-6

Nolland noted that a similar incident, in 13:10 through 17, features a woman, and this one features a man, illustrating Luke's concern to balance men and women in his narrative.<sup>1</sup>

14:1 The meal setting continues through verse 24, and the Sabbath setting concludes what has preceded (13:10-23). However the meal setting is secondary to the attitude of the Pharisees who were present. They had already decided to do away with Jesus (11:53-54). Now the Pharisees and lawyers were watching Him like vultures, waiting to pounce on their prey at the first opportunity (vv. 1, 3). These "leaders of the Pharisees" would probably have been members of the Sanhedrin, Israel's highest ruling court.

Views of the Sabbath were a major source of disagreement between Jesus and the Pharisees (cf. 6:1-5, 11; 13:10-17). Quite possibly this host Pharisee had set a trap for Jesus by inviting him to his house for a Sabbath meal. Jesus had already violated Sabbath traditions on at least seven different occasions (4:31-37, 38-39; 6:1-5; John 5:1-9; Luke 6:6-10; 13:10-17; John 9). Table fellowship implied friendship, but clearly this Pharisee's friendship was hypocritical on this occasion.

14:2 The text does not say that the host had planted the sick man among his guests to test Jesus, but that seems likely. Luke's description of the man's presence implies that. The name of the man's disease is misleading. "Edema" (Gr. *hudropikos*) is a condition that causes the body to swell up due to the accumulation of fluid in the body tissue or the body cavities. It often results from a faulty heart or diseased kidneys.<sup>2</sup> Today we might say that this man had "a serious fluid-retention

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<sup>1</sup>Nolland, *Luke 9:21—18:34*, p. 723.

<sup>2</sup>*Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, s.v. "Diseases of the Bible," by R. H. Pousma, 2:134; Green, p. 546..



problem."<sup>1</sup> The rabbis regarded this condition as the result of immorality.<sup>2</sup>

- 14:3 Jesus took the initiative and asked the Pharisees and lawyers (i.e., experts in the Mosaic Law) for their interpretation of what the Law allowed concerning healing on the Sabbath (cf. 6:9).
- 14:4 When they refused to respond to His question, Jesus proceeded to heal the man (cf. 6:10). Jesus could have waited a day, but He performed this miracle on the Sabbath in order to provide an occasion for the teaching that followed. By taking hold of the man Jesus made it unmistakable that He was the source of his healing. Perhaps He dismissed the man in order to remove him from the arena of controversy and to center the discussion on the issue rather than on a person.
- 14:5 Jesus proceeded to show the logic of His action (cf. Matt. 12:11). The Old Testament and rabbinic tradition permitted saving a son, or even an animal, that fell into a well on the Sabbath (cf. Exod. 23:4-5).<sup>3</sup> Jesus implied that the sick man belonged to Him—by comparing the man to the son of the father who rescued him (i.e., Jesus).
- 14:6 Jesus' critics had "no reply," since Jesus' logic was irrefutable: If they rescued a son or an animal on the Sabbath, Jesus had every right to rescue this man. Besides, they already knew what Jesus believed about the relative importance of helping people compared to observing the Sabbath (6:1-11; 13:10-17).

This incident set the stage for the discussion that followed. That seems to be its primary purpose in Luke's narrative. This fact accounts for the lack of development that Luke gave this incident. Above all else it established Jesus' authority to teach the lessons that followed immediately.

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<sup>1</sup>Nolland, *Luke 9:21—18:34*, p. 747.

<sup>2</sup>Marshall, *The Gospel ...*, p. 579.

<sup>3</sup>Mishnah *Shabbath* 128b.

### The parable of the seats at the wedding feast 14:7-11

Jesus next gave the assembled guests a lesson on the importance of humility.

14:7 By identifying this teaching as a parable, Luke informed his readers that the lesson has importance in people's relationship to God, not just interpersonal relations. Jesus gave the parable originally to correct the pride of the Pharisees.

Customarily people reclined on low couches for important meals, such as this one, resting on their left sides. Where a person reclined around the table indicated his status. In the typical U-shape arrangement, the closer that one was to the host, who reclined at the center or bottom of the U, the higher was his status ("place of honor"). Jesus' fellow guests had tried to get the places of honor closest to their host in order to showcase their own importance.

14:8-9 Jesus' teaching from here on in this section centers on the concept of being "invited" (or called, Gr. *kaleo*, vv. 8 [twice], 9, 10 [twice], 12 [twice], 13, 16, 17, 24).

The meal in the Pharisee's house was not a wedding feast. Jesus used that type of banquet in His parable because He was speaking of the messianic banquet at the beginning of the earthly kingdom. Then believing Israelites would unite with their Messiah. Evidently Jesus' point was that the Jews present should learn a spiritual lesson about the messianic kingdom from the simple social situation that He described. Everyone realized that seeking a prominent place for oneself at a banquet could lead to personal embarrassment.

14:10 Jesus' hearers were to learn from this story not to seek prominence for themselves but to humble themselves. Jesus Himself may have provided the example by taking the lowest place at some wedding feast.<sup>1</sup> In relation to the messianic kingdom, this meant being willing to forego present prominence, which the Pharisees so desired, and humbling oneself by associating with Jesus as a disciple. The implication

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<sup>1</sup>Whyte, 2:377.

was that those who so humbled themselves—now—with Jesus, would experience exaltation by God in the earthly kingdom when it began (v. 11).

The reason one should humble himself is that someone else has invited him. He is a guest, not the host. Jesus further stressed this dependent relationship by using passive verbs. This was not only in order to avoid direct reference to God, out of respect, but to present God as the exalted Host. A person's position in the earthly kingdom depends on God, not on his own self-seeking.

14:11 This verse expresses the principle involved (cf. 13:30; 18:14; Matt. 23:12). Self-exaltation leads to humiliation, whereas humility results in exaltation (cf. Prov. 25:6-7). The principle operates in the present and in the future. It operates in social situations and in messianic kingdom situations.

This parable then was a lesson for the Pharisees especially, but also for Jesus' disciples and everyone else present, on the importance of humility. Participants in the messianic kingdom, and honored guests in that kingdom, would be those who humbled themselves by following Jesus.

#### **The lesson about inviting guests 14:12-14**

Jesus addressed the former parable to His fellow guests, but He directed this teaching particularly to His host. This lesson, like the former parable, could have applied only to social relationships. But Jesus' teaching was never simply ethical. It always had a spiritual dimension (cf. 6:32-36). Jesus was teaching on both levels. If the Pharisees did not perceive or if they rejected the lesson about Jesus' ministry, they could at least profit from the ethical instruction. In much of Jesus' teaching the alternatives were not really "do not do this but do that," as much as "do not do as much of this as that." This was common Semitic idiom, and it accounts for many of Jesus' strong statements.

The principle that Jesus recommended to His host for selecting guests is one that God had used in inviting people to the messianic banquet.

14:12 Jesus addressed His host, but the rest of those present on this occasion also heard what He said. He recommended not inviting guests who could return the favor, because the return

of the favor (and honor) would be their reward. In other words, the sacrifice involved in providing the meal would be compensated by the return of the favor (cf. Matt. 5:46: 6:1, 2, 5, 16).

14:13-14 But inviting those who could not repay the favor resulted in the greater glory of earthly hosts, as well as for the divine Host. If earthly hosts behaved like the heavenly Host, that behavior would demonstrate true righteousness, and God would reward it. Otherwise they would only receive a temporal reward from their guests.

"Jesus by no means forbids our inviting those who will in turn invite us; nor does he demand that we invite only such as cannot invite us again. What he does is to forbid us always to invite the former and to forget all about the latter."<sup>1</sup>

"When was the last time that you or I extended hospitality in such a way that it would only be repaid to us in that future *resurrection payday*? Maybe we should rethink our guest lists!"<sup>2</sup>

This lesson vindicated Jesus' ministry to the "have nots," and it explained why He did not cater to the "haves" (cf. 4:18; 6:20-21). It also indirectly appealed to the Pharisees to receive Jesus' invitation to believe on Him for blessing.

### The parable of the great banquet 14:15-24

Jesus continued to use the meal in the Pharisee's house to teach about the messianic banquet and the earthly kingdom to come. He had taught the importance of humbling oneself in order to participate (vv. 7-11), and He had justified that requirement (vv. 12-14). Now He invited His hearers to humble themselves so they could participate, and He warned those who rejected His invitation of their destiny.

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<sup>1</sup>Lenski, p. 774.

<sup>2</sup>Zane C. Hodges, "Stop and Think! (Luke 14:13-14), Rewardable Hospitality," *The KERUGMA Message* 3:1 (Spring 1993):3.

- 14:15 The fellow guest who voiced this comment appears to have understood that Jesus had been talking about the earthly kingdom, and not just about social propriety. Alternatively, his or her comment may have been simply a pious reference to the earthly kingdom, but this seems unlikely. The speaker seems to have assumed that he or she would be one of the blessed that Jesus referred to. The speaker may have intended to correct Jesus' implication that some of those present might not participate (vv. 13-14; cf. 13:28-29). Or his comment may have been a ruse to draw attention away from the Lord's teaching on rewards.<sup>1</sup> Jesus used the comment as an opportunity to clarify who would participate. A similar though obviously different parable occurs in Matthew 22:1 through 14.
- 14:16-17 In the parable the host corresponds to God and the "slave" (Gr. *doulos*) represents Jesus. The people invited were the Jews primarily. In Jesus' day a banquet took a long time to prepare.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, God had been preparing for His messianic banquet for centuries.
- 14:18-20 Those invited refused to participate. They tried to excuse themselves by giving acceptable reasons for not attending the banquet. The three excuses that Jesus cited are only representative of many others that other invited guests undoubtedly gave.

"... in each of the following excuses, we are dealing with a personal preoccupation rather than with a reasonable priority. The man's priorities are ultimately those warned against in 17:31."<sup>3</sup>

One man begged off on the ground that he had recently become the owner of some real estate and needed to tend to it. Apparently he was proud of his position as a landowner in his community. Another person with new possessions ("five yoke of oxen") expressed his greater interest in them than in

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<sup>1</sup>Valdéz, 1:302.

<sup>2</sup>Morris, *The Gospel ...*, p. 233.

<sup>3</sup>Nolland, *Luke 9:21—18:34*, p. 756.

the invitation. The fact that both of these men inspected their purchases, after they bought them, shows their love of them, since they would undoubtedly have also inspected them before they bought them. A third man cited his recent marriage as his excuse, implying that family and pleasure were more important to him (cf. Deut. 24:5). These individuals represent the many who have declined to accept Jesus' gospel invitation for similar reasons. Here the reasons appear to have been possessions, commerce (business), and natural affection.<sup>1</sup>

"The excuses become thinner ..."<sup>2</sup>

"And too often the polite 'I cannot come' [v. 20] is, in truth, 'I will not come.'"<sup>3</sup>

14:21 The host legitimately became angry in view of his gracious invitation and sacrificial preparations. Note that Jesus now described the host as "master" or lord (Gr. *kyrie*), possibly hinting that God is the master in this story. Rejection of the master's invitation constituted a personal insult. Consequently "the head of the household"—another possible allusion to God as the head of Israel—decided to open the banquet to anyone who would come, not just the people who were the privileged few (cf. Rom. 9:4-5). The "streets" (Gr. *plateia*) carried all manner of people, and the "lanes" or alleys (Gr. *rhyme*) were where the lower elements of society felt more comfortable.<sup>4</sup> These people the head of the household described as "poor," "with disabilities," "blind," and "limping." They correspond to those in Jesus' day whom the self-righteous Jews regarded as deficient, including the publicans (tax collectors) and sinners (the irreligious and/or immoral). The servant's commission became urgent ("Go out at once") because the feast waited for guests.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Morgan, *The Gospel ...*, p. 174; McGee, 4:310.

<sup>2</sup>Lenski, p. 780.

<sup>3</sup>Blaiklock, *Today's Handbook ...*, p. 418.

<sup>4</sup>Liefeld, "Luke," p. 978.

<sup>5</sup>Marshall, *The Gospel ...*, p. 590.

14:22 The slave carried out his master's instructions and reported back to him. Some of the needy had responded, but there was still plenty of room at the banquet table.

14:23 The master then sent his slave farther out into the countryside in order to find guests wherever he could.

"Oriental etiquette required that the feast should not begin until all places were filled."<sup>1</sup>

Those on the roads and those taking refuge against the "hedges" (Gr. *phragmos*) would have been people who were especially destitute and needy. The Jews did not normally put hedges around their fields, so the picture is of the servant going out into the heathen world.<sup>2</sup> Compelling ("press upon them," Gr. *anagkazo*) did not involve forcing them against their wills, but urging them to come. It manifested "an insistent hospitality."<sup>3</sup>

These invitees doubtless represent the remainder of humankind living far from the site of the banquet (i.e., Jerusalem and Israel). They are the spiritually needy both in Jesus' day and in the ages that followed—before the banquet begins at the commencement of the Millennium (cf. 13:28-30).

12:24 None of those who received initial invitations and declined the host's gracious offer would enjoy the banquet (cf. 13:34-35). These people are those who were invited during Jesus' ministry (cf. Matt. 11:28).

Thus Jesus' correction of the original comment (v. 15) affirmed that those who would eat bread in the future earthly kingdom of Messiah would be the objects of God's special favor and therefore happy (blessed). However, they would be those who responded to God's gracious invitation that He extended through His Servant Jesus, not those who anticipated the banquet but refused His invitation. This parable would have helped Jesus' original disciples appreciate their privilege and the urgency of their mission.

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<sup>1</sup>Tenney, "The Gospel ...," p. 1053.

<sup>2</sup>Edersheim, *The Life ...*, 2:251.

<sup>3</sup>Manson, p. 130.

Likewise, Luke's original readers and all subsequent disciples should learn the same lesson. The parable contains a revelation of God's program during the inter-advent era, which Israel's rejection of her Messiah, and God's consequent postponement (delay) of the earthly kingdom, made necessary (cf. Rom. 11).

### **5. The cost of discipleship 14:25-35**

Luke had just recorded Jesus' teaching about God's gracious invitation to enjoy the messianic banquet in Christ's kingdom. It was free for all who would respond. Jesus taught elsewhere that responding meant believing on Him (John 14:6; et al.). Now Luke recorded Jesus' teaching that though salvation was free, discipleship was costly. This is important balancing revelation. Salvation guarantees heaven, but it also calls for complete commitment to Jesus, not in order to secure heaven, but to express gratitude for heaven.

"The theme of the cost of accompanying Jesus runs like a refrain throughout Lk. (9:57-62; 18:24-30)."<sup>1</sup>

#### **The setting of these parables 14:25-27**

14:25 Luke described a setting different from the preceding meal. Jesus was on the road again heading toward Jerusalem. It was evidently the great size of the multitude ("large crowds") that accompanied Him that led Him to say what He did.

14:26 Curiosity is one thing, but discipleship is another. There were many people who were accompanying Jesus who were not really following Him in the sense of learning from Him. They simply wanted to benefit from His ministry.

"Once someone was talking to a great scholar about a younger man. He said, 'So and so tells me that he was one of your students.' The teacher answered devastatingly, 'He may have attended my lectures, but he was not one of my students.' There is a world of difference between attending lectures and being a student. It is one of the

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<sup>1</sup>Marshall, *The Gospel ...*, p. 591.



supreme handicaps of the Church that in the Church there are so many distant followers of Jesus and so few real disciples."<sup>1</sup>

Jesus mentioned two qualifications for being His disciple: First, one must be willing to give up his or her primary allegiances to family and self. Jesus taught His disciples to love their enemies rather than hating them (6:27-38). He was not contradicting the teaching of the fifth commandment either ("Honor your father and your mother," Exod. 20:12; cf. 18:20). He spoke positively about loving oneself too (10:27). He clearly meant "hate" in a relative, comparative sense, rather than an absolute sense, here. Compare Genesis 29:31, where "unloved" is literally "hated," in the Hebrew text.

"The language of hate is typical Semitic hyperbole (Prov 13:24; 2 Sam 19:6; cf. Gen 29:30-33 ...; Mal 1:2-3; Deut 21:15-17) ..."<sup>2</sup>

"... in this context, 'hate' is not primarily an affective quality but a disavowal of primary allegiance to one's kin. ... Again, then, 'hating' one's self should not be taken as a reference to an affective self-abhorrence, but as a call to set aside the relationships, the extended family of origin and inner circle of friends, by which one has previously made up one's identity."<sup>3</sup>

14:27      Second, a disciple must bear the burden of public identification with Jesus, even to death if necessary (9:23; cf. Deut. 13:4; 1 Kings 14:8; 18:21; 2 Kings 23:3).

"The cross of the disciple is that particular humiliation or hardship that he would incur by becoming a follower of Jesus."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Barclay, p. 203.

<sup>2</sup>Nolland, *Luke 9:21—18:34*, p. 762.

<sup>3</sup>Green, p. 565.

<sup>4</sup>Tenney, "The Gospel ...," p. 1053.

Luke recorded this command in more detail than Matthew did, perhaps because of his Gentile readers' great need for challenge and encouragement in view of persecution (cf. Matt. 10:37-38).

"Salvation is open to all who will come by faith, while discipleship is for believers willing to pay a price. Salvation means coming to the cross and trusting Jesus Christ, while discipleship means carrying the cross and following Jesus."<sup>1</sup>

"Crucifixion was common enough in Palestine since the days of Antiochus Epiphanes and Alexander Jannaeus."<sup>2</sup>

"Discipleship means giving one's first loyalty."<sup>3</sup>

### The parable of the tower builder 14:28-30

Jesus then told another parable. His point was that those in the crowd who were considering becoming disciples of His should calculate (count, consider) the cost before they embarked on a life of discipleship. The Greek word *purgos* can mean either "tower" (v. 28) or farm building. Probably many of Jesus' hearers were farmers.

"The simple fact is that the New Testament never takes for granted that believers will see discipleship through to the end. And it never makes this kind of perseverance either a condition or a proof of final salvation from hell."<sup>4</sup>

"It ... is simply a theological illusion to maintain that a Christian who has embarked on the pathway of discipleship could never abandon it. In the spiritual realm, this notion is as naive as an earthly father who declares, 'My son would never drop out of school!'"<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Wiersbe, 1:232.

<sup>2</sup>Robertson, *Word Pictures ...*, 2:201.

<sup>3</sup>Morris, *The Gospel ...*, p. 235.

<sup>4</sup>Zane C. Hodges, *Absolutely Free!* p. 80.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 82.

A person who begins following Jesus and then stops following Him only makes a fool of himself.

### The parable of the king going to battle 14:31-33

14:31-32 This second parable makes essentially the same point as the previous one. But the cost of failure in this one is not just embarrassment but personal destruction. It is very important to assess the strength of one's enemy correctly. Jesus was not encouraging people to stop following Him because they feared that they could not withstand temptations. He wanted them to follow Him, but intelligently, not naively. There were probably no kings in Jesus' audience, but the people could easily put themselves in the place of a king.

"Discipleship to Jesus Christ is not an invitation to a Sunday school picnic. It is an invitation to spiritual warfare."<sup>1</sup>

14:33 Jesus now applied the parables (cf. vv. 26-27). Obviously the Twelve had not literally given away everything they owned, but they had adopted a lifestyle conducive to fulfilling their mission, which involved relatively few possessions. Therefore we should probably understand Jesus' command as requiring a willingness to part with possessions as necessary in order to follow Jesus faithfully (cf. 12:33). Elsewhere Jesus taught His disciples to manage the possessions that they did have wisely (16:1-12). A person should not begin a venture without the assurance of sufficient resources to finish it. Similarly, one should not begin following Jesus without being willing to sacrifice anything—possibly everything—in order to complete that calling successfully.

"A person can be saved by accepting Jesus Christ as Savior, but a person will never follow and serve Him until he is willing to make a sacrifice. That is what this passage is teaching. There is a difference between being a believer and being a disciple. Unfortunately, not all believers are disciples."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 84.

<sup>2</sup>McGee, 4:311.

### The importance of following Jesus faithfully 14:34-35

In concluding this teaching, Jesus compared a disciple to salt. Salt was important in the ancient East because it flavored food, retarded decay, and in small doses fertilized land.<sup>1</sup> It was also used as a catalyst for burning fuel such as cattle dung.<sup>2</sup> Some of these uses are in view in this passage, but its use as a flavoring agent seems to be primary.<sup>3</sup> Most salt in the ancient world came from salt marshes or the like, rather than from the evaporation of salt-water, so it contained many impurities. The sodium was more soluble than many of the impurities. It could leach out leaving a substance so dilute that it was of little worth.<sup>4</sup>

"I'm told the only way salt can lose its saltiness is by being contaminated with some other substance. Salt is compromised when it is mixed with other elements that dilute the saltiness."<sup>5</sup>

Just as a disciple can cease to follow Jesus, so salt can lose its saltiness. In those cases both things become useless. What distinguishes a disciple of Jesus from a non-disciple, what makes him or her "salty," is his or her allegiance to Jesus (cf. Matt. 5:13; Mark 9:50). Farmers added salt to animal dung to slow down the fermentation process so that they could preserve it as fertilizer until they needed to use it.<sup>6</sup> The disciple who does not continue following Jesus faithfully falls under divine judgment—not that he will lose his salvation, but part of his reward, specifically the opportunity for further significant service.

Jesus urged His hearers to listen carefully to what He had said (cf. 8:8). Prospective disciples need to realize the implications of following Jesus and only then choose to follow Him faithfully.

"His [Luke's] main point is that successful discipleship requires Jesus to be a priority in life."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Eugene P. Deatrick, "Salt, Soil, Savor," *Biblical Archaeologist* 25 (1962):44-45.

<sup>2</sup>*The Nelson ...*, p. 1728.

<sup>3</sup>Nolland, *Luke 9:21—18:34*, p. 765.

<sup>4</sup>Carson, "Matthew," p. 138.

<sup>5</sup>M. Bailey, *To Follow ...*, p. 139.

<sup>6</sup>Deatrick, p. 46.

<sup>7</sup>Bock, *Luke*, p. 401.

## F. GOD'S ATTITUDE TOWARD SINNERS CH. 15

The present section is a development of the theme of Jesus calling the poor and needy to salvation. This motif has appeared earlier in Luke's Gospel (cf. 14:2-5, 13-24; et al.). Luke had a special interest in this group, probably because he wrote his Gospel for the Gentiles, and many of them were Gentiles. This group (non-Jews) constitutes a large target of the Christian mission.

"The section 15:1-32 defends and commends preoccupation with the lost, and overflowing joy at their restoration. We all respond this way with what is our own, and this attitude corresponds to the concerns of a father's heart for his own children, each one of whom is singularly precious in his sight."<sup>1</sup>

"What is the theme of the parable? The grace of God."<sup>2</sup>

### 1. The setting for Jesus' teaching 15:1-2

15:1 Luke just recorded that Jesus called a would-be disciple to pay attention to what He said (14:35). Now he noted that many tax collectors and sinners were doing precisely that. Thus he presented these groups of needy spiritual outcasts of Jewish society as responding to Jesus' ministry. "All" is perhaps hyperbole for "very many," or it may refer to the tax gatherers and sinners in the place where Jesus was at that time.<sup>3</sup>

"The *sinner*s were the immoral or those who followed occupations that the religious regarded as incompatible with the Law."<sup>4</sup>

In other words, "sinners" were people who paid no attention to God's Word or His will.

15:2 However Luke also noted, in contrast, that the Pharisees and scribes were critical of Jesus (cf. 5:29-30). They were not really listening to Him. Probably he balanced two positive

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<sup>1</sup>Nolland, *Luke 9:21—18:34*, p. 767.

<sup>2</sup>Morgan, *The Gospel ...*, p. 181. He dealt with all three parables in this chapter as one.

<sup>3</sup>Robertson, *Word Pictures ...*, 2:204.

<sup>4</sup>Morris, *The Gospel ...*, p. 237.

groups (tax gatherers and sinners) with two negative groups (Pharisees and lawyers) in order to heighten the contrast further. Receiving and eating with outsiders demonstrated openness to them and fellowship with them.

The following parables taught the religious leaders that sinners' return to God should be a cause for rejoicing rather than grumbling (cf. 19:7). One writer titled these parables "The Searching Shepherd," "The Searching Woman," and "The Seeking Father."<sup>1</sup> Shepherds, unmarried maidens, and rebellious sons were all examples of disenfranchised people who were usually excluded by the religious establishment of Jesus' day.<sup>2</sup> The first parable emphasized the lost condition, the second the search, and the third the restoration.<sup>3</sup> The shepherd suffered, the woman sought, and the father sang.<sup>4</sup>

## 2. The parable of the lost sheep 15:3-7 (cf. Matt. 18:12-14)

Matthew also recorded this parable as part of Jesus' discipleship training. Jesus' point was that God does not want any of His "sheep" to wander away from their "Shepherd." He seeks them out and brings them home. It was a call to the disciples to exercise responsible pastoral leadership. Luke showed that Jesus used the parable to accentuate God's joy when one of His lost "sheep" gets saved. It taught the Pharisees and lawyers how important the salvation of one "sinner" is to God. Jesus evidently used the same parable on two separate occasions to teach different lessons.

15:3-4      Probably many of Jesus' hearers were shepherds, since this was one of the most common occupations in Palestine. A flock of 100 sheep was fairly common for a small farmer.<sup>5</sup> Herds normally numbered between 20 and 200.<sup>6</sup> It was also normal for a shepherd to count his sheep every night.<sup>7</sup> The Greek word *eremos* can mean "wilderness" (AV), but probably it means

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<sup>1</sup>J. Dwight Pentecost, *The Parables of Jesus*, p. 99.

<sup>2</sup>M. Bailey, "Luke," p. 135.

<sup>3</sup>Edersheim, *The Life ...*, 2:255.

<sup>4</sup>Morgan, *The Gospel ...*, p. 181.

<sup>5</sup>Jeremias, *The Parables ...*, p. 133.

<sup>6</sup>*The Nelson ...*, p. 1729.

<sup>7</sup>Liefeld, "Luke," p. 981.

"open pasture" or "open country" (NIV) here. The sheep was lost because of its foolishness (cf. 1 Pet. 2:25). Note that all the sheep belonged to the shepherd. However, because they were in the open country, some interpreters have concluded that they represent only the unsaved.<sup>1</sup>

15:5-6 The contrast between the lost and the found condition of the one sheep was the cause for the shepherd's great rejoicing. His joy at the secure condition of the sheep is the point of the parable. The parable also pictures the shepherd (Jesus) taking the initiative in seeking the lost, which is a major theme in Luke (cf. 19:10; et al.). By picturing the shepherd carrying the sheep home on his shoulders, Jesus was implying His loving care of those He saves (cf. Rom. 5:6). His action depicted common rural practice.

15:7 The 99 righteous people represent the self-righteous Pharisees and scribes (v. 2). Jesus was using the term "righteous" in irony. They were not really righteous, but they considered themselves righteous. The contrast then is between God's joy over one sinner's salvation compared to His sorrow over 99 self-righteous people's lack of salvation. "In heaven" means in God's presence (cf. v. 10).

Jesus revealed that even though sinners coming to Jesus made the Pharisees grumble, this rejoiced God's heart. The parable showed how out of harmony they were with God. It also vindicated Jesus' contacts with sinners.

### **3. The parable of the lost coin 15:8-10**

Jesus' repetition of the same point in another similar parable shows the importance of the lesson that He wanted His hearers to learn.

15:8 Again, Jesus' concern for women comes out in this illustration, with which His female listeners could identify. In the previous parable a relatively rich man lost one of his sheep, whereas in this one a relatively poor woman lost one of her coins. The silver coins in view would have been Greek drachmas, which

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<sup>1</sup>E.g., Ironside, 2:488.

were the equivalent of Roman denarii, each worth about a day's wage for a laborer. They may have been part of the dowry, or the savings, that some Palestinian women wore around their heads on a chain.<sup>1</sup>

In any case, the coin that the woman lost was precious to her, even though it did not represent great wealth. Its value is clear from the trouble to which she went to find it. The sheep was lost because of its foolishness (v. 4), but the coin was lost because of the woman's carelessness, through no fault of its own but by circumstances. Peasants' houses in Palestine normally had no windows, so she needed to get a lamp to help her find her coin.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, it cost Jesus much to seek and to save the lost. God actually searches for lost sinners (cf. Gen. 3:8-9).

15:9 The woman's recovery of what had been lost led to great joy and rejoicing.<sup>3</sup>

15:10 This parable repeated the point of the previous one, namely, that there is rejoicing in heaven when one sinner repents. However, it also stresses the fact that God willingly goes to great lengths to seek out and to find the lost. This attitude contrasts with that of the Pharisees and scribes (v. 2). According to Morris, there is no rabbinic equivalent to God seeking sinners.<sup>4</sup>

An almost identical parable to this one was common among the Jews of Jesus' day.<sup>5</sup> But in the Jewish parable, the moral was that a person should search the Torah more diligently than this woman searched for her lost coin, since Torah study would yield an eternal reward, not just temporal enjoyment. It taught the merit of works, whereas Jesus' parable taught the compassion of the Savior and the joy in heaven over the salvation of the lost.

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<sup>1</sup>Jeremias, *Jerusalem in ...*, p. 100; idem, *The Parables ...*, pp. 134-35.

<sup>2</sup>Marshall, *The Gospel ...*, p. 603.

<sup>3</sup>See A. F. Walls, "'In the Presence of the Angels' (Luke xv. 10)," *Novum Testamentum 3* (1959):314-16.

<sup>4</sup>Morris, *The Gospel ...*, p. 239.

<sup>5</sup>See Edersheim, *The Life ...*, 1:581.



Perhaps Jesus intended to focus on the Jews in the first parable, since He compared the lost one to a sheep from the Shepherd's fold (Israel). The second parable may compare the lost coin to a Gentile, since a Greek coin was lost. This is the only reference to this coin in the New Testament. If so, the numbers may be significant: Only a small number of Jews would experience salvation, compared to a greater proportion of Gentiles who would believe the gospel. The Book of Acts reveals the comparative unresponsiveness of the Jews and the receptivity of the Gentiles.

#### **4. The parable of the lost son 15:11-32**

This third parable in the series again repeats the point of the former two: that God gladly receives repentant sinners. But it stresses still other facts. The joy of the father in the first part of the parable contrasts with the grumbling of the elder brother in the second part. The love of the father was equal for both of his sons. Thus the parable teaches that God wants all people to experience salvation and to enter the messianic kingdom.

"This parable is often called 'The Prodigal Son,' but it is really about different reactions to the prodigal. The key reaction is that of the father, who is excited to receive his son back. Thus a better name for the parable is 'The Forgiving Father.' A sub-theme is the reaction of the older brother, so that one can subtitle the parable with the addendum: 'and the Begrudging Brother.'"<sup>1</sup>

"The first two parables give the Divine side of grace; the seeking love of God. The third gives the human side; the rise and growth of repentance in the heart of the sinner."<sup>2</sup>

#### **The younger son 15:11-24**

15:11-12 The man in the story had two sons, a younger one and an older one (v. 25). The younger son's inheritance would normally have been one-third of his father's estate, since the older son would have received a double portion (Deut. 21:17). However a disposition of the father's estate before his death probably

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<sup>1</sup>Bock, *Luke*, p. 412.

<sup>2</sup>Plummer, p. 371.

would have yielded this son about two-ninths of the total.<sup>1</sup> Jesus did not explain the exact terms of the settlement since they were insignificant details. However the younger son's request evidently precluded any future claim on his father's estate (v. 19).

Normally the inheritance did not pass to the heirs until the death of the father. To request it prematurely was equivalent to expressing a wish that the father would die.

"... to my knowledge, in all of Middle Eastern literature (aside from this parable) from ancient times to the present, there is no case of any son, older or younger, asking for his inheritance from a father who is still in good health."<sup>2</sup>

This father's willingness to accommodate his younger son's request shows that he was gracious and generous, and it illustrates God's willingness to permit each person to go his or her own way. Possibly the older son also received his inheritance at the same time (v. 31), though this is not certain. The implication is that the younger son was an older teenager, since men usually married about then, and this young man was apparently unmarried.<sup>3</sup>

"The elder brother did not take full possession of his share of the property when the division was made. Rather, in accord with an available Jewish custom, the father transferred ownership, to take effect at the time of his own death, retaining for himself the lifetime use of the produce of the estate. So the elder son, though holding title to the estate, had continued to work on the estate under the authority of his father."<sup>4</sup>

15:13 Evidently the younger son turned his inherited assets into cash and then departed to "live it up." Notice that the money that

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<sup>1</sup>J. D. M. Derrett, *Law in the New Testament*, p. 107.

<sup>2</sup>M. Bailey, "Luke," p. 164.

<sup>3</sup>Marshall, *The Gospel ...*, p. 607.

<sup>4</sup>Nolland, *Luke 9:21—18:34*, p. 790. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 782.

he had in his pocket was there because he had a very generous father, not because he had earned it.<sup>1</sup> The boy may have wanted to "find himself," but he ended up losing himself.

"He shall discover ... that the only true freedom is freedom in God; that to depart from Him is not to throw off the yoke, but to exchange a light yoke for a heavy one, and one gracious master for a thousand imperious tyrants and lords."<sup>2</sup>

In the first parable the sheep got lost because of its nature to wander away. In the second the coin was lost due to circumstances beyond its control. In this third parable, the son gets lost as a result of his own choice.

15:14-15 Feeding pigs was, of course, unclean work for a Jew, and it was a job that any self-respecting Jew would only do out of total desperation (Lev. 11:7). However the younger son was willing to do even this because his need had become so great.

15:16 The pigs and the young man both evidently ate the pods or hulls that held the seeds of carob trees.<sup>3</sup> This was not very nourishing or appetizing fare. There was a Jewish saying that went: "When Israel is reduced to the carob-tree, they become repentant."<sup>4</sup> This son had sunk so low that no one showed him any compassion. His loose living had not yielded any true friends.

"... neither sense nor reason exists in sin but the very contrary."<sup>5</sup>

The Pharisees would have recognized this young man as representing the sinners whom they despised.

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<sup>1</sup>McGee, 4:313.

<sup>2</sup>Trench, *Notes on the Parables ...*, p. 388.

<sup>3</sup>Liefeld, "Luke," p. 984.

<sup>4</sup>Edersheim, *The Life ...*, 2:261.

<sup>5</sup>Lenski, p. 812.

15:17 "He came to his senses" is an idiom that indicates repentance.<sup>1</sup> The son changed his mind and his attitude, and he decided to make a change in his behavior.

"... recklessness leads to misery and misery prompts reflection."<sup>2</sup>

15:18 The young man used "heaven" as a euphemism for God (cf. v. 21). The Jews frequently did this in order to avoid using God's name in vain, and there are many examples of this in Luke. The young man meant that he viewed his actions as sin against his father and against God (cf. Ps. 51:4).

The son's proposal to his father, as well as his planned speech, shows the genuineness of his humility and repentance.

"In Augustine's words, 'He shows himself worthy, in that he confesses himself unworthy;' ..."<sup>3</sup>

15:19 The young man was willing to serve his father as a hired laborer since his father had a reputation for paying his servants generously (v. 17). Ordinary slaves were in a sense members of the household, but hired laborers could be dismissed with a day's notice.<sup>4</sup>

"... the boy's proposal indicates that, while he desires the father's house, he doesn't understand the father's heart."<sup>5</sup>

15:20 Since the father saw his son while he was still a great distance from his house, he had apparently been scanning the distant road daily hoping to see him. The father's compassion reflects some knowledge of his son's plight. Perhaps he had kept tabs on him since he left home. The father put feet to his feelings

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<sup>1</sup>Jeremias, *The Parables ...*, p. 130. See also Greg Forbes, "Repentance and Conflict in the Parable of the Lost Son (Luke 15:11-32)," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 42:2 (June 1999):211-229.

<sup>2</sup>A. B. Bruce, "The Synoptic ...," 1:580.

<sup>3</sup>Trench, *Notes on the Parables ...*, p. 401.

<sup>4</sup>Barclay, p. 212; Tenney, "The Gospel ...," p. 1054.

<sup>5</sup>Inrig, p. 19.

by running out to meet his son, even though it was undignified for an older man to run in Jesus' culture.

Embracing and kissing his son continually also expressed the father's forgiving, loving acceptance of the prodigal (cf. Gen. 45:14-15; 33:4; 2 Sam. 14:33; Acts 20:37). This attitude also contrasts with the elder brother's attitude and the Pharisees' attitude. The father initiated the restoration of fellowship before the son could finish his confession. This shows the father's eagerness to forgive. The word translated "kissed" (Gr. *katephilesen*) may mean either kissed many times or kissed tenderly.<sup>1</sup>

"Let us note too that it is *after*, and not *before*, the kiss of reconciliation, that this confession is made; for the more the sinner knows and tastes of the love of God, the more he grieves to have outraged that love."<sup>2</sup>

15:21-22 Evidently the father cut his son's confession short because he knew what was in his heart (cf. 1 John 4:18). With tender affection he spared his son his humiliating admission. Rather than simply accepting his son back, much less making him a hired laborer, the father bestowed the symbols of honor ("the best robe"), authority ("a ring"), and freedom ("sandals") on him (cf. Gen. 41:42; Esth. 3:10; 8:8).<sup>3</sup> Sandals and a ring were marks of a free man, but slaves went barefooted.<sup>4</sup>

15:23 Then he prepared a banquet for him, which in Jesus' story probably hints at the messianic banquet (13:29; 14:15-24). People in Jesus' day ate far less meat than modern westerners do, so eating meat indicates a very special occasion.

"Everything the younger son had hoped to find in the far country, he discovered back home: clothes, jewelry, friends, joyful celebration, love, and assurance for the future. What made the

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<sup>1</sup>Morris, *The Gospel ...*, p. 242.

<sup>2</sup>Trench, *Notes on the Parables ...*, p. 403.

<sup>3</sup>Jeremias, *The Parables ...*, p. 130.

<sup>4</sup>Alford, 1:593-94; Robertson, *Word Pictures ...*, 2:211.

difference? Instead of saying, 'Father, *give* me!' he said, 'Father, *make* me!' He was willing to be a servant!"<sup>1</sup>

15:24 The son had determined to leave the father permanently, so he was virtually dead and lost to his father. He now had new life and was found (cf. Eph. 2:1-5). If the sheep was lost through foolishness, and the coin through carelessness, the son was lost through willfulness.<sup>2</sup> The son's return was just the beginning of rejoicing, the implication being that it would continue forever. Jesus' hearers would have understood Him to be teaching that sinners would enter the messianic kingdom because they came to God by believing in Jesus.

"There is a Buddhist story that provides a fascinating contrast to the Lord's story. It also tells of a son who left home and returned years later in rags and misery. His degradation was so profound that he did not recognize his own father. But his father recognized him and told the servants to take him into the mansion and to clean him up. The father, his identity unrevealed, watched his son's response. Gradually, time wrought changes, and the son became dutiful, considerate, and moral. Satisfied, the father finally revealed his identity and formally accepted his son as his heir. The Pharisees would have understood and approved of such a story. It makes sense to wait for a son to achieve worthiness. It is reasonable to treat a repentant person according to the stage of penance achieved. But that is not the Father our Lord describes. It is not a parable of merits. Here is a picture of grace."<sup>3</sup>

"Here it deserves special notice, as marking the absolute contrast between the teaching of Christ and Rabbinism, that we have in one of the oldest

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<sup>1</sup>Wiersbe, 1:236.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 1:233-35.

<sup>3</sup>Inrig, pp. 20-21. Paragraph division omitted.

Rabbinic works a Parable exactly the reverse of this, when the son of a friend is redeemed from bondage, not as a son, but to be a slave, that so obedience might be demanded of him."<sup>1</sup>

"To an alarming degree it [the evangelical church of today] has lost touch with the unconditional love of God."<sup>2</sup>

"The first lesson is that repentance is always possible for those who want to return to God."<sup>3</sup>

Warren Wiersbe pointed out parallels between the prodigal's coming to his father and the sinner coming to God through Christ: The prodigal was lost (v. 24); Jesus said, "I am the way." The prodigal was ignorant (v. 17); Jesus said, "I am the truth." The prodigal was dead (v. 24); Jesus said, "I am the life" (John 14:6).<sup>4</sup>

### The older brother 15:25-32

15:25-27 Jesus pictured the older brother, symbolic of the Pharisees and scribes, as working hard for the father. This man was another prodigal son, but of a different kind. The Jews, as well as the Jewish religious leaders, equally enjoyed the privileged status of an older brother in the human family, because God had chosen them for special blessing (Exod. 19:5-6). The older brother was outside the banquet, having missed it apparently because of his preoccupation with work and his distant relationship with his father. For him, and for the Pharisees, all was based on merit and reward. He viewed himself more as the father's servant than as his son.

15:28 The older son's anger at the father's forgiveness and acceptance of his brother contrasts with the father's loving compassion demonstrated by his coming out and entreating him. Similarly the Pharisees grumbled because God received sinners and welcomed them into His kingdom (v. 2).

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<sup>1</sup>Edersheim, *The Life ...*, 2:262.

<sup>2</sup>Hodges, *Absolutely Free!* p. 18.

<sup>3</sup>Blomberg, p. 36. Italics omitted.

<sup>4</sup>Wiersbe, 1:236.

Nevertheless God reached out to them through Jesus, just like the father reached out to his older son. The same tenderness marked the father's dealings with the elder brother as marked his dealings with the younger brother.

15:29 After a disrespectful address ("Look!"), the older son boasted of what he had done for his father, and then blamed him for not giving him more. Clearly he felt that the father's response should have reflected justice rather than grace. He was counting on a reward commensurate with his work (cf. Matt. 20:12). This hardly reflects a loving relationship.

"He hasn't stayed home because he loved his father, but because working in his fields was a way to get what he wanted."<sup>1</sup>

"He does not see that he is exhibiting much the same spirit as his brother. He wants to have his father's property in order that he may enjoy himself *apart from him*."<sup>2</sup>

15:30 The older son refused to acknowledge his brother as his brother, because he had so dishonored his father. By calling him his father's son ("this son of yours") he was implying that the father shared his younger son's guilt. Everyone in this chapter experienced joy except this elder brother.

"He was devoted to his father's law, and he was devoted to his father's service; but he was entirely out of sympathy with his father's heart; and therefore unable to set the true value upon his brother."<sup>3</sup>

"The proud and the self-righteous always feel that they are not treated as well as they deserve."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Inrig, p. 25.

<sup>2</sup>Plummer, p. 378.

<sup>3</sup>Morgan, *The Gospel ...*, p. 184.

<sup>4</sup>Morris, *The Gospel ...*, p. 244.



Essentially, what the elder son wanted was recognition (cf. 17:7-10; Matt. 20:11). He felt that his father had made his brother superior to him.<sup>1</sup>

"The second lesson is that God's people ought not to begrudge his generosity for even the most wayward of sinners."<sup>2</sup>

15:31 The father responded to the older son's hostility with tenderness and reason. The Greek word *teknon*, translated here "Son," is a term of tender affection. The father pointed out his older son's privileged position: he had always benefiting from his father's favor. This was a uniquely Jewish privilege that the nation's religious leaders enjoyed particularly (cf. Rom. 3:1-2; 9:4). All that God had was Israel's, in the sense that the Israelites always had access to Him and His blessings, because of the privileged relationship that He had established with the nation.

15:32 The older son could have celebrated with a fattened calf whenever he wanted to. It was necessary (right, not just good; "we had") to celebrate the return of sinners, implying that the older brother should have joined in the rejoicing. The reason for the rejoicing was the salvation of the lost ("this brother of yours was dead and has begun to live").

The parable closes with the father's implied invitation to the older son to enter the banquet. That invitation was still open to the Pharisees and scribes when Jesus told this parable.

"... the third lesson that this parable teaches is that God in his lavish love forgives the sins of both sons and wants us to do likewise."<sup>3</sup>

"The legalist can never understand the grace of God. It is utterly foreign to him."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Nolland, *Luke 9:21—18:34*, p. 787.

<sup>2</sup>Blomberg, p. 37. Italics omitted.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 38. Italics omitted.

<sup>4</sup>Ironside, 2:498.

"One purpose of the parable was to induce the Pharisees to come in and claim their share of the Father's affection and of the heavenly joy. Another was to prove to the outcasts and sinners with what generous love they had been welcomed."<sup>1</sup>

"Thus the parable teaches that God loves sinners, that God searches for sinners, that God restores sinners, and that God confers the privileges and blessings of sonship on those who return to Him."<sup>2</sup>

"The sheep went lost through sheer foolishness. ... The coin did not go lost at all; it was lost *through no fault of its own*. ... The son *deliberately went lost*, callously turning his back on his father."<sup>3</sup>

There are two interpretations of these three parables that are common among evangelicals. Some see them as teaching the restoration to fellowship of believers. They cite the fact that the man owned the sheep that he lost, the woman owned the coin, and the lost son was a son of his father. They view these relationships as indicating the saved condition of the lost objects in the parables.

Other interpreters view the lost objects as representing unbelievers. This seems more probable, since Jesus was speaking to Pharisees and lawyers who rejected God's salvation that He extended through Jesus. They grumbled against Jesus because He received sinners who believed on Him. Even more unexpected, the younger son received a new position, compared to what he had experienced recently, after he returned (v. 22). The Jews were God's children only in the sense that God had adopted them into a special relationship with Himself (Exod. 19:5-6). They still had to believe on Jesus in order to obtain eternal life (cf. Gen. 15:6).<sup>4</sup>

On one level these parables deal with Israel's religious leaders, but on another level they deal with all the Jews and the Gentiles. The unbelief that characterized the Pharisees and lawyers also marked the nation of Israel as a whole. Therefore it seems that these parables teach that God reaches out to the Gentiles in view of Israel's unbelief, as well as extending salvation

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<sup>1</sup>Plummer, p. 379.

<sup>2</sup>Pentecost, *The Parables ...*, p. 105.

<sup>3</sup>Barclay, p. 214.

<sup>4</sup>Martin, p. 244.

to Jewish sinners in Jesus' day. As Luke's Gospel unfolds from Jesus' postponement of the kingdom onward (13:34-35), Jesus' mission primarily to the Jews declines, and His worldwide mission to the Gentiles becomes an ever-increasing emphasis.

