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## Luke Chapter 5

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**Abstract:** A commentary on the events of Luke 5, accompanied by parallel columns of the King James translation of the chapter alongside a new rendition.



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# Luke Chapter 5

## INTRODUCTION

Miracles are woven through the fabric of much of this segment, brightening into a colorful pattern at the beginning of the lively, busy tapestry of the Savior's ministry. In their own way, they tighten the proof of who Jesus is and what he is empowered to do, as he declares when he heals the paralytic—"that ye may know that the Son of man hath power upon earth to forgive sins" (5:24). It seems that the sequential order of the miracles builds and radiates strength, creating a rising crescendo of sorts, starting with Jesus casting out "a spirit of an unclean devil" from a man in the Capernaum synagogue (4:33–35) and surging to his healing of the man "taken with a palsy," which involves subduing a long-standing disease (5:18–25; see the Analysis on 5:17–26).

This chapter thus reveals Jesus in his majesty as Son of God. It is his grand disclosure, as it were, culminating in forgiving sins, which only a God can do (see 5:20, 24). To be sure, he has performed miracles, as the prior chapter affirms (see 4:35, 39, 40–41). But here Jesus shows his powers over "the deep" (5:4), over the hidden and invisible animal kingdom in the form of fish (see 5:6), and over debilitating diseases—leprosy and palsy or paralysis (see 5:24–25). Such a message appeals to all people. There is more.

If chapter 4 is draped in the cloths of not only the clash with the clever devil over authority and power but also Jesus' answers to the devil's challenges delivered in synagogues, chapter 5 spreads out before readers the formal inauguration of the institution that will replace the synagogue, that is, the church. For it opens with the calling of the first four of the Twelve—two pairs of brothers, Peter and Andrew, James and John—and later adds in the calling of the fifth, Levi. Within these vivid accounts hang tapestries sparkling with Jesus' power over an illness (leprosy) and a life-long affliction (paralysis), demonstrations that go far beyond Jesus' gentle healing of Peter's mother-in-law (see 4:38–39). The dimensions of Jesus' power grow before our eyes.

The chapter also pushes forward Jesus' disciples as witnesses of his deeds and words. In this sense too, the stories underscore the forming of the Twelve. For Luke relates the accounts of Jesus' choosing disciples who will become his most intimate associates. Their responses to his invitation, by the way, are immediate and complete, and he responds on his side by providing for their families (see 5:11, 28; the Note on 5:6; Analysis on 5:1–11). Then, both before and after he chooses them, they witness the mighty acts that he performs, including the draught of fish (see 5:6–9), the healing of the leper (see 5:12–14; the disciples are present implicitly), and the healing of the man with palsy (see 5:24–25). The response of the crowd to the last miracle must also characterize the disciples' response: "they were all amazed, and they glorified God, and were filled with fear" (5:26). This is not all.

In a literary way, Luke opens the chapter by narrating the story of Jesus choosing four disciples (see 5:1–11). At the end, he records Jesus' parable about new wine in old bottles or skins (see 5:36–38). This parable unabashedly points to the new kingdom of God that has come to mankind with the arrival of Jesus (see 4:43), a kingdom which will show the inadequacy of old religious ways. By placing all these events together, in close proximity, Luke beams light onto the connecting fabric between the disciples and the new kingdom which Jesus introduces. Thus, rather than Jesus operating on his own, as he has done for a brief period in chapter 4, he begins to gather a community of believers, a community that will grow into his church.

Such a community of believers does not simply exist without a shared charter, without a clear purpose. And we see among the Savior's impressive actions an emerging set of teachings and concepts that form a fundamental guide for his followers. In chapter 5, for instance, Luke preserves Jesus' charge to the healed leper to show himself "to the priest, and offer for thy cleansing, according as Moses commanded," words that affirm the continuing value of elements in the law of Moses (5:14). Further, within his kingdom a person can find forgiveness of sins, healing from spiritual sicknesses, fasting for comfort, and new paths to follow (see 5:23–24, 31–32, 35, 38). Finally, as we shall learn in the next chapter, Jesus will set out in a sermon his expectations for citizens of his kingdom (see 6:20–49).

## CALL OF FIRST DISCIPLES (5:1–11)

(Compare Matt. 4:18–22; Mark 1:16–20)

### King James Translation

1 And it came to pass, that, as the people pressed upon him to hear the word of God, he stood by the lake of Genesaret, 2 And saw two ships standing by the lake: but the fishermen were gone out of them, and were washing their nets. 3 And he entered into one of the ships, which was Simon's, and prayed him that he would thrust out a little from the land. And he sat down, and taught the people out of the ship.

4 Now when he had left speaking, he said unto Simon, Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught. 5 And Simon answering said unto him, Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing: nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net. 6 And when they had this done, they inclosed a great multitude of fishes: and their net brake. 7 And they beckoned unto their partners, which were in the other ship, that they should come and help them. And they came, and filled both the ships, so that they began to sink.

8 When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord. 9 For he was astonished, and all that were with him, at the draught of the fishes which they had taken: 10 And so was also James, and John, the sons of Zebedee, which were partners with Simon. And Jesus said unto Simon, Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men. 11 And when they had brought their ships to land, they forsook all, and followed him.

### New Rendition

1 And it came to pass that, while the crowd pressed upon him and listened to the word of God, he stood by the lake of Gennesaret. 2 And he saw two boats standing along the lake. And the fishermen from them had disembarked and were washing their nets. 3 Upon getting into one of the boats, which was Simon's, he asked him to push off a little from the shore. And after sitting down, he began to teach the people from the boat.

4 When he stopped speaking, he said to Simon, "Go out to the deep and let down your nets for a catch." 5 And Simon said in response, "Master, we have caught nothing, although we worked all night. But at your word, I will let down the nets." 6 And after they did this, they caught a great amount of fish, and their nets began to burst. 7 And they motioned to their co-workers in the other boat to come help them. And they came and filled both boats so that they were sinking.

8 And when Simon Peter saw this, he fell down at Jesus' knees saying, "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man." 9 For fear seized him and all those with him because of the catch of fish they had taken. 10 And it likewise seized James and John, the sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. And Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid, from now on you will catch men." 11 And once they had brought their boats to the shore, they left everything and followed him.

## Notes

**5:1 the people pressed upon him to hear the word of God:** Evidently, those of Capernaum who see or know of Jesus' miracles and hear him teach (see 4:31–32, 44) come to believe that he carries God's word, with powers constituting the proof of God's approval and commissioning—"with authority and power he commandeth" (4:36). We find the term translated "people" (Greek *ochlos*) throughout Luke's report for crowds who hear and interact with Jesus (see 3:7, 10; 4:42; 5:3, 15, 19, 29; 6:19; etc.).<sup>1</sup>

**the word of God:** The Greek term *logos* differs from that which describes the revelation to the Baptist (see the Note on 3:2), but in Luke's record, it appears in this expression as the word that one receives and responds to (see 8:11, 21; 11:28).<sup>2</sup> Moreover, in Acts the expression characterizes the missionary message of the church, thus tying together Jesus' words and those of his followers (see Acts 4:31; 6:2; 8:14; 11:1; etc.).<sup>3</sup>

**he stood by the lake:** The locale is most likely at Capernaum where Peter's home stands (see 4:38). Here Peter enjoys access to tools and supplies for keeping his nets and fishing equipment in good repair. Luke properly calls this body of water a lake (Greek *limnē*)<sup>4</sup> whereas other New Testament writers call it a sea (see 8:22, 23, 33; Matt. 4:18; 8:24; etc.; Mark 1:16; 2:13; etc.; John 6:1, 16; etc.).

**Gennesaret:** Josephus repeats this name as a local term with the pronunciation Gennesar. The longer spelling may well derive from the name Chinnereth (see Num. 34:11).<sup>5</sup>

**5:2 two ships:** This detail points to an eyewitness recollection of the scene. The Greek texts of this verse differ on the spelling for the word "ships."<sup>6</sup> The preferred term (Greek *ploiaria*) represents a boat rather than a larger ship. Such a fishing craft has been discovered near the north shore of the Sea of Galilee in 1986, not far from Capernaum. It measures 27 x 7.5 feet, is 4.3 feet deep, and is constructed from a number of different woods.<sup>7</sup>

1. BAGD, 605–6; Johnson, *Luke*, 87.

2. BAGD, 478–80; *TDNT*, 4:74–75, 102.

3. Marshall, *Luke*, 201.

4. Strabo (64 BC–AD 21), almost Luke's peer, writes *limnē* ("lake") in his *Geography* (see 16.2.45).

5. Josephus, *B.J.* 3.10.1 (§463); 3.10.7 (§506); Marshall, *Luke*, 201.

6. Marshall, *Luke*, 201–2; Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 1:566.

7. Wachsmann, *Sea of Galilee Boat*.

**washing their nets:** After a night’s fishing, fishermen remove the moss and other floating debris from their deep sea nets (trammel) and drag nets (seine) and hang them to dry.<sup>8</sup> The Joseph Smith Translation reads “wetting their nets,” perhaps with the sense that the fishermen are rinsing the nets one last time before drying them. Naturally, Peter’s work on his nets allows him to respond immediately to Jesus’ instruction to drop his nets into the water again (see 5:4). In Mark’s story of Jesus calling Peter and his fellows, Peter and Andrew are casting nets, and James and John are repairing their nets (see Mark 1:16–20). Deep sea nets, drag nets, and casting nets are not of the same construction and weave.<sup>9</sup> These differences again raise the question whether Luke is following or borrowing from Mark’s account.

**5:3 one of the ships which was Simon’s:** In the following narrative, Simon Peter takes up the entire frame of the account. Even though his brother Andrew is surely present (see the Notes on 5:5–6), he remains unnamed. And Peter’s partners do not receive names until the end of the story (see 5:10). Peter will not hold our gaze in a similar way until his denials in the courtyard of the high priest (see the Analysis on 22:54–62). Placing Peter here and then in later scenes creates an *inclusio* that bespeaks the unity of Luke’s narrative (see the Notes on 5:8; 22:54; 24:12).<sup>10</sup>

**prayed him that he would thrust out a little from the land:** We should think of Jesus taking up a place in the stern or back end of the boat, sitting down, and Peter pushing the bow or front end, which lies on the shore itself, out into the water. That Peter does so without raising questions indicates his growing respect for Jesus from his few brief contacts with him.

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8. Eric F. F. Bishop, “Jesus and the Lake,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 13 (1951): 398–414, especially 400–403.

