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Luke Chapter 16

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Abstract: A commentary on the events of Luke 16, accompanied by parallel columns of the King James translation of the chapter alongside a new rendition.



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Luke Chapter 16

INTRODUCTION

Money and property shape most of this chapter's vessel,¹ as in the prior chapter. But as a good ceramist, Luke also molds contour and texture into his report by adding sayings of the Savior in the middle of the chapter that express the impossibility, or near impossibility, of sculpting certain designs in our lives without suffering divine disapproval. Such include attempting to serve two masters (see 16:13, 15), coveting this world's goods and honors (see 16:14–15), depreciating the law—a warning to Jesus' followers it seems (see 16:16–17), and insolently seeking divorce (see 16:18). Intriguingly, it is in these latter verses that the Prophet Joseph Smith adds significant details about the setting and direction of Jesus' sayings. Side by side with these crucial and timely teachings stand two stimulating stories preserved only by Luke, that of the unjust steward (see 16:1–12) and that of the rich man, Lazarus, and Abraham (see 16:19–31).

By all estimates, Jesus' parable of the unjust steward presents enormous difficulties. The chief problem grows out of the master's commendation of the scheming steward, a commendation that seems ill-suited to Jesus' message elsewhere—"the lord commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely" (16:8). A reader naturally asks, What is Jesus' point in telling the tale? Or are there more points than one?

One possible lens for viewing this parable may be the contrast that this story makes to the molded sense of correct stewardship shaped by the stories in chapter 15. For each of the prior stories portrays individuals in varying states of responsibility, that is, the man and his sheep, the woman and her precious coin, and the prodigal son and his lost inheritance. This contrast, it seems, is instructive and Luke may intend that his readers grasp the contrast when he places the narratives end to end.

1. Morris, *Luke*, 268.

As Morris points out, there are two other ways to understand the story of the unjust steward. In one, Jesus commends the steward for his astuteness in dealing with a crisis, an astuteness that Jesus wishes his followers would imitate (see 16:8–9). Such astuteness includes, we suspect, not only the cleverness but also the desperation that lie behind the steward’s approach to his master’s debtors. Jesus may be asking his disciples to pattern themselves after the astute and single-minded actions of the steward. In a second, the master’s commendation of the steward comes grudgingly. In this view, the steward, by reducing the debts of those who owe his master, not only ingratiates himself to the debtors but also keeps the master from accusations of usury, or the illegal charging of interest, an act that brings a measurable though resentful gratitude from the master. Perhaps it is the steward’s cleverness in gaining this grudging acceptance that Jesus wishes his followers to imitate.²

A proposed third solution may also carry weight. In this view, Jesus is criticizing the Essenes, who are fond of calling themselves the “sons of light,” a term that appears only here in Luke’s Gospel translated as “children of light” (16:8). In addition, the expression “unrighteous mammon,” meaning the goods of the world that Essenes despise (16:9, 11), appears in the Dead Sea Scrolls, tying the story in a distant way to the Essenes. Accordingly, Jesus turns against the extreme rejection of this world, an attitude that characterizes the Essenes, and holds them responsible for a grave error in judgment.³

A fourth view comes to mind. It may rest in irony, especially in light of Jesus’ saying, “he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much” (16:10). As irony, this saying expresses Jesus’ true judgment on the unjust acts of both the master, who is guilty of charging illegal interest, and the steward, who is guilty of dealing behind his master’s back. In a word, Jesus seems to be commending the steward, but is really not because he stresses the detail that “the lord commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely” (16:8). Jesus does not. Rather, his sayings in the next two verses underscore an entirely different point: “If therefore ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon” and “if ye have not been faithful in that which is another man’s” (16:11–12). The commendation, in fact, travels from one wrongdoer to another, that is, from the master to the steward. Hence, the actions of neither the steward nor the master are to be imitated by the

2. Morris, *Luke*, 268–70.

3. David Flusser, “Jesus’ Opinion about the Essenes,” in *Judaism and the Origins of Christianity* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1988), 150–168.

disciples. On this view, only Jesus' plea that his disciples make allies in the world connects seriously to this scene (see 16:9). Even the reception into "everlasting habitations" is ironic (16:9).

Another element of this story may be important for proper understanding. Jesus speaks to the disciples almost as if they are servants (see 16:1), that is, they are not yet recipients of the true riches of eternity nor of what is to be their own in the world to come (see also 16:12–13). Hence, it seems that the actions and circumstance of the steward apply to them and their situation, not those of the master in the story. For the disciples are not as a "rich man" (16:1) but rather as the steward to whom responsibility for their master's kingdom is entrusted. In this light, Jesus' teaching about the role of a servant vis-à-vis the master (see 17:7–10) and his parable of the pounds make a similar point (see 19:11–26).

Jesus' story about the rich man, traditionally called Dives, along with Lazarus and Abraham, is apparently adapted from a story that circulated in Egypt.⁴ It casts an important and unexpected light on the workings of the world to come. The name Dives comes from a knowing misunderstanding of the Vulgate translation of 16:19. The earliest manuscript, \mathfrak{P}^{75} , renders the name Neves (see the Note on 16:19).⁵ The disclosures about the world to come include the complete inability to predict a person's status in the next world from that person's status in earth life; a place where departed spirits go (see 16:22); a consciousness of one's self and circumstances in the afterlife (see 16:23–24); the impassible gulf between those in torment and those in happiness (see 16:26); and the relevance of conforming to scriptural teachings for the sake of one's future life (see 16:29–31).

A further question begs for an answer. How does Jesus' famous critique "Ye cannot serve God and mammon" (16:13) fit within the whole of the chapter? In fact, this statement may well form the central theme. For it seems that the entire chapter addresses the broad issues of proper and improper action in this world. But, we may ask, in the case of the unjust steward, does not Jesus quote the master's compliment of his former steward? Yes, but. . . . The compliment rests on the steward's clever action rather than on a more enduring virtue. Moreover, the "children of light" are only to make "friends" with this world, not embrace it and adopt its standards (16:8–9).

4. W. Kendrick Grobel, ". . . Whose Name Was Neves," *New Testament Studies* 10 (1963–64): 373–82.

5. Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 2:1130.

PARABLE OF THE UNJUST STEWARD (16:1–12)

King James Translation

1 And he said also unto his disciples, There was a certain rich man, which had a steward; and the same was accused unto him that he had wasted his goods. 2 And he called him, and said unto him, How is it that I hear this of thee? give an account of thy stewardship; for thou mayest be no longer steward. 3 Then the steward said within himself, What shall I do? for my lord taketh away from me the stewardship: I cannot dig; to beg I am ashamed. 4 I am resolved what to do, that, when I am put out of the stewardship, they may receive me into their houses.

5 So he called every one of his lord's debtors unto him, and said unto the first, How much owest thou unto my lord? 6 And he said, An hundred measures of oil. And he said unto him, Take thy bill, and sit down quickly, and write fifty. 7 Then said he to another, And how much owest thou? And he said, An hundred measures of wheat. And he said unto him, Take thy bill, and write fourscore. 8 And the lord commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely: for the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light.

9 And I say unto you, Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations. 10 He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much. 11 If therefore ye have not

New Rendition

1 And he began to speak also to his disciples, "There was a certain rich man who had a steward, and he was accused before him as squandering his property. 2 And after he had called him, he said to him, 'What is this I hear concerning you? Give an accounting of your stewardship, for you can no longer be steward.' 3 And the steward said to himself, 'What shall I do, since my lord is taking away the stewardship from me? I am not strong enough to dig; I am ashamed to beg. 4 I know what I should do so that, when I am removed from my stewardship, they will receive me into their houses.'

5 "And summoning each one of his lord's debtors, he said to the first, 'How much do you owe my lord?' 6 And he said, 'A hundred measures of oil.' And he said to him, 'Take your bill, sit down quickly, and write fifty.' 7 Then he said to another, 'And you, how much do you owe?' And he said, 'A hundred measures of wheat.' He said to him, 'Take your bill and write eighty.' 8 And the lord commended the unjust steward because he acted shrewdly—because the sons of this age are more shrewd in their generation than the sons of light.