Some interpreters have believed that these three parables also reveal the Trinity: the Son being seen in the shepherd, the Holy Spirit in the lost coin, and the Father in the father of the prodigal sons.<sup>1</sup>

### **G. JESUS' WARNINGS ABOUT RICHES CH. 16**

This section, like those immediately preceding and following it, contains parabolic teaching and other instruction concerning discipleship, and it includes a call for a decision to believe in Jesus.

"... chap. 15 has emphasized divine initiative and heavenly joy, with repentance in the background; now human responsibility is stressed, especially in connection with the attitude to and the use of wealth, and the divine initiative is only briefly alluded to."<sup>2</sup>

All the teaching in this chapter deals with material possessions. The chapter begins with instruction for the disciples, and then it moves to a lesson for the Pharisees.

#### **1. Discipleship as stewardship 16:1-13**

Jesus instructed His disciples about their use of material possessions. He taught them to be wise in the use of wealth and to beware of the danger of loving it (cf. 1 Tim. 6:10).

#### **The parable of the shrewd manager 16:1-9**

"Luke 16:1-8 contains probably the most difficult parable in Luke."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Gaebelein, 3:1:155; Morgan, *An Exposition ...*, p. 437; idem, *The Gospel ...*, p. 181.

<sup>2</sup>Nolland, *Luke 9:21—18:34*, p. 802.

<sup>3</sup>Bock, *Luke*, p. 418.

16:1 The linguistic connection that ties this parable with its preceding context is the word "squander" (Gr. *diaskorpizo*, cf. 15:13). This is the clue to the thematic connection, namely, the prudent (sensible) use of money. The younger son in the parable of the lost son, who represented the sinners whom Jesus received, did not manage his inheritance well. He squandered (wasted, misspent) it. The story that follows gives an example of a wise use of some money that a master entrusted to his prodigal manager.

As the story opens, the "manager" (Gr. *oikonomos*) is in trouble for unwisely managing his master's money. He was behaving like the younger son in the previous parable. In Jesus' day wealthy landowners often turned over the management of some of their money to a manager, whose responsibility was to make more money for the master. Today a stockbroker, a banker, or an investment counselor serves his or her clients in a similar way. Such a manager enjoyed enviable status in Jesus' world, so much so that people were actually known to sell themselves to gain such an coveted position.<sup>1</sup>

16:2 There is no indication in the parable whether the manager failed his master innocently or deliberately. That is unimportant. For whatever reason, his boss fired him and asked him to turn in his account books that would show what he had done (cf. Matt. 12:36; Acts 19:40; Heb. 13:17; 1 Pet. 4:5).

16:3 The manager thought about how he could earn a living, since he had been fired. He considered himself too physically weak to do manual labor, and he was too proud to beg. Ironically, he felt too proud to beg but not too proud to steal.

16:4 He decided to do something that would enable him to get another job with one of the people who owed his master money. Evidently he did not consider getting another job as a manager, because he had been disgraced, and he knew that other people would not trust him.<sup>2</sup> He thought that his plan of

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<sup>1</sup>Yvon Thébert, "The Slave," in *The Romans*, pp. 156-57; Jean-Paul Morel, "The Craftsman," in *ibid.*, p. 223.

<sup>2</sup>A. B. Bruce, "The Synoptic ...," 1:584.

action would guarantee him a job and respectability, but he realized that he needed to act quickly.

16:5-7 The manager's plan involved discounting the debts of the people who owed his master money, probably by canceling the interest on the debts that they owed.<sup>1</sup> The fact that he dealt in commodities rather than cash is inconsequential, since many traders dealt that way in Jesus' day, as they do in ours.

"These debts are large business debts, either lease arrangements on land or commercial borrowing by the merchant classes. The steward had the authority to write and even rewrite contracts in the name of his master."<sup>2</sup>

"This lord was a wholesaler, the creditors had bought from him and still owed him the money."<sup>3</sup>

One jug (lit. "bath") could hold about nine gallons of liquid material, and one kor held around 10 to 12 bushels of dry material.<sup>4</sup> So the discount that each debtor received represented a significant amount of money, and it made the debtors favorably inclined toward the manager. The debtors were probably people who had received merchandise from the master's estate and had given the agent a promissory note rather than cash. This was and is a standard accepted way of doing business. In Jesus' culture one favor was expected to produce another favor in return.<sup>5</sup>

"All the transactions are in the steward's hands; he made the sale, received and kept the papers, his lord had other business to do, had employed him as his manager. So the debtor could safely accept the reduction."<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>See M. Bailey, *To Follow ...*, pp. 132-34.

<sup>2</sup>Nolland, *Luke 9:21—18:34*, p. 803.

<sup>3</sup>Lenski, p. 826.

<sup>4</sup>Nolland, *Luke 9:21—18:34*, p. 799.

<sup>5</sup>Blomberg, p. 83.

<sup>6</sup>Lenski, p. 827.

Did the manager dishonestly cheat his master out of what others owed him, or did he deduct the interest that would have come to him as the agent for each transaction? The first alternative is a real possibility.<sup>1</sup> But it seems unlikely that Jesus would have proceeded to commend the manager, and hold him up to the disciples as an example to follow, if he was that dishonest (v. 9). Furthermore, if the manager had chosen to cheat his employer further, he probably would have ended up in jail, rather than in the good graces of his master's debtors.

The second alternative is possible and probable.<sup>2</sup> The manager could well have received a commission for each of the transactions that he had negotiated for his employer, and he probably deducted these commissions from the debtors' costs. Even a 100 percent commission (v. 6) was not unknown in Jesus' culture.<sup>3</sup> Probably the commission was part of the original bill.<sup>4</sup> Another possibility is that the steward eliminated his fee plus illegal interest that had been charged.<sup>5</sup> Or the steward may have lowered the price on his own authority.<sup>6</sup>

It appears that the steward cancelled the interest due that would have come to him as a commission. Whatever the sum that the servant discounted, it must have come out of his own pocket rather than that of his employer.

"Documents that had been tampered with would have been invalid, and the debtors would afterward be held liable for the entire amount. Entirely newly written obligations, which were substituted for the originals, would make the thing sure. So the debtor is also told to sit down, which

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<sup>1</sup>Derrett, *Law in ...*, pp. 72-73; Morgan, *The Gospel ...*, p. 185.

<sup>2</sup>J. A. Fitzmyer, *Essays on the Semitic Background of the New Testament*, pp. 175-76; idem, "The Story of the Dishonest Manager," *Theological Studies* 25 (1964):23-42. See also Edersheim, *The Life ...*, 2:267; Ironside, 2:501; and McGee, 4:317-19.

<sup>3</sup>Marshall, *The Gospel ...*, p. 619.

<sup>4</sup>J. D. M. Derrett, "'Take thy Bond ... and Write Fifty' (Luke xvi. 6) The nature of the Bond," *Journal of New Testament Studies* NS23 (1972):438-40.

<sup>5</sup>Inrig, p. 112.

<sup>6</sup>Nolland, *Luke 9:21—18:34*, p. 803.

would not have been necessary for a slight alteration."<sup>1</sup>

16:8 The master complemented the manager for his shrewdness (or prudence, Gr. *phronimos*, i.e., practical wisdom) in foregoing his (the steward's) own wealth (his commission) in order to secure his future (cf. 12:42; Matt. 10:16). He commended him for his wise use of an opportunity to both escape punishment and gain something for himself.

"He does not commend him because he had done *falsely* to his master, but because he had done *wisely* for himself."<sup>2</sup>

"In accord with the demands of Greco-Roman reciprocity ethics, they [the debtors] would feel honor bound to repay a good turn with generosity also of a high level."<sup>3</sup>

The rich master probably did not approve of the manager's earlier squandering of his money through incompetence or dishonesty (v. 1), whichever trait may have characterized him. That simply marked him as an unrighteous manager. The fact that he had not been shrewd at first—he had squandered the rich man's possessions—accentuates his later shrewdness as being even more commendable.

Another view is that the master was just as corrupt as his manager, and so he commended him for his worldly wisdom and dealings.<sup>4</sup>

"The sons of this age" are unrighteous unbelievers who live by the principles that govern most people in the present age. "The sons of light" are people who live in the light of God's revelation and are therefore believers (cf. 11:33-36; Eph. 5:8). The implication is that they are believers who are in fellowship with God, since "light" characterized them (cf. 1 John 1:7).

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<sup>1</sup>Lenski, p. 827.

<sup>2</sup>Henry, p. 1474.

<sup>3</sup>Nolland, *Luke 9:21—18:34*, p. 800.

<sup>4</sup>See McGee, 4:319.

Jesus' point was that prudent dealings characterize unbelievers more than believers. Disciples can profit by learning from them in the way that they anticipate the future. People of the light should be as shrewd in their investments for the future as people of the darkness are in their business investments for the future.

16:9 Jesus next explained the application of the parable for His disciples. They should use their money purposefully by employing it to make friends who would later welcome them into the "eternal dwellings" (heaven)—when the disciples died. Jesus may have pictured the converts ("they") as dying before the disciples and welcoming the disciples into heaven when the disciples arrived. Some believe that "they" refers to angels who will welcome the disciples into heaven.<sup>1</sup> In either case, disciples should use their money to bring others to faith in Jesus and thereby secure a warm reception for themselves into heaven.

"Did you hear about the IRS worker who was given notice that he was being laid off and who then mailed twenty good friends large, undeserved tax refund checks? Or did you hear about the hospital administrator, about to lose his job, who reduced the bills of several prominent patients by several thousand dollars? Or how about the just-fired defense contractor who changed five-hundred-dollar screw orders to five dollars? Each made many new friends as a result and thereby received several new job offers."<sup>2</sup>

The English word "mammon," which the AV translators used rather than "wealth," is probably a transliteration of the Hebrew word *mamon*, meaning "what one trusts." Another view is that it transliterates the Aramaic *mamona*, meaning wealth, money, or property. "Mammon of unrighteousness" means worldly or material wealth, wealth associated with unrighteous living contrasted with heavenly treasure (cf.

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<sup>1</sup>E.g., Bock, *Jesus according ...*, p. 284.

<sup>2</sup>Blomberg, p. 82.



12:21). The phrase does not mean wealth acquired by dishonest means.

"When it [unrighteous wealth] is all gone" is another way of saying: when you die. Money no longer supports a person after he or she dies. Even though money will fail us when we die, those whom we have led to salvation will not die. They, along with the angels, will welcome us into eternal, in contrast to temporal, dwellings. Thus Jesus contrasted the temporary value of money with the eternal value of saved lives.

Someone asked a friend at a funeral, "How much did he leave behind?" His companion replied, "All of it."

"A foolish person lives only for the present and uses personal wealth only for the present. A wise person considers the future and uses personal wealth to reap benefits in the future ..."<sup>1</sup>

Jesus' disciples should use their money to lead people to Jesus Christ. They should not consume it all on themselves, pass it all on to their heirs, or hoard it, but invest it in the Lord's work.

The reason Jesus taught this lesson appears to have been the Pharisees' money-grabbing reputation (cf. v. 14; 20:47). This attitude and practice should not characterize His disciples. All that Christians have belongs to the Lord, and we are only managers of it.

"The method of the parable is very similar to that in the parable of the Unrighteous Judge (xviii. 2). In both we have an argument *à fortiori* [a conclusion for which there is stronger evidence than for a previously accepted one]. In that case the argument is, If an unrighteous judge will yield to the importunity of a stranger, how much more will a righteous and loving Father listen to the earnest prayers of His own children? Here the argument is, If an unrighteous steward was commended by his earthly master for his prudence in providing for his future by a fraudulent use of what had been committed to him, how much more will a righteous servant be commended

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<sup>1</sup>Pentecost, *The Parables ...*, p. 110.

by his heavenly Master for providing for eternity by a good use of what has been committed to him?"<sup>1</sup>

### The implications of heavenly stewardship 16:10-13

Jesus proceeded to draw two more lessons from the parable that He had just told. One was the importance of faithfulness for Jesus' managing agents. The other was the importance of their undivided loyalty to Jesus.

- 16:10 If a person is faithful, he or she will be faithful in the use of however much he or she may be entrusted with. But if a person is unfaithful, he or she will be unfaithful in the use of however much he or she may be entrusted with. Trustworthiness does not depend on the amount for which one is responsible but on one's character (cf. 1 Tim. 3:5). A righteous person will be faithful in both the little things and the big things, and a person who is unrighteous will be unfaithful in both the little things and the big things.
- 16:11 Present unfaithfulness in the use of one's possessions disqualifies a person from being entrusted with greater riches later. Unfaithfulness does not just demonstrate untrustworthiness but unrighteousness. By using the words "unrighteous wealth" Jesus probably intended the disciples to include all the worldly things that people consider valuable, not just money. These would include one's time and talents, in addition to his or her earthly treasure.
- 16:12 If disciples squander what God has entrusted to their care on the earth (time, talents, treasure), who will entrust the true wealth (things of eternal value) to them? And if a disciple has been unfaithful in his use of what God has entrusted to him, who is going to give him something for himself? The rhetorical questions answer themselves: God will not. The "true wealth" (v. 11) and "that which is your own" probably refer to blessings in the earthly kingdom.
- 16:13 Even though one may have both God and wealth, namely, be a believer and have earthly resources, it is impossible to "serve" them both. They both demand total allegiance (cf. Matt. 6:24).

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<sup>1</sup>Plummer, p. 381.

Love for God will result in wealth taking second place in life. Conversely, if one puts wealth first, God can have only second place (cf. 1 Tim. 6:10). This fact should serve as a warning against unfaithfulness to God and as a warning against enslavement to and by wealth. Jesus personified "wealth" in order to picture it as God's rival. Disciples obviously can serve God and wealth in that they can serve God and at the same time earn a living. But they cannot be the servant, in the truest sense of that word, of both God and wealth. They can only be the servant of one master. Jesus polarized the choice in order to make the distinction clear, but the real issue is what the disciple chooses to pursue in his or her life: God or present material prosperity.<sup>1</sup>

## **2. Jesus' rebuke of the Pharisees for their greed 16:14-31**

The Pharisees, who were listening to Jesus' instructions to His disciples, ridiculed Him, because they tried to serve both God and wealth (v. 13). They tried to appear pious and at the same time accumulate all the wealth they could (cf. 20:47). Jesus therefore addressed their greed (cf. 2 Tim. 3:2).

### **The importance of submission to God's Word 16:14-18**

Jesus began His response to the Pharisees' rejection of His teaching by pointing out the importance of submitting to God's Word.

16:14 Luke identified the Pharisees as a whole as "lovers of money." What Jesus had just said led those of them that had been listening to what Jesus had said to ridicule Him.

16:15 Jesus rebuked His critics for their hypocrisy. They were able to explain their covetous practices to the Jews to their own satisfaction. They reasoned that any wealth that they could accumulate was a sign of God's blessing on them.<sup>2</sup> This was a

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<sup>1</sup>See Dave L. Mathewson, "The Parable of the Unjust Steward (Luke 16:1-13): A Reexamination of the Traditional View in Light of Recent Challenges," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 38:1 (March 1995):29-39.

<sup>2</sup>See Plummer, pp. 387-88.

common misinterpretation of the Law in Jesus' day, as it is in ours. Their showy display when giving alms may have been part of this hypocrisy too (cf. Matt. 6:2-4), but God was their real Judge, and He knew their greedy hearts (cf. 1 Sam. 16:7; 1 Chron. 28:9; Ps. 7:10).

What many people esteem highly is the pursuit of wealth. That is detestable to God because it is idolatry. It robs people of their future, and it insults God, who alone is worthy of supreme devotion. Jesus illustrated this point with the parable of the rich man and Lazarus that follows (vv. 19-31). The Pharisees' values were wrong. What really mattered, and what they should have concentrated on, was the messianic kingdom and God's Word. Rather than using money to make friends (v. 9), the Pharisees were lovers of money.

16:16 The Hebrew Scriptures should have been of primary importance to the Pharisees. They pointed to the coming of Messiah. Since John the Baptist had arrived, the message that he and Jesus preached was that the Messiah was present, and the messianic kingdom was at hand. A new era had begun with John's preaching. The Pharisees had disregarded that preaching, and in doing so they had rejected the teaching of the Old Testament, even though their fellow Jews were desperately trying to get into that kingdom (cf. 13:24; 14:15; Mark 7:8-9).

The fact that Jesus said something similar about the messianic kingdom on another occasion, which Matthew recorded, has raised questions about Jesus' meaning here and there (cf. Matt. 11:12-13). In Matthew, Jesus' point was this: The Jewish religious leaders were trying to bring in the messianic kingdom in their own carnal way, while refusing to accept God's way that John and Jesus announced. In the different teaching situation that Luke recorded, Jesus said something similar but slightly different. His point here was that many of the Jews were eager to enter the messianic kingdom, but the religious leaders were hindering them by rejecting John's and Jesus' preaching.

"... those pressing into the kingdom must be at least as much in earnest as the violent men of Palestine who tried to bring in the kingdom by force of arms. In the context we may think of men like the astute steward."<sup>1</sup>

16:17 Regardless of the Pharisees' views, the Old Testament would stand as the final authority. This verse is a very strong testimony to God's preservation of the accuracy of Scripture (cf. Matt. 5:18). The implication was that Jesus' teachings would likewise endure.

16:18 Jesus next cited an example of the continuing validity of the Old Testament and the Pharisees' disregard of it. God still expected, and expects, submission to His Word. The Pharisees did not condone adultery, though they permitted divorce (Deut. 24:1-4). Some Pharisees permitted a man to divorce his wife and then remarry another woman, though most of them did not grant women the same privilege.<sup>2</sup> Jesus condemned such conduct as a violation of the seventh commandment. This was an example of the Pharisees justifying themselves in the eyes of men but not being just before God (v. 15). Jesus both affirmed and clarified the Old Testament revelation. Therefore for the Pharisees to disregard His teaching about wealth (cf. v. 14) was equivalent to rejecting other divine revelation.

This teaching on divorce supplements other statements that Jesus made on the same subject on other occasions (cf. Matt. 5:32; 19:9; Mark 10:11). Matthew 19:9 and Mark 10:11 evidently record one teaching incident. Matthew 5:32 occurs in the context of the Sermon on the Mount. Luke's reference reflects a third context. As in Mark 10:11, Jesus omitted the exception clause here ("except for the reason of sexual immorality"; cf. Matt. 5:32; 19:9). He evidently did not want to draw attention to the exceptional case, because to do so would have weakened His main point, which was that people should not divorce. Matthew included Jesus' permission to divorce for sexual immorality because the subject of how to

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<sup>1</sup>Morris, *The Gospel ...*, p. 251.

<sup>2</sup>Marshall, *The Gospel ...*, p. 631.

deal with divorce cases involving marital unfaithfulness was of particular interest to the Jews.

"The basic application to this small unit [vv. 14-18] is to respond with obedience to the kingdom demand for ethical integrity, whether it be in how we deal with our resources or how we approach our marriages."<sup>1</sup>

### The parable of the rich man and Lazarus 16:19-31

"The unjust steward showed what good results may follow from a wise use of present advantages. The rich man shows how disastrous are the consequences of omitting to make a wise use of such things."<sup>2</sup>

In this parable the rich man and his brothers, who did not listen to Moses and the prophets (vv. 29-31), represent the Pharisees (vv. 16-17). The Pharisees believed in a future life and a coming judgment, but they, like the rich man, did not allow those beliefs to discourage them from the pursuit of present wealth (v. 14). Jesus announced that even His resurrection would not change them (v. 31). This parable also affirmed Jesus' teaching concerning a future reversal of fortunes (1:53; 6:20-26; 12:16-21; 13:30; 14:11) and the fact that present decisions affect future destiny both for the saved and the unsaved.

It has been suggested that the rabbinic story of how Abraham sent his steward Eleazar ("God is My Help," of which "Lazarus" is the Greek form of the name) to Sodom in order to test the hospitality of its citizens may be the origin of this parable.<sup>3</sup> Jesus may have built His parable on that story, which was extra-biblical, but perhaps factual, or merely fictional.

16:19 Jesus began the parable by introducing its two main characters. He presented the rich man as living selfishly, in the splendor of luxury, and rejoicing in his present earthly wealth (cf. 16:1, 13). Only the very wealthy of Jesus' day could afford to dress in the expensive purple garments that kings wore. The

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<sup>1</sup>Bock, *Luke*, p. 429.

<sup>2</sup>Plummer, p. 390.

<sup>3</sup>Derrett, *Law in ...*, pp. 86-92.

rich man also possessed the best undergarments, which were made of fine linen.

"White garments underneath a purple robe—this was the sign of the highest opulence."<sup>1</sup>

"Certain spots in a big city are really alive and jumping at night. If you want to see a lot of zombies and dead people, look in on one of these nightclubs. That is where you will find them. They are beating the drums, blaring out the music, getting the beat, drinking all they can, and getting high on drugs because they are dead and want to live."<sup>2</sup>

16:20-21 Lazarus, on the other hand, was poor, incapacitated, begging, diseased, hungry, unclean, and despised. These descriptions set the stage for the dramatic reversal in the conditions of these two men that follows (vv. 22-24). Obviously the rich man had disregarded the Old Testament teaching that the Israelites should care for the poor among them (cf. Prov. 14:21; 19:17; 21:13; 28:27).

The fact that Jesus named the beggar, and not the rich man, hints at the ultimate greater importance of Lazarus. He was not the brother of Mary and Martha (John 11). This is the only parable that Jesus taught in which He named one of the characters. The fact that Jesus mentioned his name does not necessarily mean that he was a real person. But he could have been.<sup>3</sup> Everything else about this story indicates that this was a typical invented parable.

"The naming of the poor man as Lazarus and the failure to name the rich man personalizes the level of concern for the poor man, while making clear that the rich man is a representative figure. God cares for each poor person and is fully aware of

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<sup>1</sup>Green, p. 605. See also Gladas Hamel, *Poverty and Charity in Roman Palestine, First Three Centuries C.E.*, p. 81.

<sup>2</sup>McGee, 4:321.

<sup>3</sup>R. Summers, *Commentary on Luke*.

their plight. The rich man could be any rich individual."<sup>1</sup>

"Lazarus" was a common name, the equivalent of the Hebrew "Eleazar," meaning "God Is My Help" or "Whom God Has Helped." Abraham, also mentioned in this parable, had a servant named Eleazar who was evidently a Gentile (Gen. 15:2). This fact has led some students of this passage to seek an interpretation that comes from Abraham's experience, as mentioned above.<sup>2</sup> One such writer concluded that Jesus was teaching that severe judgment would come on the Jews if they failed to repent.<sup>3</sup> However the connections with Abraham's history seem so obscure that Jesus' hearers would have missed them. Tradition has given the name "Dives," the Latin word for "rich," to the rich man, but there is no basis for naming him in the text.<sup>4</sup>

"Giving Lazarus a name helps to personalize him, and the description of his piteous condition encourages readers to sympathize with him and to condemn the rich man's callousness. It is not simply being wealthy but this callousness toward the suffering poor which is condemned in the parable."<sup>5</sup>

That Lazarus lay among unclean dogs heightens his wretched condition. The dogs that came and licked his sores would have aggravated them, not alleviated them.<sup>6</sup>

16:22 These verses describe the two destinies of the men, which were as different as their lives on earth had been. The angels assist God in caring for humans (Heb. 1:14). They escorted

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<sup>1</sup>Bock, *Luke*, p. 431.

<sup>2</sup>E.g., Derrett, *Law in ...*, pp. 85-92; idem, "Fresh Light on St Luke xvi. II. Dives and Lazarus and the preceding Sayings," *New Testament Studies*, 7 (1960-61):364-80. Cf. Blomberg, p. 50.

<sup>3</sup>C. H. Cave, "Lazarus and the Lucan Deuteronomy," *New Testament Studies* 15 (1968-67):319-25.

<sup>4</sup>Marshall, *The Gospel ...*, pp. 634-35.

<sup>5</sup>Tannehill, *The Narrative ...*, 1:131.

<sup>6</sup>Edersheim, *The Life ...*, 2:279.



Lazarus' spirit to Abraham's arms, whereas the rich man simply experienced burial without heavenly honors. The point is the care that God lavished on Lazarus. I think it is safe to assume that angels escort believers into heaven whenever they die, as they did here for Lazarus. Jesus pictured Lazarus in Abraham's arms (lit. bosom, or lap), perhaps enjoying the future messianic banquet in the millennial kingdom (cf. 13:28-29). Formerly the rich man had enjoyed banquets, while Lazarus had begged for scraps from his table (v. 21). But now the tables had turned.

The figure of Abraham's arms connotes a place of security, godly fellowship with other Old Testament believers, and honor.

16:23 "Hades" is the general name for the place of departed spirits (cf. 10:15), and it is the equivalent of the Hebrew "Sheol." However, in the New Testament, Hades always refers to the abode of the unsaved dead before their resurrection and condemnation at the Great White Throne judgment (Rev. 20:11-15).

"Gehenna" is a different place, and sometimes refers to the Lake of Fire, which is the final destiny of all unbelievers following the Great White Throne judgment (12:5). At the beginning of the earthly messianic kingdom, only unbelievers will be in Hades, since God will have resurrected all Old Testament saints, including Lazarus (Isa. 26:19; Dan. 12:2). "Paradise" (23:43; 2 Cor. 12:4) is a euphemism for God's presence, the place where all believers' spirits go, regardless of when they die, until the resurrection of their bodies.<sup>1</sup> It is a part of the place of departed spirits.

"It will help us understand this parable if we realize that Sheol or hades (translated hell in the [AV] New Testament) is divided into two compartments: paradise (which is called

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<sup>1</sup>See the Appendix "What happens to a person after he or she dies," at the end of these notes, for five diagrams. For defense of the view that both men were in Hades, see Ed Christian, "The Rich Man and Lazarus, Abraham's Bosom, and the Biblical Penalty *Karet* ('Cut Off')," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 61:3 (September 2018):513-23.

Abraham's Bosom in this parable) and the place of torment. Paradise was emptied when Christ took with Him at His ascension the Old Testament believers (see Eph. 4:8-10). The place of torment will deliver up the lost for judgment at the Great White Throne (see Rev. 20:11-15). All who stand at this judgment are lost, and they will be cast into the lake of fire, which is the second death."<sup>1</sup>

16:24 For the rich man, Hades was a place of agony and torment (v. 28). He could see the righteous far away, but he could not leave Hades to join them.

"The Scriptures teach that the intermediate state for the impenitent is one of misery."<sup>2</sup>

Torment is not the same as torture, however. Torture is agony imposed from outside a person. Some Medieval artists incorrectly pictured hell as a place where people are endlessly tortured. Torment is agony that is imposed from within a person. The rich man was tormented by the fact that he had lived as he had and was now in a place from which he could not escape.

This revelation by Jesus Christ refutes the doctrine of "soul sleep," which is the theory that when people die they become unconscious and insensible. This is what Seventh-Day Adventism teaches and what Jehovah's Witnesses believe.<sup>3</sup>

"If, when parts of the body are removed [amputated], we still believe that we possess those limbs, and feel pain in them, why may not the disembodied spirit still subjectively exist in, and feel the sensations of, that corporeal system from which it is temporarily separated?"<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>McGee, 4:321.

<sup>2</sup>William G. T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, 2:619.

<sup>3</sup>See John H. Gerstner, *The Theology of the Major Sects*, p. 186; Jan Karel Van Baalen, *The Chaos of Cults*, p. 207.

<sup>4</sup>Alford, 1:602. Parentheses omitted.

The rich man appealed to Abraham to send Lazarus to extend him some mercy. His address "Father Abraham" was typically respectful for a Jew (cf. 3:8; John 8:39). However the rich man's appeal to his racial connection with the father of the Jews was ineffective.

This fact should have warned the listening Pharisees not to count on their Jewish heritage to admit them into the messianic kingdom.<sup>1</sup> The rich man still viewed Lazarus as a servant who could help him, rather than as an equal. His judgment had not led him to repent of his selfishness—even in death. Obviously many modern ideas about hell are traceable to this parable.<sup>2</sup>

"Notice two things here: The lost go to a place of conscious torment. Also, people know each other after death. We do not lose our identities."<sup>3</sup>

16:25 The title "Child" (Gr. *teknon*) is a tender one that expressed compassion for the rich man in his misery (cf. 15:31). Abraham's reminder of the rich man's previous comfort was not an attempt to justify his present agony. God had not sentenced him to torment because he had previously been comfortable, that is, just to balance things out. Abraham reminded the rich man of the reason that he was now in torment: He had chosen a life of personal comfort rather than a life of allegiance to God's Word (cf. v. 13; 12:21).

"Analogy gives us every reason to suppose, that in the disembodied state the whole life on earth will lie before the soul in all its thoughts, words,

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<sup>1</sup>See Edersheim, *The Life ...*, 1:271, for evidence that the Jews believed that their physical, ancestral connection to Abraham guaranteed their salvation.

<sup>2</sup>See Flavius Josephus, *An Extract Out of Josephus' Discourse to the Greeks Concerning Hades*, for this first-century Jewish Ebionite Christian's understanding of Hades, the lake of fire, eternal punishment, Abraham's arms, heaven, and related matters—which is biblical and helpful.

<sup>3</sup>McGee, 4:321.

and deeds, like a map of the past journey before a traveller [*sic*]."<sup>1</sup>

The rich man's sin was not that he had done something bad, but that he had done nothing, when he should have done something good. Now it was too late for repentance.

16:26 Notice that there is no suggestion of a middle ground between Hades and Abraham's arms—no purgatory.<sup>2</sup> In fact, Jesus taught that a great chasm was set between the two that could not be crossed. There was no second chance for him. Hades is not only real and terrible, but it is final.<sup>3</sup>

"No passage from one area to the other is possible. In other words, the rich man has experienced a permanent judgment."<sup>4</sup>

Lazarus had been like one of those poor and crippled people who had responded to Jesus' invitation and had become a believer (cf. 4:18; 14:13, 21). This is clear because he ended up where he did.

"... when our Lord descended into hades after His crucifixion on the cross, He entered the paradise section, emptied it, and took everyone [there] into God's presence. No one occupies the paradise section of hades today. The only part of hades still occupied is the place of torment where unbelievers go when they die."<sup>5</sup>

16:27-28 Was the rich man sincerely concerned about his brothers, or was he backhandedly implying that he had not received adequate warning of coming judgment? I tend to favor the

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<sup>1</sup>Alford, 1:604.

<sup>2</sup>See Edersheim, *Sketches of ...*, pp. 175-77, for a summary of Rabbinic teaching on heaven and hell.

<sup>3</sup>Inrig, p. 128.

<sup>4</sup>Bock, *Jesus according ...*, p. 287.

<sup>5</sup>McGee, 4:322.

former motivation. Evidently people in Hades have a concern for the lost on earth, but they can do nothing about it.

"Friend, if the lost could come back, they would preach the gospel to us."<sup>1</sup>

16:29 Clearly the testimony of the Old Testament (v. 16) was more convincing than any testimony from a person who might return to the living with a message from Hades. This statement condemned the Pharisees who were listening to Jesus but had explained away the Old Testament revelation about Messiah and had asked Jesus for a sign from heaven (11:16). It also strongly implied that they would not believe on Jesus, even though He would rise from the dead (cf. 9:22; 11:29-30; 13:32).

"The primary use of miracles in Scripture was not to *convince* people of the truth by replacing the Bible, but rather to *confirm* the truth of Scripture."<sup>2</sup>

The testimony of the Scriptures is powerful because that is what God has chosen to use to bring conviction of spiritual need (cf. Heb. 4:12). Angels had appeared to people in Old Testament times, but hardhearted people did not believe them either (Gen. 19:14).

"There is an implication that the rich man's unpleasant situation was due not to his riches (after all, Abraham had been rich), but to his neglect of Scripture and its teaching. But the rich man does not agree. He knows how he had reacted to the possession of the Bible."<sup>3</sup>

16:30 Not long after this teaching Jesus did raise someone from the dead who bore witness to His identity: another Lazarus. What was the reaction of the Pharisees? They did not believe on Jesus but tried to kill both Jesus and Lazarus (John 11:45-53;

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>Inrig, p. 133.

<sup>3</sup>Morris, *The Gospel ...*, p. 154.

12:10-11). Perhaps this is the key to why Jesus gave the poor man in this parable the name Lazarus. Perhaps He wanted the Pharisees to remember the lesson of the Lazarus in this parable when He later raised the other Lazarus from the dead!

16:31 Verses 29 through 31 should warn us against putting too much hope in signs and wonders to persuade people to believe in Jesus (cf. John 10:41-42). The Word of God is a more convincing witness to Him than any miracle. This does not mean that miracles are valueless. God used them to reinforce the testimony of Scripture in the past, and He may do so occasionally today, but Scripture is the Holy Spirit's primary tool in bringing people to repentance (cf. John 16:7-15).

This teaching concerning greed (ch. 16) warned both the disciples and the Pharisees. Both groups ought to serve God as faithful servants, rather than serving wealth.<sup>1</sup> We should also beware of the possibility of disbelieving Scripture and explaining it away, if we make wealth our god, like the Pharisees did.

"What was the point of the narrative in its application to the men to whom our Lord was talking? First He was showing the importance of the right use of privilege in this life."<sup>2</sup>

"Two themes dominate: the idea of divine evaluation in the afterlife and the hardness of heart that cannot be overcome even by resurrection."<sup>3</sup>

"The dialogues from the afterlife in this passage reveal a series of vital truths that serve as correctives to some modern erroneous doctrines. (1) There is immediate consciousness after death; therefore soul sleep is not taught in the Bible. (2) Post-death destinies are irreversible; therefore there is no purgatory or second chance of salvation after death. (3) No one can lose or gain salvation after death. The decisions of this life are final and determinative. (4) The judgments that determine the eternal destinies of either torment or blessing are just. (5) Signs should never be sought as a substitute for

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<sup>1</sup>See Blomberg, pp. 45-52.

<sup>2</sup>Morgan, *The Gospel ...*, p. 193.

<sup>3</sup>Bock, *Luke*, p. 432.

the Word of God. The Word of God is the only adequate basis for faith (16:29; see Rom. 10:17)."<sup>1</sup>

#### **H. JESUS' WARNING ABOUT DISCIPLES' ACTIONS AND ATTITUDES 17:1-19**

Jesus had been teaching the disciples about avoiding what people esteemed highly, but which God viewed as detestable, namely, the pursuit of wealth (16:15). By pursuing wealth hypocritically the Pharisees had turned many of their fellow Jews away from Jesus (11:52). Jesus now warned the disciples about the possibility of their own improper actions and attitudes.

##### **1. The prevention of sin and the restoration of sinners 17:1-4**

- 17:1 The introductory "Now" (*de* in the Greek text, not translated in the NIV) indicates a logical connection with what has preceded. It is inevitable that disciples will retard the spiritual progress of others occasionally, because none of us is perfect. However that does not excuse personal responsibility when someone causes another person to sin (cf. 11:52). "Woe" recalls Jesus' condemnation of the Pharisees in 6:24 through 26. It indicates the seriousness of this offense.
- 17:2 Jesus equated the seriousness of this offense with doing something worthy of being executed by drowning. It is a very serious offense to hinder the progress of a believer, whom Jesus spoke of here as a child ("one of these little ones"; cf. Matt. 18:6). Jesus had previously compared believers to children, because childlike faith is necessary for a person to become a believer.
- 17:3 Jesus proceeded from warning against causing people to stumble to the subject of helping those who do stumble. The disciple's responsibility in such cases is twofold: admonition of the sinner, and generous forgiveness of the penitent (cf. Matt. 6:12; 18:15, 21-22).

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<sup>1</sup>M. Bailey, "Luke," p. 137.

17:4 The disciple's forgiveness of the repentant sinner should be limitless. "Seven times" is probably a way of saying complete or perfect forgiveness. Jesus was undoubtedly assuming that the repentance was genuine and not hypocritical.

"The saying implicitly forbids the nursing of grudges and criticism of the offender behind his back."<sup>1</sup>

## 2. The disciples' attitude toward their duty 17:5-10

Jesus again followed instruction with illustration.

### The importance of trusting God 17:5-6

17:5 Perhaps Luke referred to the Twelve as "apostles" here in order to highlight the importance of this teaching in view of the disciples' role as representatives of Jesus. Evidently the apostles concluded that such a generous approach to forgiving as Jesus taught would require more faith than they possessed. They would have to believe that God could change a person's heart, even if he gave no evidence of genuine contrition by repeatedly sinning and then repeatedly professing repentance. They would have to have more confidence in God to behave this way than they possessed.

"This is the only instance in which *a spiritual operation upon their souls* was solicited of Christ by the Twelve; but a kindred and higher prayer had been offered before, by one with far fewer opportunities. (See on Mark 9:24.)"<sup>2</sup>

17:6 Jesus encouraged the disciples by reminding them that only a little trust in God's ability ("faith") can result in unbelievable change (cf. Matt. 17:20; 21:21; Mark 11:23). A mustard seed was proverbially small (cf. 7:13). Mulberry trees grew to be as tall as 35 feet and were difficult to uproot.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Marshall, *The Gospel ...*, p. 642.

<sup>2</sup>Jamieson, et al., p. 1014.

<sup>3</sup>Liefeld, "Luke," p. 994.



"At the present time both the black mulberry (sycamine [Gr. *sukaminoi*, here]) and the white mulberry (sycamore [Gr. *sukomorean*, 19:4]) exist in Palestine. ... Both trees differ from the English sycamore."<sup>1</sup>

"The picture is of an extensively rooted sycamine tree that seemingly is anchored solidly in the ground. This black mulberry tree was so well nourished that it could live up to six hundred years."<sup>2</sup>

This response by Jesus amounted to telling the disciples that they did not need more faith. They just needed to use the faith that they had.

"This word of Jesus does not invite Christians to become conjurers and magicians, but heroes like those whose exploits are celebrated in the eleventh chapter of Hebrews."<sup>3</sup>

"It is not so much great faith in God that is required as faith in a great God."<sup>4</sup>

### The parable of the unworthy servant 17:7-10

Jesus told this parable in order to teach His disciples that warning sinning believers, and forgiving those who sinned and repented, was only their duty, but it was not something for which they should expect a reward from God. Perhaps He also did so to warn them of pride—pride that can come when "mountains" are moved by one's faith.<sup>5</sup>

17:7-8 Jesus first pictured the incongruity of a master serving his slave. Then He corrected the picture by having the slave first serve his master appropriately and then himself. Perhaps Jesus

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<sup>1</sup>Robertson, *Word Pictures* ..., 2:226.

<sup>2</sup>Bock, *Jesus according* ..., p. 289. See Thomson, 1:24-25, for evidence of the deep and extensive root systems of these sycamore trees.

<sup>3</sup>Manson, p. 141.

<sup>4</sup>Morris, *The Gospel* ..., p. 256.

<sup>5</sup>Morgan, *The Gospel* ..., p. 196.

selected the example of a slave laboring in the field or tending sheep because this is the type of service that His disciples render.

17:9 Normally the master did not thank the slave for doing his duty, since serving his master was the slave's responsibility. The point is not the master's attitude in failing to express thanks for services rendered, but the slave's attitude in doing his duty without placing his master under obligation to him.

The Pharisees believed that their righteous deeds put God in their debt, as did many of the Jews. God will indeed reward faithful service (12:35-37, 42-48). But that is not because His servants have placed Him in their debt, but because He graciously gives them more than what is just. The teaching in chapter 12 (vv. 35-37, 42-48) deals with the Master's grace, whereas the teaching here in chapter 17 (vv. 7-10) stresses the servant's attitude.

17:10 Jesus drew the application. His disciples should have the same attitude as good slaves. By claiming to be unworthy they were not saying that they were totally worthless people. They would mean that they were unworthy of any reward, because all the service that they had rendered was simply their duty to their Master. In the context the particular duty in view was forgiving generously (vv. 3-4), but the teaching applies generally to all the duties that disciples owe God.

Jesus and the apostles taught elsewhere that the prospect of reward should motivate disciples to serve the Lord (Matt. 6:19-21; 1 Cor. 3:10-15; 9:24-27; 2 Cor. 5:9-10; 1 John 2:28; 1 Pet. 4:13; 5:1-4). Jesus was not contradicting that here. Here His point was that God is under no obligation to reward us. He will do so because He chooses to do so, not because He has to do so. Our attitude should be that God does not need us to serve Him, and that serving Him is only our duty—for which He is under no obligation to reward us.

### 3. The importance of gratitude 17:11-19

Luke's narration of this miracle focuses on the response of the Samaritan whom Jesus healed. It is not so much a story that he intended to demonstrate Jesus' divine identity, though it does that. It is rather another lesson for the disciples on an important attitude that should characterize them. It balances Jesus' previous teaching on the stern demands of discipleship with a demonstration of His mercy and the appropriate attitude of gratitude for that mercy that should characterize His disciples.

"Not only is this narrative peculiar to Luke, but it also stresses several characteristically Lukan themes. Jerusalem is the goal of Jesus' journey (cr. 9:51; 13:33); Jesus has mercy on social outcasts; he conforms to Jewish norms by requiring that the lepers go for the required priestly declaration of health (cf. Lev. 14); faith and healing should bring praise to God (cf. 18:43; Acts 3:8-9); and the grace of God extends beyond Judaism, with Samaritans receiving special attention (cf. 10:25-37)."<sup>1</sup>

17:11 This verse is another geographical progress report (cf. 9:51; 13:22). These notations usually indicate the beginning of new sections in Luke and Acts, but here there is continuity in the subject matter of Jesus' teachings from what precedes. A new subject begins at the end of this pericope.

It was common for Galilean Jews to travel through Samaria on their way to Judea and Jerusalem.<sup>2</sup> This incident happened somewhere close to the border between southern Galilee and northern Samaria. This accounts for the inclusion of Jewish and Samaritan lepers in one group (vv. 16, 18). Their common affliction had brought them together.

17:12 The lepers stood at a distance from others because they were unclean and possibly because their disease was contagious. Biblical leprosy was contagious in some stages but not in others (cf. Lev. 13—14).

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<sup>1</sup>Liefeld, "Luke," p. 995.

<sup>2</sup>Josephus, *Antiquities of ...*, 20:6:1.

17:13 Their address to Jesus as "Master" (Gr. *epistata*, a word found only in Luke in the New Testament) indicated a measure of faith in Him.

"When used elsewhere in the Third gospel, 'Master' denotes one who has authority consistent with miraculous power."<sup>1</sup>

The lepers realized that their only hope for healing was Jesus' mercy, not their worthiness. Their condition made obvious what they wanted Jesus to do for them, namely, remove their leprosy.

17:14 Probably the lepers did not expect Jesus to respond as He did. Rather than touching them, or pronouncing them clean, He gave them a command. The command implied that by the time they reached the priests, they would have experienced healing and so would be able to present themselves as healed. Normally a command to show oneself to a priest followed a cure (5:14; cf. Lev. 13:49; 14:2-3). The priestly examination would result in the lepers resuming normal lives. Since Jesus told them to go and show themselves to the priests, most of them must have been Jews.

The priests were not healers or therapists, of course, but what we might call "health care professionals" who were "purity inspectors."<sup>2</sup> These lepers could have refused to go, and/or they could have repeated their request to Jesus.

Jesus was testing their faith and obedience. If they really regarded Him as their "Master," they should obey Him. They decided to obey, and they immediately experienced healing (cf. 5:12-16). Jesus healed them from a distance (cf. 2 Kings 5:10-14).

The lepers' response would have taught the disciples, and everyone else present, the importance of trusting and obeying Jesus' word. This was a lesson that Jesus had been teaching both the Pharisees and the disciples (16:15-31). This miracle

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<sup>1</sup>Green, p. 623.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 624.

showed the benefit of obeying Jesus' word because of trust in Him (cf. 6:10; Matt. 12:13; Mark 3:5). This lesson was not the main reason that Luke recorded this incident however.

- 17:15-16 The one leper who returned to Jesus gave God the glory for his healing with a loud voice. He thereby acknowledged that Jesus was God's agent. His prostrate posture and his thanksgiving expressed his great gratitude to Jesus (cf. 5:12; 8:41; 18:11; 22:17, 19; Ps. 103:2; Acts 5:10; 28:15). The fact that he was a Samaritan, rather than a Jew, is the key point in the incident. Luke's mention of this fact set the stage for Jesus' teaching that followed.

"Here, Luke's christology reaches impressive heights as he presents Jesus in the role of the temple—as one in whom the powerful and merciful presence of God is realized and before whom the God of the temple (whether in Jerusalem or Mount Gerizim!) can be worshiped."<sup>1</sup>

- 17:17-18 Jesus' questions drew attention to the ingratitude of the nine other lepers who were Jews (v. 18). They also made the point that Luke wanted to stress by recording this incident. The Jews had more knowledge about Messiah and His coming than foreigners. They should have recognized who Jesus was and returned to express their gratitude as well. Their lack of responsiveness was typical of the Jews in Jesus' day (cf. 15:3-10).

- 17:19 In closing, Jesus clarified that it was the man's faith in Him that led to his obedience and was responsible for his restoration, not just his obedience to Jesus' command.

"The soul's salvation rests on more than had as yet come to this man's soul. But he was on the way to his salvation, and to tell him, as Jesus did, encouraged him to go on toward the greater goal of faith."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 626.

<sup>2</sup>Lenski, p. 880.

Jesus was not implying that the other nine lepers lacked faith. They also believed in Him (v. 13).

The incident teaches that people whom Jesus delivers, and who believe on Him, have a moral obligation to express their gratitude to Him for what He has done for them. It also illustrates the fact that the Jews were happy to receive the benefits of Jesus' ministry without thanking Him or connecting His goodness with God. The chiasmic structure of Jesus' three questions (vv. 17-18) is another indication that the focus of attention is on the ingratitude of the nine healed lepers.

### I. JESUS' TEACHING ABOUT HIS RETURN 17:20—18:8

Again an action by the Pharisees led to a brief answer from Jesus followed by a longer explanation for His disciples (cf. 15:1—16:13; 16:14—17:19). Luke's conclusion of Jesus' teaching on this occasion included a parable (18:1-8).

#### 1. A short lesson for the Pharisees 17:20-21

17:20 Jesus' teaching about the arrival of the kingdom arose out of a question from the Pharisees. It was a reasonable question, since both John the Baptist and Jesus had preached for some time that the messianic kingdom was at hand. Probably the Pharisees asked it in order to discredit Jesus, who had spoken of the kingdom as postponed (delayed; cf. 11:53-54; 13:34-35). Most of the Jews expected a Messiah—according to their messianic ideas—to appear very soon, free them from their Roman yoke, and set up His kingdom on earth.

