

LUKE 9

Luke 9:1–6. Sending the Twelve

The following is adapted from S. Kent Brown, The Testimony of Luke (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2015), 447–449.

These verses, Luke 9:1–6, embrace the Savior’s commissioning of the Twelve, one of the vital moments for the church organization that He establishes. In effect, He entrusts His ministry into their hands, broadening the impact of what He alone can exert. To date, the Twelve have spent months at His side observing every gesture, hearing every word, and absorbing every lesson. Now the time arrives for them to imitate what they have seen and learned from their own experiences. At the heart of their preaching, assumed but unrecorded by Luke, rests their testimony of Jesus and His message. They already know much about Him and can testify to others about what they know. From other sources, we learn that He asks them to follow precisely what they have seen Him do.¹

Luke alone writes that Jesus generously confers both “power and authority” on the Twelve. For their part, Matthew and Mark record only that He confers authority on them (Greek *exousia*), though the King James translators render these expressions as “gave them power” (Matthew 10:1; Mark 6:7). Luke seems to understand the inner connection between power and authority that will manifest itself in miraculous events that he will report in the later ministry of the Twelve in the book of Acts. For, the gift inherent in their commissioning for this initial mission will continue with them—it is not a one-time gift to them—and will manifest itself in power at the coming of the Holy Ghost: “Ye [the Twelve] shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you” (Acts 1:8). This early experience will prepare the Twelve for their grand, challenging future, a future that will see Jesus intensifying His expectations for them, including extending their ministry to “all nations” (Luke 22:33–38; 24:47–48).

A number of commentators hold the view that the reports of sending the Twelve and sending the Seventy go back to the same event or same source. But no compelling reason steps forward that sweeps one or the other account from Luke's Gospel as inauthentic. Although the circumstances of the two missions are similar, the audience of each differs significantly: the Twelve go to fellow Jews (Matthew 10:6), and the Seventy go to the Gentiles, as the suspension of Jewish food laws illustrates (Luke 10:7–8). Moreover, the responses to those who reject the Apostles vary markedly: the Twelve are to remove the dust from their feet in private (9:5) whereas the Seventy remove it publicly in “the [city] streets” (10:10–11).

The differences that matter, it seems, concern those between Luke and Matthew and Luke and Mark, whose account Luke may be repeating and modifying. The common view is that Matthew and Luke draw information from Mark and from another source, termed “Q” from the German word *Quelle*, which means “source.” In this view, Luke draws on both accounts to form his story of the sending of the Twelve and the sending of the Seventy. As a caution, one observes that the existence of Q is without proof because no remnants of this hypothesized text have ever been found. In remarkable contrast, one observes that a control of sorts exists by which to test the accuracy of all the reports. This control lies in the Savior's reminiscences in a modern revelation.

In this later revelation, the Risen Jesus speaks of His “friends in days when [he] was with them.” He declares that when He sent them “to preach the gospel in [His] power,” He “suffered them not to have purse or scrip, neither two coats” (Doctrine and Covenants 84:77–78). Moreover, in an apparent allusion back to His instructions on that occasion, He declares that “he who feeds you, or clothes you, or gives you money, shall in nowise lose his reward.” In addition, “He that receiveth you not, go away from him alone . . . and cleanse your feet . . . and bear testimony of it unto your Father which is in heaven.” In fact, broadening the audience from individuals to communities, He instructs that “in whatsoever village or city ye enter, do likewise” (Doctrine and Covenants 84:90, 92–93). In all, it is important to note that God sets the timing and character of rewards and punishments.

Luke 9:7–9. Herod's Response

The following is adapted from S. Kent Brown, The Testimony of Luke (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2015), 452–453.

The interlude with Herod that follows the commissioning of the Twelve falls in the same place as it does in Mark's Gospel. In effect, it skillfully advances the passage of time until the Twelve return (Luke 9:10). But unlike Mark, Luke does not now write an extended account about John the Baptist's imprisonment and death, leaving this to a short summarizing note in Luke 3:20 and to Herod's words about executing the Baptist. Instead, by omitting the report about John the Baptist, which is part of the so-called “great omission” wherein Luke does not repeat any part of Mark 6:45–8:26, Luke holds his focus on the

empowerment of the Twelve, their successful mission, and their deeper grasp of who Jesus is through ensuing events such as the feeding of the five thousand and the divine disclosure on the Atonement.² Given this frame, it is difficult to know whether Luke makes a conscious choice to omit the Baptist's execution, for he must know about it.

In its own way, the story of Herod anticipates not only the appearance of his name in the later warning that comes to Jesus from the Pharisees but especially his unexpected meeting with the Savior in the capital city (Luke 13: 31–33; 23:8–11). By now, news reaches him, perplexing him (9:7). For the moment, he represents others, both in positions of power and in the larger populace, whose response to news and rumor about Jesus is to question who He is—“Who is this . . . ?” (9:9)—and what they should make of Him. We hear nothing more of Herod until Luke reports the Pharisees' warning to Jesus that the tetrarch seeks His life (13:31). Evidently, he comes to understand the Man from Nazareth as a significant threat whose continued existence will only cause trouble, the same conclusion that other authorities will draw about Jesus.

The most important dimension about this short narrative is that it frames the persistent question on everyone's mind, “Who is Jesus?” Most of Luke 9 forms a response to this question: Jesus is the one who authorizes the Twelve “to preach the kingdom of God” and who confers on them the remarkable powers that demonstrate that authority (9:1–6); He is the one who feeds the five thousand, much as Jehovah nourished the Israelites in the wilderness (9:12–17); He is the one who will suffer death and then rise again (9:22, 44); He is the one who, when stripped of His mortal dress on the Mount of Transfiguration, stands forth as the glorified Lord (9:28–36); He is the one who bids all to follow Him (9:57–62).

