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Luke Chapter 17

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Abstract: A commentary on the events of Luke 17, accompanied by parallel columns of the King James translation of the chapter alongside a new rendition.



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Luke Chapter 17

INTRODUCTION

The Savior's Second Coming, or the end-time, drips into the center of this chapter as a glue (see 17:20–24; also 12:40; 19:11) and, by its mere presence, joins the beginning with the end. Before and above all, of course, Jesus “first must . . . suffer” (17:25), an observation that fuses the Atonement onto the Second Coming as the essential and indispensable first act. Most elements related to the end-time in this chapter bond to the individual at the moment the Lord comes. They bundle together the one who offends (see 17:2) and the person who forgives (see 17:3–4); they bind those who do their duty (see 17:10) to the one who expresses gratitude (see 17:15–16) and is made whole (see 17:19); they supply the adhesive both for the kingdom within, or among us (see 17:21), and for those not deceived (see 17:23), as well as for the kingdom coming suddenly (see 17:24, 26–36); in a contrast, they join the terrible consequences for the unprepared (see 17:27, 29, 32, 34–36) to those who lose their lives in service (see 17:33). There is more. They cement the coming of the Lord with the sudden and unexpected (see 17:24, 27, 29–30, 34–36).

At the opening of the chapter, the juxtaposition of offenses which are damning and thus hard to forgive (see 17:1–2) and the act of seeking and receiving forgiveness (see 17:3–4) recall the following words of the Lord: “I, the Lord, will forgive whom I will forgive, but of you it is required to forgive all men” (D&C 64:10). Plainly, forgiveness is a needed grace when a person faces the end-time, and this desired state becomes vividly apparent in reverse in the Lord's gloomy description of the sons of perdition: “there is no forgiveness [for them] in this world nor in the world to come” (D&C 76:34; also D&C 42:18; 84:41).

Likewise, a person's exercise of faith and performance of duty adhere to the end-time (see 17:5–10). For by developing these characteristics we link ourselves to the world of trust in, and obedience to God: unassailable

virtues that are part of the world to come. But these virtues do not stand alone. For Jesus combines them with a robust kind of faith that glues the divine world to this world, the sort of faith that taps into raw, celestial power and can bring about real, tangible miracles, removing “this sycamine tree” into “the sea.” Jesus’ example, however, implicitly holds that our faith does not emerge suddenly and fully grown, but comes “as a grain of mustard seed” which, when planted, grows and gradually matures into a large and productive plant (17:6). Moreover, he adds a dash of humility when he first pictures his disciples as “having a servant” and then, contrarily, as “unprofitable servants” themselves whose only claim on their master’s approval is doing “that which was our duty to do,” suddenly reversing their roles from high to low. This pattern appears in his own experience of descending from his divine throne into this world and taking upon him the garb of a servant (17:7, 10; see Philip. 2:6–8). Notably, beyond the humility underscored within this reversal stands the lesson that an individual disciple will likely serve in various roles within the kingdom, at times as a leader and at times as a supporter. Each role brings its own heavenly reward.

Humility reemerges as an essential characteristic of human behavior in the story about the ten lepers (see 17:12–19). Usually, emphasis in interpreting this account glues itself to the gratitude expressed by the one who returns, the Samaritan. But humility fixes itself onto the backside of the report because the Samaritan leper, already an outcast in Jewish society and thus a man forced into a lower status by his birth, represents the most humble of all people both because of his birth and because of his disease. Due to influences beyond his control, he is forced into the depths of humility, a condition that is less desirable, of course, than that of humbling oneself in a willing and conscious manner (see Alma 32:12–16). Even so, a condition of coerced meekness carries its own blessed state (see Alma 32:13–14). When Jesus lifts the man out of his leprous condition, he not only removes from him one of the causes of his forced humility but allows the humble attitude that the leper cultivates during his lifetime to shine through when he returns to express gratitude for his deliverance.

All of the virtues that the Savior highlights in the first half of the chapter—absorbing offenses without retaliating, forgiving endlessly, cultivating humility, doing one’s duty, giving heartfelt thanks—find a place in Jesus’ sudden triumphant return “in the day when the Son of man is revealed” (17:30), the subject of the second half of the chapter (see 17:20–37). Those who have lived their lives nobly, cultivating these virtues, need not worry that his victorious day will come unexpectedly, “as the lightning” (17:24);

they need not fear that, as in the days of Noah, “the flood came, and destroyed them all” (17:27); they need not dread that, as in the case of Lot’s flight from Sodom, “it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all” (17:29). Rather, theirs is the consciously generous approach to a life of giving themselves to others: “whosoever shall lose his life” because of committed discipleship to the Savior “shall preserve it” (17:33; Matt. 16:25).

OFFENSES

(17:1–4)

(Compare Matt. 18:6–7, 15, 21–22; Mark 9:42)

King James Translation

1 Then said he unto the disciples, It is impossible but that offences will come: but woe unto him, through whom they come! 2 It were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he cast into the sea, than that he should offend one of these little ones.

3 Take heed to yourselves: If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him. 4 And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him.

New Rendition

1 And he said to his disciples, “It is impossible for temptations not to come, but woe to the one through whom it comes! 2 It is better for him if a millstone is hung around his neck and cast into the sea than that he should tempt one of these little ones.

3 “Watch yourselves. If your brother should sin, censure him, and if he repents, forgive him. 4 And if he sins seven times in the day against you and turns to you seven times saying ‘I repent,’ you will forgive him.”

Notes

17:1 *the disciples*: Jesus’ followers continue as his chief audience, as 16:1 already indicates, and thus includes all believers. But we cannot rule out that others, such as the Pharisees who are mixed into the crowd (see 16:14; 17:20), are also listening. For what he now says to his disciples is relevant to any person who seeks to improve human relations.

offences will come: but woe: The Greek noun *skandalon* bears the senses “temptation” and “that which gives offense.”¹ Jesus’ intentions seem to be twofold: (1) he is realistic enough to know that offenses or enticements which push people away from God will arise within the kingdom. Hence, a person who is listening to him should not give up on the kingdom and its message just because of an offense, real or perceived. For the kingdom is much grander than the seriousness of any scandal; (2) he seems to be saying that the offenses of which he speaks are intentional, or at least quasi-intentional. Therefore, they are serious and deserving of severe consequences such as being “cast into the sea” (17:2). He seems not to be speaking of unintentional enticements which the offender can resolve with the injured person, a situation that he seems to refer to in 17:3–4.

17:2 millstone: Luke’s pair of words (Greek *lithos mylikos*) can refer to a hand mill for grinding grain.² But the expressions preserved in Matthew and Mark indicate that the millstone is a large one for pressing olives (see Matt. 18:6; Mark 9:42; D&C 121:22).

offend one of these: The verb (Greek *skandalizō*) can carry the sense of offending another, by word or deed (see 7:23). But in this context, it carries the meaning of causing another to stumble or to sin, and thus stands as a warning about the loss of the offender’s future, eternal status.³

little ones: The apparent reference is to Jesus’ followers, although the term may envision children. In 18:15–17, Jesus speaks of followers becoming as little children, an expression that is more at home in the Gospel of Matthew (see Matt. 10:42; 18:6, 10, 14). Even so, Luke preserves the language of littleness as it applies to the Savior’s humble followers, an apparently common way for Jesus to characterize believers (see D&C 121:19).⁴

17:3 Take heed to yourselves: Some commentators read this admonition as tied to what precedes in 17:1–2, though it may also go with what follows⁵ (see 21:34) or may even spell out the warning implicitly directed to the older son in the prior parable of the Prodigal Son (see 15:11–32).

rebuke him: Modern revelation stipulates that this kind of action is permitted only if two conditions are present, the inspiring press of the Holy Ghost and a demonstration of genuine love. Why? Because of the risk of

1. BAGD, 760; Marshall, *Luke*, 640–41; Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 2:1138.

2. Liddell and Scott, *Lexicon*, 1152; BAGD, 475, 531.

3. BAGD, 760; *TDNT*, 7:351; Marshall, *Luke*, 640.

4. *TDNT*, 4:650–56.

5. Plummer, *Luke*, 399; Marshall, *Luke*, 642; Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 2:1138–39.

offending or causing the other person to stumble: “Reproving betimes with sharpness, when moved upon by the Holy Ghost; and then showing forth afterwards an increase of love toward him whom thou hast reprov’d, lest he esteem thee to be his enemy” (D&C 121:43). Jesus’ words do not permit a person to hold a grudge against an offender.⁶

if he repent, forgive him: The divine pattern of forgiving the penitent emerges here as an expected, gracious part of a disciple’s interaction with others. The heart of this line, and the following verse, has to do with the person who is to forgive, not the person who makes the mistake or commits the offense and then seeks forgiveness. Thus, as disciples, it is our forgiving of another who has erred rather than our judgment or estimate of the error which counts for or against us in the Lord’s reckoning (see Mosiah 26:31; D&C 64:9).