9. David Bivin, “The Miraculous Catch: Reflections on the Research of Mendel Nun,” *Jerusalem Perspective* 5 (March/April 1992): 7–10; Mendel Nun, “Cast Your Net upon the Waters,” *Biblical Archaeology Review* 19 (November–December 1993): 46–56, 70; W. Stewart McCullough, “Net,” in *IBD*, 3:539–40; James B. Pritchard, *The Ancient Near East in Pictures Relating to the Old Testament*, 2d ed. with suppl. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), figs. 112 and 113. Few nets have been recovered archaeologically in Palestine. For a net of linen, see Yigael Yadin, *The Finds from the Bar Kokhba Period in the Cave of Letters* (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1963), 267–68; for a net from date palm fibers, see Kathryn Bernick, “Masada Basketry, Cordage and Related Artifacts,” in *Masada IV, The Yigael Yadin Excavations 1963–1965, Final Reports*, ed. Joseph Aviram, Gideon Foerster, and Ehud Netzer (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1994), 283–317, esp. 304–5; Green, *Luke*, 232.

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

**he sat down, and taught:** As we learn from Jesus' visit to the Nazareth synagogue, the proper position for teaching is sitting (see 4:20), although he stands for his sermon to his disciples on the Mount of Olives (see D&C 45:16). Standing in a boat, of course, carries the risk of rocking the boat and falling. Naturally, we wish that Luke preserve a few words from Jesus' teaching, if he enjoys access to them (see the Note on 24:27). More than this, Luke's point is that Peter now becomes the first named witness to Jesus' words in addition to his notable acts (see 4:38–39; the Notes on 5:8 and 24:34).

**5:4 the deep:** The Greek term *bathos*, meaning “depth,”<sup>11</sup> hints at ties to the creation account wherein God shows his powers over “the deep,” though a different term appears in the Greek text of Gen. 1:2 (*abyssos*;<sup>12</sup> the two terms are equivalent in LXX Ezek. 26:19–20 and 31:14–15; see the Note on 8:31; compare Moses 2:2). But richer connections for *bathos* lie in two different directions. First, in a reversal, the “depth” of the sea, usually a place of death, is to become a path for the ransomed, “a way of passage for the delivered and redeemed” (Isa. 51:10). Second, the “depth” of the earth receives the dead (see Rom. 10:7), particularly those who need redemption, as exemplified by Pharaoh and dead Egyptians (see LXX Ezek. 26:19–20; 31:14–15, 18; 32:18–21, 24; compare 2 Ne. 27:29). These links point to a life-giving, life-saving dew distilling from the Savior's personal ministry to the world of the departed dead (see the Note on 24:21; D&C 138:11–24, 27). Further, other scriptural texts open the possibility that Jesus is showing his control not only over the unseen world but especially over one of the realms of Satan (see Isa. 5:13–14; 14:9; the Notes on 4:18; 11:21–22; the Analysis on 11:14–28).<sup>13</sup> We compare Psalm 69:2 (LXX 68:2) wherein the depth poses danger; Amos 9:3 wherein the serpent lives in the depth (see Rev. 2:24; 9:1; 20:1); and Micah 7:19 wherein sins are to be cast into the depth (compare LXX Prov. 18:3).

**your nets:** Heavy, deep sea nets (trammel), the type that Peter must have been using (see the Note on 5:7), are made from linen threads that are visible in daylight. Their visibility underscores the remarkable nature of the miracle that follows.<sup>14</sup>

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11. BAGD, 129; *TDNT*, 1:517–18.

12. BAGD, 2; *TDNT*, 1:9–10; *TDOT*, 15:574–81.

13. *TDNT*, 3:400–401.

14. Nun, “Cast Your Net upon the Waters,” 53; Marshall, *Luke*, 203; Bivin, “Miraculous Catch,” 7; Green, *Luke*, 232.

**5:5 Master:** This term of address (Greek *epistatēs*) indicates Peter’s intensifying respect for Jesus as a healer (see 4:38–39) and as a teacher, here following his unrecorded sermon from the boat. We find this term addressed to Jesus throughout Luke’s Gospel, particularly by disciples who show a willingness to obey, as Peter does here,<sup>15</sup> and it may well represent the equivalent to the title *rabbi* (see 8:24, 45, 49; 17:13; the Note on 9:33).<sup>16</sup> After the miracle of the draught of fish, Peter calls Jesus “Lord” (5:8).

**we have toiled:** Peter’s remark discloses that he has partners in the fishing business before Luke introduces them into his report in 5:10. The only person missing from this scene is Peter’s brother Andrew (see the Note on 5:6 below; also Matt. 4:18; Mark 1:16).

**nevertheless at thy word:** Even though Peter expresses doubt at this moment, his willingness to obey shines through. What he has seen and heard of Jesus during the past twenty-four hours has obviously affected him deeply.

**the net:** The earliest manuscripts preserve the plural “the nets,” in agreement with “your nets” in 5:4. The same is true in 5:6 where the earliest reading is “their nets were breaking.” To manage a couple of sturdy nets requires at least one other fisherman besides Peter.

**5:6 when they had this done:** We sense from the plurals in this verse and the next that Peter’s brother Andrew stands unacknowledged in this passage as one who assists Peter to throw out the heavy nets.

**a great multitude of fishes:** Jesus, who is about to call into his service the fishermen who own the boats (see 5:10), does not leave their families bereft. After all, in the modern era, the Lord declares that “I, the Lord, give unto [the Twelve] a promise that I will provide for their families” (D&C 118:3). By the huge catch of fish, the families of these fishermen will possess enough food and earn enough income to tide them over for a long time, certainly until they can make other arrangements for income. Some of the catch will go to the fresh market in Capernaum, but most will go four and one-half miles down the shore to Taricheae on the west side of the lake, a town with a fish salting industry that these men surely know about, to be preserved by salting.<sup>17</sup> This town is also known as Magdala, the hometown

15. BAGD, 300; Plummer, *Luke*, 143; Marshall, *Luke*, 203.

16. TDNT, 2:622–23; Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 2:1154.

17. Strabo writes, “At the place called Taricheae the lake supplies excellent fish for pickling” (*Geography* 16.2.45). Taricheae lay about four and one-half miles southwest of Capernaum and three miles north of Tiberias (see Aharoni and others, *Carta Bible Atlas*,



of Mary Magdalene. Significantly, the name Taricheae is linked to the Greek word *tarichos* which means “dried or smoked fish,” and the later rabbinic name for the town, Fish Tower, may also connect to the town’s fish salting industry.<sup>18</sup> In a second vein, the expression points to the bountiful harvest of souls that will eventually come because of Jesus’ message (“from henceforth thou shalt catch men”—5:10). In a third sense, Jesus’ power over other creatures in the lake here substitutes for Mark’s report that, during the days of Jesus’ fasting, he pacifies the animals (see Mark 1:13).

***their net brake:*** The imperfect tense of the verb (Greek *diarrēssō*) indicates that the strands of the net begin to snap and pop because of the weight of the fish.<sup>19</sup>

***5:7 they beckoned unto their partners:*** This line demonstrates that Peter and his unnamed partner are working with the deep sea nets used for fishing in the middle of the lake. If they are stringing out a drag net (seine), their action requires two boats and the other boat will have already been in the water nearby as an anchor for the net they are stringing.<sup>20</sup>

***that they should come and help them:*** Luke is already striking the chord of unified action that the disciples will have to manifest in order to carry Jesus’ work forward.

***filled both the ships:*** The weight of the fish, rather than the volume, must be at issue. If these boats are like the one recovered near Capernaum, these craft are 4.5 feet deep, allowing a huge volume of fish which will more than swamp the boats (see the Note on 5:2). Rather, it seems, the weight of the fish pushes the two boats deep enough down into the lake that water begins to lap over the sides.

***5:8 When Simon Peter saw:*** The Joseph Smith Translation adds “the multitude of fishes” to this expression, clarifying exactly what brings the astonished Peter to his knees. More than this, Simon’s full name appears here for the first and only time in Luke, apparently signaling that he has, in this moment, sensed that he is in the presence of the divine, much as the augmenting of names elsewhere signals a notable spiritual maturing (see Gen. 32:28; 35:10; Num. 13:16). The lack of “Peter” in a few manuscripts is likely due to a scribe’s attempt at simplification.<sup>21</sup> Additionally, the verb translated

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234, 235); also Schürer, *History*, 2:69–70, on Taricheae as a center for pickling; Brown, “Family and Home,” 27–29; Brown, “Savior’s Compassion,” 53–55.

18. Liddell and Scott, *Lexicon*, 1758; Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 1:697.

19. Blass and Debrunner, *Greek Grammar*, §§327, 325; Marshall, *Luke*, 203.

20. Bishop, “Jesus and the Lake,” 401–2.

21. Marshall, *Luke*, 203–4.

“saw” (Greek participle *idōn*) links back to this verb’s occurrence both in LXX Genesis 1:4, where it characterizes God’s sight (see also LXX Gen. 1:8, 10, 12, 18, 25, 31), and in LXX Genesis 3:6, where the same verb discloses that Eve, in the moment of decision, sees with God’s sight,<sup>22</sup> underlining Peter’s insightful grasp of who Jesus is. Importantly, Peter becomes the first identified witness of Jesus’ ministry that will consist of his words (see 5:3) and his remarkable deeds (see 4:38–39). Near the end of his Gospel, Luke will feature Peter as receiving an individual appearance from the Risen Savior, making him the first and chief guarantor of the fact of the resurrection (see the Note on 24:34). The emphasis rests forcefully on him as a witness. Drawing Peter into such prominence in Luke’s narrative forms a literary *inclusio* that imparts an overall unity to his record.<sup>23</sup>

***he fell down at Jesus’ knees:*** Peter’s posture, the first human acknowledgment of the Savior’s lordship following the beginning of his ministry a couple of weeks before this moment, anticipates how others will come to reverence Jesus (see 5:12; the Notes on 7:38, 40, 45; 8:41; 24:5).<sup>24</sup> The scene envisions Jesus still sitting in the boat where he is helping to pull on board the catch of fish.