Luke 9:10–17. Feeding the Five Thousand

The following is adapted from S. Kent Brown, The Testimony of Luke (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2015), 457–460.

The feeding of the five thousand is the only miracle common to all four New Testament Gospels. Its essential elements also lie in the pages of the Book of Mormon. Hence, the miracle serves a broadly important function of revealing who the Savior is and how widely He is willing to cast His powers to bless people in their needs.

Throughout the account, Jesus is the main actor, thereby disclosing the full range of His efforts to reach into people's hearts. He guides the Twelve to a place that He chooses for debriefing and instruction, He graciously receives the crowd that follows Him, He teaches them and heals them, and He hosts a meal for all. Within one day, He interacts meaningfully with His closest followers and edifies and satisfies a large group, including, especially, the Twelve.

The Gospel of John ties the miracle to the Israelite Exodus by noting that the season is Passover and that Jesus later speaks of the meal as manna (John 6:4, 31). The Synoptic Gospels do not make this connection

overtly, though it stands in the background because in the wilderness, God meets all the needs, including food and drink, of His people.³

Further, as Jehovah gives His law to His people as a guidepost, thus nourishing their souls and minds in the desert, so by speaking about “the kingdom of God” (Luke 9:11) Jesus nourishes the hearts and minds of those present in the “solitary place” near Bethsaida (Joseph Smith Translation, Luke 9:10). Although none of the Gospel writers preserve anything of what Jesus says before the miracle—Mark notes only that He teaches them “many things” (Mark 6:34)—we cannot miss the elevating wholeness of the experience. Here, in a scene orchestrated by the Savior, we find guiding words, healing powers, and nourishing food.

We also find the same essential elements in the Resurrected Savior’s meeting with people at the temple in the land Bountiful. The presence of the temple, of course, adds a special quality to the experience in the New World. In that scene, particularly on the first day of His three-day visit, the Risen Jesus comes with words of instruction and edification, even repeating long segments of what He says during his Old World ministry.⁴ Moreover, He graciously offers His broad healing powers to those in His audience who are “lame, or blind, or halt, or maimed, or leprous, or that [are] withered, or . . . deaf, or . . . afflicted in any manner.” On that stunning occasion, “he did heal them every one as they were brought forth unto him” (3 Nephi 17:7, 9).

In addition, at the end of a long day with no breaks for meals, He asks His newly called twelve disciples to look for “bread and wine.” As soon as they bring a supply, He does exactly as He does near Bethsaida: “He took of the bread and brake and blessed it; and he gave unto the disciples.” But in a detail that is missing from the New Testament Gospels, He first “commanded [the disciples] that they should eat.” Only “when they had eaten and were filled” does He command “that they should give unto the multitude” who, in their turn, eat “and were filled.” Then, in a scene reminiscent of the Last Supper, the Resurrected Lord takes occasion to connect the experience with the sacrament, saying to the disciples, “Behold there shall one be ordained among you, and to him will I give power that he shall break bread and bless it and give it unto the people of my church, unto all those who shall believe and be baptized in my name” (3 Nephi 18:1, 3–5). Hence, in one day, as in the territory of Bethsaida, the Risen Jesus brings unlooked-for blessings of wholeness and completeness, overlaying the experience with sacred, sacramental meaning.

Perhaps the most striking similarity between scenes in the Old and New Worlds has to do with the matter of Jesus’s true identity, framed by Herod’s question, “Who is this . . . ?” (Luke 9:9). As noted, in the stories that Luke repeats in chapter 9, he is holding up this matter for resolution among Jesus’s hearers and followers, particularly the Twelve. In contrast, the Book of Mormon account resolves the issue of the Savior’s identity at the beginning of His visit and clarifies the question in light of a misunderstanding that initially identifies Him as an angel (see 3 Nephi 11:8). For at that blurring, confusing moment, the Resurrected Lord declares, first and foremost, “Behold, I am Jesus Christ, whom the prophets testified shall come into the world” (3 Nephi 11:10). Thus, in an instant, His identity becomes known to all; that is not the case in the Old World. There, for whatever reason, He reveals Himself cautiously, in stages. The

Twelve, we conclude, must grasp His identity early on, though apparently not its full significance, but other admirers and followers seem not to understand.

The absence of a reaction from the five thousand in the Synoptists' accounts is striking, particularly because John writes that "those men, when they had seen the miracle that Jesus did, said, This is of a truth that prophet." Moreover, Jesus detects that "they would come and . . . make him a king," leading Him to withdraw (John 6:14–15). Luke is silent. In the New World, by contrast, the reaction is one of joy and wonder at the Risen Lord's actions and words.⁵ Although no crowd reaction is reported at the end of the first meal that He provides, by contrast, at the end of the second New World meal, which He miraculously caters in the absence of bread and wine (3 Nephi 20:6–7), we read that the gathered people "were filled with the Spirit; and they did cry out with one voice, and gave glory to Jesus" (3 Nephi 20:9). These people rightly sensed that divine powers were in this moment gracing their lives.

