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Luke Chapter 20

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Abstract: A commentary on the events of Luke 20, accompanied by parallel columns of the King James translation of the chapter alongside a new rendition.



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Luke Chapter 20

INTRODUCTION

Like an aroma wafting from a carefully tended garden that produces two remarkable plants, the scent from this chapter arises from the pressing issues of authority and inheritance that the Savior will meet in the capital city. At a different time, and in a desert setting without fragrant flowers, the devil offers a dry bouquet of temptations to him to subvert his authority (see 4:3–13). Now Jesus must breathe a fresh set of odors, some noxious, that billow not only from the challenge to his authority to teach and to act (see 20:1–8),¹ but also from the parable of the wicked husbandmen who challenge the owner’s right to his rental fees (see 20:9–16); from the matter of the rejected stone that, when exalted to its authoritative place, becomes “the head of the corner” (20:17–18); from the question about paying taxes to Caesar, that is, to Roman authority (see 20:20–26); from the saying about how David properly addresses his Lord (see 20:41–44); and from Jesus’ authoritative warning about the scribes and their despicable acts (see 20:46–47).

The parable of the wicked husbandmen (see 20:9–16), for example, preserves one of Jesus’ replies to the question of authority (see 20:2). How so? The parable portrays the husbandmen as mere renters. They do not own the vineyard or the land; they are temporary stewards only; they possess no rights to the property, even as they tend the vineyard and harvest its fruits. But they act as if they either hold the rights of ownership or at least can acquire them in a brutal, high-handed manner. Their miscalculation—almost as if they are relying on the vagaries of the weather for a successful crop—consists in their exercise of authority which they do not possess and can only hope to grasp, purposely murdering the heir, the one who holds ownership

1. Edersheim, *Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, 2:381–83.

rights. It is at this point that irony blows stormily through the story—those who possess mere derivative authority and ownership over the vineyard, at best, challenge the one who possesses the real authority. The application of the parable to Jesus and his opponents is patently obvious.

We now inspect the second plant in this garden, Where does inheritance rise within the chapter? In brief, everywhere. In the first instance, it grows side by side with the issue of Jesus' authority to teach, and earlier to cleanse the temple (see 19:45–46). That is, it springs up within the question, Who is Jesus' teacher and what is his academic pedigree or lineage (see 20:1–8; also John 7:15–17)? Simply asked, Which reputable school has he graduated from? Whose teachings does he inherit and repeat? In the same vein, the parable of the wicked husbandmen features the matter of inheritance from Jesus' portrayal of the husbandmen who attempt to defraud the owner and then to steal the vineyard, thus depriving the owner and his heirs of their inheritance in Israel (see 20:9–16; Micah 2:2). The matter of inheritance also rears its head in the question about loyalty to Caesar in the following way: Who has the right to control and tax the productive land that Abraham's descendants have received for their inheritance (see 20:21–25)? Moreover, the query about the seven brothers who all marry one woman blossoms with inheritance issues, both for this world and the next (see 20:27–38). Furthermore, Jesus' warning about those who "devour widows' houses" bursts forth from laws of inheritance wherein a person's property is supposed to be beyond public purchase because it ultimately belongs to God, an important element, for instance, in the story of Naomi and Ruth (see 20:47; Ruth 4:1–11; Ex. 20:17; Isa. 5:8; also Jer. 22:13; Amos 8:6; Micah 2:2, 9).²

Luke's opening, "on one of those days" (20:1), invites us to title this chapter "One Day in the Life of Jesus of Nazareth." The entire chapter is carried on the aromas of a typical day of his teaching. Luke simply moves us through the sunlit, verdant patches of Jesus' teaching with a minimum of introduction, except to keep Jesus' detractors in view: "the chief priests and the scribes came upon him with the elders" (20:1); "the chief priests and the scribes the same hour sought to lay hands on him" (20:19); "they watched him, and sent forth spies" (20:20); "they could not take hold of his words . . . and held their peace" (20:26); "after that they durst not ask him any question" (20:40).

2. Baker, *Women's Rights in Old Testament Times*, 140–48; Falk, *Hebrew Law in Biblical Times*, 83–87.

Most remarkably, each of Jesus’ teachings takes place within the walls of the spacious temple grounds (see 20:1; 21:1), a circumstance that sprinkles onto the whole a permanent perfume of holiness. Hence, his implicit linking of his authority with that of John (see 20:2–4), his parabolic pointer to himself as God’s heir (see 20:13–15), his defining declaration about the political order (see 20:25), his public pronouncement about the reality of the resurrection (see 20:37–38), his connotative connection to king David (see 20:41), and his expressed empathy for downtrodden widows and others (see 20:47), are all graced with a sacred scent. In a concrete setting and in a palpable sense, the uttered “oracles” of Jesus spring up in the “most holy places” (D&C 124:39).

BY WHAT AUTHORITY? (20:1–8)

(Compare Matt. 21:23–27; Mark 11:27–33; John 2:18–22)

King James Translation

¹ And it came to pass, that on one of those days, as he taught the people in the temple, and preached the gospel, the chief priests and the scribes came upon him with the elders, ² And spake unto him, saying, Tell us, by what authority doest thou these things? or who is he that gave thee this authority? ³ And he answered and said unto them, I will also ask you one thing; and answer me: ⁴ The baptism of John, was it from heaven, or of men? ⁵ And they reasoned with themselves, saying, If we shall say, From heaven; he will say, Why then believed ye him not? ⁶ But and if we say, Of men; all the people will stone us: for they be persuaded that John was a prophet. ⁷ And they answered, that they could not tell whence it was. ⁸ And Jesus said unto them, Neither tell I you by what authority I do these things.

New Rendition

¹ And it happened on one of the days, as he was teaching the people and preaching the gospel, the chief priests and scribes came up with the elders, ² and they spoke to him, saying, “Tell us by what authority you do these things, or who is the one who gave to you this authority?” ³ And answering he said to them, “I likewise will ask you a question, and you answer me: ⁴ Was the baptism of John from heaven, or from men?” ⁵ And they discussed among themselves, saying, “If we say ‘From heaven,’ he will say, ‘Why did you not believe him?’ ⁶ But if we say, ‘From man,’ all the people will stone us, for they are convinced that John was a prophet.” ⁷ And they answered that they did not know from where it came. ⁸ And Jesus said to them, “Neither do I tell you by what authority I do these things.”

Notes

20:1 on one of those days: Luke fixes the following events as if occurring on one of Jesus' typical teaching days in Jerusalem. Most events may occur in the Court of the Women.

in the temple: The Greek term *hieron* envisions the broad temple complex (see 2:27, 46; 4:9; 18:10; the Notes on 2:37 and 19:45) rather than just the sanctuary (see 1:21, 22; 23:45; the Note on 1:9).³

came upon: The verb (Greek *ephistēmi*) bears the sense of standing nearby, often arriving suddenly (see 2:9, 38; 21:34; 24:4). In this passage, the officials stand near with the intent to interrupt and intimidate—in Jesus' face, as it were.⁴

the chief priests and the scribes . . . the elders: The list of conspirators mirrors that of 9:22 and focuses on those who govern the Sanhedrin,⁵ but differs slightly from 19:47, “the elders” replacing “the chief of the people,” perhaps not the same group.⁶ More than this, the fact that representatives all appear at Jesus' side at the same time hints at a prior meeting wherein they develop strategy about how to respond to this man from Nazareth.⁷

20:2 by what authority . . . who . . . gave . . . authority?: The question, in one sense, is tantamount to one of academic background. That is, it concerns Jesus' legitimacy as a teacher, a topic that interests those contemporary teachers who seek to make “many disciples.”⁸ Jesus, of course, quickly shifts the question onto religious grounds by asking a question about John's baptism. The authority for performing baptisms ties to God, not to human institutions. It is possible, of course, to perceive Jesus' own question about authority and the Baptist (see 20:2–8) as an effort to dodge the question, “by what authority doest thou these things?” (20:2). But the “baptism of John” (20:4) rests on the same continuum as Jesus' authority. If that of John is “of men” (20:4), so is Jesus' leadership. Hence, Jesus evidently seeks to beam a light onto his own authority by raising John's to view—perhaps a second witness of sorts (the Note on 20:4 below). But the authorities' dull dithering about John—it is effectively a negative answer—instead shows off their inability to see and hear the truth (see Isa. 6:9–10).

3. BAGD, 373; *TDNT*, 3:232–33, 235.

4. Liddell and Scott, *Lexicon*, 745; BAGD, 330–31.

5. Schürer, *History*, 1:377; 2:200–205, 210, 212–13; Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 1:780.

6. Plummer, *Luke*, 454.

7. Edersheim, *Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, 2:381.

8. *Mishnah Pirke Aboth* 1:1; Edersheim, *Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, 2:381–83.

these things: The reference has to be to Jesus' action of cleansing the temple on the prior Sunday afternoon, an act that sends shudders throughout official circles.⁹

20:3 I will also ask you: Here is an instance of Jesus asking a question in response to an earlier question asked of him. From this and other passages (see 6:2–4; 10:25–26, 29, 36; 20:24), it seems that his society accepts counter questions, so to speak, and that people in debate or discussion allow a question from the other party before receiving a response to the original question.¹⁰

answer me: The imperative verb, which forms a command, plainly hints that Jesus is in charge of this interview, though the intent of the authorities is to intimidate him (see the Note on 20:1).

20:4 John: Jesus' mention of John seems calculated not only to drain the intended impact from the question of the authorities but also to draw attention to the intimate connection of John's ministry with his own. After all, John speaks of the "coming one," and his own followers are watching for this person (see the Note on 3:16).¹¹ Although the people who know Jesus or the Baptist will likely not know about the connecting heavenly manifestations that announce their births, readers of Luke's account do. And Jesus knows as well.

