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## Luke Chapter 7

Author(s): S. Kent Brown

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**Abstract:** A commentary on the events of Luke 7, accompanied by parallel columns of the King James translation of the chapter alongside a new rendition.



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# Luke Chapter 7

## INTRODUCTION

Memorable moments of the Savior raising the dead, or those near death, frame chapters 7 and 8 (see 7:1–10, 11–17; 8:41–42, 49–56). This theme of ultimate, gracious mercy finds a voice in Jesus' saying to the two disciples of John the Baptist that, by his works of power, "the dead are raised" (7:22). Amidst these remarkable displays stand his forgiveness of a woman's sins (see 7:47–50) and the parable of the sower which, among other issues, answers the growing, gnawing question about why, even in light of Jesus' awe-inspiring displays of power, some accept Jesus and others do not (see 8:4–15, especially 8:10, 12–14). The power that confers the most mercy, of course, lies in his benevolent ability to forgive sins, an act that brings exhilarating freedom to the recipient's soul. Some unnamed people, however, angrily object to this kind of power (see 7:48–50), or derisively dismiss him—and the Baptist—on some other peevish grounds, such as Jesus' willingness to eat and drink with "publicans and sinners" (7:34) and John's asceticism (see 7:33), augmenting Luke's sharpening sketch of rejection and opposition that we find in earlier chapters (see 4:28–29; 5:21, 30–35; 6:2, 7–11).

By itself, chapter 7 holds our attention on the warming, liberating powers of deliverance, powers that Jesus has recently heralded in the Nazareth synagogue (see 4:18). These powers Jesus freely offers, except in one case: John the Baptist. To the centurion's servant he hands deliverance from a deadly illness; to the grieving widow of Nain he brings deliverance from the dulling tentacles of mourning and from the impaling prospect of making her way alone in life; to her son he extends deliverance from the darkness of death; to the woman "which was a sinner" he unfolds the glowing prospect of forgiveness, of deliverance from her enfeebling past (7:37). But to the Baptist, he offers not deliverance but only reassurance. For John, it amounts to the same thing. John is by now imprisoned and Jesus knows

that fact. When Jesus receives John's two disciples who come inquiring whether he is the one "that should come" (7:19), he bids them to return to John carrying a witness of what they see and hear (see 7:22).<sup>1</sup> By withholding action, he turns his miraculous powers away from delivering John from prison. John now faces certain death, a prospect that, we can guess, brings discomfoting pain to Jesus' heart. But it must be. Like Jesus, John will seal his testimony with his blood (see Acts 13:25).

Within the encircling light of Jesus' acts of deliverance in this chapter, we witness the emergence of the grand outline of his ministry. In brief, his actions point brightly and directly to his mortal agenda. For, in the case of the deliverance of the centurion's servant from serious illness stands Jesus' continuing efforts to bring his powers to bear on mortal persons' ailments. Within the story of the woman whom Jesus frees from her sins appears his liberating ability to forgive sins. And inside the report of his raising of the widow's son rises his astonishing power to deliver all of us from death. Finally, Jesus' lack of action, even refusal, to mount a rescue of John from prison—and he possesses the power to do so (see Matt. 26:53)—underscores plainly his intention not to be a conquering, military Messiah.

In this connection, the overt tie between John and Jesus, which Jesus himself underlines in his remarks, surfaces in his observations about the relationship of forerunner and lord (see 7:27) and about John as the greatest of prophets (see 7:28). Thus, among its rich dimensions, chapter 7 casts a revealing light on Jesus' very high estimation of John as prophet and, indirectly, on John's upbringing and character.

Jewish legal customs also push their way to the fore in chapter 7. The Roman centurion's invitation to Jesus to "come and heal his servant" (7:3) obliges Jesus to decide whether to enter a Gentile's home, or even to set foot on his property, in order to bring healing to the servant, an act that will smear him with ritual uncleanness.<sup>2</sup> Further, an entirely different set of laws, those governing inheritance, form a subtext within the story of the widow of Nain who loses her only son to death. In the first case, Jesus shows his willingness to cross the boundary between Jew and Gentile, a regular theme in Luke's Gospel (see the Notes on 2:31, 32, and accompanying Analysis). In the second, Jesus rescues the widow from facing a very difficult future because of the lack of legal protection for a person in her situation.

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1. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ*, 253–56.

2. Morris, *Luke*, 151.

Finally, the story about the centurion and his servant, the first that we encounter in this chapter (see 7:1–10), foreshadows the distant future when the gospel message will go to Gentiles, a major thrust of Luke’s book of Acts. There, with the focus resting squarely on the Apostles and their companions, the gospel finds its way into Samaria (see Acts 8:1, 5–25) and then far beyond, to Ethiopia in the south and to Asia Minor in the north (see Acts 8:26–39; 13:1–14:27). In a way, the blessing that comes to rest on the centurion and his servant anticipates the blessing that will come to all who respond to the preachers’ words, no matter their ethnic origin.

## HEALING THE CENTURION’S SERVANT (7:1–10)

(Compare Matt. 8:5–13; John 4:46–54)

### King James Translation

1 Now when he had ended all his sayings in the audience of the people, he entered into Capernaum. 2 And a certain centurion’s servant, who was dear unto him, was sick, and ready to die. 3 And when he heard of Jesus, he sent unto him the elders of the Jews, beseeching him that he would come and heal his servant. 4 And when they came to Jesus, they besought him instantly, saying, That he was worthy for whom he should do this: 5 For he loveth our nation, and he hath built us a synagogue.

6 Then Jesus went with them. And when he was now not far from the house, the centurion sent friends to him, saying unto him, Lord, trouble not thyself: for I am not worthy that thou shouldst enter under my roof: 7 Wherefore neither thought I myself worthy to come unto thee: but say in a word, and my servant shall be healed. 8 For I also am a man set under authority, having under

### New Rendition

1 When he had finished all his sayings in the ears of the people, he came into Capernaum. 2 And a slave of a certain centurion, who was honored by him, was ill and about to die. 3 And when he heard concerning Jesus, he sent elders of the Jews to him to ask if he would come to save his slave. 4 And when they came to Jesus, they began to urge him strongly, saying that he deserved that this should be granted to him, 5 “For he loves our nation and built the synagogue for us.”

6 So Jesus went with them. And then, when he was not far from the house, the centurion sent friends to say to him, “Lord, do not trouble yourself; for I am not worthy that you should come under my roof. 7 That is why I did not consider myself worthy to come to you. But order it with a word, and my servant will be healed. 8 For even I am a person placed under authority who has soldiers under my own authority, and I

me soldiers, and I say unto one, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it.

9 When Jesus heard these things, he marvelled at him, and turned him about, and said unto the people that followed him, I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel. 10 And they that were sent, returning to the house, found the servant whole that had been sick.

say to this one, ‘Go,’ and he goes, and to another ‘Come,’ and he comes, and to my slave, ‘Do this,’ and he does it.”

9 And when Jesus heard these words, he admired him and, turning to the crowd that was following, said, “I have not found such faith in all Israel.” 10 And when those who were sent returned to the house, they found the slave who had been sick healthy.

## Notes

**7:1 when he had ended all his sayings:** Luke’s expression closes Jesus’ sermon on the plain, much as that of Matthew closes the sermon on the mount: “when Jesus had ended these sayings” (Matt. 7:28). But in Greek, these two temporal clauses are very different and show no sign of sharing between them or of a common summarizing source.

**the people:** Luke’s note both broadens Jesus’ audience for his just-completed sermon, beyond “his disciples” (6:20), and continues his emphasis on the formation of a people of God, a feature of his narrative from the first. The expression “the people” consistently refers to those who mark themselves in their worship, in their response to the message of salvation, and in following faithfully, thus becoming God’s people (see 1:10, 21, 68, 77; 2:10, 31, 32; 3:15; etc.; see the Note on 1:17). On only three occasions does Luke apply the word “people” to opponents of Jesus (see 19:47; 22:66; 23:13).

**he entered into Capernaum:** Both Matthew and Luke place the miraculous healing of the centurion’s servant in the city of Capernaum (see Matt. 8:5–13). For Luke, this means that Jesus is not far away when he delivers his sermon on the plain, and reaches the city on the same day.

**7:2 a certain centurion:** A centurion is a Roman officer; further, this man is a Gentile, as 7:9 shows. He typically has charge of one hundred soldiers, a century. The next highest ranking officer is a tribune, the commander of six hundred or so soldiers, or a cohort. Ten cohorts make up a legion whose commanding officer is a general. In Jesus’ day, the soldiers and officers of the Roman forces in Palestine are Samaritans or other non-Jews.<sup>3</sup>

3. Josephus, *B.J.* 5.12.2 (§ 503); Schürer, *History*, 1:362–67.

Luke's reference to a centurion here and near the end of his Gospel (see 23:47) form a literary *inclusio*, demonstrating the unity of his Gospel.<sup>4</sup>

***servant, who was dear unto him:*** Though neither Matthew nor Luke indicate whether the servant is a Gentile or a Jew, it is likely that the man is a Gentile because he evidently lives on the property of the centurion (see 7:10). If so, then he is permanently attached to the master, unless he is sold. The term translated “servant” (Greek *doulos*) refers to a slave. For slaves of Gentiles, there is no mandated release as there is for slaves or servants of Jews (see Deut. 15:12–18).<sup>5</sup> In this case, we sense that the centurion is a humane person who seeks the well-being of his slaves. In fact, all of the centurions whom we meet in the pages of Luke's two volumes are men of upright character (see 23:47; Acts 10:22; 22:26; 23:17–18, 23; 24:23; 27:1, 42–43).<sup>6</sup>

**7:3 when he heard of Jesus:** The “fame” of Jesus is already on the lips of those who have witnessed his miraculous powers (see 4:37, 42; 5:15; 6:17). Word now reaches the centurion.

***he sent unto him the elders of the Jews, beseeching him:*** It appears the centurion judges Jesus will respond more sympathetically to the plea of his fellow Jews than to an appeal from a Gentile. The verb “to send” (Greek *apostellō*) links to the term *apostle* and points to representatives authorized by the sender. The Jewish elders evidently respond out of respect and esteem for the man (see 7:5).