"The form of the Pharisees' question shows that they are thinking of the Kingdom as something still future. They believe that it will come; and they ask 'when?'"<sup>1</sup>

Jesus probably meant that no observable signs would precede the coming of the messianic kingdom.<sup>2</sup> He told the disciples

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<sup>1</sup>Manson, p. 304.

<sup>2</sup>Cf. Marshall, *The Gospel ...*, p. 654-55; Manson, p. 304.

that the sign of the coming of the Son of Man would precede the coming of the earthly kingdom. It will announce His return to the earth like lightning flashing across the sky (Matt. 24:3, 27). Perhaps it was this teaching that triggered the Pharisees' question.

A second view is that Jesus meant that the coming of the messianic kingdom would not be an observable process.<sup>1</sup> But John the Baptist and Jesus both announced that it was at hand, and Jesus' miracles gave observable evidence that the Messiah had arrived.

A third view is that Jesus meant that the messianic kingdom would not come because the Jews observed certain rites such as the Passover.<sup>2</sup> Advocates of this view take these rites as the signs that Jesus referred to. But many of the Jews in Jesus' day apparently believed that Messiah would come at a Passover celebration.<sup>3</sup> The Greek word *parateresis*, translated "signs to be observed" or "careful observation" (NIV), literally means watching, spying, or observation. There is nothing in the context that connects with the idea of observing Jewish rites.

17:21 There have also been several explanations of what Jesus meant when He said that the kingdom of God "is in your midst" or is "among you."

One view is that Jesus meant that the messianic kingdom was currently manifested in His presence.<sup>4</sup> In other words, the messianic kingdom had arrived with Jesus. Some who hold this view believe that the messianic kingdom is entirely spiritual, that is, it is God's rule over His people in a spiritual sense.

"It is wholly and altogether a *spiritual* kingdom."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Liefeld, "Luke," p. 997.

<sup>2</sup>Cf. R. J. Sneed, "'The Kingdom of God is within you' (Lk. 17, 21)," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 24 (1962):363-82.

<sup>3</sup>Marshall, *The Gospel ...*, p. 653.

<sup>4</sup>See Bock, *Jesus according ...*, p. 291.

<sup>5</sup>Lenski, p. 882.

"This romanticized meaning (popularized in the nineteenth century) independent of Jesus is one thing that Jesus is not affirming."<sup>1</sup>

Others who hold this view believe that the messianic kingdom began with Jesus but that it will have a future stage when Jesus returns to the earth and rules on David's throne for 1,000 years. Its future aspect will commence with Jesus' second coming. The teaching that follows (vv. 22-37) deals with the future coming of this earthly kingdom. I favor this view.

A second view is that neither Jesus, nor any other New Testament writer, distinguished the present from the future aspect of the messianic kingdom. Advocates believe that Jesus' teachings about the kingdom make the most sense when the messianic kingdom is understood as entirely earthly and future.<sup>2</sup>

I believe that Jesus' point was that there would be no dramatic change in His day that would announce that the messianic kingdom had arrived. The messianic kingdom was already among Jesus' hearers in the person of the King (11:20), but because the nation had rejected Jesus, His hearers would not see the earthly kingdom. God had postponed (delayed) it (13:34-35).

"... a kingdom can hardly be 'here' or 'there', and so the reference must be to the ruler himself."<sup>3</sup>

The translation "within you" (Gr. *entos hymon*) is unfortunate because it implies a spiritual reign within people. The Old Testament teaching concerning the messianic kingdom was uniformly the reign of God through His Messiah that would include His earthly reign and universal submission to His authority. Nowhere else does the Old or New Testament speak of the kingdom as something internal.<sup>4</sup> Besides, even if the

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<sup>1</sup>Bock, *Jesus according ...*, p. 291.

<sup>2</sup>See McClain, parts IV and V.

<sup>3</sup>Marshall, *The Gospel ...*, p. 655. Cf. Morris, *The Gospel ...*, p. 259.

<sup>4</sup>Manson, p. 304; Marshall, *The Gospel ...*, p. 655.



kingdom were internal, it would hardly have been "within" the unbelieving Pharisees whom Jesus was addressing.

"The Kingdom was not within them, The Kingdom of God was among them then, because the King was there."<sup>1</sup>

It was in their midst (or "among" them, NRSV) because the Messiah was standing right in their presence.<sup>2</sup> If they had believed on Him, the earthly kingdom would have begun shortly—immediately after Jesus' death, burial, resurrection, ascension, the seven-year Tribulation (cf. Dan. 9:24-27), and His second coming. It was within their reach.<sup>3</sup>

Someone might ask: If the Jews had believed on Jesus, how would He have been crucified? Jesus' crucifixion was, of course, predicted in the Old Testament (Ps. 22:16; Isa. 53:5). Evidently the Romans still would have crucified Him. The Jews did not have the authority to crucify people. The charge against Jesus in His trial before Pilate was that He had made Himself out to be a king (Mark 15:2). Perhaps Pilate would have had Jesus crucified even though the Jews believed on Him. This is an entirely hypothetical possibility, however, since the Old Testament also predicted that the Jews would not believe on their Messiah when He appeared (Isa. 53:3-5, 7-9).

## **2. A longer explanation for the disciples 17:22-37**

This teaching is quite similar to portions of the Olivet Discourse (cf. Matt. 24:23-28, 37-39), though the differences suggest two separate teaching occasions. It is one of several teachings that Luke recorded that deals with the future (cf. 12:35-48; 14:7-24; 21:5-33). This one stresses the distant future and the Second Coming. The teaching in chapter 21 deals mainly with the near future—from Jesus' perspective—and the destruction of Jerusalem.

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<sup>1</sup>Morgan, *The Gospel ...*, p. 200.

<sup>2</sup>See McClain, pp. 272-73; Morgan, *An Exposition ...*, p. 438.

<sup>3</sup>C. H. Roberts, "The Kingdom of Heaven (Lk. xvii. 21)," *Harvard Theological Review* 41 (1948):1-8.

**Characteristics of the last days 17:22-33**

- 17:22 Jesus next gave His disciples more instruction about the coming of the earthly kingdom. "One of the days of the Son of Man" refers to one of the future days when the Son of Man will be reigning on the earth (cf. vv. 24-25, 30), perhaps the first day.<sup>1</sup> The use of "Son of Man" recalls Daniel 7:13 and 14, which predicts the earthly reign of Messiah. The disciples would long to see the earthly kingdom come because they would suffer severe persecution before Jesus returned to set up His kingdom on earth.
- 17:23 There would be many false alarms about His return, but disciples should not allow others to mislead them (cf. Matt. 24:23; Mark 13:21).
- 17:24 Jesus' return to the earth will be unmistakable (cf. Matt. 24:27, 30). The earthly kingdom of Messiah will not begin gradually. People living on the earth then will not discover that it had begun some time ago or that they were suddenly aware of being in it. It will not take place in some remote, out-of-the-way place that only a few people will observe. Everyone will know when it begins. It will be as unmistakable as a lightning flash that illuminates the whole earth and sky.
- 17:25 However before the Son of Man begins His reign, He first had to suffer and experience rejection by the unbelieving Jews of His day (cf. 9:22, 41; 11:29, 31-32, 50-51; 24:26, 46; Matt. 16:21; Acts 17:3).
- 17:26 When Jesus said the days of the Son of Man would be similar to the days of Noah, He meant the days just before the Son of Man's reign on earth begins. This is clear from the comparison with the beginning of the Flood. Both in Noah's days, and toward the end of the Tribulation, just before Jesus returns, people were and will be unresponsive to preached warnings of coming judgment (cf. Matt. 24:37-39; 2 Pet. 2:5). In Noah's day, "The LORD [Yahweh] saw that wickedness of mankind was great on the earth, and that every intent of the

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<sup>1</sup>Plummer, p. 407.

thoughts of their hearts was only evil continually" (Gen. 6:5). "Now the earth was corrupt in the sight of God, and the earth was filled with violence" (Gen. 6:11).

- 17:27 "Eating and drinking" and "marrying and being given in marriage" are phrases that describe people living life normally. The return of Jesus would suddenly disrupt their lives and call them to a judgment. People living in Noah's day were unprepared for the Flood. Similarly, most people living just before the Second Coming will be unprepared for the judgment that will follow Jesus' return, and they will perish in it (cf. Matt. 25:31-46).
- 17:28 This second example of unexpected judgment reinforces the first. It also repeats the hope that some will escape divine condemnation when the Son of Man returns, namely, the righteous who will be living on the earth then.
- 17:29 By comparing moral conditions on the earth at the Second Coming with Sodom, Jesus was picturing the worst kinds of evil running rampant. Destruction that was unexpected by most people fell quickly and suddenly, and it interrupted normal daily living.
- 17:30 The word "apocalypse" comes from the Greek word *apokalypso*, meaning "to appear," and it occurs here ("is revealed"). Jesus' sudden appearing at the Second Coming will constitute the greatest apocalypse in history.
- 17:31 When the Son of Man is revealed at His second coming, everyone must flee for cover, because judgment will follow immediately (cf. Matt. 24:17-18; Mark 13:15-16; Luke 21:21).
- 17:32 Lot's wife is an instructive example of someone who underestimated the destructive power of God's judgment and perished because she was slow to seek refuge. She sought to preserve her former way of life, and in doing so she perished (Gen. 19:26; cf. Matt. 10:39).
- 17:33 Similarly, people living when Jesus returns will need to seek physical refuge rather than clinging to earthly treasures (cf.

ch. 12). The salvation of Lot's wife is debatable. Therefore we should probably take her example as a warning to all people, including believers. This interpretation finds support in the "whoever" of this verse. Physical destruction is in view (v. 31). People who try to make their lives secure in one way or another will die, but those who lose their lives (by following Jesus) will live.

### **The parable of the one taken and the one left 17:34-36**

The point of these examples is that when Jesus returns He will separate people, even those who are intimate companions. The unstated reason is implicit, namely, in order to judge some and not the others. Some will be ready for His return and others will not. The idea of sudden destructive judgment runs through the entire passage. These verses clarify verse 33.

17:34      The presence of two men in one bed may be another indication of the moral condition of that time. The Greek masculine gender could describe a man and his wife, however. But the main idea is their close association.

17:35      It was common for a mother and daughter, or two female friends, to grind grain together in Jesus' day (cf. Matt. 24:41). Perhaps Jesus intended the fact that one separation takes place at night and the other during daytime to reinforce the fact that He could return at any time (day or night). In any case, whenever He returns some people on earth will be sleeping and others will be awake.

"Men are in bed at night; women grind corn in the early morning just before daylight; and workers are in the field during the daylight hours. Instantaneous action is implied; for the coming of the Lord at one moment would occur at different times of day at different points on the globe."<sup>1</sup>

Those taken will experience punishment and will die, while those left will enter the earthly kingdom, since they will be believers. This is the opposite of what will happen at the Rapture (cf. 1 Thess. 4:13-17). At that event Jesus will take

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<sup>1</sup>Tenney, "The Gospel ...," p. 1057.

the godly into heaven and will leave the unbelievers on earth to enter the Tribulation.<sup>1</sup>

17:36 A scribe probably inserted this verse in his copy of Luke's Gospel (cf. Matt. 24:40). It is absent in the best ancient Greek manuscripts.

### What to look for 17:37

Evidently the disciples (v. 22) wanted to know where this judgment would occur. Rather than giving them a geographical site, Jesus told them what to look for. The presence of corruption would signal the coming of One to clean it up. Similarly, the presence of a dead body outdoors indicated that vultures would come along soon to eat the carrion. Jesus may have been using a proverbial expression. Some interpreters have suggested that the vultures here represent Israel's hostile enemies, and the body is Israel at the end of the Tribulation period (cf. Matt. 24:28; Rev. 19:21). Another preferable interpretation follows:

"Vultures hovering over dead bodies graphically depict the death and judgment that comes with Jesus' return as the judging Son of Man (17:37)."<sup>2</sup>

The general teaching of this parable and its sequel (vv. 34-37) is that Jesus' appearing and the beginning of the earthly kingdom will be sudden and unexpected by most people who are alive on the earth then. It will be an unmistakable event in history, and it will involve physical danger for earth-dwellers, because divine judgment will follow immediately. No one will be able to miss it when it occurs.<sup>3</sup> Jesus did not say exactly when it would occur, but clearly it would not happen immediately. An interval of time would have to elapse.

### 3. The parable of the persistent widow 18:1-8

Jesus continued His instruction to the disciples about His return. He told them a parable designed to encourage them to continue praying while they

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<sup>1</sup>See Renald E. Showers, *Maranatha: Our Lord, Come! A Definitive Study of the Rapture of the Church*, pp. 176-91, for a discussion of the differences in the biblical descriptions of the Rapture and the Second Coming, which argue for a pretribulation Rapture.

<sup>2</sup>Bock, "A Theology ...," p. 137.

<sup>3</sup>Cf. Barclay, p. 230.

lived in the interval before His second coming. Luke mentioned widows more than all the other Gospel evangelists combined (2:37-38; 4:25-26; 7:11-17; 18:1-8; 20:45-47; 21:1-4; cf. Exod. 22:22-24; Deut. 14:28-29; 16:9-15; Ps. 146:9; Isa. 1:17, 23; Jer. 7:6; Acts 6:1; 1 Tim. 5:3-10; James 1:27).

18:1 The audience for this parable ("them") was the disciples (17:22). Luke identified Jesus' reason for giving it clearly: He wanted to encourage His disciples to continue to pray and not lose heart (become discouraged). The reference to "all times" (not continuously, but in all circumstances) indicates that the interval between Jesus' present ministry and His future return is in view (17:22-37; cf. 18:8). This was, then, instruction concerning what the disciples should do in the inter-advent period in view of Jesus' second coming. When He returns Jesus will balance the scales of justice. In the meantime disciples need to continue expressing their faith in God by requesting His grace (help) in prayer.

"Jesus' teaching goes beyond that of the Jews, who tended to limit the times of prayer lest they weary God. Three times a day (on the model of Dn. 6:10) was accepted as the maximum."<sup>1</sup>

"The antidote to despair is not determination but dependence, not positive thinking but prayer."<sup>2</sup>

18:2 Jesus pictured this judge as failing to do what the Mosaic Law required of Israel's judges. In the Old Testament, fear of God was primarily fear of Him as Judge. The judge in this parable was a man of the world (cf. 16:8). Luke's Gentile readers undoubtedly knew of judges who were similar to him.<sup>3</sup> Whether this judge was a Jewish or a Roman judge is unclear and irrelevant. In view of the access that the widow enjoyed to his presence, he seems to have been a lower official rather than a judge in Israel's supreme court.<sup>4</sup> In first-century Israel, a single

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<sup>1</sup>Morris, *The Gospel ...*, p. 262. See also Plummer, p. 411.

<sup>2</sup>Inrig, p. 152.

<sup>3</sup>Danker, p. 184.

<sup>4</sup>See J. D. M. Derrett, "Law in the New Testament: The Unjust Judge," *New Testament Studies* 18 (1971-72):178-91.

judge often handled the type of monetary case that this widow presented to this judge.<sup>1</sup> Jesus contrasted God with him rather than comparing God to him (cf. 11:5-8).

18:3 Widows were the personification of dependence, helplessness, and vulnerability in Israel (cf. Exod. 22:22-24; Ps. 68:5; Lam. 1:1; James 1:27). This widow kept asking the judge—repeatedly—for protection from those who opposed her, not for their punishment.<sup>2</sup> In the parable she represents the disciples, who were equally dependent on God for protection from the powerful people who opposed them for their allegiance to Jesus.

18:4-5 The judge granted the widow's petition solely because of her persistence. Jesus was not teaching that God takes the same attitude toward disciples that this judge took toward this widow. Again, the judge contrasts with God. His point was that since persistence is effective with unjust judges, how much more effective will it be with the righteous Judge.

The phrase "wear me out" (v. 5) translates an idiom that can more literally be rendered "hit in the face" or "strike under the eye" (Gr. *hypopiaze me*, cf. 1 Cor. 9:27). We could translate this idiom "give me a black eye." Figuratively a black eye represents a damaged reputation: shame. Consequently, the judge apparently feared that by refusing to respond to the widow his reputation would suffer (cf. 11:8), not that she would assault him physically.<sup>3</sup> He granted her request for selfish reasons.

"Nearly all expositors declare that the parable teaches us that we must be importunate [very persistent] in prayer. I hold, on the contrary, that it teaches that when we are dealing with God there is no need of importunity. It is a parable of contrast all through."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Jeremias, *The Parables ...*, p. 153.

<sup>2</sup>Plummer, p. 412.

<sup>3</sup>Derrett, "*Law in ...*," p. 191; Robertson, *Word Pictures ...*, 2:231-32.

<sup>4</sup>Morgan, *The Gospel ...*, p. 203.

- 18:6 Jesus proceeded to apply the parable for His disciples. Listening carefully to the judge's words was important, because only then could the disciples see that Jesus was teaching by contrast.
- 18:7 God would never respond to a cry for help like this judge did: slowly and begrudgingly. In view of God's character, disciples can count on Him to give them the protection they need speedily. The word "elect" is a reminder that God has chosen those who call to Him (cf. Matt. 22:14; Mark 13:20, 22, 27). This is another reason that He will respond to their call. The parable implied that the Judge would not delay to give the protection that His disciples need.
- 18:8 The justice that God will provide speedily is protection from the attacks of ungodly opponents (v. 3). It is justice because the disciple is suffering unjustly when he or she stands for Jesus and consequently experiences persecution. Though God has allowed some disciples who call on Him for help during persecution to die, He nevertheless gives added grace to them (cf. 2 Cor. 12:9).

"God longs to vindicate the saints, and he will do so. When he does, his justice will be swift and sure, and our suffering will seem short-lived compared to the glory to follow. In the meantime he protects us."<sup>1</sup>

"... however long the answer to prayer may *seem* to be delayed, constant faithful prayer always *is* answered [cf. 11:9-10]."<sup>2</sup>

Jesus' final question suggests that there will be comparatively few on the earth who will have remained faithful and who still believe that He will return (17:22—18:1).<sup>3</sup> Few will persist in their faith like this widow did.<sup>4</sup> The Second Coming is in view,

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<sup>1</sup>Bock, *Luke*, p. 455.

<sup>2</sup>Plummer, p. 414.

<sup>3</sup>See David A. Mappes, "What Is the Meaning of 'Faith' in Luke 18:8?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 167:667 (July-September 2010):292-306.

<sup>4</sup>Robertson, *Word Pictures ...*, 2:232; Lenski, p. 898.



not the Rapture. The title "Son of Man" links this question with Jesus' former teaching about His second coming (17:22, 24, 26, 30). Prayer not only secures God's help during persecution, but it also demonstrates faith in God. This is all the more reason that disciples need to keep praying.

"Because we have a God quick and ready to answer every cry of the oppressed in the right way, prayer can be maintained constantly."<sup>1</sup>

This parable is an encouragement for disciples who experience opposition for their faith during the inter-advent age. Christians should continue to ask God for protection from those who oppose us for our commitment to Jesus Christ. God will respond speedily by giving us the help that we need. This will result in a continuing demonstration of faith in God when He is visibly absent from the world. The parable is an exhortation to persevere in the faith rather than apostatizing (i.e., turning away from it). God will vindicate His elect at the Second Coming (cf. Ps. 125:2-3; Rev. 6:9-11). That will be His ultimate answer to these prayers of His people, but immediate help before that Coming is primarily in view in this parable.

"At least three lessons, then, emerge in this passage: First, pray perseveringly, work perseveringly, with optimism, confident that God much more gladly than the judge in this passage often does want in this life to grant us answers to our requests. Second, consider the helpless, and the injustice of this world that they experience, as a larger topic for your prayer life and for your actions, which often give those prayers feet. Finally, recognize that, even in those areas in which God does not in this age grant us our requests, he remains eager to grant justice but has good reasons for his delay."<sup>2</sup>

#### **J. THE RECIPIENTS OF SALVATION 18:9—19:27**

Luke next developed the idea of "faith on the earth" (v. 8) that Jesus introduced in verse 8. This whole section clarifies how people become believers. This subject is a fitting conclusion to the part of Luke's Gospel that deals with Jesus' ministry on the way to Jerusalem (9:51—19:27).

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<sup>1</sup>Morgan, *The Gospel ...*, p. 203.

<sup>2</sup>Blomberg, p. 177.

Essentially this section records Jesus' teaching that salvation and entrance into the messianic kingdom come by God's grace through faith, rather than by claims to righteousness by keeping laws. The apostle Paul wrote about the process of justification (e.g., Rom. 3:21—5:21), but Luke's concern was the recipients of it.<sup>1</sup> In 18:9 through 30 Luke illustrated entry into the messianic kingdom of God from a position of deficiency.<sup>2</sup>

### 1. The parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector 18:9-14

The superficial connection between this pericope and the preceding one is that they both contain parables about prayer.

"This parable follows as giving the spirit in which men should pray."<sup>3</sup>

However the more significant link is people who exercise faith (v. 8). This parable graphically contrasts those who reject Jesus' gospel with those who receive it. Jesus drew a verbal picture in order to identify the characteristic traits of two representative groups of Jews. Both parables deal with righteousness: the unrighteous judge in the first one, and the self-righteous Pharisee in the second.

18:9 This verse sets the stage for the parable that follows (cf. 18:1; 19:11). "Now" signals the continuation of immediately preceding lessons and themes for the benefit of the reader. Obviously Pharisees are the people that Jesus was criticizing in this parable (v. 10), but Luke introduced Jesus' teaching by highlighting the characteristic about the Pharisees that Jesus addressed: their self-righteousness. This is a characteristic that many more people than the Pharisees possessed, including many of Luke's readers. The only alternative to believing in Jesus is trusting in one's own righteousness for acceptance with God. This always results in elevating oneself at the expense of others and looking down on others.

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<sup>1</sup>Danker, p. 185.

<sup>2</sup>Nolland, *Luke 9:21—18:34*, p. 878.

<sup>3</sup>Morris, *The Gospel ...*, p. 264.

- 18:10 Most of the Pharisees rejected Jesus and His gospel, whereas most of the tax collectors responded positively (cf. 5:12, 27; 7:34, 37; 15:1-2; 16:20). They were at opposite ends of the social and spiritual scales in Judaism. The former were the epitome of righteousness, and the latter of unrighteousness. The temple was the customary place of prayer. Since it stood on a hill in Jerusalem, most people literally went up to it in order to pray.
- 18:11 Standing was a normal posture for prayer among the Jews of Jesus' day. It did not in itself reflect this Pharisee's pride (cf. Matt. 6:5). Even though the Pharisee addressed God in prayer, Jesus noted that he was really talking to himself and reviewing his own self-righteousness. He told God what a superior person he was, using the behavior of others as his standard of comparison. He took pride in his supposed superior status and the works that he performed that separated him from others.

"... only in form is this utterance a thanksgiving; it is self-congratulation. He glances at God, but contemplates himself. Indeed he almost pities God, who but for himself would be destitute of faithful servants."<sup>1</sup>

"Never, perhaps, were words of thanksgiving spoken in less thankfulness than these. For, thankfulness implies the acknowledgment of a gift; hence, a sense of not having had ourselves what we have received; in other words, then, a sense of our personal need, or humility."<sup>2</sup>

"The 'God, I thank Thee that I am not as other men' (Luke xviii. 11) seems like the natural breath of Rabbinism in the company of the unlettered, and of all who were deemed intellectual or religious inferiors; and the parabolic history of the Pharisee and the publican in the gospel is not told for the special condemnation of that one prayer,

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<sup>1</sup>Plummer, p. 417.

<sup>2</sup>Edersheim, *The Life ...*, 2:289-90.

but as characteristic of the whole spirit of Pharisaism, even in its approaches to God."<sup>1</sup>

18:12 The most pious Pharisees fasted twice a week (cf. 5:33)—on Thursdays and Mondays—during the weeks between Passover and Pentecost, and between the Feast of Tabernacles and the Feast of Dedication.<sup>2</sup> Some even fasted every Thursday and Monday all year.<sup>3</sup> They believed that on a Thursday Moses had gone up into Mount Sinai, and that on a Monday he had come down, after receiving the Law the second time.<sup>4</sup> This Pharisee was also scrupulous about tithing (cf. 11:42).

18:13 "But" introduces the striking contrast between the two individuals. The tax gatherer's geographical distance from the Pharisee illustrated the difference. His unwillingness to even lift his eyes, much less his hands, to heaven in prayer showed his feeling of unworthiness (cf. Ps. 123:1; Mark 6:41; 7:34; John 11:41; 17:1). Beating his chest expressed contrition, which he put into words in his prayer. He did not boast of his own righteousness but pled with God for mercy, acknowledging his sinfulness (cf. Ps. 51). He used God as the standard of righteousness and confessed that he fell short of that standard. He knew that his only hope was God's mercy. The Pharisee felt no need and voiced no petition, whereas the publican felt nothing but need and voiced only petition.<sup>5</sup>

"This parable is really the parable of the two prayers. In those prayers appear two kinds of hearts, whose contrast is not only seen in the way they make their request, but also in the way they approach God."<sup>6</sup>

Literally the publican asked God to "be propitious" (Gr. *hilaskomai*), or "be satisfied," here translated "be merciful."

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<sup>1</sup>Idem, *Sketches of ...*, p. 31.

<sup>2</sup>Robertson, *Word Pictures ...*, 2:233.

<sup>3</sup>Plummer, p. 418.

<sup>4</sup>Edersheim, *The Temple*, p. 197; *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, s.v. "*nestis*," by J. Behm, 4:930.

<sup>5</sup>Edersheim, *The Life ...*, 2:292.

<sup>6</sup>Bock, *Luke*, pp. 460-61.

Since Jesus made propitiation (satisfaction) for the sins of humankind on the Cross, in one sense no one needs to pray this prayer today. It is, of course, permissible today to ask God to be merciful to us as sinners, but we need to remember that He has already done that through Jesus Christ. But when the tax collector prayed for mercy, propitiation through Jesus Christ's blood was not yet available. The good news of the gospel is that God is propitious (satisfied; cf. 1 John 2:2).

"Merciful" is a translation of the "... Greek *hilaskomai*, used in the Septuagint and N.T. in connection with the mercy seat (Ex. 25:17, 18, 21; Heb. 9:5). An instructed Jew, the tax collector was thinking, not of mercy alone, but of the blood-sprinkled mercy seat (Lev. 16:5 ...). His prayer might be paraphrased, 'Be toward me as thou art when thou lookest upon the atoning blood.' The Bible knows nothing of divine forgiveness apart from sacrifice ..."<sup>1</sup>

18:14 Jesus declared the tax collector "justified" (i.e., declared righteous in God's sight, a judicial act, not made righteous; cf. Rom. 3:24-25). God declared him righteous because he looked to God for the gift of righteousness, rather than claiming to be righteous on his own merit like the Pharisee did.<sup>2</sup>

"... after pardon of sins has been obtained, the sinner is considered as a just man in God's sight."<sup>3</sup>

Jesus repeated the principle that God humbles those who exalt themselves, but He exalts those who humble themselves (cf. 13:30; 14:11). In the context Jesus meant that in order to be righteous in God's sight, one must acknowledge his lack of personal righteousness, rather than claiming to have righteousness that he does not have. Justification depends on God's grace, not on human works or merit.

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<sup>1</sup> *The New Scofield Reference Bible*, p. 1108.

<sup>2</sup> See F. F. Bruce, "Justification by Faith in the non-Pauline Writings of the New Testament," *Evangelical Quarterly* 24 (1952):66-77.

<sup>3</sup> Calvin, 3:11:3.

Many modern Christians have heard this parable so often that they immediately associate Pharisees with self-righteous hypocrisy and tax collectors with humble piety. In Jesus' day the Jews viewed them differently. It was the Pharisees who were the models of righteous behavior, and it was the tax collectors who epitomized sinfulness. Therefore this parable undoubtedly made a great impact on the disciples.<sup>1</sup>

## 2. An illustration of humility 18:15-17 (cf. Matt. 10:13-16; Mark 19:13-15)

Luke included this incident of Jesus receiving children in order to illustrate the type of humility that is necessary for someone to receive salvation. The idea of humility is the connecting link with what precedes. Humility is necessary to receive God's grace (undeserved favor).

Since 9:50 Luke departed from the general narrative that Matthew and Mark recorded and included much material that does not appear in those Gospels. Here, at 18:15, he rejoined the story line of the other synoptic writers. There is more duplication of incidents in the chapters that follow than we have seen recently in Luke.

18:15      The antecedent of "they" is "the people" generally (NIV). People brought their infants ("babies," Gr. *brephe*) to Jesus so that He would pray for God to bless them (cf. Matt. 19:13). Luke alone used *brephe*, probably to stress the dependent condition of these children. It was customary for the Jews to bring their small children to rabbis for blessings, especially on their first birthday.<sup>2</sup> The disciples probably discouraged the parents from doing this because they thought that Jesus had more important things to do.

18:16      Jesus, however, corrected the disciples, "rebuking them," and encouraged the parents to continue bringing their "little ones" to Him. Jesus had a special interest in the children because they illustrated the humility necessary to enter the kingdom. Obviously infants are not humble in the same sense that adults show humility, but infants are humble in the sense of being

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<sup>1</sup>Blomberg wrote a sermon on this parable that he titled "The Parable of the Recovering Homosexual," pp. 156-64.

<sup>2</sup>Carson, p. 420; Plummer, p. 421.

totally dependent and unable to provide for themselves. They receive rather than provide, and in those qualities they are good examples of humility.

18:17 Without this sense of being unable to provide for oneself, and a willingness to receive from another, no adult can enter the messianic kingdom. Jesus emphasized this point by introducing it with "Truly I say to you."

Jesus also had an interest in these children for their own sake (8:54; 9:47-48; et al.), not just because they provided Him with an illustration of humility. As we have seen, one of Luke's characteristic emphases in his Gospel was Jesus' interest in the needy, the outcasts, and other types of dependent people, including children (4:18; et al.).

### **3. The handicap of wealth 18:18-30**

This is another lesson on riches that Luke recorded (cf. 6:24; 8:14; 11:41; 12:13-34; 16), but the context here is instruction on wealth as it pertains to entering into salvation and the messianic kingdom. Someone might conclude from the previous incident that salvation depends only on the proper human attitude. This teaching clarifies that while the correct attitude is crucial, salvation is the work of God for men and women, not their work for themselves. This is important revelation for unbelievers but also for disciples who are charged with bearing the gospel message to the ends of the earth (24:46-47).

"The religious leaders have repeatedly been presented as people who exalt themselves (11:43; 14:7-11; 16:15; 18:9-14) and as greedy rich people who neglect the poor (11:39-41; 14:12-14; 16:14, 19-31). However, Jesus has not given up all hope that some of these people will change. This is apparent in the scene in 18:18-27."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Tannehill, *The Narrative ...*, 1:187.

**Jesus' encounter with the rich young ruler 18:18-23 (cf. Matt. 19:16-22; Mark 10:17-22)**

The proud rich young ruler contrasts dramatically with the humble infants in the preceding pericope. We know that this man was rich, and young, and a ruler because of how all three evangelists described him.

- 18:18        The young ruler believed that he could do something to earn eternal life, and he wanted to make sure that he had not overlooked it (cf. 10:25). John 3:3 through 15 shows that eternal life includes life in the messianic kingdom. To obtain eternal life meant to enter the kingdom (John 3:3-5). Luke and Mark both have the ruler using the word "inherit" (Gr. *kleronomeso*), while Matthew wrote "obtain" (Gr. *scho*). This difference probably reflects Matthew's use of the young man's original word. Mark and Luke probably used "inherit" for the benefit of their Gentile readers in order to clarify what was in the rich young ruler's mind. He was talking about getting something that he, as a Jew, thought he had a good chance of obtaining based on his ethnic relationship to Abraham. Many Jews thought that they had no need of repentance because they were the physical descendants of Abraham (Matt. 3:9). But this young man realized that something more was necessary to obtain eternal life. He thought that he had to do something more.
- 18:19        Jesus' question accomplished two things. It set the standard for goodness, namely, "God alone" (cf. v. 11). It also confronted the man with the logical implication of his question (v. 18), namely, that Jesus was God. That the man did not believe that Jesus was God seems clear from his response to Him (v. 23).
- 18:20        Jesus returned to the young man's question (v. 18). If he wanted to obtain eternal life—by doing something—he would have to keep God's laws. The rabbis taught that people could keep the Mosaic Law in its entirety.<sup>1</sup> Jesus cited the fifth through the ninth commandments, from the Decalogue, that deal with a person's responsibilities to his or her fellowman

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<sup>1</sup>Morris, *The Gospel ...*, p. 267.



(Exod. 20:12-16). By doing so He affirmed the authority of the Old Testament. He was also gracious with the man by not referring to the commands about people's responsibilities to God, or the command about coveting.

18:21 The man's response indicated that he had kept the letter of the Law since his youth, when young Jews were considered to be responsible for their actions (cf. Phil. 3:6). At least he thought he had. But his understanding of God's requirements was superficial, as was true of most of his fellow Jews. Jesus had showed in the Sermon on the Mount that God requires much more than external obedience.

"Men think themselves *innocent* because they are *ignorant*; so this ruler did."<sup>1</sup>

18:22 Rather than telling the man that he had been only superficially obedient, Jesus graciously presented him with the higher hurdle of not coveting: the tenth commandment (cf. Rom. 7:7-8). This commandment dealt with matters of the heart. Jesus' command exposed the man's greed, which is idolatry (Col. 3:5). Thus this man had really violated the first and the tenth commandments, though he thought that he had kept them. If he had been willing to give away his possessions he would have shown that he was repudiating his greed. By following Jesus he would have shown that he was repudiating his own self-righteousness. These would have been the appropriate fruits of his repentance. "Treasure in heaven" implies eternal reward (cf. 12:33-34). Rabbinism (the teachings of the Jewish rabbis) prohibited giving away all of one's possessions.<sup>2</sup>

18:23 The man's sorrow on hearing Jesus' command was proportionate to his great wealth. His unwillingness to part with his riches showed that he valued them more than treasure in heaven. He really wanted material wealth more than eternal life, though he would have denied that (v. 18).

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<sup>1</sup>Henry, p. 1483.

<sup>2</sup>Edersheim, *The Life ...*, 2:342.

"... Peter, James, and John were not told to sell their boats and nets and give the proceeds to the poor; because their hearts were not wedded to them."<sup>1</sup>

The other Synoptic evangelists recorded that at this point the young man went away (Matt. 19:22; Mark 10:22). He is the only person in the Gospels who came to Jesus and went away in a worse condition than when he came.

Jesus' logic is quite clear in this conversation: He reasoned that only God is perfect (v. 19). And God's standard for obtaining eternal life by good works is His own perfection (vv. 20-21). Therefore, no one can obtain eternal life by good works.

### **Jesus' teaching about riches 18:24-30 (cf. Matt. 19:23-30; Mark 10:23-31)**

Jesus continued talking with His disciples about the preceding conversation. But Luke did not identify the disciples as those to whom Jesus spoke. This gives the impression that what Jesus said has relevance to all people, including the readers, as it does.

18:24 Luke alone mentioned that Jesus looked at the young man and then spoke. He probably did this in order to make the connection—between Jesus' comments that followed and the young man's attitude—clear to his readers. Jesus said that wealth makes it difficult, but not impossible (cf. 19:1-10), for rich people to obtain salvation. Riches are a handicap because they present two temptations to the wealthy (cf. 1 Tim. 6:9-10): First, rich people sometimes wrongly conclude that because they are rich they are superior to the poor, or perhaps more blessed by God, and therefore they do not need God's grace. Second, they may conclude that because they are rich they are secure, and therefore they fail to plan for the future beyond the grave.

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<sup>1</sup>Plummer, p. 424.

"John D. Rockefeller ... once said that riches were 'a gift from heaven signifying, 'This is My beloved son, in whom I am well pleased.'"<sup>1</sup>

- 18:25 A camel going through the eye of a sewing needle (Gr. *belones*) was evidently a proverbial expression describing a very difficult thing, indeed, an impossible thing. But Jesus was again using hyperbole. Other Scripture indicates that anyone, even extremely wealthy people, can enter the kingdom (cf. 1 Cor. 1:26).
- 18:26 The Jews viewed wealth as a sign of God's blessing, since God had blessed many of the most godly in the past with riches (e.g., Abraham, Job, Joseph, David, et al.). The idea that riches really could hinder a person from entering the messianic kingdom, rather than paving the way for his or her acceptance, shocked them. Being "saved" in this context means being delivered into the messianic kingdom.
- 18:27 Apparently Jesus meant that no one, not even the rich, could enter the messianic kingdom apart from God's grace. Entrance is impossible if one is relying on himself or herself, but God can produce repentance and faith in the heart of anyone, even the rich (cf. 1:37; Gen. 18:14). But Jesus' statement here repeats the larger truth that what is humanly impossible is possible with God (1:37; Gen. 18:14; Matt. 19:26; Mark 10:27).
- 18:28 Peter reminded Jesus that the Twelve had done what the rich young ruler had been unwilling to do (cf. 14:26-27). His comment, as Luke and Mark recorded it, was an implicit request for assurance that they would be rewarded for doing so (cf. Mark 10:28).

"It is surprising that, although generally Jesus does not think in terms of seeking reward, here he is prepared to respond to Peter's saying. This suggests that Peter's question was not regarded by the Evangelists as an implicit claim for a selfish reward. Rather it is seen as an opportunity to give

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<sup>1</sup>Wiersbe, 1:250.

a promise that self-denial for the sake of the kingdom will be vindicated."<sup>1</sup>

18:29 For emphasis Jesus introduced His reply with the preface that affirmed the truthfulness of what followed ("Truly I say to you"). Everyone who denies himself or herself the normal comforts and kinfolk of life in order to advance God's mission will receive a greater reward from God for doing so. Giving up a wife may refer to passing up marriage altogether, rather than leaving a wife. Or sacrificial periods of separation in order to engage in the Lord's work may be in view. Luke used the phrase "for the kingdom of God" (v. 29; cf. v. 25), whereas Matthew used "for My sake" (Matt. 19:29), and Mark wrote "for My sake and for the gospel's sake" (Mark 10:29). These are all synonymous statements.

18:30 First, that person will receive deeper spiritual comfort and more satisfying human connections in the present life (cf. Acts 2:44-47; 4:32-37). Second, he or she will receive an even better and infinitely more enduring life in the coming earthly kingdom. "The age to come" refers to the age when Messiah will rule on the earth.

Jesus and the apostles spoke of inheriting eternal life as a reward for self-sacrifice (Matt. 19:29; Mark 10:30; John 12:25-26; Rom. 2:7; 6:22; Gal. 6:8), and as the gift of God that comes to everyone who trusts in Jesus Christ (Rom. 6:23).<sup>2</sup> Jesus included eternal life here along with rewards because eternal life provides the ultimate contrast with what disciples give up now. This is not teaching that self-sacrifice (works) contributes to salvation; "eternal life" is distinguished here from eternal salvation.

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<sup>1</sup>Marshall, *The Gospel ...*, p. 688.

<sup>2</sup>See Dillow, pp. 135-45, for an explanation of the biblical teaching regarding inheriting eternal life as a reward.

**4. Jesus' passion announcement and the disciples' lack of perception 18:31-34 (cf. Matt. 20:17-19; Mark 10:32-34)**

Jesus' passion announcements to His disciples constitute important structural markers in Mark's Gospel. Luke and Matthew did not use them this way. The incident recorded in 18:31 through 34 was the third passion announcement that Jesus gave. He also made other allusions to His death that were not clear announcements (cf. 5:35; 12:50; 13:32-33; 17:25).

	Matthew	Mark	Luke
First passion announcement	16:21-23	8:31-33	9:22
Second passion announcement	17:22-23	9:30-32	9:43-45
Third passion announcement	20:17-19	10:32-34	18:31-34

Luke presented this announcement as part of his travelogue that records Jesus moving from Galilee to Jerusalem (9:51—19:27). He played down the amazement and fear of the disciples that Mark stressed in his Gospel. Instead he focused the reader's attention on the disciples' failure to understand what was going to happen in Jerusalem.

There is a continuation of the theme of responding to Jesus' words, which precedes this pericope. The rich young ruler failed to respond to the good news that Jesus proclaimed. Similarly the disciples, though believing the gospel, failed to respond to the bad news that Jesus told them.

There is also a continuation of the theme of entering the messianic kingdom. The disciples would enter because they believed in Jesus, but they would have to go through trials and tribulations, as Jesus would, before they entered the earthly kingdom. The death of Jesus provided the basis for God's gracious dealings with believers through His Son (vv. 26-27).

People who lived in ancient eastern cultures typically placed more importance on events than time. The disciples were probably anticipating the event of the establishment of the earthly kingdom, and their roles in it,

so much that they failed to appreciate what Jesus said lay ahead for Him and themselves.

18:31 Luke alone recorded that the things that would happen to Jesus in Jerusalem would be a fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies (cf. 12:50; 22:37; Acts 13:29). Luke apparently stressed the fact that Jesus' ministry fulfilled prophecy in order to increase his readers' confidence in Him (cf. 2:25-38; 22:37).

The Hellenistic mind resisted the idea that a God-man could be truly human. The ancient Greek legends of the gods visiting human beings lay behind this difficulty. Consequently Luke presented much evidence for his Greek readers, throughout his Gospel, that Jesus was a real man. The Jews, on the other hand, had difficulty accepting the fact that Jesus was truly God. This accounts for Matthew's stress on Jesus' deity. Throughout church history there have been those who, like the Greeks, had trouble accepting Jesus' full humanity and others, like the Jews, who have resisted His full deity.

18:32 This was Jesus' first reference to the Gentiles' role in His trial. Luke's inclusion of this detail suggests that he did not want his Gentile readers to overlook the guilt of Gentiles for Jesus' death. The passive construction pictures Jesus as the victim of Gentile wrath.

18:33 Jesus repeated again that He would be killed and rise from the dead on the third day.

"Not one prophet ever said all this [in verses 32 and 33], but the prophets together did say all this. Hence, this is a summation."<sup>1</sup>

18:34 Luke alone repeated—three times—that the disciples failed to comprehend Jesus' words. It seems strange that God would have intentionally hidden the meaning of Jesus' words from the disciples, because Jesus had just told them plainly what He wanted them to know. Probably the disciples' own way of thinking (their pre-conception of what lay ahead) prevented

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<sup>1</sup>Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *Israelology: The Missing Link in Systematic Theology*, p. 845.

them from understanding Jesus' words (cf. 9:45; 24:16, 25-26). The illumination of believers is a necessary work of God's Spirit, and it is supernatural. The Twelve probably did not believe that such a terrible fate could befall Jesus because they misunderstood His messianic mission. The disciples' failure to understand is another example of the inexplicable working together of divine sovereignty and human responsibility.

"The failure of the disciples to understand the necessity of Jesus' suffering and rejection involves the following interrelated defects: (1) a failure to understand God's plan as announced in Scripture, including God's way of working by using human opposition to fulfill the divine purpose; (2) a failure to accept rejection and suffering as a necessary part of discipleship; (3) a failure to reckon with the rejection of Jesus, resulting in premature, overly optimistic expectations for the immediate enjoyment of the messianic salvation; (4) rivalry over rank because of a failure to recognize that only those who devote their lives as servants can be great as Jesus is great."<sup>1</sup>

#### **5. The healing of a blind man near Jericho 18:35-43 (cf. Matt. 20:29-34; Mark 10:46-52)**

Luke's primary purpose for including this incident in his narrative seems to have been to show that God, through Jesus, can give insight to those who humbly call on Him for mercy. Here was another humble outcast, similar to the tax collector (cf. v. 13), who experienced salvation because of his faith (v. 42). Jesus not only saved him but also opened his eyes—physically and spiritually.

18:35 Luke wrote that Jesus met the blind man as He was approaching Jericho, but Matthew and Mark said that the incident occurred as Jesus was leaving that town (Matt. 20:29; Mark 10:46). There have been many explanations of this

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<sup>1</sup>Tannehill, *The Narrative ...*, 1:254.

apparent contradiction. A summary of the most popular ones that reflect a high view of biblical inspiration follows:

One view is that there were three separate incidents. Matthew recorded two blind men and Mark said that there was one and his name was Bartimaeus. However the similarities between the stories argue for a single incident, with Mark and Luke concentrating on the more prominent of the two blind beggars.

Another view is that Jesus performed two separate healings, one as He entered Jericho and another as He left it. Again the similarities of the descriptions argue for one incident.<sup>1</sup>

A third view is that there was just one incident but it took place in two stages: Jesus met the men as He entered Jericho but healed them as He departed. This is possible, but it seems unlikely in view of the evangelists' accounts of the incident.

A fourth explanation is that there was one incident that happened as Jesus was leaving old Jericho and entering new Jericho.<sup>2</sup> The problems with this view are essentially two: There is no evidence that people still inhabited the old town, and it is not certain that the name of the old town was still Jericho. Nevertheless, this seems to be the most likely explanation.

- 18:36-37 Luke alone mentioned that it was the noise of the multitude passing him by that led the blind man to ask what was happening. The writer may have included this detail simply to present a more vigorous scene, or the inclusion may reflect his characteristic interest in the multitudes, or both. The people standing nearby informed him that Jesus was passing by.
- 18:38-39 "Son of David" was a messianic title that expressed the man's faith in Jesus as Israel's Messiah (cf. 1:27, 32; 2 Sam. 7:8-16; Isa. 11:1, 10; Jer. 23:5-6; Ezek. 34:23-24). Like the tax collector (v. 13), he called out for mercy without claiming any merit. His insistence reflected his belief that Jesus could help

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<sup>1</sup>See Zane C. Hodges, "The Blind Men at Jericho," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 122:488 (October-December 1965):319-30.

<sup>2</sup>See Flavius Josephus, *The Wars ...*, 4:8:3, for the identification of these two Jerichos.



him, and his hope that Jesus would help him. Opposition only made him more unshakable in his desire.

