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Luke Chapter 23

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Abstract: A commentary on the events of Luke 23, accompanied by parallel columns of the King James translation of the chapter alongside a new rendition.



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Luke Chapter 23

INTRODUCTION

The Savior, with his hands bound, walks steadily, willingly toward his crucifixion and burial. He begins the day in the rough hands of his Jewish accusers. Before sundown, his lifeless body will rest in the loving hands of Jewish admirers. In between, he will be subjected to miscarried justice at the hands of Romans. What he experiences during this hard day of days becomes very bruising, pummeling him with unimagined physical discomfort and pain. The unutterable anguish that he experiences earlier at Gethsemane, of course, compounds and adds to his unquenchable, deep ache. But he trudges on, facing it all for us.

As the chapter opens, Jesus is forced to walk to the temporary residence of the Roman prefect, Pontius Pilate. This residence is likely King Herod's palace that he builds years before on the west side of the city. In Pilate's presence, the Jewish authorities accuse Jesus of pretending to royal prerogatives and titles. Part of their justification may be that, while riding into Jerusalem a week before, Jesus accepts accolades that he is "a King" (19:38), thereby "perverting the [Jewish] nation." What is more, say his accusers in a spate of hyperbole, he threatens the power of Rome itself by "forbidding [citizens] to give tribute [owed] to Caesar" (23:2). Clearly, the Jewish authorities stack as much weight onto their accusations as they can. But in doing so, they draw down upon their own heads the guilt of misrepresentation, effectively lying to help God (see D&C 10:28).

To his credit, Pilate resists the authorities' efforts to make a quick kill of their prisoner. But his stance is not enough to free Jesus. In an effort to push matters forward, Jesus' detractors stride over to Herod Antipas's palace and "vehemently accused him" (23:10). But Herod finds nothing worthy of death. Thus, Luke establishes Jesus' innocence in the responses of two Roman officials. But at the moment when matters should turn in Jesus' favor, they turn in a different direction. After Jesus is escorted back to Pilate,

the prefect decides that the Jewish authorities are too worked up about the prisoner and determines that he will “chastise [Jesus], and release him” (23:16). But the authorities and their associates begin to howl for Jesus’ blood. They demand that Pilate release a prisoner as custom requires at Passover time—not Jesus but Barabbas, an insurrectionist whose name ironically means “son of the father” (see 23:17–19; the Note on 23:18). The request must give Pilate pause. If he agrees, he puts a known criminal back onto the streets of the city. Further, the request discloses to Pilate how utterly deep and wide the accusers’ hatred of Jesus truly runs. After a third and fourth effort to reason with them, Pilate caves in. Jesus will die.

But even as the battered and bruised Jesus stumbles weakly to his death and as he hangs on the cross, he is still reaching out to those who will listen. To the people of the city, through its women, he warns them to be watchful of evil days that are coming when they will “weep for [themselves], and for [their] children” (23:28). In counterbalance to this dark scene, to one of the felons crucified with him he mercifully promises that “To day shalt thou be with me in paradise” (23:43).

Ironically, the title of this chapter could be “Kingship misunderstood.” At every turn, Jesus is acknowledged to be king. But it is clear that those who speak of him in this way do so insincerely or without faith. Thus, the whole account brims with irony. Even small details point in the direction of Jesus’ kingship. For instance, Simon of Cyrene assists Jesus in carrying his cross, as if he were a royal slave (see 23:26). In his interview with Herod Antipas, Jesus clearly outranks him because he controls the conversation (see 23:8–11; the Note on 23:9). Herod’s soldiers dress Jesus in a “gorgeous robe” that reminds us of royalty (23:11). Later other soldiers make fun of him, saying, “If thou be the king of the Jews, save thyself” (23:37). Finally, Pilate authorizes a sign in three languages to be hung to the effect that Jesus “is the King of the Jews” (23:38). Jesus’ royalty drips from the verses in this chapter, but it goes unheeded.

THE FIRST HEARING BEFORE PILATE (23:1–7)

(Compare Matt. 27:1–2, 11–14; Mark 15:1–5;
John 18:28–37)

King James Translation

1 And the whole multitude of them
arose, and led him unto Pilate.

New Rendition

1 And arising, the whole multitude of
them led him to Pilate.

2 And they began to accuse him, saying, We found this fellow perverting the nation, and forbidding to give tribute to Cæsar, saying that he himself is Christ a King. 3 And Pilate asked him, saying, Art thou the King of the Jews? And he answered him and said, Thou sayest it. 4 Then said Pilate to the chief priests and to the people, I find no fault in this man. 5 And they were the more fierce, saying, He stirreth up the people, teaching throughout all Jewry, beginning from Galilee to this place.

6 When Pilate heard of Galilee, he asked whether the man were a Galilæan. 7 And as soon as he knew that he belonged unto Herod's jurisdiction, he sent him to Herod, who himself also was at Jerusalem at that time.

2 And they began to accuse him saying, "We found this man misleading our nation, and forbidding to give taxes to Caesar, and declaring himself to be Christ, a King." 3 And Pilate asked him saying, "Are you the King of the Jews?" And answering, he said to him, "You say it." 4 And Pilate said to the chief priests and the crowd, "I find nothing blameworthy in this man." 5 But they kept pressing, saying, "He stirs up the people, teaching throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee even as far as this place."

6 And Pilate, hearing this, asked if the man was Galilean. 7 And upon learning that he was from the jurisdiction of Herod, Pilate sent him to Herod, he also being in Jerusalem in those days.

Notes

23:1 *the whole multitude of them:* Readers gather the impression that the entire Sanhedrin accompanies the bound Jesus to Pilate's quarters. Mark reports that "all the chief priests and the elders and the scribes" are present at the prior hearing (Mark 14:53). Evidently, Joseph of Arimathæa joins them (see 23:51). But Luke does not report specifically that all council members gather in its chambers (see 22:66).

arose: Likely with a touch of irony, Luke writes the Greek verb *anistēmi* that, in its intransitive sense, also means to resurrect (see 24:7, 46; the Notes on 9:8; 11:32; 18:33).¹

led him: The verb is the same as in 22:54 (Greek *agō*) and, as in that passage, conveys the sense of hostile intent (see 4:9, 29; 19:27; 21:12; 23:32). The verb can also carry a positive meaning (see 4:1, 40; 18:40; 19:30, 35).² Prophecy envisions this scene, particularly Isaiah where we find the same verb, in the passive voice, in the Septuagint rendering of Isaiah 53:7–8, "he was led as a sheep . . . he was led to death" (see the Note on 22:54; also 1 Ne. 11:32; Mosiah 15:7).³

1. Liddell and Scott, *Lexicon*, 144; BAGD, 69; *TDNT*, 1:368–71.

2. BAGD, 14.

3. Brown, "Arrest," 170–171.

unto Pilate: This person is Pontius Pilate, Roman prefect (Latin *praefectus*) from AD 26 to 36 (see the Note on 3:1).⁴ Because of the note in John 18:31 that the Jewish legal system is restricted from executing prisoners, most assume that the authorities take Jesus to Pilate because he possesses that power and they do not, although this last point about Jewish legal power remains in dispute.⁵ Where do the accusers lead Jesus? We usually think of Herod's magnificent palace at the northwest corner of the walled city. If Pilate takes up residence there during festivals, and he has a right to do so, then we have to wonder where Herod Antipas stays when he is in town—and he is in town (see 23:7). To be sure, his father builds the palace and therefore we assume that Antipas has a right to reside there whenever he comes to Jerusalem. But the enmity between Pilate and Antipas may mean that one of them stays at the former Hasmonean palace, which belongs to Herod's family,⁶ or in lesser quarters, the Antonia Fortress (see 23:12).

23:2 they began to accuse: Luke omits mention of any formalities that Jewish authorities are obliged to undergo when coming to the prefect such as remaining outside a place inhabited by Gentiles (see John 18:28–31).

saying: The person who enunciates the charges must be addressing Pilate in Greek, for that is a language the prefect understands as an educated Roman.

We found: The repetition of the verb translated “to find” in the mouths of the accusers and Pilate (see 23:4, 14, 22), with vastly different results, highlights Jesus' innocence in the eyes of Roman authority.⁷

perverting the nation: Many genuinely hold this sentiment, believing that Jesus puts himself forward as a national savior but only causes trouble (see 19:39; 23:3). The verb (Greek *diastrephō*) generally means “to twist, to confuse” (see Acts. 13:8, 10; 20:30).⁸ The best manuscripts read “our nation,” illustrating that accusers base their charge on Jewish interests, not Roman (see 7:5). But this charge is very general (see 23:5) and leads to its

4. Schürer, *History*, 1:383–87; Schwartz, “Pontius Pilate,” 5:395–401; Eric D. Huntsman, “Before the Romans,” in Holzapfel and Wayment, *From the Last Supper through the Resurrection*, 280–85.

5. Pike, “Before the Jewish Authorities,” 258–65; Huntsman, “Before the Romans,” 287–91.

6. Josephus, *B.J.* 2.16.3 (§344); Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 2:1481.

7. Green, *Luke*, 810–11.

8. *TDNT*, 7:717–19.

two specific parts that the accusers frame in their next words—urging a default of the tribute and claiming to be a king.⁹

forbidding to give tribute: Only a few days before, the authorities send “spies” who query Jesus specifically about paying taxes to Caesar (20:20–22). Even though they know Jesus’ answer, they distort it in the first of their specific charges against him. Modern scripture carries a warning against such behavior: “wo be unto him that lieth to deceive because he supposeth that another lieth to deceive” (D&C 10:28; see John 15:21—“these things will they do . . . because they know not him that sent me”).

Christ a King: This expression reflects one of the current views of the Messiah, that he would be a king.¹⁰ The accusers inflate this charge with a political dimension that, left unchallenged, threatens Rome.¹¹ See 23:37 where supernatural power is thought to attend this king (see also 23:38; the Notes on 2:11; 19:38).

23:3 Art thou the King of the Jews?: Only in Luke is Pilate prepped to ask this question because of the charges leveled against Jesus (see 23:2). In the other accounts, Pilate asks his question more or less out of the blue (see Matt. 27:11; Mark 15:2; John 18:33). On another level, this question is one for the ages. Unwittingly, Pilate hits the mark. In another vein, none of the accounts report that an interpreter stands between Pilate and Jesus because Jesus evidently knows Greek, a language that Pilate, an educated Roman, also knows (see the Notes on 2:39; 22:59; 23:2).

Thou sayest: Jesus’ response mirrors that in 22:70, this one in the singular and the earlier instance in the plural. Importantly, in neither case does he deny his status, although he understands the meaning of the terms “Son of God” and “King of the Jews” very differently.¹²

23:4 to the chief priests and to the people: Luke writes this notation about Pilate’s audience as if told from the prefect’s point of view. Pilate does not know the people who stand before him except, perhaps, the prominent chief priests. He visits Jerusalem only occasionally, during festivals.

I find no fault: By quoting Pilate’s judgment, Luke openly affirms Jesus’ innocence. Moreover, in effect, the inaction of Herod Antipas and the

9. Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 2:1475.

10. Pike, “Before the Jewish Authorities,” 244; Brown and Holzapfel, *Lost 500 Years*, 145–51.

11. Morris, *Luke*, 348.

12. Morris, *Luke*, 347–48.

judgment of the friendly malefactor will also underline Jesus' blamelessness (see 23:8–11, 41).

23:5 they were the more fierce: The basic sense of the Greek verb *epischuō* in its intransitive form is “to grow strong.”¹³ Here the verb stands in the imperfect tense, indicating relentless, repeated action.¹⁴

He stirreth up the people: The Greek verb *anaseiō*, in its transitive sense, means to move something violently, as in an earthquake. Here it carries the sense of stirring crowds in “almost riotous incitement.”¹⁵

throughout all Jewry: Properly translated, the phrase should read “throughout all Judea,” a geographical reference rather than an ethnic one.¹⁶ This claim may be important for grasping that authorities in Jerusalem view Galilee as an extension of their Judean territory.

to this place: Literally, the phrase means “to here.”¹⁷ The authorities may be alluding to the triumphal entry into the city.¹⁸ Behind this expression lies another hint that Jesus and his disciples visit Jerusalem more than this one time, not just for this Passover season (see the Notes on 10:30, 38; 13:1, 34; 19:47; 22:9; 23:5, 28, 50; 24:13; the Analysis on 22:7–13).¹⁹ The frustration of authorities with Jesus seems to run deeper than one visit might produce.

23:6 a Galilaean: Although Jesus' Jewish accusers know that Jesus comes from Galilee, and as native speakers of Aramaic they know his accent (see 22:59 and Matt. 26:73 on Peter's accent), Pilate does not know Jesus' origin on this basis because, from all appearances, the conversation between the two takes place in Greek. None of the Gospel writers record that an interpreter stands between Jesus and Pilate (see the Note on 2:39). Notably, up to this point, Jesus' activities do not bring him to the notice of Pilate. Simply stated, he is unimportant to the Romans. This observation explains why Pilate seems surprised at Jesus' case. Only in this scene does Pilate begin to learn who Jesus is, mostly through the mouth of the Savior's enemies.

23:7 Herod's jurisdiction: This man is Herod Antipas, a son of Herod the Great. He comes to power as a young man and his lifetime more than

13. Liddell and Scott, *Lexicon*, 663; BAGD, 302.

14. Smyth, *Greek Grammar*, §§1790, 1890–94, 2341; Blass and Debrunner, *Greek Grammar*, §§327, 325.

15. *TDNT*, 7:198.

16. Plummer, *Luke*, 521.

17. Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 2:1476.

18. Plummer, *Luke*, 521.

19. Plummer, *Luke*, 290: “from a short visit to Jerusalem which Lk. does not mention”; 521: “it may also refer to previous visits of Jesus to the city.”

spans that of Jesus. He is a tetrarch whose area of responsibility is Galilee, the section of land that extends west of the Sea of Galilee (see 8:3; 9:7, 9; 13:31; the Notes on 3:1, 19).²⁰

at Jerusalem at that time: Known to Luke, these phrases hint at the palpable tension between Herod Antipas and Pilate (see 23:12). One of the pieces of this scene has to do with where these two Roman appointees stay when they are both in the city. Such residences stand on the affluent upper west side, the place of the grand palace that Antipas’s father builds, the old Hasmonean palace, and the Antonia Fortress.²¹ This fortress is the least spacious and least desirable. Because Pilate, the prefect, outranks Antipas, the tetrarch, he most likely gets first choice (see the Note on 23:1).