17:4 seven times in a day: The number seven, of course, may tie to its sense of completeness and fullness. But Jesus’ words also push us to grasp his point about forgiving again and again rather than counting a certain number of forgiving acts, even if the other person does not repent (see D&C 98:39–44).⁷ Other scripture reinforces this view: “of you it is required to forgive all men” (D&C 64:10; see Mosiah 26:29–31). In a different vein, the expression “seven times in a day” occurs twice in Luke’s verse. Most of the earliest manuscripts omit the second “in a day,” illustrating that a copyist is likely harmonizing the second part of the verse with its first part.⁸

Analysis

The freshness of an early morning, with its new light and fragrant promise of events in the coming day, compares to the cleanness that comes to one forgiven by God or by another. A similar cleanness washes over the person who forgives, removing the cankers of grudge and ill feeling. The Savior seems to be aiming at these freshening experiences when he warns us of causing offenses and, on the other side of the matter, pleads for us to forgive unendingly those who do offend. He underscores the serious character of causing offense by painting a vivid scene of a millstone tied to a person and then thrown into the sea. Though he does not spell out here the disastrous consequences of not forgiving another, elsewhere he pointedly warns that “he that forgiveth not his brother his trespasses standeth

6. Morris, *Luke*, 280.

7. Plummer, *Luke*, 400; Morris, *Luke*, 280.

8. Plummer, *Luke*, 400; Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 2:1140.

condemned before the Lord; for there remaineth in him the greater sin” (D&C 64:9).

In these verses Luke’s report briefly reconnects to the accounts of Mark and Matthew. For their Gospels feature sayings of Jesus that deal with offenses and forgiveness:

“whosoever shall offend one of these little ones that believe in me, it is better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he were cast into the sea” (Mark 9:42).

“whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea” (Matt. 18:6).

“it must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh” (Matt. 18:7).

“if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault . . . if he shall hear thee, thou has gained thy brother” (Matt. 18:15).

“Peter . . . said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? . . . Jesus saith unto him, . . . Until seventy times seven” (Matt. 18:21–22).

In each of these instances, the setting differs notably from Luke’s context of Jesus’ teaching during his journey to Jerusalem (see 17:11). The references to offensive actions and to the accompanying need for forgiveness plainly point back to the situation of the rich man who imperiously omits acts of generosity toward the poor man Lazarus and then finds himself in a troublesome situation in the next life.⁹ Even noting the differences in settings, it is possible to argue, as some commentators do, that the sayings in the three Gospels tie together.¹⁰ But not all are convinced, and accordingly hold out the distinct possibility that Luke’s version of Jesus’ words may be independent and thus refers to a different setting entirely, repeating similar teachings delivered on different occasions.¹¹

9. For a contrary view, see Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 2:1136.

10. Plummer, *Luke*, 398–400; Marshall, *Luke*, 640, 642; Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 2:1136–37, 1139.

11. *TDNT*, 2:631, n. 29; see also Plummer, *Luke*, 437; *TDNT*, 4:326; Jeremias, *Parables*, 107–8, 122; Marshall, *Luke*, 701; Morris, *Luke*, 245–46, 299; Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, 286.

INCREASING FAITH (17:5–10)

(Compare Matt. 17:19–21; 21:21–22; Mark 11:22–24)

King James Translation

5 And the apostles said unto the Lord, Increase our faith. 6 And the Lord said, If ye had faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye might say unto this sycamine tree, Be thou plucked up by the root, and be thou planted in the sea; and it should obey you.

7 But which of you, having a servant plowing or feeding cattle, will say unto him by and by, when he is come from the field, Go and sit down to meat? 8 And will not rather say unto him, Make ready wherewith I may sup, and gird thyself, and serve me, till I have eaten and drunken; and afterward thou shalt eat and drink? 9 Doth he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I trow not. 10 So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do.

New Rendition

5 And the apostles said to the Lord, “Confer faith on us.” 6 And the Lord said, “If you have faith as a seed of mustard, you could say to [this] mulberry tree, ‘Be rooted out and planted in the sea,’ and it would obey you.

7 “And who among you having a ploughman or shepherd slave will say to him as he comes in from the field, ‘Come now and sit,’ 8 but not say to him, ‘Prepare something for me to dine on, and after girding yourself, serve me while I eat and drink, and thereafter you eat and drink?’ 9 Are you not thankful to the slave that he did what he was commanded? 10 Likewise you too, when you do all that is commanded you, you say, ‘We are unprofitable slaves; we have done what we were obliged to do.’”

Notes

17:5 *the apostles*: As a body, these men appear here distinctly for the first time since chapter 9 when Jesus sends them on their first mission. They, of course, are traveling with him during his journey as part of the larger group of disciples, though some of the Twelve may be absent at times if they are assigned to be his heralds who announce his arrival in towns and villages (see 9:52–54).

***the Lord*:** This is Luke’s term which he repeats in the next verse; as in other appearances of this title, it points to Jesus as Jehovah (see the Notes on 5:8 and 7:13, 31). The Joseph Smith Translation puts this lofty term on the lips of the Apostles in direct address (see JST 17:5).

Increase our faith: In the context, this verse and the next deal with the request of the Twelve for an increase of faith (literally, “confer faith on us” from the Greek verb *prostithēmi*).¹² This faith, when mature, will come to embrace Jesus and his redemption.¹³ The theme of faith’s effectiveness arises in the account of the ten lepers (see 17:11–19, especially 17:19) and in the report of the blind man in Jericho (see 18:35–43, particularly 18:42). But what of the verses concerning a master and servant that immediately follow Jesus’ brief response (see 17:7–10)? Is it not the case that servanthood in Jesus’ kingdom involves trusting, that is, faith, and that a person acting in faith is willing to put up with the difficult demands of discipleship only if he or she trusts the master? (See the Note on 14:34 concerning covenant bonds as characteristics of discipleship.) Notably, the Apostles recognize their need for genuine faith whereas Jesus’ detractors do not.¹⁴

17:6 faith as a grain: Jesus moves two full-grown fundamentals into our view: (1) a grain is very tiny—from this observation, a person can make a point about small beginnings of faith; (2) faith is manifested in the exercise of raw power, as described elsewhere in scripture (e.g., Gen. 1:3; 1 Cor. 13:2; Hel. 12:9, 17; compare 1 Ne. 17:50; Alma 12:14; and similar statements in Matt. 17:20; 21:21; Mark 11:23). In such passages, we approach a visualizing of the power unleashed during the creation.

grain of mustard seed: Jesus now raises to our sight the imagery of plants and greenery. By implication, he ties the world of living vegetation to exercising faith. A number of possible meanings arise in his words, including the observation that faith is a principle of action which even seeds participate in and that therefore a plant, once in the earth, will unfailingly grow to maturity from a seed; and the notion that a growing plant manifests a type of faith as it matures because it does not doubt that it will continue to become what it is destined to become. Not incidentally, Jesus chooses the smallest of seeds to illustrate that he is not questioning the amount of one’s faith but faith’s genuine quality.¹⁵

this sycamine tree: The Greek term, *sykaminos*, can point to more than one type of tree, including the sycamore, the mulberry, and the fig-mulberry, all of which are in the same family, *moraceae*.¹⁶ Because Luke writes

12. *TDNT*, 8:168.

13. *TDNT*, 2:826.

14. Green, *Luke*, 614.

15. *TDNT*, 7:290–91.

16. BAGD, 783; Marshall, *Luke*, 644; Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 2:1143–44.

the proper name for the sycamore tree at 19:4, he most probably intends his quotation of Jesus' words to point to the mulberry or fig-mulberry that is known for its long roots.¹⁷ Because these trees require a long time to mature, they are usually propagated by transplanting rather than by planting seeds in the earth.¹⁸ Incidentally, the Joseph Smith Translation harmonizes with 19:4 by substituting *sycamore* for *sycamine* in this passage. The demonstrative pronoun "this" means that Jesus and his followers are standing next to a tree at this moment.¹⁹

plucked up by its root: In this expression, Jesus brings up the image of transplanting (the Joseph Smith Translation has the plural "roots"). It is usual to create a new plant by taking a slip from a branch or a cutting from a root and placing it in the soil.²⁰ From the study of phytoliths, or microfossils, the imperishable ingredients of plants, scientists have been able to trace the ancient movement and transport of plants from their native habitats to other regions. This movement is explained by either the human transport of seeds, or carrying the plants themselves.²¹

planted: The verb visualizes the act of transplanting a bush or a tree, after taking the plant by its roots, or part of its root-stock, and moving it into a different spot in one's garden or field.

in the sea: The surprising twist of Jesus' imagery is planting the tree in the sea where it cannot naturally survive. His Apostles, acquainted with agricultural practices rooted in centuries of experience, will see immediately the impossibility within his imagery and will remember his words all the more clearly.

it should obey you: The sense of the expression in Greek—the aorist or past tense of the Greek verb *hypakouō* with the particle *an*—is to say, "it would in this case obey you."²² This theme of obedience, touched on here, rises later in Jesus' illustrations of obedience and disobedience and underscores the tie between faith and willing submissiveness (see 17:10, 32).²³

17. TDNT, 7:758; Marshall, *Luke*, 644.

18. Hareuveni, *Tree and Shrub in Our Biblical Heritage*, 80–94, esp. 84–85.

19. TDNT, 5:483.

20. Wilford M. Hess and others, "Botanical Aspects of Olive Culture," in Ricks and Welch, *Allegory of the Olive Tree*, 530.