- 18:40-41 The man's cries caused Jesus to stop and command that the man be brought to Him. Jesus evidently asked His question to draw out the blind man's faith. He certainly knew what the man wanted. The title "Lord" here obviously reflects more than simple respect. It expressed the man's faith.
- 18:42 Jesus' words would have left no doubt that He was responsible for the miracle. He hastened to clarify that the man's faith was the instrumental cause of the healing. Luke stressed this again for his readers' benefit (cf. 7:50; 8:48; 17:19). Divine power was the effectual cause of the healing.
- 18:43 The responses to the instantaneous (1:64; et al.) healing were what they should have been: The man began following Jesus, and he began glorifying God (cf. v. 23). Likewise the observers' reaction was to give praise to God. Only Luke recorded the glorifying and praising of God that took place then (cf. 2:20; 5:25; et al.). This reflects his interest in the joyful outcome of salvation (cf. 5:26; 17:18; Acts. 2:47; 3:9).

Luke probably included this incident, at least in part, to contrast the faith of the blind man with the unbelief of the religious leaders. Again the humble received salvation, while others who failed to realize their need for Jesus' grace did not. The incident was a lesson for the disciples as well as for the multitudes. Jesus was able to give insight as well as sight.

## **6. Zaccheus' ideal response to Jesus 19:1-10**

This section in Luke's long narrative of Jesus' ministry as He traveled to Jerusalem (9:51—19:27) is climactic. It is a choice example of Jesus offering salvation to a needy person. Zaccheus accepted Jesus' offer and responded appropriately with joy and the fruits of repentance. He also gave an excellent example of how disciples should use what wealth they have. The section closes with a summary of Jesus' ministry that also serves as the key verse in this Gospel.

Zaccheus displayed traits of the tax collector in the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector (18:9-14). They shared the same despised

occupation, the same sense of personal need, and the same childlike humility and receptivity toward God. Zaccheus also resembles the rich young ruler in that he was wealthy (18:18-23). But his response to Jesus was precisely the opposite of that other rich man. His salvation is a great example of the truth that with God all things are possible (18:25-27). Zaccheus, moreover, demonstrated the same faith in Jesus, and consequently insight into his responsibility to follow Jesus and glorify God, that the blind man did (18:35-43). His story brings together many themes that Luke interwove in this section in which he showcased the recipients of salvation (18:9—19:27).

"The incident contains several primary Lukan features: the universal appeal of the gospel (vv. 2-4); the ethical problem of wealth (v. 2); the call of a 'sinner' who was in social disfavor (v. 7); the sense of God's present work (vv. 5, 9); the feeling of urgency ('immediately,' *speusas*, v. 5), of necessity ('must,' v. 5), and of joy (v. 6); restitution, with goods distributed to the poor (v. 8); and, above all, salvation (vv. 9-10)."<sup>1</sup>

19:1        Probably the new Jericho, which Herod the Great had built, is in view here (cf. 18:35). It stood immediately to the south of old Jericho. Jesus was passing through Jericho on His way to Jerusalem and the Cross.

19:2        Luke underlined Zaccheus' occupation and wealth, two things that Jesus had taught His disciple about earlier. Tax collectors represented social outcasts, but they frequently responded positively to Jesus. Zaccheus was a "chief tax collector" (Gr. *architelones*). This occupation probably made him the object of special hatred in Jericho. The wealth that he had accumulated through his occupation probably made his neighbors hate him even more. His name is a shortened form of "Zechariah," meaning "Yahweh Remembers."

Tax collectors normally became wealthy by extorting more taxes from their fellow Jews than the amount that they owed Rome. Jericho would have been a main tax-gathering site, since many people who approached Jerusalem and Judea from the east passed through it. Rich people typically did not respond

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<sup>1</sup>Liefeld, "Luke," p. 1007. See Keller, pp. 53-66.

positively to Jesus' ministry. How would Zaccheus respond: as a typical tax collector, or as a typical rich man?

19:3 Zaccheus' curiosity about Jesus was especially understandable since one of Jesus' disciples had been a tax collector (5:27-30). In addition, Jesus had a reputation for associating with people in his profession (5:29-30; 7:29, 34; 15:1). Luke's reference to Zaccheus' short stature prepares the reader for the fact that he climbed a tree to see Jesus (v. 4). Some interpreters believe that his short stature (Gr. *elixia*) refers to Zaccheus' young age, rather than to his height. Some also believe that Zaccheus had to climb a tree because the people refused to allow him to see Jesus, due to their hatred of him, rather than because he was short.<sup>1</sup> Barclay used his imagination in describing Zaccheus' dilemma:

"For Zacchaeus, to mingle with the crowd at all was a courageous thing to do, for many a man would take the chance to get a nudge, or kick, or push at this little tax-collector. It was an opportunity not to be missed. Zacchaeus would be black and blue with bruises that day. He could not see—that crowd took an ill delight in making sure that he could not see."<sup>2</sup>

19:4 The Greek word that names the tree that Zaccheus climbed refers to a species of fig tree that was a very delicate evergreen that was easily destroyed by cold weather (cf. Ps. 78:47).<sup>3</sup> It is interesting that Zaccheus did some childlike things, namely, running to see Jesus, and climbing a tree. These were very unusual activities for an adult government official. Jesus had formerly commended the tax collector in His parable for childlike faith (18:13). He had also taught the importance of childlike faith (cf. 18:16-17).

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<sup>1</sup>See Green, pp. 669-70.

<sup>2</sup>Barclay, p. 244.

<sup>3</sup>Edersheim, *Sketches of ...*, pp. 33-34.

"The crowd as [a] physical barrier and Zacchaeus' strange position up in a tree can serve as spatial symbols of his isolation from his community."<sup>1</sup>

19:5 Jesus initiated a relationship with Zaccheus. Since He called him by name, He evidently knew about him, though Zaccheus had probably not seen Jesus formerly. Jesus not only wanted to talk with him but to stay in his house. Jesus spoke as though He felt compelled to do this, as is clear from the recurrence of one of Luke's favorite words: "must" (Gr. *dei*, cf. 4:43; et al.). "Hurry" and "today" further stress urgency for the fulfillment of God's plan (cf. 2:11; 4:21; 19:9).<sup>2</sup> Jesus' attitude was typical of Him. He sought out lost people.

19:6 Zaccheus gladly and obediently responded to Jesus' offer.

"... the coming of Jesus to share his home is a sign of fellowship and ultimately forgiveness."<sup>3</sup>

Verse 5 records an instance of divine sovereignty and verse 6 human responsibility.<sup>4</sup>

19:7 The people in the crowd started to complain. It was as though Jesus had become the guest of a Mafia godfather (cf. 5:29-30; 15:1-2). However table fellowship implied even more comradeship in Jesus' day than eating in someone else's home does today, at least in the West. Staying in a person's home amounted to sharing in his sins.<sup>5</sup>

19:8 Zaccheus' stood still ("stopped") to make his promises, thus symbolizing their solemnity. He addressed Jesus as "Lord," implying respect and Jesus' deity (cf. v. 9). His statement was a response to Jesus' gracious initiative and the crowd's disapproving reaction. His plan to give half of his wealth to the poor, and to reimburse generously ("four times") anyone

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<sup>1</sup>Tannehill, *The Narrative ...*, 1:123.

<sup>2</sup>Ellis, p. 221.

<sup>3</sup>Marshall, *The Gospel ...*, p. 697.

<sup>4</sup>Liefeld, "Luke," p. 1007.

<sup>5</sup>Marshall, *The Gospel ...*, p. 697.

whom he had cheated, testified to the genuineness of his faith in Jesus.

"Jesus had replaced money as Zacchaeus's savior, and so money went back to being merely that, just money."<sup>1</sup>

The Mosaic Law only required adding 20 percent to the amount due when restitution was necessary (cf. Lev. 5:16; Num. 5:7). When a Jew stole an animal that he could not replace, he had to repay about fourfold, but if he was caught with the stolen property, he had to repay double (Exod. 22:1, 4). Zacchaeus' words were the signs of true repentance (cf. 3:8; 14:33; 18:22).

"Zacchaeus is an example of radical repentance, not of practical wisdom, and it is assumed that his response will leave him pretty much in the same financial state required of the rich ruler."<sup>2</sup>

It is possible to interpret Zacchaeus' verbs as Greek present progressives, namely, as a statement of his customary practice, rather than as a promise: My customary practice is to give half of what I have to the poor ..." In this case Zacchaeus was vindicating himself and was in no need of repentance, because he was behaving as a true child of Abraham should.<sup>3</sup> I tend not to prefer this interpretation, because of Jesus' words that follow: "Today salvation has come to this house ...", implying that salvation had not been there previously.

"Unlike the rich ruler, Zacchaeus does not employ his wealth so as to procure honor and friends; rather, he is a social outcast who puts his possessions in the service of the needy and of justice."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Keller, pp. 63-64.

<sup>2</sup>Tannehill, *The Narrative ...*, 1:124. Cf. 7:36-50; and Matt. 26:6-13.

<sup>3</sup>See Green, pp. 671-72.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 672.

Some commentators believed that the conditional clause "if I have extorted anything of anyone" should better read "from whomsoever I have wrongfully exacted anything." This translation would indicate that Zaccheus had defrauded people.<sup>1</sup> However the NASB and NIV translators did not necessarily think that he had. Whichever is the correct translation, it seems clear that the main point is not the extent of Zaccheus' guilt but his attitude toward it.

- 19:9 Jesus assessed Zaccheus' promises as an evidence of saving faith. Salvation had come to his house because Zaccheus had exercised saving faith and had thereby proved to be a genuine descendant of Abraham, who is the spiritual father of all believers.<sup>2</sup> Zaccheus' faith and works proved that he was a true, spiritual son of Abraham, and not just one of his physical descendants (cf. Gen. 15:6; 22:1-19; James 2:24). Now he had salvation, not because he was a Jew physically but because he was a believer in Jesus.

"This ["he, too, is a son of Abraham"] will seem to be an irrelevant remark unless we recognize that the principal tension in the story is caused by the rejection of Zacchaeus by the Jewish community."<sup>3</sup>

- 19:10 Jesus summarized the present purpose of the Son of Man's ministry, which found fulfillment in Zaccheus' salvation (cf. 1 Tim. 1:15). Jesus had sought out many, especially among the lost "sheep" of Israel. He had saved those who would accept His gracious offer of salvation. I believe that this verse is the key verse in the third Gospel, because it expresses concisely the ministry of Jesus as Luke presented it (cf. 4:18-19; 15:5, 9, 24).<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>E.g., Robertson, *Word Pictures ...*, 2:240; Marshall, *The Gospel ...*, p. 698; Liefeld, "Luke," p. 1007; and Morris, *The Gospel ...*, p. 273.

<sup>2</sup>Ellis, p. 220; Ironside, 2:574.

<sup>3</sup>Tannehill, *The Narrative ...*, 1:124.

<sup>4</sup>See also Hanna, p. 68.

"This whole incident is the epitome of the messianic mission described in Luke 4."<sup>1</sup>

Throughout this Gospel Luke presented Jesus as appealing primarily—though not exclusively, of course—to the poor, the lame, the demon-possessed, the blind, etc., namely, the marginalized in that society. Those were the people who were looking for personal deliverance. Does this emphasis not say something to Christians today about whom we should be seeking out? These same unfortunate types of people are still the most ready to accept the salvation that Jesus came to bring.

### 7. The parable of the minas 19:11-27

This parable serves in Luke's narrative as a conclusion to the section that focuses on the recipients of salvation (18:9—19:27). It provides something of a *denouement* (i.e., a final unraveling of the plot) following the excellent example of Zaccheus' faith and the summary statement describing Jesus' ministry. In this teaching to the people, who were evidently observing His meal with the chief tax collector, Jesus taught several important lessons. He repeated His coming rejection and future return, and He clarified the time when the kingdom would appear. He also explained the duty of His disciples during His absence from the earth. Both the nation of Israel and the disciples had duties to Jesus. This parable summarizes Jesus' teaching on this subject.

This parable also prepared the people for the postponement (delay) of the earthly kingdom. Most of the people who believed on Him expected it to begin when Jesus reached Jerusalem. This teaching should have dispelled those hopes.

This parable is similar to the parable of the talents that Jesus gave later in the Olivet Discourse (Matt. 25:14-30). However that one lacks the emphasis on the rejection of Jesus, which was appropriate for the mixed audience that Jesus addressed in Zaccheus' house (v. 27).

19:11        The connection between Jesus being near Jerusalem, and the earthly kingdom appearing immediately, implies that the

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<sup>1</sup>Liefeld, "Luke," p. 1008.

believers in the crowd expected Jesus to begin the earthly kingdom when He arrived there.

"They interpreted the Kingdom of God as a setting up of the throne of David literally and materially in Jerusalem ..."<sup>1</sup>

Jesus had just told Zaccheus that salvation had come to his house that day (v. 9), but salvation would not come to Israel for some time. Even though the Son of Man had come to seek and to save the lost (v. 10), the national deliverance of Israel would have to wait. What follows is another of the many passages in Luke that records Jesus' teaching about the future.

"In 19:11 the disciples are pictured as expecting something that should have been and could have been apart from the rejection of Jesus. But because of this rejection, the [earthly] messianic kingdom for Israel does not come immediately, as the disciples mistakenly hoped. We see that in Luke-Acts the problem of eschatological delay is intertwined with the problem of Jewish rejection [cf. Acts 1:6]."<sup>2</sup>

19:12 The nobleman in Jesus' parable represents Jesus. The distant country that he went to stands for heaven, and the place to which he would return is the earth. Jesus went to heaven to receive an earthly kingdom from His Father. The correctness of these identifications becomes clearer as the parable unfolds.

A situation similar to the one that Jesus described had happened not long before Jesus gave this parable, and He may have had it in mind.<sup>3</sup> Herod Archelaus, one of Herod the Great's sons, had visited Rome after his father's death in 4 B.C. He went there in order to receive Caesar's confirmation to reign over a section of Palestine that had been bestowed on him in

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<sup>1</sup>Morgan, *The Gospel ...*, p. 214.

<sup>2</sup>Tannehill, *The Narrative ...*, 1:260.

<sup>3</sup>Robertson, *Word Pictures ...*, 2:241.



his father's will.<sup>1</sup> Other Herods—Herod the Great, Herod Antipas, Herod Philip, and Herod Agrippa I—also had to go through this procedure, but the case of Archelaus most closely parallels this parable.<sup>2</sup>

Jesus was announcing a postponement (delay) of the earthly kingdom (cf. Acts 1:6-7). Some time would elapse between His ascension and His return. This scenario suggests that the earthly kingdom will not begin until Jesus returns to the earth to rule.

Some amillennial interpreters take this reference to the kingdom allegorically.<sup>3</sup> That is, the kingdom that Jesus received from His Father is a spiritual, not an earthly, kingdom. I do not agree with this interpretation because of the many prophecies in the Old Testament that promise a resumption of the Davidic kingdom on the earth in the future under Messiah's rule.

19:13 Before departing, the king entrusted ten of his slaves (Gr. *doulous*) with equal responsibility for advancing his interests while he was absent. A mina was a Greek coin that was worth 100 drachmas, or slightly more than three months wages.<sup>4</sup> In the parable, this sum probably represents the life potential that each servant of Jesus has been given to invest for His glory. Lenski believed that it represents "the Word that is entrusted to us as capital with which to do spiritual business for the Lord."<sup>5</sup> This seems less likely to me. "Ten" is apparently a general number that represents all of His servants. Jesus did not mean just the Twelve. He pictured His servants in the role of modern investors, who were responsible to increase the amount of money that He had entrusted to each of them during His absence.

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<sup>1</sup>Josephus, *Antiquities of ...*, 17:9:3; 17:11:4; and 17:13:5; Ironside, 2:576-77.

<sup>2</sup>Cf. Edersheim, *Sketches of ...*, p. 10. See also Finegan, *Light from ...*, pp. 261-62.

<sup>3</sup>E.g., Morris, *The Gospel ...*, p. 274.

<sup>4</sup>*International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, s.v. "Money," by H. W. Perkin, 3:409.

<sup>5</sup>Lenski, p. 957.

"Someone has said, 'The nicest thing about God is that He trusts us to do so much by ourselves.'"<sup>1</sup>

In the parable of the talents, each slave received a different sum, which probably represents the unique set of gifts and talents that each one has, compared with the others. In this parable, each slave received the same sum, probably representing the one life that each has to invest for the Master.

- 19:14 The citizens within Herod Archelaus' territory opposed his reign, though his credentials were impeccable. They persuaded Caesar Augustus to give him only half of his father's kingdom and to award him the title "ethnarch" (meaning governor of an ethnic group) rather than "king."<sup>2</sup> Similarly the Jews, and particularly their leaders, resisted Jesus' rightful claim to be their King. One of Jesus' servants that they rejected and killed was Stephen, the first Christian martyr (Acts 7).
- 19:15 Jesus was speaking of His second coming here. He will return having received authority to reign on earth from His Father (cf. Dan. 7:13-14). After His return, and before He begins to reign, He will call His servants to give an accounting of their stewardship. Later New Testament revelation indicates that Christians, believers who have lived between Pentecost and the Rapture, will have to give their accounting at the judgment seat of Christ following the Rapture (1 Cor. 3:10-15; 2 Cor. 5:1-10). Other believers, mainly those who have lived in Old Testament times and during the Tribulation, will give their accounting at the judgment in view here, which precedes the 1,000-year reign of Christ on earth. The basis of these believers' judgments is not their saved or lost condition but their faithfulness in using the life that was entrusted to them for God's benefit.
- 19:16-17 The first slave reported a 1,000 percent return on the master's investment. This report earned the master's praise and a great reward. The servant had faithfully fulfilled his

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<sup>1</sup>Barclay, p. 247.

<sup>2</sup>Josephus, *Antiquities of ...*, 17:9:3-7 and 17:11:1-4; idem, *The Wars ...*, 2:2:1-3.

responsibility. The master considered what the servant had received in trust as a very little thing. His reward consisted of authority over "ten cities" in the future and was enormous compared to what the slave had received to invest. In view of the chronology of this judgment, the reward will apply to the earthly kingdom that will follow—and probably eternity after that.

"What are these 'ten cities,' and what does it mean to be over them? All we are able to say is that this pictures the highest degree of glory for the faithful in heaven. Beyond that we must wait until that great day comes."<sup>1</sup>

Authority to rule (serve) groups of other people under the King's authority—during the Millennium and throughout eternity—is the reward. Throughout history kings have rewarded faithful servants by giving them positions of significant responsibility over others in their kingdoms (cf. Dan. 6:3). Modern government leaders typically do the same thing. The Master's decision reflects the principle that he who is faithful in little will be faithful in much (16:10-12).

19:18-19 The second slave had also been faithful, but he had only earned a 500 percent return on the master's investment. He did not receive as much commendation as the first servant, or as much reward, but his reward was also proportionate to his service. This shows that rewards will vary depending on a servant's effectiveness in advancing the Master's interests.

"The reward is not rest, but the opportunity for wider service."<sup>2</sup>

19:20-21 Another slave reported that he had not earned anything with the master's deposit. Keeping money in a "handkerchief" (Gr. *soudarion*) was a common practice in Jesus' day, but it was unsafe and unproductive.<sup>3</sup> This person represents someone who does nothing of eternal value with his life. The slave

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<sup>1</sup>Lenski, p. 953.

<sup>2</sup>Morris, *The Gospel ...*, p. 275.

<sup>3</sup>Jeremias, *The Parables ...*, p. 61.

explained that his fear of the master was responsible for his lack of fruit (cf. Matt. 25:25). But this man was lying. He did not fear his master. If he had feared him, he would have obeyed him (v. 13). He would have gotten busy and served the master if he feared him. His assessment of the master was correct, but it did not have the proper effect on him.

The master wanted a disproportionately high return on His investments, so this slave's conservatism was irresponsible. He appears to have felt that he would receive no reward for his work for the master—if he ever returned. He should have taken some risks. Faithful stewardship involves taking calculated risks.<sup>1</sup> Taking up what one had not laid down, and reaping what one had not sown (v. 21), were evidently proverbial expressions similar to getting blood out of a stone.<sup>2</sup> They described an overly strict, exacting person.

- 19:22 The master said he would judge the slave on the basis of his own words, namely, that the master was an exacting man who demanded much from his servants (v. 21). Rather than commending him, the master condemned this slave, calling him "worthless," that is, unproductive (cf. 1 Cor. 9:27; James 2:14, 16, 20, 26). He had produced nothing of value for the master. The master's character should have moved the servant to productive service rather than passive sloth.
- 19:23 Even by depositing his investment in a bank the servant could have earned some interest for the master with little risk. Probably the bank in the parable represents a safe investment with comparatively little risk.
- 19:24 The other slaves who were present in the parable represent those who assist Jesus in carrying out His will, perhaps angels or other human servants. The unfaithful slave lost even what the master had given him. If the mina each servant received represents his life potential, this servant lost that. The master gave it instead to the most faithful servant. This seems to mean that God's faithful servants will receive additional

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<sup>1</sup>See Helmut Thielicke, *The Waiting Father*, pp. 143-45.

<sup>2</sup>Morris, *The Gospel ...*, p. 275.

opportunities to glorify Him in the next stage of their service as well as authority over others. The next stage of these servants' service will be millennial service in the earthly kingdom. It will be that for Christians as well.

"In the Christian life we do not stand still. We use our gifts and make progress or we lose what we have."<sup>1</sup>

19:25 This arrangement appeared unjust to the other slaves who were standing by. They probably thought that the unfaithful servant's mina should have gone to a slave with a smaller reward. They were looking at what was best for the slaves. However the master was operating on the principle that faithfulness with little indicates faithfulness in much. So it was to his advantage to give the unfaithful slave's mina to the most faithful servant, because he would make the best use of it.

19:26 The master expressed this truth proverbially (13:12). He was looking at what was best for himself. Obviously what is best for God is more important than what is best for His servants. Still, the master's action was also fair to his slaves, because the servant who glorified the master most received the greatest reward.

"The greatest compliment we can pay a man is to give him ever greater, and ever harder tasks to do."<sup>2</sup>

Zaccheus, who was undoubtedly listening to this parable, had just promised to give half of his possessions to the poor and to reimburse anyone whom he had defrauded four-fold (v. 8). Jesus' teaching here would have encouraged him to follow through on his commitment. He would have a great reward, much treasure waiting for him in heaven, if he served the Master faithfully.

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 276.

<sup>2</sup>Barclay, p. 247.

19:27 The master now dealt with a different group of people. These were the enemies who opposed his rule over them (v. 14), not his slaves. They suffered a fate that was typical for such rebels in the ancient world. They correspond to unbelievers in Jesus. They would not only lose a reward but their very lives. Physical death in the parable represents spiritual death in reality.<sup>1</sup> This judgment of unbelievers will come after Jesus returns and rewards believers at the Second Coming. He will then also put His enemies to death (cf. Matt. 24:45-51; John 5:22; Acts 17:31).

"In Acts 3:13-15 the people of Jerusalem are accused not only of killing Jesus but also of denying him. This repudiation is emphasized in the story of the throne claimant [vv. 14, 27], an addition to the parable of the pounds found only in Luke."<sup>2</sup>

The teaching of the parable is quite clear. Jesus was not going to begin His reign on earth as Messiah immediately. He was going away and would return later to reign. During His absence His servants, believing disciples, need to invest what God has given them for His glory. He will reward them in proportion to what they have produced for Him. This parable teaches that everyone is accountable to God, and everyone will receive what he or she deserves from the King. It provided a warning for the unbelievers in Jesus' audience, as well as believers, in view of the postponement of the earthly kingdom.

This parable clarifies that while salvation and entrance into the messianic kingdom come by faith in Jesus, rewards for service are based on the believer's works. Both salvation and rewards come as a result of God's grace. Christians have consistently confused teaching about salvation and rewards. Salvation does not depend on working for God, but resting in what Jesus Christ has done. Rewards do not depend on resting in what Jesus Christ has done, but on working for God—doing all to the glory of God. It is a misunderstanding of Scriptural revelation to conclude that, because God has saved us by His grace, we need do nothing but lie back and wait for heaven. Such behavior constitutes irresponsible stewardship that Jesus

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<sup>1</sup>See Pagenkemper, pp. 194-98.

<sup>2</sup>Tannehill, *The Narrative ...*, 1:161.

Christ will punish by withholding a reward. In view of what lies ahead for us, we need to be firm, immovable, always excelling in the work of the Lord, knowing that our labor is not in vain in the Lord (1 Cor. 15:58).

"We are all accountable to God for how we conduct our journey through his world. One day he will render judgment. This concept is not popular in some circles today, but it is a biblical concept."<sup>1</sup>

The parable of the talents (Matt. 25:14-30) teaches us that God gives everyone a different amount to invest for His glory. Some people have more intelligence, or talent, or money, or other resources than others. The parable of the minas teaches that God gives all of His servants the same opportunity to invest for His glory. Everyone has only one life. Both believers and unbelievers play a part in both parables. Both parables advocate belief in Jesus, faithfulness, and preparedness, and they both show that God will deal with all people justly, graciously, and generously.

Many amillennial and postmillennial interpreters view this parable as prefiguring the fall of Jerusalem and its attending massacres.<sup>2</sup> Posttribulationists usually view it similarly to pretribulationists.

This parable ends the long part of Luke's Gospel that deals with Jesus' ministry as He traveled to Jerusalem from Galilee (9:51—19:27). Luke's narrative highlighted Jesus' lessons to the multitudes and the disciples in view of His impending passion and the postponement of His earthly kingdom due to the official rejection of His messiahship by Israel's representative leaders. This parable also concludes the section dealing with the recipients of salvation by stressing their responsibility (18:9—19:27).

## **VI. JESUS' MINISTRY IN JERUSALEM 19:28—21:38**

Luke's account of Jesus' passion (sufferings culminating in death) highlights Jesus' entry into Jerusalem and His teaching there before His arrest.

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<sup>1</sup>Bock, *Luke*, p. 488.

<sup>2</sup>E.g., Luce, p. 297.

"The first entry was Kingly; on the second day, He went in as Priest; and on the third day as Prophet."<sup>1</sup>

**A. THE TRIUMPHAL ENTRY 19:28-40 (CF. MATT. 21:1-9; MARK 11:1-10; JOHN 12:12-19)**

Luke did not record Jesus' actual entrance into the city of Jerusalem. He focused on Jesus' approach to Jerusalem and His lamentation (grieving) over it (vv. 41-44). This presentation has the effect of eliminating the triumphant spirit of Jesus' coming and replacing it with sadness over Jesus' rejection.

Until now Jesus typically discouraged people from proclaiming that He was the Messiah. Now He not only allowed people to identify Him as such but encouraged them to do so. The time of His official presentation to Israel as her Messiah had come.

"Everything He did over the course of these days was designed to call attention to the fact that He is the Messiah."<sup>2</sup>

19:28 This is another of Luke's geographical markers that note Jesus' progress toward His goal: Jerusalem. He traveled west from Jericho, up the steep road through the Judean wilderness, and southwest toward Bethany. He walked in front of His followers—leading them eventually to the Cross.

19:29 Luke located what happened for his Gentile readers' benefit. Probably Mark and Luke mentioned Bethany because it was a better-known town than Bethphage, though Bethany was slightly farther east.<sup>3</sup> The mention of Mt. Olivet (lit. Olive Orchard) recalls the prophecy of Messiah's coming there (Zech. 14:4). The preparations to enter Jerusalem riding on a colt were to fulfill Zechariah 9:9 and 10.

19:30 The disciples were to borrow or rent a colt for Jesus to ride on. Evidently such animals were available to assist travelers.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Morgan, *The Gospel ...*, p. 218.

<sup>2</sup>Martin, p. 253.

<sup>3</sup>Marshall, *The Gospel ...*, p. 712.

<sup>4</sup>J. D. M. Derrett, "Law in the New Testament: The Palm Sunday Colt," *Novum Testamentum* 13 (1971):244.



However this colt was tied up (cf. Gen. 49:11), and no one had ridden it previously, or even sat on it (cf. Num. 19:2; Deut. 21:3; 1 Sam. 6:7; 2 Sam. 6:3). When a royal or sacred person rode on such an animal, its owners did not normally put it to customary use from then on.<sup>1</sup>

- 19:31 The term "Lord" probably simply refers to Jesus as the person whom the owner knew needed the colt. But at the same time, Jesus was the true Owner of it—since He owns everything. Thus Luke's words, as well as Matthew's and Mark's, conveyed Jesus' sovereign authority to his readers. "The Lord has need of it" seems to have been a password.<sup>2</sup>
- 19:32-34 This record shows that things turned out just as Jesus had led the disciples to believe they would. This would have strengthened the disciples' confidence in Jesus as they entered Jerusalem, and it helps the reader appreciate the reliability of all that Jesus predicted. Perhaps Jesus had previously arranged for the use of the colt. Alternatively, He may have been speaking as a prophet.<sup>3</sup> The evangelists told the story in order to underscore Jesus' knowledge of things to come.
- 19:35 Other disciples put Jesus on the colt, and its mother (mare) also accompanied it (Matt. 21:7). The disciples honored Jesus by using their outer garments to make a saddle for Him (cf. 1 Kings 1:33).
- 19:36 The people who laid their garments down for the colt to walk on were the many people who accompanied Jesus (Matt. 21:8; Mark 11:7). However Luke stressed the disciples' part in this act of homage (cf. 2 Kings 9:13). Luke simplified the scene by omitting reference to the branches that other people laid in the road before the colt (Matt. 21:38; Mark 11:8).
- 19:37 Luke alone specified that Jesus descended from the Mount of Olives toward Jerusalem. He may have done so in order to associate Jesus with the prophecy of Messiah standing on that

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., pp. 248-49.

<sup>2</sup>Morris, *The Gospel ...*, p. 278.

<sup>3</sup>Green, p. 685.

mountain (Zech. 14:4). However this was not a fulfillment of that prophecy. The fulfillment will come at the Second Coming. Jesus had predicted His entrance into Jerusalem (13:35). Perhaps Luke pictured Jesus descending toward Jerusalem in order to set the stage for His weeping over the city (vv. 42-44).

Luke continued to focus the readers' attention on the disciples' role, whereas the other evangelists included the whole crowd. Obviously Luke wanted us readers to appreciate the part that the disciples played in Jesus' glorification on this occasion (cf. 2:13, 20; 19:37; Acts 2:47; 3:8-9). Perhaps he viewed it as a preview of future disciples' participation in His Second Coming. He alone noted the disciples' reference to having observed Jesus' "miracles" (Gr. *dynameon*, evidences of spiritual power).

"In analogous scenes, the person who enters the city does not do so in order to claim kingship; rather, entry presupposes an already achieved victory."<sup>1</sup>

Jesus did not achieve victory until He died on the cross, but His Triumphal Entry anticipated that victory.

19:38 Luke omitted "Hosanna" from the disciples' praise. His Greek readers probably would not have understood it. The repetition of Psalm 118:26 from 13:35 points to one fulfillment of that messianic prophecy here. There will be another fulfillment at the Second Coming. Luke noted that the King (but not the earthly kingdom, Mark 11:10) was the focus of the disciples' praise. The earthly kingdom was not yet to appear (v. 11), but the King was present.

"I have no doubt His method of entry on the human level precipitated their [the Jewish rulers']

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 683. For "analogous scenes," see David R. Catchpole, "The 'Triumphal' Entry," in *Jesus and the Politics of His Day*, pp. 319-21.

action, the action that ended from their standpoint in His murder."<sup>1</sup>

The words "peace in heaven and glory in the highest" recall 2:14, where the angels expressed similar words in praise to God for providing a Savior. However at that event they thanked Him for peace on earth, not peace in heaven. Probably the disciples were honoring God as the author of peace as much as He is the source of glory in the highest (i.e., in heaven).

19:39 Some of the Pharisees did not like the disciples using messianic terminology for Jesus, thereby suggesting that He fulfilled messianic prophecy (cf. Matt. 21:14-16). They asked Jesus to rebuke them. They apparently thought that He would agree that the disciples were going too far. This verse occurs only in this Gospel. It provides a background for Jesus' strong statement in the next verse.

"The story strongly emphasizes the tension between the scribes-Pharisees and Jesus. Study of the references to scribes and Pharisees in Luke up through 19:39-40 (where Pharisees last appear in the gospel, although scribes will continue to play a role) shows that these groups are mentioned almost entirely in pronouncement stories or similar scenes in which they interact with Jesus by objecting, posing a testing inquiry, or taking a position which Jesus corrects. The only exceptions are the statements about Pharisees and scribes in 7:30, 9:22, and 12:1."<sup>2</sup>

19:40 Jesus refused to silence the disciples. They spoke the truth. The proverbial figure of stones crying out pictures the impossible happening. The figure (personification) stresses the appropriateness of the disciples crying out. If the disciples kept silent, the stones would be forced to declare who Jesus was instead of them. This clear messianic claim is unique to Luke.

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<sup>1</sup>Morgan, *The Gospel ...*, p. 220.

<sup>2</sup>Tannehill, *The Narrative ...*, 1:170.

It shows the blatant rejection of Israel's leaders in the face of indisputable evidence that Jesus was the Messiah.

"All history had pointed toward this single, spectacular event when the Messiah publicly presented Himself to the nation, and God desired that this fact be acknowledged."<sup>1</sup>

"It is a breath-taking thing to think of a man with a price upon his head, an outlaw, deliberately riding into a city in such a way that every eye was fixed upon him. It is impossible to exaggerate the sheer courage of Jesus."<sup>2</sup>

The Triumphal Entry is only the second incident in Jesus' ministry that all four evangelists recorded, the first being the feeding of the 5,000. This indicates its great importance in God's messianic program. Here the King of the Jews, their Messiah, came in fulfillment of prophecy to be accepted by the Jews as their Savior.

## **B. THE BEGINNING OF JESUS' MINISTRY IN JERUSALEM 19:41-48**

This is a transitional section that bridges Jesus' approach to the city and His teaching in it. Luke first recorded Jesus weeping over the city from outside its walls because He knew what lay before its people. Then Luke wrote of Jesus cleansing the temple and teaching there.

### **1. Jesus' sorrow over Jerusalem 19:41-44**

This material occurs in no other Gospel. The destruction of Jerusalem that Jesus predicted here was an important event for Luke. It showed God's judgment on Israel for rejecting His Son, and it provided evidence that God had turned from working with the Jews primarily and was going to work with Gentiles equally. It constitutes an argument for the distinctively new dispensation (arrangement) that resulted from the Jews' rejection of their Messiah. It also gives a reason for the Christian mission on which Jesus later sent His disciples. As both God and man, Jesus wept over the judgment that was coming on the people of Jerusalem, reflecting God's sorrow over their rejection of His provision of salvation.

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<sup>1</sup>Martin, p. 253.

<sup>2</sup>Barclay, p. 249.

- 19:41 Luke continued to describe Jesus as approaching Jerusalem, His city of destiny. Jesus saw the city in the light of its rejection of His gracious offer of salvation. He foresaw its later judgment being poured out for Israel's having rejected His peaceful visit. This is the only place in the Gospels, besides John 11:35, where we read that Jesus wept (lit. wailed). His compassion is something that Luke pointed out frequently in his Gospel. The fate of sinners who reject God's grace broke Jesus' heart. Jeremiah also wept over the fate of Jerusalem (Jer. 8:18-22; 15:5; Lam.; cf. 2 Kings 8:11-12).
- 19:42 Jesus meant that if the people of Jerusalem had only known then, that very day (cf. 4:21; 19:5, 9), what things would result in peace for them, they would experience peace. Only acceptance of Him and the inauguration of the earthly kingdom could bring peace (i.e., salvation) to the "City of Peace": Jerusalem. However they did not realize the consequences of their decision to reject Him. God had withheld that insight from them because they were bent on rejecting Jesus (11:49-51; 13:34).
- 19:43-44 The enemies in view in this prophecy proved to be the Roman soldiers under General Titus, who besieged Jerusalem just as Jesus described. They breached its walls and finally leveled the city in A.D. 70 (cf. 21:20-24). The reason for its destruction was its failure to recognize Messiah's visit and accept His offer of salvation.

"Throughout Luke-Acts, 'Jerusalem' functions above all as a cipher for its role as a cultural center ... so mention of the city relates primarily to the temple system and the leadership that draws its legitimacy from the temple."<sup>1</sup>

**2. Jesus' cleansing of the temple 19:45-46 (cf. Matt. 21:12-13; Mark 11:15-17)**

- 19:45 Judgment began when Jesus threw the merchants out of the temple courtyard. Jesus did this twice: once at the beginning

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<sup>1</sup>Green, p. 690.

of His ministry (John 2:13-22), and a second time here at the end. Luke's interest in this incident, which he related briefly, was primarily as the introduction to Jesus' teaching that followed. It also explains the religious leaders' great antagonism toward Jesus (v. 47).

"Sometimes the Christian should stand up and say, 'That is enough! That is wrong! Here are the Scriptures to prove it. I will not sit idly by and let this go on.'"<sup>1</sup>

19:46 Jesus described the temple as a house of prayer. He purified it by His actions, quoting from Isaiah 56:7 and Jeremiah 7:11. Perhaps Luke omitted Jesus calling the temple a house of prayer *for all the nations* (Mark 11:17) because he thought that this might confuse his Gentile readers, though Matthew also omitted the clause *for all the nations* (Matt. 21:13).

"In the Lukan vision, Gentiles would not come to the temple to find Yahweh; rather, the Lord goes out, through his witnesses, to the Gentiles (cf. Acts 1:8)."<sup>2</sup>

Some interpreters have identified this incident as the fulfillment of Malachi 3:1, but none of the evangelists connected this event with that prophecy. Malachi 3:1 is a prediction of Jesus' coming to the Tribulation temple at His second coming (cf. Zech. 14:21).

### **3. A synopsis of Jesus' teaching in the temple 19:47-48 (cf. Mark 11:18)**

Luke stressed the rejection and hostility of the Jewish leaders toward Jesus as He taught daily in the temple courtyards. The common people, however, were very receptive to His instruction. This contrast between popular acceptance and official opposition has characterized Luke's narrative. The writer evidently included these verses to show his readers that people whose power and position Jesus threatened opposed Him, whereas average

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<sup>1</sup>Charles R. Swindoll, *The Swindoll Study Bible*, p. 1263.

<sup>2</sup>Green, p. 694.

people, with no vested interests at stake, have always been open to the gospel (cf. 1:68, 77; 2:10, 31-32).

These two verses are also introductory to what follows. They introduce Jesus' teaching ministry in Jerusalem, like 4:14 and 15 introduced His teaching ministry in Galilee.

"Luke organizes his account of Jesus' daily teaching in the temple into two subsections: 19:47—21:4, which emphasizes the conflict and antagonism between Jesus and segments of the Jewish leadership in Jerusalem; and 21:5-38, which presents Jesus' vision of the unfolding future of turmoil, persecution, and acts of judgment, culminating in the coming of the Son of Man and the establishment of the kingdom of God."<sup>1</sup>

### C. JESUS' TEACHINGS IN THE TEMPLE 20:1—21:4

Luke presented Jesus' teachings in the temple as beginning with opposition from the religious leaders and leading on to Jesus' condemnation of them. He evidently wanted to highlight the reasons for God's passing over Israel in order to deal with Gentiles equally in the present era. All of what follows in this section happened on Wednesday of "Passion Week."

#### 1. The controversy over authority 20:1-8 (cf. Matt. 21:23-27; Mark 11:27-33)

Jesus' authority was crucial not only for the Jewish leaders, who opposed Him, but for Luke's readers. This passage established Jesus' authority beyond reasonable doubt.

"Lk. wishes his readers to understand that Jesus was not engaged in heated controversy all the time, that His main occupation during these last days was preaching the good news, speaking 'words of grace' there as in Galilee and in Samaria [cf. 21:37-38]."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Nolland, *Luke 18:35—24:53*, p. 939.

<sup>2</sup>A. B. Bruce, "The Synoptic ...," 1:611.

- 20:1 Luke's reference to Jesus teaching the people and preaching the gospel, as well as the question of His authority to do so, preview the experiences of Peter and Paul (cf. Acts 4:7). Representative individuals from the chief priests, scribes or lawyers, and elders, made up the Sanhedrin. Thus their question constituted an official inquiry.
- 20:2 The critics' first question dealt with who Jesus claimed to be, and the second one dealt with whom He represented: Himself, or some group.
- "Jesus had upset the normal 'religious' atmosphere of the temple, which led the religious leaders to question His authority."<sup>1</sup>
- 20:3 Jesus' reply with a counter-question was common in rabbinic discussions.<sup>2</sup>
- 20:4-5 Jesus used "heaven" as a synonym for "God." Luke recorded many instances of this practice. The Jewish leaders had opposed John the Baptist, though the people followed him.
- 20:6 Luke alone mentioned the leaders' fear of stoning by the people. Stoning was the penalty for prophesying falsely (Deut. 13:1-11), among other things. Here the leaders feared that they might suffer the same fate as the false prophets for denying the legitimacy of a true Prophet (Jesus). Luke therefore hinted that the people who listened to Jesus were the faithful Israelites, and that their leaders who rejected Him were worthy of stoning.
- 20:7 Luke recorded the leaders' confession that they did not know from where John received his authority. This was, of course, a deliberate evasion of Jesus' question. However their answer condemned them, because, as Israel's leaders, they were responsible to evaluate the claims of professing prophets.
- 20:8 Jesus used their refusal to answer His question as a reason for not answering theirs, but the implication was clear to

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<sup>1</sup>Martin, p. 254.

<sup>2</sup>Marshall, *The Gospel ...*, p. 725.



everyone: He claimed the same authority as John, namely, God. There was ample evidence of divine authority in Jesus' ministry, even though the critics refused to accept it.

**2. The parable of the wicked tenant farmers 20:9-19 (cf. Matt. 21:33-46; Mark 12:1-12)**

This parable taught that Israel's religious leaders, who had authority, were mismanaging their authority. It also affirmed Jesus' authority, not just as a prophet, but as God's Son. The leaders had expressed fear of death (v. 6). Jesus now revealed that He would die but that God would vindicate Him. The parable contains further teaching on the subject of proper stewardship as well (cf. 19:11-27). It also reveals the almost unbelievable patience of God with Israel.

20:9 Jesus directed His teaching to "the people," who generally responded positively to His instruction. A positive response to revelation resulted in more insight. Those in the crowd who did not believe in Jesus would have found this teaching less illuminating.

The owner of the vineyard in the parable represents God, the vineyard is Israel (cf. Ps. 80:8-16; Isa. 5:1-7), and the vine-growers (tenant farmers) are Israel's religious leaders.

20:10-12 The harvest stands for the inauguration of the earthly kingdom, and the slaves represent the prophets. The produce of the vineyard symbolizes the fruits of righteousness that God hoped to find in His people. Luke simplified this story, as compared with Matthew's and Mark's versions, probably in order to emphasize the main points and to avoid distraction from too much detail.

20:13 Luke cast the owner's thought in the form of a soliloquy, which he liked to do in relating Jesus' stories (cf. 16:3-4; 18:4-5). This literary device adds pathos to the story. The term "beloved [Gr. *agepeton*] son" identifies the owner's son as unique from his viewpoint, but it also identified him as God's Son to perceptive listeners, as it does to Luke's readers (cf. 3:22).

20:14 Evidently the tenants believed that they could conceal the murder of the son, and that the owner would turn the vineyard over to them, since he had no other heir. This would have been very bad stewardship of what belonged to the owner.

"Tenants were known to claim possession of land they had worked for absentee landlords (Talmud, *Baba Bathra* 35b, 40b). In a day when title was sometimes uncertain, anyone who had had the use of land for three years was presumed to own it in the absence of an alternative claim (Mishnah, *Baba Bathra* 3:1)."<sup>1</sup>

Of course, no vineyard owner would ever do what this man did: send slave after slave to his certain death, and then send his own son to his death. The action of the vineyard owner in this parable highlights the extraordinary patience that God had demonstrated toward Israel by sending prophet after prophet to them, and then even His own Son.

20:15 Matthew and Luke have the tenants throwing the son out of the vineyard and then killing him, whereas Mark has them doing these things in the reverse order. Probably they removed him from the vineyard, killed him, and then cast his corpse farther from the vineyard. The order of Matthew and Luke makes the killing the climax, and Mark's point seems to have been the insults that the son suffered.

20:16 Only Luke recorded the verbal response of the people to the vineyard owner's action: "May it never happen!" (Gr. *me genoito*, cf. Rom. 3:4, 6, 31, et al.). This was a strong statement expressing firm rejection. They understood that Jesus was predicting that God would condemn Israel's leaders and turn the nation over to other people, probably Gentiles and specifically the Romans. They foresaw the end of Judaism as they knew it, and this prospect upset them greatly.

20:17 By looking at His hearers, Jesus captivated their attention for a very important statement. Jesus' response corrected the

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<sup>1</sup>Morris, *The Gospel ...*, p. 285.

crowd's resistance to the idea that God would judge Israel's present leaders and would allow Israel to fall under other, presumably Gentile, leadership. He now changed the figure from a vineyard to a building. Luke recorded Him quoting only Psalm 118:22, not verse 23, which the other evangelists included (cf. 19:38; Acts 4:11; 1 Pet. 2:7). This has the effect of highlighting the "stone," namely, Jesus, without reference to God.

An apparently insignificant stone that builders discarded as being unfit would become the most important stone of all. Jesus would become the most important feature in what God was building. Luke's original readers would have understood this as a reference to Jesus being the Head of the church. The statement was a further indictment against the current builders: Israel's leaders.

20:18 Jesus next referred to other Old Testament passages that also referred to a stone (Dan. 2:34, 44-45; cf. Isa. 8:14-15). They taught that a capstone would be God's agent of judgment. Those who opposed the Capstone would only destroy themselves, and it would crush those on whom it fell. The stone in Daniel 2 represents a kingdom. In the exact same way, Jesus, as the King of the kingdom of God, will serve as God's agent of judgment in the future. However, even at that time, Jesus was the Stone that would bring judgment on God's enemies.

20:19 The religious leaders understood Jesus' meaning and wanted to silence Him, but they decided not to do anything publicly then, because so many of the people, whom they feared, supported Jesus (cf. 19:47-48; 22:2).

"The attitude of the leaders to Jesus is exposed as an unwillingness to be accountable to God."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Nolland, *Luke 18:35—24:53*, p. 950.