**7:4 do this:** The Greek verb *parechō* here bears the sense “to grant,” indicating that Jesus' act will be a gift to the centurion's servant.<sup>7</sup>

**7:5 he hath built us a synagogue:** gentile contributors to synagogues in towns of Asia Minor are known.<sup>8</sup> Similarly, the centurion may be a major contributor to this building in Capernaum rather than its sole sponsor.<sup>9</sup> The text reads “the synagogue,” indicating just one in the city. The reference must point to the first-century structure that underlies the fourth-century building whose remains can be seen in Capernaum.<sup>10</sup> That the centurion

4. Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, 124–47, 366–67, 388, 390–93.

5. Keith R. Bradley, “Slavery,” in *The Oxford Companion to Classical Civilization*, ed. Simon Hornblower and Antony Spawforth (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 670–73; Johannes Heinrichs, “Slavery: Rome,” in *Brill's New Pauly: Encyclopaedia of the Ancient World*, ed. Hubert Cancik and Helmuth Schneider, 16 vols. (Boston: E. J. Brill, 2008), 13:535–37.

6. Morris, *Luke*, 149–50.

7. Liddell and Scott, *Lexicon*, 1338; BAGD, 631–32.

8. Levine, *Ancient Synagogue*, 374, 507–9.

9. Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 1:652; Marshall, *Luke*, 280.

10. Levine, *Ancient Synagogue*, 71, 213.

assists in the building of this house of worship shows his good will toward a conquered people. Some suggest that he may be a “god-fearer” or proselyte to Judaism. Although we cannot demonstrate these assertions, he may well embrace at least the noble characteristics of his Jewish neighbors.<sup>11</sup>

**7:6 *the centurion sent friends:*** One suspects that these friends are Gentiles who enjoy fellowship with the centurion and spend time in his company. This group is to be distinguished from “the elders of the Jews” who come beforehand (see 7:3).

***that thou shouldst enter under my roof:*** The centurion is plainly aware of the difficulty that Jesus, a Jew, faces when coming to his home. Here he shows his sensitivity about the dilemma and urges Jesus not to come inside. Of course, if Jesus does enter the man’s home, he will not suffer from uncleanness as others do (see the Notes on 5:13; 7:14; 8:47; 10:7; the Analysis on 5:12–16).

**7:7 *neither thought I myself worthy to come unto thee:*** By quoting the words of this Gentile, Luke expresses for his gentile readers the feelings of apprehension in approaching the Savior. They may also reflect his own feelings as, long before, he underwent conversion to the Christian message.

***say in a word, and my servant shall be healed:*** Here lies the expression of faith that Jesus will remark on (see 7:9).

**7:8 *a man set under authority:*** The centurion reports to a commanding officer who stands above him in military rank. By this acknowledgment, the centurion indicates that he understands lines of authority and position, and that he respects them. Moreover, his reference to authority brings up again the issue that the devil raises earlier (see 4:6). The centurion’s authority, of course, differs from that of Jesus, but he is asking Jesus to exercise his by sending a blessing to his servant. Both kinds of authority operate in this world. But the one that counts the most, by far, is that which Jesus possesses: to offer deliverance, in this case deliverance from severe illness.

***I say unto one, Go, and he goeth:*** The centurion’s words point to his authority and his ability to command others who will obey, even though he is not present. Similarly, he grasps that Jesus can simply say “a word” with authority and his “servant shall be healed” (7:7).<sup>12</sup>

**7:9 *he marvelled at him:*** Does Jesus marvel within himself? Probably not. Instead, “he admired him.” We think of Jesus expressing surprise and

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11. Morris, *Luke*, 150.

12. Morris, *Luke*, 151–52.



pleasure to those “that followed him,”<sup>13</sup> perhaps with the sense, “Did you notice that?”

**turned him about:** This tiny but vivid detail hints that Luke has learned of this healing of the centurion’s servant from an eyewitness, a detail missing from Matt. 8:10 (see 6:10; 9:55; 10:23; 14:25; 19:3, 5; 22:41, 61; 23:28; John 8:6–8; the Notes on 7:44; 18:40; 22:31, 34).

**I have not found so great faith:** To what part of the centurion’s message might Jesus’ statement attach? The man’s expressions of unworthiness (see 7:6–7) and of his status as a Roman officer (see 7:8) do not form a connection. Rather, we should think of the centurion’s words, “say in a word, and my servant shall be healed” (7:7), as the catalyst for Jesus’ declaration.

**not in Israel:** These words clinch the case that the centurion is a Gentile.

**7:10 they that were sent . . . found the servant whole:** Presumably, Luke intends that we think of the two groups whom the centurion sent, “the elders of the Jews” (7:3) and his gentile “friends” (7:6). Effectively, both groups become witnesses to Jesus’ merciful, healing action. It is this theme that Luke will communicate in his book of Acts.

**that had been sick:** Some early manuscripts preserve the Greek participle that lies behind this English expression (*asthenounta*), but the earliest text (P<sup>75</sup>) and others omit it.

## Analysis

The setting for this miracle, of course, is the north end of the lake in the city of Capernaum, two or three miles east of where Jesus delivers his sermon on the plain. It seems apparent that Capernaum holds an ethnic mixture of people; it is not simply a Jewish enclave. To be sure, archaeological evidence has come to light showing that, following the death of King Herod, Jews typically keep to their own towns and Gentiles to their own settlements.<sup>14</sup> But this story illustrates that, in certain regions of Galilee, Jews and Gentiles live side by side in neighborly good will.

The story in Luke’s hands foreshadows the movement of the later church into gentile lands. It is striking that, according to Luke, the centurion does

13. Mark 6:6 records that Jesus “marvelled because of their [people of Nazareth’s] unbelief,” the only other reference to Jesus’ possible surprise in the gospels.

14. Andrea M. Berlin, “Romanization and Anti-Romanization in Pre-Revolt Galilee,” in *The First Jewish Revolt: Archaeology, History, and Ideology*, ed. Andrea M. Berlin and J. Andrew Overman (London: Routledge, 2002), 57–73; Berlin, “Jewish Life before the Revolt,” 417–70; Jensen, *Herod Antipas in Galilee*, 236–39.



not meet Jesus personally, at least not on this occasion. Instead, the story underscores the gentile official's firm faith in Jesus' authority and power to heal his servant. So it will be when Christian missionaries begin to carry their message into the larger Roman Empire and beyond. In that distant day, Jesus will no longer be available for people to meet in person. Rather, those who hear the preaching of his representatives have to exercise faith that what they are hearing is true. For those who do, wonders occur in their lives and in the lives of their loved ones, just as in the case of the centurion and his esteemed servant.<sup>15</sup>

One of the important, pressing questions concerns the relationship between Luke and Matthew as seen through the eyes of this story. Luke's possible connections with Mark's record slip away with the report of the calling of the Twelve (see 6:13–16), and he will not potentially reconnect with Mark's Gospel until 8:4 where we find an account of Jesus' mother and brothers coming to visit him (see Mark 3:31–35). In the stories that parallel other accounts, chapter 7 of Luke resembles Matthew's record, though not in its order of events. In this light, some conclude that the two are following a common source which is denominated "Q," the first letter of the German word *Quelle*, which means source.<sup>16</sup>

The contrast between the accounts in Matthew and Luke can be captured by two words, personal contact. According to Matthew's report, the centurion himself came to Jesus to beg for the life of his servant (see Matt. 8:5–13). In Luke, as we have seen, the contact comes about through intermediaries. For some, this distinction indicates "irreconcilable differences" between the Gospel accounts. But that need not be the case. We can hold both reports in the same hand by observing that Matthew abbreviates the story, preserving only the key parts. What the centurion does through intermediaries can be seen as done by the man himself, as Matthew records it. He is interested chiefly in the man's faith. Luke, on the other hand, preserves the fuller details of the story and sees the messengers as an important element for understanding the broad, enlivening implications for Gentiles within the report.<sup>17</sup>

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15. Morris, *Luke*, 149.

16. Caird, *Luke*, 17–19; Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 1:75–81, 648–49.

17. Morris, *Luke*, 150–51.

## RAISING THE WIDOW'S SON FROM DEATH (7:11–17)

### King James Translation

11 And it came to pass the day after, that he went into a city called Nain; and many of his disciples went with him, and much people. 12 Now when he came nigh to the gate of the city, behold, there was a dead man carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow: and much people of the city was with her. 13 And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her, and said unto her, Weep not.

14 And he came and touched the bier: and they that bare him stood still. And he said, Young man, I say unto thee, Arise. 15 And he that was dead sat up, and began to speak. And he delivered him to his mother.

16 And there came a fear on all: and they glorified God, saying, That a great prophet is risen up among us; and, That God hath visited his people. 17 And this rumour of him went forth throughout all Judæa, and throughout all the region round about.

### New Rendition

11 And it came to pass soon afterward that he went into a city called Nain, and his disciples and a large crowd went with him. 12 And as he approached the gate of the city, behold, a dead man was being carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow. And a considerable crowd from the city was with her. 13 And when he saw her, the Lord had compassion on her and said to her, “Do not weep.”

14 And approaching, he took hold of the bier, and the bearers stopped, and he said, “Young man, I say unto you, arise.” 15 And the young man sat up and began to speak, and he gave him to his mother.

16 And fear seized everyone, and they praised God, saying, “A great prophet has been raised among us,” and “God has visited his people.” 17 And this word concerning him went out in all Judea and in the entire surrounding region.

### Notes

**7:11 *the day after*:** A question arises whether this reading is original. If the earliest papyrus manuscript,  $\mathfrak{P}^{75}$ , and other early texts are to be trusted, they preserve a less definite expression that means “soon afterward.”<sup>18</sup> But whether this expression is to be preferred remains open to examination. Why? Because the typically expansive Western text (“D”) preserves the shorter expression that lies beneath the KJV translation. Further, whenever Luke writes the longer, less definite expression (see 8:1; Acts 3:24), he repeats a different adverb (Greek *kathexēs*) from the one here (Greek *hexēs*). This latter adverb is much more common in his writings (see 9:37;

18. Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 1:658; Marshall, *Luke*, 284.