***Depart from me; for I am a sinful man:*** In the brief, almost chaotic moments of seeing the nets fill and then of trying to wrestle the fish into the boats, Peter goes from seeing Jesus as an interesting, charismatic, even powerful personality to perceiving him as someone whose gifts are truly majestic, truly divine. In other words, his heart and perception have changed, and he repents, an essential step in becoming a disciple.<sup>25</sup> Though he may not grasp fully who Jesus is, the first notes of a divine symphony have begun to play in his soul. Naturally, this music grows so that, in a later scene, Peter can knowingly say to Jesus that he is “The Christ of God” (9:20).<sup>26</sup>

***sinful:*** Is Peter confessing to a specific sin or set of transgressions? It seems not, though the term (Greek *hamartōlos*) can bear the sense of scandalous action (see 5:30; 19:7). But here it expresses a more general moral meaning (see 13:2; 24:7), even humility.<sup>27</sup>

22. Draper, Brown, and Rhodes, *Pearl of Great Price*, 43.

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

24. *TDNT*, 6:625, 629–31.

25. *TDNT*, 4:446.

26. John Marsh, *Saint John*, The Pelican Gospel Commentaries (Baltimore, Md.: Penguin Books, 1968), 130–31.

27. *TDNT*, 1:327, 329, 330–32; Marshall, *Luke*, 204–5.

***sinful man:*** The expression is distinctive and reoccurs almost verbatim in 24:7, “sinful men.” Even though the terms point to individuals of differing character, they frame an *inclusio* that underlines the unity of Luke’s Gospel (see the Note on 24:7).<sup>28</sup>

***Lord:*** This title (Greek *kyrios*) for the Savior appears much more frequently in Luke and Acts than Christ or other comparable titles. Its meanings range from a simple “sir” to “your majesty.” It appears that Peter and other followers adopt the title for Jehovah and apply it to Jesus very early on (see the Notes on 2:11; 7:13, 31; 10:1),<sup>29</sup> though some see the title arising only after Jesus’ resurrection.<sup>30</sup>

**5:9 *he was astonished:*** Literally, the expression means “astonishment seized him,” a stronger sense for what happens to Peter and each of his friends, that is, “all that were with him.” Astonishment is also the emotion engendered in those in the Capernaum synagogue (see 4:36; the Note on 4:14) and those who witness the healing of the invalid at the Beautiful Gate of the temple (see Acts 3:10).

***and all that were with him:*** Although this expression does not appear in one important manuscript called “D,” which typically expands the text, its presence in all the other texts lends confidence to its originality. Luke seems to be referring to Peter and his partners who have just hoisted the draught of fish into their boats. By implication, it seems, most of the crowd to whom Jesus previously speaks disperses before the miracle occurs, very possibly because it takes several minutes for Peter and the other person in the boat to row to where Jesus points and then to set their net properly in the water. People watching on the shore will have turned away from a boringly familiar scene of fishing from a boat. Even Peter’s noisy shouting (see 5:7) may not have coaxed people back to the shore to witness what is happening.

**5:10 *also James, and John:*** Luke’s pointer to these brothers, and not to Andrew who is in Peter’s boat (see the Note on 5:6), underlines their role as witnesses of some of the most important events in Jesus’ life and ministry (see 8:51; 9:28–36; Mark 13:3; 14:33). With Peter, they form a presidency of the Twelve.<sup>31</sup> Of course, they are present whenever the Apostles accompany Jesus.<sup>32</sup>

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

29. Plummer, *Luke*, 145; *TDNT*, 3:1058–62, 1086–93; 5:273; *TLNT*, 2:341–50; Marshall, *Luke*, 204–5; Morris, *Luke*, 125.

30. *TDNT*, 3:1094; Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 1:200–3.

31. McConkie, *DNTC*, 1:401–2.

32. Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, 93–113.

**partners:** The term here (Greek *koinōnos*) bears legal overtones of a business partnership. In early Christian parlance, it comes to mean fellowship with other believers and joint participation in religious experiences (see 1 Cor. 10:20; 2 Cor. 1:7; Heb. 10:33; 1 Pet. 5:1; 2 Pet. 1:4).<sup>33</sup>

**Fear not:** These words repeat those spoken to Zacharias, Mary, and the shepherds when they find themselves in the presence of one from the celestial world (see 1:13, 30; 2:10). Such an expression ties all of these accounts together on the same continuum.

**thou shalt catch men:** This promise or commission points directly to the disciples' role as missionaries and preachers. The verb translated "catch" (Greek *zōgreō*) means "to capture alive" and appears in the New Testament only here and in 2 Timothy 2:26, where souls are caught by the devil's snare.<sup>34</sup> Obviously, Peter and his companions are to reverse this situation. Jesus' expression also hints that, as a fisher catches fish from a lake, unexpectedly and without seeing, those who respond to the message of the disciples will not always be those whom they might expect. From the perspective of mortals, there is a certain randomness among those who embrace the gospel message. We compare the varying responses among those who witness Jesus healing the man with palsy (see 5:21) and the irony brimming in Jesus' saying about those who are sick and well (see 5:31–32). According to Mormon, this latter saying of Jesus, which is evidently a part of the full record of the Savior's visit in the New World ("the whole need no physician, but they that are sick"), expresses accurately his intent among humans (Moro. 8:8).

**5:11 forsook all:** The response is immediate and final, indicating plainly the depth of conversion (see also Levi's response in 5:28 and that of the Twelve in 9:6). What is missing in this report is the trip to Taricheae to preserve the fish (see the Note on 5:6), a clear indicator that Luke does not know the full story, or chooses not to repeat it. This observation is not surprising, especially in light of the truncated report of events on the Mount of Transfiguration (see the Notes on 9:33 and 19:5).

**followed him:** To walk away from everything familiar in order to follow an itinerant preacher whom these men have known for only a couple of days, perhaps only a few hours, constitutes one of the grand mysteries of the Savior's impact on those who receive him. Such a response points

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33. Liddell and Scott, *Lexicon*, 970; *TDNT*, 3:797–98, 804; Geoffrey W. H. Lampe, ed., *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961), 764.

34. BAGD, 340; Talmage, *Jesus the Christ*, 201–2; Marshall, *Luke*, 205–6.

to much more than curiosity about and even enthusiasm for Jesus and his message. By following him, these men step firmly onto the path of discipleship and all that such an act entails.<sup>35</sup>

## Analysis

On the human side, Peter's transformation springs out of these verses and into the reader's consciousness. Peter's conversion, beginning at least the prior day in the synagogue where the Savior teaches and heals (see 4:31–36), and then receiving reinforcement as Jesus heals both his mother-in-law and the afflicted crowd that appears at the end of that Sabbath day (see 4:38–41), secures itself in his soul with Jesus' unrecorded sermon and the huge haul of fish. Its gripping power will not only weld him to the Savior but, as readers know, will anchor him to the ministry of the church through the rest of his life. And what we can say about Peter we can also say about his partners who respond to Jesus' call. Already, in this story, Peter represents others, as he will throughout Luke's two records.

Now, kneeling before Jesus in his own boat, Peter senses his own unworthiness—"I am a sinful man"—and thereby voices for all followers the sharply apparent need to lead lives of worthiness in order to enjoy the Savior's influence. More than that—and Peter does not yet sense this dimension—Jesus' gracious generosity in providing for the physical needs of Peter and his partners, and beyond them for their families, stands as a palpable example of how they should behave toward others. For Jesus knows that he is about to call the breadwinners away from their wives and children, and he graciously provides for their needs, both for sustenance and for income. The miracle of the fish is not merely for show. After all, to the modern church the Savior has said: "wo be unto man that . . . wasteth flesh and hath no need" (D&C 49:21). Instead, the miracle carries a noble and important purpose, the nourishing and sustaining of families. This nurturing care for the families of the Twelve is re-wrapped in words from modern scripture: "I, the Lord, give unto them [the Twelve] a promise that I will provide for their families" (D&C 118:3). Thus, in an unexpected way, Jesus brings families to stand at the center of his gracious acts.<sup>36</sup>

On the divine side, the manifestation of power at the lake leads onto a strikingly different path from other miracles and demonstrates an awe-inspiring reach. Heretofore, the Savior's miracles have touched directly

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35. *TDNT*, 1:213–14; Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 1:569.

36. Brown, "Family and Home," 27–29; Brown, "Savior's Compassion," 53–55.

people's afflictions, healing them of "diverse diseases" and invasive "devils" (4:40, 41). In the miracle of the fish, Jesus' powers dive into Peter's inner soul, bringing it up wet and fresh and divinely cleansed. Moreover, in the same moment, Jesus' powers also dive into the world of nature and thereby undrape for followers his ability to arouse and connect with the core of the natural world, as he does in the wilderness before matching wits with the devil (see Mark 1:13), an ability that he not only will display for his closest disciples when he calms the raging storm on the lake (see 8:22–25) but will hint at when he says that "the stones would immediately cry out" if his followers withhold their praise (19:40).

Peter's soul will never be the same. To be sure, he becomes a first-rank witness of the Savior's miracle on the lake, a role that he continues to fill. But the experience changes him forever. Something deep within him snaps into place, forging an inner connection with the divine. He is a new person. At this moment, he cannot know where the future will lead him. But he must have grasped, at least imperfectly, that his future is with this man from Nazareth. Further, his inner experience, combined with the display of Jesus' power over nature, demonstrates the truth sung about in the doxological hymn embedded in D&C 88:6–13: "the light of Christ . . . is . . . the power [of] . . . the earth . . . and the light which [ever] shineth [and] . . . is the same light that quickeneth your understandings." Here power and illumination tie to the same divine source, the Christ.

Above these heavenly, silver-lined connections to power and celestial enlightenment soars redemption which, unexpectedly, lies in the waters of the lake, in "the deep." Offering ringing praise to the future manifestations of the "arm of the Lord," the prophet Isaiah sings, "Art thou not it . . . that hath made the depths of the sea a way for the ransomed to pass over? Therefore the redeemed of the Lord shall return, and come with singing unto Zion" (Isa. 51:9–11). Thus, in language that recalls the Exodus, that most famous act of redemption, the depths of the sea become the path whereby the redeemed, freshly splashed with cleansing waters, come to their redemption. There is more. The depths of the earth also hold those who need redemption.

The prophet Ezekiel, hearing a series of dire warnings against those who exalt themselves in this life, including Pharaoh, listens to the Lord's voice: "Son of man, lament over the strength of Egypt, for the nations shall bring down her daughters dead to the depth of the earth, to them that go down to the pit" (LXX Ezek. 32:18). Here the depth holds the dead, including "the uncircumcised" and "Pharaoh . . . and the multitude of his

host” (LXX Ezek. 31:18). These words, as those from Isaiah, tie firmly to the Exodus which, itself, summons vivid images of redemption. From that colossal experience, it is “the uncircumcised” and Egypt’s “daughters” who, banished to the depth, need redemption most from Jesus who goes there (see Rom. 10:7). And from what we learn in modern revelation, redemption’s scouring, life-giving waters will surely come to those confined in death’s depths (see D&C 138:27–32).