**3. The question of tribute to Caesar 20:20-26 (cf. 22:15-22; Mark 12:13-17)**

Luke next showed how the religious leaders' antagonism was intensifying against Jesus. They made another attempt to discredit Him (cf. vv. 1-8). Luke may have included this incident also because it shows that Jesus did not teach hostility toward the state. The early Christians, like Jesus, suffered because of false accusations that they opposed their government, but this was generally untrue.

- 20:20 Luke revealed the motives of Israel's leaders on this occasion more clearly than the other evangelists did. They watched for and made opportunities to trap Jesus. Perhaps Luke obtained this information from those members of the Sanhedrin who believed on Jesus, like Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea. The Greek word *egkathetos*, translated "spy," means one hired to lie in wait. A private detective or secret agent might be closer to the ancient equivalent than a military spy. These spies gave the appearance of behaving righteously, but their real intent was to get Jesus to say something for which they might accuse Him before Pilate, the Roman governor. Later they resorted to telling Pilate that Jesus taught the people not to pay their taxes (23:2), but that was a lie.
- 20:21 The spies' preamble was both flattering and devious (cf. Acts 24:2-3). They claimed to accept Jesus' teaching and to desire a clarification of a point of law. Probably they hoped that their preamble would give Jesus a feeling of self-confidence that would lead Him to give a foolish answer.
- 20:22 They wanted to know if Jesus believed that the Mosaic Law required the Jews to pay "taxes" (Gr. *phoros*, a general word for tribute) to the occupying Romans. They thought that if Jesus said yes He would alienate the common people, especially the nationalists who objected strongly to paying taxes. If Jesus said no He would provoke the wrath of Rome, and the Sanhedrin could then tell Pilate that He taught the people not to pay their taxes.
- 20:23 Jesus perceived the malicious intentions of His questioners rather than being deceived by their flattery. He proceeded to

lead them into a trap of His own. He used an object lesson in order to reinforce and clarify His answer rather than sidestepping the controversial question. He answered by appealing to principle.

20:24 The Roman denarius bore the image of Caesar, probably the face of Tiberius (A.D. 14-37) at this time.<sup>1</sup> The face of Caesar on the coin suggested that the money ultimately belonged to him and the government that he headed and represented. He had issued it, though, of course, in another sense it belonged to the person who currently possessed it. The fact that the Jews used Roman money showed that Rome ruled over them. Roman rule involved Rome providing services for them as well as extracting payment for those services from them. Therefore Rome's demand for taxes was legitimate.

20:25 Jesus added that His questioners, and all people who bear the image of God, should likewise give Him what is His due, namely, their worship and service (cf. Rom. 13:1-7; 1 Pet. 2:13-17). Roman coins also bore inscriptions claiming that the emperor was divine.<sup>2</sup> Jesus repudiated that idea by referring to God as the Person to whom people owed their primary allegiance.

Jesus was not setting up two parallel and separate realms in which He wanted people to live, namely, the political and the spiritual. Rather He was showing that paying earthly rulers what is their due is only a logical extension of paying the heavenly Ruler what is His due. The earthly, political sphere, lies within the larger, spiritual sphere. When political and spiritual responsibilities conflict, we must give precedence to our greater spiritual responsibility (cf. Acts 5:29).

"Jesus is not a political revolutionary who rails against Rome, nor is he an ardent nationalist. ... This text is the closest to a political statement Jesus makes. ... In many ways Jesus' handling of this question shows that he is not interested in

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<sup>1</sup>Green, p. 715.

<sup>2</sup>See *Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, s.v. "Coins," by Gleason L. Archer Jr., 1:902-11.

the political agenda of changing Rome. He is not a zealot. He is more interested that Israel be a people who honor the God they claim to know than being concerned with their relationship to Rome."<sup>1</sup>

20:26 Jesus' answer in verse 25 has become so commonplace to us that we fail to appreciate the impact that it must have had on those who heard it for the first time. Jesus' critics could not criticize either His logic or His statement. Wisely they kept quiet (cf. 14:6; 20:40), a fact that only Luke noted. Luke also drew attention to their failure to "catch" (or "trap," NIV; Gr. *epilambanomai*) Jesus, which he earlier identified as their objective (v. 20).

This teaching would have been helpful to Luke's original readers who—as all Christians do—had responsibilities to pagan political authorities as well as to God.

#### **4. The problem of the resurrection 20:27-40 (cf. Matt. 22:23-33; Mark 12:18-27)**

This incident was also relevant for Luke's original Greek readers. The question of the resurrection of the body was important in view of Greek philosophy, which denied it (cf. 1 Cor. 15). Luke also used this incident in his narrative in order to bring Jesus' confrontations with His critics in the temple courtyard to a climax.

20:27 Luke had not identified the party affiliations of Jesus' former critics like Matthew and Mark did. These Jewish parties would not have been of much interest to his original readers. But here he identified the Sadducees by name. He needed to do this because of their denial of the resurrection, which was the subject that they brought to Jesus for His opinion. Most Greeks also denied the resurrection of the body (cf. 1 Cor. 15:12). Much of Greek psychology viewed the body as the temporary prison of the soul, which many of the Greeks believed was immortal.

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<sup>1</sup>Bock, *Luke*, p. 512. Paragraph division omitted.

Jesus had taught much about the future, and He had implied that He believed in the resurrection of the body (e.g., 19:11-28). The Sadducees opposed the Pharisees on many points, because they believed the Pharisees had departed too far from the teachings of the Old Testament. In one sense the Sadducees were liberal in their theology, since they denied much that is supernatural (e.g., the resurrection, angels, and spirits; Acts 23:8). On the other hand they were quite conservative in that they based their views on a strict interpretation of Old Testament teachings and rejected the oral traditions of the Jews as being authoritative. After Jesus' resurrection the Sadducees opposed the apostles because the apostles preached that Jesus had risen from the dead (cf. Acts 4:1-2). There is no record in Scripture that a Sadducee ever became a believer in Jesus, though some may have.

- 20:28 The Sadducees' commitment to the Old Testament was evident in their approach to Jesus: They began by quoting Deuteronomy 25:5, which they attributed to Moses (cf. Gen. 38:8). The practice in question was levirate marriage.<sup>1</sup>
- 20:29-33 Jesus' critics posed a possible but unlikely case of levirate marriage—actually several cases. Their obvious purpose was to show that belief in the resurrection of the body was ridiculous and that Jesus was wrong to advocate it. However they made the unwarranted assumption that life in a resurrected body would involve sexual relations as we know them now. The problem in their hypothetical situation was that none of the woman's seven husbands had fathered a child by her. Consequently none of them had any special claim on her as his wife.
- 20:34-35 Jesus contrasted the present age with the future age (the age of Messiah's reign on earth). People resurrected to live in Messiah's earthly kingdom, namely, sons of (or participants in)

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<sup>1</sup>See Millar Burrows, "Levirate Marriage in Israel," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 59 (1940):23-33; idem, "The Marriage of Boaz and Ruth," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 59 (1940):445-54.

the resurrection (v. 36), will not marry (like men do) or be given in marriage (like women are).

God considers people worthy to attain to the resurrection of believers because of their faith, not because of any personal merit of their own (cf. Acts 5:41).

20:36 They will be immortal, like the angels. Like the angels, they will also be "sons of God," a common designation for the angels in the Old Testament (cf. Job 1:6; 2:1; et al.). This title stresses the God-like characteristic of the angels and the resurrected saints that is in view, namely, their immortality. Human sons of God will become sons of God in a new sense because of their resurrection. Similarly, Jesus was always God's Son in the administrative structure of the Trinity, but He became the Son of God in a fuller sense by resurrection (Ps. 2:7; Acts 13:33).

There will be people living in the earthly kingdom who have not yet died and experienced resurrection. Jesus was not speaking about them, only about "sons of the resurrection," namely, those who had died and experienced resurrection (cf. Isa. 26:19; Dan. 12:2; 1 Cor. 15:50-57; 1 Thess. 4:13-17).

Jesus' explanation was important for Hellenistic readers. The Greeks believed that especially worthy mortals became gods, like Mormons believe today.<sup>1</sup> But this is not what Jesus taught. Rather He was saying that worthy mortals, who are already sons of God, will become immortal and incapable of reproducing following their resurrection. Mormonism teaches that people will continue to bear children after their resurrection.<sup>2</sup>

20:37 Jesus also corrected the Sadducees by affirming that the dead are raised (resurrected). There is not just continuing conscious existence after death, as many Greeks believed. In order to prove His point Jesus cited a verse from the Torah, which His critics respected greatly (Exod. 3:6; cf. Acts 7:32). He could have referred to any of several Old Testament texts which

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<sup>1</sup>See Gerstner, p. 135; Van Baalen, p. 179.

<sup>2</sup>See *ibid.*, pp. 166-67.



clearly teach bodily resurrection (e.g., Job 19:26; Ps. 16:9-11; Isa 26:19, Dan 12:2). But the Sadducees had previously referred to the Torah (Pentateuch; v. 28), so He drew His answer from that portion of Scripture. (It is not true that the Sadducees accepted only the Torah as authoritative.<sup>1</sup>) The Sadducees had misinterpreted what Moses had written about God's relationship to the patriarchs.

20:38 Jesus' point was that Moses spoke of God as presently being the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—all of whom had died. He inferred from this that God could only be their God if they would rise from the dead eventually. God will raise all people eventually. All "live to Him" in that sense. Therefore "to Him all are alive" (NIV). Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, whose souls are presently alive, will experience bodily resurrection at the Second Coming, and will live in the earthly kingdom as "sons of the resurrection" (v. 36).

20:39 Luke is the only evangelist who recorded the verbal reaction of certain scribes, who were presumably Pharisees. They agreed with Jesus about the resurrection and disagreed with the Sadducees. Their comment confirmed the truthfulness of Jesus' teaching about the resurrection, and it affirmed Him as being a reliable teacher.

20:40 Luke omitted the discussion about the greatest commandment that followed (Matt. 22:34-40; Mark 12:28-34). He had recorded a similar conversation earlier in his Gospel (10:25-28), and he may have wanted to avoid repetition. He skipped ahead to the end of Jesus' teaching in the temple that day, and he wrote that Jesus' answer ended the attempts to trap Him in His words.

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<sup>1</sup>Plummer, p. 470.

**5. Jesus' question about David's son 20:41-44 (cf. Matt. 22:41-46; Mark 12:35-37)**

Since Jesus' questioners had now fallen silent, He took the offensive and asked them a question. Its purpose was to clarify the identity of the Messiah.

20:41 Jesus addressed the religious leaders who had been questioning Him. Matthew has Jesus directing the question to the Pharisees (Matt. 22:41). Mark has Him asking the leaders in general how the scribes could say that Messiah was David's son (Mark 12:35). Luke has Jesus alluding, even more generally, to those who taught that Messiah was David's son. Luke's wording focuses on Jesus' question more directly by playing down the identity of the teachers. The people listening to the discussion were the crowds whom Jesus addressed, not just His critics (v. 45). The question itself amounted to: In what sense could Israel's teachers say that Messiah would be David's son?

"People who used the title 'Son of David' (18:38, 39; Mt. 21:9) clearly envisaged the Messiah as someone who would defeat all Israel's foes and bring in a new kingdom of David. They thought of David's son as similar to David in being, outlook and achievement. There are not wanting Jewish writings of the period which speak of the Son of David in terms of a narrow nationalism that looked for Israel's triumph over all its foes (*e.g.* the *Psalms of Solomon*). Jesus means us to see that the Messiah was not David's son in that petty sense. He was *Lord*, Lord of men's hearts and lives. To call Him *Lord* meaningfully is to see Him as greater by far than merely another David."<sup>1</sup>

20:42-43 Jesus' point was that Messiah had to be God as well as a descendant of David. He quoted Psalm 110:1 in order to show that this messianic psalm presented David as addressing

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<sup>1</sup>Morris, *The Gospel ...*, p. 293.

Messiah, who was seated at Yahweh's right hand, a position that only God Himself could occupy.

The early church's use of Psalm 110 shows that the Jews regarded it as messianic (cf. Acts 2:34; 7:56; Rom. 8:34; 1 Cor. 15:25; Eph. 1:20; Col. 3:1; Heb. 1:3, 13; 5:6; 7:17, 21; 8:1; 10:12-13; 1 Pet. 3:22; Rev. 3:21). It is the most quoted psalm in the New Testament. Further, the title "Lord," as David used it the second time (Heb. *adonay*) was a title of deity in the Old Testament. The psalm also spoke of Messiah coming from heaven to reign on the earth, another indication of His deity. In Acts 2:34 and 35, Peter explained that this verse taught Jesus' exaltation following His resurrection.

20:44 Jesus suggested the logical conclusion by framing it as a question. Messiah must be both deity and a descendant of David (cf. Rom 1:3-4). No synoptic writer recorded that anyone in the crowd gave Jesus an answer. Apparently no one offered one. The conclusion was obvious—but unacceptable to the religious leaders. They did not want to admit that Messiah was God. If they admitted this, they, being the leaders in charge of the nation, would be forced to prove that Jesus was not God, since He claimed to be Messiah. They did not want to do that because of popular support for Jesus' messiahship, and because they would have had to submit to Him.

"This title of 'Lord' was a more important title than Messiah, for it pictured Jesus' total authority and His ability and right to serve as an equal with God the Father."<sup>1</sup>

#### **6. Jesus' condemnation of the scribes 20:45-47 (cf. Matt. 23:1-39; Mark 12:38-40)**

Luke and Mark both recorded only a synopsis of Jesus' warning to the multitudes and His disciples, which Matthew narrated in detail. Perhaps Luke did so because he had already included Jesus' lengthy criticisms of the scribes in 11:37 through 54. Whereas the preceding verses criticized the teachers' doctrine (vv. 41-44), these verses condemned their practice.

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<sup>1</sup>Bock, "A Theology ...," p. 104.

Immorality often accompanies incorrect doctrine. Jesus attacked the scribes' attitudes particularly. These words constituted Jesus' final break with Israel's religious leaders.

20:45-46 Jesus primarily warned His disciples, and secondarily the "people" (Gr. *laos*) listening in—contrasted with the religious leaders—to avoid three characteristics of the lawyers: their pride, their greed, and their hypocrisy. Four of their common actions indicated their pride (v. 46). They desired personal admiration, respect, prominence, and honor. The learned teachers wore "long robes" (Gr. *stole*) in Israel.<sup>1</sup>

"The four phrases used in 20:46 to characterize the teachers of the law are all ways of indicating claims to advanced social position through nonverbal behavior. Each illuminates the attempt of the teachers of the law to lay claim to exalted social status."<sup>2</sup>

20:47 These leaders also greedily took money from widows who needed it more than they did, apparently violating the trust of these dependent women.<sup>3</sup> This may have included abusing the hospitality of widows who had little money.<sup>4</sup> Their long prayers presented the appearance of great piety, but they were offering them only to give people that impression.

The condemnation that they would receive, at the great white throne judgment, would be greater than what other unbelievers would receive who had not been guilty of those sins. Greater privilege means greater responsibility (cf. James 3:1).

This day of teaching in the temple had begun with the religious leaders questioning Jesus' authority (vv. 1-2). Jesus now concluded His public

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<sup>1</sup> *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, s.v. "stole," by U. Wilckens, 7(1971):690-91.

<sup>2</sup>Green, p. 726.

<sup>3</sup>See J. D. M. Derrett, "'Eating up the Houses of Widows': Jesus's Comment on Lawyers?" *Novum Testamentum* 14 (1972):1-9.

<sup>4</sup>Jeremias, *Jerusalem in ...*, p. 114. Cf. Morris, *The Gospel ...*, p. 294.

teaching in the temple courtyard with an authoritative evaluation of those who sought to evaluate Him. He was their Judge. They were not His judge.

**7. Jesus' commendation of a widow 21:1-4 (cf. Mark 12:41-44)**

The connecting link in Luke's narrative at this point is the mention of a widow (cf. 20:47). The contrast is between the false piety of the rich lawyers and the genuine piety of one poor woman. This is another lesson for Luke's readers on how one's faith should influence his or her attitude toward money.

Another explanation of the reason for Luke's use of this incident follows: The point is not to contrast the wealth of the religious leaders with the poverty of the widow, and the attitude of the leaders with that of the widow, but to lament "the travesty of a religious system that has as its effect the devouring of this widow's livelihood."<sup>1</sup> This view has not found as popular acceptance as the previous one.

21:1 Jesus observed wealthy people depositing their gifts in the temple offering receptacles.

"To be rich in ancient societies made one automatically part of the leadership classes, and so Jesus, in the last of the present series of critical engagement with segments of the leadership classes (from 19:47), now turns his gaze upon the rich."<sup>2</sup>

The "treasury" was a section of the court of the women in the temple complex. "The court of the women" obtained its name because women were not permitted to proceed farther into the temple precincts, not because only women used it. Both men and women used it.

"This court covered a space upwards of 200 feet square. All around ran a simple colonnade, and within it, against the wall, the thirteen chests, or

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<sup>1</sup>Green, p. 728.

<sup>2</sup>Nolland, *Luke 18:35—24:53*, p. 980.

'trumpets,' for charitable contributions were placed. These thirteen chests were narrow at the mouth and wide at the bottom, shaped like trumpets, whence their name. Their specific objects were carefully marked on them. Nine were for the receipt of what was legally due by worshippers; the other four for strictly voluntary gifts. ... We can also understand how, from the peculiar and known destination of each of these thirteen 'trumpets,' the Lord could distinguish the contributions of the rich who cast in 'of their abundance' from that of the poor widow who of her 'penury' [extreme poverty] had given 'all the living' that she had."<sup>1</sup>

Each "trumpet" bore a sign designating the particular unique monetary offering that the Israelite should deposit in it.

21:2 Jesus spotted a poor widow among the wealthy who was also making a contribution (cf. 20:45; Mark 12:43). The two small copper coins (Gr. *lepta*, lit. "the thin one") that Jesus observed her donating were together worth only about one sixty-fourth of a denarius, the day's wage of a workingman in Israel.

"The amount she gives would not buy a quarter of an hour of a day laborer's time."<sup>2</sup>

The *lepta* is the only Jewish coin mentioned in the New Testament. Some scholars believe that there is evidence that the priests announced the amount of each person's gift publicly as he or she gave it, but this is debatable.<sup>3</sup>

21:3 Jesus drew His disciples' attention to the woman. He prefaced His remark to them with His standard attention-getter ("Truly I say to you"). Her sacrificial gift was more, in His estimation, than that of all the other contributors.

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<sup>1</sup>Edersheim, *The Temple*, pp. 48-49.

<sup>2</sup>Nolland, *Luke 18:35—24:53*, p. 980.

<sup>3</sup>Marshall, *The Gospel ...*, p. 751.

21:4 The reason for Jesus' estimation was that she had given all that she had. The other contributors simply gave a part of what they possessed. Her gift represented total commitment to God and complete dependence on Him. It demonstrated the depth of her love for God and her trust that God would provide for her in spite of her deep poverty (cf. 1 Kings 17:8-16).

"It is not the amount that one gives to the cause of God that matters most, but the spirit in which the gift is bestowed."<sup>1</sup>

"We tend to appreciate the amount of a gift, not necessarily the sacrifice that went into the giving."<sup>2</sup>

"If the leaders of Jewish religion treated such pious people in the way criticized by Jesus in 20:47, it followed that the system was ripe for judgment. It is no accident that the prophecy of the destruction of the temple follows: the priests were no better than the scribes in their attitude to wealth (20:45f.)."<sup>3</sup>

#### **D. JESUS' TEACHING ABOUT THE DESTRUCTION OF THE TEMPLE 21:5-36**

The emphasis in Luke's version of this important discourse concerning the future, the Olivet Discourse, is a warning and an encouragement to persevere. Jesus gave this teaching so that His disciples would be ready for what was coming (cf. vv. 34-36). Luke had already reported much teaching about the future (12:35-48; 17:20-37). However some lessons bore repetition, such as the place of signs in signaling the end, and the importance of faithful perseverance. There is also new revelation. Particularly, the chronological relationship between the destruction of the temple and Jerusalem and Jesus' return was not clear before. Jesus now clarified that these events would not occur together, but some time would elapse between them.

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<sup>1</sup>Geldenhuis, p. 520.

<sup>2</sup>Bock, *Luke*, p. 527.

<sup>3</sup>Marshall, *The Gospel ...*, p. 752.

"Keep in mind that this was a message given to Jews by a Jew about the future of the Jewish nation. Though there are definite applications to God's people today, the emphasis is on Jerusalem, the Jews, and the temple. Our Lord was not discussing His coming for the church, for that can occur at any time and no signs need precede it (1 Cor. 15:51-58; 1 Thes. 4:13-18). 'For the Jews require a sign' (1 Cor. 1:22); the church looks for a Saviour (Phil. 3:20-21)."<sup>1</sup>

"Luke gives an account of the circumstances which should take place before and leading up to the destruction of Jerusalem; Matthew deals particularly with what was to take place afterward, leading on the second coming of Christ. Luke tells us something of that, but does not give us nearly as full and complete a report as Matthew does. Mark's account is very much like that of Matthew's, though not quite so full."<sup>2</sup>

**1. The setting and the warning about being misled 21:5-9 (cf. Matt. 24:1-6; Mark 13:1-6)**

21:5 Luke did not mention that Jesus gave this teaching on Mt. Olivet, exclusively to His disciples (Matt. 24:1-4; Mark 13:1-5). His omission of these facts created continuity in his narrative, and it connected this discourse with Jesus' preceding teaching in the temple, which He gave on the same day. It also has the effect of making this discourse the climax of that teaching, and it suggests that it had value for all the people.

"This [apparently] double audience is appropriate to the eschatological discourse because, while much of it is directly relevant to the disciple, it deals once again with the fate of Jerusalem, a topic of special importance for the people who are listening."<sup>3</sup>

Luke substituted a description of the comments of others, as Matthew did, for direct quotations from them, which Mark

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<sup>1</sup>Wiersbe, 1:260.

<sup>2</sup>Ironside, 2:616.

<sup>3</sup>Tannehill, *The Narrative ...*, 1:162.



narrated. He also mentioned that the temple's adornments of beautiful stones and vowed gifts impressed the onlookers. Matthew and Mark wrote that the temple stones and complex of buildings impressed them.

21:6 Luke's record of Jesus' reply to the comments of some who were talking about the temple is almost identical to what the other evangelists recorded. Jesus predicted the complete destruction of the temple (cf. 19:44; Mark 14:58; John 2:19; Acts 6:14).

21:7 Jesus' hearers—specifically Peter, James, John, and Andrew (Mark 13:3)—then asked Him when the destruction would take place, and what sign would precede it. They did not ask for a sign because they disbelieved Jesus, but because they wanted a warning of the disaster. "Sign" here has less the sense of proof (cf. 1:18; 11:29) than of portent or even omen.<sup>1</sup>

The coming destruction of the temple would constitute the end of Judaism as they knew it. When the Babylonians destroyed the first (Solomon's) temple in 586 B.C., the result was dispersion and disaster for the Jews. Now Jesus announced that another similar catastrophe was coming. They associated this with the Lord's return and the end of the present age, the present age being the age before the earthly messianic kingdom (cf. Matt. 24:2-3).

Significantly, Luke did not record the other questions that these people asked Him: about the sign of His coming, and of the end of the age (Matt. 24:3). Matthew and Mark concentrated on Jesus' answer to the question about Jesus' return, but Luke dealt mainly with His answer to the question about the temple's destruction. The destruction of the temple and Jesus' return would not coincide chronologically.

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<sup>1</sup>Green, p. 734.

The disciples' questions		Jesus' answers
"When will these things happen (come about)?" (Matt. 24:3; Mark 13:4; Luke 21:7)	This is a question about the time of the destruction of the temple.	Luke 21:8-9, 20-28
"What will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?" (Matt. 24:3) "What will be the sign when all these things are going to be fulfilled?" (Mark 13:4) "What will be the sign when these things are about to take place?" (Luke 21:7)	This is a question about the sign that would signal Jesus' coming and the end of the present age.	Matt. 24:4-31; Mark 13:5-27; Luke 21:10-19

21:8 Jesus proceeded immediately to warn His hearers about being misled about the time of the temple's destruction. There would be false messiahs who would appear and predict the imminent destruction of the temple (cf. Acts 5:36; 21:38).

21:9 They should not assume that wars and revolts were signs of the coming destruction either. Those things would happen, but their occurrence would not signal the immediate destruction of the temple.

## 2. The need for faithful perseverance 21:10-19 (cf. Matt. 24:7-10; Mark 13:8-13)

21:10 Luke's interruption of Jesus' teaching suggests a break of some kind in His thought. It seems clear from what follows, in verse 11 especially, that Jesus now broadened His perspective—from the wars that would precede the destruction of Jerusalem—to include later wars. He was referring specifically to the wars that would precede His return to the earth. The disciples may not have understood this difference when Jesus spoke these words, but by the time Luke wrote his Gospel, the difference had become clearer.

- 21:11 Later revelation gives us much more information about the wars, earthquakes, plagues, famines, terrors, and great heavenly signs that will precede the Second Coming (Rev. 6—18). The Old Testament prophets had predicted this time of turmoil on the earth, namely, the seven-year Tribulation (cf. Isa. 13:10, 13; 34:4; Jer. 30:4-7; Ezek. 14:21; 32:7-8; Dan. 9:26-27; Amos 8:9; Hag. 2:6; et al.). However Jesus' hearers did not know when it would come.
- 21:12 Before the calamities of the Tribulation, Jesus' disciples would experience persecution from their enemies, referred to generally here as "they." Jesus proceeded to describe what His disciples could expect—from the time He spoke until His return. He warned them about what to expect so they would be prepared for persecution.
- They would undergo examinations from hostile Jews in synagogues (cf. Matt. 10:17; Mark 13:9), and they would experience confinement in prisons. Gentiles also would arrest them, and bring them before kings and governors, because of their allegiance to Jesus (cf. Matt. 10:18; Mark 13:9).
- 21:13 Nevertheless, these situations would provide opportunities for them to bear witness for Him.
- 21:14-15 The disciples should not fret about their verbal defense ahead of time, but should rely on Jesus' promise to provide them with the "eloquence" (lit. mouth) or right words (cf. Exod. 4:11, 15; Ezek. 29:21) and the "wisdom" that they would need at the right time (cf. 12:11-12; Matt. 10:19-20; Mark 13:11). This would come to them through Jesus' (v. 15) and the Holy Spirit's ministry to them (Mark 13:11). They would discover that their witness would be very powerful (irresistible and irrefutable). We have examples of this happening in the early church (e.g., Acts 4:14; 6:10; 8:3; 12:4; 21:11; 22:4; 27:1; 28:17) and throughout church history. It will continue through the Tribulation.

"It is the preparation for the speech of defence [*sic*] (apology) that Jesus here forbids, not the preparation of a sermon."<sup>1</sup>

- 21:16-17 They would also experience betrayal by close relatives and friends (cf. Mark 13:12). Some of them would die for their testimonies. Hatred would increase rapidly against many more disciples, not just against those who would die (cf. Mark 13:13).
- 21:18 Jesus promised that He would keep them safe. This probably means that no harm would befall them without the Father's permission (v. 16; cf. Acts 27:34).<sup>2</sup> Some interpreters believe that it refers to their spiritual safety.<sup>3</sup> But physical safety seems to be in view throughout this passage.
- 21:19 By persevering faithfully when persecuted Jesus' followers would "gain [preserve] their lives" (Gr. *ktesesthe tas psychas hymon*). That is, they would not die before it was God's will for them to die. Some interpreters believe that this verse simply restates in different terms the principle that those who endure to the end will experience salvation (Matt. 24:13; Mark 13:13).<sup>4</sup> Those who remain faithful to the end of the Tribulation will enter the earthly kingdom without dying (Matt. 24:13; Mark 13:13).

### 3. The judgment coming on Jerusalem 21:20-24

Jesus now returned to the subject of when the temple would be destroyed (v. 7). The similar passages in Matthew and Mark are sufficiently different to alert the reader to the fact that they deal with a different incident from what Luke described (Matt. 24:15-22; Mark 13:14-20). Even some

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<sup>1</sup>Robertson, *Word Pictures ...*, 2:258.

<sup>2</sup>Geldenhuys, p. 527; Morris, *The Gospel ...*, p. 298; Lenski, p. 1017.

<sup>3</sup>E.g., Plummer, p. 480; Marshall, *The Gospel ...*, p. 769; Robertson, *Word Pictures ...*, 2:259; Ironside, 2:619; Liefeld, "Luke," p. 1021.

<sup>4</sup>E.g., Martin, p. 257.

commentators who believe that Luke depended heavily on Mark for his material admit this difference.<sup>1</sup>

21:20 The sign that Jerusalem's destruction was imminent would be the presence of surrounding armies (cf. v. 7). This happened when Titus encircled the city with troops and put it under siege, beginning in A.D. 68.

21:21 When this happened the Jews should get away from the city. Those in it should leave, those outside it should not enter it, and those living in the surrounding area should move farther from it. This is the very opposite of what people at that time would normally do: They would normally flee into the city for protection. God's punishment on the city would descend shortly, in fulfillment of prophecy (Dan. 9:26). Jerusalem was doomed.

Earlier Luke recorded Jesus' teaching about the destruction that would come on the land of Israel just before His return (17:22-37). Matthew and Mark wrote that Jesus also gave that teaching in the Olivet Discourse (Matt. 24:15-22; Mark 13:14-20). But, though that teaching is similar, it is different from what Jesus announced here. Here He predicted the destruction of Jerusalem that happened in A.D. 70.

"In fact, when the Romans were beginning to invest [surround] Jerusalem, the local Christians mostly fled to Pella, one of the cities of Decapolis and situated in trans-Jordan, south of the sea of Galilee (Eusebius says they went in response to 'an oracle given by revelation', which may mean Jesus' words or a later injunction of a similar kind from a Christian prophet; see *Historia Ecclesiastica* III. v. 3)."<sup>2</sup>

21:22 The reason for Jerusalem's destruction was that God would be punishing her (i.e., her people, the Jews) for their sins, as the writing prophets had predicted He would. Often in the Old

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<sup>1</sup>E.g., Marshall, *The Gospel ...*, p. 770-71.

<sup>2</sup>Morris, *The Gospel ...*, pp. 298-99.

Testament the prophets warned the people that sin would lead to judgment.

21:23 The great distress of pregnant women and nursing mothers represents the trouble that all people in and around Jerusalem would face. God's wrath, and the wrath of Israel's enemy, would also be great.

21:24 Some of the Jews would die in battle, and others would become captives and have to leave the land of Israel. Gentiles would dominate Jerusalem itself. This would last until the end of "the times of the Gentiles." This is a phrase that describes the period during which Gentiles, rather than Jews, would control the fate of Jerusalem (Dan. 2; 7).

The "times of the Gentiles" began when Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem, in 586 B.C., and will continue until Jesus Christ returns at the Second Coming (cf. Dan. 2:34-35, 45; Rom. 11:25). Throughout this entire long period of history, including the present, Gentiles have controlled the fate of Jerusalem.<sup>1</sup> Luke's reference to "the times of the Gentiles" is consistent with his interest in Gentiles.

The fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 did not fulfill this prophecy completely, because Jesus said that Jerusalem would be trampled underfoot by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles would end. Gentiles continued to control Israel's fate after A.D. 70 and still do today. Also, celestial phenomena and the return of Jesus were to take place at the end (21:25-28), but these things did not happen in A.D. 70.

"Jerusalem" in this entire discourse does not just mean the city but is used as a figure of speech (a synecdoche) for the whole nation of which it is the capital. Sometimes the city is clearly in view, but at other times what Jerusalem represents (Israel) is obviously the subject.

Again, careful comparison with the similar passages in Matthew and Mark reveals that they were recording Jesus' prediction of the attack on

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<sup>1</sup>See Pentecost, *The Words ...*, p. 399; idem, *Things to Come*, pp. 314-18; John F. Walvoord, "The Times of the Gentiles," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 125:497 (January-March 1968):3-9.

Jerusalem just before His return (cf. Zech. 14:1-2). Luke recorded His prediction of Jerusalem's destruction that happened in A.D. 70 in verses 8, 9, and 20 through 24. According to Josephus, 1,100,000 Jews perished in the destruction of Jerusalem then, and 97,000 were taken captive.<sup>1</sup> This seems to be an exaggeration, but the number must have been very large.<sup>2</sup>

Acts 3:19 records Peter's invitation to the Jews to repent and to return to a proper relationship to God, with the result that "times of refreshing" might come from the Lord's presence. This is probably a reference to the inauguration of the earthly messianic kingdom (cf. Zech. 12:10-14). If the Jewish nation as a whole had believed in Jesus during His earthly ministry, how could Jesus' predictions about the destruction of Jerusalem have taken place? Probably the Romans would have invaded Jerusalem sooner than they did, the Rapture would have happened (cf. John 14:1-3), the seven-year Tribulation would have followed, and Jesus would have returned to set up His earthly kingdom. All of this could have happened within about 10 years from the time that Peter extended his invitation.

#### **4. The second coming of the Son of Man 21:25-28 (cf. Matt. 24:29-31; Mark 13:24-27)**

Luke omitted Jesus' warning about false prophets that Matthew and Mark recorded (Matt. 24:23-28; Mark 13:21-23). Perhaps he did this because he had included similar warnings in his account of Jesus' earlier teachings (17:21-23; 21:8). Clearly Jesus was now speaking again of events that would precede His return to the earth (v. 27).

"Jesus is pointing to signs that will precede His coming and teaching His followers not to be discouraged."<sup>3</sup>

21:25-26 Tribulation conditions at the end of "the times of the Gentiles" are again in view (cf. vv. 10-19; Rev. 6—18). The scope of these crises is global, not just in Judea (cf. vv. 20-21). Probably we should understand the roaring of the sea literally, since Jesus also mentioned waves. Evidently the disturbances in the heavens will affect the tides and waves, causing great insecurity and turmoil. Global catastrophes will foreshadow

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<sup>1</sup>Josephus, *The Wars ...*, 6:9:3.

<sup>2</sup>Robertson, *Word Pictures ...*, 2:260.

<sup>3</sup>Morris, *The Gospel ...*, p. 300.

even greater trouble to come for those living on the earth in the Tribulation, and they will fear greatly. The universe will appear to be about to break up (cf. Rev. 6—18).

21:27 When conditions are at their worst, people living on the earth then will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory (Dan. 7:13; cf. Luke 9:36; 2 Pet. 1:16-17). He will come to set up the earthly messianic kingdom and to reign on the earth for 1,000 years (Dan. 7:14; Rev. 20:1-6). The cloud may be the Shekinah (the glory of God's presence; cf. Acts 1:9-11).

21:28 These calamities should have the result that believers living then will realize that the Second Coming is very near. Consequently they should prepare to meet the Lord. The approach of their "redemption" refers to the approach of the final stage of their redemption, namely, their entering the safety of the earthly kingdom (cf. Ps. 111:9; Isa. 63:4; Dan. 4:34). When Jesus returns He will remove believers from the Tribulation by ending it and allowing them to enter His earthly kingdom. This verse contains encouragement for believers. Lifting up the head is symbolic of seeing hope and rejoicing (cf. Judg. 8:28; Job 10:15; Ps. 24:7; 83:3). Again, Jesus counseled doing the opposite of what was normal. Normally people would hunker down and cover their heads in such conditions.

**5. The certainty of these events 21:29-33 (cf. Matt. 24:32-35; Mark 13:28-31)**

Jesus told the parable of the fig tree to illustrate the certainty of what He had just prophesied. He then gave other assurances of its fulfillment. Luke omitted Jesus' statement that no one would know the day or hour when He would return (Matt. 24:36; Mark 13:32). He may have felt that this would weaken the force of these predictions, and he recorded a similar statement later (Acts 1:7). He also omitted Jesus' reference to the sign of Noah and the parables of the one taken and the other left behind (Matt. 24:37-41). Luke had recorded this teaching earlier when Jesus gave it in another context (17:26-27, 34-35).



"Jesus moves from prophetic discourse to pastoral exhortation concerning faithful life in light of the events he has anticipated."<sup>1</sup>

21:29-31 This parable illustrates the truth that the earthly kingdom's appearing will follow the signs that Jesus just identified (vv. 10-11, 25-26). It will follow as certainly as summer follows the budding of trees in the spring. Jesus here connected the beginning of the earthly kingdom with His return to the earth (v. 27).

Since the fig tree was a symbol of Israel (cf. Isa. 27:12-13) some interpreters have understood this parable to mean that when Israel revives as a nation the earthly kingdom is near. However it is a mistake to take the establishment of the modern State of Israel as the fulfillment of this prophecy, because the earthly kingdom of Messiah has not followed that event. Furthermore, Israel's revival will take place when Jesus returns to the earth (Zech. 12:10).

21:32 This verse begins Jesus' final word confirming the certainty of His prophecy. He introduced it with the solemn "Truly I say to you" or "I tell you the truth" (NIV).

There are several ways that "this generation" has been interpreted: (1) It may refer to unbelievers generally, without reference to any particular time at which they live.<sup>2</sup> (2) It may refer to the unbelieving Jews who were alive when Jesus spoke, as it usually does in the Gospels (cf. 3:7; 7:31; 9:41; 11:29-32, 50-51; 17:25; Mark 11:14; Acts 2:40). Jesus may have meant that that generation would not disappear until the fulfillment of all that He had predicted had begun.<sup>3</sup> (3) "This generation" may refer to the type of Jews that Jesus contended with during the Passion Week.<sup>4</sup> (4) The best interpretation, I believe, is that "this generation" refers to the generation referred to in verse 25, which will, in the distant

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<sup>1</sup>Green, p. 741.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 742.

<sup>3</sup>Plummer, p. 485.

<sup>4</sup>Lenski, pp. 1026-27.

future, see the beginning of the end in the cosmic signs.<sup>1</sup> Jesus meant that Israelites, ethnic Jews, will not pass away until all these things have been fulfilled.

The destruction of Jerusalem was the beginning of the fulfillment of what Jesus had predicted in this discourse. Obviously all the things that He predicted here did not happen within the lifetime of His hearers. He evidently regarded the beginning of fulfillment as a guarantee of complete fulfillment. This was a common Semitic viewpoint. The Semites often regarded a part of the whole as the whole (cf. Deut. 26:5-10; 1 Kings 13:32; Jer. 31:5; 2 Sam. 5:6-10; Rev. 14:1; 22:1; Rom. 15:19-24). The name that some scholars have given this viewpoint is "representative universalism."<sup>2</sup> It is difficult to tell in this discourse when Jesus was talking about the destruction of Jerusalem and when He was talking about the Second Coming.<sup>3</sup>

21:33 "Heaven and earth" is a merism for the universe.<sup>4</sup> Jesus meant that the universe would someday pass away (cf. Rev. 21:1), but His Word would not pass away (cf. 16:17; Ps. 102:25-27; 119:160; Isa. 40:6-8; 51:6; Matt. 5:18). This is a strong way of affirming the certainty of what He had just predicted. It also implied that Jesus had divine authority.

#### **6. The concluding exhortation to watchfulness 21:34-36 (cf. Matt. 24:42; Mark 13:33-37)**

Luke concluded his account of the Olivet Discourse with Jesus' exhortation to remain ready for what He had predicted. Jesus' words presupposed an interval before His coming, but He allowed that His coming might occur in

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<sup>1</sup>Ironside, 2:630; Bock, *Luke*, pp. 538-39; M. Bailey, "Luke," pp. 146-47; Wiersbe, 1:263. For a discussion of other interpretations, see also my note on Matthew 24:34; Maddox, pp. 111-15; and Morris, *The Gospel ...*, pp. 300-1.

<sup>2</sup>See A. J. Mattill Jr., "Representative Universalism and the Conquest of Canaan," *Concordia Theological Monthly* 35:1 (1967):8-17.

<sup>3</sup>Robertson, *Word Pictures ...*, 2:261.

<sup>4</sup>A merism is a figure of speech that involves the substitution of two contrasting or opposite parts in place of the whole.

the lifetime of His hearers. Nothing that He said precluded the passing of millennia before His coming.

21:34-35 "This day" refers to the day of Christ's return, not the destruction of Jerusalem, since it would come on all earth-dwellers (v. 35). Jesus did not want any of His disciples to be unprepared for His return. He did not want them to be so self-indulgent and selfish that they disregarded His return. In that case it might catch them like a trap. Even though believers should be able to anticipate the Lord's return by the signs that precede it (vv. 10-11, 25-26), they may become so entangled in the present that they lose sight of it.

21:36 Praying brings spiritual strength to maintain alertness. It enables disciples to withstand the temptation to depart from God's will and consequently to be able to stand before the Son of Man when He returns without shame. Faithful perseverance in the midst of persecution is in view (cf. v. 19).

The people who first heard Jesus give this exhortation needed to trust in Him and commit themselves to remaining true to Him, since hard times lay ahead of them. This was especially true of Jesus' original disciples. If the Tribulation had begun shortly after Jesus' ascension, some of them who became Christians after the Rapture would have been in the Tribulation and would have anticipated His return in just a few years. After the church began on the day of Pentecost, believers could have been raptured at any moment. After the Rapture, the people who became believers could anticipate the Lord returning at the end of the Tribulation, and they would need to be ready.

Luke's original readers evidently lived after Pentecost and before the destruction of Jerusalem.<sup>1</sup> Most of them lived to witness the fulfillment of Jesus' prediction of Jerusalem's destruction. This event would have encouraged them to believe His teaching about His return and to prepare for it. They could have met the Lord any time if the Rapture had occurred during their lifetime.

As history has unfolded, we have seen that the Second Coming is still future. Before that happens, the Tribulation must occur, and before that,

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<sup>1</sup>See my introductory comments on the date of composition of this Gospel.

the Rapture. The New Testament apostles voiced many of the same warnings urging watchfulness, in view of the Rapture, that Jesus gave in view of His second coming (e.g., Rom. 13:13; Gal. 5:21; Eph. 5:18; 1 Thess. 5:4-11, 17; et al.). After the Rapture, people who become Christians will need to remain vigilant because they will go through intense persecution in the Tribulation. For them, the Second Coming will be only a few years away.

Jesus' exhortation to be watchful is therefore applicable to all disciples, regardless of when they may live before His second coming. Vigilance is essential because the Lord's return is imminent (i.e., impending, overhanging) regardless of when we live.

In all the accounts of the Olivet Discourse it is clear that Jesus was giving more revelation concerning events leading up to His second coming. He was not describing what would happen before the Rapture of the church occurs. He was expounding Old Testament revelation concerning Israel's future (in Daniel and Zechariah mainly), not the future of the church. Many people have mistakenly interpreted the Olivet Discourse as containing revelation concerning the end of the Church Age. Really it gives information about the end of the Inter-advent Age.

The church is not in view in the Olivet Discourse. Posttribulationists have confused many Christians at this point. Posttribulationists believe the Rapture and the Second Coming will occur simultaneously. Pretribulationists believe the seven-year Tribulation separates the two comings: the Lord's coming for the church (the Rapture) and His coming with the church (the Second Coming).

#### **E. A SUMMARY OF JESUS' MINISTRY IN JERUSALEM 21:37-38**

This summary is unique to Luke's Gospel. The writer included it to round off this phase of Jesus' ministry.

21:37      During the Passion Week, Jesus spent most of His days teaching in the temple area, probably Tuesday through Thursday. He must have presented Himself as the God-man and called on His hearers to believe on Him. At night He would go out to Mt. Olivet, probably with the Twelve, in order to pray and sleep. He may have stayed with Mary, Martha, and Lazarus in their Bethany home, which stood on that mount (cf. Matt. 21:17). Possibly He slept out of doors, perhaps in the garden

of Gethsemane. There were multitudes of pilgrims in Jerusalem at Passover time, and many of them slept in the open air. Normally the population of Jerusalem was between 200,000 and 250,000, but during Passover it increased to between 2 and 3 million.<sup>1</sup>

"... taking into account this extraordinary influx, the Rabbis distinctly state, that during the feasts—except on the first night—the people might camp outside Jerusalem, but within the limits of a sabbath-day's journey. This ... also explains how, on such occasions, our Lord so often retired to the Mount of Olives."<sup>2</sup>

21:38 Again Luke mentioned how eager all the "people" in general (Gr. *laos*) were to hear Jesus (cf. 4:14-15, 22, 32, 37, 42; 5:19, 26, 29). Their response contrasted with that of the "crowds" (Gr. *ochloi*), who pressed Jesus to receive something from Him, and the nation's leaders, who listened to Him only to do Him harm. Perhaps Luke noted the people's eager responsiveness to the gospel in order to encourage his readers in their evangelism.

## VII. JESUS' PASSION, RESURRECTION, AND ASCENSION CHS. 22—24

Luke's unique rendition of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus has several important characteristics. It contains more of Jesus' farewell comments to the disciples at the Last Supper compared with the other synoptic accounts. Luke's literary model in verses 1 through 38 was evidently the farewell discourse.<sup>3</sup> It also clarifies some of the events surrounding Jesus' trials. It provides additional details of the crucifixion, and it includes other post-resurrection appearances of Jesus. Generally Luke pictured Jesus as a righteous man suffering unjustly though pursuing the path that His Father, the Old Testament prophets, and He had foreordained

<sup>1</sup>Josephus, *The Wars ...*, 2:14:3; Edersheim, *The Life ...*, 1:116; idem, *The Temple*, p. 31, f. 1.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Green, p. 771.

and foretold. Though this is the concluding section of this Gospel, Luke left an ending to which he could later attach the Book of Acts smoothly.

### A. THE PLOT TO ARREST JESUS 22:1-6

This significant plot is the core around which several other incidents cluster.

#### 1. The leaders' desire 22:1-2 (cf. Matt. 26:1-5; Mark 14:1-2)

22:1 The leaders of Israel had already decided to do away with Jesus ("put Him to death," v. 2). His presence in Jerusalem for the Passover season gave them a chance to arrest Him and to put Him on trial before Pilate and Herod Antipas. Both of these rulers were in Jerusalem for this occasion.

Luke mentioned the seven-day Feast of Unleavened Bread as the better known of the two feasts, whereas Matthew and Mark both featured the Passover in their accounts. Greek readers may have known of this feast more commonly as the Feast of Unleavened Bread than as Passover.