21. Geoffrey Dimbleby, *Plants and Archaeology*, 2d ed. (London: John Baker, 1978), 37; Farooq A. Lone, Maqsooda Khan, and G. M. Buth, *Palaeoethnobotany: Plants and Ancient Man in Kashmir* (Rotterdam: A. A. Balkema, 1993), 193–96.

22. Smyth, *Greek Grammar*, §§1762, 1784.

23. TDNT, 1:223–24.

17:7 *having a servant*: Jesus begins his illustration by putting the Apostles imaginatively into a social stratum that allows them to own at least a single servant. The Greek term for servant (*doulos*) usually means slave.²⁴

***plowing*:** The servant in the story obviously takes care of the heavy, physical work of the farm, much of which he does before about 2 p.m., when his master takes his main meal. This person is evidently the master's only servant because he also takes care of chores in the house (see 17:8).

***feeding cattle*:** The verb (Greek *poimainō*) concerns herding or tending sheep rather than caring for cattle.²⁵

***sit down*:** The scene is one of the master reclining at a low table during the meal, propped up by pillows and reclining on his left side with his feet stretched away from the low table (Greek verb *anapiptō*; see the Notes on 11:37; 14:10; 22:14).²⁶

17:8 *I may sup*: The verb has to do with a more formal meal (Greek *deipneō*) than what the servant enjoys and, in some contexts, points to a sacred meal, although that is not its meaning here (see 22:20; 1 Cor. 11:25; Rev. 3:20).²⁷ This meal is the main meal of the day (see the Note on 14:12).

***till I have eaten*:** The servant's daily work routine does not end until the master finishes his meal.

17:9 *Doth he thank that servant*: Jesus subtly moves from addressing the Apostles directly, most of whom will not own a slave (see Mark 1:20), to making a general statement by switching to the third person pronoun "he." His point, resting on the ancient relationship of master and servant, aims at the question, "Why do I do what I do in the kingdom? For a reward?" In this case, the reasons for action should be nobler than seeking reward (see 17:10).

***I trow not*:** This statement, which appears to be a marginal gloss that is brought into the text, and therefore is not on Jesus' lips, means "I think not" (Greek verb *dokeō*).²⁸ The Joseph Smith Translation replaces this expression by quoting Jesus as saying: "I say unto you, Nay" (JST 17:9).

17:10 *likewise ye*: Jesus switches pronouns again and applies his illustration directly to his Apostles. As his continuing words disclose, he now places them in the role of servants, whereas he began with them as the master (see 17:7), a complete reversal.

24. BAGD, 204–5; *TLNT*, 1:380–84.

25. Liddell and Scott, *Lexicon*, 1430; BAGD, 690.

26. Liddell and Scott, *Lexicon*, 116; BAGD, 59; also *TDNT*, 3:654–55.

27. BAGD, 172; *TDNT*, 2:34–35.

28. BAGD, 200–201.

done all those things which are commanded you: This line brightens further the thread of obedience that weaves itself through Jesus’ illustration, beginning with the astonishing obedience of the tree (see 17:6).

unprofitable servants: The sense of the translation is undoubtedly correct. But the term translated “unprofitable” does not generally bear this sense (Greek *achreios*), as the only other occurrence of this term in the New Testament underlines (see Matt. 25:30). The word usually means “worthless, unfit.”²⁹

that which was our duty: Besides the repeating, strong emphasis on obedience, we grasp the importance of actions performed because they are right rather than because of an expected reward. The Joseph Smith Translation strengthens this sense by adding three words: “that which was *no more than* our duty” (JST 17:10; emphasis added).

Analysis

What starts as the Apostles’ lofty appeal for increased faith ends in a deep well of duty and obedience. Rather than meeting their request for more abundant faith, the Savior leads them to faith of a higher quality. Instead of granting to the Twelve a ready reservoir of trust in God, Jesus bequeaths to them a memorable illustration that genuine faith, to be effective, must be accompanied by fulfilled responsibilities. In the place of faith alone as a principle of action and spiritual sustenance, he hands to the Twelve a rock-rending hammer of work. His kingdom will not rest on a soft foundation of wish, good intention, and trust alone. As with his ministry, his continuing work will sit solidly on faith paired with effort.

The flourish that draws attention to obedience and duty arises partly out of what we can observe so far about Jesus’ own ministry. Of course, his is one of performance and action. But the illustration that opens by comparing the Apostles to the master of a servant and closes by likening them to “unprofitable servants” mirrors his own history, bringing a living, vital force to his words. For he comes from a place where he is master and he now toils as a servant. In the words of the hymn quoted by the Apostle Paul, Jesus is “in the form of God” and then takes “upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men.” Thereafter, “God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name” (Philip. 2:6–7, 9). The prize for the Apostles and for all others, that of exaltation, stands forth

29. Liddell and Scott, *Lexicon*, 297; BAGD, 128; Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 2:1147.

in this set of lines. Said another way, the day will come when the master will serve the servants (see 12:36–38; compare Isa. 58:9).

To be sure, Jesus does not diminish the power and value of faith. On the contrary, the promise of growth inherent in the small mustard seed and its realization in a mature tree, though unseen in its seed-like state, shape the unparalleled and essential character of faith which has to begin at some point in a person's heart (compare 13:18–19; Alma 32:27–43).³⁰ Further, he drives home its enormous power when he declares that one who possesses “faith as a grain of mustard seed . . . might say unto this sycamine tree, Be thou plucked up . . . and . . . planted in the sea; and it should obey” (17:6). These words remind us of other sayings, for instance, in the setting of the disciples' failed attempt to cast out a devil from a boy: “verily I say unto you, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove” (Matt. 17:20). Mark preserves a similar saying uttered when the disciples notice the fig tree that Jesus curses on the prior day: “verily I say unto you, That whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, . . . and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe . . . he shall have whatsoever he saith” (Mark 11:23). Although some commentators urge that each of these sayings goes back to a common source,³¹ reason can recommend all as independent sayings that Jesus utters on different occasions.³²

CLEANSING TEN LEPERS (17:11–19)

King James Translation

11 And it came to pass, as he went to Jerusalem, that he passed through the midst of Samaria and Galilee. 12 And as he entered into a certain village, there met him ten men that were lepers, which stood afar off: 13 And they lifted up their voices, and said, Jesus, Master, have mercy on us. 14 And when

New Rendition

11 And it came to pass, while going to Jerusalem, that he also went through the middle of Samaria and Galilee. 12 And when he had come into a certain village, ten leprous men met him, who stood at a distance. 13 And they raised their voice, saying, “Jesus, master, have mercy on us.” 14 And when he saw

30. *TDNT*, 7:290–91.

31. Bultmann, *History*, 75, 93–94; Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 2:1141–42.

32. *TDNT*, 7:289–90; Marshall, *Luke*, 643–44.

he saw them, he said unto them, Go shew yourselves unto the priests. And it came to pass, that, as they went, they were cleansed.

15 And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, and with a loud voice glorified God, 16 And fell down on his face at his feet, giving him thanks: and he was a Samaritan. 17 And Jesus answering said, Were there not ten cleansed? but where are the nine? 18 There are not found that returned to give glory to God, save this stranger. 19 And he said unto him, Arise, go thy way: thy faith hath made thee whole.

them, he said to them, “Go, show yourselves to the priests.” And it came to pass that, while they were going away, they were cleansed.

15 One of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, glorifying God with a great cry, 16 and fell on his face at his feet, and thanked him. And he was a Samaritan. 17 And Jesus replied saying, “Were not the ten cleansed? But where are the nine? 18 Were they not found turning back to give glory to God except this stranger?” 19 And he said to him, “Rise and go. Your faith has saved you.”