20:5 Why then believed ye him not?: The question, spoken among the conspirators, frames an admission that these authorities do not accept the Baptist or his teachings as possessing religious relevance, standing plainly against popular opinion.¹²

20:6 all the people . . . be persuaded that John was a prophet: According to Luke's report, John's influence reaches well beyond the areas of his ministry at and near the Jordan River (see 3:3; John 1:35–39 implies that at least part of John's ministry occurs in Galilee, not far from Jesus' home in Nazareth). Perhaps his reputation grows because of his status as a martyr.¹³ It is not clear from Luke whether "all the people" includes mainly those residing in the capital city or chiefly those who are visiting Jerusalem for the feast (see "all the people" in 19:48; 21:38).

9. Morris, *Luke*, 309.

10. Johnson, *Luke*, 308.

11. *TDNT*, 2:666–69; Morris, *Luke*, 309–10.

12. Josephus, *A.J.* 18.5.2 (§§116–18); C. Kingsley Barrett, *The New Testament Background: Selected Documents* (New York: Harper and Row, 1961), 196–98.

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

20:7 *they could not tell:* By this response—effectively not responding—officials seek to hold their clammy grip over the multitudes. They thereby tie themselves unknowingly to Jesus’ earlier condemnation of those Jerusalem citizens who wilfully choose not to know “the things which belong unto thy peace,” things that are “hid from thine eyes,” thereby exposing these authorities and those whom they govern to the future horrors to be inflicted by “enemies” (19:42–43).¹⁴

20:8 *by what authority I do these things:* Jesus’ negative response repeats precisely the original question from his challengers (see 20:2), an approach that impales their query as he dismisses it. However, with the crowd listening, he will answer his opponents in the parable that he narrates next, underlining their illegitimacy as heirs of God’s real authority. Jesus’ delayed response reflects precisely his delay in answering the earlier challenges of the devil over authority when he responds not on the spot but later in his synagogue visits (see the Analysis on 4:1–13).

Analysis

All of the noxious smells from the conspiracy against the Savior pour out of these verses, daubing his last days with the sticky gasses of hate and loathing. Naturally, Jesus, if left unchecked, presents a direct challenge to both the status quo and the powers that rest comfortably and luxuriously on temple authorities. Jesus chooses the temple as the field of contest over authority, bringing the fresh aromas of God’s word and presence onto the grounds of his house where odors of smoke and blood always linger. The authorities quickly grasp that Jesus’ authority grows out of the presence of the multitudes that gather to him as well as from his own domineering presence. They feel that they must respond to him with force. Hence, following an informal meeting, either during the evening after Jesus rids the temple area of its merchants or in the morning before Jesus gathers a crowd about him,¹⁵ the officials come out of a room located on the temple’s sacred grounds, screw up their courage to confront the Son of God, and forcefully challenge his actions of the prior day and his teaching pedigree. From this moment, they will snap at his footsteps, setting snares to clamp him in their deadly grip.

Jesus’ deft turn toward “the baptism of John” (20:4) when pushed to declare the source of his authority links him and his work to the one person

14. Green, *Luke*, 702.

15. Edersheim, *Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, 2:381.

whom many in the crowd see as divinely inspired.¹⁶ By doing so, Jesus anoints his own actions with the same divine fragrance, the same divine authority. Moreover, as readers of Luke’s Gospel know, John’s birth is announced by an angel (see 1:13); he receives “the word of God . . . in the wilderness” (3:2); he baptizes Jesus (see 3:21); and John’s ministry fulfills prophecy and renders him a “prophet” (see 7:24–28). Thus, Jesus, even though he refuses to answer directly the question about his authority, actually supplies a response merely by pointing to John. But Jesus will answer the challenge more concretely in the following parable, a minor delay that recalls his slow reply to the devil’s demands about his authority wherein he refuses to answer on the spot but later responds by word and deed in the synagogues of Nazareth and Capernaum (see the Analysis on 4:1–13).

PARABLE OF THE WICKED HUSBANDMEN (20:9–16)

(Compare Matt. 21:33–41; Mark 12:1–9)

King James Translation

9 Then began he to speak to the people this parable; A certain man planted a vineyard, and let it forth to husbandmen, and went into a far country for a long time. 10 And at the season he sent a servant to the husbandmen, that they should give him of the fruit of the vineyard: but the husbandmen beat him, and sent him away empty. 11 And again he sent another servant: and they beat him also, and entreated him shamefully, and sent him away empty. 12 And again he sent a third: and they wounded him also, and cast him out. 13 Then said the lord of the vineyard, What shall I do? I will send my beloved son: it may be they will reverence him when they see him. 14 But when the husbandmen saw

New Rendition

9 He began to tell this parable to the people: “A man planted a vineyard, and he leased it to tenant farmers, and he went abroad for a long time. 10 And at the right season he sent a servant to the tenants in order that they would give to him from the fruit of the vineyard. But after beating him, the tenants sent him away empty-handed. 11 And he sent another servant. But after beating and insulting him too, they sent him away empty-handed. 12 And again he sent a third servant. And after wounding him, they drove him out. 13 And the lord of the vineyard said, ‘What shall I do? I will send my beloved son. Perhaps they will have regard for him.’ 14 But after seeing him, the tenants deliberated

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

him, they reasoned among themselves, saying, This is the heir: come, let us kill him, that the inheritance may be ours. 15 So they cast him out of the vineyard, and killed him.

What therefore shall the lord of the vineyard do unto them? 16 He shall come and destroy these husbandmen, and shall give the vineyard to others. And when they heard it, they said, God forbid.

with one another, saying, ‘This is the heir, let us kill him that the inheritance may be ours.’ 15 And after driving him out from the vineyard, they killed him.

“What then will the lord of the vineyard do to them? 16 He will come and destroy these tenants, and he will give the vineyard to others.” And when they heard this, they said, “May it not be!”

Notes

20:9 *parable*: For the range of meanings, see the Note and footnote on 5:36.

***A certain man*:** In the background may be the rather common practice of foreign owners of property in ancient Palestine who manage affairs from afar and put the day-to-day care into the hands of local tenants. In areas distant particularly from Judea and the capital city, these tenants often come to bear ill will against the owners who are seen as representing the dominating Romans.¹⁷

***planted a vineyard*:** Luke’s report of the parable abbreviates Jesus’ words to the simple act of planting, whereas Mark 12:1 bears the expanded version: planting a vineyard, setting a hedge, digging a wine press, and erecting a tower, all in accord with Isaiah 5:2.¹⁸ The vineyard appears in scripture as the place of God’s work (see Matt. 20:1–16; D&C 21:9; 24:19; 53:6; etc.).

***let it forth*:** The verb (Greek *ekdidōmi*), when applied to human interactions, carries the sense of a formal legal agreement, “to give out,” in this case the renters agreeing to stipulations about the distribution of the harvest, with a certain portion going to the owner, as will soon become apparent (see 20:10).¹⁹

***husbandmen*:** The singular of the Greek term *geōrgos* bears the basic sense of “farmer.”²⁰ In the context, it means something like a vinedresser. The word is an allegorical pointer to religious leaders, as they and others come to understand (see 20:16).²¹

17. Dodd, *Parables*, 94; Marshall, *Luke*, 727, 728.

18. Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 2:1283.

19. Liddell and Scott, *Lexicon*, 504; BAGD, 237–38; Plummer, *Luke*, 459.

20. BAGD, 156.

21. Morris, *Luke*, 310.

20:10 at the season: The fundamental meaning of the noun (Greek *kairos*) has to do with time.²² The context, of course, points to the harvest time, an aspect that the Joseph Smith Translation underscores by adding, “of the harvest” (JST 20:10). Depending on the variety of grape, the harvest begins in late summer and runs into the fall.²³

he sent a servant: The verb (Greek *apostellō*), which links to the noun “apostle,” emphasizes the notion that the servant goes as the official representative of the master (see 20:20 and the Note thereon; the Notes on 9:2 and 10:1).²⁴

beat him, and sent him away empty: Rather than honor the master’s official representative by entrusting him with the agreed portion of the harvest, even if it is modest because of the young age of the plants, the husbandmen break the agreement in a most despicable way, sending the servant back with marks on his body that prove their dishonesty and perfidy, much as Jesus will carry the marks of his crucifixion in his resurrected body (see 24:39–40; 3 Ne. 11:14–15). But matters will grow much worse.

20:11 he sent: Although the verb here (Greek *pempō*) does not carry the same official feel as the verb in 20:10, its meaning is roughly the same, with the emphasis resting on the master’s act of sending rather than on the commissioning of the servant (see 20:13).²⁵ The occasion may be a year later, at the second harvest.

another servant: As Jesus’ hearers will soon understand (see 20:16, “God forbid”), he is offering a summary of how leaders, especially Israelite leaders, through time treat God’s representatives badly. He presents this sort of summary before (see 11:47–51). He does not seem to have any particular prophet in mind.

20:12 cast him out: This notation is the only topographical detail that Jesus introduces into his story. Its repetition in 20:15 becomes important in interpreting the “beloved son” (20:13) to be Jesus himself, who is taken outside the city for execution in accord with Jewish law (see Lev. 24:14; Mark 15:20; Acts 7:58; Heb. 13:12–13; the Notes on 20:15; 23:33).²⁶

20:13 What shall I do?: The question is the same that appears in Jesus’ prior stories that involve a crisis of one sort or another (see 12:17; 16:3).

22. BAGD, 395–96.

23. *TDOT*, 6:60.

24. *TDNT*, 1:400–401, 414–24.

25. *TDNT*, 1:403–4.

26. *Mishnah Sanhedrin* 6:1.