Acts 21:1; 25:17; 27:18). Plummer’s protestation that “we must not limit the interval between the miracles [at Capernaum and in Nain] to a single day” is an example of special pleading.<sup>19</sup>

***he went into a city called Nain:*** The sequence and location of events—in Capernaum (7:1), then in Nain (7:11)—tells a reader that Jesus travels a long way because the distance between the two sites is almost thirty miles, much of it uphill. If Jesus reaches Nain within a day, or even two, of healing the centurion’s servant, then he travels hard from Capernaum. This observation raises the query again whether Luke knows the geography of Galilee. That he knows geography well in regions farther south, in and around Jerusalem, is beyond question, for he accompanies Paul to Jerusalem through the port city of Caesarea (see Acts 21:8–17). Further, he appears to have been with Paul during the two years that Paul is under house arrest in Caesarea (see Acts 27:1). To come to the point, firm indicators also exist that Luke is acquainted with geography in the north of Palestine (see the Notes on 4:31; 6:12; 6:17; the Analysis on 6:20–49; the Introduction V.C). So he has a general sense of distances. In this connection, the raising of the young man at Nain appears to recall Elisha’s raising of the only son of the Shunammite woman whose residence was on the backside of the hill of Moreh from Nain (see 2 Kgs. 4:32–37).<sup>20</sup> On the occasion of Jesus’ visit to Nain, it is probable that, with his divine powers that Luke features (see the Notes on 5:22; 11:17),<sup>21</sup> Jesus knows the wretched condition of the widow and walks the long distance so that he can meet the funeral procession as it emerges from the gates of the town (see 7:13).

***many of his disciples went with him, and much people:*** Besides the Twelve, an entourage of people willing to devote themselves to Jesus begin to emerge during the weeks that he is active in the Capernaum region. What is impressive is their willingness to accompany him on the long and physically challenging trip up to Nain, very likely beginning the journey very early in the morning hours.

**7:12 *the gate of the city:*** Implicit in these words is a city wall. Archaeologists have explored the site and report the remains of an ancient wall now covered with soil.<sup>22</sup>

19. Plummer, *Luke*, 198; Blass and Debrunner, *Greek Grammar*, §§200(1), 241(2).

20. Walter L. Liefeld and Ruth A. Tucker, *Daughters of the Church: Woman and Ministry from New Testament Times to the Present* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Academie Books, 1987), 29–30.

21. *TDNT*, 6:844.

22. James F. Strange, “Nain,” in *ABD*, 4:1000–1001.

***the only son of his mother, and she was a widow:*** Luke paints a picture of the absolute, disconnected state of the woman from family and inheritance. There are no daughters because Luke calls the woman’s son “only begotten” (Greek *monogenēs*). Under current Israelite law, a widow does not inherit anything from her husband’s estate. Only her children do, although that legal restriction changes after a mere two generations.<sup>23</sup> In the absence of brothers or sisters who can assist the widow, and a male—her son—to represent her, and with perhaps only menial jobs available to her (see 22:56),<sup>24</sup> the death of her son brings her face to face with stark poverty. This is especially so if (1) she is beyond her child-bearing years—Jesus calls her son a “young man” (7:14), a person presumably in his mid-twenties (Greek *neaniskos*)<sup>25</sup>—and (2) no possibility is open to her to marry one of her husband’s brothers in a levirate marriage so that she might give birth to another child who becomes the heir to her husband’s estate. Moreover, without heirs, her family will lose its place (i.e., its name or inheritance) among God’s people (see Deut. 25:5–6; Isa. 56:5; Micah 2:2). The clear implication is that there will be no one to remember her and her family members as the years pass, slowly rubbing out their place among the people of Israel (see the Note on 20:28).<sup>26</sup>

**7:13 *the Lord:*** For the first time, Luke calls Jesus “the Lord” (Greek *ho kyrios*), a title that fits the story wherein Jesus will show his majesty as one who controls even death (see the Notes on 2:11; 5:8; 7:31; 10:1).<sup>27</sup>

***when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her:*** According to Luke’s description, Jesus’ compassion apparently arises when he sees the woman and the funeral procession. But implicit within Luke’s prior words is Jesus’ ability to grasp a situation without talking to anyone, as in the cases of the man with palsy and the critics in the synagogue when Jesus heals the man with the withered hand (see 5:22; 6:8). Hence, the possibility opens that

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23. Yadin, *Bar-Kokhba*, 233–49; Naphtali Lewis, *Life in Egypt under Roman Rule* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 66, 70–71, 73.

24. Roger S. Bagnall, *Egypt in Late Antiquity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 95–97.

25. Philo, the first century AD Jewish savant living in Alexandria, in his *On the Creation of the World (De Opificio Mundi)* 105, says that the term *neaniskos* refers to a man between the ages of twenty-two and twenty-eight years.

26. Eryl W. Davies, “Inheritance Rights and the Hebrew Levirate Marriage,” *Vetus Testamentum* 31 (1981): 138–44, 257–68; James R. Baker, *Women’s Rights in Old Testament Times* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1992), 51, 134, 137, 140; Ze’ev Falk, *Hebrew Law in Biblical Times* (Provo, Utah: BYU Press; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2001), 109–10, 153–55.

27. Morris, *Luke*, 154.

he senses the woman's desperate situation well before arriving at the town, and his overflowing compassion brings him to Nain.

**7:14 *he came and touched the bier*:** The touch renders Jesus ritually unclean. But a greater need exists than remaining ritually clean, and he shows an example of setting aside one need for a higher.<sup>28</sup> Moreover, the majesty of his person overpowers the ritual stain (see the Notes on 5:13; 7:6; 8:47; 10:7; the Analysis on 5:12–16). The verb “to touch” (Greek *hapto-mai*) bears the sense “to take hold of” or “to cling.”<sup>29</sup> Hence, we see in our mind's eye Jesus grasping the bier firmly and stopping its movement.

***Young man*:** The Greek term (*neanisko*) designates a man between the ages of twenty-two and twenty-eight (see the Note on 7:12).<sup>30</sup>

**7:15 *began to speak*:** The evidence that air in the body of the fellow does not cause it to move involuntarily lies in these words, though we do not know whom he is addressing, nor does Luke preserve what he says.

**7:16 *there came a fear on all*:** Earlier, Luke narrates stories of this sort of fear (see 1:65; 5:26). Such fear differs from the sort of fear, or fright, that comes upon people when angels suddenly appear (see 1:12–13, 30; 2:9–10). The fear that grasps witnesses of Jesus' powers may be closer to the sense of awe,<sup>31</sup> as here, but may also be related to the fear that relentlessly drives those who seek his death (see the Notes on 5:26 and 8:35).<sup>32</sup>

***God hath visited his people*:** The notion that God comes among his people, here in the person of Jesus,<sup>33</sup> links to the *Shekinah*, the experience of God descending into the midst of his people and remaining with them (see the Notes on 1:68, 78; and 6:17).<sup>34</sup>

**7:17 *throughout all Judaea*:** We expect to read Galilee rather than Judea because Galilee is the place of the miracle at Nain. But Luke may be right about the spread of Jesus' reputation. Of course, we do not know precisely how word about the miracle spreads from Galilee in the north to Judea in the south. But news about raising a dead person will surely travel rapidly beyond the confines of Nain. In effect, Luke tells us that word of Jesus' power also spreads in Galilee when he mentions “all the region round about” Nain.

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28. Morris, *Luke*, 154.

29. Liddell and Scott, *Lexicon*, 231; BAGD, 102.

30. Philo, *On the Creation of the World* 105.

31. Morris, *Luke*, 154.

32. Welch, “Miracles, *Maleficium*, and *Maiestas* in the Trial of Jesus,” 349–83.

33. *TDNT*, 6:846.

34. Brown, *Gospel according to John*, 1:33–34, 90–91; Sharon Faye Koren, “*Shekinah*,” in Berenbaum and Skolnik, *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 18:440–41.

## Analysis

The narrative of Jesus raising the widow's only son in Nain appears only in Luke's Gospel. At its center stands Jesus' compassion for this widow who evidently finds herself in the desperate condition of continuing to live without inheritance, income, or family support. As it is, only her son inherits the property of his deceased father which allows him to support his bereft mother. At the son's death, the property goes back to his father's family. The wife brings to her marriage a dowry that, under normal circumstances, will still be intact and will support her for a time following her husband's death.<sup>35</sup> We learn nothing more about her situation, whether her siblings are still alive or whether anyone from her husband's family still lives, any of whom can possibly offer support. In this woman's case, Luke's language strongly implies that her son is her solitary support.

Luke's words "he had compassion on her" (7:13) draw up the heart of the account. Notably, Jesus initiates the action, stepping toward the funeral procession without anyone requesting his aid. In fact, no one in the town will know who he is because his activities occur in Nazareth, five and a half miles to the northwest, and in and around Capernaum which lies almost thirty miles away. To observers, especially his newly gathered disciples, his strong, abiding concern for the vulnerable in society will become immediately apparent. In a vivid sense, he fulfills the words of his mother when she declares that God pays attention to "the low estate of his handmaiden" (1:48; see the Note thereon). Although his act of touching the dead brings ritual uncleanness upon him, he sees the deeper need to bring relief and wholeness to the widow. Besides, as his actions show, the stain of ritual uncleanness does not adhere to him as it does to others (see the Notes on 7:6, 14).

In a very real way, the story gives meaning to some of what the Savior will say to John's disciples in the next scene: "the dead are raised" (7:22).<sup>36</sup> To be sure, Jesus brings back the centurion's servant from death's door (see 7:10). But the number of witnesses of that event are limited to those who know the centurion well, although, to be sure, word will run rapidly throughout the city of Capernaum. In Nain, all in the funeral procession witness firsthand Jesus' words, the raising of the dead man, and his restoration to his mother. The stunning character of the miracle underlies the spread of the "rumour of him . . . throughout all Judea, and throughout all the region round about" (7:17).