Analysis

The divine necessity that hangs over the Savior now comes to further, deeper fulfillment. Earlier Jesus intones that he “must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders and chief priests and scribes” (9:22). Since his arrest, this humiliation has been ongoing. In addition, as part of his suffering, “he shall be delivered unto the Gentiles, and shall be mocked, and spitefully entreated” (18:32). It is the necessity expressed in the verb “must” (Greek *dei*) that undergirds this and the previous scenes (see the Notes on 9:22 and 19:5). Jesus’ experience not only forms an integral part of the divine plan that *must* go forward but also offers salvation to men and women everywhere.²²

Luke alone records the charges that authorities bring against the Savior in Pilate’s presence, intimating that he acquires his information by interviewing a person present at the trial. The other Gospels do preserve a hint of the charges when they report the same first question from Pilate, “Art thou the King of the Jews?” (Matt. 27:11; Mark 15:2; John 18:33). But they give no account of the Jewish authorities raising accusations that prepare Pilate to ask such a question. For his part, Luke quotes the accusers as hissing: “We found this fellow perverting the nation, and forbidding to give tribute to Caesar, saying that he himself is Christ a King” (23:2). When Pilate finds little weight in their charges, they push harder: “He stirreth up the people . . . from Galilee to this place,” painting Jesus as a national threat because of his “teaching” (23:5). We readily sense that they know their accusations

20. Aharoni and others, *Carta Bible Atlas*, maps 223, 231.

21. Josephus, *A.J.* 15.9.3 (§318); Josephus, *B.J.* 1.21.1 (§402); 2.16.3 (§344); 2:17.6 (§426); Bahat, *Illustrated Atlas of Jerusalem*, 57.

22. *TDNT*, 2:22–25; Green, *Luke*, 798.

lack substance; they are now beginning to grasp at straws. Moreover, Luke's characterization of their response to Pilate as "more fierce" points not to Jesus as one who stirs up "the people" but to the authorities (23:5).²³

But the untamed response of Jesus' accusers to Pilate's dismissive "I find no fault in this man" (23:4) leaves the prefect himself grasping at straws. What to do? Then the authorities unknowingly hand him a possible solution.²⁴ Jesus is from Galilee, they say. Pilate concludes: Let's send the prisoner to Herod Antipas, the tetrarch of Galilee, and get rid of this problem or, at least, learn whether he finds this Galilean innocent or guilty of some crime in his territory.²⁵ In this connection, Luke alone will record the hearing before Antipas (see 23:8–12).

Thus far, Luke establishes Jesus' innocence through two devices. The first has to do with the authorities' accusations before Pilate. They differ completely from their findings in the hearing before the council (see 22:66–71). Luke thereby exposes their charges as creative lies, especially the charge that Jesus forbids "to give tribute to Caesar" (23:2) because Luke records for his readers Jesus' earlier words about this very issue (see 20:21–25). Luke's second prong comes from Pilate's declaration, "I find no fault in this man" (23:4). Effectively and consistently, as we shall see, Roman justice declares Jesus innocent.²⁶

This initial hearing before Pilate does not last long. To be sure, Luke is abbreviating as he writes, and the conversation between the prefect and Jesus' accusers is surely filled with innuendo and spiteful language, certainly on the accusers' side. In Luke's reckoning, the earlier hearing before Jewish authorities takes place soon after sunrise (see 22:66). The accusers arrive as a group with their prisoner at Pilate's temporary residence perhaps about eight o'clock in the morning, not at sunrise as hinted in the other accounts (see Matt. 27:1; Mark 15:1; John 18:28). Because Jesus will be crucified about noon, "about the sixth hour" (23:44; Matt. 27:45; Mark 15:33), the hearing before Herod Antipas will last only an hour at most. Counting the time for the crowd to walk to and from his temporary residence, also on the upper west side of town,²⁷ Jesus and his accusers will arrive back at Pilate's residence about ten thirty or so, allowing

23. Green, *Luke*, 802.

24. Marshall, *Luke*, 854.

25. Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 2:1480; Morris, *Luke*, 350.

26. Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 2:1473–74, 1480.

27. Josephus, *B.J.* 1.21.1 (§402); 2.16.3 (§344).

another hour for the second hearing before Pilate (see 23:13–25). Because of the notations of time in the other accounts, these accounts indicate that the hearing before Pilate lasts from about six thirty to eleven thirty in the morning, a very long time. Luke seems to set out the events of that fateful morning in a more compact, accurate manner.

THE HEARING BEFORE HEROD ANTIPAS (23:8–12)

King James Translation

8 And when Herod saw Jesus, he was exceeding glad: for he was desirous to see him of a long season, because he had heard many things of him; and he hoped to have seen some miracle done by him. 9 Then he questioned with him in many words; but he answered him nothing. 10 And the chief priests and scribes stood and vehemently accused him. 11 And Herod with his men of war set him at nought, and mocked him, and arrayed him in a gorgeous robe, and sent him again to Pilate. 12 And the same day Pilate and Herod were made friends together: for before they were at enmity between themselves.

New Rendition

8 And Herod, seeing Jesus, rejoiced greatly because, for a considerable time, he desired to see him because of what he had heard about him. And he hoped to see some miracle performed by him. 9 And he kept questioning him with many words, but he answered him nothing. 10 And the chief priests and scribes stood by, vehemently accusing him. 11 And Herod with his guards treated him with contempt and, mocking him, they put splendid clothing on him and sent him to Pilate. 12 And Herod and Pilate became friends with one another on that day. For previously they were hostile to each other.

Notes

23:8 when Herod saw Jesus: These two men reside in the same Galilean territory for the entire length of Jesus' life and, before this moment, Jesus' fame reaches Herod Antipas's ears (see 9:7–9). Yet they meet for the first and only time in Jerusalem.

desirous to see him: The apparent fact that Herod Antipas seeks Jesus' death on an earlier occasion (see 13:31) touches the following scene. Antipas will find no cause for Jesus' death in the accusations of the authorities, firmly underscoring Jesus' innocence.

he had heard: Herod knows about Jesus, but news of his miraculous powers, exercised mainly in Galilee, does not reach Pilate (see the Note on 23:6).

many things: This term is missing from the earliest manuscript, \mathfrak{P}^{75} , and other early texts.

some miracle: The Greek noun *sēmeion* is usually translated “sign,” in both good and bad senses, and deals with miracles or spectacular events (see 2:12, 34; 11:30; 21:11; the Notes on 11:16, 29; 21:7, 25). Herod thus fits the stereotype of a sign seeker (see 11:16, 29–30).

23:9 he questioned with him in many words: The verb translated “questioned” (Greek *eperōtaō*) stands in the imperfect tense, indicating that Herod asks questions for a long time, even while Jesus is silent, raising Herod’s ire.²⁸ Such a summary of Jesus’ interview with Herod Antipas shows that neither Luke nor his sources know the exact words of the exchange in Herod’s quarters. It is apparently beyond the abilities of Jesus’ followers to learn more than an outline of the conversation. Perhaps Joanna, “the wife of Chuza Herod’s steward,” who is in town (8:3; 24:10), gathers the information at the palace, although we cannot be certain.²⁹ Of course, Jesus can tell them about this interview after the resurrection, during his forty-day ministry (see Acts 1:3).

he answered him nothing: Clearly, Jesus is in charge of this interview. He exercises his control by saying nothing when faced by his demanding royal superior and surrounded by hostile accusers and soldiers (see 23:10–11; Isa. 53:7).³⁰

23:10 the chief priests and scribes: The list does not match exactly those reproduced in 22:52 and 22:66. But Luke knows this fact. Hence, we should see him as noting here the prominent persons with the understanding that the others are also present. Presumably two or three of these men serve as speakers. Because of the early hour, “the people” (23:13) are not yet present.

stood: It seems that the appropriate stance of an accuser, especially the accused, before a judge, in this case Herod Antipas, is to stand, much as we find in Paul’s experience (see Acts 25:10, 18; 26:6).³¹

vehemently: Luke writes a series of terms, here in translation, that underline in dark hues the unrestrained determination of Jesus’ accusers to bring about his execution: “more fierce” (23:5); “cried out” (23:18); “loud voices” (23:23).

28. Smyth, *Greek Grammar*, §§1790, 1890–94, 2341; Blass and Debrunner, *Greek Grammar*, §§327, 325.

29. Plummer, *Luke*, 522.

30. Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 2:1480.

31. *TDNT*, 7:652.

23:11 Herod with his men: When Jesus performs no miracle to slake Herod's thirst for a magical display, Herod loses interest in Jesus and the case against him, instead joining his bodyguards in humiliating the prisoner.³²

set him at nought, and mocked him: The response of Herod and his bodyguards to Jesus' silence is the same as that of those who surround Pilate and will "chastise" Jesus (23:16, 22), and those who will see to Jesus' execution (see 23:36). The Greek verb *exoutheneō* that is translated "to set at nought" means "to despise" and is joined here with two other verbs, all in participial form of the past tense, that "express the supreme contempt and mistreatment of Jesus" (see also 22:63–64).³³

arrayed him in a gorgeous robe: Only Luke preserves this detail. Why? Perhaps it is because he alone records the incident with Herod and, in his source, it is a part of that story. The word translated "gorgeous" (Greek *lampra*) means "shining" or "radiant," possibly indicating that the garment is white in contrast to Jesus' own clothing, which is surely soiled with blood (see 22:44).³⁴ We compare a similar note about the proceedings before Pilate in Mark 15:17, Matthew 27:28, and John 19:2, wherein Jesus' captors dress him in a purple robe in a mocking display of obeisance before royalty. Modern scripture brings the radiant and purple images together: "Who is this that cometh down . . . with dyed garments . . . clothed in his glorious apparel?" (D&C 133:46).

23:12 were made friends together: Even though Jesus is a prisoner, might he be the force for reconciling these two men, illustrating his quiet, ongoing influence? Impossible? See the Notes on 6:12, 28; 22:51.

at enmity: Neither Luke nor any other ancient source offers the reason for the frosty relationship between Pilate and Antipas. Perhaps it is Pilate's execution of Galileans at the temple (see 13:1); perhaps it is Pilate's installation of inscribed golden shields in the palace of Antipas's father in Jerusalem, which draws a protest sent evidently from Antipas and his brothers to the emperor Tiberius, who forces Pilate to remove them from the city.³⁵

32. Morris, *Luke*, 350–51.

33. BAGD, 277; the quotation is from Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 2:1482.

34. BAGD, 467; *TDNT*, 4:27.

35. Philo, *The Embassy to Gaius* 38 (§§299–305); Schürer, *History*, 1:343; Marshall, *Luke*, 857.

Analysis

Although the Savior stands as a prisoner before the tetrarch of Galilee, Herod Antipas, surrounded by enemies who “vehemently accused him” (23:10), he exudes the power of the one in charge. Even in the old Hasmonean palace, with its impressive trappings and intimidating surroundings, Antipas’s constant questioning “in many words” (23:9) does not push Jesus into defending himself. Instead, he remains silent, effectively allowing events to play out and, not incidentally, to exhibit his innocence. After all, during the prior evening he places himself in a spot, Gethsemane, where Judas and the arresting party will surely find him (see 21:37; 22:39–40; Matt. 26:36; Mark 14:32; also John 18:1). Hence, it is Jesus who starts the process that carries him to the hearings before both Jewish and Roman officials.

Among the Gospel records, Luke’s account alone reports the scene with Herod Antipas. Its effects are twofold. First, it breaks up the hearing before Pilate in not only a literary but also a historical sense, adding texture and depth to Luke’s portrayal of Jesus’ aroused accusers as they rush from Pilate to Antipas and back again. Second, Luke establishes Jesus’ innocence in the eyes of Rome. Two of Rome’s representatives, Antipas and Pilate, conclude that Jesus’ case does not lead to serious consequences for him under Roman law (see 23:14–15). Instead, he is to be beaten, released, and the charges dropped (see 23:16, 22). But more than anyone, Jesus knows that he will not be released, as he has been telling his disciples throughout most of his ministry (see the Note on 9:22).

Many suggest that Psalm 2:1–2 lies behind these events, shaping the way that Luke reports them. To be sure, we cannot brush away the possibility that Luke may fall under the influence of this passage, as many claim.³⁶ But no substantial reason exists to show that the language and order of Psalm 2:1–2 undergirds or inspires Luke’s record even though Luke later cites these verses in connection with the hearings before Pilate and Herod (see Acts 4:25–28).³⁷ Instead, the scene with Antipas strikes the notes of historical authenticity.

36. Bultmann, *History*, 273; Beare, *Earliest Records of Jesus*, 235.

37. Marshall, *Luke*, 854–55; Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 2:1478–79.

THE SECOND HEARING BEFORE PILATE (23:13–26)

(Compare Matt. 27:15–32; Mark 15:6–21; John 18:38–19:16)

King James Translation

13 And Pilate, when he had called together the chief priests and the rulers and the people, 14 Said unto them, Ye have brought this man unto me, as one that perverteth the people: and, behold, I, having examined him before you, have found no fault in this man touching those things whereof ye accuse him: 15 No, nor yet Herod: for I sent you to him; and, lo, nothing worthy of death is done unto him. 16 I will therefore chastise him, and release him. 17 (For of necessity he must release one unto them at the feast.)

18 And they cried out all at once, saying, Away with this man, and release unto us Barabbas: 19 (Who for a certain sedition made in the city, and for murder, was cast into prison.) 20 Pilate therefore, willing to release Jesus, spake again to them. 21 But they cried, saying, Crucify him, crucify him. 22 And he said unto them the third time, Why, what evil hath he done? I have found no cause of death in him: I will therefore chastise him, and let him go. 23 And they were instant with loud voices, requiring that he might be crucified. And the voices of them and of the chief priests prevailed.

24 And Pilate gave sentence that it should be as they required. 25 And he released unto them him that for sedition and murder was cast into prison, whom they had desired; but he delivered Jesus to their will.

New Rendition

13 And Pilate, calling together the chief priests and the leaders and the people, 14 said to them, “You brought this man to me as one perverting the people. And behold, after investigating before you, I found in this man none of the offense of which you accuse him. 15 But neither did Herod; for he sent him to us. And behold, nothing worthy of death has been committed by him. 16 Therefore, after chastising him I will release him.”

18 And they cried aloud all together, saying, “Take this man away, but release to us Barabbas!” 19 (Who was, on account of a certain insurrection which happened in the city, and murder, thrown into prison.) 20 But Pilate again addressed them, desiring to release Jesus. 21 But they shouted out, saying, “Crucify, Crucify him!” 22 And a third time he said to them, “What evil did this man do? I found nothing worthy of death in him. Therefore, after chastising him, I will release him.” 23 But those calling to crucify him kept pressing with great shouts, and their voices prevailed.

24 And Pilate decided that their demand be granted. 25 He released the one cast into prison on account of insurrection and murder, whom they were asking for, and he handed over Jesus to their will.

26 And as they led him away, after taking hold of Simon, who was a Cyrenian coming from the country, they

26 And as they led him away, they laid upon him the cross to bear behind
 laid hold upon one Simon, a Cyrenian, Jesus.
 coming out of the country, and on him
 they laid the cross, that he might bear it
 after Jesus.