9 "And I say to you, make for yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness so that, when it fails, they may receive you into the everlasting dwellings. 10 He who is trustworthy in little is also trustworthy in much, and he who is unjust in little is also unjust in much. 11 So if you have not been

been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches? 12 And if ye have not been faithful in that which is another man's, who shall give you that which is your own?

trustworthy in unrighteous mammon, who will entrust to you the real riches? 12 And if you have not been trustworthy in what is another's, who will give to you what is yours?"

Notes

16:1 *he said*: As often, the verb (Greek *legō*) is in the imperfect tense, conveying either the iterative sense that “he kept talking” or the inchoative sense “he began to speak.”⁶

***his disciples*:** These followers constitute Jesus’ main audience, not a general crowd of people nor even “the publicans and sinners” (15:1), although Pharisees are listening from the edges (see 16:14). Hence, Jesus’ teachings embody significant elements that he wants his disciples to grasp for their own present and future stewardships (see also 17:1).

***a certain rich man*:** This expression is mirrored in 16:19. In these stories, Jesus features people whose means allow them to live more comfortably than many in his audience. In each case, their wealth stands as a major element in the story. Such people are among those who already “have received [their] consolation” (6:24).

***a steward*:** The earlier appearance of this term (Greek *oikonomos*) has to do with the future leaders of Jesus’ church (see the Note on 12:42). Although the noun can refer to a slave or servant born in a household who has risen in responsibility,⁷ here the term bears the sense of a free-born treasurer who oversees the rich man’s estate.⁸

***wasted*:** The verb is the same as that describing the prodigal son’s action (Greek *diaskorpizō*), thus forming an important tie back to Jesus’ words in chapter 15 (see 15:13). More than this, it connotes the act of scattering, whether it is God scattering the enemies of his people (see 1:51), or God strewing his people before gathering them (see Ezek. 5:2, 10; Zech. 13:7–9; John 11:52), or a beast of prey scattering God’s flock (see John 10:12; also Acts 20:29), or a sower flinging his seed across a plowed field.⁹ Thus

6. Smyth, *Greek Grammar*, §§1790, 1890–94, 1900, 2341; BAGD, 469–71; Blass and Debrunner, *Greek Grammar*, §§327, 325.

7. Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 2:1099; Johnson, *Luke*, 243.

8. Plummer, *Luke*, 381; *TDNT*, 5:149–50.

9. *TDNT*, 7:418–22.

implied is the steward's puzzling loss of competence and self-confidence as he mismanages his master's goods, a competence that he apparently regains as soon as his master takes action against him.¹⁰

16:2 *give an account of thy stewardship*: Here the master obliges the steward to defend himself by producing the accounts that will show him to be innocent or guilty.

***thou mayest be no longer steward*:** Fitzmyer translates this expression as "you can no longer be manager here" and believes that the lord intends to dismiss the steward.¹¹ Other commentators agree that the sense of the verb conveys the final decision of the master to dismiss the steward, as indicated in 16:3.¹² Thus the KJV, whose translation appears to hold open the possibility of the steward retaining his job, is incorrect.

16:3 *lord*: The term (Greek *kyrios*), which also appears in 16:5, is the same that identifies Jesus in other contexts as Jehovah (see the Notes on 5:8; 7:31; 11:39). But on the lips of the steward, the word does not carry this sense because no metaphorical overlay lies here, such as the rich man representing God and the steward standing for the devil or some other detested personality.

***I cannot dig*:** The expression means that the steward is physically unable to perform hard, physical labor for some reason.¹³

***to beg I am ashamed*:** Society's true view of beggars and abject poor appears in the steward's words.¹⁴ Of course, a person who has enjoyed a high standard of living tries to avoid such an outcome in life. The shame does not arise in the steward because of remorse for his irresponsible actions but because begging will show that he has been caught and dismissed.¹⁵

16:4 *I am resolved what to do*: The Greek expression literally means, "I know what to do," and bears the meaning, "I have it!" because the solution just now occurs to the steward.¹⁶

***they may receive me into their houses*:** Here the steward's intent becomes obvious. The question is whether this is plan A or plan B. That is, is his first, unspoken intent to remain in the employ of his master?

10. Ford, *Parables of Jesus*, 14–15.

11. Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 2:1100.

12. Marshall, *Luke*, 617; Morris, *Luke*, 270.

13. Marshall, *Luke*, 618; Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 2:1100.

14. Green, *Luke*, 60, 590.

15. *TDNT*, 1:189–90.

16. Moule, *Idiom Book of New Testament Greek*, 7, 11.

16:5 every one of his lord's debtors: Jesus' words signal that the steward doggedly contacts all of the master's debtors, although the story will feature only two. The skill of the story teller is to keep weaving the thread of the story without slowing to recite all the details. On his part, Jesus deftly highlights two examples to make his point.

16:6 An hundred measures of oil: The amount of oil cannot be determined precisely, but it is approximately 900 gallons. The term translated "measures" (Greek *batos*) is actually a Hebrew measure which, according to Josephus, amounts to 72 *sextarii* or about 8.6 gallons per measure.¹⁷

bill: This document is a hand-written promissory note (Greek *gramma*). Typically, it does not specify the interest to be paid on the goods, but spells out the entire amount owed, including both interest and principal.¹⁸ Thus, under Jewish law, which specifically forbids the charging of interest (see Ex. 22:25; Lev. 25:36–37; Deut. 23:19–20), the amount of interest to be paid remains hidden in the promissory note's total.

fifty: Evidently, this amount represents the quantity that the debtor really owes. The rest is interest, though this cannot be established firmly from other ancient sources.¹⁹ One of the reasons that the interest on oil is so high rests on the observation that, if the debt is repaid in kind, the repaid oil can be diluted with water, which sinks to the bottom of a ceramic jar and is thus invisible.

16:7 An hundred measures of wheat: The exact amount of grain (Greek *sitos*)²⁰ is difficult to determine. The measure is the Hebrew *kor*, a dry measure which, in one passage, Josephus reports is equivalent to ten *medimnoi*, a very high ratio, and to 4/7 of one *medimnos* in another.²¹ By the best calculation, a *kor* is approximately 360 liters. At all events, the total amount exceeds 100 bushels.²²

16:8 because he had done wisely: In the view of Fitzmyer, the commendation genuinely reflects Jesus' high praise of the steward and applies specifically to Jesus' disciples. Why? Because the steward acts quickly and decisively in a crisis and, as Jesus' next words indicate, he wishes his

17. Josephus, *A.J.* 8.2.9 (§57); BAGD, 137.

18. *TDNT*, 1:763; Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 2:1100–101.

19. Marshall, *Luke*, 619; Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 2:1101.

20. BAGD, 759.

21. Josephus, *A.J.* 15.9.2 (§314); 3.15.3 (§321).

22. Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 2:1101; Powell, "Weights and Measures," 6:904–5; William G. Dever, "Weights and Measures," in *Harper's Bible Dictionary*, ed. Paul J. Achtemeier (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1985), 1130–31.

disciples to respond similarly when facing the decision that his preaching presents to them about accepting his kingdom.²³ We can add that a further decision follows directly on this one—whether to work to obtain that kingdom.

wisely: The Greek adverb means something like “shrewdly” or “cunningly” in this context (*phronimōs*), although the adjective generally carries the more positive sense of *wise* in other passages (see 12:42; Matt. 7:24; 10:16; 24:45; 25:2).²⁴

the children of this world: Beginning with this expression, which appears in the New Testament only here and at 20:34, Jesus’ following words of explanation through 16:13 are widely regarded as a later addition to the parable proper.²⁵ But because the expression, here with the meaning of “the sons of this age,” is at home in the Jewish world, as the Dead Sea Scrolls illustrate, these words and those that attach to them need not be thought of as foreign to Jesus’ vocabulary and interests.²⁶ After all, he offers explanations of parables and stories in other contexts (see 8:11–15; 18:6–9, 14; 19:26).²⁷

in their generation: Jesus places a limit on the sphere wherein *the children of the world* are and can be effective. Their activities, which bring them what the steward now seeks, a materially prosperous life, find a place in this world, not the next.

wiser: Much of what Jesus teaches rests on this term, which derives from the same root as the word translated “wisely.” One admirable virtue that he wishes his followers to emulate, and to transfer to the spiritual side of their lives, is that of always and eagerly organizing their lives to inherit his eternal blessings just as those of this world organize their lives with singleness of purpose to succeed in the here and now.

the children of light: This expression, too, is mirrored in the Dead Sea Scrolls, most often translated as “the sons of light.” Its appearance in the Scrolls shows that it belongs in the Jewish religious environment of Jesus’ day, and points to those fully within the kingdom (see John 12:36; 1 Thes. 5:5; also Eph. 5:8) who receive God’s light both in its form as the brightness of the sun and especially in its aspect as spiritual enlightenment (see

23. Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 2:1102.