Moreover, he frames again the question in 20:15 that here bears concern and compassion and in the latter passage, by contrast, bristles with anger and punishment. More significantly, and perhaps with a touch of irony, the question mirrors that of the original conspirators who ask themselves “what they might do to Jesus” (6:11).

my beloved son: Jesus’ intent now becomes clear—he tells the parable about his own fate at the hands of ill-disposed men.²⁷ The term translated as “beloved” appears here for the second time in Luke’s narrative (Greek *agapētos*). The other occurrence turns up in the words of the Father at Jesus’ baptism (see the Note on 3:22).²⁸ On the Mount of Transfiguration, the best texts read “chosen son” rather than “beloved son” as in the King James translation (see the Note on 9:35). Another element also appears. If we take Jesus’ account to be an instructive story, we are impressed that the son obeys his father even though he knows how the husbandmen have treated his father’s servants. This dimension underscores the family relationship inherent in the commandment, “Honour thy father and thy mother” (see the Notes on 4:38; 18:20).²⁹

it may be they will reverence him: Most impressive is the enduring patience of “the lord of the vineyard” (20:15), underscoring metaphorically God’s hope-filled patience with the leaders of his people.

when they see him: The majority of early manuscripts omit the participle (Greek *idontes*) that lies behind this expression. It seems to be a late addition, harmonizing it with the same term at the beginning of the next verse.³⁰

20:14 the heir: Implied is the fact that the son is an only son, thus fitting Jesus’ stature as the Only Begotten of the Father.

that the inheritance may be ours: If the lord of the vineyard sends his servants at annual intervals, the coming of the heir may be at the end of four harvest seasons and thus embolden the renters to believe that they can now take over the vineyard, particularly if they do not know that the master still lives and if they assume that the heir is the last owner of the property. If the heir is dead, the first person to take control of the property becomes the new owner.³¹ Does the set of issues between Jesus and his opponents reduce itself to this question, Who has charge of Israel’s inheritance? At

27. Dodd, *Parables*, 97–98; Jeremias, *Parables*, 72–73.

28. BAGD, 6; Marshall, *Luke*, 156.

29. Balla, *Child-Parent Relationship*, 124–26.

30. Marshall, *Luke*, 730.

31. Jeremias, *Parables*, 75–76; Marshall, *Luke*, 730.

least partly. An allusion to the Lord's critique in Ezek. 34 may lie in these verses, to the effect that greedy leaders in Israel enrich themselves at the expense of people whom they should be serving. We might also consider that the greed of Cain may lie distantly behind this scene and somehow infuse it with meaning (see Moses 5:31, 33, 38; compare John 8:44).

20:15 *cast him out of the vineyard*: This detail, which prophesies about Jesus' death in a rather veiled way, points to his dying outside of the walls of the city (see Lev. 24:14; Mark 15:20; Acts 7:58; Heb. 13:12–13; the Notes on 20:12 and 23:33).

***killed*:** The most heinous act comes at the end with the murder of the heir, forming a horrifying climax to the story but one that will match Jesus' fate a few days hence. In an important contrast, Mark's version of this parable narrates that the heir is first "killed" and then "cast . . . out of the vineyard" (Mark 12:8), the reverse of Matthew's and Luke's report (see Matt. 21:39). Perhaps significantly, the Joseph Smith Translation adjusts Mark's account to match the order of Matthew and Luke: "they took him and cast him out of the vineyard, and killed him" (JST Mark 12:9). On a different subject, attempts to see such details as pointers to the growing revolutionary movement of Zealots in Galilee against foreign overlords of this era are possible but not firm.³²

***What therefore shall the lord . . . do*:** The question, rephrased from the master's concerned and compassionate asking in 20:13, now turns into a question about judgment and punishment, bringing with it undertones of the end-time and final judgment.

20:16 *He shall come*: One pointer aims at the "coming one" of earlier passages (see 13:35; Matt. 3:11; Mark 1:7; Mal. 3:1; also Mosiah 3:9; D&C 133:10, 17, 19, 66; the Notes on 3:16; 12:40; 19:38; 21:8, 27; the Analysis on 3:7–20; 19:28–40; 22:39–46),³³ this time in his role as judge: "the chaff he will burn with fire unquenchable" (3:17; also D&C 133:2).

***give the vineyard to others*:** The expression may carry two meanings. First, the vineyard may point to the city of Jerusalem, which becomes totally Gentile in character following the second revolt against Rome (AD 132–35).³⁴ Second, the vineyard may refer to Israel as an entire people who will now be replaced by Jesus' followers, as the new Israel, including both Jews and Gentiles who are converts to Jesus as the Messiah. On this latter possibility, consult Jesus' words in 13:28–29. In this connection, the Joseph Smith

32. Dodd, *Parables*, 94–95; Jeremias, *Parables*, 74–75.

33. *TDNT*, 2:666–69.

34. Schürer, *History*, 1:540–43, 553–55; Bahat, *Illustrated Atlas of Jerusalem*, 60.

Translation adds the following illuminating explanation from the Savior: “the kingdom of God shall be taken from them [Jewish leaders], and shall be given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof [meaning the Gentiles]” (JST Matt. 21:53). In addition, with a pointer to the last days, the lord of the vineyard “will let again his vineyard unto other husbandmen, even in the last days, who shall render him the fruits in their seasons” (JST Matt. 21:55). This is not all. In a direct pointer to the end-time, the disciples come to understand that “the Gentiles should be destroyed also, when the Lord should descend out of heaven to reign in his vineyard, which is the earth and the inhabitants thereof” (JST Matt. 21:56).

when they heard: Luke’s note continues the ringing emphasis on the theme of hearing and lets us know that these people grasp the thrust of Jesus’ parable (see 6:47, 49; 8:8, 12–15, 21; 14:35; 16:29, 31; 19:11; the Notes on 6:27; 11:28; the Analysis on 8:4–15).

they said, God forbid: The referent of the pronoun “they” possibly points to “the people in the temple” (20:1), and the expression “God forbid” means “Let it not be” (Greek *mē genoito*, negative with optative).³⁵ They are open enough to understand that Jesus’ pronouncement of execution against the wicked husbandmen involves terrible consequences for someone and they hope that it will not happen. It is also probable that “they” also refers to “the chief priests and the scribes” (20:1) because they “perceived that he had spoken this parable against them” (20:19). In this instance, too, these hearers comprehend the implications. Thus, the parable of the wicked husbandmen is one that people can grasp, an important point. The meaning is not hidden as it is in other parables (see 8:10), indicating that Jesus grows more clear and pointed during his last days as he tries to jolt hearers from their lethargy (see the Analysis on 19:45–48).

Analysis

Like bad breath, the Savior’s parable—termed an allegory by some³⁶—exhales the bruising odors of rejection and eventual judgment. In a word, Jesus’ story points to himself, complete with a preamble about the persecution of earlier prophets amidst God’s tender yet unsuccessful efforts to reach out to his people. When the “beloved son” finally appears (20:13), the response of the hearers mirrors that of the lord of the vineyard: they

35. Smyth, *Greek Grammar*, §1814; BAGD, 157; Blass and Debrunner, *Greek Grammar*, §§4)427, 86–384).

36. Jeremias, *Parables*, 70; Morris, *Luke*, 310; Johnson, *Luke*, 308.

hope that this last effort will bring the wanted, positive results. But it fails, tragically, with the murder of the son and the attempt by the husbandmen to seize the vineyard for themselves. Because of the reprehensible actions of the husbandmen, the master's choice is to "destroy these husbandmen" and to "give the vineyard to others" (20:16).

This narration is the second in a row wherein Jesus adds violent colors to a portrait that paint a scene of horrible destruction in the final panel (see 19:27). We get a sense that he is stepping up the intensity of his warnings, perhaps because he walks into the place—not incidentally, a holy place—where deadly rejection already lurks in the corridors and halls that temple authorities frequent, but certainly because he has only a few days in which to make lasting impressions that will bring hearers closer to his message and to the church that will survive his mortal term. Earlier teachings of his ministry, particularly parables and illustrative stories, are couched in language that requires explanation (see 8:10). But now his words come out blazingly clear, possibly because they deal with past, present, and future events rather than with eternal gospel truths,³⁷ as people's responses disclose: "God forbid" (20:16) and "they perceived that he had spoken this parable against them" (20:19). This observation hints, nay, demonstrates that Jesus knows what is immediately ahead for him. The next short parable will secure this conclusion (see 20:17–18).

One question that rises regularly centers on the relationship between Luke's rehearsal of this story and those found in Matthew and Mark. Scholars generally conclude that Luke lifts his account from Mark but tailors it so that it fits more closely the contours of Jesus' last days.³⁸ Another path leads to the *Gospel of Thomas*, saying 65, whose simpler form of the parable resembles that in Luke more than in the other Gospels, inviting a conclusion that Luke and the *Gospel of Thomas* rest on common ground. It reads:

He said: A good man had a vineyard. He gave it to husbandmen so that they would work it and that he would receive its fruit from them. He sent his servant so that the husbandmen would give him the fruit of the vineyard. They seized his servant, they beat him; a little longer and they would have killed him. The servant came, he told it to his master. His master said: "Perhaps he did not know them." He sent another servant; the husbandmen beat him as well. Then the owner sent his son. He said: "Perhaps they will respect my son." Since those husbandmen knew that he was the heir

37. Plummer, *Luke*, 458.

38. Marshall, *Luke*, 726–27; Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 2:1277–78.

of the vineyard, they seized him, they killed him. Whoever has ears let him hear.³⁹

Now we ask the question, Does a possible relationship exist between Luke's record of this parable and the version in the *Gospel of Thomas*, saying 65? In response, the differences are decisive against borrowing. For instance, in *Thomas*, the owner simply owns a vineyard whereas in Luke's rendition he plants a vineyard before departing (see 20:9); when narrating the ill treatment of the first servant, Thomas writes that "a little longer and they would have killed him," a detail missing in all the Synoptic reports; moreover, in *Thomas* the first servant is said specifically to report to the master: "The servant came, he told it to his master," to which the master said, "Perhaps he did not know them," sentences missing from both Luke and Mark; in *Thomas*, the lord sends only two servants, in Luke's version he sends three (see 20:12); in *Thomas*, the husbandmen do not cast the heir out of the vineyard—instead "they seized him, they killed him," whereas in Luke's record "they cast him out of the vineyard, and killed him" (20:15); in *Thomas*, Jesus is quoted as saying at the end, "whoever has ears let him hear,"⁴⁰ and, in contrast, Jesus asks in Luke's record, "What therefore shall the lord of the vineyard do unto them?" (20:15). Hence, although a common story lies at the base of both accounts, Luke does not borrow from *Thomas* or vice versa.