Notes

23:13 *when he had called together:* The Jewish authorities enjoy access to Pilate, but only as he permits. Here he summons them to see him again, probably at their insistence.

the people: According to 22:66 and 23:1, only the members of the Sanhedrin “council” are assembled in a body to accuse Jesus. Evidently, as the morning wears on, others join the authorities and do not remain neutral, raising their voices too in demanding Jesus’ death (see 23:23).

23:14 *perverteth the people:* The charge, as Pilate restates it, has to be that Jesus is misleading people or perhaps is seditious (see 23:2). But Pilate judges that this charge does not hold up and therefore is willing to free Jesus. In effect, Pilate shrinks the accusers’ charges against Jesus into this one category (see 23:2). By doing so, he momentarily opens the door to Jesus’ freedom. But when he mentions releasing Jesus, the authorities take up the cry for releasing Barabbas, not giving up until Pilate condemns Jesus (see 23:18, 23–24). In other words, Pilate will condemn Jesus to die on grounds that he himself at first dismisses. He instead allows the hateful voices of the Jerusalem authorities to make his decision (see 23:23–24). This reason is flimsy indeed. John records that the element that changes Pilate’s mind is the threat by authorities that they will expose him as one who does not take seriously the task of crushing pretenders to Caesar’s power (see John 19:12).

behold, I: The pronoun *egō* (“I”) is emphatic and anticipates Pilate’s reference to Herod as joining him in judging Jesus to be innocent (see 23:15), that is, “both I and Herod.”³⁸

examined him before you: This scene of examining Jesus is missing in Luke’s report, showing that he or his source is abbreviating.³⁹ More importantly, Pilate’s words imply that the authorities know of his thorough examination of the prisoner.⁴⁰

have found no fault in this man: This is the second of Pilate’s four judgments of Jesus’ innocence (see 23:4, 20, 22).

38. Plummer, *Luke*, 524.

39. Morris, *Luke*, 352.

40. Plummer, *Luke*, 524.

23:15 *No, nor yet Herod:* Pilate highlights his awareness of Herod’s judgment that the charges against Jesus do not merit more punishment (see 23:11).

I sent you to him: The earliest manuscript, \mathfrak{P}^{75} , and the best early texts read “he sent him back to us.” In this other version, Pilate implies that all the Jewish authorities remain at his residence while only a squad of soldiers escorts Jesus to Herod. But the “us” of Pilate’s statement may refer to Pilate and his entourage of public officials.⁴¹

nothing worthy of death: Pilate may be virtually quoting Herod’s words of judgment (see 23:22).

23:16 *I will . . . chastise him:* The method of chastisement that Pilate refers to is usually seen as scourging, one of the most cruel ways to beat a person (see the Note on 18:33).⁴² But the verb *paideuō* means only “to discipline” and thus may point to a lesser punishment (see 23:22; Matt. 27:26; Mark 15:15; John 19:1).⁴³ However, the scourging will occur, as both angels and prophets learn. In prophecy, the scourging is usually tied to the Savior’s crucifixion and always captures a person’s full attention (see 1 Ne. 19:9; 2 Ne. 6:9; Mosiah 3:9; 15:5).

release: This verb, Greek *apoluō*, may form a play on the Atonement as a release for mankind from the results of (1) Adam’s transgression and (2) our own transgressions. Here, Pilate seeks to release Jesus, but in the end will not. Apparently, he seeks to release Jesus as a show of compassion at the Passover.⁴⁴ Instead, at the insistence of the crowd, he will release Barabbas who has done nothing worthy of a release.

23:17 (*For of necessity . . .*): This verse does not appear in many of the important New Testament manuscripts, including the earliest known copy of Luke’s Gospel, \mathfrak{P}^{75} . Therefore, some translations omit it because it appears to be a scribal addition.⁴⁵ However, the custom of the Roman prefect releasing a prisoner is affirmed in Matthew 27:15, Mark 15:6, and John 18:39.⁴⁶

23:18 *they cried out all at once:* The basic sense is that the gathered crowd shouts all together, as the rare Greek adverb *pamplēthei* illustrates (“all together”).⁴⁷

41. Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 2:1479.

42. *TDNT*, 4:517, 519; 5:621; 7:574.

43. BAGD, 608–9; Morris, *Luke*, 352.

44. Marshall, *Luke*, 860.

45. Plummer, *Luke*, 525; Marshall, *Luke*, 859.

46. Black, *Aramaic Approach to the Gospels and Acts*, 228.

47. BAGD, 612.

release unto us Barabbas: We know of this man from no other source outside the Gospels. The name Barabbas (“son of the father” or “son of Abba”)⁴⁸ comes up suddenly. Plainly, the crowd understands that Pilate wants to release Jesus as a goodwill act for the feast and they resist. On their side, the authorities’ desire to free Barabbas may rest on the fact that Barabbas is a man who earlier takes strong action against the Romans: he is something of a hero in the society and his freedom, without saying it, creates a very big problem for Pilate. On the other hand, for both Pilate and the authorities, Jesus does not seem to be a person who will lead a rebellion but will draw crowds to himself for other reasons. Simply stated, Jesus is a threat to the religious establishment of his day, not the political. If this interpretation is even partly accurate, it imputes another level of mendacity to the authorities who, in Jesus’ case, try to persuade Pilate that he represents a serious threat to Rome. In fact, of the two men, only Barabbas undertakes rebellious actions against Rome (see the next verse).

23:19 for a certain sedition made in the city: This insurrection in Jerusalem remains unknown except from the Gospel records (see Mark 15:7). Whether the sedition is recent or not is also unknown. But if Barabbas’s actions are recent,⁴⁹ the Roman military is doubly alert. Even holding this man in prison within the city raises tensions.

for a certain sedition . . . and for murder: The charges against Barabbas are capital. Why do the Romans hold him rather than execute him? After all, Pilate is known for going after opponents with deadly force (see 13:1).⁵⁰ It is possible, though not certain, that Barabbas is captured only days before and is held in Jerusalem until the feast for a show trial and execution. Without doubt, the “sedition” of Barabbas has to do with acts of rebellion specifically against Roman rule (see 23:25).

23:20 Pilate . . . [was] willing to release Jesus: Though Pilate apparently does not see the issue clearly, it is far less troublesome for him to release Jesus, the Galilean peasant, who on his past record poses no trouble for the Romans, than to release Barabbas, who already carries serious charges against himself—sedition and murder (see 23:19, 25).

spake again: This is the third attempt to reason with Jesus’ accusers (see 23:4, 14, 22).

48. BAGD, 132.

49. Schürer, *History*, 1:439, n. 28.

50. Schürer, *History*, 1:385.

23:21 they cried: The Greek verb *epiphōneō*, which appears in the earliest and best manuscripts, and means “to cry out loudly,”⁵¹ stands in the imperfect tense with the sense that the crowd howls for an extended time.⁵²

Crucify him, crucify him: For the first time, this demand surfaces as the real motive of Jesus’ accusers. By repeating the verbs, Luke captures the rolling staccato of the crowd’s long and loud chant, allowing us to hear the screaming, screeching voices.

23:22 the third time: Luke is counting. But his count is off, unless we reckon 23:20 (where Luke does not preserve a quotation) as Pilate again citing Herod’s judgment.

what evil: In Pilate’s fourth attempt to reason with the authorities and their supporters, he adds the aspect that Jesus has done no evil, an even more refined aspect of Jesus’ innocence than his innocence of the charge of insurrection (see 23:4, 14–15). Thus, unwittingly Pilate underscores Jesus as the suffering righteous one.⁵³

no cause of death: The words may be Herod’s, as Pilate’s summary hints after Herod sends Jesus back to him, doubtless with a written judgment of Jesus’ innocence (see 23:15). Pilate essentially repeats what he says earlier, a fact that underlines his own judgment of innocence.

chastise: Pilate’s stated intent to beat Jesus before letting him go seems to have the same aim as that in 23:16—to satisfy the crowd’s lust for Jesus’ punishment. But their cry for Jesus’ crucifixion moves Pilate’s planned punishment onto different grounds.

23:23 they were instant: The Greek verb *epikeimai* means “to press” (see 5:1). The tense is the imperfect, signaling that, without letting up, the crowd “kept pressing.”⁵⁴

with loud voices: Once again, Luke signals the unrelenting, overpowering noise from the crowd, now swollen by “the people” who join the authorities (23:13; the Note on 23:10).

requiring: The Greek verb *aiteomai* can mean “to request” or, more strongly, “to demand,” depending on the context. Here we meet the latter sense, as we do for the corresponding noun, *aitēma*, in 23:24.⁵⁵

51. BAGD, 304.

52. Smyth, *Greek Grammar*, §§1790, 1890–94, 2341; Blass and Debrunner, *Greek Grammar*, §§327, 325.

53. Green, *Luke*, 810.

54. BAGD, 294; *TDNT*, 3:655; Smyth, *Greek Grammar*, §§1790, 1890–94, 2341; Blass and Debrunner, *Greek Grammar*, §§327, 325; Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 2:1492.

55. BAGD, 25; *TDNT*, 1:191–93.

of them and of the chief priests: The earliest manuscript, \mathfrak{P}^{75} , and a number of early texts omit “and of the chief priests,” an expression that may well be a later scribal addition intended to keep the priests inside the picture of those demanding Jesus’ death.⁵⁶

prevailed: Finally, the voices of the accusers and their fellow citizens surmount Pilate’s pleas to release Jesus. The verb (Greek *katischuō*) bears the sense “to be strong” or “to prevail.”⁵⁷ John’s report of this scene differs notably. He records that the authorities shout out, almost as a threat, “If thou let this man go, thou art not Caesar’s friend” (John 19:12). Here “Caesar’s friend” stands almost as a title and finds a parallel in the actions of Antiochus IV toward Jonathan, son of Mattathias, “to make him his friend and ally” so that he is “called one of his First Friends.”⁵⁸

23:24 Pilate gave sentence: This verdict is the actionable declaration that the authorities seek. To keep peace, Pilate steps away from holding to the right course, from promoting justice.⁵⁹

23:25 for sedition and murder: The double charge against the evidently guilty Barabbas, first noted in 23:19, contrasts sharply with Jesus’ innocence (see Acts 3:13–15).

whom they had desired . . . their will: It appears that the crowd rules the ruler in this set of instances—they demand and receive both the release of Barabbas and the death of Jesus. Thus, the crowd shares the responsibility with Pilate for executing Jesus.

he delivered Jesus: Luke omits any reference to the actual beating that Pilate’s soldiers administer to Jesus (see 18:33; Matt. 27:26; Mark 15:15; John 19:1; 1 Ne. 19:9; 2 Ne. 6:9; Mosiah 3:9; 15:5). Instead, Luke focuses on the Roman miscarriage of justice. Thus the Roman Prefect Pilate shares the blame with the Jewish authorities for Jesus’ execution (see 9:22; 18:32–33).

23:26 they led him away: We naturally think of Pilate’s soldiers as leading Jesus to his place of execution. But Luke’s ambiguous “they” seems to point to the momentary unity of purpose among both Jewish authorities and citizens, as well as Romans. But this unity will soon begin to fragment (see the Note on 23:27).⁶⁰

56. Marshall, *Luke*, 861; Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 2:1492.

57. BAGD, 425; *TDNT*, 3:398.

58. Josephus, *A.J.* 13.5.4 (§§145, 146); compare 1 Maccabees 11:57, “one of the friends of the king.”

59. Green, *Luke*, 811.

60. Green, *Luke*, 811–12, 813–15.

they laid hold: Presumably because Jesus cannot carry the heavy cross, or cross piece, to the place of execution, the soldiers forcibly constrain Simon to heft the weight.⁶¹ Jesus is weakened both by his extreme suffering in Gethsemane and, though Luke omits it, by the scourging that he undergoes (see 18:33; Matt. 27:26; Mark 15:15; John 19:1; 1 Ne. 19:9; 2 Ne. 6:9; Mosiah 3:9; 15:5).

Simon, a Cyrenian: Because all of the Synoptics preserve Simon’s name, we can safely presume that he becomes well-known among Jesus’ followers, perhaps even a Christian (Mark 15:21; Matt. 27:32). He will certainly become the eyewitness source for retelling this incident.⁶² Cyrene, by the way, is the capital city of the Roman province of Cyrenaica in North Africa (modern Libya) and becomes home to a community of Jews.⁶³ Because none of the Gospel writers introduce this man as a Gentile, we safely conclude that he is Jewish.

coming out of the country: The expression can be translated “coming out of a field,” perhaps meaning simply that Simon is coming from outside the city, because visitors commonly camp in fields outside the walls of the city during festivals.⁶⁴ On one level, Luke dissociates Simon from the crowd that condemns Jesus.⁶⁵ On another, perhaps inadvertently, Luke preserves a detail that may well touch on Jewish law about the need for those who live outside the land of Israel, or even outside of Judea, to purify themselves when they come to a festival (see John 11:55—“many went out of the country up to Jerusalem before the passover, to purify themselves”). In this connection, ritual baths are set up outside the city so that arriving pilgrims can bathe, purifying themselves before entering the city (see the Notes on 2:42; 18:35; 19:29).⁶⁶ For Simon may well be just arriving in the city after purifying himself. Such regulations especially apply to a person like Simon who lives in North Africa (see the Note above). The regulations rest on the observation that territories outside the land of Israel are considered impure (see Josh. 22:19—“if the land . . . be unclean”; Hosea 9:3—“the Lord’s land”; Amos 7:17—“polluted land”). In a word, gentile countries are considered to be among the “fathers of impurity” (Heb. *avot ha-tumah*) in that they

61. *TDNT*, 7:573.

62. Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, 51–52, 262.

63. Josephus, *Ag. Apion* 2.4 (§44); Josephus, *A.J.* 14.7.2 (§115); Plummer, *Luke*, 527.

64. Josephus, *A.J.* 17.9.3 (§217).

65. Green, *Luke*, 812–13, 814–15.

66. *Mishnah Yoma* 3:3; Richman, *Holy Temple of Jerusalem*, 71; Hayes, “Purity and Impurity, Ritual,” 16:748, 752.

transmit a severe kind of impurity to individuals.⁶⁷ An extension of this concern for uncleanness from abroad appears in the law that “earth [carried] from a foreign country” conveys uncleanness to the bearer.⁶⁸ In later times, it becomes a burden to observe all Israelite laws in gentile lands and these rules are correspondingly eased (see the Notes on 2:42 and 10:10).

on him they laid the cross: The other two passages where “cross” appears feature words of Jesus about bearing the cross as a part of discipleship (see 9:23; 14:27). In this scene, Luke paints for readers a vivid visual reminder of those sayings in that a man, Simon, carries the cross while following the Savior.⁶⁹

Analysis

The Savior’s innocence strides visibly and forcefully across these verses. Both Pilate and Herod Antipas, official representatives of Rome, find nothing in Jesus’ conduct and demeanor that warrants more than a beating to satisfy the crowd’s bloodlust (see 23:16, 22). Although Herod is said to seek Jesus’ death on an earlier occasion for an unspecified reason (see 13:31), when the tetrarch finally meets the man from Nazareth, his interest lies in seeing “some miracle done by him,” not in punishing him (23:8). His sentence, virtually quoted by Pilate, specifies that Jesus does “nothing worthy of death” (23:15).