24. BAGD, 874; *TDNT*, 9:234.

25. Beare, *Earliest Records of Jesus*, 179; Jeremias, *Parables*, 45–46; Fitzmyer, *Essays on the Semitic Background of the New Testament*, 166–67; *Luke*, 2:1105–7.

26. *TDNT*, 1:206–7; Marshall, *Luke*, 621; Green, *Luke*, 593.

27. Marshall, *Luke*, 622.

2 Cor. 4:6; the Notes on 24:31–32; also D&C 84:45–47; 88:6–13; 93:40, 42).²⁸ Importantly, in modern scripture, this term ties to a person’s readiness at the end-time, at “that day” (D&C 106:5).

16:9 *I say unto you:* To make his point more earnest, Jesus draws on his own authority, an aspect of his preaching ministry that he exhibits elsewhere (see 4:24; 5:24; 6:27; 7:9, 14, 26, 28, 47; 9:27; etc.; the Notes on 6:27 and 7:26).

Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness: Jesus’ command offers a proper orientation to the modern world. We are to become friends with it, accepting what it brings, but not to embrace it and allow it to overpower our commitment to the world of righteousness. For how disciples deal with the world shapes to a large extent how and whether God “will commit to [our] trust true riches” (16:11). This principle seeps into how we use possessions in the service of the kingdom: are we as careful and scrupulous as givers and stewards of donated funds, such as alms and tithes, as people are about their material goals?²⁹ In a different vein, modern scripture renders this expression with a slightly different focus: “make unto yourselves friends *with* the mammon of unrighteousness,” placing emphasis on making proper use of this world’s goods (D&C 82:22; emphasis added).

mammon: This Aramaic term means wealth or property, but in this context the word features property gained for the wrong reasons.³⁰

when ye fail: This reading from later texts, including the Vulgate, is surely wrong. The reading from earlier manuscripts is “when it fails,” meaning “when the world of mammon fails,”³¹ pointing either to the end of a person’s life when property no longer matters or to wealth’s inability to sustain righteous purposes by itself.³²

they may receive you: This expression has invited much discussion. Does the plural “they” refer to those who are already in heaven, such as family members and friends, or even to angels, or is the plural a Jewish circumlocution that points to God as the one who receives the faithful?

28. *TDNT*, 9:312–13, 319–20, 326, 343–45; Marshall, *Luke*, 621; *TLNT*, 3:475–76, 482, 484; Flusser, “Jesus’ Opinion about the Essenes,” 150–168; George W. E. Nickelsburg, *1 Enoch: A Commentary on 1 Enoch*, 2 vols. (Minneapolis, Minn.: Augsburg Fortress, 2001, 2012), 1:557–58.

29. Morris, *Luke*, 272.

30. BAGD, 491; *TDNT*, 4:388–90.

31. Plummer, *Luke*, 385; Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 2:1110.

32. Johnson, *Luke*, 245.

All are possible interpretations.³³ In an interesting twist, modern scripture substitutes the expression “they will not destroy you,” signaling that mammon can act as a protection of sorts (D&C 82:22).

everlasting habitations: This expression is unusual because the Greek term for “habitations” refers to tents or temporary dwellings (Greek *skēnē*). But here it points both to the permanent place that one inherits in the world to come (see D&C 78:7) and, very likely, to the place where God dwells, because of its connection to the desert sanctuary of the Exodus.³⁴

16:10 *He that is faithful . . . he that is unjust:* The words of Jesus in this and the following verses (see 16:10–12) turn on the observation that a person’s actions in one sphere of life will surely mirror those in another sphere. In Jesus’ view, they cannot be separated. As the following verses will remind us, we must hold onto the noblest virtues because we “cannot serve God and mammon” (16:13).

16:11 *faithful in the unrighteous mammon:* Jesus underscores the principle that worldly wealth does not belong to us but rather comes to us as a trust, in effect testing us in how we value and use it.³⁵ This very positive view of wealth does not stoop to the world’s material culture, but carries with it a deepened sense of responsibility (see the Note on 18:27).

who will commit to your trust the true riches: Genuine, eternal wealth belongs to God and is his to give, as the passive voice indicates (see 12:44; the Notes on 12:50; 13:32; 14:11; 18:31; 22:37; 24:31, 44; also see Rom 8:32; Rev. 21:7; D&C 84:38).³⁶

16:12 *that which is another man’s:* In contrast to wealth and property that belong to a person in the prior verse, the issue in this verse stands astride the principle of stewardship over another’s property, bringing readers back to the parable of the unjust steward. Here the Savior enunciates one of the principles that he wishes hearers to grasp from his story.

that which is your own: At the end, Jesus draws hearers to his ultimate point about how a person receives the deed to heavenly possessions—it is through faithfulness both in personal matters and in matters that have to do with the well-being of others.

33. Marshall, *Luke*, 621–22; Morris, *Luke*, 272–73.

34. *TDNT*, 7:378–79; Marshall, *Luke*, 621.

35. Morris, *Luke*, 273; Johnson, *Luke*, 246.

36. Blass and Debrunner, *Greek Grammar*, §§313 ,(1)130; Jeremias, *Parables*, 122, n. 33; Marshall, *Luke*, 623, 898; Johnson, *Luke*, 227.

Analysis

Even with all its intricate details, the Savior’s parable of the unjust steward fits snugly together, illustrating his skill in its retelling. Luke’s deft placement of Jesus’ story about the steward continues and enhances the theme of the prior chapter—proper attitudes toward wealth.³⁷ In Jesus’ hands, the one who possesses the property, the lord, quickly recedes into the background whereas the steward, who manages the property, emerges into the full light of day, where his actions come under tight scrutiny. These actions, thorough and self-preserving in character, become the focal point for Jesus’ wide-ranging set of comments that follow, both positive and negative.

A number of important threads weave their way through this parable and Jesus’ following comments, some bright and thick, others dim and thin. The most radiant thread running through the story itself has to do with the commendation of the steward: his lord calls him clever, pointedly acknowledging his wisdom when dealing with his fast-deteriorating situation. For, after bungling his master’s estate, the steward acts decisively and with dispatch, earning his lord’s grudging praise for creating a future for himself that will keep him upright in a material sense,³⁸ thus allowing him to continue to enjoy the kind of lifestyle to which he has become accustomed. The rub, of course, comes because Jesus’ words, uttered through the lord, seem to condone the steward’s actions—all of them. But we must hold in mind that the lord does not call the steward good, but wise or clever. The distinction is significant because it allows a hearer to grasp that the steward’s efforts—focused and intensely self-preserving—to recover from his dismissal are worth emulating by Jesus’ disciples when it comes to eternal matters. For, as Jesus’ comments illustrate, faithfulness in dealing with that which belongs to another adds threads to an eternal tapestry, and it is this principle that finally and ultimately judges the steward (see the Note on 16:12).

A second noticeable thread weaves a pattern through the checkered issue of wealth. Jesus’ words are strongly positive. Though elsewhere he downplays wealth and property and elevates the poor (see 6:20–21, 24–25; 9:25), here he softens his comments on wealth and instead focuses on the notion that methods of acquiring it bring out the worst in people, leading him to highlight “the mammon of unrighteousness” and “unrighteous mammon” (16:9, 11). And besides people’s unscrupulous acquisition of this

37. Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 2:1095.

38. Ford, *Parables of Jesus*, 14–15.

world's goods, Jesus' words raise questions about how people use them (see 16:11). Elsewhere, he darkens the rich because they spend their goods on themselves, leading him to say that such persons "have received [their] consolation" and have "wasted [their] substance" (6:24; 15:13). But here Jesus brightens the prospect that "he that is faithful" will have committed to his "trust the true riches" (16:10–11). In concert with this idea, in an expansion of 18:27, the Joseph Smith Translation quotes Jesus as saying, "It is impossible for them who trust in riches, to enter into the kingdom of God; but he who forsaketh the things which are of this world, it is possible with God, that he should enter in" (JST 18:27; see the Note on 18:27; the Analysis on 18:26–30).