22:2 The Jewish religious leaders took the initiative against Jesus, but the common people did not share their antagonism. The chief priests were mainly political leaders who owed their jobs to Rome. The situation also required the legal expertise of the scribes or lawyers. The Jewish leaders could not discover a way to arrest Jesus without causing a riot—until Judas came forward with his plan.

#### 2. Judas' offer 22:3-6 (cf. Matt. 26:14-16; Mark 14:10-11)

Luke omitted the story of Jesus' anointing in Bethany (Matt. 26:6-13; Mark 14:3-9; John 12:2-8). He had already narrated a similar event that happened on another occasion (7:36-50). With this omission Luke allowed the story of the plot to arrest Jesus to flow more smoothly.

22:3 Only Luke and John mentioned Satan's entering into Judas at this time (cf. John 13:2). Perhaps Luke wanted to clarify that

Jesus' death was due to more than just human scheming (cf. Acts 5:3; 1 Cor. 2:8). It was part of a cosmic plan to destroy the God-man (cf. 4:1-12). Ironically, Satan's participation in Jesus' arrest led to his own downfall (cf. Col. 2:15; Heb. 2:14). Luke also clarified Judas' identity ("the one called Iscariot") for his readers (cf. 6:16).

- 22:4 Luke also noted Judas' contact with the Jewish "officers" of the temple guards. It was probably these temple officers, along with Roman soldiers, who arrested Jesus (cf. John 18:3). Perhaps Judas went to them because he originally thought that Jesus would be arrested in the temple area.
- 22:5-6 Judas was as hypocritical as the religious leaders. He, too, sought to avoid arousing the people. The theme of joy in Luke now crops up again, but this time it is Jesus' enemies' delight at the prospect of His fall.

**B. THE PREPARATIONS FOR THE PASSOVER 22:7-13 (CF. MATT. 26:17-19; MARK 14:12-16)**

Luke recorded more details of these preparations than the other synoptic evangelists did. Against the backdrop of a plot to arrest Him, Jesus comes across as the One who is in control and is quietly directing the events leading to His own crucifixion (cf. 19:29-35).

- 22:7 The Jews killed their Passover lambs on the fourteenth of Nisan and ate them after sundown. Sundown began the fifteenth. The fourteenth would have been Thursday until sundown. This verse marks the transition to Thursday from Wednesday, the day on which Jesus had His controversy with the leaders in the temple and gave the Olivet Discourse (20:1—21:36). This is another of Luke's benchmarks that signals Jesus' relentless movement toward the Cross.

Luke evidently referred to this day as "the first day of Unleavened Bread" because it was the first day of the combined feasts of Passover and Unleavened Bread. Another possibility is that this was the day on which the Jews removed

all leaven from their homes in preparation for the Passover.<sup>1</sup> The Jews referred to the whole seven-day period as "the Feast of Unleavened Bread" sometimes, and as "the Passover," or simply "the Feast," sometimes (cf. 2:42; 22:1; Acts 12:3-4).

- 22:8-9 Only Luke recorded the names of the disciples whom Jesus sent to prepare for their Passover meal. Peter and John, of course, later became Jesus' chief servants as leaders of the Christians in Jerusalem (cf. Acts 3:1-2; 8:14). This detail links Luke's Gospel and Acts. Luke also featured Jesus' initiation of plans to observe the Passover. These plans were confidential in order to avoid premature arrest.
- 22:10 It was unusual for men to carry pitchers of water.<sup>2</sup> Usually women did this task. Men carried water in leather skins.<sup>3</sup> The man carrying the pitcher appears to have been a prearranged signal that was part of Jesus' plan in order to avoid an early arrest. Judas would not have known where the upstairs room was, since Jesus revealed its location only to Peter and John, according to Luke.
- 22:11 The title "Teacher" (Gr. *didaskalos*) was one that Jesus' disciples used to describe Him (cf. 6:40). Evidently the owner of the upper room was a disciple of Jesus.
- 22:12 The "upstairs room" probably stood on the flat roof of a typical Israelite's house and served as an extra room. It would have been accessible by an external stairway. The owner would have at least furnished it with cushions for reclining on.<sup>4</sup> According to tradition, this room was located on Mt. Zion, just to the north and east of the Hinnom Valley, and west of the City of David.<sup>5</sup>
- 22:13 This verse underlines Jesus' prophetic foresight and sovereign control. It also sets the stage for what follows.

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<sup>1</sup>Morris, *The Gospel ...*, p. 304.

<sup>2</sup>Barclay, p. 276.

<sup>3</sup>Marshall, *The Gospel ...*, p. 791; Liefeld, "Luke," p. 1025.

<sup>4</sup>Jeremias, *The Eucharistic ...*, p. 48, footnote 1.

<sup>5</sup>See the diagram "Jerusalem in New Testament Times" at the end of these notes.



### C. EVENTS IN THE UPSTAIRS ROOM 22:14-38

Luke included more information about what Jesus said and did on this occasion than Matthew or Mark did. John's account is the fullest of all (John 13—17).

#### 1. The Passover meal 22:14-18

Luke introduced this meal, then he narrated Jesus' words of welcome to His disciples and His drinking of a cup of wine.

**The writer's introduction to these events 22:14 (cf. Matt. 26:20; Mark 14:17)**

Luke continued to imply Jesus' authority in his account of the events that these verses introduce. "The hour" in view is the hour (time) at which Jesus had determined to eat the Passover meal with His disciples.<sup>1</sup> Luke probably called the Twelve "apostles," here because what took place in the upstairs room was foundational for the church, and the apostles were its leaders (Eph. 2:20). "Disciples" emphasizes the Twelve's role as learners, and "apostles" emphasizes their role as representatives.

#### **Jesus' words of welcome 22:15-16**

These verses record Jesus' introduction to what followed, and they are similar to the welcoming words of a host before his guests begin their meal. This is the seventh of nine meal scenes that Luke recorded in his Gospel (cf. 5:29-32; 7:36-50; 9:12-17; 10:38-42; 11:37-54; 14:1-24; 22:14-20; 24:28-32; 24:36-42). And it is the most important one.

22:15 Jesus' eager desire (Gr. *epithymia epethymesa*, lit. "with desire I have desired") to eat this meal with the Twelve was due to the teaching that He would give them. It also arose from the fact that this would be His last fellowship meal with them. It was also the last Passover to be celebrated under the old Mosaic Covenant in the will of God.

"With a Sacrament did Jesus begin His Ministry: it was that of separation and consecration in

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<sup>1</sup>See Harold W. Hoehner, "Jesus' Last Supper," in *Essays in Honor of J. Dwight Pentecost*, pp. 63-74.

Baptism. With a second Sacrament did He close His Ministry: it was that of gathering together and fellowship in the Lord's Supper."<sup>1</sup>

22:16 Jesus announced that He would never again eat (a strong negative statement in Greek: *ou me phago*) another Passover meal until what the Passover anticipated, namely, His own sacrificial death, had transpired (cf. 9:31).

"When His [earthly] kingdom would arrive, the Passover would be fulfilled for God would have brought His people safely into their rest."<sup>2</sup>

Jesus would eat with these men "again" (next) in the earthly kingdom, specifically at the messianic banquet at the beginning of the millennial kingdom. This announcement probably contributed to the apostles' expectation that the earthly kingdom would begin very soon (cf. Acts 1:6).

### The drinking of the cup 22:17-18

22:17 There were four times that participants in the Passover meal drank together, commonly referred to as four "cups." The Passover opened with a prayer of thanksgiving, followed by the drinking of the first cup. Then the celebrants ate the bitter herbs and sang Psalms 113 through 114. Next they drank the second cup and began eating the lamb and unleavened bread. Then they drank the third cup and sang Psalms 115 through 118. Finally they drank the fourth cup. The cup in view in this verse may have been the first of the four.<sup>3</sup> If it was, Jesus evidently did not participate in the drinking of the following three cups (v. 18).<sup>4</sup> The other Gospel writers did not refer to the first cup, so this may have been the third cup, the so-called cup of redemption. This view assumes that Jesus participated in the drinking of the first and second cups, which would have been normal.

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<sup>1</sup>Edersheim, *The Life ...*, 2:491.

<sup>2</sup>Martin, p. 259.

<sup>3</sup>Nolland, *Luke 18:35—24:53*, p. 1056.

<sup>4</sup>Jeremias, *The Eucharistic ...*, pp. 211-12.

Jesus continued to lead by giving thanks to God and then encouraging the apostles to partake. His action was similar to making a toast.

22:18 "From now on" could mean either "after this cup" or "after this Passover." I favor the view that Jesus was referring to the cup, not the Passover, and that this was the third cup. Luke rearranged the order of events in the upper room considerably, as comparison with the other Gospels seems to indicate. Matthew and Mark have Jesus saying what Luke recorded in these verses just after what Luke recorded in verse 20.

Jesus' announcement that He would not drink the fruit of the vine again, until He did so with His guests in the earthly kingdom, was not customary. It reinforced His previous statement that the earthly kingdom would come. Jesus was punctuating the certainty of the earthly kingdom's coming. This was necessary since His impending arrest and death would cause the apostles to question whether it would come.

## 2. The institution of the Lord's Supper 22:19-20 (cf. Matt. 26:26-29; Mark 14:22-25; 1 Cor. 11:23-26)

Luke's account points out Jesus' linking of His self-giving with the bread, and Jesus' giving of Himself for His disciples specifically (cf. Matt. 26:28; Mark 14:24; Jer. 31:31-34; 32:37-40). According to Matthew and Mark, Jesus announced that He would not drink the fruit of the vine until He did so in the earthly kingdom—after instituting the Lord's Supper (Matt. 26:29; Mark 14:25). Perhaps Jesus repeated this announcement then. If so, this would have been Jesus' third reference to the coming earthly kingdom (cf. vv. 16, 18). But Luke probably rearranged the order of events and recorded Jesus instituting the Lord's Supper after His promise not to drink again.

Luke's account is more similar to Paul's, in 1 Corinthians 11, than it is to Matthew's or Mark's. This seems to be one indication that Paul influenced Luke as he wrote his Gospel, as well as Acts. Alternatively, Luke may have influenced Paul.

22:19 Jesus invested the common elements of unleavened bread and diluted wine with new significance. The bread represented His

body given sacrificially for His disciples.<sup>1</sup> The disciples were to eat it, as He did, symbolizing their appropriation of Him and their consequent union with Him.

22:20 The cup, representing what was in it, symbolized the ratification of the New Covenant with Jesus' blood (Jer. 31:31-34; cf. Exod. 24:8).<sup>2</sup>

"... Jesus meant that the new covenant would take effect through that which the contents of the cup signified, namely, his sacrificial death."<sup>3</sup>

"Every covenant among the ancients was sealed by some symbolic act."<sup>4</sup>

Much of the New Testament is an exposition of the significance of Jesus' sacrificial death, which He referred to so concisely here. Luke emphasized that Jesus gave His body and poured out His blood "for you." However, the phrase "in remembrance of Me" (v. 19) encouraged the disciples to focus on the person of Jesus Christ and not just the benefits of His death for them.<sup>5</sup> Jesus commanded His disciples to remember Him. This is not optional for disciples of Jesus (cf. 1 Cor. 11:24-26).

### **3. Jesus' announcement of His betrayal 22:21-23 (cf. Matt. 26:21-25; Mark 14:18-21; John 13:21-30)**

Luke placed Jesus' announcement of His betrayal after the institution of the Lord's Supper, whereas Matthew and Mark located it before that event in their Gospels. The effect of Luke's placement is that the betrayal appears

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<sup>1</sup>See Lenski, p. 1048, for the Lutheran view that the bread was Christ's actual body.

<sup>2</sup>See Renald E. Showers, *There Really Is a Difference*, ch. 10: "The New Covenant," pp. 99-111; and Rodney J. Decker, "The Church's Relationship to the New Covenant," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 152:607 (July-September 1995):290-305; 608 (October-December 1995):431-56.

<sup>3</sup>Robert L. Saucy, *The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism*, p. 126. Cf. Marshall, *The Gospel ...*, p. 806.

<sup>4</sup>F. Godet, *A Commentary on the Gospel of St. Luke*, p. 466.

<sup>5</sup>See Eugene H. Merrill, "Remembering: A Central Theme in Biblical Worship," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 43:1 (March 2000):27-36.

especially wicked in view of Jesus' self-sacrifice for His disciples. The connecting link is the reference to Jesus' death.

22:21 Jesus shocked His disciples with the announcement that one of them would betray Him. The reference to the betrayer's hand being "on" (or at, Gr. *epi*) the table with Jesus' own hand highlights their close relationship and the hypocrisy of Judas' betrayal.

"Jesus characterizes Judas as a second Ahithophel, the man who turned traitor to David and ended by hanging himself."<sup>1</sup>

22:22 Jesus then affirmed again that He was going (to die) and thereby fulfill God's plan (cf. Acts 2:23; 10:42; 17:31; Rom. 1:4). Luke used a strong word (Gr. *horismemon*, "determined" or "decreed," NIV) to stress God's sovereign control in these affairs. The title "Son of Man" helped the disciples appreciate that this was part of God's will for the Messiah who would reign. Jesus pronounced "woe" on the betrayer—as He had on the religious leaders and on Jerusalem—for betraying Him. There is a play on the word "man" (Gr. *anthropos*). The worst of men would betray the best of men. Note also the reference to both divine foreordination and human responsibility in this verse (cf. Acts 2:23).<sup>2</sup>

22:23 Luke is the only evangelist who recorded this conversation. It reveals the disciples' concern and the extent of Judas' hypocrisy. Judas still had an opportunity to repent, but he did not. It was especially despicable for Judas to share a meal with Jesus, which implied mutual commitment, and then betray Him.

#### **4. Teaching about the disciples' service 22:24-30**

Again Luke apparently rearranged the chronological order of events in the upper room to make certain points.

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<sup>1</sup>Lenski, p. 1055.

<sup>2</sup>See Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 1:544-46.

### The disciples' concern for their greatness 22:24-27

22:24 Following Jesus' announcement of His self-sacrifice and the announcement of His betrayal, the disciples' argument over which of them was the greatest appears thoroughly inappropriate (cf. Matt. 20:17-28; Mark 10:32-45).

22:25 Jesus used the situation as an opportunity to teach them the importance of humility—again (cf. 9:46-48). Luke's recording of the lesson illustrates its vital importance for all disciples.

In the world, authority over other people constitutes greatness, but in Jesus' kingdom, service of others does. Pagan rulers have two objectionable characteristics at least: First, they lord it over or tyrannize others (cf. 2 Cor. 1:24; 1 Pet. 5:3). Second, they take titles to themselves that indicate their superiority over others, such as "Benefactor" (cf. Matt. 23:7). Actually Jesus is the only true Benefactor (Gr. *evergete*, cf. Acts 10:38).

"Private benefaction was the primary means by which the wealthy were legitimated as those most deserving of public office and prestige in the community."<sup>1</sup>

22:26 Typically the younger serve the older, and the servants serve the leaders. The aged enjoyed great veneration in the ancient Near East. However, with disciples, all must serve regardless of age or position (cf. Acts 5:6; 1 Tim. 5:1; Titus 2:6; 1 Pet. 5:5). Luke's selection of terminology ("is greatest," "youngest," "leader," and "servant," lit. deacon) in this pericope suggests that he may have had church leaders especially in mind.<sup>2</sup> Jesus' point was quite clear: He did not measure greatness as the world does.

22:27 In the ancient Near East the person waited on at dinner had a higher social position than the waiter who served him or her. The waiter was often a slave. Jesus had behaved like a servant (Gr. *diakonon*, "one who serves" in a lowly way) by serving

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<sup>1</sup>Green, p. 768.

<sup>2</sup>Marshall, *The Gospel ...*, p. 813. See Alexander Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, pp. 17-31.

others, even His disciples (cf. John 13:12-17). They should do likewise. If serving was not below their Master, it should not be below His servants. They should seek opportunities for service rather than status, and they should imitate their Lord rather than pagans.

This lesson is vital for all disciples of Jesus. Luke's original Gentile readers would have been in need of it since they lived in a culture in which pagan values dominated life, as we do.

### The future role of the Twelve 22:28-30

Jesus balanced the need for humility and service with a promise of future reward. Though the disciples who were present are in view, the implication of reward for other faithful disciples is strong. Jesus evidently repeated this promise in different words from an earlier incident (Matt. 19:28).

"This generous eulogy of the disciples for their fidelity has the effect of minimizing the fault mentioned just before. Lk. was aware of the fact. It is another instance of his 'sparing of the Twelve'."<sup>1</sup>

22:28 The basis of the reward is essentially faithfulness to Jesus (cf. Matt. 19:28). This is always the basis for believers' rewards, works being the consequence of faithful discipleship. Here the manifestation of faithfulness was standing by Jesus in His past "trials" (Gr. *pairasmos*, i.e., dangers, troubles; cf. Acts 20:19). Satan was behind these difficulties.

22:29-30 The Father had delegated authority to the Son to rule in the earthly kingdom. Likewise the Son delegated authority to His disciples to rule under Him in the earthly kingdom (cf. John 20:21; 2 Tim. 2:12; Rev. 2:26-27; 3:21). They would enjoy table fellowship with Jesus then, as well as the privilege of having authority over the twelve tribes of Israel then (cf. Dan. 7:9; Rev. 7:1-8).<sup>2</sup> This is another reference to the messianic banquet (cf. 13:28-30; 14:15; 22:16).

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<sup>1</sup>A. B. Bruce, "The Synoptic ...," 1:627.

<sup>2</sup>See Lenski, p. 1061, for the incorrect view that "the twelve tribes of Israel" means both Jews and Gentiles.

"Luke, by the way he has structured his two-volume work and by the insertion of material peculiar to him, displays an unmistakable interest in the question of the national restoration of Israel. ... Luke's manner of representing the nationalistic hopes of the Jewish people implies that he himself believed that there would be a future, national restoration. If Luke really believed that there would not be a restoration, he has certainly gone out of his way to give the contrary impression."<sup>1</sup>

Jesus spoke of twelve disciples, even though Judas would disqualify himself. This was gracious of Jesus and implied that there was still time for Judas to repent. Evidently, since he did not repent, Matthias will take his place in the earthly kingdom (Acts 1:26). It is interesting that the choice of Matthias took place in an upstairs room, perhaps the same one as this one (Acts 1:13).

Upcoming events would test the faithfulness of the Eleven soon (cf. vv. 31-34). This promise doubtless encouraged them to stand by Jesus in His future trials, though they would fail Him. The theme of testing and faithfulness is quite prominent in Luke.<sup>2</sup>

#### **5. Jesus' announcement of Peter's denial 22:31-34 (cf. Matt. 26:31-35; Mark 14:27-31; John 13:36-38)**

Luke probably placed this event next because of its logical connection with Jesus' preceding comment about the disciples remaining faithful to Him during His past trials. Their faithfulness would not continue. However Luke did not record Jesus' announcement that all the disciples would desert Him (Matt. 26:31; Mark 14:27). Perhaps he did not do so because it presents a negative picture of disciples generally. They all proved unfaithful, but only temporarily. Luke wanted to encourage his disciple readers, not discourage them.

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<sup>1</sup>Larry R. Helyer, "Luke and the Restoration of Israel," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 36:3 (September 1993):328-29. Paragraph division omitted.

<sup>2</sup>See S. Brown, *Apostasy and ....*



"Viewed in its primal elements (not in its development), Peter's character was, among the disciples, the likeliest to that of Judas."<sup>1</sup>

- 22:31 Jesus apparently put Peter's testing, which Jesus knew was coming in view of His own arrest and trials, in a cosmic setting because Satan was ultimately responsible for it.<sup>2</sup> Jesus viewed what would happen to Peter similarly to what had happened to Job (Job 1:6-7). Sifting like wheat pictures Satan's attempt to separate Peter's faithfulness to Jesus from him (cf. Job 1—2). The Greek word translated "you" (*hymas*) is in the plural, indicating that Simon was not the only disciple whom Satan desired to sift. Probably Jesus used the name "Simon," Peter's given Jewish name, because it pictured Peter in his natural state, not as Peter the Rock. He probably repeated it in pathos (sadly), anticipating the sad consequence of Satan's testing.
- 22:32 Jesus had already counterattacked Satan by praying to God for Peter (singular "you," *sou*), and presumably for all the other disciples (cf. Rom. 8:34; Heb. 7:25).

"Notice that the Master did not ask that His servant might be freed from trouble. The undergoing of difficulty and hardship is an integral part of the Christian way."<sup>3</sup>

"We may notice here, that our Lord speaks of the total failure of *even an Apostle's faith*, as *possible*."<sup>4</sup>

Jesus described Peter's faith as being stretched to its limit. He was confident that Peter would survive this attack with God's help. His confidence indicates His superior power over Satan in spiritual warfare. When Peter did "turn back" (Gr. *epistrepho*) to Jesus, Peter would need to help his brother disciples—whose faith Jesus' betrayal, arrest, trials, crucifixion, death,

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<sup>1</sup>Edersheim, *The Life ...*, 2:536.

<sup>2</sup>See Page, pp. 456-57.

<sup>3</sup>Morris, *The Gospel ...*, p. 309.

<sup>4</sup>Alford, 1:644.

and burial would challenge (cf. John 21:15-17; 1 Thess. 3:2, 13; 1 Pet. 5:10; et al.).

Jesus implied that Peter would turn away from Him temporarily ("when you have turned back"). When Peter objected to this assumption, which he considered insulting (v. 33), Jesus said frankly that Peter would deny Him (v. 34). Evidently Jesus singled Peter out from the other disciples—all of whom needed God's help in withstanding temptation—because of his leading role among the Twelve. He would be able to help the other disciples recover (cf. Acts 1:15; et al.).

Peter had a responsibility even though Jesus prayed for him. Prayer and action are not mutually contradictory but complementary.

22:33 Peter's commitment to Jesus was admirable. Luke alone recorded that Peter promised to die with Jesus, and he made no reference to the other disciples. (This is the first time that one of the disciples perceived and/or acknowledged that Jesus was about to die.) Nonetheless, Peter overestimated his own ability to remain faithful when persecuted.

22:34 Luke is also the only evangelist who mentioned that Jesus told Peter that he would deny that he even knew Jesus. Perhaps this was a particular temptation for Theophilus and Luke's original Greek readers.

"This is the only place in the Gospels where our Lord addresses Peter by the name *Petre* ["Peter"]. And it is remarkable as occurring in the very place where He forewarns him of his approaching denial of Himself."<sup>1</sup>

"Rocky" would hardly behave like a rock. His overconfidence should be a warning to every disciple.

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., 1:645.

## 6. The opposition to come 22:35-38

This last part of Jesus' conversation with His disciples in the upper room is unique to Luke. It continues the theme of Jesus' rejection, leading to His death, and what the disciples could expect in view of that rejection.

22:35 Jesus reminded the disciples that when He had sent them out on two previous missions they had lacked nothing that they needed (cf. 9:1-3; 10:1-3). In view of Peter's failure, which Jesus had just revealed, it seems that Jesus intended this question to remind the disciples to trust in Him, in the upcoming crisis, rather than in themselves.

22:36 Previously the disciples had not equipped themselves for their ministry, but they had trusted other people to provide for them. But they were not to trust in other people now. They were to fortify themselves for the conflict that lay ahead shortly, namely, Jesus' arrest and crucifixion. Probably Jesus used the terms "money-belt," "bag," and "sword" metaphorically, rather than literally, in order to symbolize the disciples' personal resources.<sup>1</sup> Apparently Jesus wanted His disciples to arm themselves with personal preparedness—including dependence on God and His Word—for the impending crisis. He was calling on them to be ready for hardship and self-sacrifice.<sup>2</sup>

Some commentators took Jesus' command literally.<sup>3</sup> The "money-belt" and "bag" may indicate that they should provide for their own subsistence, since no one else would. However this was not the case in the early days of the church, or even during Jesus' passion. There were still other believers who looked out for one another (e.g., Acts 1:3, 15; 2:44-47). Some take the command to sell one's outer garment in order to purchase a sword literally as well:

"The sword is thought of as part of the equipment required for the self-sufficiency of any traveller

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<sup>1</sup>A. B. Bruce, "The Synoptic ...," 1:629.

<sup>2</sup>Marshall, *The Gospel ...*, p. 825; Creed, p. 270; Luce, pp. 335-36; et al.

<sup>3</sup>E.g., Plummer, p. 505; Liefeld, "Luke," p. 1029-30; and Easton, p. 329.

[*sic*] in the Roman world. Nothing more than protection of one's person is in view."<sup>1</sup>

However Jesus later rebuked Peter for using a sword to defend himself (Matt. 26:52). Furthermore, Jesus never taught His disciples to arm themselves in order to defend themselves, much less take active aggression against those who might oppose them (cf. 6:35-36; 22:52; et al.).

22:37 Jesus quoted Isaiah 53:12 in order to help His disciples realize that others would, or already did, regard Him as a criminal. So it would be very difficult for His disciples. They would face intense opposition, like what Peter experienced in the high priest's courtyard, and later as recorded in Acts. Jesus did not want them to underestimate the strength of the opposition they would face so that they would depend on God alone, and not on themselves, to help them remain faithful.

"At this point Christ emphatically applies to Himself a portion of Isa. 53. Therefore, to deny that the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah predicts Christ's passion is to contradict the Savior's own interpretation of the prophecy."<sup>2</sup>

22:38 The disciples evidently had taken Jesus' words about buying swords literally. They produced two of them that they had already acquired. They had understood Jesus' earlier warnings about what lay ahead of Him in Jerusalem, and they had armed themselves to this extent in order to protect Jesus—and themselves. This was not Jesus' intention.

Some interpret "It is enough" as meaning two swords would be adequate in view of the coming conflict.<sup>3</sup> This does not seem to be what Jesus meant, since He later rebuked Peter for using even one sword to defend Him (vv. 49-51; cf. Matt. 26:52). Furthermore, two swords would not be enough to defend Jesus against arrest. Others interpret Jesus as having meant that the possession of two swords was enough to identify Jesus and

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<sup>1</sup>Nolland, *Luke 18:35—24:53*, p. 1076.

<sup>2</sup>*The New Scofield ...*, p. 1116.

<sup>3</sup>E.g., Valdéz, 1:340.

the disciples as criminals, and so fulfill Isaiah 53:12.<sup>1</sup> But it was not the possession of swords that identified Jesus as a criminal but the false charges that He had claimed to be a king opposed to Caesar.

Probably Jesus meant that He wished to pursue the discussion no further.<sup>2</sup> The disciples had misunderstood Him. They would only learn what He meant later, as they would learn the meaning of many other things that He had taught them that they had failed to understand. This expression occurs often in the Old Testament in this sense (cf. Gen. 45:28; Exod. 9:28; Deut. 3:26; 1 Kings 19:4; 1 Chron. 21:15).

"Every preacher and teacher understands this mood, not of impatience, but of closing the subject for the present."<sup>3</sup>

Luke probably included this part of Jesus' conversation with His disciples because it is a sober warning to all disciples of the need for personal spiritual preparation. We all face essentially what the Eleven did. We must not rely on physical defenses in spiritual warfare but make responsible preparations by arming ourselves with the resources that only God can provide (cf. Eph. 6:10-20). Very soon the disciples would be sleeping in Gethsemane when they should have been praying (vv. 40, 46). Similarly, we often fail to ask God to help us, and instead we rely on our own resources.

#### **D. THE ARREST OF JESUS 22:39-53**

This section in Luke's Gospel consists of two incidents: Jesus' preparation for His arrest and crucifixion, and the arrest itself. The application of the whole section is proper preparation for persecution.

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<sup>1</sup>Danker, p. 225; P. S. Minear, "A Note on Luke xxii. 36," *Novum Testamentum* 7 (1964):128-34; and Martin, p. 260.

<sup>2</sup>Manson, p. 342; Morgan, *An Exposition ...*, p. 440; Morris, *The Gospel ...*, p. 310; Robertson, *Word Pictures ...*, 2:271; M. Bailey, "Luke," p. 148; Green, p. 775; et al.

<sup>3</sup>Robertson, *Word Pictures ...*, 2:271.

**1. Jesus' preparation in Gethsemane 22:39-46 (cf. Matt. 26:30, 36-46; Mark 14:26, 32-42; John 18:1)**

Luke organized his narrative so that Jesus' praying in Gethsemane follows immediately His instructions to the disciples about their preparing for the crisis to come. The present pericope shows Jesus' proper approach to it and the disciples' improper approach. The next pericope reveals the consequences of their actions.

"... Jesus' struggle on the Mount of Olives is presented by Luke as the watershed in the passion narrative, the critical point at which faithfulness to the divine will is embraced definitively in the strenuousness of prayer."<sup>1</sup>

22:39 Luke earlier revealed that during this week Jesus had been spending His nights on the Mount of Olives (21:37). It was apparently to this custom that the writer referred here. Judas would have expected Jesus to go there, and Jesus did not try to hide from Judas. Jesus' control over His own destiny is again evident in His leading the disciples out of the city to the mount. Luke did not identify the place where Jesus prayed as Gethsemane (Matt. 26:36; Mark 14:32), perhaps because he did not want to detract from the action as it unfolded.

22:40 Jesus focused the disciples' attention on their need for God's protection from "temptation" (Gr. *peirasmon*), and He instructed them to pray for it (cf. 11:4). Only Luke wrote that He told them to pray specifically for this, and only Luke mentioned that Jesus gave this command to all the disciples. The effect is that the reader sees all the disciples as needing to pray because of the danger of failing.

22:41 Luke presented Jesus praying like any disciple could pray (cf. Rom. 11:4; 14:11; Eph. 3:14; Phil. 2:10). His posture reflects His submissive attitude: "He knelt down." Luke did not record that Jesus lay prostrate during part of His prayer vigil (cf. Matt. 26:39; Mark 14:35).

"He kneels to pray: in Acts kneeling is identified as the prayer posture only on occasions where the

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<sup>1</sup>Green, p. 777.

context suggests that a particular intensity of prayer might be appropriate."<sup>1</sup>

22:42 Jesus' prayer itself reveals complete dependence on His Father's will. Jesus asked for removal of "this cup": the symbol of His sufferings connected with God's judgment on sin (cf. Ps. 11:6; 75:8; Isa. 51:17; Jer. 25:15-17; 2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Pet. 2:24). He requested it only if it was possible, namely, if the Father was "willing" (Gr. *ei boulei*). In either case He submitted to His Father's will above all.<sup>2</sup> Throughout his Gospel Luke made frequent references to Jesus' conscious fulfillment of God's purposes.

The submissiveness of Jesus' prayer is a model for all disciples. When we do not know God's will specifically, we can voice our request, but we should always submit our preferences subject to God's will.

"The effect of the saying is that Jesus, facing the temptation to avoid the path of suffering appointed by God, nevertheless accepts the will of God despite his own desire that it might be otherwise. He does not seek to disobey the will of God, but longs that God's will might be different. But even this is to be regarded as temptation, and it is overcome by Jesus."<sup>3</sup>

22:43 Only Luke mentioned the angel who strengthened Jesus (cf. 9:26; 12:8-9; 15:10; 16:22; Matt. 4:11; Mark 1:13). Probably he did this in order to help his readers realize the supernatural strength that praying brings (cf. 1 Kings 19:5-6; Dan. 10:17-18).

22:44 However the angel's presence did not remove the agony that Jesus felt as He prayed. The implication may be that the angel's help enabled Jesus to pray more intensely and so to resist temptation more effectively. Jesus' fervency, like His

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<sup>1</sup>Nolland, *Luke 18:35—24:53*, p. 1085.

<sup>2</sup>See Zola Levitt, *A Christian Love Story*, for explanation of Jesus' submission to His Father's will here in connection with Jewish wedding customs.

<sup>3</sup>Marshall, *The Gospel ...*, p. 831.

posture, reflected His feelings—this time His horror at the prospect of the Cross. God does not always spare us trials, but He provides strength to face them.<sup>1</sup>

"His going into Death was His final conflict with Satan for man, and on his behalf. By submitting to it He took away the power of Death; He disarmed Death by burying his shaft in His own Heart."<sup>2</sup>

In what sense was Jesus' sweat similar to drops of blood? Perhaps it was so profuse that it resembled blood flowing from a wound.<sup>3</sup> Perhaps there is an allusion to this suffering being the fulfillment of God's judgment on Adam, when God said that Adam would live by the sweat of his brow (Gen. 3:19).<sup>4</sup> Luke may have been creating a rhetorical expression, namely, "tears of blood."<sup>5</sup> Perhaps Jesus' sweat was red because blood exuded through the pores of His skin.<sup>6</sup> Probably Luke made a symbolic connection with blood because Jesus' sweat was the result of His great sufferings, just like bleeding is often the result of intense suffering. The point then is that Jesus was sweating profusely, and His sweat was the result of His suffering in anticipation of the Cross.

22:45 Instead of praying, the disciples were sleeping. Luke noted that they slept "from sorrow." Evidently their great or heavy sorrow (Gr. *lupe*, grief) at the prospect of Jesus' impending death had worn them out. The NEB translation "worn out by grief" is helpful. They were probably emotionally exhausted.<sup>7</sup> Depression often results in weariness.

22:46 Jesus' question had the force of: How can you sleep at a time like this? They needed to pray so that they would not enter into temptation, much less fall before it. Spiritual preparation, before testing, can be more effective than calling for rescue in

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<sup>1</sup>Bock, *Luke*, p. 568.

<sup>2</sup>Edersheim, *The Life ...*, 2:539.

<sup>3</sup>Liefeld, "Luke," p. 1032.

<sup>4</sup>Martin, p. 260.

<sup>5</sup>Marshall, *The Gospel ...*, p. 832.

<sup>6</sup>Plummer, pp. 510-11.

<sup>7</sup>Nolland, *Luke 18:35—24:53*, p. 1085.



the middle of a trial (cf. Matt. 6:13; Luke 11:4). Jesus showed concern for the welfare of His disciples, even when His own needs were the greatest. Luke omitted the three trips that Jesus made from his place of prayer to the sleeping disciples, which Matthew and Mark recorded (Matt. 26:42-45; Mark 14:39-41). The effect is more emphasis on Jesus' praying and less on the disciples' failing.

**2. Judas' betrayal 22:47-53 (cf. Matt. 26:47-56; Mark 14:43-52; John 18:2-12)**

- 22:47 All the synoptic evangelists noted the close connection between Jesus' praying and the arrival of the soldiers. It was very important that Jesus pray because He did not have much time before his arrest. Judas led the arresting mob (Gr. *ochlos*, "crowd") like Jesus had led His disciples, namely, as their leader (v. 39). Luke highlighted Judas' hypocrisy in betraying Jesus in two ways: by recording that it was with a kiss (the sign of friendship; cf. Gen. 27:26-27; 2 Sam. 15:5; 20:9; Prov. 7:13; 27:6), and by noting the fact that Jesus knew Judas' purpose. Disciples of rabbis often greeted their teachers with a kiss on the hand.<sup>1</sup> Luke described Judas as "the one called Judas," which was a way of keeping him at a distance while viewing him.
- 22:48 "Son of Man" points to Jesus' identity as the divine ruler whom God had sent. The word order in the Greek text that indicates emphasis is "kiss," "Son of Man," and "betraying."
- 22:49 When the other disciples realized what was going on they asked Jesus if they should strike with their swords (cf. v. 38). Their question was not so much a request for permission as an announcement of the action that they intended to take. Jesus had earlier expressed His submission to the Father's will in prayer (vv. 41-44). The disciples had failed to pray, and they acted out their opposition to God's will here.

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<sup>1</sup>Eric F. F. Bishop, *Jesus of Palestine: The Local Background to the Gospel Documents*, p. 246.

22:50 Luke did not identify the assailant as Peter (John 18:10), probably to keep the emphasis on his act rather than his identity. Interestingly Luke identified Judas clearly, but he did not identify Peter. Perhaps this magnifies the seriousness of Judas' sin while playing down Peter's failure. Doctor Luke and John both noted that it was the right ear that Peter cut off.

"All the accounts use the diminutive form of the word ear, which is different from the usual word. It is the word that in the Septuagint (Greek) translation of Deuteronomy 15:17 means 'the lobe of the ear.' Apparently, Peter only nicked Malchus's ear and cut off the lobe. And that is what Christ touched in order to restore it."<sup>1</sup>

"We are probably to understand that the slave of the high priest was his personal representative and, therefore, the leader of the arresting party."<sup>2</sup>

Quite possibly Peter had swung in order to split the servant's head open and had missed. The "sword (Gr. *machaira*, v. 49) was small, curved, and commonly used for self-defense.

In Matthew and Mark, Peter's attack follows Jesus' arrest, but in Luke it precedes it. Probably the soldiers took hold of Jesus, then Peter flew into action, then Jesus restored the servant's ear, and then the soldiers led Jesus away.

"Peter had been sleeping when he should have been praying, talking when he should have been listening, and boasting when he should have been fearing. Now he was fighting when he should have been surrendering."<sup>3</sup>

22:51 Jesus rebuked Peter's aggressive defensive attack. This is more probable than the notion that He spoke to the soldiers and requested permission to heal the servant.<sup>4</sup> Another

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<sup>1</sup>Ryrie, p. 180.

<sup>2</sup>Nolland, *Luke 18:35—24:53*, p. 1090.

<sup>3</sup>Wiersbe, 1:270.

<sup>4</sup>Alford, 1:649.

improbable interpretation is that Jesus meant that the disciples should let the soldiers have their way with Him.<sup>1</sup>

Jesus then reversed the damage done by healing the servant. He did what He had previously told the disciples to do, namely, do good to your enemies rather than evil. Again Luke noted Jesus' compassion—even for those who sought to kill Him. Jesus did not rely on the sword, nor did He establish His messianic kingdom by the use of physical force. Luke is the only narrator of this event who recorded that Jesus healed Malchus's ear.

"As a physician, this cure, the only one of its kind which we know of our Lord's performing, the only miraculous healing of a wound inflicted by external violence, would attract his special attention. And then, further, nothing lay nearer to his heart, or cohered more intimately with the purpose of his Gospel than the portraying of the Lord on the side of his gentleness, his mercy, his benignity; and of all those there was an eminent manifestation in this gracious work wrought on behalf of one who was in arms against his life."<sup>2</sup>

"... the last act of Divine surgery performed by the tender fingers of Jesus, was made necessary by the blundering zeal of a disciple. I think sometimes He has been busy ever since healing the wounds made by the blundering zeal of disciples."<sup>3</sup>

22:52 By mentioning the representatives of the various groups that had come to arrest Jesus—religious, military, and political—Luke highlighted the absurdity of their action, which Jesus specifically pointed out. These were all leaders of the Jews, not common Israelites.

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<sup>1</sup>Creed, p. 274; Marshall, *The Gospel ...*, p. 837; and Morris, *The Gospel ...*, p. 313.

<sup>2</sup>Trench, *Notes on the Miracles ...*, p. 478.

<sup>3</sup>Morgan, *The Gospel ...*, p. 252.

22:53 They had come prepared for a fight, but Jesus assured them that He would not give them one. If they wanted to arrest Him, it would have been easier to do so in the temple in daylight. They did not do the deed then, of course, because they feared the people (19:48; 20:19; 22:2). By coming when and as they did, they only made the treachery of their action more obvious.

"This hour" designates a time of destiny or opportunity. The "power [Gr. *exousia*, cf. 4:6; 23:7] of darkness" is the authority of Satan that God gave him at that time. Their coming after dark symbolizes the power of darkness that was active behind their action.

"Each of us must decide whether we will go through life *pretending*, like Judas; or *fighting*, like Peter; or *yielding to God's perfect will*, like Jesus."<sup>1</sup>

#### E. THE TRIALS OF JESUS 22:54—23:25

The following table identifies the aspects of Jesus' two trials that each evangelist recorded.

<b>JESUS' RELIGIOUS TRIALS</b>	
Before Annas	John 18:12-14, 19-24
Before Caiaphas	Matt. 26:57-68; Mark 14:53-65; Luke 22:54, 63-65
Before the Sanhedrin	Matt. 27:1; Mark 15:1; Luke 22:66-71
<b>JESUS' CIVIL TRIALS</b>	
Before Pilate	Matt. 27:2, 11-14; Mark 15:1-5; Luke 23:1-5; John 18:28-38

<sup>1</sup>Wiersbe, 1:270.

Before Herod Antipas	Luke 23:6-12
Before Pilate	Matt. 27:15-26; Mark 15:6-15; Luke 23:13-25; John 18:39—19:16

Luke recorded more about Jesus' trials than the other Synoptic writers. He probably did so because he wanted to highlight the humanity and innocence of Jesus (cf. 23:4, 14, 15, 22, 41, 47). An additional reason follows:

"The space devoted by all four [Gospel writers] to these Jewish and Roman trials seems to be out of proportion to the brief accounts of the crucifixion. But they serve to bring out the meaning of the crucifixion by exhibiting the nature of the Messiahship of Jesus. Why was Jesus condemned to death by the Sanhedrin? Because He claimed to be the Son of God. Why was He condemned to death by Pilate? Because He claimed to be the King of the Jews."<sup>1</sup>

**1. Peter's denial of Jesus 22:54-62 (cf. Matt. 26:69-75; Mark 14:66-72; John 18:15-18, 25-27)**

Luke placed Peter's denial ahead of Jesus' trial before Caiaphas, whereas Matthew and Mark intertwined these events. The effect in Luke is to focus the reader's attention on Peter's behavior soon after Jesus' prediction of his denial (v. 34). Luke wanted his readers to see how Peter fell before temptation because he failed to pray. Luke stressed the fulfillment of Jesus' prediction of Peter's denial, Jesus' continuing concern for Peter (v. 61), and Peter's weakness in contrast to Jesus' strength. After Peter's denial, Luke moved on to Jesus' trials and concentrated on Him.

22:54 This verse introduces Jesus' trials and Peter's denial. Even though Peter followed Jesus at a distance, he at least followed Him. The only other disciple to do so was evidently John (John 18:15-16). Apparently the "house" or palace in view was the dwelling in which both Annas and Caiaphas resided (cf. Matt. 26:57-68; Mark 14:53-65).

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<sup>1</sup>Plummer, p. 515.

22:55-57 Luke's account is essentially the same as Matthew's and Mark's. Peter evidently joined the circle of people seated around the fire. He first denied acquaintance with Jesus to a slave woman.

"Peter's response is called a denial. The word 'deny' (*arneomai*, v. 57) is used in the NT as the polar opposite of the word 'confess' (*homologeō*). We are to confess (i.e., acknowledge) Christ but deny ourselves (i.e., disown our private interests for the sake of Christ; cf. comment on 9:23). Peter here does the reverse. He denies Christ in order to serve his own interests."<sup>1</sup>

The absence of Jesus' name in this whole incident presents a picture in which Jesus was so much the center of everyone's attention that no one needed to call Him by name. This helps us appreciate the pressure that Peter was under.

22:58 The person who accused Peter next was another slave woman, though Luke did not identify her as such (cf. Mark 14:69). Evidently a man joined her in accusing Peter, since Luke wrote that Peter addressed him as a man when he uttered his denial: "Man, I am not!" Matthew and Mark did not say that Peter responded to the woman. Perhaps Luke wanted to stress the pressure that was on Peter from male critics.

22:59 Luke's singular reference to an hour passing reflects his interest in the passing of time. The third accusation—this one spoken with conviction—came from another person who was a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off (John 18:26). Peter's identity as a Galilean would have been obvious from his accent and/or his clothing.<sup>2</sup>

22:60 Luke omitted the oaths that Peter added to this denial (Matt. 26:74; Mark 14:71). He also wrote that Peter denied knowledge of what the accuser meant, apparently in addition to denying that he knew Jesus (Matt. 26:74; Mark 14:71). To

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<sup>1</sup>Liefeld, "Luke," p. 1035.

<sup>2</sup>Nolland, *Luke 18:35—24:53*, p. 1097.

deny all knowledge of what this man was talking about was the strongest form of denial.<sup>1</sup> Immediately a rooster crowed, as Jesus had predicted (v. 34).

22:61 Luke had not told his readers that Jesus was anywhere near Peter. Perhaps Jesus was visible through a window, or His guards may have been leading Him past a place where He could see Peter. Luke's unique reference to His turning and looking at Peter adds to the shock effect of the moment. The word that Luke used to describe Jesus' looking ("looked") usually means to look with interest, love, or concern (Gr. *emblepo*).

22:62 Peter suddenly remembered what Jesus had predicted earlier that evening (v. 34) and, undoubtedly, his profession of loyalty to Jesus (v. 33). The realization of his unfaithfulness in this light, along with Jesus' teaching on the importance of faithfulness (cf. 12:9), caused Peter to leave the courtyard and to weep tears of bitter remorse.

Luke's account of this outstanding disciple's tragic failure brings out the importance of adequate spiritual preparation for times of testing. Like the other evangelists, Luke included this incident because of its timeless importance for all of Jesus' followers.

## 2. The mockery of the soldiers 22:63-65 (cf. Matt. 26:67-68; Mark 14:65)

Evidently this mockery happened during Peter's denial and at the end of Jesus' hearing before Caiaphas. Luke probably placed it here in his narrative as a transition: in order to contrast Peter's attempts to avoid suffering with the sufferings of Jesus. It introduces Luke's account of Jesus' trials. Luke's is the longest of the synoptic accounts. It presents Jesus as a real man who suffered unjustly at the hands of His accusers.

The men who were holding Jesus in custody were the religious leaders (v. 52; cf. Matt. 26:66-67; Mark 14:64-65). Luke presented Jesus as a prophet. He probably included this incident to show that Jesus' refusal to prophesy was not due to inability but to His determination to lay down His life as a sacrifice. Jesus' passive acceptance of all this abuse shows the

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<sup>1</sup>A. B. Bruce, "The Synoptic ...," 1:633.

same thing.<sup>1</sup> His accusers were blaspheming in that they were saying things about Jesus that were disrespectful in view of His being God.