Pilate’s verdict mirrors that of Antipas exactly: “I . . . have found no fault in this man” and “I have found no cause of death in him” (23:14, 22). These findings stand opposite to the claim of Jesus’ accusers: “We found this fellow perverting the nation” (23:2). Under the harsh glare of Roman justice, Jesus stands guiltless. Yes, even sinless. And this is Luke’s point. Pilate spends time early in the morning interrogating Jesus and then repeats the process later. His double interview produces nothing actionable under the law. In Pilate’s view, Jesus is free to walk away. But wait. More than law is at play here.

The loud, unrelenting barrage of angry voices begins to roar through Pilate’s residence: “they cried out all at once” or, better, “they shouted all together” (23:18). The palace built by Antipas’s father vibrates with the shrill demands for Jesus’ death from his accusers and from those who join them from “the people” in the city (23:13). Pilate tries to shout above the din but “they cried, saying, Crucify him, crucify him” (23:21). Somehow,

67. Brown, *Gospel according to John*, 1:445; Hayes, “Purity and Impurity, Ritual,” 16:752–53.

68. *Mishnah Oholoth* 2.3.

69. Green, *Luke*, 812, 814.

Pilate gets the attention of the threatening multitude and says again that he will “chastise [Jesus], and let him go” (23:22). The bellowing voices of the angry crowd howl again—“they were instant with loud voices, requiring that he might be crucified.” In the end, Pilate loses his nerve and “the voices of them and of the chief priests prevailed” (23:23). In a complete turnabout from the prefect’s usually stiff interactions with his subjects (see the Note on 23:12), he decides “to preserve peace rather than to promote justice.”⁷⁰ “Pilate gave sentence” (23:24). Jesus will die.

Inside Pilate’s palatial residence, the voices of “the chief priests and the rulers and the people” exhibit complete unity against Jesus (23:13). But not all in the city share that unity. The first wobble comes in the person of Simon of Cyrene who arrives at the feast and is promptly commandeered to carry Jesus’ cross (see 23:26). Simon does not stand with Jesus’ accusers; in fact, Luke’s notice separates him from them. Moreover, as we shall soon see, the voices of the “great company of people, and of women,” the penitent thief, and the centurion all fracture the unified voice of the accusers (see 23:40–42, 47, 48; the Notes on 23:27, 35).⁷¹ Not all turn against the Savior.

THE LONGEST WALK (23:27–33)

(Compare Matt. 27:33–36; Mark 15:22–25; John 19:17–18)

King James Translation

27 And there followed him a great company of people, and of women, which also bewailed and lamented him. 28 But Jesus turning unto them said, Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children. 29 For, behold, the days are coming, in the which they shall say, Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bare, and the paps which never gave suck. 30 Then shall they begin to say to the mountains, Fall on us; and

New Rendition

27 And there followed him a large multitude of people and women who were beating themselves and bewailing him. 28 And turning, Jesus said to them, “Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and your children. 29 For behold, days are coming in which they will say, ‘Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that have not born children, and the breasts that have not suckled.’ 30 At that time they will begin to say to the mountains,

70. Green, *Luke*, 811.

71. Green, *Luke*, 811–14.

to the hills, Cover us. 31 For if they do these things in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry?

32 And there were also two other, malefactors, led with him to be put to death. 33 And when they were come to the place, which is called Calvary, there they crucified him, and the malefactors, one on the right hand, and the other on the left.

‘Fall on us,’ and to the hills, ‘Cover us.’ 31 Because, if they do these things in a green tree, what will happen in a dry?”

32 And they also led away two other criminals to be executed with him. 33 And when they came to the place that is called Skull, there they crucified him and the criminals, who were on his right and left.

Notes

23:27 *there followed him a great company of people:* Luke switches the scene from inside Pilate’s residence to the scene on its outside, from a crowd who demands Jesus’ execution to an apparently sympathetic gathering that learns about the trial and arrives to show support (see the Note on 23:35). In a theological sense, this “company of people” follows the Savior (Greek verb *akoloutheō*), as he previously asks his disciples to do, fulfilling his command (see 9:23, 59; 18:22), and mirroring the actions of other followers (see 5:11, 28; 9:11; 18:28, 43).⁷²

women, which also bewailed and lamented him: These women and their sympathetic associates may be seen as devout people who come to dutifully mourn the death of a condemned man.⁷³ But Luke’s sense seems to be that they appear at the palace gate to offer belated support to Jesus, standing for the moment in the same camp as Simon of Cyrene, whose place *outside* the palace (see 23:26) separates him from the accusing crowd *inside* the palace (see 23:18, 21, 23). In the narrative, the unity exhibited by Jesus’ detractors now begins to unravel (see the Note on 23:26).⁷⁴ In a different vein, all of the verbs in this verse stand in the imperfect tense, showing on-going, repeated lamentations.⁷⁵

23:28 *Jesus turning:* As in other cases, this kind of notation about Jesus’ actions, or those of another, points to an eyewitness memory (see 9:55; 10:23; 14:25; 18:40; 19:5; 22:41, 61; John 8:6–8; the Notes on 7:9; 7:44).

72. TDNT, 1:213–14; for a different view, see Green, *Luke*, 815–16.

73. TDNT, 3:845–46; Jeremias, *Jerusalem*, 95; Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 2:1497.

74. Green, *Luke*, 811–12, 813–15.

75. Smyth, *Greek Grammar*, §§1790, 1890–94, 2341; Blass and Debrunner, *Greek Grammar*, §§327, 325.

Daughters of Jerusalem: These women are not reckoned among the Galilean women who follow Jesus (see 8:2–3; 23:49, 55) but reside in the capital city and may, as a matter of course, offer “opiates to the condemned men” to ease their pain.⁷⁶ That they may already be followers lies in the hints that Jesus and his Galilean disciples previously visit Jerusalem (see the Notes on 10:38; 13:34; 19:47; 22:9; 23:5, 50; the Analysis on 22:7–13).

weep for yourselves, and for your children: In light of 21:23 (“woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck, in those days”) and 23:29, Jesus sounds a warning to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, who will experience terrible days (see D&C 5:20; the Notes on 19:43–44; the Analysis on 21:5–6). What is more, Jesus here holds up women as the benchmark of how society is faring. Their situation and the situations of their children mark the current state of a civilization, whether good or bad (see Morm. 4:14, 21; Moro. 9:8–9, 16; the Notes on 20:47; 21:23).⁷⁷

23:29 the days: These words and their singular, “the day,” frequently point to a bleak era (see 5:35; 17:26, 28; 21:6, 22; D&C 52:11; 61:15; the Note on 17:22).⁷⁸

Blessed are the barren: Jesus affirms that barren women will not mourn for lost children and grandchildren, a twist on the curse of childlessness (see the Note on 1:25).⁷⁹ An overtone also exists that the promises outlined by Isaiah for barren women are not yet fulfilled (see Isa. 54:1, 13–14).

23:30 say to the mountains, Fall on us; and to the hills, Cover us: The quotation comes from LXX Hosea 10:8, with the reversal of the verbs “Fall” and “Cover” (see also Rev. 6:15–17). The words of Hosea clearly point to an age of divine punishment, a complete contrast to the promising era when the heavenly king arrives and mountains are leveled (see 3:5). As Jesus reframes Hosea’s words, the population’s unfulfilled wish that the mountains fall on them (see Alma 12:14) stands opposite to the believer’s power to move mountains (see the Note on 3:5; Matt. 17:20; 21:21; Mark 11:22–23). As with the image of the green tree that follows, Jesus draws from aspects of what surrounds him and his hearers, in this case the high hills and mountains around the city.⁸⁰

76. Marshall, *Luke*, 864.

77. Josephus, *B.J.* 5.10.3 (§§430, 433); 6.3.4 (§§201–12).

78. Also Isa. 39:6; Jer. 7:32; 9:25; 19:6; 48:12; 49:2; 51:47, 52; Amos 4:2; 8:11; Mal. 4:5; *TDNT*, 2:671, 946, 950–51.

79. Marshall, *Luke*, 864; Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 2:1496.

80. *TDNT*, 5:483.

23:31 a green tree . . . the dry: What does this saying mean? Three possibilities present themselves. First, we can think that the “green tree” represents Jesus and his gospel on a metaphorical level; hence, the “dry” tree stands for Judaism and its representatives. Second, the “green tree” and “the dry” may refer to the current, verdant city in the spring and the later, coming days of siege when the Romans will cut down all trees and shut off water conduits that flow into the city and temple as they level the ground around the city, filling in waterways.⁸¹ The third forms a combination of the first two. The “green tree” is Jesus who is about to die, an interpretation solidified by a reference to the expression in an account of the martyrdoms of Joseph and Hyrum Smith (see D&C 135:6; also Ezek. 20:47). If Jesus is the “green tree,” then “the dry” refers to the city of Jerusalem, which will eventually suffer destruction, much of it by fire.⁸² The Joseph Smith Translation takes the interpretation a completely different direction by adding the following after this verse: “This he spake, signifying the scattering of Israel, and the desolation of the heathen, or in other words, the Gentiles” (JST 23:32).

23:32 two other, malefactors: The punctuation of the English expression seeks to distance Jesus from the criminals (and their guilt) who are forced to accompany him, a feature that appears in some manuscripts. Only Luke notices these men at this juncture in the story, perhaps pointing back to 22:37, which features the quotation from Isaiah 53:12: “and he was numbered with the transgressors.”⁸³

23:33 the place: All of the Gospel accounts repeat this term (Greek *topos*), a term that often signals a special, sacred spot (see the Note on 22:40).⁸⁴ This place of execution lies outside the city walls, as hinted in Jesus’ parable of the wicked husbandmen (see 20:9–16; the Notes on 20:12, 15) and as practiced in the stoning of Stephen to accord with Old Testament law that executions occur “without the camp” or outside the city (see Acts 7:58; Lev. 24:14). No ancient source mentions that this place is on a hill. To achieve the greatest threatening effect, Romans typically crucify victims along busy streets or intersections.⁸⁵

called Calvary: The other Gospels repeat the name Golgotha (see Matt. 27:33; Mark 15:22; John 19:17). Luke preserves the name Calvary (Greek

81. Josephus, *B.J.* 5.3.2, 5; 5.6.2 (§§106–8, 130, 264).

82. Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 2:1498.

83. Marshall, *Luke*, 866.

84. *TDNT*, 8:195–99, 203–5; *TDOT*, 8:537–43.

85. Pseudo-Quintilian, *Declamationes minores* 274; cited by Gerald G. O’Collins, “Crucifixion,” in *ABD*, 1:1208 (see *OCD*, 421); *TDNT*, 7:574.

kranion; in Latin *calvaria*), which means “skull,” as does John (this name is translated “skull” in the King James translation at John 19:17).⁸⁶

they crucified him, and the malefactors: As all the reports record, the criminals share Jesus’ fate. The synoptic Gospels do not mention nails although John and Paul do (see John 20:25; Col. 2:14).⁸⁷ Both ancient sources and archaeology confirm that nails or spikes affix the victim’s body to the cross, a feature that Luke omits here although his report hints at it later (see the Note on 24:39). In addition, circumstances point to the nails being driven into the wrists of victims rather than into the hands as art often portrays.⁸⁸ Further, soldiers often hang victims from trees as well as from stakes or poles.⁸⁹

Analysis

Luke finally leads us to the cross. He repeatedly discloses his aim throughout his Gospel, beginning with the words of the aged Simeon (see 2:34–35) and continuing throughout the Savior’s sayings about his fate at Jerusalem (see 9:22, 44; 12:50; 17:24–25; 18:31–33; 22:15, 37). But as a stunning counterbalance, out of the ashes of Jesus’ death on the cross springs the promise of the resurrection—“raised the third day” (9:22) and “the third day he shall rise again” (18:33).

In these verses about Jesus’ trek to the place of execution, preserved only by Luke, we read not about distance or destination or crowd noise but about what happens along the path that Jesus trudges in pain on his way to Calvary.⁹⁰ Remarkably, we witness Jesus reaching out one last time, beyond his own terrible discomfort, to get the attending crowd’s attention, and warning “a great company of people, and of women” about events that, ominously, will descend upon the city and their “children” (23:27–28). His loving compassion is obviously not stunted by his own troubles. That future scene in Jerusalem will become intolerable, bringing down “great tribulations . . . upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem; such as was not before sent upon Israel, of God, since the beginning of their kingdom” (JS–M 1:18; JST Mark 13:20). It will be the very worst of times. So much so that citizens

86. BAGD, 449.

87. *TDNT*, 7:575, n. 24; Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 2:1503.

88. Marshall, *Luke*, 902; Skinner, “Two Crucified Men,” 386–87.

89. *TDNT*, 7:574; Kent P. Jackson, “The Crucifixion,” in Holzapfel and Wayment, *From the Last Supper through the Resurrection*, 320–22; Skinner, “Two Crucified Men,” 371–72, 379–84.

90. Green, *Luke*, 813, 815.

will say “Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bare” and will cry out “to the [nearby] mountains, Fall on us” (23:29–30). Plainly, he agonizes that the city which crucifies its king will suffer as the king suffers.⁹¹

Jesus directs much of what he says toward the women of Jerusalem, some of whom are probably followers (see the Note on 23:28). Throughout his ministry he pays attention to women and their needs, whether the widow of Nain (see 7:11–12) or the “sinner” woman “in the Pharisee’s house” (see 7:37) or his women disciples (see 8:2–3; 23:49, 55) or the woman with the issue of blood (see 8:43) or Jairus’s daughter (see 8:41–42) or Martha and Mary (see 10:38–39). Often his sayings and observations feature a woman, such as his words about a person who lights a candle (see the Note on 8:16) or about the Queen of Sheba (see 11:31) or about suffering widows (see 20:46–47) or about the “poor widow” who gives to the temple (see 21:2). In Jerusalem, he does not set aside his concern for women. In fact, as his impassioned words indicate, he tries to warn them about the looming disaster that hangs over the city and will eventually crush both them and their “children” (23:28). Their experience, if they do not flee (see 21:21–23), will gauge the severity of the suffering that lands on them and their fellow citizens (see the Note on 21:23). And, as Josephus eventually records, the situation in the city deteriorates dreadfully, and the women and children suffer unimaginably.⁹²

ON THE CROSS (23:34–38)

(Compare Matt. 27:37–43; Mark 15:26–32; John 19:19–27)

King James Translation

34 Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do. And they parted his raiment, and cast lots.
35 And the people stood beholding. And the rulers also with them derided him, saying, He saved others; let him save himself, if he be Christ, the chosen of

New Rendition

34 And Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.” And dividing his garments, they cast lots. 35 And the people stood watching. And also the leaders kept sneering, saying, “Others he saved. Let him save himself, if he is the Christ, the

91. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ*, 666–67; Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 2:1496.