In a different light, Luke’s verses reveal for the first time the Savior’s exquisite sense of creating a symbol. He is more than an impressive preacher. He is more than a bright, verbal wordsmith who can capture a crowd with a turn of phrase. He miraculously provides a huge catch of fish for a few fishermen and then calls them to “catch men” (5:10). Whatever else these few fishermen have undergone in their lives—staying out all night in their boats in all types of weather, daily cleaning and testing their nets, relying on their time-tested skills to make a living for themselves and their families—their combined experience as fishermen will now be brought to bear in the quest for the souls of fellow humans. And they will be doing this in company with Jesus of Nazareth whom they have known for only a few hours. But they have witnessed some of his abilities, and that is enough.

## **HEALING A LEPER (5:12–16)**

(Compare Matt. 8:1–4; Mark 1:40–45)

### **King James Translation**

12 And it came to pass, when he was in a certain city, behold a man full of leprosy: who seeing Jesus fell on his face, and besought him, saying, Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean. 13 And he put forth his hand, and touched him, saying, I will: be thou clean. And immediately the leprosy departed from him. 14 And he charged him to tell no man: but go, and shew thyself to the priest, and offer for thy cleansing, according as Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them. 15 But so much the more

### **New Rendition**

12 And it came to pass that while he was in one of the cities, behold, there was a man full of leprosy. And when he saw Jesus, he implored him by falling on his face, saying, “Lord, if you want to, you can cleanse me.” 13 And stretching out his hand, he touched him, saying, “I do want to. Be clean.” And the leprosy immediately left him. 14 And he commanded him not to tell anyone: “Rather go and show yourself to the priest and make an offering for your cleansing, as Moses commanded, for a witness to

went there a fame abroad of him: and great multitudes came together to hear, and to be healed by him of their infirmities.

16 And he withdrew himself into the wilderness, and prayed.

them.” 15 But the word traveled all the more concerning him, and many crowds gathered to listen and to be healed from their ailments.

16 And he went off into the wilderness and prayed.

## Notes

**5:12 in a certain city:** The Greek text reads “in one of the cities,” indicating that the memory of Jesus’ deed that comes to Luke does not preserve the name of the place. The context of the story in Mark’s Gospel places it in Galilee (see Mark 1:39–40). The story seemingly persists in people’s memory because lepers are not to enter populated areas (see Lev. 13:46). That the man comes to a city shows his determination and desperation to seek Jesus’ help.

**a man full of leprosy:** This man obviously suffers from a long-term and therefore much more serious illness than the woman with the high fever (see 4:38–39), thus requiring the Savior to intensify the power needed to heal him (see the Note on 5:23).<sup>37</sup> Not incidentally, Jesus thereby discloses more about himself to his new followers. The man’s skin condition is perhaps a serious fungal infection because Hansen’s disease, or what is currently known as leprosy, is only introduced into the Mediterranean region by soldiers of Alexander the Great returning from India in the late fourth century BC and is extremely rare in this era.<sup>38</sup> The Greek word *lepra*, here translated “leprosy,” first comes to refer to this disease in the writings of John of Damascus (AD 777–857). Before that time, the common Greek terms for leprosy are *elephas* or *elephantiasis*.<sup>39</sup>

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37. The change in the Joseph Smith Translation of 5:23 is revealing about the matter of greater and lesser power: “Does it require more power to forgive sins than to make the sick rise up and walk?”

38. E. V. Hulse, “The Nature of Biblical ‘Leprosy’ and the Use of Alternative Medical Terms in Modern Translations of the Bible,” *Palestine Exploration Quarterly* 107 (1975): 87–105; Richard M. Heller, Toni W. Heller, and Jack M. Sasson, “Mold: ‘tsara’at,’ Leviticus, and the History of a Confusion,” *Perspectives in Biology and Medicine* 46 (Autumn 2003): 588–91.

39. Hulse, “Nature of Biblical ‘Leprosy,’” 88. The article *lepra* in *TDNT*, 4:233–34, is wrong.



***fell on his face:*** This vivid expression, based on the verb “to fall” (Greek *piptō*), shows the man’s acknowledgment of Jesus’ powers and his sincere petition for relief (see the Note 17:16).<sup>40</sup>

***thou canst make me clean:*** We notice that the man seeks to be clean, though such an act involves healing. If he suffers from leprosy, he will very likely ask to be healed of the deformities that usually accompany that disease.<sup>41</sup> The basic issue with any skin disease, mild or otherwise, concerns ritual cleanness. According to Mosaic law, any long-lasting skin disease confers on the sufferer a state of uncleanness that disqualifies the person from worshipping in the temple or elsewhere, and obliges the diseased one to live separately from normal society (see Lev. 13:1–46; the Note on 17:12). Hence, Jesus’ act will restore the man to his beloved society. More than this, it restores him to his family.

**5:13 *put forth his hand, and touched him:*** The meaning is that Jesus stretches out his hand (see also 6:10). In another context, the expression refers to hostile intent (see 22:53), but not here. According to the Mosaic law, Jesus becomes unclean by touching the man (see Lev. 13:46; Num. 5:2–4).<sup>42</sup> But the point is that Jesus, who controls disease and gives the law, is not crippled in a ritual way as others are. Instead, his power and authority vanquish any need to remain ritually clean, for he is and ever will remain clean, untouched by such strictures (see the Notes on 7:6, 14; 8:47; 10:7; 24:9; the Analysis on 5:12–16). Moreover, he models the action of touching to confer a blessing and sets the standard for acts of compassion both for observers, including his new disciples, and for recipients of his blessings (see the Notes on 4:40; 8:54; 13:13; 18:15).<sup>43</sup>

***I will: be thou clean:*** It is curious that both Luke and Matthew, if they are following Mark’s account, omit the note about Jesus’ compassion (see Mark 1:41). In Luke’s report, instead of acting out of compassion Jesus acts because of his will, that is, his firm resolve to bring relief to the sufferer.<sup>44</sup>

**5:14 *he charged him to tell no man:*** Though some see this expression in Mark’s Gospel as pointing to Jesus’ effort to keep his messiahship secret (see Mark 1:44),<sup>45</sup> here the command is natural for the story’s setting. The

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

41. Hulse, “Nature of Biblical ‘Leprosy,’” 94–95.

42. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, 802–8; Josephus notes this condition in his work *Ag. Apion* 1.31 (§281); cited in Green, *Luke*, 237.

43. TDNT, 9:428–29, 431–34.

44. Marshall, *Luke*, 209–10.

45. Evans, *Luke*, 90; Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 1.575.

man, rather than going to celebrate with friends and family, is to walk directly to the priest to receive his clean bill of health.

**but go:** These words begin a direct quotation of Jesus' words to the afflicted, which runs only to the end of the verse.

**shew thyself to the priest:** The Savior unfurls his respect for the Mosaic requirement that a person healed of a skin disease approach a priest to be declared clean (see the Note on 17:14). Whether such a declaration is to come after a week's quarantine for this man remains unknown (see Lev. 13:1–46).

**5:15 great multitudes came together to hear, and to be healed:** The soaring positive public response to the Savior, at least in small measure, brings again to the forefront the temptation articulated by the devil that Jesus accept the accolades of the world (see 4:9–12), much as in the later scene in Capernaum (see 4:40).

**5:16 withdrew himself into the wilderness:** Naturally, the sheer numbers of those who seek Jesus begin to affect his ability to control the pace and character of his ministry. Mark's version of this story emphasizes this dimension (see Mark 1:45). But Luke captures the more important sense of the wilderness as God's ground, a place where Jesus can immerse himself in the heat-tested environment of spiritual renewal (see 4:1; the Notes on 3:2; 4:42).

**prayed:** This verb captures the Savior's evident perception that he needs the spiritual rejuvenation that arises from personal worship. Thus Luke combines this important reason with his earlier point that Jesus withdraws in order to visit other towns and cities to spread his word (see 4:43–44). The verb itself is a present participle and, combined with the governing verb *was*, forms the expression “was . . . praying,” conveying the notion that prayer is a customary and regular feature of Jesus' worship life.

## Analysis

Cleansing the leper brings a new, unexpected dimension to the miracles that Luke chooses to feature. For the Savior does not bring relief to someone with a mere temporary affliction but to a man with an evidently ongoing, permanent condition. The incident reveals Jesus' broader power, a pattern that we shall see more of as Luke continues his record. The chief beneficiary, of course, is the sufferer. Not only has he dealt with his problem for a long time but he has lived in quarantine, dwelling as a social and religious outcast from family and society. With his cleansing, Jesus sets all straight again.

The next beneficiary is the Savior's small band of disciples. They have now become his constant companions. From their point of view, each miracle, each sermon discloses more to them about this man from Nazareth. Their fellowship with Jesus becomes bedewed not only by an extraordinary comradeship with an unusual man but also, as important, with a highly charged learning environment.<sup>46</sup>

The story also beams a bright, favorable light on the law of Moses. Earlier, Zacharias and Elisabeth and Jesus' parents show respect for law, both religious and secular (see 1:6; 2:1–5, 21–24, 27, 39, 42). Now it is the Savior who shows his reverence for the strictures of the Mosaic law by sending the formerly unclean man to the priest. To be sure, a person can hold that Jesus simply does not want to shock the sensibilities of the man and his acquaintances by not requiring him to visit the priest, an act that some may have expected. And the sufferer may have gone to the priest in any event. But Jesus' directive, especially when combined with other positive assessments of the law (for example, "it is easier for heaven and earth to pass, than one tittle of the law to fail"—16:17), illustrates his profound esteem for what his society has inherited from its past.

In a different vein, Jesus' act of touching the afflicted man pulls up another dimension of his interaction with the Mosaic law. As another saying certifies, he respects and honors it (see 16:16–17), but it does not exercise any claim on him. Instead, his divine authority simply overpowers aspects of ritual uncleanness and dietary concerns, as this story and his suspension of food laws illustrate (see 10:7–8). In a word, he does not operate under the same liabilities that others do.