Jesus interlaces this proper, even celestial management of personal wealth with the principle of properly managing the wealth of others (see 16:12). Perhaps surprisingly, both activities carry eternal consequences. But not surprisingly, they do so in the world of donated funds, for commentators see Jesus' words tying to the common practice of giving alms.³⁹ Beyond this, the principle interweaves more than the simple acts of giving and receiving alms; it meshes with the proper use of donated funds within the church that Jesus is establishing. Those who properly manage these sacred monies and properties will eventually receive "that which is [their] own" as a heavenly gift (16:12; see the Note thereon). In a word, our eventual acquisition of heavenly property or possessions depends at least in part on our management of what belongs to God, whether our own material resources, which really belong to him, or those of others that are donated for sacred purposes.

One question to settle is whether Jesus' comments on the story really derive from him or whether they represent later additions to his words. Among scholars, a large number judge that the comments do not come from Jesus.⁴⁰ Much of this judgment rests on a perception that some of the language in the comments is not at home in Jesus' world and therefore is not available to him. But studies have shown that expressions such as "the children of this world" and "the children of light" (16:8) are fully at home in ancient Palestine, as the Dead Sea Scrolls illustrate.⁴¹

39. Marshall, *Luke*, 621; Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 2:1109.

40. Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 2:1096–97, offers a list of studies and the notable differences among scholars about where the parable ends and the later comment begins.

41. Marshall, *Luke*, 620–21, 622; Flusser, "Jesus' Opinion about the Essenes," 150–168; Green, *Luke*, 595.

Those who wish to separate the story of the first seven and one-half verses, or more, from the statements that follow, claiming that the comments are not originally from Jesus, effectively add a pattern to his teachings from those initial verses that is not found elsewhere in the Gospels—that he really does commend the unjust steward, without qualification. In response, first, this point of view assumes that Jesus does not comment on or explain his own teachings, preferring to let hearers wrestle with the meaning of his words rather than offering guidance. Such a viewpoint stands at odds with other passages that bring forward his interpretive remarks (see 8:11–15; 18:6–9, 14; 19:26; D&C 38:25–27; 45:34–39, 56–57; 86:1–7; 88:51–61; 101:63–68, 85–91). Second, shearing away the comment from the story about the steward, and representing the parable as typical of Jesus’ teachings, produce distortion and fulfill some scholars’ penchants for seeing Jesus through peculiarly individualistic, pre-existing lenses.⁴² Such approaches produce interesting publications but do not add enlightenment to the Savior’s ministry.

FORBIDDEN PATHS (16:13–18)

(Compare Matt. 5:17–18, 31–32; 6:24; 11:12–14; 19:3–9; Mark 10:2–12)

King James Translation

13 No servant can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.

14 And the Pharisees also, who were covetous, heard all these things: and they derided him. 15 And he said unto them, Ye are they which justify yourselves before men; but God knoweth your hearts: for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God.

New Rendition

13 “No house-slave can serve two masters; for he will either hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.”

14 And the Pharisees who loved money, were listening to all these things, and they ridiculed him. 15 And he said to them, “You are those who justify yourselves before men. But God knows your hearts; for that which is lofty among men is an abomination before God.

42. Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Real Jesus* (New York: HarperCollins, 1997), 29–56.

16 The law and the prophets were until John: since that time the kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseth into it. 17 And it is easier for heaven and earth to pass, than one tittle of the law to fail.

18 Whosoever putteth away his wife, and marrieth another, committeth adultery: and whosoever marrieth her that is put away from her husband committeth adultery.

16 “The law and the prophets were until John; since then the kingdom of God is preached, and all are forcing their way into it. 17 But it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one stroke of the law to fail.

18 “Every one who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery, and he who marries a woman who has been divorced from her husband commits adultery.”

Notes

16:13 *servant*: The term is unusual (Greek *oiketēs*), appearing only here and in three other passages (see Acts 10:7; Rom. 14:4; 1 Pet. 2:18) and bearing the meaning of a servant or domestic belonging to someone’s house.⁴³

***masters*:** Elsewhere, this word points to Jesus as Lord (Greek singular, *kyrios*) and hence draws in overtones of the divine in this context (see 2:11; 5:8; 6:5; 7:13, 31; 11:39; 12:42; 13:15; 17:6; 18:6; etc.; the Notes on 5:8; 7:13, 31).⁴⁴ The masters in our lives, of course, include ourselves as well as persons or influences outside ourselves.

***either he will hate the one, and love the other*:** Jesus’ foray into psychological analysis hits a bull’s-eye (see the Note on 24:41). Here he expresses the sentiments of a person who becomes emotionally attached to, or detached from, a master or supervisor.

***he will hold to the one, and despise the other*:** This expression characterizes an individual who is less emotionally affected by a relationship with a master but still faces the need to choose where his or her loyalty will lie. Incidentally, the psychological statements in this verse form a chiasmus of sorts, a–b–b’–a’.

***Ye cannot serve God and mammon*:** Jesus’ statement frames a central theme of this entire chapter. It has to do with the broad question of appropriate and inappropriate action in this world (see the Analysis below).

16:14 *the Pharisees*: Luke’s notice of the Pharisees’ presence ties back to 15:2 and adds a touch of unity to the content of chapters 15 and 16. In Luke’s mind, Jesus is not speaking to followers alone but also to others who are mixed into the crowd.

43. Liddell and Scott, *Lexicon*, 1202; BAGD, 559.

44. TDNT, 3:1039–63, 1081–95; TLNT, 2:341–50; Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 1:200–2.

covetous: Although this adjective means “avaricious” or “fond of money,” literally “fond of silver” (Greek *philargyros*), and appears in only one other passage in the New Testament (see 2 Tim. 3:2), its abstract noun, which occurs once, is properly translated as the “love of money” (1 Tim. 6:10).⁴⁵ In the New Testament, only this passage portrays Pharisees in this manner, though other ancient sources complain about the avarice of their scribes. The term plainly ties these Pharisees to the unjust steward of the parable.⁴⁶

heard: This verb stands in 15:1 and, in that passage, highlights the receptive nature of “all the publicans and sinners” to Jesus’ message, in sharp contrast to the response of “the Pharisees and scribes” (15:2). In this setting, Luke underlines the Pharisees’ disposition to hear only what they want to hear, to take offense, and then to whine as victims.

derided: Only Luke repeats this verb (Greek *ekmyktērizō*), with the meaning “to turn up the nose,” which underlines the Pharisees’ attitude. The verb also appears in the scene of Jesus’ crucifixion: “the rulers . . . derided him” (23:35).⁴⁷ The term here therefore anticipates distantly an event tied to the Atonement.

16:15 justify yourselves before men; but God knoweth: The major issue has to do with justification and its source. In this case, of course, Jesus holds that true justification comes from God; it does not originate with others (see 1 Ne. 16:2; D&C 20:30; Moses 6:60). In the language of Paul, justification is “the gift of God” (Eph. 2:8). In Jesus’ words, the Pharisees lack God’s approval, putting them at high risk. Luke illustrates this point when he repeats Jesus’ story about the publican and Pharisee as well as Jesus’ meeting with the rich ruler (see 18:9–14, 18–30; the Note on 18:14).⁴⁸

highly esteemed . . . abomination: Although it appears that Jesus employs hyperbole or overstatement to make his point, we must not dismiss his searing censure that self-justification is abominable before God. The term translated as “abomination” points to that which God hates (Greek *bdelygma*), as other passages illustrate (see Matt. 24:15; Mark 13:14; Rev. 17:4–5; 21:27).⁴⁹ Another possible dimension may exist here. That “which is highly esteemed among men,” as Jesus declares, holds within it a link to a person’s “covetous” attitude (16:14). That is, what is “highly esteemed”

45. Liddell and Scott, *Lexicon*, 1932; BAGD, 866.

46. Marshall, *Luke*, 625; Green, *Luke*, 601.

47. *TDNT*, 4:796–99.