Notes

17:11 as he went to Jerusalem: Luke does not let his readers forget that he is following Jesus on his long, purposely extended journey to Jerusalem (see 9:51–52), dropping statements into his narrative as time passes and as Jesus covers more ground (see the Notes on 9:51; 10:38; 14:25; 18:35; 19:28).

he passed through the midst of Samaria and Galilee: This statement continues, perhaps summarizes, Jesus’ journey to Jerusalem thus far, which begins at 9:51. The expression means “through the middle” of Samaria and Galilee, not between the two territories.³³ The order “Samaria and Galilee” is puzzling but may be instructive. Why? Because a person who begins from Galilee to go south to Jerusalem reaches Samaria after passing out of Galilee. (The Joseph Smith Translation reverses the two place names, reading Galilee first.) As Luke paints the picture, Jesus seems to be crisscrossing from one territory to another, and then back. For example, as soon as he starts toward Jerusalem, he intends to come to “a village of the Samaritans” (9:52). But when the townspeople hold back their hospitality, he and his disciples “went to another village” which could have been in either Samaria or Galilee (9:56). Moreover, all of the action described during Jesus’ winding trip to Jerusalem surely does not all occur in Samaritan territory and in the Jordan Valley without some note from Luke. Most commentators make light of Luke’s notations about Jesus’ movements as if they are clear evidence that he does not

33. Evans, *Luke*, 257.

understand the geography of the country in the least, without taking account that even modern geographers face major challenges when determining boundaries and locales of some ancient cities and territories.³⁴ The critics' basic question is: How can one travel south and still be returning occasionally to Galilee?³⁵ In response, we first notice that Luke's geographical asides are far less important than his accounts of Jesus' teachings that, in most instances within the journey report (see 9:51–19:28), are preserved only in this Gospel.³⁶ That said, geography does play a significant role in the overall story, whether the venture into gentile territory where Jesus heals the Gergesene demoniac (see 8:26–39) or the ascent to the sacred heights of the Mount of Transfiguration where Jesus' glory is disclosed (see 9:28–36). Hence, although it seems that Luke's knowledge of the geography of the northern areas "was imprecise" in some instances, it is certainly not grossly wrong and misleading.³⁷ As shown earlier, one cannot take lightly Luke's distinctive geographical notes chiefly because of his accuracy when describing Jesus' early activity around the north end of the Sea of Galilee (see the Notes on 4:31; 5:27; 6:12, 17; the Analysis on 6:20–49; the Introduction V.C).

17:12 a certain village: That the village is in or close to Samaritan territory becomes clear from the identity of one of the lepers (see 17:16), but Luke's source does not preserve the name of the place.

lepers, which stood afar off: As in the prior narrative of Jesus cleansing a leper, such people are obliged to keep their distance from those who are not infected (see Lev. 13:45–46; Num. 5:2). In Luke's other account, the diseased man, in his desperation, comes within the town limits (see 5:12). These ten men respectfully do not. The disease is extremely rare in Jesus' day and is introduced into the region by Alexander the Great's soldiers returning from India in the late fourth century BC (see the Note on 5:12).

17:13 they lifted up their voices: The verb (Greek *airō*), repeated only in Acts 4:24 with this sense in the New Testament, commonly means "to lift up" or "to take away."³⁸ In its Hebrew form, to lift up one's voice can mean "to shout" (see Gen. 39:14–15, 18). But it can also bear the sense of prayer, as it does in this context (see Judg. 21:2; 1 Sam. 11:4).³⁹

34. Rasmussen, *Zondervan NIV Atlas of the Bible*, 167–71, for uncertainties about northern towns and territories known to Jesus.

35. Conzelmann, *Theology of St. Luke*, 60–62, 68–73; Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 2:1152–53.

36. Marshall, *Luke*, 650.

37. Evans, *Luke*, 257–58.

38. BAGD, 23–24; *TDNT*, 1:185–86; Marshall, *Luke*, 651.

39. *TDOT*, 13:109–16, 406; Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 2:1154.

master: The title (Greek *epistatēs*),⁴⁰ first applied to Jesus in Peter’s words (see 5:5) and repeated only in Luke’s Gospel, is uttered elsewhere only by his disciples and therefore may implicitly place this man among them (see 8:24, 45; 9:49; the Notes on 5:5 and 9:33).

have mercy on us: The same expression, in the singular, appears in 16:24 and 18:39. In each case, the speaker is praying, begging for a blessing.

17:14 when he saw them: The Joseph Smith Translation omits this expression, smoothing the flow of the story (see JST 17:14).

shew yourselves unto the priests: This imperative forms the only direction that Jesus gives to the afflicted lepers. He says no word about their cleansing. Rather, in accord with the law of Moses, he directs them to the priests who alone can declare such persons whole (see the Note on 5:14; Lev. 13:1–46). As the following record shows, it is their action of going to the priests, accompanied obviously by their faith in Jesus’ words (see 17:19), that brings about their healing.

they were cleansed: In the eyes of the Mosaic law, lepers are unclean. So properly, Jesus’ act prepares these individuals to enjoy once again a state of ritual cleanness (see 4:27; 5:12–13; 7:22; 17:17). But clearly Jesus heals the lepers of their disease, as the proper term for healing shows in the next verse (Greek *iaomai*).⁴¹

17:15 turned back: The verb means “to return” (Greek *hypostrephō*) and usually characterizes a person’s return to a starting point (see 1:56; 2:39, 43, 45; 4:1, 14; etc.). But here one perceives a thread that ties back to the story of the cleansing of Naaman, the Syrian officer, to whom Jesus has already drawn specific attention (see 4:27; 2 Kgs. 5:15). The background melody of non-Israelites is not to be missed (see the Note on 17:18).

with a loud voice: Although we might think of the man as shouting (see 4:33; 8:28; 23:23), the volume comes in the form of a heartfelt prayer, as in 17:13 and 19:37 (compare 23:46).

17:16 fell down on his face: A verb exists which means “to prostrate oneself” (Greek *proskyneō*), and Luke repeats it elsewhere (see 4:7–8; 24:52; Acts 7:43; 8:27; 10:25; 24:11). But here he chooses the more vivid language “to fall” that describes the man’s physical collapse in joy (Greek *piptō*; see the Note on 5:12).⁴²

40. BAGD, 300.

41. BAGD, 368–69; *TDNT*, 3:204–5.

42. BAGD, 664–65; *TDNT*, 6:163 and n. 15.

at his feet: The man’s close contact with Jesus, and those traveling with him, must have been the first in a very long time and signals both his cleansing—in effect, a fresh beginning—and a new status that others recognize. By changing one word, the Joseph Smith Translation makes this scene more vivid: “at Jesus’ feet” (JST 17:16).

giving him thanks: This line underscores the enduring, fundamental difference between the nine and the one: the nine depart cleansed, the one departs whole in every sense, physical and spiritual (see D&C 78:19; also 46:32).

Samaritan: This is the second story wherein a Samaritan is the chief personality. The other is the parable of the Good Samaritan in chapter 10 (see 10:30–37), underscoring Jesus’ interest in these people particularly and in Gentiles generally (see the Notes on 2:31 and 6:17).

17:17 the nine: Presumably Luke intends his audience to understand that these nine, who do not return to express gratitude, are Jews. They, of course, know the requirement to report to the priests for an inspection of their formerly diseased skin. The contrast between them and the single Samaritan underlines their lost opportunity to become whole, not only physically but also spiritually, as the Samaritan does.

17:18 this stranger: Besides the allusion to Naaman the Syrian (see the Note on 17:15), Jesus’ terminology here points directly to Gentiles, thus underscoring his high regard for them. For, in this repetition of the term for “foreigner”—its only occurrence in the New Testament (Greek *allogēnēs*)—Jesus’ words recall the “no trespassing” signs at the temple that prohibited Gentiles under penalty of death from entering the holy area.⁴³ Hence, those whom the temple signs forbid, Jesus approves and welcomes.

17:19 Arise: Although the intransitive form of the Greek verb usually carries the simple sense of standing up (Greek *anistēmi*),⁴⁴ often with an important purpose in mind (see 1:39; 4:16, 29, 39; 5:25, 28; 11:32; etc.), it also points to the resurrection and may well bear overtones of that meaning in Jesus’ words here (see 9:8, 19; 16:31; 18:33; 24:7, 46).

thy faith hath made thee whole: Jesus’ statement offers two meanings—salvation and health. Both senses are present in the Greek verb *sōzō*⁴⁵ and both arise from faith. The main meaning is, “Thy faith hath saved thee [in

43. *TDNT*, 1:266–67; Schürer, *History*, 2:284–85; Marshall, *Luke*, 652; Bahat, *Illustrated Atlas of Jerusalem*, 44; Ritmeyer and Ritmeyer, *Ritual of the Temple*, 11.