We ask, What is the point of Luke's silence on this matter? He and the other Synoptists may well know about some reaction from the multitude. Whether or not this is so, it seems that he is leading his readers to focus on the Twelve and not on the assembly's reaction to the miracle. Readers know that the Twelve, who are involved first in the conversation about what to do for the crowd and then in settling the people and gathering and distributing the food, witness firsthand what is happening. They are the true audience. In addition, at first the Twelve clearly see that they are unable to offer substantial help to the gathered throng. But with Jesus's aid, they can extend a meaningful, sustaining hand. That lesson is not to be missed. Further, they gather enough to fill twelve baskets, an observation that points directly to their number. With these experiences, they come one giant step closer to grasping who Jesus really is. And this account sets in place the stepping stone for their representative, Peter, to express his testimony in the next story about who the Savior truly is (Luke 9:18–22).

Finally, the sheer abundance of the miracle pushes itself into our consciousness. In the past, Israel's God blessed His people with abundance, especially during their days of wandering and camping in the desert with Moses. Luke may intend his readers to recall those earlier experiences. For example, Bethsaida lies east of the Jordan River where it empties into the lake. In the Exodus, the children of Israel receive manna before reaching the west side of the Jordan River. But that is in the past. Jesus's actions, in contrast, point to the here and now—who He truly is—and apparently give directions to the future as well. One thinks of the coming Atonement that His miracles anticipate. We think of the messianic banquet, or marriage supper, on the other side of the Atonement at which the Savior will join his faithful followers in a celestial meal.⁶ One also thinks of the days of the Messiah when the earth will yield in abundance, at last escaping the curse placed on it in the beginning (Genesis 3:17; Moses 4:23). According to Old Testament passages, this abundance will manifest itself in the growth especially of grapevines and their fruit.⁷ In other sources that are roughly contemporary with the New Testament, this idea expands to hold that every vine will grow a thousand branches, every branch will produce a thousand clusters of grapes, and each cluster will bring forth a thousand grapes.

Luke 9:18–22. Jesus’s First Prediction of His Death

The following is adapted from S. Kent Brown, The Testimony of Luke (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2015), 464–467.

These few verses (Luke 9:18–22) continue the ever-pressing interest in who the Savior truly is. To be sure, Herod’s question—“Who is this . . . ?”—builds the proper framework for addressing this weighty matter. Notices about Jesus have reached the highest offices of the land, certainly via Herod’s trusted agents (8:3). This means that Jesus’s activities and words are gathering a relentless, almost palpable momentum among the populace. But the questions persist. Is He simply a wonder worker? A superb orator? A man in the ancient prophetic tradition? Popular views, such as those reflected in the rumors that reach both Herod and the Twelve, make out Jesus not as an important person in his own right but as a mere reincarnation of one of the former prophets. But such views demean the Man Jesus. It is in this stunted climate that Jesus seeks to reveal parts of His true identity. And He starts with the Twelve.

In contrast, Herod sits puzzled about news of Jesus; Jesus’s disciples do not. Part of the tangle in Herod’s mind grows out of his execution of John the Baptist; no such tangle exists in the minds of the Twelve. Instead, through Peter’s words, they express a straightforward, though still incomplete, grasp that Jesus is the Messiah, the one whom they and their fellow citizens have been expecting for a very long time. Although they do not yet comprehend all that Jesus’s messiahship may mean, they possess a firm first knowledge that will bind them to Jesus with an ironclad chain, even in the face of the most horrific persecution and death itself.

What Jesus announces, of course, illumines their minds about how His messiahship will play out. He will suffer and die. The sharp incongruity of this concept with the Twelve’s prior understanding shows up in their strong protest, voiced by Peter, that both Matthew and Mark record (Matthew 16:22–23; Mark 8:32–33). To bring the Twelve under control, and especially Peter, Jesus adopts remarkably strong language, implying that any misunderstanding carries a satanic quality: “Get thee behind me, Satan” (Matthew 16:23; Mark 8:33). Luke does not report these words but allows Jesus’s prediction of His death to stand without challenge. For Luke, evidently the chief missteps of the disciples are that “they understood not this saying” and, perhaps worse, “they feared to ask him” (Luke 9:45). In the end, a correct comprehension of who He is will come to stand at the base of their testimony about Him (Acts 2:22–36).

The two titles that appear in these verses, “The Christ of God” and “The Son of man” (Luke 9:20, 22), both of which uncover aspects of His identity, initially seem very different. The expression “the Christ of God,” or God’s Messiah, bears the sense that the Messiah draws His authority and mission from God. This messiahship does not arise from some human commissioning.⁸ And our testimony of its reality, as we learn from Matthew, comes from a celestial-borne revelation (Matthew 16:17).

The second expression, “the Son of man,” is more enigmatic and difficult to solve. For most scholars, this title, which occurs regularly in the book of Ezekiel and at Daniel 7:13–14 and 8:17, grows out of the

Aramaic phrase *bar 'enōsh* (“son of man”) and simply points to a human being. Thus, in this view, the origin of the title goes back to the Old Testament prophets and means little more than a mortal person. Whatever additional, special meaning the phrase holds for Jesus is imparted by Him into it. But an ancient record that comes from Moses through Joseph Smith sheds an unexpected light on this matter. In this text we learn that ancient titles for God consist of expressions that describe His attributes. Among them are “Man of Counsel” and “Endless and Eternal” (Moses 7:35); in this vein, the title that ties to Son of Man is Man of Holiness. In fact, the key passage reads, “Man of Holiness is his name, and the name of his Only Begotten is the Son of Man, even Jesus Christ, a righteous Judge” (Moses 6:55). Hence, the title Son of Man is originally tied to a sense of celestial holiness derived from God Himself and is unabashedly applied to Jesus Christ in His role as judge. What is not clear is whether the title Son of Man carries beyond the generation of Moses as a known title for the future Messiah. Its omission in the Old Testament suggests that it does not.