But what about borrowing from Mark? Again, the differences are too many to hold that Luke depends slavishly on Mark's account. For example, Mark's report models the master's planting of the vineyard after details in Isaiah 5:2 (see Mark 12:1), none of which sits in Luke's record; the third servant whom the master sends is killed in Mark's account, whereas in Luke's he is simply beaten (see 20:12; Mark 12:5); after the sending of the third servant, Mark's narration mentions "many others" sent by the lord who are beaten and killed (Mark 12:5); in the foul treatment of the heir, Mark's version specifies that he is killed and then cast "out of the vineyard," whereas in Luke, by contrast, the heir is first cast out and then killed (see 20:15; Mark 12:8); the more literary arrangement in Luke has three servants beaten and turned away, with the heir murdered at the end, whereas in Mark two servants are beaten and a third servant and the heir are killed, offering little of the "perfect symmetry" that Luke's version seems to reproduce.⁴¹

39. Antoine Guillaumont and others, *The Gospel according to Thomas: Coptic Text Established and Translated* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1959), 39.

40. Guillaumont and others, *Gospel according to Thomas*, 39.

41. Jeremias, *Parables*, 71–72.

THE REJECTED STONE (20:17–19)

(COMPARE MATT. 21:42–46; MARK 12:10–12)

King James Translation

17 And he beheld them, and said, What is this then that is written, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner?
18 Whosoever shall fall upon that stone shall be broken; but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder.
19 And the chief priests and the scribes the same hour sought to lay hands on him; and they feared the people: for they perceived that he had spoken this parable against them.

New Rendition

17 And fixing his gaze on them, he said, “What does it mean that is written: ‘The stone which the builders rejected, this has become the capstone?’ 18 All who fall upon that stone will be dashed to pieces, and upon whomever it falls, it will crush him.” 19 And the scribes and the chief priests sought to lay their hands upon him that very hour, and they feared the people, for they knew that he had spoken the parable about them.

Notes

20:17 *he beheld them:* The Greek verb means literally to look into someone’s face (Greek *emblepō*), with the added sense that Jesus sees perceptively as God sees (see 22:61).⁴² It seems that Luke wants us to understand that Jesus looks at his critics (“them”) with more than a dispassionate gaze. Moreover, Jesus’ defenses are up and no one will take him by guile, even though authorities try (see 20:20–21, 23).

written: The quotation comes from Psalm 118:22 (LXX 117:22), underscoring that the third section of scripture, the so-called “sacred writings,”⁴³ carries authority along with the other two—the law and the prophets (see 24:44).

The stone which the builders rejected: On Jesus’ lips, this line from Psalm 118:22 points to himself as the stone (Greek *lithos*) that suffers rejection (see JST Matt. 21:51). In other illuminating passages, such rejection points to his death (see Acts 4:10–11; 1 Pet. 2:4, 7).⁴⁴

the head of the corner: Jesus is the cornerstone. No one disputes this identification. In buttressing lines from the Joseph Smith Translation, the

42. Liddell and Scott, *Lexicon*, 539–40; *TDNT*, 5:317, 327, 344.

43. Marshall, *Luke*, 905; Johnson, *Luke*, 402.

44. *TDNT*, 4:271–72, 274–76.

Savior declares to his uncomprehending disciples, “I am the stone, and those wicked ones reject me.” Further, he affirms, “I am the head of the corner” (JST Matt. 21:51–52). But where does this stone fit into the building? It is literally the “final stone in the building”⁴⁵ that sits over the porch, resting there as the keystone of the main arch (see Eph. 2:20; 1 Pet. 2:6), thus completing it and ensuring that the building has been erected exactly according to plan. In a metaphorical sense, Jesus becomes the keystone for the heavenly temple to be revealed at the end-time.⁴⁶ Although Jesus draws this imagery from Psalm 118:22, we should not lose sight of the language of Isaiah 28:16, wherein the Lord speaks of a foundation stone as well: “Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation” (see 1 Pet. 2:4–6; also D&C 50:44; Jacob 4:15–17; Hel. 5:12).

20:18 *Whosoever shall fall upon that stone . . . but on whomsoever it shall fall:* Jesus now introduces the second part of his short parable by pointing to a very large stone, perhaps gesturing with his finger because such stones are visible to his hearers in the surrounding walls of the temple, making his words all the more vivid.

shall be broken: Jesus spells out the consequence of falling hard onto or against one of the giant stones that make up the temple walls. Metaphorically, he points to himself as the stone that, when collided against, remains unmoved, undisturbed, as he does. Only the person who falls sustains injury, in this case eternal injury. Moreover, with a slightly different focus, the Joseph Smith Translation adds clarifying words of Jesus as he nods toward officials: “These Jews [leaders] shall fall upon me, and shall be broken. And the kingdom of God shall be taken from them” (JST Matt. 21:52–53). On the positive side, it may be that those broken by falling on the stone manifest “a broken heart and a contrite spirit” (see 3 Ne. 9:20; 12:19; etc.). In the context, a distinction may lie in Jesus’ words. It may be possible to reshape, or to reuse, in mason’s terms, those who are broken. That is, they may be able to repent, ending up with “a broken heart.” On the other hand, such repair would not be possible for those ground “to powder.”

on whomsoever it shall fall: The subject, of course, is the “stone” (20:17) that “shall fall.” Unlike the usual concept of a stone as inanimate, this stone seems to have life and direction, as in the case of the stones that will “cry out” (see 19:40). In this instance, the stone purposely falls on those who reject

45. TDNT, 1:792.

46. TDNT, 1:792–93; 4:274–75; Jeremias, *Parables*, 73.

it (see 20:17). In one sense, the stone forms an extension of the will of God who directs stones against enemies of his people or away from his servants (see Alma 17:36; Hel. 16:2; compare the opposite result in 1 Kgs. 22:34).

grind him to powder: Jesus continues to paint results in ultimate, dark hues, as he does in the warning within the story that he rehearses at Jericho (see 19:27) and in the parable of the wicked husbandmen (see 20:16). The notions of breaking and grinding to powder, of course, connect to the world of stone masons—not incidentally, Jesus is known as a skilled artisan (see Matt. 13:55; Mark 6:3; Greek *tektōn*)⁴⁷—and are vivid descriptions of what happens to falling stones or to stones deemed unfit for building (see 2 Ne. 26:5).

20:19 sought to lay hands on him: The conspiracy, which begins to cook in one pot or another after Jesus heals the man with the withered hand (see 6:11), now spills over with a broiling attempt to arrest him.⁴⁸

and they feared the people: The Joseph Smith Translation changes “and” to “but,” making clearer sense (JST 20:19). We are left with the impression that the officials fear the crowd because of Jesus’ popularity. But, according to the JST, the matter runs deeper: “they feared the multitude, because they learned that the multitude took him for a prophet” (JST Matt. 21:49).

they perceived: People in the crowd, especially “the chief priests and the scribes,” grasp that Jesus aims the saying against them (see Matt. 21:47). But, according to one source, the disciples miss the point that the audience comes to understand (see JST Matt. 21:50–56).

this parable: What is the referent here? Do the authorities perceive that Jesus speaks about them in the story concerning the wicked husbandmen (see 20:9–16) or in the saying about the stone (see 20:17–18)? It may be either or it may be both. In either scenario, the fate of the opponents is disastrous (see 20:16, 18).

Analysis

Rejection as a noxious odor billows to its full strength in the Savior’s saying about the stone, a rejection that virtually stains the air in the temple. Constantly giving off a bad smell, the authorities hound Jesus so that “they might take hold of his words” and “deliver him unto the power . . . of the governor” (20:20). Their conspiracy takes firm form, passing from an airless, conceptual stage to concrete action. And Jesus knows it and effectively

47. Liddell and Scott, *Lexicon*, 1769; BAGD, 816.

48. Brown, “Arrest,” 165–69, 178–85.

warns them that their enterprise “shall be broken” to their everlasting detriment and pummeled “to powder” (20:18). Jesus has now odorized this theme three times in the last few days, including twice in the last few minutes, and each warning reeks of horrible consequences for the perpetrators (see 19:27; 20:16, 18).

Jesus’ appeal to stones draws up a rich imagery. It not only points far backward to the devil’s insidious invitation to Jesus to expend power by creating bread from a stone (see 4:3) but, in a positive sense, it also points to the living rock from which dressed stones are quarried, including cornerstones. In its earliest mention in scripture, this rock, called “Rock of Heaven, which is broad as eternity,” is identified as the Messiah and, symbolically, becomes the route by which a person “climbeth up” to a spiritually secure loft from which that person “shall never fall” (Moses 7:53; see 2 Ne. 4:35). In a different vein, this bedrock is to serve as the foundation for one’s house and, by extension, for one’s household or family. This point is not trivial, for it is one of the messages of Jesus’ saying in the Sermon on the Plain: “He is like a man which built an house [family], and digged deep, and laid the foundation on a rock” (6:48). Such language enfolds the creation of a family whose foundations rest on spiritual bedrock (see the Notes on 6:48–49 and the Analysis on 11:14–28).

The Joseph Smith Translation adds important interpretive information to this saying and the prior parable, not to Luke’s report but to Matthew’s record, coming at the end of chapter 21 (see JST Matt. 21:48–56). The information is relevant because it preserves not only what Jesus’ opponents and his disciples are saying and thinking in this temple setting but a long explanation from Jesus himself. Specifically, after hearing Jesus’ saying about the stone that becomes “the head of the corner” and falls on the wicked, pulverizing them “to powder,” the chief priests and their allies both perceive that the saying is aimed at them and, more significantly because of the concrete detail about their spoken response, “they said among themselves, Shall this man think that he alone can spoil this great kingdom? And they were angry with him,” portraying Jesus as a political troublemaker in their minds (JST Matt. 21:47–48). This account exists in no other source. Further, the disciples, in embarrassing contrast to everyone else, do not understand Jesus’ saying about the stone. So “his disciples came to him” for an explanation, at the end of which they come to comprehend “the parable . . . that the Gentiles should be destroyed also, when the Lord should descend out of heaven to reign in his vineyard, which is the earth and the inhabitants thereof” (JST Matt. 21:50, 56).