The Savior's withdrawal at the end of the story for personal worship presents an important example to Luke's readers. The incident points to Jesus' intent to impose control on situations that develop rather than to allow events and personalities to shape his ministry. We witness already such efforts from him in dealing with the devil's temptations (see 4:1–13) and we shall see this dimension, for instance, in how he takes charge of the noisy mourning crowd in the home of Jairus before raising his daughter from the dead (see 8:51–54). After cleansing the leper, he purposely departs from his ministering to reestablish contact with his Father. The example cannot be lost on his newly called disciples wherein Jesus holds his ministry in balance between offering aid and instruction on the one hand and keeping his relationship with his Father fresh and open on the other.

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46. See Brown, "Twelve," 98–124.

Luke's narration of this incident raises the question of his dependency on Mark's account. Most commentators argue that Luke has taken Mark's story and remolded it.<sup>47</sup> Indeed, enough similarities exist between the accounts, including the fact that the story of the healing of the paralytic follows immediately in the two Gospels, to affirm a connection. But Mark reports that the leper, now cleansed, effectively disobeys the Savior's directive not to tell others and becomes loud and public in rehearsing the miracle that has cleansed him. Principally because of the leper's actions, therefore, Jesus is unable to exert the type of control he wants over the crowds in the towns he visits and hence chooses to withdraw to quieter places to reestablish mastery of the situation (see Mark 1:40–45). Luke's emphasis in retelling the story, on the other hand, rests not on the leper's subsequent actions, and their public impact, but on Jesus' reasons for seeking spiritual renewal after interacting with the multitudes (see 5:15–16). Whether intentional or not, Luke thereby passes on an essential element of the Savior's ministry, that of regular personal worship, which goes authentically back to Jesus himself and carries a firm historical tie to Jesus' worship habits, as even Mark affirms (see Mark 1:35). Hence, Luke offers to readers exactly what he learns about Jesus' typical actions.

## HEALING THE PARALYZED MAN (5:17–26)

(Compare Matt. 9:1–8; Mark 2:1–12)

### King James Translation

17 And it came to pass on a certain day, as he was teaching, that there were Pharisees and doctors of the law sitting by, which were come out of every town of Galilee, and Judæa, and Jerusalem: and the power of the Lord was present to heal them. 18 And, behold, men brought in a bed a man which was taken with a palsy: and they sought means to bring him in, and to lay him before him. 19 And when they could not find

### New Rendition

17 And it came to pass on one of the days, he was teaching and there were sitting Pharisees and teachers of the law who had come from all the villages of Galilee and Judea and Jerusalem. And the power of the Lord was with him to heal. 18 And behold, men carried on a bed a man who was paralyzed and looked for a way to take him in and place him before him. 19 And when they found no way to carry him in because of the

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47. For example, Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 1:571–76; Johnson, *Luke*, 92.

by what way they might bring him in because of the multitude, they went upon the housetop, and let him down through the tiling with his couch into the midst before Jesus.

20 And when he saw their faith, he said unto him, Man, thy sins are forgiven thee. 21 And the scribes and the Pharisees began to reason, saying, Who is this which speaketh blasphemies? Who can forgive sins, but God alone? 22 But when Jesus perceived their thoughts, he answering said unto them, What reason ye in your hearts? 23 Whether is easier, to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Rise up and walk? 24 But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power upon earth to forgive sins, (he said unto the sick of the palsy,) I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy couch, and go into thine house. 25 And immediately he rose up before them, and took up that whereon he lay, and departed to his own house, glorifying God.

26 And they were all amazed, and they glorified God, and were filled with fear, saying, We have seen strange things to day.

crowd, they went up onto the roof and lowered him through the roof tiles with his stretcher into the middle before Jesus.

20 And seeing their faith, he said, “Man, your sins have been forgiven you.” 21 And the scribes and Pharisees began to confer, saying “Who is this who speaks blasphemy? Who can forgive sins, except God alone?” 22 But as Jesus perceived their thoughts, he replied and said to them, “Why are you pondering in your hearts? 23 Which is easier, to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven you,’ or to say, ‘Arise and walk?’ 24 But so that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins,” he said to the paralytic, “I say to you, arise, take your stretcher, and go to your home.” 25 And immediately he stood up in front of them, took up what he was lying on, and went to his home praising God.

26 And astonishment seized everyone and they praised God, and were filled with fear, saying, “We saw unusual things today.”

## Notes

**5:17 on a certain day:** The following account of the healing of the paralyzed man is one of the few healings that does not occur on a Sabbath. The memory of what happens must have been so sharp and strong that it does not need an association with time to help preserve it. Thus it stands in the accounts of Matthew and Mark (see Matt. 9:2; Mark 2:2). Moreover, Luke disconnects the following miracle from Capernaum, which Mark mentions (see Mark 2:1), making no assignment of place, though the story of the calling of Levi takes place just east of the town (see 5:27–28). This omission is curious if Luke is following Mark, unless Luke seeks to frame the story as one possessing a universal quality not tied to place (see the Note on 6:1).

***Pharisees and doctors of the law:*** This notice of identifiable opponents is the first in this Gospel. Later, in 5:21, it appears that the doctors (*nomodaskalos*, properly *law teachers*) are termed *scribes*.<sup>48</sup> They may also be tied to the “chief Pharisees” and thus form a select group within the Pharisees (see the Notes on 5:21; 14:1).<sup>49</sup> The Pharisees form an identifiable religious group within Jewish society whose ennobling interests center on Sabbath observances and dietary laws as a path to holiness. Their numbers, according to Josephus, reach six thousand in this period. They are apparently very influential even though they do not come from the upper levels of the society.<sup>50</sup> Identifying such representatives signals the groping, dark tentacles of opposition and conspiracy that will emerge into the open with Jesus’ healing of the man with the withered hand (see 6:6–11).

***out of every town of Galilee, and Judea, and Jerusalem:*** Only Luke preserves this note about the residences of those who will become the Savior’s shadowing opponents. We thus learn that, by this moment, Jesus’ reputation has spread far from Nazareth and Capernaum. We also learn that Pharisees and scribes reside in small towns and cities across the country and not only in and around Jerusalem.<sup>51</sup>

***the power of the Lord was present to heal them:*** Luke draws a firm link between the Savior’s praying in the previous verse and his notice that Jesus carries “the power [of Jehovah] . . . to heal” (see the Notes on 1:35; 4:6, 14, 36; 9:1; the Analysis on 4:1–13).<sup>52</sup> The final pronoun *them*, which appears in some important manuscripts, is the singular *him* in others, with the sense that power was with him, Jesus, to heal.<sup>53</sup>

**5:18 taken with a palsy:** The man suffers from paralysis evidently in all his limbs. The Greek verb which lies behind this expression (*paralyō*) comes into English as “paralyze” and, in its noun form, as “paralysis.”<sup>54</sup> Luke alone repeats this verb, “which is in strict agreement with that of the

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48. *TDNT*, 2:159.

49. Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 1:581.

50. Jacob Neusner, *The Glory of God Is Intelligence* (Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1978), 13–28; Anthony J. Saldarini, “Pharisees,” in *ABD*, 5:289–303; Brown and Holzapfel, *Lost 500 Years*, 122–25.

51. Saldarini, “Pharisees,” 5:294, citing the Apostle Paul’s experience.

52. BAGD, 206–7, 277–78; *TDNT*, 2:299–308, 562–70.

53. Plummer, *Luke*, 152; Marshall, *Luke*, 212; Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 1:581–82.

54. BAGD, 625.

medical writers,” whereas the other Gospel writers repeat other terms for this disease (see 5:24; Acts 8:7; 9:33; Matt. 4:24; 8:6; Mark 2:3–5; etc.).<sup>55</sup>

**5:19 they went upon the housetop:** Many homes have an external stairway that leads to the roof. In pleasant weather, roofs offer a place for sleeping or for other activities (see 1 Kgs. 17:19; Acts 10:9–10).

**through the tiling:** Some have thought that Luke adds this detail to Mark’s rehearsal, thereby making the residence into a Greco-Roman house rather than a typical Galilean home with a flat roof of wattle and mud. But studies have shown that tiling is a feature of Palestinian homes in the first century BC.<sup>56</sup>

**with his couch:** Evidently, the men who are carrying the paralytic man strap him to the stretcher so that he can be lowered by cords.

**into the midst before Jesus:** Luke alone repeats this pair of phrases which confer a sense of holiness on the scene because, first, the term “midst” (Greek *mesos*) often points to the holy center and, second, the word “before” (Greek *emprosthen*) appears almost as a technical term in temple worship contexts and points to coming before the Lord or before his altar. A person can read in this manner, for example, the words “the Lord called Moses on the seventh day out of the midst of the cloud” (LXX Ex. 24:16) and “the first-fruits of every sacrifice of Israel before me [the Lord]” (LXX 1 Kgs. 2:29; for “before” in this sense, see also LXX 1 Kgs. 10:8; 3 Kgs. 8:5; 1 Chr. 9:20; 15:24; 21:30; 2 Chr. 5:6).<sup>57</sup>

**5:20 their faith:** The triggering principle that draws out the miracle consists of the unbending faith of the man’s friends who have carried him some distance to where Jesus is.

**Man, thy sins are forgiven thee:** Jesus’ declaration immediately brings the question to mind, How does a paralyzed man commit sin? Physically, he is helpless. One possibility is that he has become terribly bitter and, on this view, blames God for his serious disability. If so, then Jesus’ declaration makes sense. He is forgiving the man his thoughts and feelings. In a

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55. Plummer, *Luke*, 152, citing William Kirk Hobart, *The Medical Language of St. Luke* (Dublin: Hodges, Figgis, and Co., 1882), 6.

56. Marshall, *Luke*, 213; Morris, *Luke*, 129.

57. For studies on the sacred center, see Mircea Eliade, *Cosmos and History: The Myth of the Eternal Return* (New York: Harper and Row, 1959), 12–17; Hugh Nibley, “What Is a Temple?” in *The Temple in Antiquity*, ed. Truman G. Madsen (Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1984), 22–25; Brown, *Voices from the Dust*, 147–48, 150–51.

different vein, the tense of the verb (Greek perfect) “expresses the abiding force of the forgiveness.”<sup>58</sup>

**5:21 *the scribes*:** As a named group, the scribes appear for the first time in Luke’s account. They are evidently the same as the “teachers of the law” in 5:17 and Acts 5:34 (KJV: “doctors of the law”). They fill the role of teachers in society, effectively displacing the priests whom scripture designates as arbiters of disputes and as teachers of the law (see Deut. 21:5; 33:10; the Notes on 5:17, 30; 22:66).<sup>59</sup>

**saying:** The verb need not point to speech but to unspoken thoughts, as the expression “Jesus perceived their thoughts” in the next verse indicates (see 1:63; 12:17).<sup>60</sup>

***Who is this which speaketh blasphemies?:*** Blasphemy takes several forms: denigrating God, uttering the divine name, and usurping God’s roles. Here, the third kind is at issue.<sup>61</sup> The question, as it is framed, reveals the Pharisees’ and scribes’ point of view. They have already made up their minds about Jesus and his work (see also 7:48–49).