44. BAGD, 69.

45. BAGD, 805–6; *TDNT*, 7:989–91; *TLNT*, 3:349–50.

the kingdom].” The return of this man illustrates that the nine are obedient and receive the blessing that they expect (see D&C 130:20–21; also 132:5); but only he, seeking out the Lord and expressing gratitude, receives salvation, a remarkably different outcome. Notably, Jesus’ words point to a different cause of being made whole from that of the man who is ill for thirty-eight years (see John 5:1–16, esp. 5:9, 14). In that case, Jesus takes the initiative in healing the man, a pure gift of grace. In contrast, the ten approach Jesus in faith, desperately seeking his help, as their loud but trusting importuning demonstrates (“they lifted up their voices”—17:13). However, in the case of the leper who returns, he comes worshiping and expressing his thankfulness, actions that distinguish him sharply from his fellows (see the Note on 18:42). In all instances, however, the operative expression is “made whole,” that is, wholeness is a quality of Jesus that he imparts to the persons whom he heals (see John 5:6). The recipient hangs onto this wholeness by subsequent actions, such as offering thanks, as the leper does, for his stupendous blessing (see 7:50; 8:48; also D&C 78:19).

Analysis

In a story that only Luke preserves, the Savior meets the desperate needs of ten lepers in both temporal and eternal terms, and, not incidentally, responds again to the request of the Apostles to increase their faith (see 17:5). For within his compassionate words to the one returning leper, “thy faith hath made thee whole,” Jesus holds together both salvation and physical wholeness (see the Note on 17:19). And both components are driven forward by faith.

To illustrate, we ask, How does faith appear in this account of the healing of lepers? To be sure, Jesus draws attention to faith (see 17:19). But how does faith insert itself into this narrative? In answer, we notice the willing obedience of the lepers to begin the journey to the priests without further ado. Obviously, they trust Jesus’ instruction, and this trust is the key. In a word, the action of these blighted individuals shows their belief, overtly and firmly tying act and faith together. For “as they went, they were cleansed” (17:14). There is a second part.

Obviously, all ten do exactly as Jesus instructs, that is, go to the priests, an action that has the effect of cleansing them. But only one is “made . . . whole” (17:19). It is this leper who returns to Jesus and, after giving glory to God, thanks him (see 17:15–16). Conclusion? People can do as the Lord instructs and receive the promised blessings (see D&C 130:20–21), but

only those who purposely seek him out, in gratitude, will be made whole in the ultimate, celestial sense, a point made plain in modern scripture: “he who receiveth all things with thankfulness shall be made glorious” (D&C 78:19; also 46:32).

Luke’s grasp of geography comes into play as he introduces this story, for he writes that, as Jesus “went to Jerusalem, . . . he passed through the midst of Samaria and Galilee” (17:11). His unexpected phrasing leads a reader to envision Jesus moving back and forth between the territories of Samaria and Galilee as he journeys toward Jerusalem. But, one might urge with good reason, traveling to Jerusalem entails going southward, from Galilee into Samaritan territory, and not vice-versa. In effect, it seems that Luke exhibits little grasp of the geographical layout of the territories, a common criticism.⁴⁶ But because his geographical and topographical details in early stories about Jesus’ ministry match the countryside precisely, we should not dismiss his other geographical notations (see the Note on 19:11). The possibility that this experience may have occurred earlier in Jesus’ journey, and thus near the border of the two territories, is certainly open for discussion. But if Jesus is indeed following a meandering route from village to village, and not following a direct path to the capital city, instead meeting with and talking to and blessing as many people as he can, then Luke’s notation that he is still passing “through the midst of Samaria and Galilee,” through the border towns, carries validity. For territorial borders in those days are not always as firm as maps may lead us to believe. One main question is whether a certain town is inhabited mostly by Galileans or by Samaritans. Such a feature, largely immeasurable except in the cases of Gentile versus Jewish towns,⁴⁷ does not go onto modern maps of the region.

Another possibility rises to view. In the early verses of chapter 4 that feature the devil’s temptations of Jesus, Luke seems to detach Jesus’ experience from specific places. Luke may also be casting the story here into a timeless setting that lacks concrete connections to place, except for injecting the sense that Jesus is moving from town to town. Luke thereby universalizes Jesus’ movement and teachings, and sets them into a realm to which all can relate (see the Analysis on 4:1–13).

46. Conzelmann, *Theology of St. Luke*, 60–62, 68–73; Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 2:1152–53.

47. Berlin, “Romanization and Anti-Romanization,” 57–73; Berlin, “Jewish Life before the Revolt,” 417–70.

SECOND COMING (17:20–37)

(Compare Matt. 24:17–41; Mark 13:14–23)

King James Translation

20 And when he was demanded of the Pharisees, when the kingdom of God should come, he answered them and said, The kingdom of God cometh not with observation: 21 Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you.

22 And he said unto the disciples, The days will come, when ye shall desire to see one of the days of the Son of man, and ye shall not see it. 23 And they shall say to you, See here; or, see there: go not after them, nor follow them. 24 For as the lightning, that lighteneth out of the one part under heaven, shineth unto the other part under heaven; so shall also the Son of man be in his day. 25 But first must he suffer many things, and be rejected of this generation.

26 And as it was in the days of Noe, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man. 27 They did eat, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, and the flood came, and destroyed them all. 28 Likewise also as it was in the days of Lot; they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded; 29 But the same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all.

30 Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed. 31 In that day, he which shall be upon the housetop, and his stuff in the house, let him not come down to take it away: and

New Rendition

20 And being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God will come, he replied to them and said, “The kingdom of God does not come with close observation, 21 nor will they say, ‘Look here,’ or ‘There.’ For behold, the kingdom of God is among you.”

22 And he said to the disciples, “Days are coming when you will desire to see one of the days of the Son of Man, and you will not see it. 23 And they will say to you, ‘Look there’ [or] ‘Look here.’ Do not follow or pursue. 24 For just as the lightning flashes and gives light from that part under heaven to this part under heaven, so shall the Son of Man be [in his day]. 25 But first it is necessary for him to suffer many things and to be rejected of this generation.

26 “And just as it happened in the days of Noah, so it will be in the days of the Son of Man too: 27 They ate, they drank, they married, and were given in marriage until the day when Noah entered the ark, and the flood came, and destroyed everyone. 28 And likewise, just as it happened in the days of Lot: they ate, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they built. 29 But the day when Lot went out of Sodom, it rained fire and sulphur from heaven, and destroyed everyone.

30 “It will be like these things in the day the Son of Man is revealed. 31 In that day, whoever will be upon his housetop, and his goods in his home, do not go down to pick them

he that is in the field, let him likewise not return back. 32 Remember Lot's wife. 33 Whosoever shall seek to save his life shall lose it; and whosoever shall lose his life shall preserve it. 34 I tell you, in that night there shall be two men in one bed; the one shall be taken, and the other shall be left. 35 Two women shall be grinding together; the one shall be taken, and the other left. 36 Two men shall be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left. 37 And they answered and said unto him, Where, Lord? And he said unto them, Wheresoever the body is, thither will the eagles be gathered together.

up. And likewise, he in the field do not turn back. 32 Remember Lot's wife! 33 Whoever seeks to preserve his life will lose it, and he who loses it will save it. 34 I say unto you, on that night two persons will be in one bed, the one will be taken and the other will be left behind; 35 two women will be grinding together, the one will be taken and the other will be left behind." 37 And answering, they said to him, "Where, Lord?" And he said to them, "Where the body is, there the eagles will also be gathered together."

Notes

17:20 *the Pharisees:* The Pharisees appear again in the narrative (see 15:2; 16:14), though they are likely not far away and thus become visible periodically among Jesus' larger entourage as he travels.

demanded: The verb (Greek *eperōtaō*), here in participial form, is the same as that in 3:14. The usual sense is simply "to ask" (see 2:46; 3:10; 6:9; 8:9, 30; 9:18; etc.).⁴⁸

when the kingdom of God should come: The question arises either from something Jesus says on a prior occasion (see 4:43; 6:20; 7:28; 8:1; 9:11, 27, 60, 62; 11:2, 20; etc.), or from a remark by one of his disciples (see 9:2; 10:9, 11), or the query comes from the Pharisees' known, general curiosity about such matters.⁴⁹ The inquiry allows Jesus to frame issues in a public setting that he will treat later in private, addressing them here and on the Mount of Olives (see 17:22–37; 21:25–31). The Pharisees' question, of course, assumes that the coming of the kingdom is yet in the future, not recognizing its embodiment in Jesus.

cometh not with observation: The rather rare word translated "observation" (Greek *paratērēsis*), appearing only here in the New Testament, means "watching" and "observance," as in both the regular performance of sacred

48. BAGD, 284–85.

49. Marshall, *Luke*, 654; Green, *Luke*, 629.

actions and the observation of scientific phenomena.⁵⁰ The preferred sense here is that the kingdom’s arrival will not be made visible by expected signs and wonders to those who are watching for it although, to be sure, Jesus’ teachings and especially miracles herald its coming.⁵¹ Further, the proof of the kingdom’s presence is not subject to the demand for signs (see 11:16–20, 29–30). As a matter of fact, it is already present and Jesus’ opponents have missed it (see 4:43; 6:20; 8:1; 9:2; 10:9–11; 16:16; 17:21).