Most importantly, the JST preserves Jesus’ long, clarifying explanation that he offers to his followers. First, he makes plain to the disciples that “I am the stone” and “I am the head of the corner.” Ominously, “These Jews shall fall upon me, and shall be broken” (JST Matt. 21:51–52). Then in words that unite the parable of the wicked husbandmen—Jesus says that the lord of the vineyard will “give the vineyard to others” (20:16)—and in the saying about the stone, Jesus predicts that “the kingdom of God shall be taken from them [the Jewish leaders], and shall be given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof; (meaning the Gentiles).” More precisely, he “will destroy those miserable, wicked men, and will let again his vineyard unto other husbandmen, even in the last days” (JST Matt. 21:53, 55). This entire explanation arises from the earlier parable of the wicked husbandmen. Woven into this dark tapestry are Jesus’ dire words that both derive from his saying about the stone and complete the unification of the parable and the saying: “Wherefore, on whomsoever this stone shall fall, it shall grind him to powder” (JST Matt. 21:54). The officials’ rejection of Jesus will bring terrible consequences that will roll on for centuries, to “the last days” (JST Matt. 21:55).

RENDER TO CAESAR (20:20–26)

(Compare Matt. 22:15–22; Mark 12:13–17)

King James Translation

20 And they watched him, and sent forth spies, which should feign themselves just men, that they might take hold of his words, that so they might deliver him unto the power and authority of the governor. 21 And they asked him, saying, Master, we know that thou sayest and teachest rightly, neither acceptest thou the person of any, but teachest the way of God truly: 22 Is it lawful for us to give tribute unto Cæsar, or no? 23 But he perceived their craftiness, and said unto them, Why tempt ye me? 24 Shew me a penny. Whose image and superscription hath it? They answered

New Rendition

20 And watching closely, they sent spies feigning themselves to be just men, that they might catch him in a word, so that they might deliver him into the jurisdiction and authority of the prefect. 21 And they asked him, saying “Teacher, we know that you speak and teach correctly, and you do not show favoritism, but that you teach the way of God in accordance with truth. 22 Is it proper to give tribute to Caesar or not?” 23 But perceiving their craftiness, he said to them, 24 “Show me a denarius. Whose image and inscription does it have?” And they said, “Caesar’s.”

and said, Cæsar's. 25 And he said unto them, Render therefore unto Cæsar the things which be Cæsar's, and unto God the things which be God's. 26 And they could not take hold of his words before the people: and they marvelled at his answer, and held their peace.

25 And he said to them, "Therefore give the things of Caesar to Caesar, and the things of God to God." 26 And they were not able to catch him in what he said in front of the people. And being amazed at his answer, they kept silent.

Notes

20:20 *they watched*: The verb (Greek *paratēreō*), with the basic sense "to observe," is the same that appears in 6:7 and 14:1, all with the sense of hostile intent.⁴⁹

***sent forth*:** By repeating the Greek verb *apostellō*, Luke emphasizes that the spies carry an official commission, though secret, from the authorities (see the Note on 20:10).⁵⁰

***spies . . . feign themselves just men*:** The conspiracy seems to be widening. This line forms one of Luke's most damning judgments against those who plot Jesus' death (see the Analysis on 6:6–12). Although the authorities seem to believe that they are keeping matters quiet, the fact that the plot widens to another level of willing conspirators simply jerks more of them into the dark glare of divine wrath.

***deliver him unto . . . the governor*:** This note, followed by the question about taxes to be paid to Caesar and Rome (see 20:22), tells us the direction that the plotters want to carry matters. They seek a charge that will force Pontius Pilate, the Roman prefect, to execute Jesus. The authorities are thinking all along of a capital case that will lead to Jesus' death, not simply to imprisonment. In fact, Jesus tells the disciples long before that he "shall be delivered unto the Gentiles, and . . . they shall scourge him, and put him to death" (18:32–33). In this and other passages, the Greek verb *paradidōmi*, translated "to deliver," carries the sense "to betray" (see 9:44; 18:32; 22:4, 6, 21–22, 48; 24:7).⁵¹ By the way, this is the first mention of "the governor," that is, "the prefect" (Greek *hēgemōn*) who serves nominally under the Roman governor in Syria.⁵² The related participle (Greek *hēgemoneuōn*), not the noun, appears in 2:2 and 3:1.⁵³

49. *TDNT*, 8:146–48; Johnson, *Luke*, 223.

50. *TDNT*, 1:400–401, 414–24.

51. BAGD, 619–21.

52. Schürer, *History*, 1:357–62; BAGD, 344.

53. BAGD, 343.

20:21 *we know*: By declaring that they know something that they do not, the representatives of the authorities step into self-incrimination, not in this world, of course, but in the next. As we are reminded elsewhere, “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Heb. 10:31).

***Master*:** This term (Greek *didaskalos*) appears frequently as a title of respect for Jesus and, on one occasion, for John (see 20:28; the Notes on 3:12 and 12:13).

***the way of God*:** Besides the distant echoes of “the way of the Lord” (3:4) and “the way toward the Garden of Eden” (Moses 5:4), both of which deal with divine roadways or approaches to God,⁵⁴ “the way of God” seems to stand opposite the “broad” way and “wide” gate that we find elsewhere on Jesus’ lips (see Matt. 7:13–14).⁵⁵

20:22 *Is it lawful*: This question from insincere hearers is the same that Jesus asks in other settings (see 6:9; 14:3). The contrast between the Judge of all, as underscored in the earlier instances, and the persons who feign interest here is stark.

20:23 *he perceived their craftiness*: Elsewhere Luke writes that Jesus knows the thoughts of his detractors. With a uniform emphasis, Luke highlights this aspect of Jesus’ powers throughout his record (see the Notes on 5:22; 6:8; 11:17; 21:3).

***Why tempt ye me?*:** This question is textually suspect. Most of the manuscripts which repeat this question are late, though it appears in A (Codex Alexandrinus) and W (The Freer Codex), both fifth century.⁵⁶ The query may come from the hand of a scribe who is influenced by either Matthew 22:18 or Mark 12:15, each of which repeats it.⁵⁷

20:24 *penny*: The coin is a *denarius*, the typical pay for a day’s work, although the salary may be less in Palestine (see the Notes on 7:41 and 10:35).⁵⁸ While some in Jesus’ audience will find the coin to be offensive because of its image of Caesar, who is effectively the owner of coins that bear his image,⁵⁹ Jesus evidently does not.

***superscription*:** The Greek word *epigraphē*, in this context, refers to the inscription or legend on the coin (see 23:38).⁶⁰

54. Draper, Brown, and Rhodes, *Pearl of Great Price*, 57–58.

55. *TDNT*, 5:69–71.

56. Metzger and Ehrman, *Text of the New Testament*, 67, 80–81.

57. Marshall, *Luke*, 735.

58. BAGD, 178; Jeremias, *Jerusalem*, 111; Sperber, “Palestinian Currency Systems,” 273–301; Betlyon, “Coinage,” 1:1086–87.

59. Marshall, *Luke*, 736; Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 2:1296.

60. Liddell and Scott, *Lexicon*, 628; BAGD, 291.

20:25 *Render therefore unto Caesar the things which be Caesar's:* Jesus' statement cuts through a growing political issue of his day, settling his views on taxation and on terrestrial loyalties. Especially for some, taxation by a foreign power—Rome in this case—stands against the beliefs that God governs his people and his land, and that no outside entity is to come between God and his people.⁶¹ Importantly, Jesus' utterance here does not countermand his observation about God and mammon because taxes and mammon are not the same.⁶² In this connection, the verb “to render” (Greek *apodidōmi*) means to pay what is due, in this case what is due to the government (see 10:35; D&C 63:26–27; 98:4).⁶³

20:26 *they marvelled:* Even the agents of the authorities, their “spies” (20:20), who seek to ensnare Jesus, cannot help themselves—they are deeply impressed. One wonders who among these people pulls away from his assignment, or at least scales back enthusiasm for snagging Jesus. Besides, this type of experience brims with elements that make it memorable in the minds of the Twelve and others, ensuring it as an eyewitness report (see 5:9; 8:56; 9:43; 10:23–24; the Note on 4:14).⁶⁴

held their peace: The Greek verb *sigāō* means to be silent. In its other occurrence, the three disciples keep silent about their experience on the Mount of Transfiguration not only because Jesus asks them (see Matt. 17:9; Mark 9:9) but because of the notably sacred character of what they experience (see 9:36).⁶⁵

Analysis

In one moment of astute brilliance, the Savior cuts through a debated and potentially destabilizing issue—What loyalty do we owe to Caesar?—that will come to engulf his people less than forty years later in a war to the death with Rome (AD 66–70). As the eventual breakout of the war will show, Jesus' words do not turn the heated tide of battle that will wash onto and over the land and its people. Nevertheless, he sets the standard for those who choose to follow him: pay that which is due to Caesar without complaint, just as we pay to God what he requires. Jesus' words fix the standard ever after for his disciples' relationship to the state.⁶⁶

61. Brown and Holzapfel, *Lost 500 Years*, 138–141; David Rhoads, “Zealots,” in *ABD*, 6:1043–45.

62. Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 2:1297.

63. *TDNT*, 2:167–68; Morris, *Luke*, 315–16; Green, *Luke*, 716.

64. Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, 93–132, 146–49.

65. BAGD, 757; Morris, *Luke*, 189.

66. Morris, *Luke*, 315–16.

Moreover, his declaration warns his followers against tagging along with those who will eventually lead the ill-fated charge against Rome. To be sure, his warning voiced in his sermon on the Mount of Olives will ring the tone even more clearly (see 21:20–24) and, before the war engulfs them, will lead Christians away from battle zones into places of safety.⁶⁷ But his words spoken in the temple will both contribute to his followers’ physical safety during the war and anchor their spiritual moorings to tides untouched by sudden surges. His principle of dealing with earthly governments will not change (see D&C 63:26–27).