92. Josephus, *B.J.* 5.12.3 (§§512–18); 5.13.7 (§§567–72); 6.3.3–4 (§§193–213).

God. 36 And the soldiers also mocked him, coming to him, and offering him vinegar, 37 And saying, If thou be the king of the Jews, save thyself. 38 And a superscription also was written over him in letters of Greek, and Latin, and Hebrew, This Is the King of the Jews.

chosen one of God.” 36 And the soldiers coming to him, ridiculed him, bringing vinegar to him, 37 and saying, “If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself.” 38 And there was also a writing above him, “This is the King of the Jews.”

Notes

23:34 *Then said Jesus:* The earliest text (P⁷⁵) and many other manuscripts omit the first part of this verse, leaving only the portion that begins with “And they parted his raiment.” Such evidence seemingly points away from the following saying as originally belonging to Luke’s record. But the saying fits Luke’s language. And Stephen’s prayer in Acts 7:60 seems to draw its inspiration from the words of Jesus reported here, thus buttressing its genuineness as a saying of Jesus, whether or not it originally stands in Luke’s record.⁹³ Significantly, the imperfect tense of the verb implies that Jesus repeats his request again and again, pleading with his Father to forgive these unknowing men.⁹⁴ Incidentally, the Joseph Smith Translation preserves these words, with a clarifying insertion (see the Note below).

Father, forgive them: The placement of Jesus’ words directly after writing about the crucifixion (see 23:33) may signal that Luke is stressing, first, Jesus’ control of the whole situation, though his enemies do not know it, and second, Jesus’ control of his pain-filled body. Jesus addresses God as “Father” previously (see 10:21; 11:2). On Jesus’ willingness to forgive, see the Notes on 6:12, 28; 22:51. Here he plainly makes intercession for others (see the Note on 6:28; D&C 45:3–5; Moses 7:39).⁹⁵

they know not: Jesus’ expression about his executioners’ ignorance mirrors Peter’s later remark about the Jewish rulers’ “ignorance” (Acts 3:17; see JST 13:27), thus pointing to the genuineness of Jesus’ prayer. The Joseph Smith Translation adds a surprising, clarifying explanation of Jesus’ meaning: “they know not what they do. (*Meaning the soldiers who crucified him,*)” (JST 23:35; emphasis added). Hence, Jesus’ forgiveness extends to the soldiers alone, not yet to “the rulers” (23:35; compare Acts 3:14–19; 7:60).

93. TDNT, 5:713, n. 455; Bruce, *Acts of the Apostles*, 110–11; Marshall, *Luke*, 867–68; Morris, *Luke*, 356–57.

94. Smyth, *Greek Grammar*, §§1790, 1890–94, 2341; Blass and Debrunner, *Greek Grammar*, §§327, 325.

95. TDNT, 5:713.

And they parted his raiment, and cast lots: This expression derives from Psalm 22:18 (LXX Ps. 21:18). Because clothing possesses value (see the Notes on 6:29; 10:30), the soldiers remove Jesus' clothing and cast lots for it, a customary action taken against those to be executed.⁹⁶ On the nature of lots (Greek *klēros*), see the Note on 1:9.⁹⁷

23:35 the people stood beholding: Luke consciously draws a distinction between the general population who do not participate in bringing Jesus to his execution and the officials who do, those who at this moment “derided him.” The participle rendered “beholding” (Greek *theōrōn*) may indicate that the crowd is gawking at the spectacle of Jesus now disrobed (see Ps. 22:7; the Note on 23:48).⁹⁸ These people are not hostile, but rather respectful.⁹⁹

the rulers: This group stands in contrast to “the people” of the city. Luke now lumps all of Jesus' accusers into this group (see 23:13). Under this title, they bear the weight of guilt for urging Jesus' death (see 24:20; Acts 2:23; 3:13–15, 17; 4:10, 26–27; 5:30; etc.; D&C 21:9 [“crucified by sinful men”]).

derided him: The droning drumbeat of doubting derision continues from an earlier day (see 16:14). The persisting derision lies in the imperfect tense of the verb, signaling the ongoing vitriol, whereas the simple past tense of the soldiers' mockery points to a “less persistent” harassment on their part.¹⁰⁰ The pronoun “him” is missing from the earliest manuscript (P⁷⁵) and a number of others. But it is clearly assumed in the context.

also with them: This expression too is omitted in the earliest manuscript and others. Luke's damning words seem to rest on just “the rulers.”

He saved others: For Luke, the authorities' words bear a deep sense of ignorance, a complete lack of understanding that he heals and saves people according to their faith (see 7:50; 8:48; 17:19; 18:42), in addition to requiring them to carry their crosses, not abandon them (see 9:23; 14:27).¹⁰¹

if he be Christ: According to this expression, and that in 23:39, a popular conception holds that the Messiah will be able to deliver himself and others from difficulty. Specifically, the deliverance will take the form of a physical, perhaps military rescue (see also 23:37; 24:21; Alma 14:20). In a word, the Messiah is thought to be more like Barabbas (see 23:18–19).

96. Plummer, *Luke*, 532; Marshall, *Luke*, 868.

97. *TDNT*, 3:758–64; Fred D. Gealy, “Lots,” in *IDB*, 3:163–64.

98. Plummer, *Luke*, 532; *TDNT*, 5:346.

99. Brown, *Death*, 2:989–90.

100. Plummer, *Luke*, 533; Smyth, *Greek Grammar*, §§1790, 1890–94, 2341; Blass and Debrunner, *Greek Grammar*, §§327, 325.

101. Brown, *Death*, 2:995–96.

Moreover, there is a Christological sense in the rulers' expressions that God will choose his Messiah from among mortals rather than send the Messiah from the heavens. In a theological vein, "the rulers" are attacking the most profound insight that the Twelve receive about Jesus, that he is "the Christ of God" (9:20).¹⁰²

Christ, the chosen of God: The Christology inherent in the words of the officials is low, that is, they conceive the Messiah to be a person of God's choice from among humans rather than being God's own son. Importantly, the text preserves the definite article, signaling "the Christ," "the Messiah," "the Anointed One" (see the Note on 24:26). A further aspect arises from the Greek term *eklektos*, "chosen,"¹⁰³ that occurs here, though it is on the lips of Jesus' detractors. It has very much to do with Jesus' prior election by God and with his obedience to that divine choice, in this case choice made in premortal life (see Moses 4:1–3; Abr. 3:27). In addition, Luke is the author who brings together Jesus' election and suffering, thereby settling the question of what election consists of in Jesus' kingdom (see 9:35, 44; 17:25; 24:26, 46; Isa. 42:1; 53:12; the Notes on 9:35; 18:7).¹⁰⁴ Moreover, because the title "Christ, the chosen" comes from Jesus' detractors, it points to an earlier understanding that the elect one of Isaiah 42:1 is the Messiah.¹⁰⁵

23:36 *the soldiers:* These individuals appear for the first time in the narrative, even though their looming presence is surely assumed from the moment that Jesus' accusers bring him to Pilate. They represent a third group at the cross, besides "the people" and "the rulers" (23:35). According to John, four soldiers crucify Jesus (see John 19:23). Like "the rulers," they turn against Jesus and thus stand in need of his forgiveness (see JST 23:35; the Note on 23:34).

mocked: The soldiers' mocking (Greek *empaizō*) forms one of the prophesied insults of Jesus' experience (see 18:32; Mosiah 15:5). According to Matthew and Mark, the chief priests and scribes join in this sin "of the tongue" (see Matt. 27:41; Mark 15:31).¹⁰⁶

coming to him: The soldiers appear to approach the crucified Jesus as if he is a king. But their mockery¹⁰⁷ and offering of vinegar demonstrates the insincerity of their action.

102. Brown, *Death*, 2:993.

103. BAGD, 242.

104. *TDNT*, 4:186–89; 5:687, 689.

105. *TDNT*, 5:689.

106. *TDNT*, 5:630.

107. Brown, *Death*, 2:997.

vinegar: The Greek term *oxos* refers to sour wine. In the context, the offering of such wine seems to fit with the general contemptuous tone of the soldiers, almost as if they are mockingly saluting a deposed monarch with unfit wine: “a burlesque gift to the king.”¹⁰⁸ Mark writes that the soldiers give Jesus “wine mingled with myrrh,” a drink that has an anesthetic quality (Mark 15:23).¹⁰⁹ The vinegar seems to tie to Psalm 69:21: “in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink.” Wine, another product of the vine which is sweet, will become the symbol of Jesus’ blood in the Eucharist. Hence, a certain level of irony or disconnect may exist in the reference to vinegar.

23:37 *If thou be the king:* The taunt tastes like the devil’s earlier taunts, “If thou be the Son of God” (4:3, 9), thus putting the soldiers’ words on the same level of feigned respect (see 20:19–21).

the king of the Jews: This title, as others, misleads. For here the Messiah is conceived to be an earthly king, not heavenly. Even so, by quoting these words Luke continues to underline Jesus’ kingship (see 18:38; 22:29; the Notes on 2:11; 19:38; 23:2–3). The soldiers read these words, of course, from the placard which hangs from Jesus’ neck on his walk to the place of execution and then is affixed to the top of the cross.¹¹⁰

save thyself: Coming on the lips of the soldiers, as this imperative expression does, these words illumine the concept that, for these Roman soldiers, deliverance must include the ability to shove aside Roman military might (see 19:38–39; 23:35, 39; 24:21).

23:38 *a superscription:* The Greek term *epigraphē* generally means an inscription, that is, words written on a solid surface.¹¹¹ Often, such an inscription, or placard (Latin *titulus*), hangs around the neck of the condemned person, or on the top of the pole, with the charge written on it.¹¹²

in letters of Greek, and Latin, and Hebrew: This long phrase does not appear in certain early manuscripts of Luke, including the earliest (P⁷⁵). We compare John 19:20, which most think is the source of this phrase in Luke.¹¹³ If this be true, the vivid phrase in John likely goes back to an eye-witness recollection.

108. Brown, *Death*, 2:997; also Johnson, *Luke*, 377.

109. Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 2:1505.

110. Brown, *Death*, 2:998.

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

112. *TDNT*, 7:573; Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 2:1505; Skinner, “Two Crucified Men,” 379–80; compare Suetonius, *The Lives of the Caesars: Gaius Caligula* 32.2.

113. Plummer, *Luke*, 533; Marshall, *Luke*, 870; Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 2:1505.

This: The demonstrative pronoun, which comes at the end of the inscription in the Greek text of Luke, is usually understood as contemptuous—meaning “This fellow”—thus completing the belittling of Jesus (see the Note on 18:11).¹¹⁴

The King of the Jews: All of the Gospels repeat this title, with slight variations, underlining its place in the memories of witnesses (see Matt. 27:37; Mark 15:26; John 19:19). Even though the inscription is intended to show Jesus as a criminal, its appearance at the end of a long chain of references to the Savior’s royalty serves to complete Luke’s testimony about Jesus’ kingship (see 19:38; 20:41–44; 23:2–3, 37). The version that John preserves of this inscription, “Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews” (John 19:19), becomes the source of the abbreviation INRI, from the first letters of each word of the inscription in Latin.

Analysis

The Joseph Smith Translation’s stunning addition to the Savior’s plea for forgiveness in 23:34, which forms the heart of these verses because of the abuse that he receives—“Meaning the soldiers who crucified him” (JST 23:35)—pushes forward the issue whether certain wicked acts can be forgiven. To be sure, some cannot, such as blasphemy against the Holy Ghost (see 12:10; D&C 132:27). But what about other serious sins? Are there limits to divine mercy? Are there bounds to celestial clemency? In response, we notice that, in the only existing sample of the Savior’s intercessional language in modern scripture, he limits his appeal to his Father, seeking the Father’s graciousness only for those who “believe on my name,” begging him to “spare these . . . that they may . . . have everlasting life” (D&C 45:5). This engaging framework fits snugly with other passages from latter-day scripture that set out a limit to salvation—only for those who believe and repent (see 2 Ne. 2:6–7; Mosiah 3:17–19; Alma 12:15; D&C 29:43–44; etc.). Why? Because saving the wicked, particularly those who “have willfully rebelled against God . . . and would not keep [the commandments of God]” cuts across God’s justice: “salvation cometh to none such; for the Lord hath redeemed none such; yea, neither can the Lord redeem such” (Mosiah 15:26–27).

From a different angle comes God’s mercy for those swallowed up in the days of the flood. After God says to Enoch that “a prison have I prepared

114. Marshall, *Luke*, 870; Brown, *Death*, 2:998.

for them,” that is, for those who will perish in the Flood, he then goes on to declare about the Savior: “That which I have chosen hath pled before my face [for these people]. Wherefore, he suffereth for their sins.” More than this, God holds out the possibility that they can repent and receive forgiveness: “inasmuch as they will repent in the day that my Chosen shall return unto me.” In a word, after the Savior’s ministry, after he endures mocking and mistreatment, after he suffers for the sins of all, he returns to his Father with the power and right to plead for the forgiveness of those who will repent, in the next life, even though “they shall be in torment” in that “prison” until “that day” (Moses 7:38–39; also 7:57; compare the distant “times of refreshing” in Acts 3:19). Might Jesus’ accusers receive forgiveness? Only he knows. Scripture shows us a door (see 13:24; also 12:48; Moses 7:39—“he hath suffered for their sins”). They need to turn the lock.

As Jesus exits the city, reversal stands at every bend.¹¹⁵ Only days before, crowds greet him as the king on his entry into Jerusalem—“Blessed be the King,” they shout (19:37–38). Now, at the place of execution, the authorities and soldiers exhibit spite as he is executed as king (see 23:35, 37–38). As he leaves Jerusalem, “a great company of people, and of women, . . . lamented him” (23:27). Now, “the people stood,” silent and looking on, as “the rulers . . . derided him” (23:35). As he approaches the place of execution, the crowd “bewailed . . . him” (23:27). Now he bewails the city and its inhabitants as he warns, “weep not for me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children” because “the days are coming, in the which they shall say, Blessed are the barren” (23:28–29).

On one level, it appears to passersby that Jesus is unable to turn his fate. For them, he lacks messianic power, leaving them silent (see 23:35, 48). But the misunderstanding about the nature of his messiahship rests on a lack of perception. Jesus announces long beforehand, in another place, that he does not fear those who are able to take life but then have no more power (see 12:4). His real, mercy-filled power manifests itself in forgiving others (see 5:20; 7:47–48) and, under the current circumstances, in pleading with his Father to forgive his executioners (see 23:34; JST 23:35; also D&C 45:3–5). Jesus’ terrible situation on the cross, which seems to point to his defeat, really shows off his power to remit sin and to bring willing souls to himself (see 23:34, 43).

115. Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 2:1495.