48. *TDNT*, 2:214–15.

49. BAGD, 137; *TDNT*, 1:598–600.

usually comes in the form of possessions or power. And the owner of such runs the risk of developing covetousness in the course of either managing or acquiring possessions or power, and not acknowledging that God is the ultimate owner.

16:16 *The law:* The saying about the law as it stands in Luke’s report, continued in the next verse, may cut two ways. (1) It may represent Jesus’ attempt to warn his followers not to depreciate the law of Moses (see the Notes on 4:16; 5:14; 17:14; 20:47; 23:56), particularly because they may hear him say negative things from time to time about the law and attempt to mirror him. This idea seems to lie at the base of 16:17. (2) The saying may represent Jesus’ warning to “the Pharisees,” who stand on the edge of the circle of his disciples (see 16:14), that the kingdom has replaced the law as the proper, eternal object of our efforts. In fact, the saying about hearing “Moses and the prophets” (16:29–31) connects to this scene in the sense that those who really hear what Moses and the prophets are saying, and allow the revelatory power of scripture to work, will thereby be prepared to receive the words of Jesus (see the Notes on 16:29, 31, and the following Analysis).

The law and the prophets: This expression summarizes most of the Hebrew scripture as it then existed, embracing the first five books of the Bible, or the Pentateuch, and both the historical books and prophetic works (see 16:29, 31; the Note on 24:27).⁵⁰ Only the sacred writings as they are called, are missing from this list, works such as Proverbs, Job, and Psalms, though Jesus may assume them. Jesus will enfold this latter category into his revealing remarks spoken to his gathered disciples in Jerusalem less than twenty-four hours after the resurrection (see the Note on 24:44). This sort of summary statement does not appear in the Old Testament though it occurs in other sources more or less contemporary with Jesus (see Acts 13:15; 24:14; 28:23).⁵¹ Turning back to the passage in front of us, at this point in Luke’s record the Joseph Smith Translation begins a major overhaul of this verse and the next three. The JST attributes the initial mention of the law and the prophets to the Pharisees, as well as a scathing rejection of Jesus as a royal pretender: “they [the Pharisees] said unto him, We have the law, and the prophets; but as for this man [Jesus] we will not receive him to be our ruler; for he maketh himself to be a judge over us” (JST 16:16). Plainly, the Pharisees understand the force of Jesus’ prior teachings about himself but choose to reject him. There is more. In response to the

50. *TDNT*, 6:832.

51. Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 2:1116–17.

Pharisees' harsh words, Jesus grows all the more transparent and emphatic about his messiahship: "The law and the prophets testify of me; yea, and all the prophets who have written, even until John [the Baptist], have foretold these days" (JST 16:17; see also JST John 3:18; 1 Ne. 10:5; Jacob 4:4; 7:11; Mosiah 3:13, 15; 13:33; 15:11; etc.; the Notes on 1:70 and 24:27).

until John: since that time: Here is the clear indicator of what is termed "the meridian of time." Indeed, time seems to be divided into two epochs, that before the arrival of Jesus and John the Baptist and that afterward, though discussion continues whether the Baptist belongs to the old era or the new.⁵² This moment is marked earlier in Luke's account as well as the separation of Jesus' mortal and postmortal ministries (see the Notes on 3:2–6; 24:44; and the Analysis on 24:50–53).

the kingdom of God is preached: Jesus' broad statement clearly implies that he is not alone in preaching about the kingdom, although it is a fair question from his language whether we should understand John as one of those preachers. Among those who have joined Jesus in this effort are the Twelve (see 9:2), the Seventy (see 10:1–11), and others whom he has commissioned (see the Notes on 9:50; 9:60).

every man presseth into it: One sense is that all who choose to enter the kingdom must do so with vigor and firm intent; we cannot be casual. This concept arises in the parable of the unjust steward. The rigors of discipleship are too high, especially if we are to imitate the Master (see 9:23–27, 57–62; 14:26–27, 33; the Analysis on 21:1–4). The other sense is that everyone is forced (Greek *biazomia*)⁵³ into the kingdom, a meaning that presents challenges unless, taking Jesus' broader remarks into account, we understand that all are pressed into the kingdom when "heaven and earth" are changed (16:17), that is, at the end-time. On this view, not all will choose or be able to stay in the kingdom. The Joseph Smith Translation inclines toward the former interpretation by adding three words to Jesus' saying: "every man *who seeketh truth* presseth into it [the kingdom]" (JST 16:18; emphasis added).

16:17 it is easier for heaven and earth to pass: Jesus' expression achieves two ends. First, he challenges his hearers' minds with overstatement so that they will remember what he says about the value of the law. Second, he pushes his remarks into the sphere of the end-time when heaven and earth will undergo change, underscoring that he is concerned not only with the here and now but also with people's long-range futures.

52. Marshall, *Luke*, 628; Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 2:1115–16; Johnson, *Luke*, 250.

53. BAGD, 140; *TDNT*, 1:609.

one tittle of the law: The reference features the parts of Hebrew letters that distinguish one letter from others of similar shape. The Greek term *kerasia* points to a small horn or hook created as a copyist begins or finalizes the shape of a letter on parchment or papyrus, thus one of a letter's smallest parts.⁵⁴ In a different vein, at the end of this verse the Joseph Smith Translation adds a major declaration by Jesus against his Pharisaic opponents that appears in no manuscript of Luke's Gospel:

And why teach ye the law, and deny that which is written; and condemn him whom the Father hath sent to fulfill the law, that ye might all be redeemed? O fools! for you have said in your hearts, There is no God. And you pervert the right way; and the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence of you; and you persecute the meek; and in your violence you seek to destroy the kingdom; and ye take the children of the kingdom by force. Woe unto you, ye adulterers! And they reviled him again, being angry for the saying, that they were adulterers. (JST 16:20–22)

This surprising, condemnatory characterization of these Pharisees, from their disbelief in God to their early persecution of Jesus' followers to their immoral behavior, is one of the most sweeping in scripture, perhaps equaled only in Mark 7:6–13.

16:18 *Whosoever putteth away his wife, and marrieth another:* The two actions, divorce and remarriage, stand together in Jesus' saying, and thus are joined. In addition, these are actions initiated by a man. Hence, Jesus' judging words aim at men who divorce their wives with the intent to take another bride. One effect of Jesus' words is to re-level the legal landscape for women by removing a man's whim or wandering eye as a justifiable reason for divorce. Early on, protections are set in place for women caught in a divorce, requiring the husband to give her a certificate so that she cannot be accused of adultery in a second marriage and cannot be taken again by her original husband into a demeaning marriage (see Deut. 24:1–4).⁵⁵ By Jesus' day, some teachers hold that a man can divorce a wife for any act that displeases him, undercutting the divine warning about a man dealing "treacherously against the wife of his youth" (Mal. 2:14–16).⁵⁶ Jesus' words aim to blunt this attitude (see the Notes on 17:27 and 20:34). According to the Joseph Smith Translation, Jesus directs this saying about divorce to the Pharisees who "reviled him again" because he calls them "adulterers" (JST 16:21–22).

54. BAGD, 429; Marshall, *Luke*, 630; Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 2:1118.

55. Christopher J. H. Wright, "Family," in *ABD*, 2:766.

56. *Mishnah Gittin* 9:10.

her that is put away from her husband: The divorced woman stands in the cross hairs of Jesus’ words. What does he mean that a man—he is the subject here—who marries a divorced woman “committeth adultery?” Jesus has just warned men in a way that offers more protection for women caught in divorce, and now he issues a second warning. In a partial answer, Jesus pushes aside the Jewish law that allows a man to marry a divorced woman. At issue is the sterling sanctity of the first marriage. The force of Jesus’ words is to underscore for his disciples the need to protect marriage and thus to avoid the terrible costs of divorce and its commonly associated transgressions. Here, Jesus anticipates Paul’s standard (see 1 Cor. 7:10–11). Both standards mirror the marriage criteria set for priests (see Lev. 21:7), thus requiring the true follower to imitate temple ideals.⁵⁷

Analysis

The Savior thunders, “No servant can serve two masters” and “Ye cannot serve God and mammon” (16:13). Enshrined within these two brawny, negative statements stands the strong, beating heart of the chapter. For these driving declarations plainly point backward to the compromising actions of the unjust steward and to the lessons that Jesus draws from this man’s dishonesty. They also pull his disciples’ minds forward to his sayings about the impossibility, or severe difficulty, of pursuing certain courses of action without risking divine displeasure, including covetousness (see 16:14–15), devaluing the law (see 16:16–17), and seeking divorce (see 16:18). Moreover, at the center of Jesus’ story of Lazarus, Dives, and Abraham dangles the issue of the rich man’s choices—to clothe and feed himself, and to avoid simple acts of charity that acknowledge God as the true owner of his abundant goods, thus choosing mammon over God (see 16:19–21). In this light, the entire chapter responds to the broad issues of proper and improper action in this world. Jesus’ probing proclamation about serving two masters forges the linchpin of the whole. Whether Luke is the architect who skillfully draws everything together, or whether he finds Jesus’ teachings in a source essentially as they appear here, remains a question that divides scholars.