MARRIAGE AND RESURRECTION (20:27–40)

(Compare Matt. 22:23–33; Mark 12:18–27)

King James Translation

27 Then came to him certain of the Sadducees, which deny that there is any resurrection; and they asked him, 28 Saying, Master, Moses wrote unto us, If any man’s brother die, having a wife, and he die without children, that his brother should take his wife, and raise up seed unto his brother. 29 There were therefore seven brethren: and the first took a wife, and died without children. 30 And the second took her to wife, and he died childless. 31 And the third took her; and in like manner the seven also: and they left no children, and died. 32 Last of all the woman died also. 33 Therefore in the resurrection whose wife of them is she? for seven had her to wife.

34 And Jesus answering said unto them, The children of this world marry, and are given in marriage: 35 But they which shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world, and the resurrection

New Rendition

27 When some of the Sadducees, who claim that there is no resurrection, came to him, they questioned him, 28 saying, “Teacher, Moses wrote to us, ‘If someone’s brother dies having a wife, and this man is childless, that his brother should take the man’s wife and raise up seed for his brother.’ 29 Accordingly, there were seven brothers, and the first, taking a wife, died childless. 30 And the second 31 and the third took her, and also the seven in like manner, and they did not leave behind children, and they died. 32 Lastly, the woman also died. In the resurrection, whose wife will the woman be? For the seven had her as wife.”

34 And Jesus said to them, “The children of this world marry and allow themselves to marry. 35 But those judged worthy to obtain that world and the resurrection from the dead neither marry nor allow themselves to marry.

67. Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 3.5.3–4.

from the dead, neither marry, nor are given in marriage: 36 Neither can they die any more: for they are equal unto the angels; and are the children of God, being the children of the resurrection. 37 Now that the dead are raised, even Moses shewed at the bush, when he calleth the Lord the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. 38 For he is not a God of the dead, but of the living: for all live unto him.

39 Then certain of the scribes answering said, Master, thou hast well said. 40 And after that they durst not ask him any question at all.

36 For they are no longer able to die, for they are like the angels and, being sons of the resurrection, they are sons of God. 37 And that the dead are raised, even Moses disclosed at the bush when he called the Lord ‘the God of the Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.’ 38 He is not God of the dead, but of the living, for all are alive to Him.”

39 And answering, some of the scribes said, “Teacher, you spoke well.” 40 For they no longer dared to ask him anything.

Notes

20:27 Sadducees, which deny . . . resurrection: In their only appearance in his Gospel, Luke correctly characterizes Sadducees as people who disdain belief in the resurrection (see Acts 23:8). In addition, they accept only the five books of Moses as scripture, make up a significant percentage of the temple priesthood, and form an elite group inside Jerusalem society.⁶⁸ What is more, nothing in written form survives from them; we learn of them only from outsiders and detractors.

they asked him: The question that follows seems to be a classic issue that the Sadducees create and regularly toss at their rivals, the Pharisees, because it defies an easy answer. With the same purpose, they bring it up to Jesus in an effort to stump him.

20:28 Moses wrote: The Sadducees appeal to the one part of scripture that they accept, the five books of the Mosaic law. Jesus will counter this thrust by also appealing to the law of Moses (see 20:37; Ex. 3:1–6).

his brother should take his wife: The rule rests on Genesis 38:8 and Deuteronomy 25:5–10. The concept, called levirate law, stipulates that a man is not to die childless, thus losing for his unborn posterity an inheritance among God’s people, the Israelites (see the Note on 7:12).⁶⁹

68. Josephus, *A.J.* 18.1.4 (§16–17); *TDNT*, 1:370; 7:46–47, 50–51; Brown and Holzapfel, *Lost 500 Years*, 125–26.

69. Richard Kalmin, “Levirate Law,” in *ABD*, 4:296–97; Milgrom, *Leviticus 17–22*, 1545, 1758.

raise up seed: The point of the barren widow marrying her brother-in-law is to give birth to an heir for her deceased husband, a “firstborn,” who then inherits her first husband’s place and property in the family (Deut. 25:6; see the Note on 7:12).⁷⁰

20:29 seven brethren: The number seven amps up the problem that the story shapes—among so many husbands, who will claim the widow as his own?

died without children: This element is the most critical for the story and for its relation to levirate marriage: the deceased leaves behind no heir. This legal complication intensifies everything else because the oldest brother inherits the double portion (see Deut. 21:17; the Note on 15:12).

20:30 and the second took her to wife: The better manuscripts omit everything in the verse except “and the second.”⁷¹ Notably, the second brother does as the law requires, unlike Naomi’s closest relative, who withdraws, allowing Boaz’s union with Ruth (see Ruth 4:1–10).

20:31 they left no children, and died: The sum of the matter rests on the fact that the widow’s union with the seven brothers produces no heir for her first husband. That said, we can presume that some of the brothers become fathers of other children with their first wives, thus assuring that the family property stays within the larger family circle.

20:32 Last of all the woman died: With this final detail, the puzzle is complete and now requires Jesus to assemble its pieces for an answer.

20:33 in the resurrection whose wife of them is she?: It seems obvious that the Sadducees are aware of a teaching that marriage continues into the next life. The absurdity of their story is designed to undercut and dismiss this doctrine.⁷² But the real answer is hinted in the question itself: she does belong to one of the brothers, the first one whom she marries.

20:34–35 children of this world . . . they which . . . obtain that world: In these two verses, Jesus evidently distinguishes between people of this world and their activities, on the one hand, and on the other, those who obtain celestial status in the next world and their activities. If indeed he is identifying two groups, as seems plain, then we conclude that marrying is an activity or performance connected to this world and is not a part of the activities in the next. The next important point is that marriage as an institution is

70. Eryl W. Davies, “Inheritance Rights and the Hebrew Levirate Marriage,” *Vetus Testamentum* 31 (1981): 138–44, 257–68; Baker, *Women’s Rights in Old Testament Times*, 51, 134, 137, 140; Falk, *Hebrew Law in Biblical Times*, 109–10, 153–55.

71. Plummer, *Luke*, 468; Marshall, *Luke*, 740.

72. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ*, 547–48.

not disqualified from heaven.⁷³ This understanding receives support from certain New Testament manuscripts, from the Old Latin and Syriac versions, and from early quotations of this passage by second- and third-century Christian writers so that 20:34 might properly read: “The children of this world marry and are given in marriage, beget and bear children.”⁷⁴

20:34 *answering*: This verb does not appear in the better manuscripts, but is evidently a scribal insertion.⁷⁵

***marry, and are given in marriage*:** The kernel of this line is planted deep in the issue that the Sadducean story raises—that of inheritance from parents. Thus, we understand this part of Jesus’ reply to touch lightly on the legal matter of inheriting earthly property, a notion that reinforces the view in this verse that the Savior is dealing with matters which tie to this world.

***given in marriage*:** The verbs here and at the end of the next verse (Greek *gamizō*) appear in the middle voice, not the passive voice as the KJV translators render the verbs, with the meaning “to allow oneself to be married” that applies specifically to the bride.⁷⁶ With these very significant declarations, Jesus elevates women to full participants in marriage decisions rather than, as is customary, to be “taken” by a bridegroom from a parent or guardian, potentially ignoring their desires (see 20:28–29, 31; the Notes on 16:18 and 17:27).⁷⁷

20:35 *accounted worthy*: The verb (Greek *kataxiōō*), meaning “to regard as worthy,” introduces an important variant at play in Jesus’ response—a person’s worthiness is determined by God.⁷⁸

***the resurrection from the dead*:** As we know, resurrection does not depend on worthiness, as this verse plainly implies, for it is universal (see Acts 23:6; 24:21; Alma 40:1–5; Hel. 14:15–16; Morm. 9:13; etc.). So how are we to understand Jesus’ saying? It seems that the resurrection to which he refers is special, that is, he is pointing to the resurrection of the just.⁷⁹ This concept receives corroboration from the Joseph Smith Translation, which reads: “accounted worthy to obtain that world, *through* resurrection from

73. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ*, 548.

74. Black, *Aramaic Approach to the Gospels and Acts*, 226–27.

75. Marshall, *Luke*, 740.

76. *TDNT*, 1:650–51, n. 15.

77. *TDNT*, 1:656; *TDOT*, 8:19; Green, *Luke*, 721; Falk, *Hebrew Law in Biblical Times*, 138–40.

78. BAGD, 416; *TDNT*, 1:380; Johnson, *Luke*, 313; Green, *Luke*, 720.

79. Plummer, *Luke*, 469; Marshall, *Luke*, 741.

the dead” (JST 20:35; emphasis added). The status and timing of one’s resurrection makes all the difference (see 14:14; John 5:28–29; 1 Cor. 15:40–44; Mosiah 15:20–24; Alma 41:2–5).

neither marry, nor are given in marriage: That this is the situation in the immortal realm becomes obvious from Jesus’ following words: “Neither can they die any more” (20:36). In a word, the act of marrying does not take place in heaven, only on earth.

20:36 *Neither can they die any more:* At first glance, this summary of immortal life applies to all who live on the earth. The positive version of this statement is that these people continue to live in the celestial sense, that is, they enjoy eternal life. Thus, Jesus here keeps his focus on those “accounted worthy to obtain that [heavenly] world.”

equal unto the angels: Jesus’ declaration makes clear that certain of those “accounted worthy to obtain that world” are received into an order that is at least equal to that of the angels and that they do not marry or remain married (see D&C 88:107; 132:16–17).

the children of God: This group is not the same as those “equal unto the angels.” Simply put, the inheritance status of a child—this element is very much at play in the Sadducees’ story—differs from that of a messenger or agent. Under law, whether terrestrial or celestial, the two positions are not comparable in any way.

being children of the resurrection: Again, with the emphatic repetition of the word for “children” (Greek *huiioi*, properly “sons”),⁸⁰ we are dealing with children who enjoy a legal status of heirship above that of others’ status. Moreover, we encounter the special resurrection again, that of the just (see the Note on 20:35).