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35. Falk, *Hebrew Law in Biblical Times*, 154.

36. Morris, *Luke*, 153; Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 1:655.



In sum, Jesus' action restores more than life to the widow's son. Now the young man will be able to support her in her advancing age. Now he can marry and continue the posterity of his mother and father. Now the inheritance will stay among their descendants and thus their names will live on in their grandchildren.<sup>37</sup>

## JOHN THE BAPTIST (7:18–35)

(Compare Matt. 11:2–19)

### King James Translation

18 And the disciples of John shewed him of all these things. 19 And John calling unto him two of his disciples sent them to Jesus, saying, Art thou he that should come? or look we for another? 20 When the men were come unto him, they said, John Baptist hath sent us unto thee, saying, Art thou he that should come? or look we for another?

21 And in that same hour he cured many of their infirmities and plagues, and of evil spirits; and unto many that were blind he gave sight. 22 Then Jesus answering said unto them, Go your way, and tell John what things ye have seen and heard;

how that the blind see, the lame walk,

the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear,

the dead are raised, to the poor the gospel is preached.

23 And blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me.

24 And when the messengers of John were departed, he began to speak

### New Rendition

18 And John's disciples reported all these things to John. And John summoned a certain two of his disciples. 19 And he sent them to the Lord to say, "Are you he who is to come, or do we wait for another?" 20 And when they approached him, the men said, "John the Baptist sent us to you to say, 'Are you he who is to come, or do we wait for another?'"

21 In that hour, he healed many from illnesses and sufferings and wicked spirits, and he granted sight to many blind. 22 And in reply he said to them, "Go report to John what you have seen and heard:

The blind see, the lame walk,  
Lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear,

The dead are raised, and the gospel is declared to the poor.

23 And blessed is he who is not offended in me."

24 And when John's messengers had departed, he began to speak to the crowd concerning John: "What did

37. Baker, *Women's Rights in Old Testament Times*, 134.

unto the people concerning John, What went ye out into the wilderness for to see? A reed shaken with the wind? 25 But what went ye out for to see? A man clothed in soft raiment? Behold, they which are gorgeously appareled, and live delicately, are in kings' courts. 26 But what went ye out for to see? A prophet? Yea, I say unto you, and much more than a prophet. 27 This is he, of whom it is written,

Behold, I send my messenger before thy face,  
which shall prepare thy way before thee.

28 For I say unto you, Among those that are born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist: but he that is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he. 29 And all the people that heard him, and the publicans, justified God, being baptized with the baptism of John. 30 But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the counsel of God against themselves, being not baptized of him.

31 And the Lord said, Whereunto then shall I liken the men of this generation? and to what are they like? 32 They are like unto children sitting in the marketplace, and calling one to another, and saying,

We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced;

we have mourned to you, and ye have not wept.

33 For John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine; and ye say, He hath a devil. 34 The Son of man is come eating and drinking; and ye say, Behold a gluttonous man, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners! 35 But wisdom is justified of all her children.

you come out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? 25 But what did you come out to see? A man dressed in soft clothes? Behold, those in splendid clothing and living in luxury are among royalty. 26 But what did you come out to see? A prophet? Indeed, I tell you, even more than a prophet. 27 This is he concerning whom it is written:

Behold, I send my messenger before your face  
who will prepare your way before you.

28 I say to you that, among those born of women, no one is greater than John; but the least in the kingdom of God is greater than he." 29 And all the people that heard, even the tax collectors, acknowledged God's justice by being baptized with the baptism of John. 30 But the Pharisees and scribes rejected God's will for themselves by not being baptized by him.

31 "To what will I liken the people of this generation and what are they like? 32 They are like children sitting in the market, and they call out to one another and say,

'We played you the flute and you did not dance,

we lamented and you did not weep.'

33 For John the Baptist came not eating bread nor drinking wine, and you say, 'He has a devil.' 34 The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and you say, 'Behold a gluttonous man and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.' 35 But wisdom is justified by all her children."

## Notes

**7:18 *the disciples of John shewed him:*** The plain sense is that Herod Antipas, who arrests the Baptist, is allowing visitors to come to John either before he is taken to the Machaerus fortress, “in chains” according to Josephus, or while he is in the fortress (see 3:19–20 and the Notes on 3:1, 19–20). Machaerus stands on the east side of the Dead Sea and is raised as a major fortress by Herod’s father.<sup>38</sup>

***all these things:*** The wide sweep of this statement must include more than the sermon on the plain—in fact, all of Jesus’ words and deeds since the temptations.<sup>39</sup>

**7:19 *John calling unto him two of his disciples:*** An account in John’s Gospel introduces two of the Baptist’s disciples who, after learning Jesus’ identity, accompany him to his home and, over the next few hours, learn that he is the Messiah (see John 1:35–41). The two stories, one in Luke and the other in John, are not variants of the same report because John introduces Andrew, Peter’s brother, as one of the Baptist’s two disciples who is just becoming acquainted with Jesus. In contrast, according to Luke, Andrew is already a member of the Twelve. The Baptist’s act of sending two persons may rest on the requirement in the Mosaic law for at least two witnesses (see Deut. 19:15).<sup>40</sup> More than this, the two disciples represent of a larger body of followers who have faithfully lived their lives around John and his precepts and have not transferred their loyalty to Jesus (see Acts 19:1–7). We suspect that, because Jesus sends angels to John (see JST Matt. 4:11), John now senses the need to turn as many of his disciples to Jesus as he can.

***sent them to Jesus:*** Some early manuscripts read “to the Lord” rather than “to Jesus.” This would mesh with the title “Lord” that Luke first introduces in 7:13 (Greek *kyrios*). Following the miraculous raising of the widow’s son, Jesus now appropriately wears this title in Luke’s narrative (see 10:1; 11:39; 12:42; 13:15; 17:5–6; 18:6; 19:8; 22:61; 24:3). In other instances, the title comes on the lips of an individual, often with the sense of “sir” or “master” (see 5:8, 12; 6:5, 46; 7:6; 9:54, 57, 59, 61; 10:2, 17; etc.).

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38. Josephus, *B.J.* 7.6.2–3 (§§171–89); Josephus, *A.J.* 18.5.2 (§§116–19); Aharoni and others, *Carta Bible Atlas*, 169, map 229.

39. Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 1:665.

40. Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 1:665; on the universality of the number two, see Bultmann, *History*, 316.

**Art thou he that should come:** Many scholars understand this question as pointing up a substantial gap between John and Jesus. In their minds, the Baptist seems to be in doubt about the mission of his distant cousin, a sense that underlies the parallel passage in Matthew’s report (see Matt. 11:2–3).<sup>41</sup> The expression “the one who comes,” as the Greek text reads (*ho erchomenos*), hints at the messenger of Malachi 3:1 (see 3:16; 7:27; Matt. 11:3), a role that Jesus fills in part, though he is not Elijah returned (see 9:18–21).<sup>42</sup> It also hints at his messianic role. Two possible solutions attract attention. Either John has become confused from reports about Jesus because he has prophesied of Jesus’ acts of judgment (see 3:16–17) and Jesus shows himself instead as one who reaches out to the afflicted and downtrodden, or he also puts the question into the minds of his followers so that they will learn the true nature of Jesus’ ministry, a solution that must be taken seriously even though it has been labeled “artificial.”<sup>43</sup>

**7:20 John Baptist hath sent us:** This translation is unusual because the Greek text reads “John *the* Baptist.” The verb “to send” in this passage (Greek *apostellō*), to which the term *apostle* is related, has to do with sending an embassy or representative (see the Note on 7:3). These disciples fully represent John as the expression “messengers [Greek *angeloi*]<sup>44</sup> of John” illustrates (7:24).

**7:21 in that same hour he cured many:** Luke adopts the term “the hour” to mark special moments in his Gospel, such as the time of the incense offering (see 1:10), the moment of Anna’s arrival to see the infant Jesus (see 2:38), and the Savior’s happy response at the return of the seventy disciples (see 10:21). In the present scene, John’s disciples arrive at a fortuitous moment when Jesus is marshaling his merciful powers for the afflicted. In a sense, he is recreating the situation of the exodus wherein no one in his presence suffers from debilitating disease or difficulty—“there was not one feeble person among their tribes” (Ps. 105:37).<sup>45</sup>

**plagues:** The Greek word *mastix* is unusual in the New Testament. The noun and its verb generally point to scourging with a specially crafted whip (see Matt. 20:19; Mark 10:34; John 19:1; Acts 22:25; the Notes on 18:33; 23:16). Here we sense the torments of illness that people endure.<sup>46</sup>

41. Morris, *Luke*, 155–56; Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 1:663–65.

42. George A. Horton Jr., “Elias,” in *EM*, 2:449.

43. Morris, *Luke*, 155; compare Talmage, *Jesus the Christ*, 253–56.

44. BAGD, 7.

45. *TDNT*, 6:847.

46. *TDNT*, 4:515–19.

***unto many that were blind he gave sight:*** Though this specific act of messianic power lies in prophecy (see Luke 4:18; LXX Isa. 61:1; Mosiah 3:5), Luke records here the first instances of Jesus giving sight to the blind. The one miracle of this sort that Luke features in detail touches the blind beggar on the Jericho road (see 18:35–43).

***7:22 tell John what things ye have seen and heard:*** To seeing and hearing must be joined the sense of touching as the irrefutable basis for a full testimony of who the Savior is (see 1 John 1:1; 3 Ne. 11:8–16). On this occasion, John’s disciples must experience the concrete, palpable results of Jesus’ healing powers by touching recipients, perhaps in a handshake or the like.

***the lepers are cleansed:*** Presumably, Jesus draws attention to the leper whom he cleanses earlier as well as to other lepers with whom he may have dealt on this occasion (see 5:12–14).