17:21 *Lo here! or, lo there!*: Except for his announcement in Nazareth about who he is and what his ministry will consist of, Jesus avoids the kind of noisy public displays that the devil earlier tries to coax him into (see 4:9–11).

***within you*:** This expression has generated a lot of discussion because the rare word translated “within” (Greek *entos*) is an adverb of place. The difficulty arises because Jesus nowhere says that the kingdom resides inside a person, but that individuals reside in the kingdom. Since the pronoun *you* is plural, one of the preferred senses is “among you,” that is, Jesus’ presence brings the kingdom.⁵² In basic agreement with this meaning, the Joseph Smith Translation alters the verse to read, “the kingdom of God has already come unto you” (JST 17:21).

17:22 *the disciples*: Even though it is the Pharisees’ question that brings Jesus to his topic, he now turns to the disciples to elaborate and clarify his response to the Pharisees (see 17:20–21), a pattern that we see in chapters 15 and 16 (see also Matt. 19:16–26; Mark 10:17–27).⁵³

***The days will come*:** This sort of expression often points to a time of crisis or judgment (see 5:35; 21:6; 23:29; D&C 52:11; 61:15; 112:24; 133:10–11; the Note on 19:42),⁵⁴ as Hosea 9:7 illustrates: “The days of [God’s angry] visitation are come, the days of recompence are come.” But an opposite sense of prized promises to be fulfilled also attaches to this expression: “Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah” (Jer. 31:31).⁵⁵ Hence, Jesus’ expression breathes the air of both dire warnings and warming prom-

50. BAGD, 628; *TDNT*, 8:148–51.

51. Marshall, *Luke*, 654–55.

52. Marshall, *Luke*, 655–56; Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 2:1160–62; Morris, *Luke*, 284; Green, *Luke*, 630.

53. Green, *Luke*, 628, 631.

54. Also Isa. 39:6; Jer. 7:32; 9:25; 19:6; 48:12; 49:2; 51:47, 52; Amos 4:2; 8:11; *TDNT*, 2:946.

55. Marshall, *Luke*, 657, 719; also Jer. 16:14; 23:5, 7; 30:3; 31:27–28, 38; 33:14; Amos 9:13; Heb. 8:8; D&C 88:68.

ises, here with emphasis on the warnings. But an era of promises yet to be fulfilled—for example, “a new covenant”—lingers in the background. They will be realized after the bleak age passes.

ye shall desire: The Joseph Smith Translation renders a very different sense, “they will desire,” implying that others, such as the Pharisees, will want to see the kingdom but that Jesus’ followers will be better informed about events of the end-time (JST 17:22).

one of the days of the Son of man: The expression, repeated nowhere else in scripture (but see 17:26), attaches to the future coming of the Savior, as other passages demonstrate (see 17:26; 21:25–28; 1 Cor. 5:5; 2 Cor. 1:14; Philip. 1:6, 10; 2:16; 1 Thes. 5:2; 2 Thes. 2:2; 2 Pet. 3:10, 12). The words may simply mean “the *first* of the days of the Son of man.”⁵⁶ It is possible that Jesus nods toward a day when the disciples will pine for his presence after he is gone. Of course, Jesus knows that his disciples do not yet grasp how events will play out in that coming epoch, just as the Pharisees do not. So he begins to lay out its contours for them and other believers, continuing what he initially approaches in 13:34–35. That he teaches his disciples about his Second Coming weeks or months before arriving in Jerusalem for the last time, as Luke affirms here, is demonstrated in modern scripture: “As ye have asked of me concerning the signs of my coming . . . Ye say that ye know that the end of the world cometh . . . And in this ye say truly, for so it is” (D&C 45:16, 22–23; see the Note on 13:34). On the title *Son of Man*, see the Note on 5:24.

ye shall not see it: Jesus’ words clearly hint the special day will not come in the era of longing⁵⁷ and therefore a significant delay will precede the coming of the Son of Man; that is, the Second Coming will not occur during the lifetimes of his hearers.

17:23 *See here; or, see there:* The “or” in this expression is omitted in some manuscripts and the order is reversed in others.⁵⁸ In this form, the expression is almost the same as that in Jesus’ words in 17:21 and therefore carries the cautions that, first, the presence of the kingdom does not appear in observable physical phenomena but is spiritually discerned (see 17:20) and, next, the timing and place of Jesus’ Second Coming are not predictable by examining what seems obvious. From other sources, it is apparent that his appearance on the Mount of Olives will be a significant part of his return (see D&C 45:48; Zech. 14:4).

56. Plummer, *Luke*, 407; emphasis in original.

57. Plummer, *Luke*, 407.

58. Marshall, *Luke*, 659.

go not after them: The pronoun “them,” supplied by the KJV translators, incorrectly points to an identifiable person or group because the main verb (Greek *erousin*, “they shall say”) is impersonal.⁵⁹ Hence, Jesus is generalizing and not pointing to a specific individual or unit. On the other hand, Matthew 24:23–24 and Mark 13:21–22 do point to individual pretenders to spiritual powers.

17:24 as the lightning: By comparing Jesus’ Second Coming to lightning, emphasis falls on its brilliance (see 21:27; Ps. 102:16; Matt. 16:27; 25:31; 2 Thes. 2:8; D&C 5:19) and its unexpected suddenness (see 2 Pet. 3:10; Rev. 3:11; D&C 33:18; etc.). The Joseph Smith Translation diminishes the suddenness by rendering this expression, “as the light of the morning” (JST 17:24), but the brilliance remains. Further, Jesus’ coming will bring certitude because it will not be hidden or hard to find, as implied in the invitations, “See here; or, see there” (17:23).⁶⁰

shineth: Although the verb (Greek *lampō*) does not appear in Luke’s description of Jesus’ transfiguration (see 9:28–36),⁶¹ it describes Jesus’ appearance in Matthew’s report of this event (see Matt. 17:2). It seems that the image of brightness, which links to that of *glory* (see 9:32; 2 Pet. 1:16–18; D&C 93:11, 16–17), intentionally recalls the scene on the mount.⁶²

in his day: A few manuscripts, including the earliest (P⁷⁵), omit this phrase. Although many include it, its presence is insecure.⁶³ To be sure, Jesus is with his followers, and will be for a number of months. But the phrase betrays that a separation of the present from the future will occur. Only in the future will the Son of Man at last have his day, including taking up his role as judge of all (see 21:36).

17:25 first must he suffer: This prophecy of Jesus’ suffering, specifically tied here to his title “Son of man,” is one of several (see 9:22, 44–45; 18:31–33; the Notes on 12:50 and 22:15). Before all the conditions of the end-time come about, this most important event must occur as a first step. The verb translated “must” (Greek *dei*) underscores the divine necessity both in Jesus’ suffering and in his ministry (see 2:49; 4:43; 13:33; 22:37; 24:7, 26, 44; the Note on 9:22).⁶⁴ In a different vein, one naturally wonders whether there is a tie to the suffering Servant-King of whom Isaiah prophesies (see Isa. 50:6; 52:14; 53:3–12).

59. Smyth, *Greek Grammar*, §905; Blass and Debrunner, *Greek Grammar*, §2) 130).

60. Marshall, *Luke*, 660; Morris, *Luke*, 284; Green, *Luke*, 633.

61. BAGD, 467.

62. Marshall, *Luke*, 660.

63. Marshall, *Luke*, 661.

64. TDNT, 2:22–25.

be rejected of this generation: The prophecy of rejection runs deep in scripture (see 9:44; Isa. 53:3; 1 Ne. 10:11; 11:28, 32–33; Mosiah 3:9). The rejection of Jesus will not somehow disqualify him from divine aid in sending him back in glory to the Father, just as Noah’s rejection does not mean the withdrawal of God’s assistance. The term “this generation,” meaning those of Jesus’ era (see 7:31), is often qualified in a negative way—“faithless and perverse generation” (9:41); “an evil generation” (11:29); “this untoward generation” (Acts 2:40); “adulterous and sinful generation” (Mark 8:38).⁶⁵ In the context of this verse, the expression presents Jesus’ opponents who will bring about his suffering. We can compare the context of “this generation” in Joseph Smith—History 1:45 and Doctrine and Covenants 5:25.

17:26 *the days:* This term, when associated with a person or event, ties to a special situation or to a time that God intervenes in history (see 1:25; 17:28).⁶⁶ Here, Jesus takes his audience back to a time before the flood.