WITH THE THIEVES (23:39–43)

(Compare Matt. 27:44; Mark 15:32)

King James Translation

39 And one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on him, saying, If thou be Christ, save thyself and us.
40 But the other answering rebuked him, saying, Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? 41 And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss. 42 And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom. 43 And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise.

New Rendition

39 And one of the criminals who were hanged blasphemed him saying, “Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!” 40 And the other, answering and rebuking him, said, “Do you not fear God, since you are in the same condemnation? 41 And we indeed justly, for we are receiving that which is fitting for what we did. But this man did nothing wrong.” 42 And he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” 43 And he said to him, “Truly I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise.”

Notes

23:39 *one of the malefactors*: Neither of the names of these men makes it into the Gospel records, although the much later Acts of Pilate, in the Coptic and Armenian versions, records the name Gestas for this man.¹¹⁶ But the memory of them and their interaction with the dying Jesus remain a firm part of the synoptic stories. Unlike Matthew and Mark, who report merely that both men revile Jesus (see Matt. 27:44; Mark 15:32), Luke refines the record by articulating that the two criminals respond to Jesus in different ways, implying that he receives information from a witness.

***railed on him*:** This man’s words frame the third spoken derision of Jesus, following those of “the rulers” and “the soldiers” (23:35–36). Significantly, the Greek verb is *blasphēmeō*, usually rendered “to blaspheme” (see 12:10; 22:65). And it appears in the imperfect tense, underscoring the continuing, frequent invective against Jesus.¹¹⁷ Just as the Jewish council members speak “blasphemously . . . against [Jesus]” again and again, so the insolent

116. NTA, 1:459, n. 1.

117. Smyth, *Greek Grammar*, §§1790, 1890–94, 2341; Blass and Debrunner, *Greek Grammar*, §§327, 325.

criminal contemptuously contests Jesus' divine messiahship, drawing out Luke's strong accusation of blasphemy against those who speak in this way (see the Note on 22:65).¹¹⁸

If thou be Christ: The man's words, unlike the feigned respect in the soldiers' "If thou be the king of the Jews" (23:37), bears openly all the disrespect that "the rulers" heap upon him (see 23:35) and that the devil barely hides in his "If thou be the Son of God" (4:3, 9).

save thyself and us: Embedded inside the felon's words rests a popular view of the Messiah's role: deliverance from Rome (see the Note on 23:37). Evidently, the man does not think of his own past deeds as criminal when measured against the Roman justice system for they exhibit resistance against Rome's dominating power.¹¹⁹ Instead, in his mind his actions qualify for the power of deliverance that the Messiah can offer. The second man does not share this view (see the Note on 23:41).

23:40 *the other:* The second criminal now pushes himself into the Gospel record by responding to the first man. By doing so, he endears himself to believers everywhere. Although he remains unnamed here, a much later tradition in the Acts of Pilate assigns to him the name Dysmas.¹²⁰

rebuked: The verb (Greek *epitimaō*), though common, often portrays Jesus' actions (see 4:35, 39, 41; 8:24; 9:21, 42, 55; 19:39).¹²¹ In this light, Luke may be placing the man's action in the realm of expressing divine disapproval, perhaps as the scolding by the first man shows links to the devil's words (see 4:3, 9; the Note on 23:39).

fear God: In many occurrences of this verb in Luke (Greek *phobeomai*), it has to do with fearing or being in awe of the divine, often nourished and informed by faith (see 1:13, 20; 2:9–10; 5:10; 8:25, 35; etc.). In this instance, the meaning is close to fearing God who "hath power to cast into hell" (12:5).¹²²

23:41 *we indeed justly:* The second criminal does not share the view of the first, that is, that their deeds are justifiable because they fight against Roman power (see the Note on 23:39). These words stand in harmony with the affirmation of the centurion about Jesus, "this was a righteous [just] man" (23:47).¹²³

118. TDNT, 1:623; Marshall, *Luke*, 871.

119. Marshall, *Luke*, 871.

120. NTA, 1:459; Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 2:1509.

121. BAGD, 303.

122. TDNT, 9:208–12.

123. Brown, *Death*, 2:1004.

we receive the due reward of our deeds: Lying behind these words rests the sense that the criminal’s death will help him to reconcile himself with God. But, as becomes apparent in the next verse, he reaches both for the merit of Jesus’ innocence and for his power to bring him into his kingdom.¹²⁴

this man hath done nothing amiss: These words, on the lips of a criminal, stand in affirming contrast to the denials of those whose religious lives should allow them to see Jesus for what he is—an innocent man, and more. This judgment of innocence, of course, extends and enriches the innocence pronounced by Pilate and Herod as well as the centurion (see 23:47). Irony may also lie in the criminal’s words, pointing to what everyone should know—the innocence of Jesus, and that he is being executed against all norms of legal and social standards.

23:42 *Jesus, Lord:* The manuscripts preserve a number of readings at this juncture. This sense in the KJV is the more reverent. Other manuscripts have the man addressing Jesus directly by name, omitting the respectful term “Lord” (Greek *kyrios*). This is the only occasion in any Gospel that someone addresses Jesus directly by his name without a respectful title, perhaps illustrating a remarkable intimacy¹²⁵ or the language habits of the criminal class, who avoid titles.

remember me: The words of the criminal show that he has ability to see the Messiah for who he really is rather than being blinded by anger and, in his case, self-pity either for his course of life or for his capture. The sense of the verb (Greek *mimnēskomai*) is “to remember [me] for good.”¹²⁶ The felon’s expression mirrors words addressed to God in the Old Testament, begging for his blessing (see Judg. 16:28; 1 Sam. 1:11, 19; Neh. 13:14, 22, 31; Ps. 25:7; etc.).¹²⁷

when thou comest into thy kingdom: Various readings occur here among the manuscripts. The prepositional phrase “into thy kingdom” seems to be a later correction by scribes who do not understand the underlying Semitic expression “when you come again as king,” the better reading and a clear pointer to Jesus’ Second Coming. In this light, the felon shows his belief in Jesus as the returning Messiah.¹²⁸

124. TDNT, 4:677; Marshall, *Luke*, 872.

125. Brown, *Death*, 2:1005.

126. BAGD, 524; TDNT, 4:677; 5:770; Marshall, *Luke*, 872.

127. Green, *Luke*, 822.

128. TDNT, 5:770–71, n. 48; Marshall, *Luke*, 872.

23:43 *Jesus said unto him:* With this introduction, Luke records the last words that Jesus will speak to a fellow human in this life, and they are words of mercy and reassurance.¹²⁹

Verily I say: For the last time, Jesus utters the term “verily” (Hebrew and Greek *amēn*), a word that underlines the truth of what he will say next.¹³⁰

To day . . . with me in paradise: If the sense is accurate in the Note above, Jesus now promises more to the second criminal by offering immediate fellowship with him in the next world, on the very day of their deaths (see 24:26), as modern scripture illustrates (see D&C 138:11–19), rather than simply agreeing to bring him when he comes to the earth again “as king.” This notion is consistent with the general New Testament view that, in the world of departed spirits, association with Jesus is the main reward (see Acts 7:59; 2 Cor. 5:8; Philip. 1:23; 2 Tim. 4:18; also Rom. 8:38–39; 14:7–9; D&C 138:18–24, 36–37).¹³¹ The prepositional phrase “with me,” as elsewhere, embraces a sense of discipleship (see the Notes on 6:17; 8:1, 38, 45; 22:14, 28; 24:33).¹³² Jesus’ promise of deliverance fulfills the mandate that he sets for himself at the beginning of his ministry: “to preach deliverance to the captives” and “to set at liberty them that are bruised” (4:18). Moreover, his gracious forgiveness of a felon perpetuates a series of such acts toward those hostile to him, beginning with the healing of the high priest’s servant (see 22:50–51) and continuing with his compassion for the “Daughters of Jerusalem” (23:28) and his forgiveness of the soldiers (see 23:34; JST 23:35).¹³³

paradise: A Persian loanword that comes to mean a “garden,” this term and equivalent expressions in the New Testament, such as the “bosom” of Abraham (16:23), have to do with the realm of departed spirits, specifically for redeemed persons where “there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying” (Rev. 21:4; see 2 Cor. 12:4).¹³⁴

Analysis

Luke’s epic saga of the Savior’s crucifixion stretches to its apex in these verses. Here strides out the final taunt against Jesus; here stands another

129. Brown, *Death*, 2:1000.

130. *TDNT*, 1:338; *TDOT*, 1:320–22; Brown, *Death*, 2:1008–9.

131. *TDNT*, 5:771.

132. *TDNT*, 7:794–95, 797.

133. Brown, *Death*, 2:1002, 1012–13.

134. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ*, 670–77; *TDNT*, 5:769–71; Marshall, *Luke*, 872–73; Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 2:1510–11.

affirmation of his innocence; here unfolds—again—his merciful graciousness as it gently wraps itself around a condemned criminal.¹³⁵

Only Luke preserves the words that pass between the three men as they hang in agony, awaiting the inevitable. The desperation draped over the first felon that afternoon suddenly bursts out when, without hope, he calls for deliverance, any deliverance, from his dragging distress. In Luke's language, he blasphemes as he demands, "If thou be Christ, save thyself and us" (23:39). But the salvation that Jesus offers is not to deliver the three of them from their crosses but through his own cross.¹³⁶ If Jesus' mercy is to extend to this first criminal, he will need to change, as the second man rightly notices (see 23:40–41). For in railing on Jesus, the first man not only takes sides with the authorities and the Roman soldiers but also with the devil, whose words still hiss in the early part of Luke's report, "If thou be the Son of God" (4:3, 9).

Remarkably, the other man seems to be at peace. He plainly accepts his fate. But more is at play than a stoic resignation to his punishment. In some way, as he hangs on his cross next to the Savior, suffering as Jesus suffers, struggling for breath as he struggles, racked with pain as he is racked, he comes to see Jesus for who he is. Unlike Jesus, the man is guilty; unlike Jesus, he deserves his punishment; above all, unlike Jesus, he does not control what happens on the other side of death. But he obviously believes in the next life. So with his newly discovered insight into who Jesus is, he prays, he begs: "remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom" (23:42). Now he hears words that brim with mercy and grace, words that only Jesus can utter: "To day shalt thou be with me in paradise." We can only imagine the reassurance and peace that settle upon the man's soul. As one of Jesus' disciples, he will be "with" him; as one of those worthy to enter God's garden, he will be "in paradise," no questions asked (23:43).

Although the Gospels do not preserve the names of the criminals, their deaths are forever linked with that of Jesus, elevating them as his companions at life's end. Together their spirits pierce the veil of death linked arm in arm, as it were. Although one of the untold stories has to do with the final mental and emotional state of the first criminal, we can hope and trust that he responds repentingly as he hears the exchange between Jesus and the second man, an exchange that indirectly but warmly beckons him to join them after their pain is past and their spirits are released from their bodies.

135. Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 2:1508.

136. Green, *Luke*, 823.

NATURE RESPONDS TO HER KING (23:44–45)

(Compare Matt. 27:45–53; Mark 15:33–38)

King James Translation

44 And it was about the sixth hour, and there was a darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour. 45 And the sun was darkened, and the veil of the temple was rent in the midst.

New Rendition

44 And it was already about the sixth hour, and darkness was upon all the land until the ninth hour 45 because of the failing light of the sun. And the veil of the temple was torn down the middle.

Notes

23:44 *about the sixth hour*: The hour is about noon. At this time, the earth receives its greatest amount of light in a twenty-four hour period. It is, of course, the same time of day that Jesus reveals himself to the Samaritan woman (see John 4:5–26). Hence, we expect a disclosure of divine action, and nature does not disappoint us. Further, in Luke’s time scheme, this is the time that Jesus is crucified, a belated note on time.¹³⁷

***darkness*:** Nature drapes herself in mourning colors.¹³⁸ Not surprisingly, prophecy foresees this moment (see Moses 7:55–56; 1 Ne. 19:11–12; Hel. 14:20–24). The Gospels report less of nature’s mourning than that reported in the records of “those who are of the house of Israel” in other places (1 Ne. 19:10; see Matt. 27:45; Mark 15:33). In those other places, specifically the New World, people experience “a great and terrible tempest; and . . . terrible thunder” and “exceedingly sharp lightnings. . . . And many . . . cities were sunk, and many were burned, and many were shaken till the buildings thereof had fallen to the earth, and [were] . . . left desolate” (3 Ne. 8:6–7, 14). In a different vein, the darkness points to the apparent victory of Jesus’ enemies, their “hour, and the power of darkness” (22:53). In a third connection, the dark reminds us of the night during which the first Passover meal is eaten in Egypt, thus hinting at a connection to the Exodus when God’s people are about to undergo a memorable deliverance (see Ex. 12:3–10).

137. Morris, *Luke*, 359.

138. Plummer, *Luke*, 536–37.

over all the earth: To be sure, much of the earth is veiled in darkness, fulfilling prophecies to the effect that “the heavens were veiled; and all the creations of God mourned” (Moses 7:56), and that “many of the kings of the isles of the sea shall be [led to] . . . exclaim: The God of nature suffers” (1 Ne. 19:12). This said, the expression can mean “over all the land” (Greek *gē*),¹³⁹ meaning over all the land visible from Jerusalem, and thus thought of as a local phenomenon when it is much larger (see 4:25).

until the ninth hour: The time is about three in the afternoon, normally the time of the evening sacrifice at the temple (see 2 Kgs. 16:15; 1 Chr. 16:40; 2 Chr. 2:4; Acts 3:1; etc.; the Note on 23:54).¹⁴⁰

23:45 the sun was darkened: Luke or his source repeats in different words the observation made in the prior verse about the dark. This event inaugurates a partial fulfillment of Jesus’ prophecy that “there shall be signs in the sun,” becoming a pointer to the end-time (21:25). But it is a mistake to think of an eclipse here because such an event is impossible at the time of the Passover full moon.¹⁴¹

veil of the temple was rent: Significantly, Luke begins his story at the temple sanctuary and brings a partial closure with a report of damage in the sanctuary (Greek *naos*), forming a literary *inclusio* because this important Greek term appears only at the beginning and end of his Gospel (see 1:21–22; the Note on 1:9).¹⁴² Christians, of course, will continue to attend temple services and events at least until “the [temple] doors were shut” against the Apostle Paul and his fellow Christians more than twenty years later (Acts 21:30).¹⁴³ Almost all agree that the inner curtain suffers damage, one of the two curtains that hang one in front of the other and hide the Holy of Holies.¹⁴⁴ Between the two curtains “there was a cubit’s space” for the high priest to walk between on the Day of Atonement as he approaches the holiest place.¹⁴⁵ Incidentally, Herod begins the renovation of the temple in the winter of 20/19 BC, and the work continues on in Jesus’ day, ending no sooner than AD 62, more than eighty years later.¹⁴⁶ The rupturing of the veil, understood

139. BAGD, 156; Plummer, *Luke*, 536; *TDNT*, 1:677.

140. *Mishnah Pesachim* 5:1; Schürer, *History*, 2:299–301; Fitzmyer, *Acts of the Apostles*, 277.