***the deaf hear:*** The Gospel accounts record only one healing of a deaf person, though we can reasonably believe that other deaf people receive healing (see Mark 7:32–37). To be sure, prophecies about the Messiah’s merciful actions specifically point to this kind of healing, and we should therefore expect it (see Isa. 29:18; 35:5; 42:18; 43:8; LXX Isa. 61:1; Mosiah 3:5; D&C 35:9 points to promised results for the faithful).

***the dead are raised:*** This expression may well link backward to the raising of the widow’s son rather than to a miracle performed in the presence of John’s disciples (see 7:11–17).

***to the poor the gospel is preached:*** In concert with his declaration about his mission “to preach the gospel to the poor” (4:18), Jesus announces that he has effectively completed the task, or it is underway. In fact, the “poor” are the inheritors of “the kingdom of God” (6:20). They are the direct recipients of Jesus’ best efforts, no matter what John’s disciples might think the Messiah ought to be doing.

***7:23 blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me:*** Though Jesus expresses this beatitude in the singular, his intended audience seems to be John’s two disciples. But the principle declared in the saying applies to all who understand Jesus’ messiahship and find no stumbling block in it.<sup>47</sup>

***7:24 A reed:*** Plants that produce reeds (Greek *kalamos*) do not grow in the desert where only winter rains support growth but near sources of water, such as the Jordan River where John has been baptizing (see 3:3;

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47. Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 1:668.

Matt. 3:6; Mark 1:5).<sup>48</sup> Hence, Jesus subtly draws attention to and shows his support for John's baptism.

**7:25 *clothed in soft raiment*:** Although Luke does not preserve details about John's clothing, as Matthew does (see Matt. 3:4), Jesus' words disclose his knowledge of John's garment of poverty and show his acceptance of John's appearance. Pointing to "soft" clothing, of course, carries forward Jesus' interest in the poor and his concern for the challenges of wealth (see 4:18; 6:20, 24; the Notes on 7:22; 18:27).

***live delicately*:** Jesus' expression reveals his knowledge not only about the lifestyle of those who live differently from the Baptist but also about John's diet and other features of his desert existence, details that we find noted elsewhere in Luke's record (see 1:15; 7:33).

**7:26 *I say unto you*:** Jesus' reference to himself packages the weight of his authority, as well as his divine perspective on John. What he is about to say carries the stamp of his heavenly view.

***much more than a prophet*:** These words frame Jesus' high valuation of the Baptist, lifting the latter to a plane above others of God's mouthpieces. This is not to say that Jesus is judging John's character as eclipsing those of other prophets, but that the tasks which God entrusts to him tie directly to the arrival of the Messiah and to the preparation of a new people of God (see 1:16–17, 76–79; the Note on 7:28).

**7:27 *I send my messenger*:** A quotation from LXX Exodus 23:20, these words point to the Baptist's role as the one who will lead the people of God through their wilderness as the Lord's angel leads the Israelites through the desert. The words also exhibit a strong link to Malachi's prophecy about the Lord sending his messenger to prepare his path (see Mal. 3:1). Thus the language not only looks back to God's care of his ancient people when they possess no resources to help themselves in the desert but also looks forward to the coming of the Lord among his people, suddenly arriving in "his temple," as Malachi affirms.<sup>49</sup> This is not the first time that connections to Malachi's words appear in Luke's record. The other instances call up the language of judgment (see the Notes on 3:9, 17).

***which shall prepare thy way before thee*:** The reference nods toward the one who carefully prepares the path or roadway for the Lord, recalling the commanding words of Isaiah, "Prepare ye the way of the Lord" (3:4; Isa. 40:3). An allusion also exists to the divinely appointed tasks of

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48. Liddell and Scott, *Lexicon*, 865–66.

49. Marshall, *Luke*, 295–96.



the messenger noted in LXX Exodus 23:20, “that he may keep thee in the way, that he may bring thee into the land which I have prepared for thee.” Such language drips with the warm, moistening assurance that God has prepared a place for his people.

**7:28 *I say unto you:*** Jesus here repeats his expression of 7:26 and brings to bear the weight of his divine perspective on John.

***not a greater prophet than John the Baptist:*** These words continue Jesus’ assessment of John as “much more than a prophet” (7:26). The Prophet Joseph Smith lists three reasons why Jesus says that John is the greatest of the prophets: (1) he prepares the way for the Messiah; (2) he baptizes the Messiah; (3) John alone holds the keys of priesthood power for his generation.<sup>50</sup>

***he that is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he [John]:*** Commentators regularly read Jesus’ comment as declaring the Baptist and his followers to be less than Jesus and his disciples, not as individuals, but in their direct access to God’s blessings.<sup>51</sup> According to some early Christian authors, and to Joseph Smith, Jesus is referring to himself as the least in the kingdom (see D&C 50:26–28).<sup>52</sup>

**7:29 *all the people:*** These persons, in accepting John’s baptism, stand in a different spiritual place from those—especially officials—who reject it (see 7:33; 20:1–8; the Notes on 1:17 and 7:1).

***the publicans:*** In a real sense, the response of publicans to Jesus, and to John, fixes the standard for measuring the genuine response by others (see 7:34). For Luke singles out publicans in the crowds who come to hear John and receive of his baptism (see 3:12–13), and then focuses on their embracing of Jesus following the call of Levi (see 5:29–32).<sup>53</sup>

***justified God:*** The sense is that Jesus’ hearers acknowledge God’s righteousness (Greek *dikaioō*) by accepting John’s mode of baptism.<sup>54</sup> Other meanings of this verb appear at 7:35; 10:29; 18:14 (see the Notes thereon).

***the baptism of John:*** This baptism is a “baptism of repentance for the remission of sins” (3:3). As a later story illustrates, accepting this baptism from John, or his disciples, is a first step in coming to the Savior, as John himself affirms (see 3:16; Acts 19:1–6). Jesus stands on the same ground as

50. *TPJS*, 275–76.

51. Plummer, *Luke*, 205; Charles H. H. Scobie, *John the Baptist* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1964), 157; Morris, *Luke*, 158.

52. Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 1:675; *TPJS*, 276.

53. Marshall, *Luke*, 298–99.

54. *TDNT*, 2:214.

“all the people” and “the publicans” because he submits to John’s baptism, allowing him “to fulfill all righteousness,” as Matthew writes (Matt. 3:15; 2 Ne. 31:5–7; see the Note on 3:21).

**7:30 *Pharisees and lawyers:*** In broad strokes, Luke begins to distinguish between those who stand against John and Jesus and those who stand with them. As a title, “lawyers” appears most regularly in Luke’s Gospel (see 10:25; 11:45, 46, 52; 14:3; also Matt. 22:35; Titus 3:13). Pharisees and lawyers are most regularly represented as “scribes and Pharisees” in accounts that precede Jesus reaching Jerusalem for the last time (see 5:21, 30; 6:7; 11:44, 53; 15:2). Lawyers, or scribes, have been experts in the Mosaic law since the days of Ezra.<sup>55</sup>

***rejected the counsel of God against themselves:*** These words carry a strong condemnation of those who choose to turn away from the divine message. Here and elsewhere, “the counsel of God” can be equated to the plan of salvation (see Acts 2:23; 4:28; 20:27; Heb. 6:17).<sup>56</sup> The expression may also point to the teachings of John the Baptist.<sup>57</sup> The term translated “counsel” (Greek *boulē*) raises a distinct allusion to the divine “council” of God and what is decided therein (see Jer. 23:18, 22; Amos 3:7).<sup>58</sup>

**7:31 *the Lord:*** This title first appears from Luke’s hand in 7:13 and is repeated in many manuscripts of 7:19. In the first, Jesus is lord over death; in the second, he is the coming one about whom John prophesies (see the Note on 3:16). In this verse, Jesus stands as judge of the people “of this generation” (see the Notes on 2:11; 5:8; 7:13).

***liken:*** The verb (Greek *homoioō*) can also mean *to compare* and often introduces parables (see 13:18, 20; also Matt. 13:24; 18:23; etc.).<sup>59</sup> In this context, the term plainly points to judgment.

**7:32 *children sitting in the marketplace, and calling one to another:*** These lines offer a small window into the ordinary lives of children in Jesus’ society, telling readers that it is common for children to play among the stalls in a town’s marketplace, a place that is full of adults and therefore safe and supervised.

***We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced:*** Jesus turns to the image of children playing together. It is not clear whether “the men of this generation” (7:31) are like those who first “piped” and then “mourned,”

55. TDNT, 4:1088; Brown and Holzapfel, *Lost 500 Years*, 101, 119, 163.

56. Marshall, *Luke*, 299.

57. TDNT, 1:635; 4:1088.

58. Liddell and Scott, *Lexicon*, 325; BAGD, 145; TDNT, 1:633–35; TDOT, 10:174–75; E. Theodore Mullen Jr., “Divine Assembly,” in *ABD*, 2:214–17.

59. BAGD, 570.

effectively changing their attitudes to be critical of not only the somber John by blowing on their pipes but also the more social Jesus by acting more serious and then demanding that he be serious, or whether those “of this generation” are like the children who refuse to respond to the invitations of their playmates.<sup>60</sup>

**7:33 *neither eating bread nor drinking wine:*** Although Luke does not tell us of the Baptist’s diet, as Matthew does (“locusts and wild honey” in Matt. 3:4), the words here disclose Jesus’ knowledge of John’s habitual fare, though it is not recorded. In all events, John’s ascetic life contrasts starkly with those who “are gorgeously apparelled, and live delicately” (7:25).

***ye say, He hath a devil:*** Jesus highlights the darkened will of those who distance themselves from John’s message and baptism by creating ill-natured accusations in order to excuse themselves. Eventually, Jesus will become the object of a similar complaint, that he casts out devils by the power of “Beelzebub the chief of the devils,” thus fulfilling prophecy (11:15; see Mosiah 3:9).