***Who can forgive sins, but God alone?:*** The question is exactly right. The main issue then has to do with who Jesus is. For the Pharisees and scribes, he is a mere human. For Luke, he is divine, a characteristic that he will soon prove.

**5:22 *when Jesus perceived their thoughts*:** Part of Luke’s proof of Jesus’ divinity in this scene rests on the Savior’s ability to read thoughts (see the Notes on 6:8; 7:39; 11:17; 20:23; 21:2; 22:49, 64; also see Alma 7:17; 10:17; 12:3, 7; etc.), as Isaiah prophesies about the coming Messiah-king: “he shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears” (Isa. 11:3; also Mosiah 4:30; Alma 12:14; D&C 33:1).<sup>62</sup> Furthermore, here and elsewhere such thoughts are linked to wicked intentions (see 2:35; 6:8; the Note on 24:38).<sup>63</sup>

**5:23 *Whether is easier*:** The sense is, Which is easier to perform?<sup>64</sup> The Savior’s question is more philosophical than legal, as the change in the

58. Marshall, *Luke*, 213.

59. Brown and Holzapfel, *Lost 500 Years*, 113, 119, 160, 163; Anthony J. Saldarini, “Scribes,” in *ABD*, 5:1012–16.

60. Plummer, *Luke*, 155.

61. Simon J. Gathercole, *The Pre-existent Son: Recovering the Christologies of Matthew, Mark, and Luke* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2006), 59–61.

62. *TDNT*, 6:362–63, 844.

63. *TDNT*, 2:97.

64. Plummer, *Luke*, 156.



Joseph Smith Translation affirms: “Does it require more power to forgive sins than to make the sick rise up and walk?” (JST 5:23). This adjustment acknowledges a difference in power expended from one miracle to another (see the Note on 5:12).

**5:24 *that ye may know*:** This expression arises first in the account of the Exodus of the Hebrew slaves (see Ex. 6:7; 7:5) and appears in passages wherein the Lord wants to prove something to people, chiefly that he is God (e.g., 1 Ne. 17:53). By healing the paralyzed man, Jesus proves his authority to forgive sins and thus creates the legal proof for a law court. One further question is whether these words come from Jesus or from Luke. If from Jesus, he is directing them to “the scribes and the Pharisees” (5:21). If from Luke, the words are directed to readers of his report, a rare feature in the Gospels (see “let him that readeth” in Mark 13:14).<sup>65</sup>

***the Son of man*:** This is the first occurrence of this title in Luke’s Gospel. It seems curious that Jesus speaks about the Son of Man in the third person, almost as if this figure is someone else. But Jesus adopts this type of reference throughout his ministry, an aspect that the Gospel writers follow, including Luke (see 6:5, 22; 7:34; 9:26; etc.; the Note on 9:22; compare the Savior’s references to himself in the first and third persons in D&C 63:55–57). Taken together, these passages point to the “Son of man” as the Savior. Here he demonstrates the powers to forgive sins and to heal. Though there is substantial debate about the meaning of the term “Son of man,” its origin evidently comes from an early title for the Father: Man of Holiness (Moses 6:57).<sup>66</sup> See the discussion on “Who Is Jesus” in the Introduction II.E.

***power*:** The term is the Greek *exousia*, usually rendered “authority,” though in this context the word carries both senses, power and authority. Here Jesus answers further the devil’s needling questions on power and authority (see 4:3–12; the Note on 4:18; the Analysis on 4:1–13; 4:16–30), though he involves a different institution in the answer: the home as a place where God’s power and authority are manifested (see 1:40–45, 64).

***to forgive sins*:** Immediately after this infinitive clause the Joseph Smith Translation adds “I said it,” referring to “the Son of man” and tying Jesus securely to this title.

**5:25 *immediately he rose up before them*:** Astonishingly, all at once the invalid receives the ability to balance himself and the strength to lift

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65. Marshall, *Luke*, 214–15; Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 1:579.

66. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ*, 142–44; Brown, “Man and Son of Man,” 57–72; also Marshall, *Luke*, 215–16; Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 1:208–11.

a burden. As soon as the paralyzed man arises, his ability to control his movements prove the point that the Savior makes in the prior verse—that he possesses power and authority to forgive sins. Moreover, the miracle occurs with a crowd looking on, thus adding witnesses to those who have already seen his miraculous powers.

**5:26 they were all amazed:** The crowd gathered at the house now become eyewitnesses of both this miracle and Jesus’ preceding words, effectively making them a group with “shared recollections” (see 4:32, 36; the Note on 4:14). Their story, along with those of the Twelve, will become a part of the record of Jesus’ ministry (see 5:9; 8:56; 9:43; 10:23–24; 20:26).<sup>67</sup>

**filled with fear:** Luke touches on a common reaction not only to God’s acts but also to those of Jesus (see 1:12, 65; 2:9; 7:16; 8:35; etc.). His enormous powers simply leave people wondering and even fearful of what it all means.<sup>68</sup>

## Analysis

Of those who have seen the Savior’s miracles, or experienced their healing powers, only the recently called disciples are in a position to grasp that Jesus’ powers are running deeper and deeper. A reader, of course, senses that Jesus is pushing forward the boundaries of his kingdom and is pushing back the dimensions of this world that have held people bound, whether physical, spiritual, or social. With each sermon and miraculous act, Jesus discloses more about who he is, more about his ministry of preaching “the gospel to the poor” and “deliverance to the captives” as well as healing “the brokenhearted” (4:18).

Embedded within this broad view of his ministry lies the Savior’s evident purpose in healing and restoring health: he seeks to make the recipient whole. For example, in cleansing the leper he not only cures the disease but also brings him back into his family and into his circle of friends. In healing the paralyzed man, he not only untwists and strengthens the man’s limbs but also restores his soul and opens the door to a normal life within his family, generously unburdening family members at the same time.

But even as the Savior graciously beckons to hearers through both word and deed, an opposition takes root and begins to reach out its menacing

67. Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, 93–132, 146–49, 313–14.

68. John W. Welch, “Miracles, *Maleficium*, and *Maiestas* in the Trial of Jesus,” in *Jesus and Archaeology*, ed. James H. Charlesworth (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2006), 349–83.

tentacles to draw him down. For the first time, Luke identifies the seedbed of this opposition, those who identify themselves with the Pharisees and scribes. The resistance will grow and strengthen until it runs upon Jesus in Jerusalem and leads to his death. In the scene of the healing of the paralyzed man, opponents seem not to be organized. It is only after the healing of the man with the withered hand that opponents find one another and enter into a conspiracy, seeking “what they might do to Jesus” (6:11).<sup>69</sup> But none of that is present when he heals the paralytic.

Luke’s notation of the place of the miracle, “into the midst before Jesus” (5:19), invites the reader to grasp the sacred character of what happens. The holy center, usually associated with temples and sanctuaries, is where the powers of God reside and where they are manifested. As noted above, both prepositional phrases point unmistakably to a holy spot and to acts associated with worship.

Tightly tied to the sacred character of the experience stands the Savior’s authority. He illuminates his divine authority in his declaration, “that ye may know that the Son of man hath power [Greek *exousia*, or *authority*]” (5:24). At issue, of course, is his authority to forgive sins, for “Who can forgive sins, but God alone?” (5:21). And Jesus must know that his initial statement, “Man, thy sins are forgiven thee” (5:20), will spark debate among some in the crowd. Therefore, purposely he draws them into their critique, and purposely he responds to the spoken and unspoken criticisms by drawing down the powers of heaven and healing the paralytic, answering again the questions posed by the devil.

## LEVI

### (5:27–32)

(Compare Matt. 9:9–13; Mark 2:13–17)

#### King James Translation

27 And after these things he went forth, and saw a publican, named Levi, sitting at the receipt of custom: and he said unto him, Follow me. 28 And he left

#### New Rendition

27 And after these things he went out and spotted a tax collector named Levi sitting in the tax office and said to him, “Follow me.” 28 And leaving everything,

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69. S. Kent Brown, “The Arrest,” in Holzapfel and Wayment, *From the Last Supper through the Resurrection*, 166–69.

all, rose up, and followed him. 29 And Levi made him a great feast in his own house: and there was a great company of publicans and of others that sat down with them.

30 But their scribes and Pharisees murmured against his disciples, saying, Why do ye eat and drink with publicans and sinners? 31 And Jesus answering said unto them, They that are whole need not a physician; but they that are sick. 32 I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.

he stood up and followed him. 29 And Levi prepared a great banquet for him in his home. And there was a large crowd of tax collectors and others who were dining with them.

30 And the Pharisees and their scribes began to murmur to his disciples, saying, “Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?” 31 And Jesus responded and said to them, “The sick, not the healthy, have need of a physician. 32 I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.”

## Notes

**5:27 went forth, and saw a publican . . . sitting at the receipt of custom:** The verb “to see” (Greek *theaomai*) here carries the more intense sense “to gaze at, to observe.”<sup>70</sup> Jesus must be walking eastward from Capernaum. A customs post stands east of the town near the border between the territories of Herod and Philip (see 3:1), on a main east-west road just two miles west of the spot where the upper Jordan River empties into the lake.<sup>71</sup> Tax collectors (*publicans*) and customs officers typically lease the right from government authorities to collect taxes or customs and then live on whatever they gather that exceeds the contracted amount (see the Notes on 3:12 and 19:2).<sup>72</sup>

**named Levi:** Mark calls this man “Levi the son of Alphaeus” (Mark 2:14) but Matthew repeats the name “Matthew” (Matt. 9:9), a potentially complicating element. For a number of reasons, it is difficult to assume that the “Matthew” of the Twelve in Luke 6:15 is the same person, even though we find “Matthew the publican” in Matthew 10:3. It is not uncommon for persons to be known by two names, one Hebrew and one Greek or Latin,

70. Liddell and Scott, *Lexicon*, 786; BAGD, 353–54.

71. Jerome Murphy-O’Connor, *The Holy Land*, 3d ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 217; D. Kelly Ogden and Andrew C. Skinner, *Verse by Verse: The Four Gospels* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2006), 248; Plummer, *Luke*, 159. The map in *ABD*, 5:784, omits this road. The Joseph Smith Translation clarifies that Levi is “sitting at the place where they received custom” (JST 5:27).