Two other omissions face a reader of Luke’s verses. The first is the omission of Peter’s protest, a topic treated above. The second is just as puzzling and concerns the omission of the accounts from Mark 6:45–8:26, including Jesus’s sayings about defilement and “the tradition of the elders” (Mark 7:1–23; Matthew 15:1–20), His healing of the Syrophenician woman (Mark 7:24–30; Matthew 15:21–28), and the story of Jesus feeding the four thousand (Mark 8:1–10; Matthew 15:32–39). To be sure, scholars of the Gospels have noted that Luke apparently avoids duplicate stories, such as the feedings of the five thousand and of the four thousand. But other omissions seemingly make little sense if Luke indeed is adopting much from Mark. For example, in a later passage, Luke records a brief confrontation between Jesus and a group of Pharisees at a dinner party over the issue of defilement (Luke 11:37–41). In this light, it is difficult to understand why Luke does not include Jesus’s long critique of the Pharisaic defilement rules that Mark reports, unless he gauges his one brief report of Jesus’s judgments to be sufficient (Mark 7:1–23).

In a second instance, Jesus heals a blind man in the town of Bethsaida (Mark 8:23–26). Luke does not record this notable story, an odd circumstance if Luke is a physician unless, again, he views the account of Jesus healing the blind man near Jericho as an adequate illustration of such powers (Luke 18:35–43; also 7:22). A third example concerns the healing of the Syrophenician woman, a Gentile. Both Matthew and Mark repeat this account, but Luke does not. Why not? In other passages, Luke shows an unabashed interest in reporting Jesus’s interaction with women and with Gentiles. Further, if he is a physician, such a healing will certainly draw his attention. But it does not. One is left to wonder whether he sees the healing of the Gergesene demoniac as ample evidence of Jesus’s power among Gentiles, particularly because this story ties nicely to the coming mission of the Seventy among Gentiles, whereas the healing of the Syrophenician woman exhibits no such connection beyond itself.⁹

The sum is that Luke’s omissions may fit a pattern, given the interests that are manifest in what he preserves and emphasizes elsewhere, a pattern of abbreviating or omitting when a story does not augment his portrait of the Savior. Hence, either Luke is not aware of Mark’s Gospel, which seems impossible

in light of his Gospel’s opening statement, or he chooses at points not to follow that account. Whatever the case, by arranging the stories as he does, Luke drives forward the emphatic points about Jesus’s true identity and its unfolding disclosure to the Twelve, keeping his focus on their experiences with Jesus that bring illumination.

Luke 9:23–27. Discipleship

The following is adapted from S. Kent Brown, The Testimony of Luke (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2015), 470–472.

The Greco-Roman world is full of disciples. Such persons owe ultimate loyalty to noted masters and teachers who carve out a way of living that appeals to people seeking discipline, occasionally severe, and looking for high-minded purpose in their lives. To a modest extent, such ideals come to influence later Judaism, though much less than in Greco-Roman society. Against this backdrop we measure the Savior’s requirements for His own disciples. His demands carry both tough obligations and astonishing rewards. He requires followers to heft their “cross daily” and even, possibly, to forfeit their own lives “for [Jesus’s] sake” (Luke 9:23–24). To refuse will bring a banishing shame upon them when “the Son of man . . . shall come in his own glory” (Luke 9:26). Thus, to accept discipleship from Jesus, such persons in effect take a path that leads in one direction only. But Jesus’s rewards go far beyond those that come to disciples of other masters, such as a satisfying, noble way of life. Astonishingly, those willing to follow Jesus shall save their lives both in this world and the next (Luke 9:24).

In a harmonic blend with the question about Jesus’s identity that persists throughout chapter 9, the Joseph Smith Translation adds a Christocentric overlay to Luke 9:23–27, drawing the focus even more clearly onto the Savior. For instance, after Jesus lays down the changeless requirement of denying oneself, He continues, “For whosoever will save his life shall lose it” (Luke 9:24). The Joseph Smith Translation adjusts this saying to read, “For whosoever will save his life must be willing to lose it for my sake,” drawing a refined light onto the Savior. The issue, then, is no longer one of misguided persons losing their eternal lives by focusing intently and solely on this life. Rather, the issue concerns their willingness to surrender their lives to Jesus in a selfless act, even if that act means a loss of mortal life (see the comments on Luke 14:25–35).

A second change leads in the same direction. According to Luke’s report, Jesus queries, “What is a man advantaged, if he gain the whole world, and lose himself . . . ?” (Luke 9:25). Although Luke does not repeat the words preserved in Matthew and Mark, “What shall a man give in exchange for his soul?” (Matthew 16:26; Mark 8:37), he makes this point plainly. But the Joseph Smith Translation shifts the focus entirely away from this question and onto the Savior Himself by adding nine words at a key point: “What doth it profit a man if he gain the whole world, and *yet he receive him not whom God hath ordained . . . ?*”

(Joseph Smith Translation, Luke 9:25; emphasis added). The added expression not only opens the possibility that people of means can be saved but especially draws Jesus into the middle of the picture as the one who saves.