**7:34 *a gluttonous man, and a wine bibber, a friend of publicans and sinners:*** This negative caricature of Jesus has grown rapidly, within a matter of weeks after his emerging into the public’s gaze at Capernaum (see 4:23). Contrasted to this are both Peter’s humble, submissive response while sitting in his boat after the miracle of catching the fish and the centurion’s ready recognition of Jesus’ gracious powers (see 5:8–9; 7:6–7).

**7:35 *wisdom is justified:*** In this saying, whose origin is unknown, *wisdom* appears almost as a divine person, as in Proverbs 8:22–30, who possesses children, that is, those who will follow her lead. One of the prominent meanings of the verb (Greek *dikaioō*) is “to be considered just” and, in this context, “to be accepted as just”<sup>61</sup> (see the Notes on 7:29; 10:29; 18:14). Wisdom’s children know that she is right, that she is just (see the Notes on 11:49 and 21:15).

***all her children:*** In this instance, wisdom’s children are John and Jesus. They are the proof that wisdom is just and does not descend to demeaning caricatures of God’s servants.

## Analysis

The chief focus of these verses turns onto John the Baptist. Before this section, John’s message and mission have lain only in Luke’s earlier report about the Baptist’s words and activities (see 3:1–20). Now Jesus himself

60. Morris, *Luke*, 159; Jeremias, *Parables*, 160–62.

61. BAGD, 196–97; Morris, *Luke*, 160.

weighs in on his distant cousin. The account, of course, ties back to John's arrest, first mentioned in 3:19–20. Evidently, during much of these inaugural weeks of Jesus' ministry, John languishes within the prison of Herod's Machaerus fortress, a site that overlooks the east shore of the Dead Sea, far from the crowds who earlier come to John to be baptized and to hear both his stern message and his testimony of the Coming One.

People have emerged from the crowds to follow John, an observation that becomes evident in the visit of the two devoted disciples. In fact, the movement surrounding John continues to flourish after his death, an event still in the future and one that will inject glue into the nascent movement that is gathering about him. The Baptist's followers will, in time, form their own community loyal to John and his memory.<sup>62</sup>

According to Josephus, both the strength and numbers of John's followers frighten Herod Antipas and lead him to imprison and execute John, even though he holds the Baptist in highest regard. Josephus repeats the widespread belief that Herod's army suffers a later defeat because he unjustly kills John.<sup>63</sup> Luke, though he does not narrate Herod's execution of John as other Gospels do (see Matt. 14:3–12; Mark 6:17–29), draws attention to it by quoting words of Herod (see 9:7–9) and writes that one reason for Herod's death penalty against the Baptist is John's criticism of Herod's unacceptable act of taking his brother's wife (see 3:19–20). Others in the society must have privately censured Herod. But the fact that Herod arrests John for openly criticizing his adultery illuminates an unusual relationship between these two men, one a ranking government official and the other a fiery, itinerant preacher. Herod must be well acquainted with John, watching his career with interest, respecting his views, and then coming to fear his movement. Apparently playing on that fear, Herodias, Herod's newly acquired wife, schemes against John and finally sees him executed (see the Notes on 3:19–20). We readily sense that Herod, surrounded by fawning courtiers who speak to him in only the most flattering tones, finds in John someone who is brutally honest with him, blowing a breath of fresh air into the palace.

During John's final days, his two disciples bring important news to him. We ask, Does John experience some confusion and discouragement while imprisoned? After all, rumor must have carried differing messages about Jesus' activities to him (see 7:18). But because Jesus sends angels to minister

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62. Scobie, *John the Baptist*, 131–41.

63. Josephus, *A.J.* 18.5.2 (§§116–19).

to him weeks earlier (see JST Matt. 4:11), he is likely not seeking clarity and reassurance for himself about Jesus as “the coming one.” Rather, it appears that he wants to expose his disciples to the Savior (see 7:19–20).<sup>64</sup>

John’s disciples arrive at a fortuitous moment, when the Savior is about to heal. The subsequent manifestations of power must have been breathtaking to them, as it has been for Jesus’ disciples who have been near him for the past few weeks. The experience probably convinces John’s disciples in strong, palpable ways that Jesus, “the coming one,” is not a politically motivated person but instead concerns himself with delivering people from debilitating illness and affliction, from incorrect traditions and doctrines (see 7:21–23). This clear realization contrasts with the later political and religious motivations dishonestly imputed to Jesus so that authorities seek Jesus’ death (see 23:2, 5, 14).

After John’s disciples depart, it is Jesus’ turn to offer his assessment of his desert-dwelling cousin. In his elevated and elevating praise, Jesus draws attention to prophecies about the Messiah’s forerunner that are embedded in the books of Exodus and Malachi, “This is he, of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee” (7:27; Mal. 3:1; also LXX Ex. 23:20). As we have seen, these passages point both to Jehovah leading his people through the desert and to the Messiah’s forerunner, anchoring John’s ministry firmly within the Old Testament era and prophetic tradition: “The law and the prophets were until John” (16:16). But the Baptist is also situated firmly within the era of the Messiah, as Jesus’ words, repeated by Peter, affirm, bringing the old and the new together: “John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost” (Acts 11:16; see the Analysis on 3:7–20).

Further, Jesus’ high assessment of John confirms the fulfillment of prophetic words spoken under inspiration a generation earlier. From the lips of the angel who finds Zacharias in the sanctuary comes this lively promise: “many shall rejoice at his birth. For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord” (1:14–15). Zacharias himself, in speaking to his infant son on the day of his circumcision, utters words brimming with expectation: “thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest: for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways; To give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins” (1:76–77).

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64. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ*, 253–56; Morris, *Luke*, 156; Robert J. Matthews, *A Burning Light: The Life and Ministry of John the Baptist* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1972), 92.

Although Jesus connects his lofty praise of John to the positive response by “the men of this generation” who are drawn out of their homes “to see” a “prophet” (7:26, 31), that generation will not be the last to be graced by the presence of John. To be sure, he will soon die at the hands of Herod’s henchmen, and his mark will embed itself chiefly within the words and deeds of his followers.<sup>65</sup> But John’s ministry does not end with his death. First, he will appear on the Mount of Transfiguration with Moses and Elijah (see JST Mark 9:3).<sup>66</sup> Second, approximately 1,800 years later he will appear to Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery, conferring on them the Aaronic Priesthood, which will allow divinely authorized baptisms to resume (see JS–H 1:68–72).

## THE WOMAN AT THE PHARISEE’S MEAL (7:36–50)

(Compare Matt. 26:6–13; Mark 14:3–9; John 12:1–8)

### King James Translation

36 And one of the Pharisees desired him that he would eat with him. And he went into the Pharisee’s house, and sat down to meat. 37 And, behold, a woman in the city, which was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at meat in the Pharisee’s house, brought an alabaster box of ointment, 38 And stood at his feet behind him weeping, and began to wash his feet with tears, and did wipe

### New Rendition

36 A certain man of the Pharisees asked him to eat with him. And going into the house of the Pharisee, he reclined to dine. 37 And behold, a woman who was a sinner in the city, because she knew that Jesus was dining in the house of the Pharisee, brought an alabaster flask of ointment. 38 And standing behind at his feet and weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. And she wiped

65. Besides references to John’s disciples and their continuing activities in the New Testament (e.g., John 1:35; 4:1; Acts 19:1–3), the Mandaeans of the Middle East have claimed to descend spiritually from the Baptist; see F. L. Cross and E. A. Livingstone, eds., *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 2d ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1974), 863–64; Ethel S. Drower, *The Mandaeans of Iran and Iraq: Their Cults, Customs, Magic Legends, and Folklore*, 2d ed. (rpt.; Piscataway, New Jersey: Gorgias Press, 2002), 1–4, 6–7, 100.

66. Faulring, Jackson, and Matthews, *Joseph Smith’s New Translation of the Bible*, 334; Richard Nietzel Holzapfel, “The Transfiguration,” in Holzapfel and Wayment, *Life and Teachings of Jesus Christ: From the Transfiguration through the Triumphal Entry*, 66; Robert J. Matthews, “Tradition, Testimony, Transfiguration, Keys,” in Kent P. Jackson and Robert L. Millet, eds., *Studies in Scripture: The Gospels* (Salt Lake City: Deseret, 1986), 308.



them with the hairs of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment.

39 Now when the Pharisee which had bidden him saw it, he spake within himself, saying, This man, if he were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth him: for she is a sinner. 40 And Jesus answering said unto him, Simon, I have somewhat to say unto thee. And he saith, Master, say on.

41 There was a certain creditor which had two debtors: the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty. 42 And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most? 43 Simon answered and said, I suppose that he, to whom he forgave most. And he said unto him, Thou hast rightly judged.

44 And he turned to the woman, and said unto Simon, Seest thou this woman? I entered into thine house, thou gavest me no water for my feet: but she hath washed my feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head. 45 Thou gavest me no kiss: but this woman since the time I came in hath not ceased to kiss my feet. 46 My head with oil thou didst not anoint: but this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment. 47 Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little. 48 And he said unto her, Thy sins are forgiven.

49 And they that sat at meat with him began to say within themselves, Who is this that forgiveth sins also? 50 And he said to the woman, Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace.

them with the hair of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment.

39 And when the Pharisee who had invited him saw, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would know what kind of woman this is who touches him, for she is a sinner." 40 And responding, Jesus said to him, "Simon, I have something to say to you." So he said, "Teacher, go ahead and say it."

41 "Two men were in debt to a certain creditor; one owed five hundred denarii, and the other owed fifty. 42 Since both did not have anything to repay their debt, he forgave them freely. Which of them will love him more?" 43 Simon answering said, "The one, I suppose, to whom he forgave the larger debt." And he said to him, "You have judged correctly."

44 And turning to the woman, he said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? When I came into your house, you did not give me water for my feet. But she wetted my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. 45 You did not give me a kiss, but she, from the time I came in, has not ceased to kiss my feet. 46 You did not anoint my head with oil, but she anointed my feet with ointment. 47 On this account I say to you, her many sins have been forgiven, because she loved much. He to whom little is forgiven loves little." 48 And he said to her, "Your sins are forgiven."