20:37 *that the dead are raised, even Moses shewed:* To deal with the second issue, resurrection, after treating marriage in the hereafter, Jesus appeals to a passage from the Mosaic law (see Ex. 3:6, 15), the only section of scripture that the Sadducees embrace (see the Note on 20:27).

at the bush: The referent, of course, is the burning bush that is “not consumed” (Ex. 3:2).

the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob: An oft-repeated title for God, Jesus quotes almost exactly the language of Ex. 3:6, evidently from memory.

80. *TDNT*, 8:390–92; *TDOT*, 2:154–57.

20:38 not a God of the dead: Jesus' description expands across all of God's creatures and their lives. Even in bodily death, human souls still live, as do those of animals (see D&C 77:2).⁸¹ All eras of our existence—premortals, mortals, postmortals—are infused with life.

the living: In the context of Jesus' discussion of heavenly matters, "the living" (Greek participle *zōn*) are those filled with eternal life, God's life, more than simple existence (see 18:30; D&C 14:7; 20:19; 68:6; the Note on 10:25).⁸² More specifically, that life will be fully manifested in "the Living One," the resurrected Jesus as he is later called (see the Note on 24:5).

20:39 certain of the scribes: These persons appear to be quasi disciples who are open to Jesus' views, perhaps touched in a way that will eventually lead them to his church. It is also possible that their compliment shows their amazement at Jesus' reply, the comprehension of which has so far escaped them when they try to respond to the same or a similar issue raised by the Sadducees. One suspects that the Sadducees make up this story in order to frustrate opponents, of whatever sort (see the Note on 20:27).

Analysis

The Sadducees' riddle is so important that the Savior addresses it in modern scripture (see D&C 132:16–17). Why? Because it is misunderstood across the Christian spectrum. This situation arises, presumably, either because the Gospel writers do not have in hand the full response of Jesus, with nuance and clarity, or the hearers' "on-the-spot" memory of Jesus' answer is faulty and thus lacking when it is handed on. The result is the same. Perhaps oddly, the Joseph Smith Translation adds little. However, what does come through clearly in Jesus' answer is his forceful response to the main thrust of the Sadducees' riddle—it concerns the resurrection. He does not respond fully to the issue of the eternal nature of marriage.

The first gap in understanding occurs when grasping the intent of Jesus' words in 20:35: "they which shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world . . . neither marry nor are given in marriage." From this verse, many scholars conclude that marriage in this world does not persist into the next, a clear misconception.⁸³ The second blank is found in 20:36 wherein it appears that "the angels" are the same as "the children of God." But they

81. *TPJS*, 291–92; Packard, "Animals," 1:42–43.

82. Plummer, *Luke*, 471; *TDNT*, 2:863–66; Morris, *Luke*, 319.

83. *TDNT*, 1:651; Marshall, *Luke*, 741; Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 2:1305; Johnson, *Luke*, 313.

are not equivalents: a person’s messengers or agents (Greek *angelos*)⁸⁴ are never on the same legal or social continuum, in this life or the next, with one’s children (see the Note on 20:26). But a casual reading may not draw up this crucial distinction. In another place, the Savior clarifies that when “the children of *this world*” (20:34; emphasis added) “are out of the world they neither marry nor are given in marriage; but are appointed angels in heaven” (D&C 132:16). How so? Because “these angels did not abide my law; therefore, they cannot be enlarged, but remain separately and singly . . . to all eternity” (D&C 132:17). The others, “the children of God” (20:36), “shall pass by the angels, and the gods . . . to their exaltation and glory.” Specifically, their marriages continue into eternity: “if a man marry a wife by my word . . . and by the new and everlasting covenant, and it [their marriage] is sealed unto them by the Holy Spirit of promise, . . . it shall be . . . of full force when they are out of the world” (D&C 132:19).

What more can we say about Jesus’ statements to the Sadducees? For in Luke’s report he appears to agree that marriage does not continue into “that world” (20:35–36). The answer, in my mind, rests on a subtle yet firm distinction that Jesus makes in his reply. He first speaks of “the children of this world” who “marry, and are given in marriage” (20:34). Though Jesus repeats the expression “the children of this world” in 16:8, a different context, in 20:34 he evidently means those who are currently living in this world.⁸⁵ That is to say, marriage properly takes place among the inhabitants of this world (see the Note on 20:34). The other part of the distinction rests with those who “shall be accounted worthy to obtain that [celestial] world” (20:35). Among them, the rules are different, for in “that world” they “neither marry, nor are given in marriage,” activities that are normal in this world. That is to say, in “that world” no marriages are performed.

But this observation does not disqualify marriages performed in this world, as the Sadducees’ question unwittingly implies: “in the resurrection whose wife of them is she?” (20:33). The only marriages that work in “that world” are those which continue from this. The point? Although the issue turns on a small base and receives its form from an interpretation informed by LDS doctrine, Jesus clarifies the notion that marriage—especially eternal marriage—is an earthly ordinance and must be performed here. There are to be no marriages performed in “that world.” Nevertheless, single people

84. *TDNT*, 1:74–85.

85. Morris, *Luke*, 317.

and those who die without hearing the gospel message are promised that no blessing will be withheld from them in “that world” as long as they are faithful in this world. The mechanism of a lasting marriage for them rests in earthly temples where sacred, eternal marriages are performed for those who have passed from this life.⁸⁶

In this connection, we must take a very careful look at all of Jesus’ words that have to do with marriage. One significant passage occurs in John 4, where Jesus engages a Samaritan woman in conversation. In the course of their exchange, Jesus promises her an inner “well of water springing up into everlasting life” (John 4:14). After she expresses a desire for this water, he replies that she is to call her husband (see John 4:15–16). Most commentators believe that, at this juncture, Jesus is simply setting her up so that he can tell her that she “had five husbands; and he whom thou now hast is not thy husband” (John 4:18). But, I believe, there is more at work here. In my reading, Jesus brings forward an eternal principle: she can possess the “water” which he promises to her only with her husband. Moreover, this water brings her, and him, to “everlasting life” (John 4:14). The conclusions? Jesus’ promise of “everlasting life” to the woman comes to fruition only in partnership with her husband, and he with her. It is a family affair.

Concerning the case that the Sadducees present (see 20:28–33), it must form a classic example for them, full of absurd twists and turns which, in their view, undercut the doctrine of the resurrection and therefore one of the fashionable pillars of Pharisaic belief. Importantly, in his rendition of this account, Luke adds dimensions to Jesus’ response that do not appear in the versions reported in Mark 12:18–27 and Matthew 22:23–33. For example, verse 20:34 on marrying and giving in marriage has no counterpart, and 20:35–36 add aspects missing in the other reports, namely, notes about worthiness and about those who cannot die. Contrarily, Luke omits Jesus’ blunt condemnation of the Sadducean view (see Matt. 22:29; Mark 12:24, 27). Remarkably, the Joseph Smith Translation changes Luke’s account but little, and only in small details.

In sum, Jesus’ main aim in his response, in my view, is to point his questioners to the “God . . . of the living” and thereby to himself who will soon prove the reality of the resurrection (20:38).

86. James T. Duke, “Marriage: Eternal Marriage,” in *EM*, 2:857–59.

DAVID'S SON AND LORD (20:41–44)

(Compare Matt. 22:41–46; Mark 12:35–37)

King James Translation

41 And he said unto them, How say they that Christ is David's son? 42 And David himself saith in the book of Psalms, The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, 43 Till I make thine enemies thy footstool. 44 David therefore calleth him Lord, how is he then his son?

New Rendition

41 And he said to them, "How do they say that the Christ is the son of David? 42 For David himself said in the book of Psalms, 'The Lord said to my lord, sit on my right hand, 43 until I place your enemies beneath your footstool.' 44 David then called him lord, and how is he his son?"

Notes

20:41 *How say they:* Jesus now puts forward a puzzle of his own. Whether he does so as a response to the Sadducean riddle remains unknown, for only Luke places this saying about David directly after his exchange with the Sadducees. Jesus' purpose is to beam a light onto himself, if his hearers' eyes are open, illuminating his ties to David and David's Lord. He captures interest by raising a problem of interpreting scripture. Some, perhaps his detractors denoted by the plural verb "they say" (Greek *legousin*),⁸⁷ believe one view based on scripture that the Messiah descends from David (see Gen. 49:10; 2 Sam. 7:12–16; Ezek. 34:23). Yet another scripture, as he will note, says something different (see Ps. 110:1).

Christ is David's son: As Jesus utters it, the title is properly "the Christ" (Greek *ho Christos*). Although almost no one within the sound of Jesus' voice will know of his biological tie to David (see the Note on 1:32; Rom. 1:3), he leaves broad hints that he is the ancient king's descendant. To do so, he taps into one of the key pieces of popular belief about the Messiah, that he descends from King David (see Isa. 9:2–7; 11:1–9). Only after his resurrection will the Savior repeat the title "the Christ" for himself (see the Note on 24:26).

87. BAGD, 469.

20:42 *David himself saith:* Here comes the other point of view which Jesus draws from Psalm 110:1, namely, that Christ is David's Lord, not his son (see the Notes on 3:5, 15; 20:41, 44; 22:32; the Analysis below).

The Lord said unto my Lord: Everyone in Jesus' audience will understand that "the Lord" in the quoted line points to God (Hebrew *Yahweh* or *Jehovah*). The questions pop up with the term "my [David's] Lord" (Hebrew *adon*) in Psalm 110:1.⁸⁸ As Jesus spreads out the puzzle, the latter term refers evidently to David's Messiah because this understanding veers from the popular view that the Messiah is instead David's son.