141. Plummer, *Luke*, 537; Morris, *Luke*, 360.

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

143. Bruce, *Acts of the Apostles*, 396

144. *TDNT*, 3:629; 7:961; Ritmeyer and Ritmeyer, *Ritual of the Temple*, 25.

145. *Mishnah Yoma* 5:1.

146. Schürer, *History*, 1:292, n. 12; 1:308, n. 71.

symbolically, possibly points to (1) an act of mourning, a tearing of clothing, for the dying Messiah; (2) a bridging of the barrier, represented by the temple's veil, between the divine and human worlds (see Heb. 6:19–20; 10:19–20); (3) a pointer to the end of Old Testament temple worship because God abandons the temple.¹⁴⁷ There may also be another dimension that has to do with (4) a signal that the temple will yet fall. In any event, the passive of the verb implies that God extends his hand to damage the temple in response to what authorities do to his Son.¹⁴⁸

Analysis

As the light-bearer dies, nature goes dark; as hate seemingly wins out, the elements sound a warning. Thus, nature begins to mourn for her king, draping herself in dark hues and reacting as if pained, just as prophesied especially in other scripture (see Moses 7:55–56; 1 Ne. 19:11–12; Hel. 14:20–24). This action—and we can only call it an action because of what Jesus says about how nature will respond if humans do not acknowledge him as their king: “the stones would immediately cry out” (19:40)—breaches the seasonal situation in Jerusalem. The time of year is Passover, meaning that the Vernal Equinox is recently past and, for the first time since the prior autumn, the glow of the sun and full moon mingle, producing a full twenty-four hours of light. At this moment of celestial illumination when the earth is delivered from its dim winter hues and people celebrate the radiant deliverance of the Exodus, all goes dark.

For such events, and those that follow immediately, Luke slows down his narrative. How? By introducing the first notations of the time of day into his Gospel, “the sixth hour” and “the ninth hour” (23:44).¹⁴⁹ To be sure, the other Synoptists preserve these times of day (see Matt. 27:45; Mark 15:33). And like their reports, Luke's record allows readers to experience what he narrates as he rotates events slowly, almost moment by moment, in this most critical yet promising time. For example, within this three-hour period of darkness,¹⁵⁰ recorded and unrecorded, we hear the conversation between the three men hanging on their crosses and listen to the divine words of forgiveness that Jesus is still offering as the life sinks out of his body. We behold the darkness descend over both the city and

147. *TDNT*, 3:629–30; 7:960–61; Morris, *Luke*, 360; Brown, *Death*, 1100–2.

148. Green, *Luke*, 825.

149. Green, *Luke*, 824–25.

150. Morris, *Luke*, 359.

the land as far as the eye can see, dimming the sunlight and lessening the Passover celebration that is in full swing. We turn to the cry of priests who spread the shocking news that the temple's veil is inexplicably damaged, torn from top to bottom.

We also come away from these verses knowing that God is in charge. To be sure, the lowering gloom seemingly signals to the disciples the authorities' victory over Jesus. After all, Jesus' enemies make their way inside the circle of Jesus' most trusted associates, the Twelve, and engage one, Judas, as their agent. With a nighttime effort, they successfully arrest Jesus out of the gaze of the crowds and drag him before some of their number for a hearing to determine what they will charge him with when they take him to the Roman prefect, Pilate. Their object all along is to put Jesus out of the way and they need Pilate to legitimize their effort. Against all odds, including Pilate's ongoing reluctance to condemn Jesus, they succeed in gaining Pilate's assent to Jesus' death. They only have to raise their voices to get their way. So they win. Or so it seems.

But the damage to the temple's veil shows a different side to events. The winners are, in reality, losers. Those who oppose Jesus, whether Jew or Roman, if paying attention, eventually learn that the veil, which hangs in the sanctuary and is visible only to those who participate in lighting the incense, can be torn inexplicably. We suspect that the ruptured veil is replaced quickly because one is sewn as a replacement every six months as a matter of course.¹⁵¹ Even so, the God of the temple sends his warning.¹⁵²

Important for Luke's overall story, he begins his account inside the temple, in front of the sanctuary where Zacharias walks to light the incense (see 1:9). Now, whether Luke has any idea about the inner configuration of that building, he effectively closes his story at the same place, where the veil hangs and separates the inner temple from the Holy of Holies, just a few feet west from where Zacharias earlier stands. In effect, he creates a literary *inclusio* by framing his record with clear references to the same element,¹⁵³ that is, with references to the sacred space in front of the Holy of Holies. By doing so, he perfumes his record with holiness.

151. *Mishnah Shekalim* 8:5.

152. Green, *Luke*, 824–26.

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

THE GREAT REDEEMER DIES (23:46–49)

(Compare Matt. 27:50, 54–56; Mark 15:37, 39–41; John 19:28–37)

King James Translation

46 And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, he said, Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit: and having said thus, he gave up the ghost.

47 Now when the centurion saw what was done, he glorified God, saying, Certainly this was a righteous man. 48 And all the people that came together to that sight, beholding the things which were done, smote their breasts, and returned. 49 And all his acquaintance, and the women that followed him from Galilee, stood afar off, beholding these things.

New Rendition

46 And crying with a loud voice, Jesus said, “Into your hands I commit my spirit.” And after saying this, he gave up his spirit.

47 And seeing what happened, the centurion glorified God, saying, “Truly this man was righteous.” 48 And all the people who had assembled together at this spectacle, after seeing what had happened, returned beating their chests. 49 And standing at a distance, all the men known to him and the women who accompanied him from Galilee saw these things.

Notes

23:46 *cried with a loud voice:* We may wonder how Jesus’ raised voice sounds. As the King James Translators punctuate this expression, Jesus’ cry precedes his words spoken to his Father. But the Greek text, with the verb in participial form, points to the likelihood that in his loud voice he utters the following words.¹⁵⁴ Several reports exist that quote these words (see the next Note).

Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit: We must place these final words of Jesus side by side with those in John 19:30 (“It is finished”) and JST Matthew 27:54, which quotes Jesus as intoning, “Father, it is finished, thy will is done.” In Luke’s quotation, Jesus utters the words of Psalm 31:6 (Hebrew text). It becomes evident that, until the last moment of his life, Jesus holds the Father’s will as supreme over his own.

gave up the ghost: The Greek verb *ekpneō* simply means “to breathe out.” At the moment of death, it means to expire, with the added meaning that

154. Plummer, *Luke*, 538.

“the true self survives death.”¹⁵⁵ In other words, the spirit that departs the body is the person’s true self, not the dead body.

23:47 *the centurion*: The commanding officer who is in charge of the soldiers at the cross, this man may command up to one hundred men under arms. Mentioning the centurion here forms a literary *inclusio* of sorts when joined with the first notice of a centurion who resides in Capernaum, a man who, not incidentally, possesses “great faith” (7:9; see 7:2–10).¹⁵⁶

***saw what was done*:** The verb “to see,” of course, frames an essential element in a person’s testimony or witness (2:17, 20, 30, 48; 5:8, 26; 8:28, 34; 9:32; 19:37; 24:39; also 3 Ne. 11:15). In the case of the centurion, as with the second criminal, he seems to grasp who Jesus is immediately and responds accordingly¹⁵⁷ (see Matt. 27:54 and Mark 15:39). To point out the obvious, the centurion is one of the soldiers who enjoys Jesus’ forgiveness (see JST 23:34). Moreover, he is a firsthand witness of Jesus’ suffering and, as an experienced observer of other crucifixions, notices the striking differences between him and other condemned men. In sum, “The strength which he possessed at the moment of death was so unusual the centurion spontaneously acknowledged Jesus’ transcendent dignity.”¹⁵⁸

***this was a righteous man*:** In a word, this expression of the centurion effectively offers another verdict of Rome on Jesus, that is, that he is innocent (see Mark 15:39; Matt. 27:54). This conclusion, of course, matches the verdicts of Pilate, Herod, and the second criminal (see 23:4, 14–15, 41). In contrast to the placard that bears the accusation against Jesus, here the pronoun “this” reverses Rome’s view and sets it on positive ground (see the Note on 23:38).

23:48 *all the people*: The crowd grows throughout the afternoon. After all, it is a holiday and people are free from normal tasks. Plainly, news of the executions spreads through the city and people come to see. Some in the gathering may be disciples from the city, in addition to those from Galilee (see 23:49; the Note on 23:28).

***beholding*:** The same verb stands here as in 23:35 (Greek *theōreō*), implying that many in the crowd come to gawk at the “sight” or spectacle (Greek *theōria*).¹⁵⁹

155. BAGD, 243; TDNT, 6:452–53.

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

157. Brown, *Death*, 2:1004; Green, *Luke*, 826–27.

158. Lane, *Gospel according to Mark*, 576.

159. Plummer, *Luke*, 532; TDNT, 5:346.

smote their breasts: We first see this action in Jesus' story of the Pharisee and publican who come to the temple to pray (see 18:9–14). It is the publican who, in an act that signals his humility and contrition, smites himself, a clear sign of repentance. So it is here.¹⁶⁰ Many are touched by what they experience. Some in this larger group of people are likely among the three thousand who, seven weeks later, respond to the message of the Apostles and are baptized (see Acts 2:41).¹⁶¹

23:49 *all his acquaintance:* Luke seems to be nodding toward Jesus' followers from Galilee, a number that presumably includes, on this occasion, at least some of the Twelve. That they look on "afar off" hints that they feel some danger of arrest if they approach the place of crucifixion too closely. Among this group may also be Joseph of Arimathaea and other local disciples (see 23:50–53; the Note on 23:28).

women: These women of Galilee appear first in 8:2–3. Their extraordinary devotion to the Savior stands out in their willing presence at the cross. On the following Sunday, they will play a major role as they go to the tomb and then take the message of Jesus' resurrection to the Apostles (see 23:55–24:10). By their involvement, they stand among the eyewitnesses, as Luke's account emphasizes.¹⁶² Luke's notice of them forms a literary *inclusio* that helps to frame much of the story of Jesus' ministry and resurrection (see the Note on 8:2).¹⁶³

followed: The verb (Greek *synakoloutheō*) is richer than simply the meaning "to follow [as a disciple]." It carries the sense of following together with others. It casts a feeling of togetherness, of being not only with Jesus but also with the other women.¹⁶⁴

beholding: The root of this verb (Greek *horaō*) differs from that in 23:35 and 23:48, and carries a wide range of meanings, including "to pay heed" and "to pay attention."¹⁶⁵

Analysis

Those who witness the Savior's death now stride into full view in Luke's narrative. The feet of many of them seem to tread the path of faith, the

160. Brown, *Death*, 2:990.

161. Morris, *Luke*, 361.

162. Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, 48–51.

163. Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, 129–31, 366–67, 388, 390–93.

164. Liddell and Scott, *Lexicon*, 1693; BAGD, 791; Smyth, *Greek Grammar*, §1696.2; TDNT, 1:216.

165. TDNT, 5:342.

road of hope, although at the moment hope seems empty and faith seems vain. After watching Jesus die, many of “the people that came together . . . smote their breasts” in sorrow (23:48). Some of their number are doubtless believers already (see the Note on 23:28), and others seem to be touched by Jesus as he dies.¹⁶⁶ It seems safe to assume that they hear the derisive comments from the authorities and soldiers, even though they “stood afar off” (23:49). If they can hear the mockery, at least some of the conversation between Jesus and the second criminal reaches their ears. And they hear some of the surprising words from the centurion, recalling among them exactly what he says. Perhaps, they may think, their faith is not in vain as they hear words of veneration from the felon and the centurion who spend these last, fateful hours physically close to Jesus. For ourselves, with “all the people” (23:48), we witness Jesus’ last moments and hear his “loud voice” (23:46) as he addresses his Father and dies. We look at the Roman centurion and then listen to his respectful benediction uttered at Jesus’ death, “Certainly this was a righteous man” (23:47).

In a word, Jesus’ death affects people differently—some harden themselves, others are softened to the point of repenting.¹⁶⁷ This dappled view of this crowning event is part of Luke’s heritage that he hands on to readers. Even in death, the responses to Jesus are mixed. From his ministry, we think of the differing reactions of the healed demoniac and his neighbors (see 8:27–39); we recall the divergent responses of synagogue worshipers and the synagogue chief and his friends to Jesus’ healing of the woman afflicted for eighteen years (see 13:10–17). As in life, so in death, his presence creates “division” (12:51).

In these verses, the women from Galilee emerge from the shadows cast by other disciples. They are present and assisting from a very early period of Jesus’ ministry (see 8:2–3; the Note on 8:2). We suspect their presence, for example, in the preparation and serving of the Last Supper (see the Note on 22:8 and the Analysis on 22:7–13). Now, because they are among Jesus’ most devoted disciples and because they will step forward to prepare his body for proper burial, they walk to center stage. In coming verses Luke will feature them as the first witnesses of Jesus’ resurrection. By doing so, he creates an *inclusio* in his narrative, another arcing connection between beginning and end, another partial tying off of his story that is coming to a close (see the Notes on 7:2; 8:2; 23:47, 49).¹⁶⁸

166. Lane, *Gospel according to Mark*, 575–76.

167. Brown, *Death*, 2:990.

168. Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, 129–31, 366–67, 388, 390–93.

THE BURIAL (23:50–56)

(Compare Matt. 27:57–66; Mark 15:42–47; John 19:38–42)

King James Translation

50 And, behold, there was a man named Joseph, a counsellor; and he was a good man, and a just: 51 (The same had not consented to the counsel and deed of them;) he was of Arimathæa, a city of the Jews: who also himself waited for the kingdom of God. 52 This man went unto Pilate, and begged the body of Jesus. 53 And he took it down, and wrapped it in linen, and laid it in a sepulchre that was hewn in stone, wherein never man before was laid. 54 And that day was the preparation, and the sabbath drew on.

55 And the women also, which came with him from Galilee, followed after, and beheld the sepulchre, and how his body was laid. 56 And they returned, and prepared spices and ointments; and rested the sabbath day according to the commandment.

New Rendition

50 And behold, a man by the name of Joseph, who was a councilor, and a good and just man, 51 he did not consent to the council and to their action. He came from Arimathæa, a city of the Jews, and he was expecting the kingdom of God. 52 This man, approaching Pilate, requested the body of Jesus. 53 And taking it down, he wrapped it in linen and placed it in a tomb cut out of stone in which no one was yet buried. 54 And it was the day of preparation, and the Sabbath drew near.

55 And the women, following after, who came with him from Galilee, beheld the tomb and how his body was laid. 56 And when they returned, they prepared perfumes and ointments. And they rested the Sabbath day according to the commandment.