49 And those who reclined at dinner began to say among themselves, "Who is this who even forgives sins?" 50 But he said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you. Go in peace."

## Notes

**7:36 one of the Pharisees:** The story that follows demonstrates that members of the Pharisaic sect reside in Galilee. Luke has already introduced representatives of the Pharisees in his narrative so that their permanent presence in Galilean society is settled (see 5:17, 21, 30, 33; 6:2, 7; 7:30). But this report forms the first clear indicator that people holding Pharisees' views live outside of Jerusalem and its environs (see Matt. 9:9–13; Mark 2:13–17).<sup>67</sup>

**sat down:** The verb in the passive voice (Greek *kataklinō*) means to recline “on cushions” at a meal rather than to sit (see 24:30; the Notes on 5:29; 7:37; 14:8, 10; 22:14).<sup>68</sup> This observation becomes important when we consider how the woman washes Jesus' feet without intruding among the guests and interrupting their conversation.

**7:37 a woman in the city, which was a sinner:** These words belong to Luke. He likely borrows the language about the woman's reputation from the Pharisee host (see 7:39) and spells out how people view her so that readers grasp the significance of Jesus' gracious response to her actions, actions that underline how the men at the meal are to treat women, no matter their station in life.

**sat at meat:** The verb (Greek *katakeimai*) means “to lie down” or “to recline” at a meal (see 5:25, 29).<sup>69</sup>

**brought:** The woman is the person who carries the action in this scene, seeking out Jesus. Her arrival in the dining room of Simon's home is all the more remarkable because, presumably, she has to talk her way past the doorkeeper, a person employed in certain households and known from other Gospel stories (see 12:35–38; Mark 13:34–36).<sup>70</sup>

**alabaster:** This stone vessel likely comes from Egypt where such stone is plentiful.

**ointment:** The Greek term (*myron*) can also mean perfume.<sup>71</sup> This sort of aromatic has become part of the burial custom (see 23:56) and is likely

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67. Josephus, *A.J.* 18.1.3 (§15), reports that Pharisees are “extremely influential among the townsfolk,” an indicator that many come from the countryside. Of course, they eventually come to look unfavorably on these people whom they call *am ha-aretz* (“people of the land”); Schürer, *History*, 2:396, 400; Brown, “Arrest,” 178–85.

68. BAGD, 412; *TDNT*, 3:654–56.

69. BAGD, 412; *TDNT*, 3:654–56.

70. Jeremias, *Parables*, 53–55.

71. BAGD, 531; *TDNT*, 4:800–801.

manufactured in Jerusalem.<sup>72</sup> One important question has to do with its cost (see the Note on 7:46). In a Galilean town, who can afford such a luxury? Evidently, this woman has means to buy it and this fact may possibly point to an unsavory profession—harlotry. In a different vein, the appearance here of the Greek term (see 7:38, 46) and in 23:56 frames a literary *inclusio* that helps to tie Luke’s account into a formal unity.<sup>73</sup>

**7:38 stood at his feet behind him:** The fact that the woman enters uninvited into the home of the host, who is surrounded by other men, seems unusual, a characteristic of the story that points to its authenticity. Even though doors to homes lead directly from the street, a person has to gain entry through a door. As noted above on 7:36, except for upper classes, Jesus’ culture does not typically use chairs. Thus, Jesus is reclining at the low-lying table for the meal and the woman can stand or sit next to his feet without intruding herself among the guests.

**began to wash his feet with tears:** Showing her deep respect, the woman is now kneeling,<sup>74</sup> no longer standing. The image is one of deep affection and of genuine repentance. Luke does not say why she feels this way. Perhaps she has heard of Jesus forgiving the sins of a paralyzed man and she comes in the hope of receiving the same gift (see 5:20).

**did wipe them with the hairs of her head:** Luke’s words, that Jesus will soon repeat (see 7:44), draw attention to the head, which carries its own set of symbols, in contrast to the feet, which she is wiping (see the Notes on 7:44 and 7:45). The host and guests may feel some unease because the woman has plainly uncovered her head and hair, an act of shame in some parts of their culture (see 7:38; 1 Cor. 11:5–6, 13).<sup>75</sup>

**kissed his feet:** This act, which requires a person to kneel, much as Peter “fell down” before Jesus (see the Notes on 5:8; 7:40, 45; 8:41; 24:5), underscores the woman’s desperation and humility. It may also point to an expression of gratitude for deliverance from an evil fate.<sup>76</sup>

**anointed them:** The language of anointing (Greek *aleiphō*) hints at sacred ordinances (see Mark 6:13; John 11:2; 12:3; James 5:14; LXX Gen. 31:13; Num. 3:3, 12; Esth. 2:12).

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72. Jeremias, *Jerusalem*, 28.

73. Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, 124–47, 366–67, 388, 390–93.

74. *TDNT*, 6:625, 629–31.

75. Jeremias, *Jerusalem*, 359–61; *Parables*, 126.

76. Jeremias, *Parables*, 126, n. 55.

**7:39 *he spake within himself:*** Luke discloses earlier that Jesus is able to read thoughts (see the Note on 5:22). Nothing is hidden from him. The redundant Greek participle *legōn*, translated “saying,” simply introduces the words which the Pharisee thinks.<sup>77</sup>

***if he were a prophet:*** This statement envisions a certain view of what a prophet is and the powers that a prophet possesses, understanding a prophet as one equipped with power to see the unknown and unknowable, such as people’s thoughts (see 5:22; 6:8; 11:17; 20:23). Such a view is very similar to the one held by those who strike Jesus after they blindfold him and then demand, “Prophecy, who is it that smote thee?” (22:64; see the Note thereon). Prophecy, in this understanding, has to do with seeing or sensing what one cannot grasp by natural means, a clairvoyance. More precisely, such a prophet will know notable details, including the identity of individuals by name, even though these persons may not be personally known to the prophet (compare John 4:16–19; see the Notes on 5:22; 7:11).<sup>78</sup>

**7:40 *I have somewhat to say to thee:*** Jesus’ following words, of course, are aimed at the other guests as much as they are at the host. He here seizes the moment to teach them all about forgiveness. In doing so, his voice is the only one heard in the home; from this point on, he dominates the conversation, just as he will in another dinner setting wherein he is also the guest of honor (see 14:1–24; the Analysis on 14:1–6). Thus Luke introduces us to a side of Jesus that his contemporaries know—he is an irrepressible conversationalist who begins to teach at every opportunity (see 6:6–10; 7:36–50; 11:37–52; 13:10–17; the Note on 7:40; the Analysis on 5:27–32).

***Master:*** This term (Greek *didaskalos*) means in the first instance “teacher.”<sup>79</sup> Besides appearing as a title for Jesus (see 8:49; 9:38; 10:25; 18:18; etc.), Luke applies it both to Jewish savants (see 2:46) and to the Baptist (see 3:12). Though a title of modest respect on the lips of Simon the Pharisee, it does not describe fully what and who Jesus is.<sup>80</sup> In this connection, the title is one that is commonly reserved for scribes and, in the context, diminishes Jesus’ true status and contrasts sharply to the woman’s actions of worship and devotion (see the Notes on 7:38, 45).<sup>81</sup>

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77. Marshall, *Luke*, 309; Green, *Luke*, 311.

78. *TDNT* 6:844.

79. *TDNT* 2:148–57.

80. BAGD, 190–91; Marshall, *Luke*, 310.

81. *TDNT*, 6:630.

**7:41 *five hundred pence*:** In an earlier era, the word translated “pence” (Greek *dēnariōn*), in its singular form, refers to a person’s daily wage as established in Rome, though the amount that a worker receives in Palestine may be less per day (see the Notes on 10:35; 12:6; 20:24; Matt. 20:2).<sup>82</sup> The total is roughly two years of earnings.

***fifty*:** Jesus sharpens his contrast by repeating the equivalent of about two months’ wages.

**7:42 *which of them will love him most?*:** Here Jesus—and Luke—come to the nub of the story, love.<sup>83</sup> The verb (Greek *agapaō*) and its noun (*agapē*) appear frequently throughout the New Testament, most often in John’s Gospel and first epistle, and characterize love’s many manifestations. In Luke’s record, the verb appears earlier in Jesus’ command to love one’s enemies (see 6:27, 35; and the Notes thereon), in his observation that sinners love one another (see 6:32), and in the gentile centurion’s generosity toward his Jewish neighbors in Capernaum (see 7:5).

**7:43 *I suppose*:** Simon’s response is given grudgingly; he plainly senses what Jesus’ point will be and that it will not please him.<sup>84</sup>

**7:44 *he turned to the woman*:** This small but graphic detail illustrates that Luke relies on an eyewitness report from a person present at the meal (see 6:10; 9:16, 55; 10:23; 14:25; 19:3, 5; 21:1; 22:41, 61; 23:28; John 8:6–8; the Notes on 7:9; 18:40).

***Seest thou this woman?*:** The question, though addressed to Simon the host, plainly is intended for the other guests (see 7:49). The question also signals to Simon and his guests that Jesus is taking the initiative in steering the conversation and in shaping and correcting perceptions about the woman and her actions. We thus encounter another instance of Jesus taking over a conversation or a synagogue discussion to make a point among gathered people (see 5:30–31; 6:6–10; 7:36–50; 11:37–52; 13:10–17; 14:1–24; the Analysis on 5:27–32).

***thou gavest me no water for my feet*:** Jesus begins his famous list of omitted yet customary acts that will illustrate how a person shows love for another. The woman fills those usual courtesies in unusual ways, adding to the human color of the occasion. This first of three references to Jesus’

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82. BAGD, 178; Jeremias, *Jerusalem*, 111; Daniel Sperber, “Palestinian Currency Systems during the Second Commonwealth,” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 56 (1965–66): 273–301; John W. Betlyon, “Coinage,” in *ABD*, 1:1086–87.