### 3. Jesus' trial before the Sanhedrin 22:66-71 (cf. Matt. 27:1; Mark 15:1a)

Luke is the only Gospel writer who gave us an account of what happened at this official meeting of the Sanhedrin. It followed informal questionings late at night by Annas and Caiaphas. This meeting took place very early on Friday morning. According to Hoehner's chronology this was April 3, A.D. 33.<sup>2</sup>

"Fundamentally, the issue at stake is the same as has pervaded the presentation of the Jewish leadership in the Third Gospel. Who interprets the will of God correctly? Who legitimately exercises the authority of God? Who will rule the people of God?"<sup>3</sup>

22:66 The Sanhedrin, also known as "the Council of elders," was Israel's supreme court. It was supposed to conduct cases involving potential capital punishment during daylight hours.<sup>4</sup> This seems to be the reason for the time of this meeting ("When it was day"). Evidently the Sanhedrin members wanted to send Jesus on to Pilate for trial as early as they "lawfully" could. The Sanhedrin normally met in a building not far to the west of the western wall of the temple.<sup>5</sup> But archaeologists have not yet been able to determine exactly where.

"This trial violated various Jewish legal rules given in later sources: meeting on the morning of a feast; meeting at Caiaphas's home; trying a defendant without defense; and reaching the

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<sup>1</sup>See D. L. Miller, "empaizein: Playing the Mock Game (Luke 22:63-64)," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 90 (1971):309-13; and Larna L. Berg, "The Illegalities of Jesus' Religious and Civil Trials," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 161:643 (July-September 2004):330-42.

<sup>2</sup>Hoehner, *Chronological Aspects ...*, p. 143.

<sup>3</sup>Green, p. 793.

<sup>4</sup>Mishnah *Sanhedrin* 4:1.

<sup>5</sup>Josephus, *The Wars ...*, 5:4:2; 6:6:3.



verdict in one day instead of the two days that were required for capital cases."<sup>1</sup>

22:67-68 The Sanhedrin asked Jesus if He was claiming to be the Messiah (cf. 4:3, 9).

"Given the preceding conflict in Luke's story, there can be no question at this hearing of determining the guilt or innocence of Jesus. This hearing was a continuation of the efforts of the Jewish leadership to do away with Jesus. The question was, What could they take to Pilate?"<sup>2</sup>

Jesus replied that His accusers would not believe Him if He told them the truth, nor would they answer Him if He questioned them. Jesus and the religious leaders had formerly come to an impasse in their discussions (cf. 20:1-8, 26, 40). Jesus' point was that claiming or not claiming to be the Messiah would be pointless since His accusers would believe what they wanted to believe, regardless of what He said. Furthermore, they had a different idea than He did of what the Messiah would do. They were really talking about two different types of individuals when they discussed the Messiah.

22:69 Jesus did not claim to be the Messiah here, but He did claim to be "the Son of Man." He alluded to the discussion that He had had with some of His accusers on Wednesday (20:41-44). Then, less than two days before, Jesus had questioned them about the identity of David's Son in Psalm 110:1. He had showed from Scripture that David's Son, the Messiah, was deity. Now Jesus referred to the same verse again and asserted that the Son of Man would sit at God's right hand. This was a claim of unique association with God that constituted blasphemy—for anyone by Jesus.<sup>3</sup> It also denoted that Messiah would not reign on His earthly throne immediately. The title "Son of Man" connected the divine Messiah with a future coming to the earth to reign (Dan. 7:13-

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<sup>1</sup> *The Nelson ...*, p. 1746.

<sup>2</sup> Nolland, *Luke 18:35—24:53*, p. 1112.

<sup>3</sup> See Darrell L. Bock, *Blasphemy and Exaltation in Judaism and the Final Examination of Jesus*, pp. 30-183.

14). Jesus was implying that Messiah ("the Son of Man," i.e., He Himself) would return to heaven and then return later to reign on the earth (cf. Acts 2:33; 5:31).

22:70 To the Sanhedrin He seemed to be claiming that He was "the Son of God," and Jesus admitted that He was claiming that (cf. 9:20-22). He said, "You say" (Gr. *Humeis legete*), which was an idiom for Yes.<sup>1</sup>

22:71 The Sanhedrin recognized Jesus' statement to be an unequivocal claim to be the Son of God. It was equal to a claim to being God. Consequently it appeared to them to be blasphemous.

Luke's record bears out the identity of Jesus as Messiah, Son of Man, and Son of God, but it also stresses His fearless testimony to His own identity in spite of the certain consequences of doing so. Thus the writer clarified who Jesus was and presented His testifying before hostile authorities as a model for disciples to follow.

#### **4. Jesus' first appearance before Pilate 23:1-7 (cf. Matt. 27:2, 11-14; Mark 15:1b-5; John 18:28-38)**

Jesus' trial now moved from its Jewish phase into its Roman phase.<sup>2</sup> It did not take long for Pilate to determine that Jesus was innocent of any crime worthy of death. At the same time, the record bears out how difficult it was for him to convict an innocent man.

Pilate normally resided in the provincial capital at Caesarea. He was presently in Jerusalem because of the Passover season, which drew huge crowds and possible civil unrest to the city. Some interpreters believe that Jesus' trial before Pilate took place at the Antonia fortress.<sup>3</sup> Others believe that the site was Herod's palace.

23:1-2 The entire assembly in view is the Sanhedrin (v. 66). Luke alone recorded their specific charges against Jesus. First, they accused Him of leading the Jews away from their duty to Rome

<sup>1</sup>Robertson, *Word Pictures ...*, 2:277.

<sup>2</sup>See R. Larry Overstreet, "Roman Law and the Trial of Christ," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 135:540 (October-December 1978):323-32.

<sup>3</sup>E.g., Lenski, p 1101.

(cf. Exod. 5:4; 1 Kings 18:17; Acts 13:6-8; 17:5-9). Implicit in this charge was the accusation that Jesus was a false prophet. This was untrue. It was not Jesus who was leading the people astray, but rather the Jewish leaders who were stirring up the people and leading them astray.<sup>1</sup> Second, they charged Him with teaching the Jews not to pay taxes. This was also untrue (cf. 20:25). Third, they accused Him of claiming to be a king, namely, the Jewish Messiah or "Christ." This charge was true (cf. 22:69-70), and it was the only issue about which Pilate showed any concern.

23:3 Pilate asked Jesus directly if He was the King of the Jews, and Jesus responded just as directly that He was.

23:4 It may seem strange that, having secured a confession from Jesus that He was the King of the Jews, Pilate would declare Him innocent. The explanation is that Luke did not record the conversation that took place between verses 3 and 4 (cf. John 18:35-38). In that conversation, Pilate learned that Jesus did not claim to be a king in the ordinary sense. He concluded that Jesus posed no threat to the political stability of Roman interests in Palestine. Only Luke recorded Pilate's official verdict that he gave to the Sanhedrin (cf. John 18:38; 19:4, 6). Perhaps Luke chose not to record what John did because, for his readers, the claim to be the King of the Jews was absurd. It would have been obvious to Greeks that Jesus posed no threat to Rome.

In Acts, as well as in Luke, our writer recorded the innocent verdicts of government officials when passing judgment on Christian leaders (e.g., Acts 18:12-17; 19:35-41; 25:23-27; 26:30-32). Luke obviously wanted to assure his readers that Christianity was not seeking to overthrow the Roman Empire and that it was not hostile to Roman civil authority.

23:5 The charge that Jesus was stirring up the people drew Pilate's attention, because his responsibility was to preserve peace.

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<sup>1</sup>Green, p. 802.

And the accusers' reference to Galilee indicated that Jesus evidently had a wide influence.

23:6-7 The continuing protests of the Sanhedrin members led Pilate to send Jesus to Herod for examination. He probably did this in order to placate the Jewish leaders and to satisfy himself that he had not overlooked something in Jesus' case that might require punishment. Pilate may have thought that perhaps Herod Antipas had evidence of Jesus' alleged insurrectionist activity in Galilee. Herod had a longer and more thorough acquaintance with Jewish affairs than Pilate did, and he was a Semite.

Herod was evidently in Jerusalem for the same reasons that Pilate was. Herod Antipas normally stayed in Herod the Great's Hasmonean palace, which was adjacent to the western wall of the city, when he visited Jerusalem.<sup>1</sup>

There is some question about where Pilate conducted his trial of Jesus: either in the Antonia Fortress, or in Herod's palace. I prefer the view that Pilate was in the Antonia Fortress, because Luke described him as "sending" Jesus to Herod (Gr. *anepempsen*), and he described Herod as "sending" Jesus back to Pilate (Gr. *anepempsen*, v. 11). It seems to me that these terms better describe two places separated by some distance than two places within one structure.

Pilate's intention was evidently not to pass Jesus off to Herod, and thus relieve himself of his own responsibility, but to secure Herod's counsel in Jesus' case (cf. vv. 7, 11). Herod's jurisdiction was Galilee, and the Jewish leaders claimed that Jesus had stirred up the people, teaching all over Judea (cf. 4:44), starting from Galilee (v. 5).

"Herod was crafty, a schemer. He was not cruel, as Pilate could be cruel, or mercenary, as Annas could be mercenary. He may have been mentally disordered. His father had killed his mother, and then had called her name loudly through the

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<sup>1</sup>Plummer, p. 522.

palace corridors for weeks. His ancestors had showed extremes of ambition and extremes of jealousy, coupled with chronic fears of persecution. All the Herods changed political allegiance as a weathercock changes direction in a variable breeze."<sup>1</sup>

### 5. Jesus' appearance before Herod 23:8-12

Luke alone recorded this aspect of Jesus' Roman trial. He probably did so because Herod Antipas found no basis for condemning Jesus any more than Pilate did. Thus Luke cited two official witnesses to Jesus' innocence for his readers' benefit (cf. Deut. 19:15). Two witnesses would have constituted a powerful defense of Jesus' innocence with Greeks.

23:8 Luke had previously mentioned Herod's interest in seeing Jesus (9:9). But he clarified here that his interest in Jesus was only as a miracle worker. He had no interest in talking with Him about spiritual matters.

23:9 It was evidently regarding His miracles that Herod questioned Jesus here. Jesus did not respond, apparently because Herod had rejected the implication of His miracles, namely, that Jesus had come from God with a message for humankind. Herod had made his feelings toward prophets clear by beheading John the Baptist. Jesus had nothing to say to someone such as this.

"Jesus could not be impressed. The things he knew about Antipas had engraved themselves firmly on his mind. The King was the murderer of the Nazarene's cousin John. The King was a coward who could remain loyal to no one. The King was an adulterer who had stolen his own brother's wife. The King would do nothing in this case except ask for a show of power."<sup>2</sup>

"Jesus' *exousia* [authority] also manifests itself in the political realm. This is most evident in Luke,

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<sup>1</sup>Jim Bishop, *The Day Christ Died*, p. 281.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 282.

which alone of the gospels records two rebuffs of Herod Antipas, Jesus' political sovereign in Galilee (Luke 13:31-32; 23:6-12)."<sup>1</sup>

"For Greco-Roman readers, Jesus' behavior may have been seen as an expression of admirable self-control, perhaps even nobility; for readers of the LXX, his silence is reminiscent of the Servant of Yahweh with whom he is thus identified (Isa 53:7)."<sup>2</sup>

23:10-11 The accusations by the Jewish leaders (cf. 22:66), plus the insult that Herod must have felt at being snubbed, resulted in more contempt and mocking for Jesus (cf. Isa. 53:7). This mistreatment revealed Herod's true attitude toward Jesus.

Herod put a brightly shining (Gr. *lampros*, cf. Acts 10:30; James 2:2-3; Rev. 15:6; 19:8) robe over Jesus, which implied His royalty, but he sent Him back to Pilate as a king in bondage to Rome. This may or may not have been the same robe that Pilate's soldiers later placed over Jesus after beating Him (Matt. 27:28; Mark 15:17; John 19:2).

23:12 Perhaps it was this touch especially that united Pilate and Herod. They were two rogues who could at least agree to humiliate a pretender to the Jewish throne (cf. Acts 3:13-14; 4:25-28).

"The Procurator had ordered some Galileans slain and Herod, as king, had resented the usurpation of power by the Roman, and was impotent in the matter except to sulk."<sup>3</sup>

"There had been no communication between him [Pilate] and Herod since the time that Pilate's

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<sup>1</sup>James R. Edwards, "The Authority of Jesus in the Gospel of Mark," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 37:2 (June 1994):217-33

<sup>2</sup>Green, p. 805.

<sup>3</sup>J. Bishop, p. 10.

soldiers had mistakenly killed Herod's subjects on the temple grounds."<sup>1</sup>

"Here is the beginning of an ecumenical movement! Before this problem of Jesus arose, Herod and Pilate had been enemies. Now they come together because they are both opposed to Jesus."<sup>2</sup>

Luke did not record any judicial opinion that Herod may have sent back to Pilate here, but the implication is obvious that he viewed Jesus as a harmless phony.

"... when Herod returned Jesus to Pilate's court he said in effect that he would approve any disposition of the case that Pilate might make."<sup>3</sup>

Pilate later announced Herod's verdict to the people (v. 15).

**6. Jesus' second appearance before Pilate 23:13-25 (cf. Matt. 27:15-26; Mark 15:6-15; John 18:39—19:16)**

The overall impression that Luke presented with this part of his narrative is that Jesus' condemnation was a terrible travesty of justice. Pilate condemned an innocent man. Pilate's decision comes across as especially heinous since he also acquitted a guilty man: Barabbas. The strong resolve of the Jewish leaders overcame the weak will of the Roman official.

23:13-14 Pilate announced his verdict that he made after receiving Herod's opinion. Pilate had found Jesus innocent of the charge of insurrection. He used standard legal terminology (cf. Acts 23:9; 26:31-32). He doubtless intended to put the matter to rest.

Luke's reference to the "people" (Gr. *laos*, v. 13) is significant. Throughout his Gospel Luke referred to the people (*laos*) as distinct from the crowds (*ochlos*). The former word describes people who did not oppose Jesus as their leaders did (cf. vv.

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 279.

<sup>2</sup>McGee, 4:352.

<sup>3</sup>Lenski, p. 1113.

27, 35; 24:19; Acts 2:47). Many people from this group believed on Jesus. The crowds, on the other hand, sought Jesus for what they could get out of Him. In these verses the people who were sympathetic—or at least neutral—toward Jesus, heard Pilate's verdict along with the antagonistic Sanhedrin members.<sup>1</sup>

23:15 Pilate also announced that Herod's verdict agreed with his own. Herod was a recognized authority on Jewish affairs, whom Pilate's hearers probably respected more than they did Pilate, since Herod was Semitic. Both men agreed that Jesus had done nothing deserving death.

23:16 Pilate evidently intended to, and indeed did, punish Jesus, both because He had caused Pilate trouble, and as a concession to the Jewish leaders. This is clearer in the Greek text than in most English translations. The Greek work translated "punish" (*paideusas*) is probably a participle that modifies the main verb translated "release" (*apolyso*). Luke presented Pilate as wanting to give Jesus a light reprimand and then release Him.

Pilate's preference for relatively light punishment for Jesus, rather than more severe treatment, is one of several indications in Luke's Gospel that the writer wanted his Gentile readers to view Christianity favorably. This desire of Luke's comes through at several places in Acts too. The "scourging" (Gr. *phragellosas*, Matt. 27:26; Mark 15:15) that Jesus received before His crucifixion was much more severe than the punishment by whipping (Gr. *paideusas*) that Pilate referred to here. Pilate had no intention of crucifying Jesus at this point.

"The suggestion that Jesus should be chastised before being released strikes us as curious. If He was innocent, He should have been released without further ado. But in Roman law a light beating was sometimes given together with a

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<sup>1</sup>Liefeld, "Luke," p. 1040.



magisterial warning, so that an accused might take greater care for the future."<sup>1</sup>

23:17 Many ancient manuscripts do not contain this verse. Probably scribes influenced by Matthew 27:15 and/or Mark 15:6 added it to early copies of this Gospel.

"There are historical analogies from the period that stand in general favor of the historicity of the Passover pardon."<sup>2</sup>

23:18 Luke's version of this trial has the Jewish leaders and the people (v. 13) "all together" rejecting what was just and demanding the release of a man who was the antithesis of Jesus: Barabbas. This scene shows the great guilt of the Jews in demanding Jesus' death (cf. Acts 2:22-23; 8:33; 21:36). The people allowed their leaders to influence them to demand a perversion of justice.

"They would rather be with a well-known sinner than with the One who could forgive their sins."<sup>3</sup>

23:19 Pilate had declared Jesus innocent of the charge of leading an insurrection, but Barabbas was guilty of that crime. Jesus had gone about healing and restoring people to life, but Barabbas had murdered them.

23:20-21 Luke noted again (vv. 14, 16) that Pilate wanted to release Jesus, but his appeal for reason only led to increased demands for Jesus' capital punishment (cf. Matt. 27:22; Mark 15:13). The Jews now called for Jesus' crucifixion, the worst of all possible punishments.

23:22-23 A third appeal for reason only led to louder and stronger cries for Jesus' crucifixion. Finally, the loud voices of the crowd began to prevail, and Pilate yielded to their pressure. Pilate wanted to preserve peace and his position (i.e., his commission and rank in the Roman government) more than he wanted to

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<sup>1</sup>Morris, *The Gospel ...*, p. 322.

<sup>2</sup>Nolland, *Luke 18:35—24:53*, p. 1130.

<sup>3</sup>Martin, p. 262.

maintain justice. It was the will of the people, not Pilate, that led to Jesus' crucifixion. At this climax of chaos, what is it that emerges most clearly in the text?

"The innocence of Jesus could not be more firmly underlined."<sup>1</sup>

"It is literally true that the Jews blackmailed Pilate into sentencing Jesus to death."<sup>2</sup>

23:24-25 Pilate caved in totally to the will of the people. This was in perfect harmony with God's will (Acts 2:23), but Luke did not mention that here. Here he wanted his readers to see the human responsibility that resulted in Jesus' death, particularly the Jews' responsibility.

"It was not a condemnation but simply a sentence to death under pressure."<sup>3</sup>

"Perhaps we should add that Luke is not being anti-Semitic, much less providing grounds for anti-Semitism in our own day. He is dealing with a specific group of people and maintaining that they brought about Jesus' death. It was not Pilate nor his Romans that called for Jesus' execution: it was the Jewish chief priests and their followers ... Luke is not indicting a race and neither should his readers."<sup>4</sup>

"Pilate was a complex character. He openly said that Jesus was innocent, yet he permitted Him to be beaten and condemned Him to die. He carefully questioned Jesus and even trembled at His answers, but the truth of the Word did not make a difference in his decisions. He wanted to be popular and not right; he was more concerned about reputation than he was character. If Herod had silenced the voice of God, then Pilate

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<sup>1</sup>Marshall, *The Gospel ...*, p. 861.

<sup>2</sup>Barclay, p. 292.

<sup>3</sup>A. B. Bruce, "The Synoptic ...," 1:638.

<sup>4</sup>Morris, *The Gospel ...*, p. 324.

smothered the voice of God. He had his opportunity and wasted it."<sup>1</sup>

Luke was much kinder to Pilate than the other Gospel writers were. He stressed Jesus' innocence more than Pilate's guilt. Perhaps he did this so his Greek readers would focus their attention more on Jesus than on Pilate. In Acts, also, Luke gave as positive a picture of Roman rulers as he could. Evidently he did not want his writings to alienate the Gentiles and their rulers unnecessarily.

"The narrative in 23:13-25 places strong emphasis on the responsibility of both the leaders and the people for Jesus' death."<sup>2</sup>

#### **F. THE CRUCIFIXION OF JESUS 23:26-49**

Luke's account of the crucifixion includes, among other things, a prophecy of the fate of Jerusalem (vv. 29-31), greater emphasis on the men who experienced crucifixion with Jesus (vv. 39-43), and less reporting on the crowd that mocked Jesus. It climaxes with Jesus' final prayer of trust in His Father (v. 46) and the reactions of various people to His death (vv. 47-49).

"In this version of the story we may see an accent on the way in which Jesus died as a martyr, innocent of the charges against him, trusting to the end in God, and assured of his own place in paradise. The whole scene vindicates the claim that he is the Messiah of God."<sup>3</sup>

#### **1. Events on the way to Golgotha 23:26-32**

Luke omitted reference to the Roman soldiers' mockery and flogging of Jesus (Matt. 27:27-30; Mark 15:16-19). Perhaps he wanted to connect the Jews' call for Jesus' crucifixion and the crucifixion itself as closely as he could. This arrangement of the events has the effect of heightening the innocence of Jesus and the guilt of those who demanded His execution.

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<sup>1</sup>Wiersbe, 1:274.

<sup>2</sup>Tannehill, *The Narrative ...*, 1:164.

<sup>3</sup>Marshall, *The Gospel ...*, p. 862.

**The example of Simon of Cyrene 23:26 (cf. Matt. 27:32; Mark 15:21)**

Luke probably chose to insert this apparently insignificant incident because it provides such a good example of an ideal disciple (cf. Mark 15:21; Rom. 16:13). Jesus had taught His disciples to forsake all, take up their crosses, and follow Him (9:23; 14:27). That is precisely what Simon did. It involved laying aside his personal plans, becoming associated with Jesus publicly in His humiliation, and following in His steps as His servant. However we cannot help but wonder: where was the other Simon, Simon Peter, who professed such devotion to Jesus?

Cyrene was the capital of the Roman province of Cyrenaica (Libya) in North Africa (cf. Acts 2:10; 6:9). Normally criminals condemned to crucifixion had to carry the large crossbeam of their own cross to their place of execution.<sup>1</sup> Apparently Jesus' severe beating had made it impossible for Him to carry His crossbeam the whole way to Calvary.

"The traditional *via dolorosa*, which is now shown in Jerusalem as being the street over which Jesus passed, is of late construction. The city was destroyed several times, and many of its levels were greatly changed. In places the declivities [downward slopes] were filled with debris so that some streets are as high as 60 or 80 feet above their original levels."<sup>2</sup>

**The fate of the guilty predicted 23:27-31**

Luke is the only evangelist who recorded this incident. He apparently did so because the fate of Jerusalem was one of his special interests. He had already recorded several warnings that Jesus had given to the people of Jerusalem (cf. 11:49-51; 13:1-5, 34-35; 19:41-44; 21:20-24). If, being innocent, Jesus experienced such a fate as crucifixion, what could the Jews who had rejected their Messiah anticipate?

23:27-28 Luke's interest in Jesus' concern for women surfaces again. Several women were mourning His fate and were evidently sympathizers rather than mockers (cf. 7:32; 8:52; Zech. 12:10-14). Apparently they were residents of Jerusalem, rather than women from Galilee who had been ministering to Jesus, since Jesus addressed them as "Daughters of

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<sup>1</sup>Creed, p. 285.

<sup>2</sup>Lenski, p. 1124.

Jerusalem." This is an Old Testament designation for the residents of Jerusalem that views them as typical Israelites (Mic. 4:8; Zeph. 3:14; et al.). He urged them to mourn their own fate, and the fate of their children, more than His fate. They were weeping over the injustice of one man's death, but He was grieving over the coming destruction of an entire nation.

"In the Gospels there is no instance of a woman being hostile to Christ."<sup>1</sup>

23:29 Jewish women considered barrenness a misfortune and children a blessing (cf. Ps. 127:3). Jesus announced that in the future the opposite would be true. They would see their children suffer and wish that they had never been born. Jesus was alluding to Hosea 10:8, which is in a passage that describes Israel's idolatry and God's consequent judgment of her for it. Jesus was predicting God's judgment here.

23:30 Probably the people would call on the mountains and hills to hide them ("Cover us!") from God's wrath (cf. Hos. 10:8; Rev. 6:15-16). The Tribulation particularly is in view in the Hosea passage. Probably the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, as well as the judgments on Jerusalem in the Tribulation, are in view here in Jesus' words. The destruction by the Romans would only be a foretaste of the worse judgment still future.

23:31 This was evidently a proverbial saying in Jesus' day.<sup>2</sup> The green tree stands for good conditions resulting from God's blessing, and the dry tree for bad conditions resulting from divine judgment. If God allowed innocent Jesus to perish in times of His blessing, what would happen to guilty Jerusalem when God judged her?

"Verse 31 is a proverbial phrase which could be used in many connections. Here it means, If they do this to one who is innocent, what will they

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<sup>1</sup>Plummer, p. 528.

<sup>2</sup>Robertson, *Word Pictures ...*, 2:284.

some day do to those who are guilty and who deserve it?"<sup>1</sup>

"If the Romans condemned to death the one they admitted to be innocent, how would they deal in the future with those whom they found guilty?"<sup>2</sup>

Jesus' words constituted yet another call for repentance. There was still time for individuals to believe on Him and escape God's wrath. But barring repentance, God's severe judgment would certainly fall. Luke evidently recorded these words because of his interest in extending the call to salvation to his readers.

### **The criminals crucified with Jesus 23:32**

This verse constitutes a narrative bridge that connects Jesus' journey to the Cross with His crucifixion. One of its functions seems to be to introduce the two criminals who feature later in the story (vv. 33, 39-43). More importantly, it associates Jesus with guilty sinners.<sup>3</sup> This reference also adds to the humiliation of Jesus that Luke stressed. There are several indications that Luke wanted to point out Jesus' humiliation in the next section. This notation also records a fulfillment of prophecy (cf. 22:37; Isa. 53:12).

## **2. Jesus' death 23:33-49**

The parts of this section of Luke's Gospel that are unique are Jesus' prayer for His enemies (v. 34), His dialogue with the criminals (vv. 39-43), and His prayer of self-sacrifice to His Father (v. 46). Thus Luke presented Jesus as the forgiving Savior even in His death.

### **The mockery of Jesus' crucifixion 23:33-38 (cf. Matt. 27:33-43; Mark 15:22-32; John 19:18-24)**

23:33 Luke alone called the site of Jesus' crucifixion "the place called The Skull" (Gr. *kranion*), rather than referring to it by its Aramaic name, Golgotha, and then translating it. This was undoubtedly an accommodation to his Gentile readers. The

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<sup>1</sup>Barclay, p. 296.

<sup>2</sup>*The New Scofield ...*, p. 1119. See also J. Bishop, p. 305.

<sup>3</sup>W. Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to Luke*, p. 1027.

name of the place was obviously appropriate to the occasion. Some observers believe that the site was Gordon's Calvary.<sup>1</sup> Others prefer the site now under the Church of the Holy Sepulcher.

"This name [the Skull] was probably taken from the fact that this was the place where people were killed in public execution rather than from the skull-like appearance on the side of the hill on which He was crucified."<sup>2</sup>

Nolland believed that the nails pierced Jesus' forearms, rather than his hands.<sup>3</sup> Jesus' central position among the three crucified men symbolized His centrality in the event and His nearness to all sinners.

23:34 In contrast to the hate and rejection expressed in crucifixion (cf. Ps. 22:6-8), Jesus manifested love and forgiveness for the soldiers who crucified Him. He prayed for them, basing His petition for mercy on their ignorance, even though at the same time they were stealing and gambling for His garments—in fulfillment of prophecy (Ps. 22:18). Luke's inclusion of Jesus' prayer for His executioners harmonizes with his emphasis on Jesus offering grace and forgiveness to sinners (cf. 7:40-43; 19:10). If Jesus had had any sins of His own to confess, this would have been the time to do so. He did not, so He prayed for others who were sinners instead. Stephen followed Jesus' good example here when he later died at the hands of his persecutors (Acts 7:60). Luke may have wanted his readers to see Jesus' act as a good model for disciples.

23:35 The Jewish people (Gr. *laos*) stood by looking on—in fulfillment of prophecy (Ps. 22:7). Perhaps Luke wrote that even the rulers were sneering at Jesus because they, of all the people, should have been the most compassionate toward someone in Jesus' position (cf. Ps. 22:6-8). Instead, they mocked His apparent impotence. They may have meant "saved" (Gr.

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<sup>1</sup>E.g., Lenski, p. 1130.

<sup>2</sup>M. Bailey, "Luke," p. 150.

<sup>3</sup>Nolland, *Luke 18:35—24:53*, p. 1145.

*esosen*) in the sense of physical deliverance, or they may have meant it sarcastically, meaning that He claimed to save people spiritually. Both meanings could have been in their minds. The title "His [God's] Chosen One" reflects what Jesus claimed that He was and what the Father had acknowledged Jesus to be at the Transfiguration (9:35; cf. Isa. 42:1; 1 Pet. 2:4).

"Jesus crucified is the touchstone revealing what the world is: 'The people stood beholding' in stolid indifference; the rulers, who wanted religion but without a divine Christ crucified for their sins, mocked (Mt. 27:41); the brutal 'railed at him' (v. 39), i.e. reviled Him; the conscious sinner prayed (v. 42); and the covetous sat down before the cross and played their sordid game (Mt. 27:35-36). The cross is the judgment of this world (Jn. 12:31)."<sup>1</sup>

23:36-38 The Roman soldiers also taunted Jesus. Their offer of sour wine was a mock relief for His sufferings (Ps. 69:21; cf. Matt. 27:34). If they had wanted to relieve Him, they should have given Him something refreshing rather than something revolting. Their words also expressed ridicule for Him and for His inscribed title, which they had nailed above His head in obedience to Pilate's order (John 19:19-22).

Jim Bishop claimed that a group of charitable women often brought wine that was slightly drugged to the victims of crucifixion in order to ease their pain.<sup>2</sup> It may have been this wine vinegar that Jesus refused here.

### The salvation of one criminal 23:39-43

This is another incident that only Luke recorded. It reflects his interest in needy people receiving salvation from Jesus. This is such a dominant theme in Luke's Gospel that one commentator concluded that this incident is the core of Luke's crucifixion narrative.<sup>3</sup> The attitudes of the two criminals crucified with Jesus represent the two attitudes that lead to condemnation

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<sup>1</sup> *The New Scofield ...*, p. 1119.

<sup>2</sup> J. Bishop, p. 310.

<sup>3</sup> Ellis, p. 267.



or salvation. The incident is also another testimony to Jesus' innocence, and it presents Him as the Savior even as He was dying.

23:39 The first criminal (robber, Matt. 27:38; Mark 15:27) joined the mockery of others around the cross by implying Jesus' inability to save Himself and His fellow sufferers. He was bitterly sarcastic toward Jesus.<sup>1</sup> His verbal abuse constituted blasphemy (Gr. *eblasphemei*). Blasphemy is essentially impious irreverence and slander. Obviously this man did not believe that Jesus was the Messiah. Luke may have intended this criminal's action to be a warning to his readers not to do the same thing. Refusing to take Jesus' claims seriously constitutes blasphemy of Him.

23:40-41 Matthew and Mark wrote that both criminals railed at Jesus (Matt. 27:44; Mark 15:32). Luke focused on the repentance of the second one. This man did believe that Jesus was the Messiah (v. 42). He therefore viewed the blasphemy of his fellow criminal as worthy of divine judgment on top of human judgment. He admitted his own guilt (cf. 18:13-14), and he did not try to excuse his acts. He went further and even defended Jesus' innocence.

"When the two malefactors [criminals] were hanged beside the Lord, the one was no better than the other. ... It is only the grace of God in the cross of Christ that can instantly transform a reviling sinner into an attitude of saving faith and confession. The repentant thief began to see (1) the justice of his own punishment (v. 41); (2) the sinless character of Christ (v. 41); (3) the Deity of Christ (v. 42); (4) a living Christ beyond the grave (v. 42); and (5) a kingdom beyond the cross, with Jesus as its coming King (v. 42)."<sup>2</sup>

23:42 The second criminal's request that Jesus remember him was a call for spiritual salvation. He claimed nothing deserving of Jesus' mercy but simply asked for grace in spite of his guilt.

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<sup>1</sup>Morris, *The Gospel ...*, p. 328.

<sup>2</sup>*The New Scofield ...*, p. 1119.

His appeal anticipated that Jesus would live (rise from the dead?), and that He would return, raise the righteous dead, and establish His kingdom on the earth. The man's view of Messiah was that He was divine, not just a present political deliverer. Evidently this man had earlier heard Jesus' teachings about the kingdom.

"... the second criminal is a perceptive person who contrasts sharply with the imperceptive people who are calling on Jesus to save himself."<sup>1</sup>

"Some saw Jesus raise the dead, and did not believe. The robber sees Him being put to death, and yet believes."<sup>2</sup>

"The criminal is the last person who turns to Jesus for help during Jesus' ministry; he is also the one person who understands and accepts the path which Jesus must follow to fulfill God's purpose: through death to enthronement at God's right hand."<sup>3</sup>

"Like other marginalized persons in the Third Gospel, the second criminal, this religious and social outsider, thus exercises astounding insight into the status and identity of Jesus."<sup>4</sup>

"It is remarkable how, in three following sayings, the Lord appears as Prophet, Priest, and King: as *Prophet*, to the *daughters of Jerusalem*;—as *Priest*, interceding for forgiveness:—as *King*, acknowledged by the penitent thief, and answering his prayer."<sup>5</sup>

23:43      The penitent thief received more from Jesus than he expected, as is always true in salvation. Jesus prefaced His solemn

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<sup>1</sup>Tannehill, *The Narrative ...*, 1:126.

<sup>2</sup>Plummer, p. 535.

<sup>3</sup>Tannehill, *The Narrative ...*, 1:127.

<sup>4</sup>Green, p. 822.

<sup>5</sup>Alford, 1:661.

promise with a guarantee of its validity: "Truly I say to you." The thief would not have to wait for the earthly kingdom to be with Jesus. He would be with Him in paradise, the place of righteous departed spirits, that very day when they both died. The mockers had challenged Jesus to save them (v. 39), and now Jesus was doing just that for this thief.

"The promise implies the continuance of consciousness after death. If the dead are unconscious, the assurance to the robber that he will be with Christ after death would be empty of consolation."<sup>1</sup>

English translations normally have a comma after "Truly I say to you." Some interpreters, however, do not put the comma there but after "today." Such a rendering allows for the possibility that the thief would not go into paradise immediately after he died. This rendering appeals to advocates of the false doctrines of purgatory and soul sleep.<sup>2</sup> The original Greek text did not have any punctuation marks. The normal translation, with the comma following "you," is correct. The phrase translated here "Truly I say to you" occurs over 75 times in the Gospels, and it is always followed by an important statement. Furthermore, the Greek text puts the word translated "today" (*semaron*) forward in the rest of Jesus' reply ("today you will be with Me in Paradise"), which positioning indicates emphasis on the word "today." Jesus wanted the thief to understand that, when he died, he would enter paradise immediately.

"... if a sinner ever deserved a long term in purgatory, this malefactor was such a one. His immediate transfer into heaven is proof that is fatal to the idea of a purgatory or of an intermediate place."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Plummer, pp. 535-36.

<sup>2</sup>See Gaebelien, 3:1:171.

<sup>3</sup>Lenski, p. 1147.

"Paradise" and "Abraham's arms" (16:22-26) are the same place. The word "paradise" has come into English from the Greek language, but it originally came from the Persian. It describes a beautiful garden or delightful park such as the Garden of Eden (Gen. 2:8). Symbolically it represents future bliss (cf. Isa. 51:3; Rev. 2:7). Essentially the paradise that lies ahead for believers is ideal because God is there (cf. 2 Cor. 12:4). Jesus presented fellowship with Himself as the best part of salvation, which it is.

"... Jesus acts as the Messiah who has the kingly right to open the doors of paradise to those who come into fellowship with him."<sup>1</sup>

"When a Persian king wished to do one of his subjects a very special honour he made him a companion of the garden, and he was chosen to walk in the garden with the king. It was more than immortality that Jesus promised the penitent thief. He promised him the honoured place of a companion of the garden in the courts of heaven."<sup>2</sup>

When Jesus suffered on the cross He experienced separation from the Father, which is spiritual death. Having died physically, His body went into the grave for parts of three days. His spirit went to paradise, namely, into the Father's presence, where the spirits of the righteous dead abide until their reunion with their bodies at their resurrection. When Jesus arose, the Father reunited His spirit with His then immortal body.

The Apostles' Creed says that when Jesus died He descended into hell. This idea evidently originated because Jesus said that He would spend three days and three nights in the heart of the earth when He died (Matt. 12:40). The ancients viewed Sheol (the Old Testament term) and Hades (the New Testament

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<sup>1</sup>Marshall, *The Gospel ...*, p. 873.

<sup>2</sup>Barclay, pp. 299-300.

term) as being in the heart of the earth, or at least as being under the surface of the ground.

There is no clear biblical statement that Jesus' spirit went to hell after His death. The passages sometimes cited to support this view, in addition to Matthew 12:40, include Acts 2:27 (cf. Ps. 16:8-11); Ephesians 4:7 through 10; and 1 Peter 3:18 through 20. But I do not believe that they do support it.<sup>1</sup> On the contrary, Jesus here affirmed that His spirit would go to paradise (i.e., God's presence) when He died (cf. 2 Cor. 12:4).

"The point is that the Creed sets forth what Christ suffered in the sight of men, and then appositely [in a corresponding way] speaks of that invisible and incomprehensible judgment which he underwent in the sight of God in order that we might know not only that Christ's body was given as the price of our redemption, but that he paid a greater and more excellent price in suffering in his soul the terrible torments of a condemned and forsaken man."<sup>2</sup>

Note also that Jesus promised the thief that he would go to paradise simply because of his faith in Jesus. This is one of the clearest proofs in Scripture that salvation is not a reward for something that we do that deserves a reward but is a gift of God (Eph. 2:8-9). The thief did not have to do anything more in order to qualify for heaven. Indeed, he could have done nothing more. People who believe that some works are necessary for salvation usually explain this instance of salvation as an exception to the rule. But Jesus' promise is consistent with the teaching of Scripture elsewhere that salvation comes to a person solely in response to believing faith in Him.

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<sup>1</sup>For an extended discussion of Christ's supposed descent into hell, see W. H. Griffith Thomas, *The Principles of Theology*, pp. 65-72.

<sup>2</sup>Calvin, 2:16:10.

"One thief was saved, so that none needs to despair; but only one, so that none may presume [that all will be saved]."<sup>1</sup>

**Jesus' self-sacrifice to God 23:44-49 (cf. Matt. 27:45-56; Mark 15:33-41; John 19:28-30)**

Luke included three things in this heart of Jesus' death scene: He gave two evidences of God's displeasure with people for rejecting His Son, he recorded Jesus' prayer of trust in the Father, and he noted three immediate reactions to Jesus' death.

23:44-45 Luke arranged two unusual occurrences in order to show God's displeasure with humankind for rejecting His Son.<sup>2</sup>

The sixth and ninth hours were noon and 3:00 p.m. respectively. The darkness that obscured the sun represented the judgment that obscured the beneficent light of God's countenance (cf. Isa. 5:30; 60:2; Joel 2:30-31; Amos 5:18, 20; Zeph. 1:14-18; Luke 22:53; Acts 2:20; 2 Pet. 2:17; Rev. 6:12-17). Evidently this was a local rather than a universal phenomenon (cf. Exod. 10:22).<sup>3</sup> It could not have been a solar eclipse, since Passover occurred at the full moon. There is some evidence, however, that unusual darkness covered other parts of the known world at this time.<sup>4</sup>

Luke moved the tearing of the temple veil up in his narrative, whereas Matthew and Mark placed it after Jesus' death as a consequence of that event. In those Gospels this event symbolized the opening of the way into God's presence that Jesus' death affected. But in Luke the reader sees it as a sign of God's wrath. Specifically, it seems to represent God's judgment on Judaism for rejecting the Messiah. It was a preview of the judgment coming on Jerusalem that Jesus had predicted.

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<sup>1</sup> *The New Scofield ...*, p. 1119.

<sup>2</sup> Marshall, *The Gospel ...*, pp. 873-74.

<sup>3</sup> Plummer, p. 536.

<sup>4</sup> See J. Bishop, p. 314, footnote.

"Luke portrays the rending of the temple veil as a symbol of the destruction of the symbolic world surrounding and emanating from the temple, neutralizing the centrality of the temple in preparation for the centrifugal [outward moving] mission of Jesus' followers—not *to* Jerusalem, but *from* it, and to the 'end of the earth' (Acts 1:8)."<sup>1</sup>

23:46 Luke next recorded Jesus' death and, just before it, Jesus' final prayer to His Father.

<b>JESUS' WORDS ON THE CROSS</b>				
	<b>Matthew</b>	<b>Mark</b>	<b>Luke</b>	<b>John</b>
"Father, forgive them.; for they do not know what they are doing."			23:34	
"Truly I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise."			23:43	
"Woman, behold your son!" and "Behold, your mother!"				19:26-27
"My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?"	27:46	15:34		
"I am thirsty."				19:28
"It is finished!"				19:30
"Father, into your hands I entrust My spirit."	27:50		23:46	

In this prayer, Jesus offered Himself to God as a sacrifice for the sins of the world. Jesus voluntarily laid His life down; no one took it from Him (John 10:15-18; cf. John 15:13). His words were similar to those that many Jews used in prayer

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<sup>1</sup>Green, p. 826.

before they went to sleep at night (cf. Ps. 31:5).<sup>1</sup> They expressed Jesus' trust in God as well as His commitment to Him.

"How many thousands have pillowed their heads on them when going to rest! They were the last words of a Polycarp, a Bernard [of Clairvaux], Huss, Luther, and Melanchthon. And to us also they may be the fittest and the softest lullaby."<sup>2</sup>

The strength with which Jesus cried out ("with a loud voice") showed His physical strength. He did not die of exhaustion. But, more importantly, His loud cry emphasized the significance of what He said. Jesus sovereignly controlled His circumstances all the way to the end of His life.

"Jesus died with a shout of triumph on His lips. ... He said it like a victor who has won his last engagement with the enemy, like one who has brought a tremendous task to its ultimate conclusion."<sup>3</sup>

The exact date on which Christ died has been the subject of scholarly disagreement for many years. Geldenhuys calculated that it was April 6, A.D. 30.<sup>4</sup> Andrews and Bishop placed it at April 7, A.D.<sup>5</sup> 30. Hoehner concluded that it was April 3, A.D. 33.<sup>6</sup> Others have come up with other dates.

As God rested after six days of work on the creation (Gen. 2:1-3), so Jesus rested after six hours of work on the cross in which He made a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17).<sup>7</sup>

23:47 The Roman centurion who was responsible for carrying out Jesus' crucifixion added his testimony to the others who

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<sup>1</sup>Liefeld, "Luke," p. 1045.

<sup>2</sup>Edersheim, *The Life ...*, 2:609-10.

<sup>3</sup>Barclay, p. 301.

<sup>4</sup>Geldenhuys, p. 670.

<sup>5</sup>Andrews, p. 649; J. Bishop, p. ix.

<sup>6</sup>Hoehner, *Chronological Aspects ...*, p. 114.

<sup>7</sup>Wiersbe, 1:277.



recognized Jesus' innocence. His witness constituted praise of God, because his witness harmonized with God's assessment of His Son.<sup>1</sup> Praising God is a response to God's power and mercy that Luke often noted in this Gospel (2:20; et al.).

23:48 The reaction of the general public (Gr. *ochloi*, a mixed group) was to beat their chests with their hands in typical ancient Near Eastern fashion. This symbolized their grief at the tragedy of Jesus' crucifixion (cf. 18:13).

These reactions, in verses 47 and 48, confirm that Jesus did indeed die as a real man. He was not a god who merely appeared to die, like some Greek gods did. Note also that Luke presented these witnesses in a receding order from the cross (v. 46). The effect is to lead the reader to step back from the cosmic epicenter of history gradually. Sometimes modern filmmakers use this technique in order to conclude their stories dramatically.

23:49 Jesus' acquaintances, including several females, stood at a distance watching. The reference to these women prepares the reader for the following events. The implication is that they, too, marveled at the tragedy but stood aloof (cf. Ps. 38:11).

Luke highlighted Jesus' innocence in a number of ways that the other Gospel writers did not. He recorded that Pilate declared Him innocent four times (vv. 4, 14, 15, 22). He also noted Herod's testimony to Jesus' innocence (v. 15). He contrasted Jesus' innocence with Barabbas' guilt (v. 25). He recorded the thief's testimony to Jesus' innocence (v. 41). He also included the centurion's confession of Jesus' innocence (v. 47). Finally he noted the reaction of the crowd, which showed that many of them believed that He was innocent (v. 48). Obviously Luke wanted to convince his readers that Jesus died as an innocent man, not as a guilty sinner.

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<sup>1</sup>See Vern S. Poythress, "Presuppositions and Harmonization: Luke 23:47 as a Test Case," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 56:3 (September 2013):499-509.

**G. THE BURIAL OF JESUS 23:50-56 (CF. MATT. 27:57-66; MARK 15:42-47; JOHN 19:31-42)**

This pericope is primarily transitional; it bridges the stories of Jesus' death and resurrection. And it confirms the reality of Jesus' death. However Luke included more information about Joseph of Arimathea than the other evangelists, revealing his desire to inform his readers that not all the Jewish leaders opposed Jesus.

"Here at the end of Jesus' life, we find reminiscences of the beginning (chs. 1—2), with Jewish faithfulness on full display."<sup>1</sup>

- 23:50 Luke presented Joseph of "Arimathea" (possibly Ramah, Ramathaim) as a member of the Council (Sanhedrin) who was a believer in Jesus. He was one of the good and righteous in Israel who were waiting for the arrival of the messianic kingdom. Luke did not emphasize Joseph's wealth (Matt. 27:57), but his piety (cf. 2:25-38). Evidently Joseph was absent when the Sanhedrin voted to condemn Jesus, since their vote was unanimous (22:70; Mark 14:64).
- 23:51 Not all of Israel's leaders opposed Jesus. This notation would have encouraged Luke's original readers to view Christianity favorably. It would also have helped them realize that it is possible to believe in Jesus and still be part of a group that rejects Him. Here is another indication that Jesus was innocent: Even one of the Sanhedrin members believed in Him.
- 23:52 Joseph's request for Jesus' body indicated his intention to give it a decent burial and so honor Jesus.<sup>2</sup>

"As at his birth, so at his death, the best of Jewish piety shows itself sensitive to the possibility that in Jesus God was at work."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Green, p. 829.

<sup>2</sup>See Barclay, p. 303, for the legend that Joseph went to England with the Holy Grail.

<sup>3</sup>Nolland, *Luke 18:35—24:53*, p. 1163.