72. Schürer, *History*, 1:372–76; *TDNT*, 8:97–98.

as Simon Peter or Joseph Justus (Acts 1:23; also 12:25), but rare to be called by two Semitic names, as Joseph Caiaphas.<sup>73</sup>

**5:28 he left all:** As in the case of the fishermen (see 5:11, “they forsook all”), Luke underlines the remarkable willingness of Levi to give up everything, including his livelihood, for the sake of his new calling, thus putting himself within the inner circle of the Twelve.<sup>74</sup>

**rose up:** This is the basic intransitive sense of the Greek verb *anistēmi*. In this form, it can also mean “to begin [an action]” or, in the transitive, “to raise [from the dead].”<sup>75</sup>

**5:29 him:** Jesus is the guest of honor; the entire meal will feature him in some way and forms Levi’s gift to him.

**a great feast:** This note seems to underscore a material abundance acquired by Levi and accentuates his willing departure from his comfortable livelihood. In this same vein, Luke’s words hint that members of Levi’s family possess enough to maintain themselves in his absence.

**a great company of publicans and of others:** Luke points to Levi’s main circle of friends and associates: most are tax collectors or customs agents like himself, though the word *others* indicates that he had cultivated friendships beyond such persons.

**sat down:** The verb (Greek *katakeimai*) means to lie or recline at a meal rather than to sit on chairs or couches (see the Note on 11:37). We should imagine the guests reclining on pillows and mattresses while eating.<sup>76</sup> We see the same dining posture in the homes of Pharisaic hosts (see the Notes on 7:36, 37; 14:8, 10) and at the Last Supper (see the Note on 22:14). Perhaps importantly, later Jewish law forbade eating with publicans.<sup>77</sup>

**5:30 their scribes and Pharisees:** The KJV expression, based on certain texts, is odd because of the possessive *their*, effectively making the scribes employees or colleagues of the tax collectors. Other texts preserve the expression differently as “the Pharisees and their scribes,” which means that the scribes are of the Pharisaic sect (see the Note on 5:21). We are not to think that these people are among the guests but only later learn about the feast (see the verb “saw” in Matt. 9:11, which likely bears the sense “to learn”).<sup>78</sup>

73. Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 1:590; Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, 108–11.

74. *TDNT*, 6:907, n. 203; 9:607.

75. BAGD, 69; *TDNT*, 1:368–71.

76. BAGD, 412; *TDNT*, 3:654–56.

77. Schürer, *History*, 2:400; Neusner, *Glory of God Is Intelligence*, 21–22.

78. *TDNT*, 5:342, n. 142.

***murmured against his disciples:*** Most commentators believe that this conversation takes place on a later occasion, after the banquet.<sup>79</sup> The sense is that they grumble to Jesus’ disciples rather than directly to him.

***eat and drink:*** For Pharisees, food preparation and consumption rests at the center of their lives of devotion because they seek to make meals into sacred events. In their view, sharing a table with those perceived to be the dregs of society, many of whom are ceremonially impure, is a desacralizing act.<sup>80</sup> Their question implies that Jesus’ disciples are also invited to the meal; both Mark and Matthew, in fact, write that they are among the guests (see Matt. 9:10; Mark 2:15).

***publicans and sinners:*** The expression captures the loathsome view of most in the society about people who collect taxes or tolls, as is illustrated in the same words in 7:34 and 15:1. The chief grudge concerns widespread dishonesty among tax collectors.<sup>81</sup>

**5:31 *Jesus answering:*** Jesus answers the complainers directly even though they murmur to his disciples, a fact confirmed by the plural verbs at the end of 5:30 (“eat and drink”). It seems apparent that Jesus wants to make his reply pointedly to the complainers, not merely to his small band of followers.

***They that are whole need not a physician; but they that are sick:*** This declaration, preserved in each of the synoptic Gospels (see Matt. 9:12; Mark 2:17), can be read as brimming with irony. That is, those who think of themselves as spiritually whole, though they really are sick, do not perceive a need for a physician such as the Savior. But it seems better to accept Jesus’ words as a broad, encompassing statement of his purpose, to be a physician to those who need him. This sense certainly underlies the revealed words to the prophet Mormon in his letter to his son about not baptizing little children (see Moro. 8:8).

**5:32 *I came not to call the righteous . . . to repentance:*** If irony lies in Jesus’ words, it is here, with a possible equation of *the righteous* with the Pharisees of verse 30. Even so, Jesus’ insistence that he comes to call people to repentance combines with the prior declaration as his lofty reason for coming.

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79. Morris, *Luke*, 132; Marshall, *Luke*, 220.

80. Green, *Luke*, 247.

81. Jeremias, *Jerusalem*, 303–5; Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 1:591–92.

## Analysis

The call of Levi, the response that it pulls up in some observers, and then the Savior's response package much of the Savior's ministry. First, Luke offers a glimpse of how Jesus measures a person's soul. Briefly, he looks at the person with discernment: he "saw a publican" whose means of livelihood is despised but, as the verb "saw" shows, Jesus perceives his inner character. Second, Levi responds joyfully and seeks to share his newly found happiness with friends. These friends are those whom Jesus can and will help. But others, not seeing what Jesus sees, find fault and reject both the Savior's actions and his words. Even when Jesus explains his purpose of calling people to repentance, these latter individuals turn away and even rise up to oppose him.

The most striking element in these verses concerns Levi's response to the Savior's call: "he left all" (5:28). The term translated "all" (Greek *panta*) points not only to his total abandonment of his livelihood but also to his grasp of the utter finality of his action. Unlike Peter and his fellow fishermen, who can take up fishing again, Levi enjoys no option to return to his former life. As a collector of tolls, Levi is under contract to gather monies for government purposes. Breaking that contract means the end of his livelihood.<sup>82</sup>

A second important feature has to do with Jesus' response to the grumbling Pharisees. In a scene that likely follows directly after Levi's feast, Jesus reveals the exalting purpose of his ministry: "They that are whole need not a physician; but they that are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (5:31–32). Although questions have arisen about the authenticity of this saying,<sup>83</sup> its genuineness is assured by its appearance, of all places, in the Book of Mormon. Interestingly, in this source the two parts of the saying are reversed. The context—a letter from Mormon to his son Moroni about not baptizing small children—offers a genuine saying of the Savior, as Mormon's introduction of the revealed words discloses: "Listen to the words of Christ, your Redeemer, your Lord and your God." Then follows the couplet: "I came into the world not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance; the whole need no physician, but they that are sick" (Moro. 8:8).

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82. *TDNT*, 6:907, n. 203; 9:607; Morris, *Luke*, 131.

83. Bultmann, *History*, 166–69; also cited in Marshall, *Luke*, 220.

Upon examination, the two sayings joined here can stand independent of one another, each making sense by itself, and therefore there is no difference in which comes first. Hence, the order does not become a measure of authenticity. The version in Luke 5:31–32 possesses the same credibility as that which comes by direct revelation to Mormon.

A hint lies in Mormon's version that he already knows this coupled pair of sayings from the larger record of the Savior's visit to the New World.<sup>84</sup> To be sure, the revelation introduces them as fresh sayings. But in applying them to Mormon's question about baptizing children, the Lord says, "wherefore, little children are whole." The term *wherefore* in this passage points to the specific application of the sayings to Mormon's query, answering the question *why* the Lord quotes the sayings, as if the principles spelled out in the sayings are well known to Mormon but their application is new. If, in fact, the Risen Jesus has spoken these words during his prior New World visit, and they are a part of the record which Mormon already knows, their authenticity as sayings from Jesus' mortal ministry is doubly underlined.

In this connection, one intriguing aspect of the Savior's response to the complaining Pharisees needs dusting off—the fact that he responds on behalf of his disciples. One can observe, of course, that even in these early days of his ministry he is in charge and his disciples must be muting their words and actions in his presence. Hence, the voices of the disciples are entirely absent in this story. We hear only Jesus. What might this circumstance mean? In concert with other passages, such as the dinner conversation that opens chapter 14, Luke seems to be portraying Jesus as an irrepressible conversationalist who literally takes over discussions and meetings of which he is a part, including synagogue services (see 6:6–10; 7:36–50; 11:37–52; 13:10–17).

In a different vein, Levi seems to be one of the minor customs officials rather than a person who recruits others to this livelihood and supervises them. The observation that he is "sitting at the receipt of custom," at the toll station, points to this conclusion. Tolls are collected all across the Roman world, seemingly at every place that officials can think of, a point of annoyance to travelers. In the case of Levi and his fellows at the Capernaum toll station, whatever they collect likely goes to the coffers of Herod Antipas, the tetrarch of Galilee, rather than to some other government treasury.<sup>85</sup>

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84. For Mormon's summary statement about this larger record, see 3 Ne. 26:6–12.

85. Schürer, *History*, 1:372–76; Jeremias, *Jerusalem*, 124–26.



**EARLY TEACHINGS****(5:33–39)**

(Compare Matt. 9:14–17; Mark 2:18–22)

**King James Translation**

33 And they said unto him, Why do the disciples of John fast often, and make prayers, and likewise the disciples of the Pharisees; but thine eat and drink?  
 34 And he said unto them, Can ye make the children of the bridechamber fast, while the bridegroom is with them?  
 35 But the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then shall they fast in those days.

36 And he spake also a parable unto them; No man putteth a piece of a new garment upon an old; if otherwise, then both the new maketh a rent, and the piece that was taken out of the new agreeth not with the old.  
 37 And no man putteth new wine into old bottles; else the new wine will burst the bottles, and be spilled, and the bottles shall perish.  
 38 But new wine must be put into new bottles; and both are preserved.  
 39 No man also having drunk old wine straightway desireth new: for he saith, The old is better.

**New Rendition**

33 And they said to him, “The disciples of John fast frequently and make prayers as do those of the Pharisees, but your disciples eat and drink.”  
 34 And Jesus said to them “You cannot make the wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them, can you?”  
 35 But days are coming when the bridegroom will surely be taken from them; then they will fast in those days.”

36 But he also spoke a parable to them: “No one who has cut a patch out of new clothing puts it on old clothing. If so, then the new tears from the old; the patch from the new is not compatible.  
 37 And no one puts new wine into old wineskins. If so, then the new wine bursts the skins, and it is spilled, and the skins are ruined.  
 38 Rather new wine is to be put into new wineskins.  
 39 And no one, after tasting the old, desires the new, for he says, ‘The old is better.’”