The teachings about discipleship embedded in Luke 9:23–27 lead readers to a deeper grasp of who Jesus really is. He is not one who offers just a more disciplined way of life; He is not one who offers a more refined or robust education. Instead, He is the one who can offer an abundance of life that spills over into the life to come. Following Him, learning His discipline and adopting it, will bring disciples into the breathtaking hallways and colorful, decorated rooms of eternal life, in His company. In all of this, as in the prior stories related in chapter 9, the Twelve sit as the central objects of Jesus’s teachings, even though others stand with them in His audience. For it is the Twelve who will bear the chief task of leading others to see as they see, to follow as they follow.

Luke 9:28–36. Transfiguration

The following is adapted from S. Kent Brown, The Testimony of Luke (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2015), 478–482.

Rising almost without peer as a defining moment in the Savior’s mortal life, the Transfiguration ushers the three Apostles—and Luke’s readers—into the unseen world that constantly envelops Jesus and is briefly uncovered, for instance, in the earlier temptations account. But the contrasts with the temptations cannot be more sharply drawn. In that earlier experience, the devil privately and menacingly challenges Jesus’s authority and power, promising Him an exalted earthly stature that will assure results for His messianic ministry—if He will worship him. In the later incident, in the company of three trusted companions, Jesus is disclosed for who He is, the beloved Son who wraps within Himself God’s work from ages past, all represented in the reverential approach of Moses and Elijah, who themselves stand for the ancient, sacred interaction between God and His people that the law and the prophets enshrine.

The fact that other scriptural accounts refer back to the Transfiguration underscores its importance as a momentous decoding disclosure. For Jesus stands before the Apostles as He really is—pure, celestial, venerated. Peter, writing decades after the event, declares in undying astonishment that he and the other two were “eyewitnesses of [the Savior’s] majesty.” They beheld as “he received from God the Father honour and glory,” an unparalleled moment in Peter’s memory “when there came . . . a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved son” (2 Peter 1:16–17). But this is not all.

The Savior Himself draws attention to this grand event in a revelation to Joseph Smith late in August 1831. In noting the unspeakable rewards that await the faithful, He declares that they “shall receive an inheritance upon the earth when the day of transfiguration shall come; When the earth shall be transfigured, even according to the pattern which was shown unto mine apostles upon the mount” (Doctrine

and Covenants 63:20–21). Plainly, the experience of the three Apostles embraced a stunning vision of the eventual transfiguration of the earth, a vision that the New Testament Gospels do not report. Although matters are not fully clear, the vision granted to the three includes much else, for the Savior observes that we have not yet received “the fulness” of what happens “upon the mount” (Doctrine and Covenants 63:21). Clearly, readers of the Gospels live with abbreviated accounts.

Enough is preserved, however, to conclude that the experience is orchestrated, in large measure, for the benefit of the three Apostles. Even though it likely occurs at night and the three therefore struggle against sleep (Luke 9:32), the fact that Jesus invites them to accompany Him onto the mount illumines the first clue about the intended audience—these three men. Further, that the Apostles are allowed to overhear the conversation between Jesus and the celestial visitors rolls out the second tip. For the three Apostles, the content of the discussion is open to them. But their obligation to keep matters quiet among themselves following the experience does show its special, sacred nature (Luke 9:36). Third, the erection of the three booths evidently allows the three Apostles to sit with and receive private and personal instruction from Jesus and the two visitors. Such an experience will leave an indelible impression on the three men. Finally, the voice of witness that the Apostles hear from the bright cloud comes specifically to them, enlarging their view. This aspect, as noted, is so memorable that it arises as Peter’s emphatic point in his later correspondence (2 Peter 1:16–18).

We must also reckon that the experience is also for the Savior’s benefit. We learn from a later saying that He anticipated His suffering and death with apprehension: “I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened [distressed] till it be accomplished” (Luke 12:50). In this connection, Talmage writes that for Jesus the Transfiguration “was strengthening and encouraging. The prospect of the experiences immediately ahead must naturally have been depressing and disheartening in the extreme. . . . He had reached the verge of the valley of the shadow of death; and the human part of His nature called for refreshing.”¹⁰ The Transfiguration provided that opportunity to refresh.

Latter-day Saints carry a distinctive view of the extended purposes for the coming of Moses and Elijah. According to Matthew, on the earlier occasion of Peter’s confession—“Thou art the Christ”—Jesus promises that He “will give unto thee [Peter] the keys of the kingdom of heaven” so that “whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven” (Matthew 16:19). This promise is fulfilled when Moses and Elijah arrive. Although the transfer of keys does not appear in the Gospel records, it lies just below the surface. Malachi earlier prophesies that “before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord,” God “will send you Elijah the prophet,” who “shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers” (Malachi 4:5–6). This welding of generations, past with present, comes through celestial binding powers, the very powers that Jesus promises to confer on Peter. This conferral occurs when the “Savior, Moses, and Elias [Elijah], gave keys to Peter, James, and John, on the mount.”¹¹

For his part, Moses evidently confers on the three Apostles the same authority that he confers on Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery in the Kirtland Temple: “Moses appeared before us, and committed unto

us the keys of the gathering of Israel from the four parts of the earth” (Doctrine and Covenants 110:11). In an entirely different vein, Elijah arrives to “deliver the keys of the Priesthood, in order that all the ordinances may be attended to in righteousness” because “he holds the keys of the authority to administer in all the ordinances of the Priesthood.”¹² Therefore, on the mount, the Apostles received the “power to hold the key of the revelations, ordinances, oracles, powers and endowments of the fulness of the Melchizedek Priesthood and of the kingdom of God on the earth.”¹³

The possibility of other visitors coming to the mount surges forward in the language of the Joseph Smith Translation. In Mark 9:4 the text reads, “There appeared unto them [the three Apostles] Elias with Moses.” The Joseph Smith Translation adds to this sentence: “There appeared unto them Elias with Moses, *or in other words, John the Baptist and Moses*” (Joseph Smith Translation, Mark 9:3; emphasis added). In this reading, Elijah and Moses are not the only visitors to the Savior and the Apostles. At least the deceased John the Baptist, in his spirit state, comes as well. In his later words to the three, Jesus hints that this is so: “They have done unto him [John] whatsoever they listed,” an evident reference to the Baptist’s execution (Matthew 17:12; Mark 9:13).