- 23:53 Joseph's careful and respectful treatment of Jesus' body reflected how he felt about Him (cf. Isa. 53:9).
- 23:54 Luke dated his action as late Friday afternoon. The "preparation" (Gr. *paraskeue*) day was the day before the Sabbath, which began at sundown on Friday. Luke's explanation is helpful for non-Jewish readers.
- 23:55 This reference to the women who had come to Jerusalem from Galilee anticipates the account of Jesus' resurrection. When they went to the tomb on Sunday morning, they did not go to the wrong one. They had previously been there and had seen Jesus' corpse in it ("how His body was laid").
- 23:56 The women prepared spices and perfumes for their return visit on Sunday that was designed to honor Jesus further. Luke's reference to the passing of the Sabbath with no disciple activity confirms Jesus' prediction that He would be in the grave three days (18:33; cf. 24:7). It also shows that Jesus' followers observed the Sabbath as obedient Israelites (Exod. 20:10).

#### H. THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS 24:1-12 (CF. MATT. 28:1-8; MARK 16:1-8; JOHN 20:1-10)

Luke's account of the events following Jesus' resurrection highlights the reality of that event and the reactions of the witnesses to it. All of these people felt depressed because of Jesus' death, but when they learned of His resurrection they became joyful and praised God. Thus the book concludes as it began: with joy and rejoicing because of a miracle involving the salvation of humankind (cf. chs. 1—2).

"The majority of the pertinent passages in the Gospel of Luke parallel those in Matthew and Mark and contribute no new information to the common stock, but there are a few significant additions revealing the author's interest in this doctrine [of resurrection; see 14:14; 16:19-31; 24:13-35]."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Merrill C. Tenney, *The Reality of the Resurrection*, p. 61.

"The record of the resurrection of the crucified dead body of Jesus constitutes the climax of all four Gospels. Yea, more than a climax. All that these Gospels record in the rest of their chapters heads straight for this final chapter on the risen and glorified Lord. Take away this chapter and the facts it records, and you cancel all else that is of any worth in all the previous chapters."<sup>1</sup>

"Luke 24 and Acts 1, which partly overlap, bridge the important transition from the story of Jesus to the story of his witnesses. The narrator's concern to build a strong bridge, unifying the story rather than permitting it to disintegrate into two stories, is shown by the amount of material in these chapters which either reviews what has already happened or previews what is going to happen."<sup>2</sup>

24:1 Saturday was a day of rest for the Jews, but when Sunday came the women who had previously visited the tomb (23:55) went into action.<sup>3</sup> Luke dated their arrival at the tomb at "early" (lit. deep) dawn. Dawn has obvious symbolic connotations as signifying something new and fresh. This day would signal the beginning of something entirely new: a new day in human history. The women brought spices and perfumes (23:56) to anoint the body of Jesus. They were the first to learn of the resurrection because their devotion to Jesus moved them to express their love for Him. Their example has challenged believers ever since to copy their love for the Savior.

24:2-3 Luke focused more on the absence of Jesus' body than the moving of the stone that sealed the tomb. All four evangelists mentioned the removal of the stone, probably because of its apologetic value. It was not just the spirit of Jesus that had departed, but His body had departed as well. Luke contrasted what the women found ("the stone rolled away") with what they did not find ("the body"). The title "Lord Jesus" is new in

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<sup>1</sup>Lenski, p. 1168.

<sup>2</sup>Tannehill, *The Narrative ...*, 1:277.

<sup>3</sup>See Zane C. Hodges, "The Women and the Empty Tomb," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 123:492 (October-December 1966):301-9.

Luke. It indicates the new status of the risen Christ. The early Christians used this title often (Acts 1:21; 4:33; 8:16).

- 24:4 Only Luke mentioned that there were two angels. Probably God sent two in order to convince the women that Jesus really had arisen (Deut. 17:6; 19:15; cf. Luke 2:25-38; 24:48; Acts 1:8, 22; 2:32; 3:15; 5:32; et al.). They appeared to be men, but they were angels (v. 23; Matt. 28:5), as their "gleaming clothing" (Gr. *astraptouse*, cf. 9:29; Matt. 28:3; Acts 1:10) undoubtedly indicated to the women. Tenny translated this Greek word "flashing like lightning."<sup>1</sup>
- 24:5 The women responded to these "men" as to divine messengers by bowing their faces to the ground (cf. 1:12, 29; 2:9; 9:34). The angels' words stressed the fact that Jesus was alive. It was inappropriate to look for a living person in a tomb (cf. Acts 2:24).
- 24:6-7 The angels then flatly declared that Jesus had risen from the dead, and they reminded the women of Jesus' prophecy that He would rise on the third day (9:22, 43-45; 18:31-33). Luke had written that the meaning of Jesus' prediction was incomprehensible to the disciples when He gave it (18:34; cf. 24:16). But now God's messengers clarified it. Note the recurrence of the divine necessity behind Jesus' death and resurrection in verse 7 indicated by the word "must" (Gr. *dei*, cf. 2:49; 4:43; 13:33; 17:25; 19:5, 22; 22:37; 24:25-27, 44-46; Acts 2:23-24).<sup>2</sup>
- 24:8 The women now remembered the predictions that they had heard but had not understood. The Resurrection had begun to clarify many things that Jesus had previously taught His disciples (cf. Acts 11:16).
- 24:9 The women then returned to the Eleven and the other disciples with their news. The angels had been witnesses of the Resurrection to the women, and now the women were witnesses to all the Eleven and to all rest of the disciples. They

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<sup>1</sup>Tenny, "The Gospel ...," p. 1068.

<sup>2</sup>See Mark L. Bailey, "A Biblical Theology of Suffering in the Gospels," in *Why, O God? Suffering and Disability in the Bible and the Church*, pp. 163-65.

in turn would be witnesses of it to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). Luke probably wanted his readers to note this beginning of the Christian mission here.

24:10 Luke now introduced the identity of these female witnesses, whose names he evidently omitted earlier in order to focus attention on the Resurrection itself.

<b>WOMEN WHO VISITED THE TOMB EASTER MORNING</b>			
<b>Matthew 28:1</b>	<b>Mark 16:1</b>	<b>Luke 24:10</b>	<b>John 20:1</b>
Mary Magdalene	Mary Magdalene	Mary Magdalene	Mary Magdalene
The other Mary =	Mary the mother of James	Mary the mother of James	
	Salome		
		Joanna	
		others	

Salome, who is not mentioned here in Luke, was apparently the mother of Zebedee's sons (i.e., James and John, Matt. 27:56) and the sister of Jesus' mother (John 19:25). Joanna was the wife of Chuza, who was Herod's steward, and was one of Jesus' companions in Galilee (8:3).

24:11 The rest of the disciples would not believe that Jesus was alive (cf. vv. 12, 22-24). The apostles were the first disbelievers in the Resurrection. This is amazing since Jesus had predicted His resurrection, and they had seen Him raise at least three people from the dead (cf. 7:11-17; 8:49-56; John 11:38-44). However their reluctance to believe is a strong argument for the reality of the Resurrection. They knew that Jesus had died and been placed in the tomb, but they did not expect the Resurrection. So they would hardly have dreamed it up. Perhaps Luke called these disciples "apostles" because that is

what Jesus intended them to be, namely, messengers sent with a message. They were not yet ready to go, however.

24:12 Some ancient manuscripts omit this verse, but the evidence is good that it was part of Luke's original Gospel. Luke reported that Peter ran to the tomb to check out the women's story. He did not mention the other disciple who accompanied Peter (John 20:6-7), probably because Luke regarded Peter as the leader of the disciples in his Gospel (cf. 5:1-11). Peter too found it empty of Jesus' body. Only the linen cloth with which Joseph of Arimathea had wrapped Jesus' corpse remained.

Peter's decision to return to his "home" (i.e., lodging place) may indicate that he did not understand what had happened. If he had understood, he probably would have returned to the other disciples, assuming they were not all staying in the same house. Luke used the Greek word *thaumazon* ("marveling") to express Peter's lack of comprehension. He neither yet believed nor disbelieved that Jesus had risen. Peter was Luke's second witness to the Resurrection after the women.

#### I. THE POST-RESURRECTION APPEARANCES OF JESUS 24:13-49

Luke included two of Jesus' post-resurrection appearances in his Gospel: first to two disciples, and second to many of the disciples. In both cases the key to their enlightenment was the Hebrew Scriptures.

##### 1. The appearance to the disciples walking to Emmaus 24:13-35

This is another of Luke's exquisite and unique stories. Various students of it have noted its similarity to the stories of the feeding of the 5,000 (9:10-17), Jesus' later appearance in Jerusalem (vv. 36-49), and the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:26-40). Luke's purpose in recording the incident seems to have been to demonstrate the reality of the Resurrection and the identity of the risen Christ. It also unites many of Luke's major themes. Structurally

this section is chiasmic, with the center of the chiasmus falling on and emphasizing "He was alive" (v. 23b).<sup>1</sup>

24:13 The day in view was Sunday, the day of the Resurrection, the so-called "Easter event." Luke described the two men as "two of them." The antecedent seems to be those who had heard of Jesus' resurrection (v. 9). Emmaus (lit. warm springs, or "warm bath"<sup>2</sup>) was about seven miles west of Jerusalem, toward the Mediterranean Sea.<sup>3</sup>

Luke presented Jesus as heading toward Jerusalem and the Cross throughout his Gospel. Now he told of two disciples who were heading away from Jerusalem and the Cross. He probably intended his readers to see these people as representative disciples going out from Jerusalem to witness for Jesus, though so far they had no good news to proclaim (cf. Acts 1:8).

24:14 Shortly after Luke recorded that Jesus set out resolutely for Jerusalem (9:51) he wrote that a man approached Him about discipleship. That man had gone away sad. Now we see that Jesus approached two disheartened disciples as they were sadly leaving Jerusalem. They needed more training before they could represent Him effectively.

24:15 Luke pictured the scene like a drama or play. The two people were walking along discussing Jesus' death and the reports of His resurrection (v. 10), but not knowing what to make of them, when Jesus Himself joined them. Some writers have seen this situation as parallel to Jesus' presence with His often non-perceptive disciples in the present age.<sup>4</sup>

24:16 Luke's implication was that these men's pre-conceptions, combined with Jesus' somewhat altered appearance, were preventing them from recognizing Him (cf. 9:45; 18:34). Evidently Jesus looked like the real man that He was, albeit

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<sup>1</sup>See Green, p. 842, for the full chiasmic diagram.

<sup>2</sup>Josephus, *The Wars ...*, 4:1:3.

<sup>3</sup>See the *The Wycliffe Bible Encyclopedia*, s.v. "Emmaus," 1:525-26, for discussion of possible sites. Cf. Nolland, *Luke 18:35—24:53*, p. 1201.

<sup>4</sup>E.g., Liefeld, "Luke," p. 1051.



now immortal, yet they could not recognize Him. The key to recognizing Jesus for who He was would be the illumination of God through the Scriptures.

24:17 Jesus' question apparently so shocked the two disciples that they stopped walking. It opened a wound in their hearts and renewed their sorrow.

24:18 Cleopas' casual comment tells the reader that Jesus was the talk of Jerusalem. Everyone there, residents and pilgrims alike, knew about Him and what had happened to Him (cf. Acts 26:26). Luke may have mentioned Cleopas by name because some of his readers knew him or knew of him.

According to Christian tradition, Cleopas was Jesus' uncle and Joseph's brother, and he became a leader of the Jerusalem church.<sup>1</sup> He could have been the husband of Mary, the wife of Clopas (a variant spelling of the same name), who was present at Jesus' crucifixion (John 19:25). But that may have been a different man. There was a tradition in the early Byzantine church that Luke was the second, unnamed disciple.<sup>2</sup>

24:19 Jesus was baiting His companions: getting them to articulate what they knew and to reveal what was important to them. They viewed Jesus as a mighty prophet in the eyes of God and all the people (Gr. *laos*, the open-minded public, cf. Acts 18:10).

"This characterization, together with the assertion of full publicity amongst the people, contains pointed echoes of Luke's introductory summary of Jesus' ministry [in the power of the] Spirit (Lk. 4, 14; cp. Acts 10, 38)."<sup>3</sup>

"The importance of the affirmation of the two disciples here in 24:19 must not in any way be

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<sup>1</sup>Eusebius, 3:11:99; cf. Ellis, p. 894.

<sup>2</sup>For defense of this view, see Wenham, pp. 29-32.

<sup>3</sup>R. J. Dillon, *From Eye-Witnesses to Ministers of the Word: Tradition and Composition in Luke 24*, p. 114.

underestimated. It is integral to Luke's theology and purpose."<sup>1</sup>

"Jesus chose these two because they were two and could serve as two witnesses, not only to testify that they had seen him, but to testify to all that he was telling them about the Scripture prophecies regarding his death and his resurrection."<sup>2</sup>

24:20 These men also laid the blame for Jesus' death on the religious leaders, another point that Luke had been making throughout his Gospel. The rulers did not acknowledge Jesus as a prophet from God.

24:21 The travelers, in contrast to Israel's leaders, had hoped that Jesus would prove to be their nation's deliverer (cf. 1:68; 2:30, 38; 21:28), namely, the Messiah—whom they evidently saw as a political liberator. Of course, Jesus did redeem Israel by His death on the cross, but they were speaking of physical deliverance from Rome and the establishment of the earthly kingdom of Messiah.

"... even though they regard Jesus as a prophet, they have failed to take with appropriate seriousness his prophecies regarding his own suffering, death, and resurrection."<sup>3</sup>

Their reference to the third day since Jesus' death implied that they had expected something important to happen by then. The fact that nothing had happened, from their standpoint, was a great disappointment.

Possibly these disciples were not yet believers. They appear not to have recognized that Jesus was much more than a prophet or a political messiah, rather than the divine Son of God.

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<sup>1</sup>Liefeld, "Luke," p. 1052.

<sup>2</sup>Lenski, p. 1183.

<sup>3</sup>Green, pp. 846-47.

"Observe that the verb is 'hoped,' not 'trusted' (as in KJV); there is a big difference between trusting Jesus as our Deliverer and Savior and hoping that he will prove to be our Deliverer and Savior."<sup>1</sup>

Another possibility is that they were believers who had simply become discouraged by Jesus' death (cf. John the Baptist, 7:19).

24:22-24 Even after hearing of the empty tomb they were not aware of anything outstanding that had happened on the third day, since the report of some women in their group of disciples confused them. There was evidence of an empty tomb, but no evidence of Jesus (cf. v. 12). This shows that the Resurrection is all-important in the Christian faith. An empty tomb was just a strange puzzle that discouraged these disciples. Even hearing about the angelic visit had not lifted their spirits (cf. 1:22). Jesus' resurrection would prove to be something infinitely more significant.

24:25 A fool in the Old Testament is a person who does not allow the Scriptures to influence his or her thinking or behavior. These disciples ("foolish men") had failed to do that. They were also "slow of heart" to believe what they did know or understand that the former prophets and Jesus had revealed. They had overlooked the prophecies about the Messiah having to suffer, preferring rather to focus only on those that predicted His glorification. Their error constitutes a warning for all subsequent disciples. All Scripture is profitable. We should not slight any part of it but should strive for a comprehensive understanding of its teaching. If these disciples had understood and believed what the Old Testament and Jesus had revealed, they would not have felt depressed but would have been full of joy.

"The Lord, in speaking about His resurrection, did not show them the prints of the nails in His hands to prove it. He referred them to the Scriptures

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<sup>1</sup>Liefeld, "Luke," p. 1052.

rather than to the nail prints. He told them, 'You should have believed what the prophets said.' It is well to note the Lord's attitude toward the Bible. The day in which we live is a day of doubt. There are people who are actually saying that you cannot be intelligent and believe the Bible. Many people are afraid that they will not be considered intelligent; so they don't come out flat-footed and say whether they believe the Bible or not. I suppose it is the most subtle and satanic trap of our day to discount the inerrancy and integrity of the Word of God. Christ says a man is a *fool* not to believe it. He gave an [*sic* a] unanimous and wholehearted acceptance of the Bible's statements, with no ifs, ands, or buts."<sup>1</sup>

"Acceptance of what the prophets said should have led the disciples to believe the reports of the women at the tomb; one may believe in the resurrection on the evidence of others, although this does not mean that the Lord withholds personal evidence from those who need it."<sup>2</sup>

"Failure of insight comes from failure to embrace the ways of God."<sup>3</sup>

Luke highlighted Jesus' identification as the risen Christ by placing the Greek word translated He and Him in the emphatic position in the Greek text, in verses 24 and 25: "Him [Jesus] they did not see." "He [Jesus] said to them."

24:26 Jesus stressed again the divine necessity ("necessary," Gr. *dei*) of Messiah's sufferings.

"This scene suggests that a meal with Jesus is an especially appropriate place for the revelation and recognition of Jesus as the (risen) Messiah, and that the feeding of the five thousand is

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<sup>1</sup>McGee, 4:358.

<sup>2</sup>Marshall, *The Gospel ...*, p. 896.

<sup>3</sup>Green, p. 848.

understood by the narrator as a first experience of this revelation at a meal [cf. 9:16], resulting in Peter's recognition of Jesus as the Messiah."<sup>1</sup>

24:27 Jesus gave these privileged disciples a unique short course in Old Testament Christology.<sup>2</sup> He evidently pointed out the passages that spoke of Messiah's sufferings particularly, beginning in the Law ("Moses") and all the Old Testament Prophets. What an exposition of the Scriptures this must have been! It is no wonder that they later commented that their hearts were burning within them as Jesus explained the Scriptures to them (v. 32).

"Jesus found himself in the Old Testament, a thing that some modern scholars do not seem able to do."<sup>3</sup>

"Which texts does Jesus exegete for his companions? We are not told, but the implication with which Luke leaves us is that it does not matter. The pattern exemplified by Moses and the prophets is consummated in a Messiah who suffers. Likewise, all of the Scriptures have their fulfillment in a Messiah who suffers."<sup>4</sup>

Jesus' method of bringing spiritual illumination to these disciples is a model that the apostles followed in their preaching, as is clear from Acts. It centered on explaining the meaning of what God had revealed. This method is still essential for spiritual enlightenment (cf. 2 Tim. 3:16-17; 4:1-2).

This verse is sometimes used to support the idea that every sermon preached, on any Biblical text, should in some way clarify something about Jesus. But it was the things concerning

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<sup>1</sup>Tannehill, *The Narrative ...*, 1:219. Cf. Acts 1:4; 10:40-41.

<sup>2</sup>See Morgan, *The Gospel ...*, pp. 278-79, for a synopsis of what Jesus might have included.

<sup>3</sup>Robertson, *Word Pictures ...*, 2:294.

<sup>4</sup>Green, p. 848.

His death and resurrection that Jesus used Scripture to clarify for these men.

24:28 Jesus did not force these disciples to believe or to entertain Him. He whetted their spiritual appetites and then left those decisions up to them. However God's Spirit had been at work in their hearts, and they did not resist His working. Consequently they wanted to hear more.

24:29 They strongly urged Jesus to stay with them for further fellowship and illumination (cf. Gen. 18:3; 19:2). This was obviously more than just a gracious offer that reflects eastern hospitality. Jesus naturally accepted their invitation. He always gives more to those who receive and believe His words (cf. Rev. 3:20).

"Prayers are part of the chain of causation."<sup>1</sup>

24:30-31 Jesus' praying over the bread and breaking it opened the spiritual eyes of Cleopas and his companion. They had not been in the upper room when Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper, so remembering that occasion is not what proved to be the agent of change (cf. v. 21). Perhaps they had been present when Jesus fed the 5,000 (9:10-17; cf. 9:18-20), or the 4,000, or on some other occasion when Jesus had eaten with people. Luke recorded several such instances (cf. 5:29; 7:36; 9:16; 10:38-40; 14:1, 7, 12, 15-16). Perhaps they had only heard about those miracles.

"The description of the Emmaus meal is closer to the feeding of the multitude than to the Last Supper in some details."<sup>2</sup>

The fact that Jesus acted as the host shows that He was the most important person present, which these disciples evidently sensed even before they recognized who He was. Jesus' role as host may have been a factor in their recognizing

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<sup>1</sup>Plummer, p. 556.

<sup>2</sup>Tannehill, *The Narrative ...*, 1:289.

Him. The wounds in His hands may not have been, since Luke did not mention them.

Their recognition of Jesus for who He was is the climax of the story. Now they knew that the Man they hoped was the Messiah, who had to suffer and then experience glorification, had indeed risen from the dead. Luke said that their eyes were opened (passive voice, cf. v. 16). Someone did it for them. Clearly God gave them understanding (cf. Gen. 3:7).<sup>1</sup> God is the One who reveals His Son to people by His Spirit. In both Luke and Acts, the breaking of bread has connections with instruction concerning Jesus' Person and mission.<sup>2</sup>

After His resurrection Jesus could appear and disappear at will (cf. v. 36). This is an attribute of His resurrection body. Jesus vanished from their sight at this point, because these disciples had become believers in and witnesses of His resurrection. He left them to carry out their duty as His witnesses. Perhaps Luke also included Jesus' remarkable disappearance to impress on his Greek readers that Jesus is supernatural and not just a real man.

24:32 Luke probably recorded this conversation to stress the supernatural power and convincing effect of the Scriptures on people when God opens their eyes (cf. Rom. 10:17). All disciples need to remember that the Bible is what God uses to solve life's mysteries. John Wesley also testified that he felt his heart strangely warmed at his conversion when he heard the Scriptures expounded.

24:33 Cleopas and his friend's eagerness to return to tell the other disciples that Jesus had appeared to them confirms the reality of His resurrection. They could not keep the good news to themselves. There were others back in Jerusalem that did not know it and needed to hear it.

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<sup>1</sup>See Dane C. Ortlund, "'And Their Eyes Were Opened, and They Knew': An Inter-Canonical Note on Luke 24:31," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 53:4 (December 2010):717-28.

<sup>2</sup>Dillon, *From Eye-Witnesses ...*, p. 105. Cf. Luke 9:11, 23; 22:21-38; 24:13-32, 35; Acts 2:42; 20:7, 11.

24:34 When they returned they discovered that the Lord had also appeared to Simon Peter. No New Testament writer described this appearance in detail (cf. 1 Cor. 15:5).

Thus Luke included a second incident that confirmed the Resurrection. The women and Peter had witnessed the empty tomb, and now these two disciples and Peter bore witness to the Resurrection. "Simon" was Peter's normal Jewish name.

24:35 These two witnesses then proceeded to tell others about their experiences with Jesus and who He is. They serve as models of what disciples of the risen Christ should do. The manner in which they came to recognize Him clearly made a life-changing impression on them. Perhaps the reason that Luke mentioned again that the two disciples recognized Jesus in the breaking of the bread is because, for Christians, that happens whenever we observe the Lord's Supper, though in a different sense: We refocus on His death and resurrection.

## 2. The appearances to the disciples in Jerusalem 24:36-49

Luke arranged his accounts of Jesus' post-resurrection appearances in order to give the impression that an ever-increasing audience learned of this great event. First, he recorded an announcement of it with no witnesses (vv. 1-12). Then he told of Jesus appearing to two disciples (vv. 13-35). Next he presented Jesus materializing in the presence of the Eleven minus Thomas (cf. Mark 16:14; John 20:24). Perhaps he meant this presentation to represent the ever-widening circle of witness that the disciples were to give in the world (cf. Acts 1:8). The arrangement does suggest this to the reader, especially since the third incident contains Luke's version of the Great Commission.

Luke's account apparently combines two post-resurrection appearances into one. Luke evidently combined them in order to give Jesus' instructions to His disciples continuity. This section is the basis for Luke's defense of Jesus' bodily resurrection in Acts 1:3 and 4, and Peter's witness to Cornelius in Acts 10:40 through 43.



**The proof of Jesus' bodily resurrection 24:36-43 (cf. Mark 16:14-18; John 20:19-23)**

The emphasis here is on the physical reality of Jesus' body after His resurrection, whereas in the previous pericope the focus was on His supernatural nature. The incident clarifies that the One who rose from the dead was indeed Jesus of Nazareth, a real man. This Gospel opened with alternating emphases on Jesus' humanity and deity (ch. 2), and it likewise closes with this balanced emphasis.

24:36 This incident followed the preceding one immediately. As Jesus had suddenly disappeared (v. 31), so He now suddenly appeared. The doors to the room were shut (John 20:19). Luke verified that it was indeed Jesus by writing: "Jesus Himself suddenly stood in their midst."

Some translations include the disputed reading "And He said to them, Peace be with you" (e.g., NIV). A scribe who was familiar with John 20:19 may have included this sentence in a later copy of this Gospel. It has strong textual support in John but not in Luke.

24:37 Jesus' sudden and unexpected appearance startled and frightened the disciples (cf. 1:12). They apparently thought that Jesus was a "spirit" (Gr. *pneuma*, a being lacking a material body), though not an angel, since He looked like an apparition (a ghost; cf. v. 39; Acts 23:8-9).

24:28 Jesus' questions implied that they should have recognized that it was He. Since they had questions and doubted the reality of His presence, it is unlikely that they projected their hope that He was alive and only imagined that He arose.

24:39 Anyone wishing to prove his real presence could offer his hands and feet for inspection, as Jesus did. However the Roman soldiers had pierced Jesus' hands and feet with nails, so the wounds would have identified Him as Jesus (John 20:25-27). Jesus claimed, "It is I Myself" (Gr. *ego eimi autos*, cf. *ego eimi*, which John recorded Jesus saying frequently in his Gospel). He encouraged His followers to touch Him, as well as to look at Him, and to satisfy their senses that His body was real. His

resurrected human body had flesh and bones, which ghosts do not have. The phrase "flesh and blood" is a similar expression that also describes a physical body (cf. 1 Cor. 15:50). Perhaps Jesus said "flesh and bones," rather than flesh and blood, because bones are easy to identify, whereas blood is not.

24:40 This verse is probably authentic, though it has questionable textual support and is similar to, but not identical to, John 20:20. However the differences with John 20:20 and the textual support favor inclusion in modern translations. Evidently Jesus offered the disciples His hands, His feet, and His side for them to examine as further proof that His body was real.

Docetism was a heresy in the early history of the church that denied that Jesus' body was genuinely human. These verses would have helped the early Christians combat this error. However these statements are not the strongest proofs of Jesus' humanity, since everyone agrees that Jesus' resurrection body was different from His pre-resurrection body. Better proof consists of the evidences of Jesus' true humanity before His resurrection. Luke gave his original Greek readers many such proofs in this Gospel.

24:41 The disciples could no longer disbelieve because of a lack of evidence. But they still had trouble accepting ("could not believe") Jesus' resurrection because it seemed too good to be true that He was alive. Luke's joy motif surfaces again here.

24:42-43 Jesus gave the disciples further proof by eating a piece of broiled fish that they gave Him. We should not conclude from this that His resurrection body depended on physical food for nourishment (cf. Gen. 18:8; 19:3). Jesus' resurrection body was immortal (1 Cor. 15:35-49).

"Christianity is not founded on the dreams of men's disordered minds, or the visions of their fevered eyes, but on one who in actual historical

fact faced and fought and conquered death and rose again."<sup>1</sup>

Luke omitted Mark's reference to Jesus chiding the disciples on this occasion for their unbelief (Mark 16:14). This is typical of Luke, who usually did not discourage his disciple readers with references to Jesus criticizing His followers.

### **The mission of Jesus' disciples 24:44-49 (cf. Acts 1:3-8)**

All the Gospels contain instances of Jesus giving the Great Commission to His disciples, but evidently He did not just give it once. The contexts are different suggesting that He repeated these instructions on at least four separate occasions. This fact obviously reflects the importance of this instruction. The charge that Luke recorded here—and in Acts 1:8—was apparently the last one that Jesus gave. The chronological order seems to have been John 20:21; Mark 16:15; Matthew 28:19 and 20; and Luke 24:46 through 49, and Acts 1:8. This last one occurred just before Jesus' ascension into heaven.

24:44 Jesus reminded the disciples that He had previously taught them that He would fulfill everything written about the Messiah in the Old Testament. The Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms were the three major divisions of the Hebrew Bible. Fulfillment was a divine necessity ("must," Gr. *dei*).

24:45-46 Then Jesus proceeded to open the disciples' understanding (cf. v. 31) by showing them first how He had fulfilled Scripture so far (cf. v. 27). He explained how His sufferings and resurrection, the great psychological barriers to the Jews of Jesus' day, had fulfilled biblical prophecy. We have seen how the disciples failed to grasp these things when Jesus taught them before His passion. Luke again stressed the importance of Scripture in understanding God's program. As Jesus opened the Scriptures, God opened the disciples' minds.

24:47 Next Jesus proceeded to tell them that the Old Testament also predicted that the gospel should go to everyone beginning from Jerusalem (e.g., Isa. 2:2-3; 42:6; 49:6; 60:3; Joel 2:28-29, 32; Mic. 4:1-2). This was also a teaching that the Jews of

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<sup>1</sup>Barclay, p. 311.

Jesus' day resisted strongly. The theme of Gentile evangelism is strong in Luke (Luke 10), and it carries over into Acts (Acts 10—11; 13—28). "Repentance for the forgiveness of sins" was understood by some early copyists to mean "repentance and the forgiveness of sins."

Luke featured Jerusalem as Jesus' city of destiny throughout his Gospel. Now it was destined to become the hub from which the gospel would go out into all the world. Thus this verse is a kind of strait in which the main emphases in Luke converge and through which they pass to Acts. It is Luke's mission statement for the church.

24:48 Evangelism is a key motif in Luke's Gospel, and it too continues in Acts. "These things" evidently refers to the messianic prophecies that Jesus fulfilled. The disciples were witnesses to the fact that Messiah had come as predicted. The Scriptures predicted that the evangelization of the nations could only be fulfilled if the disciples bore witness. We see again the blending of divine sovereignty and human responsibility in Jesus' commission to His disciples.

When God created Adam He gave him a cultural mandate (an official order as head of the human race, Gen. 1:28). Essentially it was to rule over the earth, and it involved the advancement of civilization. This has been the responsibility of every human being. When Jesus arose from the dead, He gave His disciples another mandate. Essentially this was to evangelize the world. This involves the advancement of Christianity. This is the responsibility of every Christian.

24:49 Having explained the disciples' responsibility, Jesus announced what He would do and what they should do next. The "promise of My Father" refers to the Holy Spirit that God promised in the Old Testament to pour out on His people (Isa. 32:15; 44:3; Ezek. 39:29; Joel 2:28-29; cf. John 14:16-17). These Old Testament prophecies are of an outpouring of the Spirit in the millennial kingdom, as the contexts indicate. But a similar outpouring of the same Spirit came on the day of Pentecost (Acts 1:4-5; 2:16). It was perhaps this promise of the Spirit's outpouring that led the disciples to view it as inaugurating the

earthly kingdom (Acts 1:6). Jesus corrected their misunderstanding (Acts 1:7).

Finally Jesus instructed the disciples to remain in Jerusalem until the Spirit clothed them (Acts 1:8). This was a common figure of the Spirit's enabling presence and power in the Old Testament (e.g., Num. 11:25, 29; Judg. 3:10; 14:19; 1 Sam. 11:6; et al.). This power from the Most High has been evident throughout this Gospel (e.g., 1:35; et al), and it is very evident in Acts as well.

"There is a time to wait on God and a time to work for God."<sup>1</sup>

"... Jesus' words in Luke 24:46-49 not only provide a bridge to the early part of Acts but fit with a series of statements describing the missions of key characters, from the summary of John the Baptist's mission early in Luke to the summary of Paul's mission late in Acts."<sup>2</sup>

"... Luke not only presented Jesus as the fulfillment of the Isaianic Servant, but also worded his version of the commission to depict the disciples as those who were to take up the Servant's mission after Jesus' departure."<sup>3</sup>

#### J. THE ASCENSION OF JESUS 24:50-53 (CF. MARK 16:19-20; ACTS 1:9-12)

Jesus' ascension was already in view in 9:51. There Luke presented it as the ultimate goal of Jesus' first advent ministry. Jesus' ascension would have happened even if the Jews had accepted Him as their Messiah. Prophecies of His glorious return to the earth fill the Old Testament. We should not view Jesus' ascension as an afterthought, therefore. It was rather the culmination of Jesus' first advent. Luke is the only New Testament writer who described the Ascension, both in Luke and in Acts.

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 312.

<sup>2</sup>Tannehill, *The Narrative ...*, 1:298.

<sup>3</sup>Thomas S. Moore, "The Lucan Great Commission and the Isaianic Servant," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 154:613 (January-March 1997):47.

Perhaps he did so in order to underscore the significance of the Resurrection.<sup>1</sup>

"With the ascension the Gospel reaches its climax. What began in the temple concludes in the temple with praise to God, and the path of Jesus now reaches its goal. The programme has been established for the second volume of Luke's work in which the church will obey the command of the risen Jesus to take the gospel to all the nations."<sup>2</sup>

"In Luke's mind the Ascension of Christ has two aspects: in the Gospel it is the end of the story of Jesus, in Acts it is the beginning of the story of the Church, which will go on until Christ comes again. Thus for Luke, as Barrett says, 'the end of the story of Jesus is the Church, and the story of Jesus is the beginning of the Church'.<sup>3</sup>

- 24:50 Jesus continued to lead His disciples as their Lord. As noted previously, Bethany stood on Mt. Olivet just east of Jerusalem. As the disciples were walking toward ("as far as," Gr. *pros*) Bethany, Jesus stopped and prayed for God's blessing on them. Lifting up the hands in traditional fashion symbolized a priestly transference of blessing from heaven above to the recipients below (cf. 1:22, 42, 64, 68; 2:28, 34).
- 24:51 Luke described Jesus' ascension (Acts 1:9-11) as a parting, not a permanent separation. Jesus' ascension is reminiscent of Elijah's (2 Kings 2:11; cf. Acts 1:2, 11). Thus Luke drew attention to Jesus' role as a prophet as well as a priest. He will return as King. Jesus' ascension took place 40 days after His resurrection (Acts 1:3).
- 24:52 Some manuscripts record the disciples worshipping Jesus. The textual support for this activity here is good. This is Luke's first reference to the disciples worshipping Jesus. The Resurrection and Jesus' subsequent instruction made His deity beyond doubt for them.

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<sup>1</sup>Bock, "A Theology ...," p. 116.

<sup>2</sup>Marshall, *The Gospel ...*, p. 908.

<sup>3</sup>William Neil, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 26.

The disciples returned from the Mount of Olives to Jerusalem full of joy because they finally understood and accepted God's program for Messiah and for them (cf. 2:10). Jerusalem would shortly become the birthplace of what became known as Christianity.

24:53 The disciples' continual praising God in the temple was undoubtedly for the gospel, the good news that God has provided salvation for humankind through His Son (cf. Acts 2:46; 3:1; 5:42). Peter preached his sermon on the day of Pentecost 10 days later in Jerusalem (Acts 2:1).

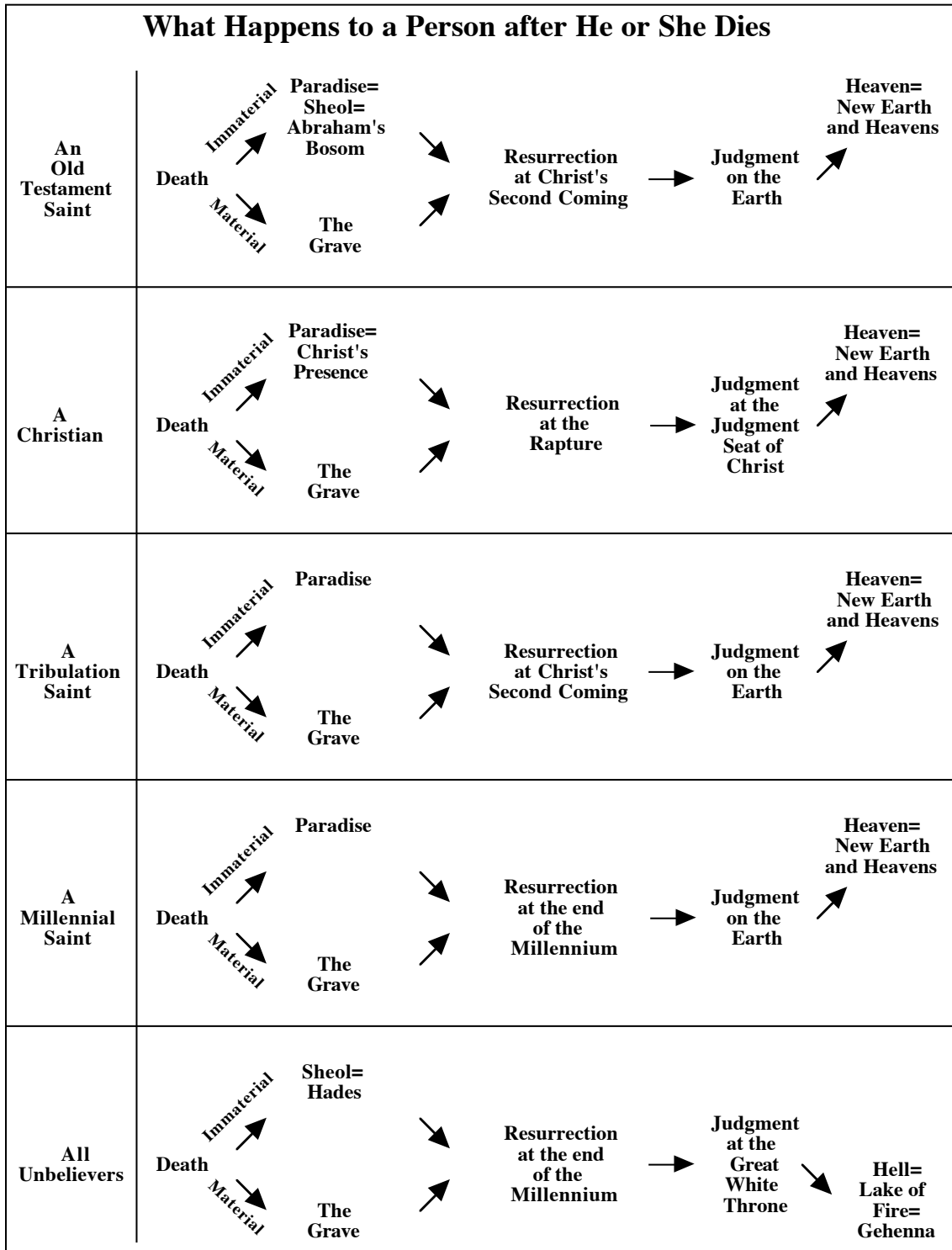
"The return at the end of Luke to the mood of joyful praise of God that filled the birth stories rounds off the story of Jesus; it also affirms that the joy felt by the devoted Jews who greeted the infant Jesus has been justified by later events, bringing the story to a happy resolution. The joy and praise filling the disciples following Jesus' appearance and departure will continue in the life of the early church, as Acts 2:46-47 indicates."<sup>1</sup>

These original disciples set a good example for all of their subsequent fellow disciples. We too should worship, rejoice, and praise God as we eagerly await the fulfillment of all that He has promised.

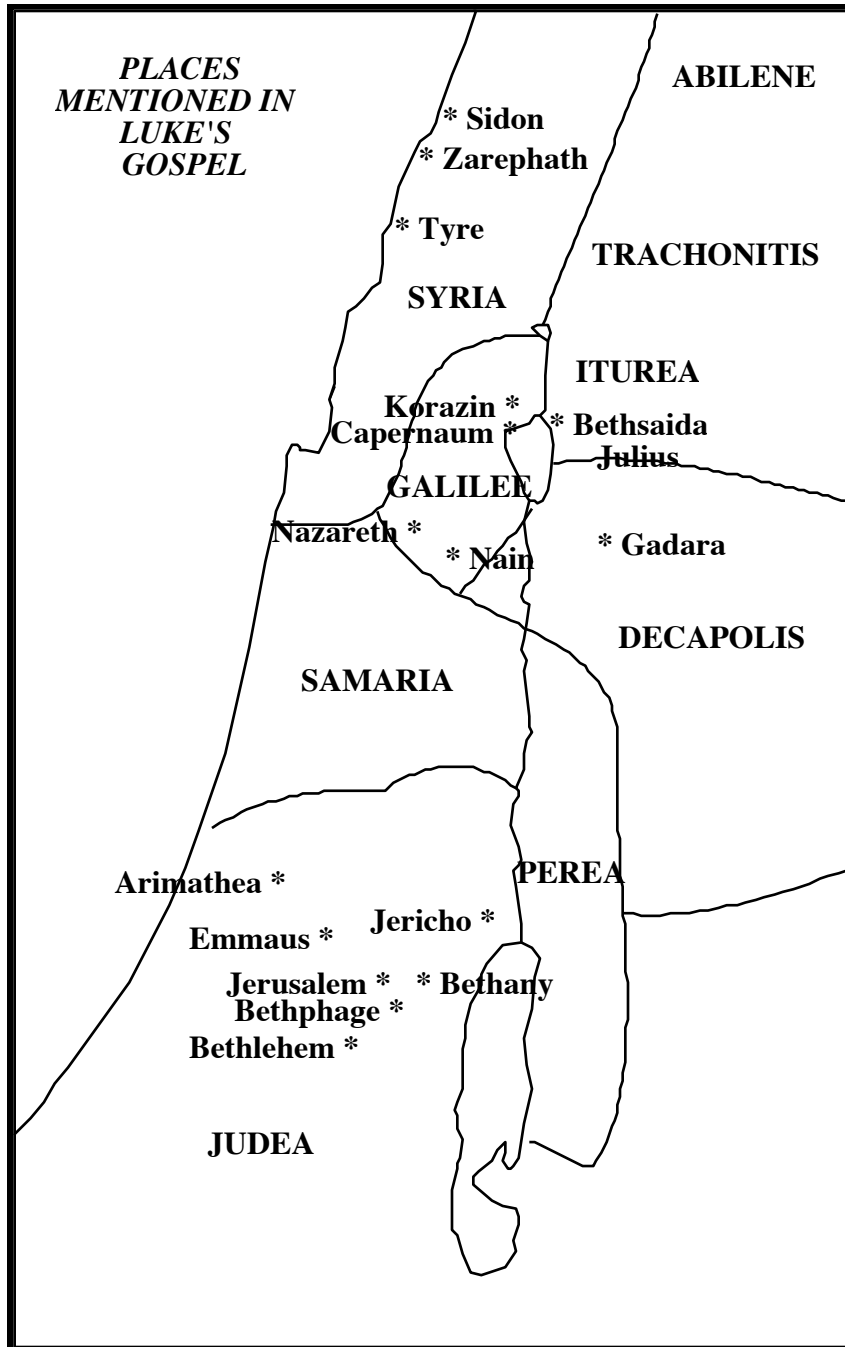
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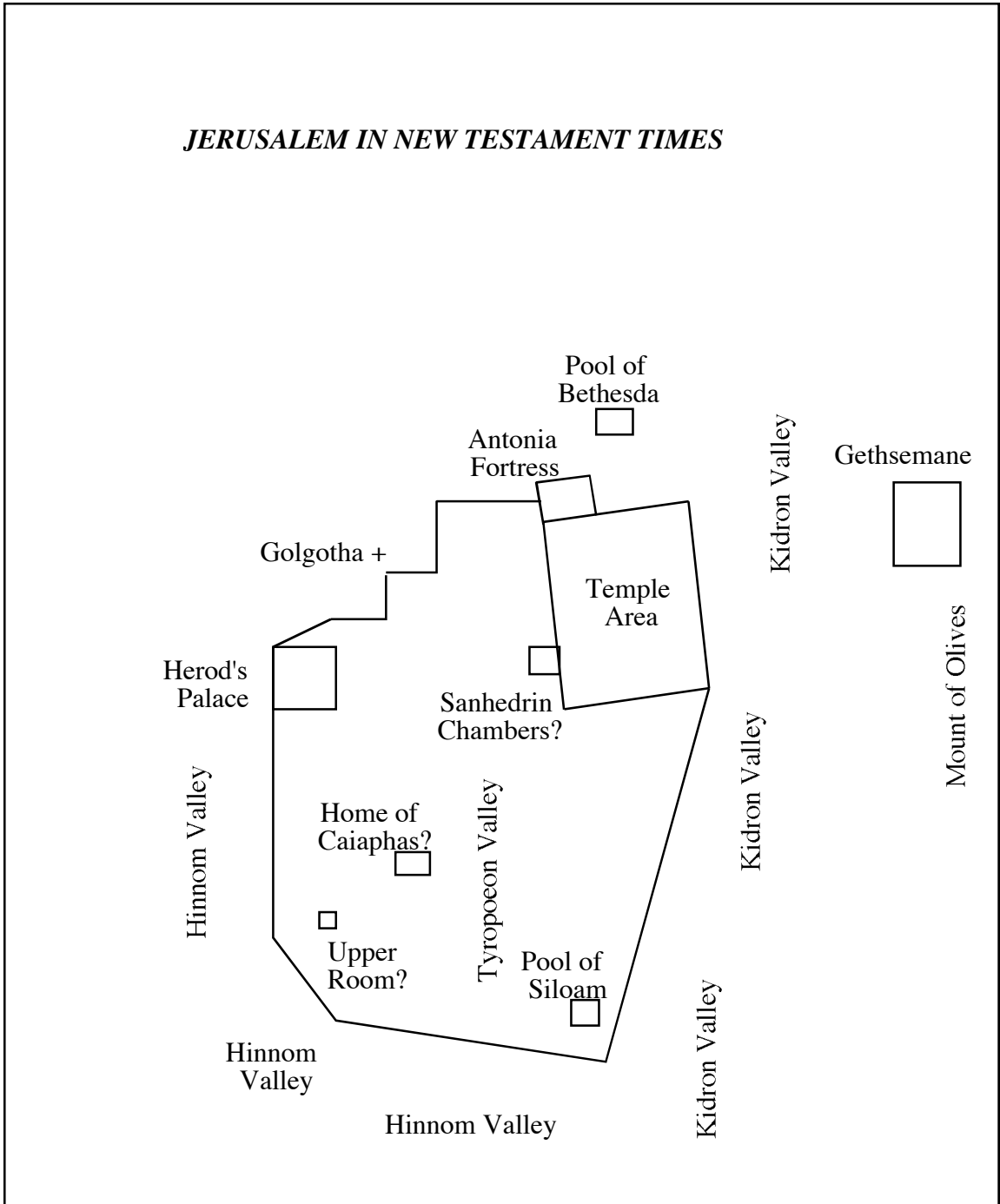
<sup>1</sup>Tannehill, *The Narrative ...*, 1:301.

## Appendix









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