83. Marshall, *Luke*, 304.

84. Morris, *Luke*, 162.

feet (see 7:45, 46) recalls the Hebrew verb for turning the feet as an act of repentance (Hebrew *shuv*) and appears to present an allusion to the woman's repentant state, that she turns her feet from the paths of sin (see the Note on 6:23).<sup>85</sup> Certainly, her feet bring her into the home of Simon, in an unusual approach, and into the presence of the person who can offer forgiveness of sins.

**7:45 *Thou gavest me no kiss:*** Jesus points to the customary greeting of friends. It seems plain that Jesus, a relative newcomer to Capernaum, does not stand in the circle of Simon's close friends. But that does not subdue Jesus into modest, respectful silence. Further, reference to a kiss highlights an act with a person's head, here contrasted with feet. In Judas's betrayal, he comes by foot and betrays with a kiss (see 22:47–48).

***washed my feet:*** Jesus draws attention to the woman's act of veneration, underscoring her devotion to one who, standing in this world, can confer blessings (see the Notes on 5:8; 7:38; 8:41; 24:5).<sup>86</sup>

**7:46 *oil:*** Olive oil is an inexpensive product whereas the ointment brought by the woman is expensive,<sup>87</sup> thus setting up another contrast: the woman gives much but Simon gives little.

**7:47 *Her sins:*** It is important to note that Jesus does not announce the forgiveness of the woman's sins to her. Instead, he announces the forgiveness to Simon, the host of the meal and owner of the home. Why? It seems that (1) it is proper for the guest of honor to address the host rather than someone who essentially comes off the street, and (2) Jesus' action of talking first to Simon then to the woman (see 7:48, 50) mirrors a custom of the day that a man does not usually speak to a woman (see John 4:27).

***forgiven: for she loved:*** The question has to do with whether the woman's acts of love are the natural result of Jesus' forgiveness or the compelling, albeit visible, reason for his forgiveness. That is, do her actions earn forgiveness? Many commentators conclude from the context, and from their views of how forgiveness comes from God, that her actions do not earn forgiveness but flow from them.<sup>88</sup> But the question need not be resolved in favor of one view or the other. For forgiveness both springs

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85. See, for example, Deut. 4:30; 30:10; 1 Kgs. 8:35; 2 Kgs. 17:13; 23:25; Isa. 9:13; 59:20; Jer. 3:10, 14; 18:8; 31:19; Ezek. 3:19, 20; 14:6. In response to repentance, the Lord turns from his wrath; see Deut. 13:17; Josh. 7:26; 2 Kgs. 23:26; Ezra 10:14; Jer. 2:35; etc.; also *TDOT*, 14:475, 480, 492, 506; *TDNT*, 6:626, 628.

86. *TDNT*, 6:625, 629–31.

87. Marshall, *Luke*, 312.

88. Marshall, *Luke*, 313; Morris, *Luke*, 163; Johnson, *Luke*, 127.



from visible and invisible evidences that a person seeks it (see 6:37; 1 Ne. 7:20; D&C 31:5) and then manifests itself in the good that results (see Alma 36:18–20, 24–26). In all instances, repentance is required and forgiveness is God’s alone to bestow (see 5:24; Isa. 43:25; Jer. 33:8).

***to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little:*** It is difficult to determine whether Jesus is stating a truism or whether he has Simon his host in mind as one who manifests little love. If the latter, then Jesus may be saying that Simon’s invitation to him to join the meal is not motivated by a genuine interest in him but by a type of curiosity that sees him as a momentary showpiece, but little more.

**7:48 *he said unto her:*** Jesus now addresses the woman directly, illustrating that he is not bound by the custom that mandates, when possible, men speaking only with men (see John 4:27).<sup>89</sup>

***Thy sins are forgiven:*** In the presence of witnesses, many of whom may have heard him speak and seen him respond to afflicted friends on previous occasions, Jesus intones the startling announcement to the woman that her sins, evidently known to Simon and his guests, are no more. For the woman, the gracious, loving nature of Jesus’ words cannot be overestimated.

**7:49 *began to say within themselves:*** As in earlier scenes (see 5:22; 6:8), Luke makes clear that Jesus knows the inner thoughts of each person at the meal, an extension of “the power of the Spirit” that accompanies him following the temptations (4:14).

***Who is this . . . ?:*** The question is precisely right. But irony lies with those who ask the question owing to their evident view of Jesus—he is not a prophet (see 7:39). The true answer will make all the difference in the world for them if they will open themselves to that answer—he is the Messiah (see the Note on 24:26). But what the guests are not willing to accept blunts their ability to receive the truth (see similar questions in 5:21; 8:25; 9:9; compare Moses 5:16; Ex. 5:2; Mosiah 11:27; Alma 9:6).

**7:50 *Thy faith hath saved thee:*** At the base of this account lies the woman’s faith that, if she seeks the Savior’s forgiveness, she will receive it. That sense of trust apparently moves her forcefully enough to break social conventions and appear uninvited in the midst of a dinner party likely consisting of men only. Because of her past life, she is not cowed by what others think of her. Her focus is on Jesus and the gift that, she knows, he offers. Further, her faith moves her to action, an action that makes her faith refreshingly

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89. Brown, *Gospel according to John*, 1:173.

visible. These words are the same that Jesus speaks to the woman with the issue of blood (see 8:48; the Notes on 17:19 and 18:42).

*go in peace:* Two aspects suggest themselves. First, the wish is literally “go into peace,” the proper greeting for a living person, whereas “go in peace” is the wish expressed by some people for the dead.<sup>90</sup> Second, the peace that Jesus offers ties to and results from the woman’s salvation; it is far more than a temporary easing of conscience (see 1:79; Acts 10:36).<sup>91</sup>

## Analysis

At base, this account underscores how Jesus responds to women, no matter their position in society. The report thus stands as a benchmark to followers and detractors alike about how they are to treat women: all women are to receive respectful treatment.

More than any story that Luke has narrated thus far, this report brims with symbolism. Much of this symbolism centers on the feet and head. The Savior’s three references to his feet cement this observation, as well as his three references to the head. The feet come into play because, in acts of adoration, a suppliant grasps or pleads at the feet of the master (see 8:28, 41; John 11:32; Rev. 1:17).<sup>92</sup> They are also the body parts that turn a person from a path of sin onto a path of righteousness, as a host of scriptural passages show. The woman has come seeking forgiveness, an act that illustrates her repentance as well as her deep desire to turn her life onto a different path. The evident fact that she breaks social custom to reach the Savior underscores her steely determination.

Because Jesus is reclining with the other guests, the woman enjoys easy access to his feet. She bathes and wipes them dry, she kisses them, and she anoints them with an expensive perfume (see 7:44–46). On one level, her actions can represent the cleansing that a person goes through in the repentance process (washing), in the embracing of a life free of sin (kissing), and in the sweet, clean aroma of knowing that one’s sins are permanently forgiven (perfuming). On another, her attention to Jesus’ feet draws a reader metaphorically to her feet that turn an important corner and have now come to rest on the good path.

The head also plays an illuminating role in the story. First, the Savior notices the woman’s acts of weeping and wiping with her hair, acts that

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90. Morris, *Luke*, 163–64.

91. Marshall, *Luke*, 314; Johnson, *Luke*, 128.

92. *TDNT*, 6:630.

come only from her head. Next, he speaks of kissing, another act that involves a person's head. Finally, he draws attention to the custom of anointing the head. These three references, of course, balance the three that have to do with the feet, an observation that suggests Jesus is purposely marking the moment by making balancing observations so that his audience remembers what happens and what he says in response.

Symbolism also attaches to the feet and head in another way. Simon and his friends represent the head, as does the Savior, but they differ from one another. Simon and his guests stand for the better, more well-off parts of their human society. In contrast, Jesus represents the loftiness of the divine, the one element that all in the room strive for. Of course, Jesus' sacred status floats above any other prestige that a mortal person might achieve or inherit. In a word, as in many other stories that Luke reports, the contrast highlights the difference between the worldly and the heavenly.

The richer set of contrasts lie in the woman. She clearly personifies the bottom rung of her society. She is the outcast, the despised, the one whom others not only separate from their company but also reproach (see 6:22). The reasons for the spiteful response of others toward her lie in her past actions, her past life. But by turning to the Savior with her own feet, she now will join those who rejoice "in that day, and leap for joy" with their feet (6:23). The woman, who pays attention to Jesus' feet, thus represents the feet of her society, the parts of the society that are always in the dust and dirt, that are always in need of cleaning. Notably, personified in her, those at the bottom of the social scale recognize more readily what Jesus can offer and, in a way, who he is, answering the guests' unspoken question, "Who is this . . . ?" (7:49). Her desperate seeking of Jesus, more than any other element in the account, answers this question. For her desperation highlights his lofty status, his real position as the head.

In another vein, the Savior's willing association with a "sinner" ties to other elements in Luke's Gospel. Almost from the moment of Jesus' call of Levi, a public perception grows up that Jesus associates with despised "publicans and sinners" (5:30). Within a few weeks, that judgment solidifies into a saying about him, "a friend of publicans and sinners" (7:34). The story of the woman confirms this perception, at least in the minds of Simon and his guests (see 7:39). Beyond this story, of course, as one of Luke's main messages, he continues to feature not only Jesus' sayings about sinners but also his associations with such people (see 15:1–2, 7, 19; 18:13; 19:7).

Because this story exhibits similarities with reports in the other Gospels, some see Luke's narrative as simply a variant account of the story of the

woman who anoints Jesus' head in the house of Simon the leper in Bethany (see Matt. 26:6–13; Mark 14:3–9),<sup>93</sup> or of Mary, sister of Lazarus, who anoints Jesus' feet in their home in Bethany not long before Jesus' death (see John 12:1–8).<sup>94</sup> But the differences among the accounts are decisive and nod toward an independent story in Luke. None of the other stories carry the same rich symbolism that is woven into Luke's account. Hence, we conclude that he obtains his narrative from an independent source.

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93. Bultmann, *History*, 21.

94. Charles Harold Dodd, *Historical Tradition in the fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963), 162–63, and Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 1:686, argue for a common story that lies behind all of these accounts. The differences, in their views, result from diverging oral traditions.