Noe: The spelling of Noah comes about because Greek does not pronounce a final “h” at the end of a word or name.

the days of the Son of man: The expression substitutes for the “day of the Lord,” or its equivalent, that we see elsewhere (see 17:30; Amos 5:18–20; Zeph. 1:14; Joel 2:1).⁶⁷

17:27 *They did eat, they drank, they married wives:* The portrait gives color to normal life (see 4 Ne. 1:11). In another passage, these commonplace activities form the reason why people resist the preaching of Noah (see Moses 8:21). But these activities color mainly the surface of a society and mask the fact that under society’s painted skin festers a set of ills that leads to the divine punishment of the flood (see Gen. 6:5, 11–13; Moses 8:15, 22, 26, 28–30).

given in marriage: The passive voice of the Greek verb *gamizō* indicates that women are given in marriage by a male member of the family, a very different picture from how Jesus intends his kingdom to operate (see the Notes on 16:18 and 20:34).⁶⁸

the flood came, and destroyed them all: Although normal pursuits of life characterize Noah’s era, God sees debilitating corruption that must be eliminated (see Gen. 6:5–6; Moses 8:22, 28–30). A similar situation will characterize the time when Jesus returns, an age of “wickedness and vengeance” (Moses 7:60).

65. *TDNT*, 1:663.

66. *TDOT*, 6:25, 30.

67. *TDNT*, 2:944–47, 951–53; *TDOT*, 6:28–30.

68. *TDNT*, 1:650–51, n. 15.

17:28 Lot: Some stories of this man do not paint him as a paragon of virtue (see Gen. 19:30–38). So why does Jesus turn to Lot as an illustration? Because Lot’s era portrays many of the same normal activities that Noah’s does. But, as Jesus’ hearers will know, the sins of Sodom and Gomorrah, which Jesus does not bring up here, rise to such a pitch that God responds in anger, as he does in Noah’s day.

they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded: To his picture of Lot’s day, Jesus adds the business or economic activities, items that do not appear in his portrait of Noah’s era. These colorful pigments have to do with possessions and their power to divert attention from what really matters, major themes in the stories that Luke preserves from Jesus’ teachings (see the Introduction IV.A).⁶⁹

17:29 went out: This verb (Greek *exerchomai*) also folds into the Exodus of the Hebrew slaves from Egypt (see LXX Gen. 15:14; Ex. 12:31, 41; 13:3; 23:15; 34:18),⁷⁰ thus conferring on the story of Lot the same type of divine deliverance.

it rained: The implied subject is the Lord (see Gen. 19:24).⁷¹

brimstone: The Greek term *theion* properly means sulphur.⁷²

17:30 the day when the Son of man is revealed: The expression, in the context of the flood and the fate of Sodom, depicts a black, bleak moment for the wicked. To be sure, Jesus has already revealed himself in his glory to three of his Apostles. But, presumably, they are not yet talking about this experience (see 9:28–36).

17:31 he which shall: The person on the housetop could be anyone who is working or resting there. Significantly, the Joseph Smith Translation specifies “the disciple who,” clarifying that Jesus has in mind not unbelievers but those who follow him (JST 17:31). They are not to try to retrieve anything from their homes at his coming but are rather to gather at an appointed place (see JST 17:37–38).

let him not come down to take it away: The language underscores that the person needs to flee, an odd action for one facing the coming of the Son of Man. The main emphasis may fall on the person trying to secure possessions, an act that betrays the person’s first and strongest impulse.

69. Green, *Luke*, 634–35; Johnson, *Luke*, 265.

70. BAGD, 273–74; David Daube, *The Exodus Pattern in the Bible* (London: Faber and Faber, 1963), 24–25, 31–34.

71. Plummer, *Luke*, 408.

72. BAGD, 354.

17:32 Remember: The verb (Greek *mnēmoneuō*) depicts an active remembrance, a type of remembering that leads us to patterns of living, and even worshiping, that are right before God.⁷³

Lot's wife: The allusion points back to Gen. 19:26 and intimates that her action of turning around is more than quenching her curiosity about what is happening in the city of her residence. Seen through Jesus' words, she evidently yearns to return home to recover beloved possessions, a passion that Jesus criticizes (see the Notes on 6:20, 21, 24; 16:25; 17:28; also D&C 133:15—"let [her] not look back").

17:33 Whosoever shall seek to save his life: In the prior two verses, the emphasis falls on those who seek to recover possessions at a moment of crisis. Here Jesus paints a vivid picture of a person who seeks, too late, to preserve a life that has not been spent in service. The formulation of this saying mirrors that in 9:24, with minor but striking differences. Notably, the sense of Jesus' language in 9:24 is "whosoever wills to save," with one's will as the key motivator and salvation of one's soul as the goal. Here, in contrast, the idea is to preserve one's current self-centered life (Greek *peripoieō*),⁷⁴ complete with one's possessions, as the context discloses. In the light of this passage, a person must submit to the Son of Man before he arrives, exhibiting a life not centered on oneself, rather than submitting in the moment of his sudden arrival (see the Note on 9:24; also Matt. 10:39; 16:25; John 12:25).

shall preserve it: In contrast to Jesus' saying in 9:24, where a subtle yet firm emphasis rests on salvation, that is, saving one's life both here and hereafter (Greek *sōzō*),⁷⁵ in the current saying the stress falls on allowing mortal life to continue (Greek *zōogoneō*; see LXX Ex. 1:17–18, 22; Judg. 8:19; 1 Sam. 27:9, 11; etc.; Acts 7:19).⁷⁶

17:34 I tell you: The Greek expression is the same as that in 3:8 on the lips of John ("I say unto you"), and in Jesus' mouth at 4:24 and elsewhere. With these words, Jesus drapes himself in divine authority (see the Note on 6:27).⁷⁷

in that night: Jesus switches images from daytime to night, perhaps very early in the morning before dawn (see below), though in the next two verses he returns to daytime activities (see also pointers to *day* or *days* in 17:24, 26–31).

73. TDNT, 4:682–83; Marshall, *Luke*, 665.

74. Liddell and Scott, *Lexicon*, 1384; BAGD, 655.

75. BAGD, 805–6; TDNT, 7:966, 990–92, 996–97; TLNT, 3:349–50.

76. BAGD, 342; TDNT, 2:873–74.

77. TDNT, 4:103.

two men in one bed: The numeral “two” does not tie to gender and can refer to two men, two women, or to a woman and a man.⁷⁸ In agreement, the Joseph Smith Translation omits the word “men” (see JST 17:34). In this light, this verse and the next two may portray a farmer and his wife who remain in bed while others begin the work of the day.⁷⁹ On this view, we may be seeing an extended family whose members are in different stages of readiness to greet the returning Savior.

shall be taken: The verb (Greek *paralambanō*) can exhibit two basic meanings, to be taken into the kingdom away from harm, or to receive an inheritance. Doubtless Jesus points to the former sense, that he will take the person to himself.⁸⁰

17:35 Two women shall be grinding together: The feminine participle “grinding” and feminine pronouns make certain a picture of two women working to turn the mill which is usually made of two large basalt stones that sit one atop the other. Because of the large weight of the top stone, which is implicit in 17:2, turning it requires an animal or two women.⁸¹ In an interesting twist, the Joseph Smith Translation omits the term *women* (see JST 17:34).

17:36 Two men shall be in the field: As it stands, this line completes Jesus’ picture drawn from surrounding agricultural life, typical of most of his illustrations. However, the best manuscripts omit this verse and its presence may be due to the influence of Matthew 24:40 on a later copyist, though the tense of the verbs differs between the accounts.⁸² The Joseph Smith Translation leaves the verse in the text and, perhaps importantly, omits the word “men,” even though the numeral “one” (Greek *heis*) and the term “the other” (Greek *ho heteros*) are masculine (see JST 17:35).⁸³

17:37 they answered and said: The understood subject, of course, is “the disciples” (17:22). In a sweeping adjustment, the Joseph Smith Translation changes the rest of this verse and adds another four verses, all pointing to the end of time and the gathering of the righteous into the kingdom which shall be located on “a new earth . . . cleansed from all sin” (JST 17:36–40).

78. Smyth, *Greek Grammar*, §§347, 349; Morris, *Luke*, 286.

79. Marshall, *Luke*, 667, 668.

80. BAGD, 624–25; TDNT, 4:13; Marshall, *Luke*, 668.

81. Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 2:1138, 1172; Peter Connolly, *Living in the Time of Jesus of Nazareth* (Jerusalem: Steimatzky, 1988), illustrations on 64.