Notes

23:50 a man named Joseph: Unknown in the Gospel records before this moment, Joseph seems to be a sympathetic observer of Jesus' prior efforts, if not a full disciple (see Matt 27:57; Mark 15:43; John 19:38),¹⁶⁹ a firm indicator that earlier Jesus and his followers come to Jerusalem more than once where Joseph becomes acquainted with them (see the Notes on 10:38; 13:34; 19:47; 22:9; 23: 5, 28; the Analysis on 22:7–13).

a counsellor: The Greek term *bouleutēs* means that Joseph is a member of the Sanhedrin in light of no mention of any other official body.¹⁷⁰

169. Stanley E. Porter, "Joseph of Arimathea," in *ABD*, 3:971–72.

170. BAGD, 145; Marshall, *Luke*, 879; Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 2:1526.

a good man, and a just: Unlike Matthew, who notes Joseph’s wealth (see Matt. 27:57), Luke is more interested in his personal qualities, features that fit with Luke’s concerns about the cankerous powers of wealth (see the Note on 18:27; the Analysis on 18:26–30). The Greek term translated “just” (*dikaios*) can also mean “righteous.”¹⁷¹ In fact, Luke begins his Gospel by calling certain individuals “just” or “righteous,” a strong term, and ends in a similar manner, forming a literary *inclusio* (see 2:25; 23:47; the Note on 1:6).¹⁷²

23:51 had not consented: At first glance, it seems plain that Joseph of Arimathea dissents from the council’s decision to execute Jesus. And others may do likewise. Luke writes that all present at the hearing of the Sanhedrin agree to Jesus’ death (see 22:70–71) and then escort Jesus to Pilate’s residence (see 23:1). He offers no prior hint that anyone disapproves of the council’s decision. We must reckon with the likelihood that some council members do not attend the meeting. Is Joseph one of them? Does an absence allow him to avoid the peer pressure to join the others in condemning Jesus? Not likely. Here Luke seems to be refining and filling out the earlier scene by saying that, from the first, Joseph firmly opposes the “counsel and deed” of other Sanhedrin members.

of Arimathea: The preposition (Greek *apo*) means “from” and indicates either Joseph’s birthplace or the fact that the town is a former residence, or both. It seems evident that Joseph now resides in Jerusalem, where he becomes a member of the Sanhedrin (see the Note on 23:53).¹⁷³

Arimathaea, a city of the Jews: Evidently a town that lies about twenty miles east of Jaffa in the hill country, Arimathea becomes a Jewish town when the Syrian king Demetrius II Nicator is forced to turn over three Samaritan toparchies to the Jewish leader Jonathan Hyrcanus (see 1 Macc. 11:34).¹⁷⁴ Arimathea may have been a strictly Jewish town like those known in Galilee from archaeological investigations.¹⁷⁵

waited for the kingdom of God: The verb (Greek *prosdechomai*) stands in the imperfect tense and thus shows an ongoing expectation.¹⁷⁶ This verb

171. BAGD, 194–95; *TDNT*, 2:189–90.

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

173. Plummer, *Luke*, 541.

174. Jerry A. Pattengale, “Arimathea,” in *ABD*, 1:378; Betty Jane Lillie, “Demetrius,” in *ABD*, 2:135–36.

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

176. Smyth, *Greek Grammar*, §§1790, 1890–94, 2341; Blass and Debrunner, *Greek Grammar*, §§327, 325.

describing Joseph is the same that depicts Simeon, who meets Mary and Joseph in the temple and is “waiting for the consolation of Israel” (2:25).¹⁷⁷ In the New Testament, these two stand out as men who await God’s merciful acts. Because they are tied together by a common verb, it becomes apparent that Luke is paying attention to them, one at the beginning and one at the end of his narrative. The shared verb forms another literary *inclusio* in his record (see the Note on 2:25).¹⁷⁸

23:52 went unto Pilate: It is most interesting that Joseph seeks access to Pilate, especially during the days of the Passover festival, when he is to maintain his ritual cleanness, or even that Joseph walks into a gentile place. Perhaps he anticipates becoming ritually unclean when he removes Jesus’ body from the cross (see 23:53).

23:53 he took it down: By touching Jesus’ dead body, Joseph and those who help him contract ritual uncleanness. Notably, he disappears from the narrative, probably because he withdraws in accord with Mosaic law to purify himself for seven days (see Num. 5:2–3; 19:11–20). According to a vivid, imaginative account in the apocryphal *Gospel of Peter* that dates to the late second century AD and draws heavily from Luke’s Gospel, at this time Joseph washes the body of Jesus, apparently rinsing off the blood from the experience at Gethsemane.¹⁷⁹

wrapped it in linen: Customarily, the wrapping consists of linen fabric (Greek *sindōn*) that people wind around the body. The same term appears for the piece of clothing that the young man wears into Gethsemane (see Mark 14:51–52).¹⁸⁰ Luke does not write that anyone initially prepares Jesus’ body for burial with spices although John does (see John 19:39–40). In Luke’s report, the Galilean women are to return after the Sabbath to prepare the body according to custom, bringing spices (see 23:56–24:1).

sepulchre: According to Matthew, this burial spot belongs to Joseph of Arimathea and constitutes his own tomb (see Matt. 27:60). This observation hints that Joseph now resides in Jerusalem, not in Arimathea (see the Note on 23:51). Jesus’ burial in a sepulcher carved in rock, a common practice in ancient Palestine,¹⁸¹ is the subject of prophecy (see 1 Ne. 19:10; 2 Ne. 25:13). Perhaps importantly, because Jesus dies by hanging on a tree,

177. BAGD, 719; TDNT, 2:57–58.

178. TDNT, 2:58; Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, 124–47, 366–67, 388, 390–93.

179. *Gospel of Peter* 6:24, in James, *Apocryphal New Testament*, 92; NTA, 1:185.

180. Liddell and Scott, *Lexicon*, 1600; BAGD, 759; Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 2:1527.

181. David Ilan, “Burial Sites,” in Meyers, *Oxford Encyclopedia of Archaeology*, 1:384–86; Rachel Hachlili, “Burials: Ancient Jewish,” in *ABD*, 1:789–91.

as a criminal (see Deut. 21:23), it is very possible that Joseph intends Jesus' body to remain in the tomb only briefly.¹⁸² Interestingly, at the end of this verse, Codex Bezae and a few other ancient texts add that Joseph "put before the tomb a stone which twenty men could scarcely roll."¹⁸³

23:54 *that day was the preparation:* The day and time are significant. The day is the Friday before a Sabbath; the following expression, "the sabbath drew on," clinches the case (see the next Note).¹⁸⁴ Concerning the time of day, according to *Mishnah Pesahim* 5:1, "If the eve of Passover fell on the eve of a Sabbath, it [the evening whole burnt offering] was slaughtered at a half after the sixth hour" and is then "offered up at half after the seventh hour," that is, at about 12:30 and 1:30 p.m., respectively (see the Note on 23:44). The paschal lambs are slaughtered only after this offering. The burnt offering, of course, is "to make atonement" or to make expiation for sins. Such an offering is to be "a male without blemish" (Lev. 1:4, 10). These dimensions of worship bring the time of Jesus' death into contact with ongoing ceremonies at the nearby temple and link it both to the burnt offering which is sacrificed for all Israel and to the deaths of the Passover lambs.¹⁸⁵

the sabbath drew on: The verb (Greek *epiphōskō*) means "to shine forth, to dawn." Here it carries the sense of the beginning or dawning of the Sabbath, at sundown, or even the appearance of the first star after sunset.¹⁸⁶ At Passover, sunset is about 5:30, depending on the exact date. Because Jesus dies about 3 o'clock (see the Note on 23:44–46), little time is available for preparing and burying his body.

23:55 *the women:* Many of these women are to be identified with those whom Luke notices early in his narrative (see 8:2–3; also 24:10; see the Note on 23:49). Perhaps because they have little time, they do not mourn Jesus' death at the tomb, as is customary, but remain silent.¹⁸⁷ They will soon be among the important eyewitnesses to Jesus' resurrection because of what the angel tells them (see 24:4–9; Matt. 28:1–10).¹⁸⁸

beheld the sepulchre: The women evidently do not enter the sepulcher where Joseph and his helpers lay Jesus' body, but simply note its entry. Their effort will assist them if other tombs are carved nearby.

182. Klausner, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 357.

183. Metzger and Ehrman, *Text of the New Testament*, 71.

184. Marshall, *Luke*, 880–81; Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 2:1529.

185. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, 146–150, 153–154.

186. BAGD, 304; *TDNT*, 7:20, n. 159; Marshall, *Luke*, 881; Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 2:1529.

187. *TDNT*, 3:845–46.

188. Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, 48–51.

how his body was laid: If the women do not participate in the burial, how do they notice how Jesus' body is laid in the tomb? Tombs of this era are typically not large¹⁸⁹ and thus there is little room for maneuvering the body after carrying it inside. Hence, the women know a lot from whether Joseph carries the body feet first or head first. In addition, from outside the tomb, they apparently are able to see enough to know how Jesus' body is laid to rest.

23:56 they returned: Where do they go? They must be staying in the city itself because Bethany, where Jesus spends time, lies too far away to walk before the Sabbath begins that day at sundown.

prepared spices and ointments: The women are allowed to make such preparations for a dead person on the Sabbath. The issue has to do with any aromatic items that they have to buy in the market. They must wait until Saturday evening when shops open.¹⁹⁰ For the term *myron*, "ointment," as a literary *inclusio*, see the Note on 7:37.

rested the sabbath day according to the commandment: As Jesus respects the Sabbath day (see the Notes on 4:16; 19:5), so do his followers, notably these women whose action sets a standard for others because they are full participants in Jesus' budding church (see the Notes on 8:1–3). This notation subtly ties to other notices about those who participate in the founding of the Christian movement—they are respectful of and obedient to law (see the Note on 1:6).¹⁹¹ In this light, this announcement brings forward another literary *inclusio* that underscores the overall unity in Luke's story.¹⁹²

Analysis

Joseph of Arimathea, acting out of respect and affection, removes the Savior's body from the cross and places it in his own sepulcher. Jesus' body thus escapes a dishonorable burial in a common grave with the criminals who are crucified with him.¹⁹³ Even so, he will escort the wrongdoers' spirits into the spirit world (see 23:43). For those who suffer capital punishment, Jewish custom demands that their bodies be buried before sundown (see Deut. 21:22–23). Such a custom puts pressure on Joseph not only to bury Jesus' body before sunset but also to leave himself enough time to prepare for the coming Sabbath.

189. Ilan, "Burial Sites," 1:384–86; Hachlili, "Burials: Ancient Jewish," 1:789–91.

190. *Mishnah Sabbath* 23:5; Klausner, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 356.

191. Evans, *Luke*, 342; Green, *Luke*, 829.

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

193. Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 2:1524.

Once again, Luke notes the affectionate, hovering presence of the women disciples from Galilee. Events of this day do not push them to the side, as seems to be the case with most of the men. Instead, they remain nearby, discussing and thinking ahead. Knowing that the time following Jesus' death on Friday afternoon is much too short for readying his body for proper burial before the onset of the Sabbath and its evening rituals, they begin gathering spices and ointments and preparing them even during the Sabbath. Any items that they have to purchase for Jesus' body will have to wait until Saturday evening. They will not let the body of their friend and master suffer from lack of suitable, customary attention.

Luke here omits elements that he may have known about such as the rolling stone (see Matt. 27:60; Mark 15:46), though he notes it later (see 24:2), and the posting of the guard (see Matt. 27:62–66). In their place he brings forward one *inclusio* after another, enhancing a sense of unity and interrelationship within his narrative. We first notice Joseph of Arimathea. Luke's introduction of this man also presents two arcing connections that bridge from the beginning of Luke's Gospel to virtually its end. Joseph is initially called a "just" man (23:50). Such a term, which as applied specifically to individuals can also mean "righteous," characterizes both Zacharias and Elisabeth as well as Simeon (see 2:25; the Note on 1:6). The second characteristic of Joseph is that he "waited for the kingdom of God" (23:51). The same verb (Greek *prosdechomai*) applies to another individual, Simeon, who in his day is "waiting for the consolation of Israel" (2:25).¹⁹⁴

The third *inclusio* ties to the women of Galilee. They appear first in Luke's narrative at an early juncture, while Jesus is still ministering in Galilee (see 8:2–3). They reappear now near the end of Luke's story as concerned, affectionate followers and full participants among his disciples, who are determined to take action to honor the Savior (see 23:49, 55–56). Fittingly, these women will become the first eyewitnesses of Jesus being resurrected and the first heralds of his renewed life (see 24:1–10). The fourth *inclusio* also involves the women. We read that they "rested the sabbath day according to the commandment" (23:56). This notation underscores in bright colors their obedience to law, a feature that characterizes the first persons associated with Luke's story, namely, Zacharias and Elisabeth, Mary and Joseph, Simeon and Anna, and even Jesus himself (see 2:4–5, 22, 24, 27, 36–37, 39, 42, 51; 4:16; the Note on 1:6).¹⁹⁵

194. BAGD, 719; *TDNT*, 2:57–58.

195. Evans, *Luke*, 342; Green, *Luke*, 829; Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, 124–47, 366–67, 388, 390–93.

The voice of prophecy points to another omission that all four Gospels share—that of Jesus’ ministry among the departed spirits of the dead. A broad hint exists, of course, in Jesus’ words to the second criminal, “To day shalt thou be with me in paradise” (23:43). But we lack a treatment of this most important facet of Jesus’ ministry. Its significance rests in God’s words to Enoch the prophet when describing events associated with Jesus’ Atonement: “as many of the spirits as were in [spirit] prison came forth, and stood on the right hand of God” (Moses 7:57). How these spirits come to associate with God in this lofty portrait of the future we do not learn either from Enoch’s prophecy or from the Gospels. Instead, we turn to the first epistle of Peter to find out that Jesus, after “being put to death . . . went and preached unto the spirits in prison” (1 Pet. 3:18–19). Because “the gospel [was] preached also to them that are dead . . . they [will] be judged according to men in the flesh” (1 Pet. 4:6).

Besides the hint in Jesus’ words to the second criminal, his quotation from Isaiah 61:1 in the Nazareth synagogue carries a strong allusion of this future moment between his death and resurrection: “The Spirit of the Lord . . . hath anointed me . . . to preach deliverance to the captives” (4:18; see the Note thereon). In addition to this, the most intense intimation of Jesus’ postmortal activities pushes out from his sayings on casting out devils. Within these words, he sets out a scene of “a stronger [one]” who dispossesses “a strong man” and takes away “his goods.” In this sketch, the “strong man” represents the devil and the “stronger” person is Jesus himself. The struggle for control of the “palace” or home is made more fierce by the struggle for control of the “goods” that the devil initially controls and then loses (11:21–22). These “goods” are human souls. And the struggle is not limited to the mortal sphere but carries into the next life (see the Notes on 1:79; 11:21–22; the Analysis on 11:14–28; D&C 88:99; 138:18, 30–31). In this light, we behold with sharp clarity a pointer to Jesus’ labor among the departed spirits, a loving labor of deliverance.