Sit thou on my right hand: The language is that of coronation, as the Greek verb *kathēmai* demonstrates, pointing to the enthroned Jehovah.⁸⁹ The right hand (Greek *dexios*), of course, points to the favored spot (see Acts 2:34–36; 5:31; 7:56; Rom. 8:34; etc.).⁹⁰

20:43 *make thine enemies thy footstool:* The image is one of power wherein one places one's foot onto a subdued opponent (see Josh. 10:24) or wherein the children of Israel walk across land that is now theirs, obtained by vanquishing the prior inhabitants (see Deut. 11:24; Josh. 14:9). But the term "footstool" (Greek *hypopodion*) introduces links to the temple or sanctuary that fit into the place where Jesus utters these words (see Ps. 99:5; Isa. 66:1; Lam. 2:1; also Ex. 24:10), as well as to worship, specifically at Jesus' feet (see 5:8, 12; 8:41; the Notes on 7:38; 7:44; 17:16; the Analysis on 7:36–50).⁹¹

20:44 *Lord . . . son:* The puzzle that Jesus presents elevates the question about his authority above the simple issue of his educational pedigree (see 20:1–2; the Note on 20:2) to one that sees him both as David's divine Lord and as the inheritor of David's authority through lineage. It is the former that sets him above the popular expectation that the Christ will be a descendant of David (see 20:41; the Note on 20:42).

Analysis

The solution to the scriptural dilemma that the Savior sets before his hearers resolves two competing views of the coming Messiah held in the Judaism of his day, namely, an earthly Messiah who descends from David (see 20:41; the Note on 3:16) in contrast to a heavenly personality such as the

88. *TDOT*, 1:59–72; 5:500–21; *TLOT*, 1:23–29; 2:522–26.

89. *TDNT*, 3:441–42.

90. *TDNT*, 2:39–40.

91. *TDNT*, 6:626–30.

Son of Man (see 20:42; the Notes on 5:24; 9:22).⁹² He is both. A helpful way to recast Jesus' question is, "If the Messiah is David's Lord, how is he David's son?" rather than "If the Messiah is David's son, how is he David's Lord?"⁹³ If we accept the first form of the question, then we acknowledge that Jesus is David's Lord long before he appears on earth (see 1:76; 2:11). To be sure, Jesus' resurrection brings him onto center stage as Messiah and Lord, a point that Luke records later (see the Notes on 24:5, 26; Acts 2:32–36).⁹⁴ But the resurrection is only one of the decisive moments in Jesus' long, personal history that makes him Lord and God, as modern scripture illustrates (see the Notes on 3:5, 15; 4:22; 20:41–42, 44; 22:32; the Analysis on 6:1–5; Ether 3:14; D&C 93:7–10; Moses 1:6; 4:1–4; also John 1:1–5, 10; etc.).

BEWARE OF THE SCRIBES (20:45–47)

(Compare Matt. 23:1–36; Mark 12:38–40)

King James Translation

45 Then in the audience of all the people he said unto his disciples, 46 Beware of the scribes, which desire to walk in long robes, and love greetings in the markets, and the highest seats in the synagogues, and the chief rooms at feasts; 47 Which devour widows' houses, and for a shew make long prayers: the same shall receive greater damnation.

New Rendition

45 While all the people were listening, he said to his disciples, 46 "Beware of the scribes who like to walk around in long robes, and who love greetings in the marketplace and the chief seats in the synagogue and places of honor at dinners. 47 They are those who devour the homes of widows and, for any pretext, say long-lasting prayers. These will receive a greater punishment."

Notes

20:45 *all the people*: Luke lets readers know of Jesus' broadened audience, repeating the Greek term *laos*, "people," to distinguish these listeners from

92. Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 1:208–10; Brown, "Man and Son of Man," 57–72; Brown and Holzapfel, *Lost 500 Years*, 145–51.

93. Marshall, *Luke*, 745.

94. Marshall, *Luke*, 745–46.

leaders.⁹⁵ In front of a large audience, Jesus does not withhold criticism. He knows that, in angry response, the scribes will seek a deadly occasion against him. It is as if he is goading them to make a decision about him, as some already have (see 20:39).

20:46 *the scribes:* These people, called “lawyers” elsewhere (see 11:45–46), do not inherit their roles or positions, as priests do. But they are inheritors of a long literate tradition and work hard to master the Mosaic law, a crucial function in legal hearings and the like. In their authoritative self-importance, they make pretensions to be a cut above the rest of society.⁹⁶

long robes: The garment (Greek *stolē*) has been understood either as a *tallith* that is worn as an outer garment or as a cloak worn especially on Sabbath days.⁹⁷ In Jesus’ words, ostentatious clothing is out.

greetings in the markets: Earlier, Jesus links this characteristic to the scribes’ associates, the Pharisees (see 11:43). At issue is whether the scribe is greeted first, a gratifying sign of deference from another person. The noun translated “greeting” (Greek *aspasmos*) conveys this exact sense.⁹⁸ In contrast, Jesus’ representatives are to offer their greeting first, for example, when entering a home (see 10:5; the Note on 11:43).

the highest seats: Jesus again alludes to synagogue architecture wherein “the highest seats,” more properly “the foremost seats” (Greek *prōtokathedria*),⁹⁹ are reserved for important people as both archaeology and written sources affirm (see the Notes on 4:20; 6:8; 11:43).¹⁰⁰

chief rooms at feasts: On an earlier occasion of a Sabbath meal, Jesus offers a mild rebuke to people who seek to recline in the places of honor when dining as guests (see the Note on 14:7).

20:47 *devour widows’ houses:* These words form the most damning of Jesus’ criticisms. No one knows exactly what lies behind his concern because he does not say more. But four relevant matters rise into view. The first has to do with the Mosaic prohibition that Israelites not purchase property belonging to people outside the family. Under law, no person is to speculate in real estate because such property is deemed an inheritance

95. BAGD, 467–68; TDNT, 4:34, 51; TLNT, 2:373; Marshall, *Luke*, 749.

96. Bruce, *New Testament History*, 78–81; Brown and Holzapfel, *Lost 500 Years*, 119.

97. TDNT, 7:687–91; Marshall, *Luke*, 750; Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 2:1317–18.

98. TDNT, 1:496–99; Marshall, *Luke*, 498–99.

99. BAGD, 732.

100. Schürer, *History*, 2:441–43; Meyers, “Synagogue,” 6:253–55; Levine, *Ancient Synagogue*, 185–86, 337–41.

from God (see Ex. 20:17; Lev. 25:23; Deut. 19:14; Isa. 5:8).¹⁰¹ In a vivid reminder, the prophet Micah lays accusation against those who “covet fields . . . and houses” and force “the women of my people . . . from their pleasant houses” (Micah 2:2, 9). Second, Jesus’ words acknowledge a problem within the society that needs fixing (see the Notes on 21:23; 23:28). The mistreatment of widows is an old problem, as other prophetic complaints show (see Isa. 1:17, 23; 10:2; Jer. 7:6; Zech. 7:10; etc.), and a proper response to their plight remains a concern in the early church (see Acts 6:1; 1 Tim. 5:3; James 1:27; also D&C 83:1–6). In fact, in coming generations, Jewish authorities will enact legislation to protect and regularize inheritance laws for widows. Still, these women are at times vulnerable to greedy family members, as the documented attempts to wrest a widow’s properties that lie near the Dead Sea confirm.¹⁰² Third, Jesus’ pointer to ill-treated widows raises into view his concern for families, particularly families in distress or difficult circumstances, because the Old Testament has always associated the well-being of widows with the fatherless and orphans, insisting in places that mistreatment of widows and the fatherless will bring a violator into the punishing hands of God (see Deut. 10:18; 14:29; Ps. 146:9; Jer. 22:3–7; Ezek. 22:7; etc.).¹⁰³ Fourth, the fact that Jesus appeals to a statute in the law of Moses illumines his respect for that law code as a series of divine enactments that are to govern one’s life (see the introduction to chapter 1; the Notes on 1:6; 4:16; 5:14; 16:16–17; 17:14; Ex. 22:22; Deut. 24:17; 27:19). Incidentally, this charge is the only one Jesus levels against the scribes that is more than hypocrisy (see the Note on 11:52).

for a shew make long prayers: In the most unkind critique, Jesus decries the hypocrisy of a scribe’s “show” of importance that manifests itself in strutting about in pious clothing, in receiving flattering greetings, and in taking up the visible, influential spots at public gatherings (see 20:46). But Jesus piles on the criticism: all of this show of prestige is capped off by “long prayers” that, tragically for the individual, lead nowhere. Public religious actions form the most despicable among justifications for inflated self-importance (see the Notes on 18:11–14).

101. Falk, *Hebrew Law in Biblical Times*, 83–87.

102. *Mishnah Ketuboth* 4:12; 11:1–6; 12:3–4; *Gittin* 5:1, 3; Yadin, *Bar-Kokhba*, 247–49; Johnson, *Luke*, 269; for widows’ troubles in neighboring Egypt, see Bagnall, *Egypt in Late Antiquity*, 95, 98–99.

103. *TDOT*, 15:140.

Analysis

The Savior's complaint centers on the self-importance of authority and achievement that gives off the noxious odors of high-handed, backroom dealings. This human characteristic of self-aggrandizement has no place in his kingdom. In its place stands humility, draped in the modest robes of hard, honest work, and perfumed by the disciplined yet reassuring aromas of integrity. In another setting, with the devil looking on, Jesus turns his back on worldly importance and flashy gimmicks that might draw attention to himself (see 4:5–12). His words about the scribes illustrate that he still holds to this course for himself as well as for his followers.

More than this, Jesus' deep well of compassion for the downtrodden and vulnerable opens beneath our feet, inviting us to drink with him from its waters, sharing his concerns and acting as he does to lift the burdens of these people, especially women, in this case widows. We need think only of his efforts for the widow of Nain and the woman afflicted long with an issue of blood (see 7:11–16; 8:43–48). But pointing to these gracious acts of Jesus does not exhaust the catalogue of his generosity. The scented fragrances of a sweetly perfumed compassion that seeks the welfare of others follow in his wake throughout his entire ministry. What is recorded about the public part of his ministry now comes to a close.