In particular, the presence of Moses invites us to see connections to the Israelite Exodus. In fact, the overlay of the Feast of Tabernacles is more than subtle. For seven days in the autumn, this festival celebrates the days of the Exodus.¹⁴ The reference to the eighth day, tied to this festival,¹⁵ brings forward the first link. A second tie is visible in the three tabernacles that Peter proposes to erect (Luke 9:33) because those who celebrate this festival are to “dwell in booths” throughout the celebration (Leviticus 23:42). The third connection consists of the cloud. The cloud that accompanies the Israelite wanderers, of course, serves as a guide.¹⁶ But the cloud becomes more than that. The cloud also covers God and thus discloses His actual presence when He is among His people: “The glory of the Lord appeared in the cloud” (Exodus 16:10); “The Lord descended in the cloud” (Exodus 34:5); “The Lord came down in a cloud” (Numbers 11:25). In addition, the cloud regularly rests on the sanctuary, underscoring its holy character: for example, “The Lord came down in the pillar of the cloud, and stood in the door of the tabernacle” (Numbers 12:5); “The cloud covered the tabernacle” (Numbers 9:15); “The cloud tarried upon the tabernacle” (Numbers 9:22). All such observations hint that the appearance of the glowing cloud on the Mount of Transfiguration confers a sense of sacredness not only on events there but also on the place itself.

Luke 9:37–42. Healing the Possessed Boy

The following is adapted from S. Kent Brown, The Testimony of Luke (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2015), 485–486.

As in other parts of chapter 9, the question of Jesus’s true identity pushes its way to the forefront, dancing enticingly across the actions and words that Luke preserves. In a comparison with Mark’s account, Luke

omits much, if he is following it. Luke's version compacts the story of the healing and rolls it tightly and intimately with the Transfiguration, thus folding the revelation of Jesus's glory into the deliverance of the boy so that His divine nature becomes visible to all those who will see it, not just to the three Apostles.

The identity of the disciples who fail to control the aggressive demon afflicting the boy remains an issue because they remain anonymous. That their number includes some of the Twelve is very possible, even probable. If so, why the failure? Such demonic creatures have succumbed to their powers in recent weeks during their missions (Luke 9:1, 6, 10). But something is now amiss. Jesus's words in the other reports about the need for faith and prayer point to a lack of spiritual power, and perhaps more (Matthew 17:20–21; Mark 9:29). But it is a situation that can and will be remedied.

Luke 9:43–45. Second Prediction of Death

The following is adapted from S. Kent Brown, The Testimony of Luke (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2015), 489.

This second of the Savior's three predictions of His fate runs shorter in Luke's hands than in Matthew's and Mark's, not featuring Jesus's saying about His eventual execution and elevation from the dead (Matthew 17:23; Mark 9:31). Moreover, Luke clearly places the prediction on the same day that Jesus, with the three Apostles, descends from the mount and heals the boy, lifting it out of the vague, disconnected Galilean setting painted by the other reports and pinning it palpably onto the grand tapestry of the Transfiguration (Matthew 17:22; Mark 9:30). By doing so, Luke frames the Transfiguration between two important prophecies of Jesus's divine fate (Luke 9:22, 44), conferring on them the clarifying meaning that only the Transfiguration can bestow, with its stunning revelation of Jesus's glory and the rehearsal of His approaching "decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem" (Luke 9:31). And the prophecies are only for His closest disciples (see the note on Luke 18:31), unveiling as they do His ultimate end: "his death, and also his resurrection" (Joseph Smith Translation, Luke 9:31).

But the disciples do not grasp the import and meaning of Jesus's words, even after He pulls them aside for a private discussion and asks them to try to understand (Luke 9:43–44). They yet lack the frightening experience of watching authorities arrest their Master and physically force Him to the home of the high priest (Luke 22:54); they yet lack the wrenching experience of seeing Him hang on a cross and die (Luke 23:48–49); they yet lack the exhilarating, elevating experience of beholding Him as a resurrected being now freed from death (Luke 24:36–43). In a word, they lack the perspective that will come only when they and Jesus walk to Jerusalem for the last time and together face events there.

Once again, in these short verses, Luke leads us, his readers, to behold the common, strong thread woven through chapter 9: Who is this Jesus? To be sure, we know the outcome of Jesus's prediction of His betrayal and arrest; we know the rest of the story. But through Luke's narrative we can identify with the disciples'

lack of comprehension and can even understand the fear that keeps them from asking questions about what Jesus utters on this occasion.

Luke 9:46–48. Who Shall Be Greatest?

The following is adapted from S. Kent Brown, The Testimony of Luke (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2015), 492–493.