**Notes**

**5:33 *they said unto him:*** The subject *they* is ambiguous. The nearest possible referent consists of “scribes and Pharisees” (5:30), which is unlikely. The language of Mark 2:18 is similarly ambiguous, but Matthew identifies the questioners as “the disciples of John” (Matt. 9:14).

***the disciples of John fast often, and make prayers:*** Some manuscripts make this statement into a question by prefixing it with the Greek *dia ti*. But other manuscripts omit these words, including the earliest,  $\mathfrak{P}^4$  (Papyrus 4, at the National Library of France). The appearance of the unnamed

speakers reveals a good deal about John’s legacy. Plainly, disciples gather about him and he introduces them to honorable patterns of worship, similar to those adopted by the Pharisees, though the patterns of fasting and praying may have been different. And those disciples will continue his heritage past his death (see Mark 6:29; Acts 18:24–19:7).

***eat and drink:*** The similarity to the expression in 5:30—in the prior passage in the second person plural, here in the third person—likely points to the way that Luke and the other Gospel writers organize some information about Jesus, by the mnemonic means of catch words or phrases. Though the subject of this verse differs from the prior one, the fundamental interest in eating and drinking in the two stories ties them together in a person’s memory, assisting the accounts to be passed on as a connected pair. In a different vein, to outsiders, Jesus’ small group of disciples appears to be too happy and lacking discipline.

**5:34 *children of the bridechamber:*** This characterization of the disciples draws up images of both a happy wedding celebration and the Savior’s parental feelings for his followers, with all the responsibilities that such a relationship implies. The expression “children of the bridechamber” points to the wedding guests.<sup>86</sup> The term “bridechamber” (Greek *numphōn*) can refer either to the wedding hall (see Matt. 22:10, certain manuscripts) or to the couple’s room for their wedding night (see Tobit 6:14, 16), probably the former in this passage.<sup>87</sup> Grammatically, Jesus’ question, uttered with the Greek negative *mē*, expects a negative answer.<sup>88</sup>

***the bridegroom:*** The Savior clearly applies this title to himself. Although no evidence exists that the image of the bridegroom and that of the Messiah are linked together in the Old Testament, the tie between the bridegroom and Jehovah as covenant-maker and as redeemer is well documented (see Hosea 2:18–20; Isa. 54:5–8; 62:5; Jer. 2:2–4; Ezek. 16:44–63).<sup>89</sup>

**5:35 *the days will come:*** Clearly, such days will differ from the joyous days when the disciples are in the company of the bridegroom (see the Note on 17:22).

***shall be taken away from them:*** The allusion may be to the arrest, the crucifixion, or the ascension, and perhaps to all three. The verb (Greek *apairō*), though not the verb that describes Jesus’ arrest (see 22:54; Matt.

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86. *TDNT*, 4:1103, n. 40.

87. Marshall, *Luke*, 225.

88. Blass and Debrunner, *Greek Grammar*, §2)427).

89. *TDNT*, 4:1101–3; Marshall, *Luke*, 225; Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 1:599.

26:50; Mark 14:46; John 18:12), carries the sense “to lead away, to remove.”<sup>90</sup> A similar verb (Greek *airō*) appears in the Servant Song in LXX Isaiah 53:7: “he *was led* as a sheep to the slaughter,” indicating that the Servant-King is led by another against his will, and in LXX Isaiah 53:8: “his life *is taken away* from the earth,” a plain reference to his death (emphases added). On the other hand, Luke’s verb in this passage also describes the ascension in Acts 1:9: “he was taken up.” Although later Christian writers apply this verb to Jesus’ death, no New Testament author does so.<sup>91</sup> Modern scripture underscores the return of the bridegroom, the coming one (see the Note on 19:38; D&C 33:17–18; 65:3; 88:92; 133:10, 19–20).

***then shall they fast:*** The Savior underscores the principle of fasting and its implicit spiritual benefits. At a minimum, it involves cultivating “the Spirit” as a companion and eating “nothing,” as Jesus does before the temptations (4:1–2).<sup>92</sup>

***5:36 a parable:*** This term (Greek *parabolē*) appears for the second time in Luke’s narrative (see the Notes on 4:23; 8:4). In this case, it features a comparison drawn from common life, which possesses a memorable vividness and carries a major lesson, rather than a similitude (“the kingdom of heaven is like . . .”). But the difference between the two types of parables is minor. Although Jesus puts his own stamp on such sayings, the Old Testament supplies a number of examples that are widely known in Jesus’ world.<sup>93</sup>

***a piece of a new garment:*** The reference points to newly woven fabric that has not undergone washing and therefore has not shrunk. The Joseph Smith Translation substitutes “new cloth” for “new garment.” On a religious level, Jesus is underlining the inadequacy of repairing the old Judaism with the new fabric of the gospel, of refilling the old Judaism with the new wine of the gospel (see 5:36–38). Based on this parable and the next, Jesus does not intend to reform but to restore and to change.

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90. Liddell and Scott, *Lexicon*, 175; BAGD, 79.

91. BAGD, 23–24; *TDNT*, 1:185–86; Lampe, *Lexicon*, 172; for views that the passage points mainly to Jesus’ death, see Marshall, *Luke*, 226; Morris, *Luke*, 133; for a view on the arrest, see Brown, “Arrest,” 170–75.

92. For fasting and its ancient religious ties, see *TDNT*, 4:924–35; and John Muddiman, “Fast, Fasting,” in *ABD*, 2:773–76.

93. For similarly framed sayings, see 13:6–9; 14:7–11; 15:3–7, 8–10; 18:1–8, 9–14; 19:11–27; 20:9–16; 21:29–33. The literature on parables is extensive. For example, see Dodd, *Parables*, 13–28; Jeremias, *Parables*, 20; Brad H. Young, *The Parables: Jewish Tradition and Christian Interpretation* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1998), 3–38; Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 1:600–601; *TDNT*, 5:744–61; *TDOT*, 9:64–67.

***and the piece that was taken out of the new agreeth not with the old:***

This expression appears only in Luke’s version of this saying (see Matt. 9:16; Mark 2:21). It adds to Jesus’ point about the entire incompatibility of the old and new, of the old way of clothing a person’s worship and the new fabric that he is weaving. The Joseph Smith Translation omits the words “the piece that was taken out of the new” (JST 5:36).

**5:37 *new wine:*** The Savior appeals to the harvesting of grapes and the processing of their juice. The term translated “new” (Greek *neos*) means fresh rather than novel.<sup>94</sup> Although we may be tempted to see allusions to Jesus’ atoning blood, they are not strong. His point has to do with the fermenting of grape juice into wine.

***old bottles:*** Wine skins, made from the skins of kosher animals, hang from the walls of homes when filled. Over time, the leather of such skins will age and become brittle, thus rendering them unfit for new wine that ferments, giving off gases.<sup>95</sup>

**5:39 *The old is better:*** This sentiment expresses the view of the person who holds onto old ways and old beliefs, not wishing to change.<sup>96</sup>

## Analysis

These verses present three teachings that share a common theme—the utter inadequacy of the old and therefore the sharp need for the new. The Savior’s fresh message and unexpected activities begin to cut across old norms and customs. And people who treasure the old start to resist. Jesus’ words in part mold his response to his critics. Moreover, what he teaches is as much for his new, tiny group of disciples as for other hearers. They are still in a learning mode, and will be for a long time.

This observation presumes that these teachings of Jesus come from him early in his ministry. Both Mark and Matthew repeat them together and place them immediately after the calling of Levi (see Mark 2:13–22; Matt. 9:9–17). Moreover, the sayings deal with matters that naturally arise early on as the behavior patterns and announced intents of Jesus and his followers become publicly known. Hence, even though none of the Gospel writers offers hints about the place and exact timing of the sayings, they fit appropriately where they are, fixing them as early utterances. If Jesus in fact speaks the sayings recorded in Luke 5:34–39 in a later setting, rather

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94. BAGD, 537–38.

95. Marshall, *Luke*, 227.

96. Plummer, *Luke*, 165; Morris, *Luke*, 134.

than soon after he calls Levi, this observation does not diminish their validity and authenticity.<sup>97</sup>

The three teachings, and the portrayal of the Savior's attitude toward sinners in the prior story (see 5:30–32), allow Luke, early in Jesus' ministry, to uncover some of his important and distinctive characteristics that will bridge across the rest of his life. And they bring a refreshing approach that invites all to come to him. Jesus obviously is willing to reach out to and associate with the despised outcasts of society; he plainly intends to offer merciful assistance to all; he clearly carries a new agenda that replaces the old; he frequently frames his teaching in terms that are familiar and understandable to all his hearers.<sup>98</sup> And there is more just beneath the surface.

Perhaps not surprisingly, Jesus still values elements from the old ways of worship. Fasting and prayer are staples in the patterns of Jewish worship. Such acts, which show a person's devotion, confer regularity and bring order into one's life before the Lord. Many prayers consist of memorized recitations, but others come from the heart, as do the prayers of both the Pharisee and the publican in Jesus' story of temple worship (see 18:9–14).<sup>99</sup>

Just as meals and the sharing of one's table with others are often special, even sacred occasions, so abstaining from food and drink, often an act of mourning,<sup>100</sup> is also a time for spiritual regeneration and for inviting God's aid through the discipline of resisting the body's appetites.<sup>101</sup> To be sure, certain worshipers, the Pharisees among them, fast "often," regularly "twice in the week" (5:33; 18:12). But for the moment Jesus does not impose this form of self-denial on his followers, though the days are coming when they will fast (see 5:35), a clear affirmation of its enduring value in his eyes.

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97. Bultmann expresses doubts about the authenticity of the first saying in its current placement and form in Mark 2:18–22/Luke 5:33–35 (*History*, 18–19). Although placement is an issue, the form of the saying need not be a product of the later interests of "the church." Jesus is certainly capable of anticipating the future needs of his followers.

98. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ*, 195–97; Johnson, *Luke*, 99.

99. David E. Aune, "Worship, Early Christian," in *ABD*, 6:980–81.

100. Judg. 20:26; 1 Sam. 7:6; 31:13; 2 Sam. 1:12; Neh. 1:4; Jer. 14:12; Dan. 9:3–6; Zech. 7:5–6.

101. Ex. 34:28; Deut. 9:9; 2 Sam. 12:21–22; 1 Kgs. 21:27; Ezra 8:23; Esth. 4:16; Isa. 58:3–4.