But the unity remains. Even small details reach across broad swaths of the narrative, stitching together chapters 15 and 16. For instance, the notices of the Pharisees’ presence form a bridge between the opening of

57. Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 2:1121.

chapter 15 and the middle of chapter 16. Furthermore, the verb translated “to hear,” which frames the differing responses of “publicans and sinners” on the one hand and of Pharisees on the other, sews together precisely the same passages, underlining unity (see 15:1; 16:14).

Moreover, Jesus’ nod toward the “law and the prophets” (16:16) links to his concluding remarks in the story about Dives the rich man and Lazarus the beggar when he twice speaks of “Moses and the prophets” (16:29, 31). Although the former reference points to ending the era of the “law and the prophets,” with the coming of John, and Jesus’ later remarks about “Moses and the prophets” sustain the enduring value of the old era, both share the common judgment that the law remains relevant. For Jesus observes that “it is easier for heaven and earth to pass, than one tittle of the law to fail,” a clear knock against those disciples who evidently are already discounting the law of Moses (16:17; see the Note on 16:16).

It is exactly at the expression “the law and the prophets” (16:16) that the Prophet Joseph Smith inserts a substantial series of additions into the content of Jesus’ words that condemn the critically attentive Pharisees who stand within the crowd. At the pinnacle of Jesus’ sayings rises his affirmation of who he is—the one who fulfills the law so “that ye might all be redeemed” (JST 16:20). Besides rejecting him, according to the added words, these Pharisees lack faith in the scriptures that they teach, they already persecute his meek followers with “violence” and “by force,” and they are adulterers (JST 16:17, 20–22). Few recorded sayings reach this level of criticism except, perhaps, that in Mark 7:6–13.

In recent scholarship, Jesus’ statement that “the law and the prophets were until John” (16:16) has generated discussion about Luke’s historical scheme. Following the lead of Hans Conzelmann, who argues that Luke divides salvation history into three parts—the old era that includes the Baptist, the era that Jesus stands in, and the final age that his followers inaugurate—many scholars have embraced this verse as decisive for understanding Luke’s writings.⁵⁸ An untestable assumption underlies this view, namely, that not Jesus but Luke is responsible for formulating this saying, at least in its current form.⁵⁹ Such an assumption, of course, lays down an uncertain floor upon which a good deal of scholarship is reared. To be sure, certain passages from Luke point to John as standing in an earlier era (see

58. Hans Conzelmann, *The Theology of St. Luke*, trans. Geoffrey Buswell (New York: Harper, 1960); Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 1:18–22; 2:1115–17.

59. Bultmann, *History*, 164–65; Beare, *Earliest Records of Jesus*, 181.

3:16–17; Acts 10:37; 13:24–25), but others hold that he is very much a part of Jesus’ age, not from a time now past (see Acts 1:22; 19:3–4; the Analysis on 3:1–6; 3:21–22).

The most challenging issue among these verses has to do with Jesus’ teaching about divorce (see 16:18). Plainly, for his followers, he sets his standard high. At base is his concern for women who become victims of husbands’ whims. In his world, certain prominent Jewish teachers declare that a man can divorce his wife for almost any cause, including a mistake in cooking: “if she spoiled a dish for him.”⁶⁰ Two results flow from Jesus’ words. First, he clearly stands for monogamy and against successive polygamy wherein a man marries a series of women in sequential fashion. Second, he raises the standard for marriage to that of priests who officiate at the temple: “[a priest] shall not take a wife . . . put away from her husband: for he is holy unto his God” (Lev. 21:7).⁶¹ In the case of priests, the issue has to do with a divorced woman’s perceived reputation because priests are permitted to marry widows of other priests (see Ezek. 44:22).⁶² Whether this principle lies behind Jesus’ words remains uncertain.

PARABLE OF DIVES AND LAZARUS (16:19–31)

King James Translation

19 There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day: 20 And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores, 21 And desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man’s table: moreover the dogs came and licked his sores. 22 And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into

New Rendition

19 “There was a certain rich man, and he was clothed in purple and fine linen and made merry in splendor every day. 20 A certain poor man named Lazarus had been laid at his gates, covered with sores 21 and wanting to be fed from what fell from the rich man’s table. Further, even the dogs, when they came, kept licking his sores. 22 And it came to pass that the poor man died and was carried by the angels into Abraham’s

60. *Mishnah Gittin* 9:10.

61. Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 2:1121.

62. Milgrom, *Leviticus 17–22*, 1808.

Abraham's bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried;

23 And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. 24 And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame. 25 But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented. 26 And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence.

27 Then he said, I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him to my father's house: 28 For I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment. 29 Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them. 30 And he said, Nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent. 31 And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.

bosom. And the rich man also died and was buried.

23 "And in Hades, when he raised his eyes, being in torment, he saw Abraham from afar and Lazarus in his bosom. 24 And calling out, he said, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me and send Lazarus to wet the tip of his finger with water and cool my tongue, because I suffer in this blaze.' 25 But Abraham said, 'Son, remember that you received your good things in your life, and likewise Lazarus bad things; but now, here, he is comforted and you suffer. 26 And besides all this, a great chasm has been placed between us and you, so that those who want to cross from here to you cannot, nor from there might they pass over to us.'

27 "But he said, 'Then I beg you, Father, that you send him to the house of my father, 28 for I have five brothers, that he may bear witness to them, that they might not also come to this place of torment.' 29 But Abraham said, 'They have Moses and the prophets; let them listen to them.' 30 But he said, 'No, Father Abraham. Rather, should someone from the dead come to them, they will repent.' 31 But he said, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, they will not be persuaded should someone rise from the dead.'"

Notes

16:19 a certain rich man: In most Greek manuscripts of Luke's Gospel, this person remains unnamed and thus lacking in honor. Even in death he is called simply "the rich man" (16:22). However, in the earliest text (P⁷⁵) and in the Sahidic Coptic translation, he receives the name *Nevēs*. Conversely, from a misunderstanding of the Vulgate version, the name Dives has become attached to this man, the name that remains in Christian

lore.⁶³ In another vein, before the current introductory words for this story, “There was a certain rich man,” the Joseph Smith Translation adds other introductory words to the effect that Jesus told the story specifically to the Pharisees: “Verily I say unto you [Pharisees], I will liken you unto the rich man. For there was a certain rich man. . . .” (JST 16:23–24).

clothed in purple and fine linen: The rich man of the story clearly stands above the crowd. Purple is a fabric color that few can afford, and is usually therefore in the possession of royalty and aristocracy because of the high cost of extracting the dye from murex snails that live in salt water.⁶⁴ In this light, Lydia, a convert of Paul, is a dealer in high-end fabrics (see Acts 16:14). The term translated “fine linen” (Greek *byssos*), here “underclothes,” also points to wealth and ties some of the inspiration for Jesus’ story to Galilee where the best linen in the country is made.⁶⁵

fared sumptuously: The Greek verb *euphrainomai* here conveys the sense of “purely secular joy” as in a festive, lavishly prepared meal wherein a worldly person finds a measure of happiness.⁶⁶

16:20 *beggar named Lazarus:* Although this is the only instance of Jesus naming a person in one of his parables, irony may lie in naming the poor man and not naming the rich (see 16:19). The word derives from the common Hebrew name Eleazar which means “God has helped,” a fitting name, based on the results of the story.⁶⁷

was laid at his gate: The passive of the verb implies that the poor man needed assistance to move and was therefore an invalid. The gate, likely ornamental because Jesus draws attention to it, stands as a further reminder of the rich man’s opulence and separates the two men of the story, just as the terms “afar off” and “great gulf” disclose an unbridgeable distance between them later on (16:23, 26).⁶⁸

16:21 *desiring to be fed:* The same expression describes the younger son’s destitute condition in the parable of the Prodigal Son (see 15:16). In both instances, it remains unclear whether either man received much to eat.