The disciples' question about their perceived importance in Luke 9:46–48 runs in the opposite direction from the real significance of the Savior as unveiled at the Transfiguration. In effect, the query about who they are resolves itself by asking, in this context, who He is. Yet, even though a wide gulf stands between them and Him in this matter, He responds to their dilemma with respect and with a visual aid. He knows that they do not yet fully grasp who He is and what He represents both in the here and now and in eternity. And what He points out about discipleship will bring them closer to a deeper understanding of Him. In a word, He seizes a teaching moment, patiently instructing them and moving them to a clearer insight about what it means to follow Him.

To be sure, the Savior shows concern about how people jostle one another for positions of honor and esteem, as His sturdy lecture about this topic at a Sabbath-ending dinner party illustrates (Luke 14:8–14). But here He busies himself with ultimate, celestial dimensions of a person's position, doing so plainly within the confines of what it means to be a disciple. At base, for Jesus's disciples, personal position is to mean nothing. Instead, the meaning and value of discipleship, of their relationship with Him, grows most robustly out of the disciples' interaction with others, particularly with others who enjoy no worldly importance in this life. To drive home this point, Jesus holds up a child, a representative of the helpless and unimportant. If a person who seeks to be a disciple will receive such persons as Jesus does and in His welcoming name, then that person receives Jesus. There is more. Discipleship in this case does not merely clothe the follower in the garment of the Master, so to speak. Discipleship brings the devotee stunningly to "him that sent" the Savior, to the one who commissions Him, to God Himself. Moreover, when a disciple comes to this elevating moment, that person becomes a conduit for others who seek the same: "He that heareth you heareth me" (Luke 10:16).

Perhaps most notably, Jesus begins His teaching moment with a child. Why? The disciples' memory of the child, of course, will serve as a vibrant visual aid, bringing Jesus's words easily to mind. But the lesson runs deeper. In the eyes of those present, Jesus heaps high value onto children by beginning His discussion as He does—that is, by physically placing the child next to Himself. The child represents not only the weak and vulnerable but especially other children. And a disciple begins to move meaningfully toward "him that sent" the Savior by receiving and respecting children as He does. This is precisely the point of the

Risen Jesus’s interaction with children during His New World visit. He elevates them and bestows His exalting esteem on them in the eyes of all who behold, including parents and family members.

Luke 9:49–50. Second Lesson on Discipleship

The following is adapted from S. Kent Brown, The Testimony of Luke (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2015), 494–495.

The exchange between the Apostle John and the Savior, initiated by John’s reply to Jesus’s teaching on discipleship (Luke 9:48), immediately raises the prospect of a broader, authorized group of disciples who are already functioning in Jesus’s name and possess His powers. The Gospel rehearses the calling and empowering of the Twelve as well as that of the Seventy.¹⁷ However, neither Luke nor the other Gospel writers recount the explicit authorization of others, except at Luke 9:60 where Jesus says to a potential follower: “Go thou and preach the kingdom of God.” These words intriguingly point to this possibility as well.

Exorcism, or the casting out of evil spirits, engages Jesus’s energies and power, as the plethora of reports demonstrates. And Jesus points to this action as one that faces His authorized servants, for to the Twelve He “gave . . . power and authority over all devils” (Luke 9:1), and the Seventy report that “even the devils are subject unto us through thy name” (10:17). Hence, a natural conclusion is that largely unreported by the evangelists, Jesus is authorizing other disciples to begin their work and this scene frames His lesson to the Twelve about a shared responsibility. Such a conclusion about an apparent omission, if there is one, should not be surprising. Why not? Because, to turn to a different topic, none of the Gospel accounts report what Jesus does during the time that His body lies in the tomb, though other sources do. This lapse, coupled with others such as the omission of Jesus’s multiple trips to Jerusalem, forms omissions of major proportions.¹⁸

Luke 9:51–56. Turning toward Jerusalem

The following is adapted from S. Kent Brown, The Testimony of Luke (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2015), 499–501.

These six verses, Luke 9:51–56, frame a major junction in Luke’s story, as the verbs and nouns in 9:51 illustrate. Jerusalem now comes prominently into view as the main aim of the Savior’s ministry. Some call the next few chapters a travel account or the journey. To this point, Jesus pursues His ministry within the tetrarchy of Galilee that Herod Antipas manages and, to the east, the tetrarchy of Gaulanitis that his brother Herod Philip rules. Along the way, He interacts with Jews and Gentiles. Now He reaches out to Samaritans, a people holding severe differences from the Jews. Before this moment, His genuine interest

in them appears, first, in His rebuke of the two brothers who want to call down fire on those Samaritans who refuse to receive them and, second, in His quiet, noncensuring retreat to another village.

These markings in Jesus's interaction with His disciples and His example to them frame part of the larger pattern in this chapter of revealing Jesus's true identity and setting the proper dimensions of discipleship. Jesus's rebuke unveils His attitude toward irresponsible ideas and acts, disclosing His refined sense for appropriate actions. He will not be a party to willful and wanton destruction in any form. Further, in the matter of discipleship, it becomes apparent that His disciples have learned that they are to check with Him before they undertake any important task in His name. In a word, they are to learn His will. In their case, simply adopting some of His teachings will not do. Their wills are to line up with His.