82. Marshall, *Luke*, 668; Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 2:1173.

83. BAGD, 229–30, 315.

Where, Lord?: The term for “Lord” (Greek *kyrios*), as in other passages, points to Jesus as Jehovah (see the Notes on 2:11; 5:8; 7:31).⁸⁴ The disciples’ question asks where those who are taken will end up, as the addition in the Joseph Smith Translation signifies: “Where, Lord, *shall they be taken?*” (JST 17:36; emphasis added). As is apparent from the JST, they do not go to an ill judgment, as some might hold.⁸⁵

the body: Most commentators understand this term to refer to a dead corpse, though it need not do so (Greek *sōma*), chiefly because Matthew’s version of the passage repeats the term for a dead body (Greek *ptōma* in Matt. 24:28).⁸⁶ In a clarifying contrast, the Joseph Smith Translation adds an explanatory expression and thereby illuminates the meaning: “Wheresoever the body is *gathered; or, in other words, whithersoever the saints are gathered*” (JST 17:37; emphasis added). The “body” therefore is not dead but very much alive, and consists of those who have been “taken” to this place.

thither will the eagles be gathered: The word “eagles” can occasionally be rendered “vultures” (Greek *aetos*; see also Matt. 24:28; Isa. 34:15).⁸⁷ One understands that vultures gather to eat dead animals or fish, or even human bodies, thus leading commentators to understand “body” to mean corpse (see above). If this is the case, Jesus is reinforcing his discussion about the severe consequences for those who are willfully unprepared at his coming. But the Joseph Smith Translation paints a completely different scene. There, the gathered eagles represent instead “the gathering of his [God’s] saints” (JST 17:38). In fact, in a different hue, the eagles are as “angels descending and gathering . . . the one from the bed, the other from the grinding, and the other from the field” (JST 17:38). In a stunning change of colors that follows this gathering of saints, “there shall be new heavens, and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness” (JST 17:39).

Analysis

With these verses, Luke allows us a peek into the breathtaking panoramic sweep of the Savior’s teachings about the end-time: “the days of the Son of man,” “the day when the Son of man is revealed,” the day when the person who “shall lose his life shall preserve it,” the day when “the eagles [shall] be gathered together” (17:22, 26, 30, 33, 37). Drawing deeply on the image of

84. BAGD, 459–61; *TDNT*, 3:1058–62, 1086–93; *TLNT*, 2:347–50.

85. Morris, *Luke*, 287.

86. BAGD, 735, 806–7; Plummer, *Luke*, 410; Marshall, *Luke*, 669; Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 2:1173.

87. BAGD, 19.

“the day of the Lord” from the Old Testament prophets, which bulges with both threats and promises,⁸⁸ Jesus weaves together a stunning warning to the spiritually obtuse about sudden destruction, coupled with a warming promise that, because he knows the hearts of each person, he will take the individuals into his kingdom who, among other acts, respond to him by diminishing the importance of this world’s goods as, sadly, “Lot’s wife” does not (17:32).

Perhaps most surprising is Luke’s placement of these teachings during the Savior’s journey to Jerusalem, long before Jesus enters the city where the beauty of the temple apparently acts as a catalyst, first, for his words about Jerusalem’s looming fate (see 19:41–44; 21:5–6, 20–24) and thereafter his words about the end-time (see 21:25–28). Because much in chapter 17 resembles Jesus’ words recorded in Mark 13, presumably one of Luke’s sources for Jesus’ teachings on these topics, and because other parts resemble his words reported in Matthew 24, after Jesus arrives in the capital city, some judge that Luke himself has created a new combination of Jesus’ words and a new context.⁸⁹ But in light of Doctrine and Covenants 45:22–23, it is just as reasonable to see his teaching here as part of his training efforts with the disciples before he reaches the hectic and drama-filled days in Jerusalem (see the Notes on 13:34 and 17:22).⁹⁰

Although some commentators challenge the unity of verses 17:20–21 that precede 17:22–37,⁹¹ the persistent portrait of the end of days that runs throughout Jesus’ remarks, and the instruction not to speculate about that coming era, argues for a common occasion⁹² when he outlines this very important part of his teaching.

Jesus himself underlines the significance of the end of time in his teaching by his lengthy treatment of the subject in his later sermon to members of the Twelve on the Mount of Olives (see 21:5–36; Matt. 24:1–25:46; Mark 13:1–37). In addition, the Savior inspires the Prophet Joseph Smith to make extensive changes in the reports of this sermon in order to set the record straight (see JST 21:5–36; JST Matt. 24:1–25:47; JST Mark 13:1–61). And, as if these changes are not enough, he reveals more to Joseph Smith about what he says

88. *TDNT*, 2:944–47; *TDOT*, 6:30; *TLOT*, 2:537–39.

89. Bultmann, *History*, 117; Beare, *Earliest Records of Jesus*, 185–86; George R. Beasley-Murray, *Jesus and the Last Days: The Interpretation of the Olivet Discourse* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1993), 300.

90. Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 2:1166, 1168.

91. Bultmann, *History*, 25; Beare, *Earliest Records of Jesus*, 185–86; Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 2:1158.

92. Marshall, *Luke*, 652–54; Green, *Luke*, 631.

on this solemn occasion to the Apostles (see JST 17:37–40; D&C 45:16–59). In all, including what Jesus declares in 17:20–37, and in other teachings about the fate of Jerusalem that Luke quotes (see 13:34–35; 19:41–44; 23:28–31), we possess multiple records of Jesus’ words about the end-time, an observation that underscores his weighty emphasis on the topic.

Further, these verses disclose Jesus’ deep concern for the spiritually obtuse, a concern framed by his saying, “Whosoever shall seek to save his life shall lose it; and whosoever shall lose his life shall preserve it” (17:33). An earlier report of a similar saying, uttered when Jesus discusses discipleship, adds a significant phrase, recording Jesus’ words thus: “whosoever will lose his life *for my sake*, the same shall save it” (9:24; emphasis added). The broad context of the words recorded by Luke in 17:33 stitch this added sense—“for my sake,” although unspoken here—onto Jesus’ intent, for he himself stands at the center of his words and his Second Coming will make this coloration clear in dramatic fashion.

Both rampant speculation and spiritual malaise will characterize “the days of the Son of man,” when Jesus “is revealed” (17:22, 26, 30). Jesus declares, first, to the speculating Pharisees that “the kingdom of God cometh not with observation,” or with careful watching and calculating (17:20; see the Note thereon). Further, no one will know the time and place, even though some may assuringly point out, “Lo here! or, lo there!” (17:21). Next, Jesus states clearly to the disciples that they are to avoid uninformed claims such as “See here; or, see there,” completely steering away from claimants: “go not after them, nor follow them,” he intones (17:23). For Jesus shall come without warning, “as the lightning” (17:24).

On the other end of the spectrum, lounging apart from unbridled enthusiasts, will be the self-assuredly complacent: those who act like those of Noah’s day and are swept down by the flood (see 17:26–27); those who act like the inhabitants of Lot’s city and are burned (see 17:28–29); those who in sudden panic rush back into the house to retrieve valuables (see 17:31); those who because of temporal cares are not “taken” to meet the Son of Man but are “left” behind (17:33–36). For these, the drumbeat of Jesus’ words creates an unmistakable rhythm of warning.

The large-scale changes that the Joseph Smith Translation paints onto this section, all of which deal with the end-time, create a richly textured canvas of persons and events that are yet to come. And Jesus creates this painting for the instruction and edification of his disciples who, to this point in the Gospel, are largely uninformed about these important matters that tie to the Savior’s still undisclosed ministry, a ministry that will

continue beyond his death. In contrast to the additional materials that the JST affixes to a similar saying about the gathering of eagles in Matthew's Gospel (see Matt. 24:28; JST Matt. 24:28–33; JS–M 1:27–32), which consists of words drawn from elsewhere in Matthew's report of Jesus' sermon on the Mount of Olives, the added verses that appear in the JST version of Luke's record are entirely new, completely different from anything else in the Gospels.

The trigger mechanism for Jesus' future ministry will be his death: "first he must suffer many things, and be rejected of this generation" (JST 17:25). Thereafter, the picture is one of coming brightness, "as the light of the morning, that shineth . . . so shall also the Son of man be in his [coming] day" (JST 17:24). In that moment, "the disciple who shall be on the housetop, and his stuff in the house, let him not come down to take it away" (JST 17:31). Rather, on this day of days, this disciple and other followers "shall be taken . . . whithersoever the saints are gathered; . . . the one from the bed, the other from the grinding, the other from the field" into "a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness . . . for the earth becoming old, . . . having waxed in corruption, wherefore it vanisheth away, and the footstool [the new earth] remaineth sanctified, cleansed from all sin" (JST 17:34, 37–40). Indeed, this first glimpse of eternity that Jesus offers to his disciples is stunning in its sweep and majestic in its promise.