63. Marshall, *Luke*, 634–35; Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 2:1130.

64. Edwin Firmage, “Zoology,” in *ABD*, 6:1148–50.

65. BAGD, 148; Jeremias, *Jerusalem*, 4; Douglas R. Edwards, “Dress and Ornamentation,” in *ABD*, 2:237.

66. *TDNT*, 2:774.

67. BDB, 740–41; *TDOT*, 11:16–17; Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 2:1131.

68. Green, *Luke*, 605–6.

with the crumbs: This phrase is missing in the earliest manuscripts, but its absence does not alter the meaning of Jesus' story.⁶⁹ These crumbs are small pieces of discarded bread with which men wipe their faces and beards during a meal or that, once bitten into, are thrown under the table so that a person does not dip with the same piece of bread in a common dish.⁷⁰

the dogs: The man's misery becomes all the more vivid when Jesus adds the detail that the local, scavenging dogs, likely full of ticks and sores themselves, pay attention to the beggar's sores whereas the rich man does nothing to alleviate the man's condition.

16:22 was carried . . . was buried: The colorful imagery of the two verbs points to the final state of each person; one went up and the other down. Moreover, angels escort the beggar whereas the rich man enjoys no such company.

Abraham's bosom: Two dimensions suggest themselves: a physical, personal aspect of Abraham and a location. First, the personal aspect of "bosom" appears in the expression "he [the rich man] . . . seeth . . . Lazarus in [Abraham's] bosom" (16:23). Clearly, the beggar is with Abraham himself, perhaps enfolded within his arms (see D&C 132:49). In this connection, "bosom" can point to both the physical and spiritual dimensions of God's existence or character: "thou [God] art there, and thy bosom is there; and also thou art just; thou art merciful and kind forever" (Moses 7:30; also 7:63). Moreover, the word applies not only to the Father but to the Son of Man (see Moses 7:24, 47). Second, concerning a celestial place called "bosom," we notice that "bosom" is where God is (see Moses 7:30). In addition, God's heaven is called "the bosom of the Father" (Moses 7:24; also 7:30) and is evidently the place of his throne (see Moses 7:59). Further, the word "bosom" refers to the celestial residence of the city of Zion (see D&C 38:4), and highlights the premortal place of education and nourishment for the Son (D&C 76:13, 25, 39; compare D&C 88:13; 109:4).⁷¹

16:23 in hell: The expression is "in Hades," and contrasts with "Abraham's bosom" (16:22). Clearly, they are different places. The Greek term *Hades* in the Septuagint carries chiefly the meaning of a dark, permanent underworld where departed spirits are confined (see LXX Job 7:9–10; 10:21–22). In the New Testament era, this view is corrected to *Hades* as a place where the disembodied spirits temporarily await the resurrection

69. Marshall, *Luke*, 635; Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 2:1131.

70. Jeremias, *Parables*, 184, n. 53.

71. Draper, Brown and Rhodes, *Pearl of Great Price*, 127.

and judgment (see the Note on 10:15; Acts 2:27, 31; Rev. 20:13) and where Jesus preaches during the time that his body lies in the tomb (see 1 Pet. 3:19–20; 4:6).⁷² A similar correction appears in the Book of Mormon (see Alma 40:11–14). Joseph Smith taught that “Hades, Sheol, paradise, spirits in prison, are all one: it is a world of spirits.”⁷³

lift up his eyes: The sense must be that the rich man is outside the place where Abraham resides but can see him (see the Note on 13:28). The scene clearly underscores the view that persons who die are both conscious of themselves and exist as individuals in the next life. The expression “to lift up the eyes” often describes the raising of eyes in common actions, and denotes distance (see 18:13; Gen. 13:10, 14; 18:2; etc.; John 4:35; 6:5; 11:41).

being in torments: The expression, repeated in Doctrine and Covenants 104:18 as “being in torment,” ties to the torments of one’s soul at realizing that one could have experienced a different outcome in the next world (see Mosiah 3:25)—“The torment of disappointment in the mind of man is as exquisite as a lake burning with fire and brimstone.”⁷⁴ Moreover, wealth by itself does not disqualify a person from a celestial reward, but its misuse: “if any man shall take of the abundance which I [God] have made, and impart not his portion . . . unto the poor and the needy, he shall, with the wicked, lift up his eyes in hell” (D&C 104:18; see the Note on 18:27).⁷⁵

16:24 Father Abraham: The former rich man appeals to his genealogical tie when he addresses Abraham, a tie that the Baptist has already discounted (see the Note on 3:8).

have mercy on me: In the mind of the rich man, Abraham possesses an abundance of mercy that he can confer on others, doubtless from the merit of his life. Here we see in full flower the idea that Abraham’s righteousness is so ample that it spills onto later generations, conferring righteousness on them in God’s sight, as sayings from rabbis of the early second century suggest. The view that the action of one individual benefits others underlies the Savior’s Atonement (see the Note on 3:8).⁷⁶

that he may dip . . . and cool: It seems plain that the rich man still thinks of Lazarus as somehow subservient. Moreover, he has access to cooling water.⁷⁷

72. Plummer, *Luke*, 397–98; *TDNT*, 1:146–49; 3:399–401.

73. *TPJS*, 310.

74. *TPJS*, 357; also M. Catherine Thomas, “Hell,” in *EM*, 2:585–86.

75. McConkie, *DNTC*, 1:519–20; Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 2:1132.

76. W. D. Davies, *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism: Some Rabbinic Elements in Pauline Theology*, rev. ed. (New York: Harper and Row, 1967), 268–73.

77. Marshall, *Luke*, 637–38.

I am tormented in this flame: Nothing indicates that the flame will continue tormenting forever (see D&C 19:10–12). But it is interesting that the term “this flame” characterizes the place called “hell” (16:23; Greek *Hades*), a notion that arises in ancient sources outside scripture⁷⁸ but is very much at home in LDS scripture (see 2 Ne. 9:16, 19, 26; Mosiah 3:27; etc.; compare “unquenchable fire” in D&C 43:33; 63:34; 101:66; also 29:21, 28; 76:44, 105).

16:25 in thy lifetime . . . good things . . . evil things: Jesus illumines the principle that one’s status in earth life is not in any sense a predictor of one’s status in the next. But how are we to read the complete reversal of status that both men undergo when leaving this life and entering the next? In response, we note that the place in “Abraham’s bosom” (16:22) is reserved for those who measure up as Abraham does. Therefore, we should see the poor man as also righteous before God, not just poor. Moreover, the account presumes that the rich man is evil, or at least neglectful when he might be helpful (see the Note on 6:24). These notions are reinforced if we see the story as continuing the themes that Jesus strikes in his observations about hosting a supper (see 14:12–14) and then his story about a supper and the one who hosts it (see 14:16–24). Those who have means are “to impart to him that hath” nothing and to serve “the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind” (3:11; 14:13, 21; see also D&C 104:18).

16:26 a great gulf fixed: The gulf that exists in the next world is such that no one is able to cross it, including the gap between the righteous and wicked in the world of departed spirits before the resurrection.⁷⁹ A passage in the book of *1 Enoch* mirrors this notion, describing the barrier as impassible “pits” or “hollow places.”⁸⁰ In large measure, such observations address the issue whether a person can pass from one kingdom to another in the next life. According to Jesus’ words, the answer is no (see D&C 29:29; 76:112; compare D&C 138:20–22, 29–32, 37).⁸¹

78. 1 Enoch 10:13; 63:10; Ben Sirach 21:9–10.

79. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ*, 468; Monte S. Nyman, “The State of the Soul between Death and the Resurrection,” in *The Book of Mormon: Alma, The Testimony of the Word*, ed. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate Jr. (Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1992), 175–82.