Jerusalem already serves as an important factor in Luke's story, standing as a destination for the Savior's parents in the weeks following His birth and as the place for a story from His youth (Luke 2:22, 42), as well as the scene for one of the devil's temptations (4:9). But now it looms as the terminus of Jesus's final journey where the events of His last days will play out and where He will undertake His atoning acts. Throughout the next few chapters, the capital city is never far from Jesus's thoughts, as Luke's notations and Jesus's words will demonstrate.¹⁹

Lurking beneath the report tied to the Samaritan village stands the centuries-long antagonism between Jews and Samaritans. Jesus's now public intent to take His ministry to Jerusalem stirs resentment among Samaritans because they, besides intensely disliking and distrusting Jews, worship at their temple on Mount Gerizim, a small building by any account, and refuse to join in worship activities at the Jerusalem temple. The two structures and the locales where they sit serve as symbols of the deep division between the two peoples. Thus, Jesus's announced plan to journey to the Jews' capital city inflames the passions of those Samaritans who learn of it. But Jesus does not retaliate. Rather, He respects their feelings and, what is more, bats down the irresponsible proposal of two disciples who want to strike back (Luke 9:54–56). In so doing, the Savior shows a bit more of who He is and what He represents, establishing further boundaries for those who seek to be His disciples.

For Matthew especially and for Mark, much of what follows in Jesus's ministry takes place in Perea, "beyond Jordan," on the river's east bank (Matthew 19:1–2; also Mark 10:1). But in Luke's reconstruction, Jesus also continues to teach west of the Jordan River, alternately slipping between Samaritan and Galilean territory: "He passed through the midst of Samaria and Galilee" (Luke 17:11). In this light, Jesus keeps on preaching to Jews of the north and to Samaritans who dislike all Jews, spreading His teachings and offering His example in an effort to bind up old wounds and heal hardened hearts. Of course, His preaching travels will take Him to Jews who reside on the east side of the Jordan River, as He makes his way to Jerusalem, though Luke does not specifically feature this region. Unlike the Savior's successful efforts in the New World to put a soothing salve on a fractured society and to unite it, here His labors seem to improve the situation only marginally. But He does not turn away from His tasks.

Luke 9:57–62. Third Lesson on Discipleship

The following is adapted from S. Kent Brown, The Testimony of Luke (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2015), 503–504.

Concern for discipleship weaves itself through these lines, Luke 9:57–62. We are to grasp the Savior’s words in the light of the three Apostles’ experience on the mount, see the Savior for who He really is and thus tying their loyalty to celestial verities (Luke 9:28–36); we are to understand these sayings within the sharp demands on true disciples that appear in the unstinting responses of the Twelve who receive their charge and depart immediately on their missions (Luke 9:6). Following Jesus is not a casual matter: it demands all but rewards all (see Luke 14:25–33; 18:28–30). This theme that appears at the beginning, at the center, and at the end of chapter 9 confers a unity both on the chapter and on Jesus’s enduring teaching.

Discipleship with Jesus, of course, involves a set of ultimate standards that reaches beyond even family concerns: “Suffer me first to go and bury my father” (Luke 9:59). Perhaps oddly, the person who accepts the tough demands placed on disciples finds himself or herself in a sunny landscape. This scenery comes into view after passing through the tunnel of deciding whether to accept Jesus’s requirements of discipleship and offers back the loving graces of family and friends, now wrapped in eternal bonds. But the disciple, after decision, now carries a different set of priorities and even desires that allow him or her not only to follow Jesus through thick and thin but also to reach out to others to bless them exactly as He would do. Disciples thus become imitators of Jesus in the highest, loftiest manner.²⁰

Subtly, the sayings reveal more of Jesus’s true identity. He brings a message that requires hearers and readers to confront and make decisions that carry ultimate consequences, that lead to celestial realities. His is not simply a feel-good message because He is not simply a feel-good person. His celestial nature, His heavenly origin elevates His requirements for disciples to an eternal level of reality that indeed takes account of this world but ultimately diminishes its lasting importance: “The Son of man hath not where to lay his head” (Luke 9:58).

Notes

- 1 3 Nephi 18:6, 13, 16, 24; 27:21.
- 2 Luke 9:1–5, 10, 12–17, 28–36.
- 3 Exodus 15:23–25; 16:4; Numbers 11:8–9; Psalms 78:15–16, 24; 105:40–41.
- 4 See 3 Nephi 11:22–41; 12:1–14:27; 15:3–16:20.
- 5 3 Nephi 11:16–17; 17:5, 16–17.

- 6 Luke 6:21; 14:15; 22:30; Isaiah 25:6–8; Revelation 19:9; Doctrine and Covenants 27:5–14; 65:3; 58:8–11; 65:3. See the notes on Luke 4:1–13; 12:37; 13:25, 28; 14:15; 22:16–18, 30.
- 7 Jeremiah 32:15; Hosea 14:7; Amos 9:13–14.
- 8 See Luke 10:22 and the notes on Luke 3:2, 21–22; 4:18.
- 9 Luke 8:26–39; 10:1–12, 17–20.
- 10 James E. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1963), 17.
- 11 *Teachings of the Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City, UT: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2007), 105.
- 12 *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 172.
- 13 Talmage, *Jesus the Christ*, 371.
- 14 See Leviticus 23:34, 36, 39, 42; Numbers 29:12–34.
- 15 Luke 9:28; Leviticus 23:39; Numbers 29:35.
- 16 Exodus 13:21–22; 14:19; Numbers 9:17.
- 17 Luke 6:13–16; 9:1–5; 10:1–11.
- 18 See 1 Peter 3:18–20; 4:6; the notes on Luke 4:18; 9:22; 11:21–22; 22:9.
- 19 Luke 12:50; 13:22, 33–34; 17:11; 18:31; 19:11, 28.
- 20 See the comments on Luke 9:23–27; 14:25–35; 18:29–30; 21:1–4.

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