80. 1 En. 22:8–13, in Nickelsburg, *1 Enoch*, 1:300, 307.

81. Joseph Fielding McConkie and Craig J. Ostler, *Revelations of the Restoration: A Commentary on the Doctrine and Covenants and Other Modern Revelations* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2000), 539; Robinson and Garrett, *Commentary on the Doctrine and Covenants*, 2:328–29.

16:27 *Then he said:* The former rich man is not at a loss for ideas. It is clear that he is used to taking charge and getting his way, characteristics that continue into the next life. Here he proposes his alternate plan to no less a personage than Abraham!

thou wouldst send him: The rich man’s words hint firmly that Abraham possesses power to dispatch persons from the realm of the dead, a notable privilege.

my father’s house: This term, known in Hebrew as *bet ‘av* (“house of the father”), points specifically to the household of the rich man’s father, and includes all his brothers (see 16:28) and anyone else who is attached to the household, including slaves and resident laborers. Such a household forms the basic unit of ancient Israelite society and the hub around which all family life gathers.⁸² Significantly, this part of the story illustrates Jesus’ ongoing interest in the family because of the enduring connection between the dead man and his living brothers (see the Notes on 11:21–22; the Analysis on 11:14–28). Incidentally, the rich man’s expression implies that his brothers are also well off.

16:28 *that he may testify unto them:* The growing stature of Lazarus in the eyes of the rich man becomes plain in these words. Although Lazarus will be doing the bidding of the man who once lived behind a gate, he will go to the man’s brothers as a firsthand witness of the blessings and vicissitudes of the next life.

lest they also come into this place: The rich man finally shows genuine concern, but only toward his siblings. Plainly, the personal characteristics that he has cultivated in his mortal life accompany him into the hereafter, a teaching underscored elsewhere (see Alma 41:2–8, 11–15; 42:27–28).

torment: The Greek noun *basanos* here has to do with the torment of hell. In its broader meaning, it points to testing the genuineness of an article.⁸³

16:29 *Abraham saith:* The tone is notably respectful; Abraham does not discount the rich man’s request by turning a deaf ear.

Moses and the prophets: Abraham shows an awareness of the contemporary tripartite division of scripture, for he nods toward two of the three (see 16:16, 31; 24:27). The other consists of the so-called “sacred writings” (Greek *hagiographa*)—what Jesus later calls “the psalms” (24:44).⁸⁴

82. *TDOT*, 1:8–9; 2:113–14; *TLOT*, 1:6; Wright, “Family,” 2:762–65.

83. *TDNT*, 1:563.

84. Schürer, *History*, 2:316–17; *TDNT*, 6:832; James A. Sanders, “Canon,” in *ABD*, 1:846.

let them hear them: Abraham's words purposely raise to view the common practice of reading scripture aloud in worship settings, emphasizing the availability of correct teachings on the subject, even though some may see them as obscure (see 4:16–20; Neh. 8:1–8; Acts 13:15; 15:21; Rev. 1:3; 1 Ne. 1:13; the Note on 4:16). Thus, scripture stands as a teacher that must be approached with a proper attitude so that it imparts its truths to the seeker (see 6:3–5; 24:25–27; Matt. 24:15; Mark 13:14; 2 Cor. 3:14–16; Eph. 3:4; D&C 71:5–6; 91:4–6; JS–M 1:12).

16:30 if one went unto them from the dead: The rich man's words underscore his valuation of the vivid voice of spoken testimony in contrast to the written text of scripture. He at least understands this much (see the Notes on 3:2, 4, and 4:12).

16:31 hear not Moses and the prophets: A possible allusion to reading scripture aloud on the Sabbath lies in this expression although we do not know the cycle of reading during this period (see the Notes on 4:16; 16:16; 24:44).

neither will they be persuaded: Abraham's words frame the principle that a genuine change of heart or change of mind comes from within a person, not from some external influence, no matter how spectacular or unusual.

one rose from the dead: In the long view, the obvious allusion aims at Jesus' resurrection (see the Note on 22:67). But the words also refer more closely to Lazarus' own resurrection.

Analysis

More than any other account in the Gospels, the Savior's story about Lazarus, the rich man, and Abraham opens an intriguing window onto the life to come, particularly the period between death and the resurrection. Emerging from a sort of no man's land, with unclear boundaries and habitations, a sharpening vista presents physical distance and separation, self-conscious awareness of status and station, and a clearly graded bundle of rewards and punishments. Life after death is not jumbled and indistinct; it does not consist in an impersonal melding of individual identities with that of God. Rather, the next world offers an existence not only fitly framed in accord with a person's actions in this life but also textured by the character that people have forged in their mortal lives.

On the surface, the story concerns the matters of rich and poor, of caring and neglect. But the surface paves over a deeper set of issues such as why poor Lazarus ends up in the bosom of Abraham and the rich man finds himself in Hades. Even though Jesus opens wide the door to allow the

wealthy to enter his kingdom (see JST 18:27; the Notes on 16:11; 18:27; the Analysis on 16:1–12), the warnings hold their place: “the rich [God] hath sent empty away” (1:53) and “ye [rich] have received your consolation [in this life]” (6:24). Why? Because, like the rich man, many wealthy people spend their goods solely on themselves and on those closest to them—they have “wasted [their] substance” (15:13). Such a course of action, as the story illustrates, influences where former rich persons land in the next life, including Jesus’ current critics, certain Pharisees (see JST 16:23). For the divine requirement, based on the concept that all belongs to God, obliges the wealthy to share their substance rather than to keep it for themselves: “Wo unto you rich men, that will not give your substance to the poor, for your riches will canker your souls” (D&C 56:16).⁸⁵ To drive home the point more sharply, we read in a passage that plainly alludes to Luke 16:23:⁸⁶ “if any man shall take of the abundance which I [God] have made, and impart not his portion . . . unto the poor and the needy, he shall, with the wicked, lift up his eyes in hell, being in torment” (D&C 104:18; see 2 Ne. 9:30; Mosiah 4:16–23).

On their part, poor persons must likewise meet a set of burnished expectations, which evidently Lazarus does. As any other person, their lives must turn to God: “blessed are the poor who are pure in heart, whose hearts are broken, and whose spirits are contrite.” As their reward, “they shall see the kingdom of God coming in power and great glory unto their deliverance” (D&C 56:18). There is more. The impoverished, though they possess little of this world’s goods, must also sidestep the evils of greed and envy: “Wo unto you poor men . . . whose bellies are not satisfied, and whose hands are not stayed from laying hold upon other men’s goods, whose eyes are full of greediness, and who will not labor with your own hands” (D&C 56:17; see Mosiah 4:24–25).⁸⁷

As much as any other principles that Jesus frames here, the twin standards that truth lies in the text of scripture and, implicitly, that scripture serves as a vehicle for inspiration and deeper understanding elegantly capture center stage. “They have Moses and the prophets,” intones Abraham. If the rich man’s five brothers will “hear them,” presumably in the Sabbath

85. McConkie, *DNTC*, 1:519–20; McConkie and Ostler, *Revelations of the Restoration*, 408–9; Robinson and Garrett, *Commentary on the Doctrine and Covenants*, 2:139–40.

86. Robinson and Garrett, *Commentary on the Doctrine and Covenants*, 3:300.

87. McConkie, *DNTC*, 1:519–20; McConkie and Ostler, *Revelations of the Restoration*, 409; Robinson and Garrett, *Commentary on the Doctrine and Covenants*, 2:139–40.

reading of scripture, “they will repent” because they will come to perceive the truth about the life to come (16:29–30). Notably, the brothers will not be persuaded any more forcefully, Abraham affirms, “though one rose from the dead” (16:31).

At base, this story about Abraham is apparently older than Jesus. Perhaps significantly, this account circulated first in Egypt before it came to Palestine where, plainly, Jesus adapts and retells it for his own purposes. This story underscores an Egyptian connection to the ancient patriarch and possesses possible relevance for the origin of the book of Abraham in the Pearl of Great Price. For it is a known technique among Egyptian Jews to repeat an old local story and attach it to a biblical figure.⁸⁸

88. Grobel, “. . . Whose Name Was Neves,” 373–82; H. Donl Peterson, “Origin of the Book of Abraham,” in *EM*, 1:132–34.