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Luke Chapter 12

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Abstract: A commentary on the events of Luke 12, accompanied by parallel columns of the King James translation of the chapter alongside a new rendition.



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Luke Chapter 12

INTRODUCTION

Just as twine secures a vine to a trellis, so the theme of God's enwrapping influence in our lives binds unity into the first half of this chapter (see 12:1–34). God's influence reaches into dark recesses (see 12:2–3), into our deaths (see 12:5, 20), into the next world (see 12:4–5, 8–9, 33–34), into the realm of animals (see 12:6–7, 24), into the world of plants (see 12:27–28), into providing for our needs (see 12:29–31), and into our minds (see 12:11–12). A second theme wraps itself around these verses, securing tightly the answer to the question, How do we view the goods of this world? Significantly, a man's request that the Savior arbitrate his inheritance becomes an occasion for Jesus to disclose his doctrine on property and wealth, his penetrating point about the locale of one's treasure concluding this segment (see 12:13–34).

In the second part of this chapter, Luke quotes two stories from Jesus that feature stewards who respond completely differently to their assignments. In one, the stewards are true and faithful to the charge of their master and receive an astonishing act of gratitude from him—in a complete reversal of roles, the master serves his servants (see 12:36–38). In the other, a steward who abuses the master's entrusted authority receives the ultimate punishment when the master returns (see 12:42–48). By repeating such contrasting stories, Jesus makes it easier for his audience—and us—both to remember his words and to recall the points that he is making. Subtly, these two accounts about stewardship not only bind themselves to the prior matters of property and wealth, thus continuing the Savior's teachings about these items, but also elucidate the roles and duties of stewards who possess derived authority from their masters over goods, and over others, much as ecclesiastical and auxiliary officers of the church possess derived authority from God.

This point may be the most significant of the entire chapter. For these parable-like stories that sit prominently in later verses set out guidelines and principles that will govern the essential character of the church that Jesus is

organizing (see 12:35–48). He has already made the most important of his ecclesiastical callings, to the Twelve and the Seventy (see 9:1–6; 10:1–11). Now, through stories, he turns his disciples’ attention to proper governance: his representatives possess only derived authority from him, as the servants in the stories, thus unfolding a proper perspective on church service; the servants’ main function is to watch over those persons and possessions that belong to their lord and master; they are to be “faithful and wise” (12: 42) in the discharge of their offices as they meet both physical and spiritual needs of those within their stewardship; as his representatives they are to avoid ill behavior in all its forms, especially that which seeks to dominate others, grasping that “when we undertake . . . to exercise control or dominion or compulsion upon the souls of the children of men, in any degree of unrighteousness, behold, the heavens withdraw themselves” (D&C 121:37).

The last section deals generally with situations that might—wrongly—turn us from God, such as human conflicts and natural occurrences, which ends with Jesus’ warning about judgment (see 12:49–59). Jesus’ turn to the topic of human judgment (see 12:57–59) seems to be a thinly veiled pointer to the final judgment of God, a theme that emerges into light in this chapter and the next (see 12:5, 8–9, 14, 46–48; 13:1–5).

This chapter also incorporates much of what Jesus will say about Jerusalem and the last days on a later occasion (see Luke 17) and during his last sermon (see Luke 21). The question arises whether Jesus says such things at other times during his ministry or saves all these topics until, as he continues his journey or sits on the Mount of Olives, he speaks about the future. One can argue, of course, that Luke removes such items from their original context and places them here in Jesus’ ministry. But that need not be so. By adding a long and significant verse, for instance, the Joseph Smith Translation supports a view that Jesus speaks earlier in his ministry about such subjects, a part of which reads: “verily I say these things unto you, that ye may know this, that the coming of the Lord is as a thief in the night” (JST 12:44).

Further, in a recitation of what he says in his sermon on the Mount of Olives, Jesus says to the Twelve: “As ye have asked of me concerning the signs of my coming,” a pointer to prior conversations about this topic (D&C 45:16). Moreover, clear indicators exist in this chapter that Jesus is thinking about the last days at this point in his teaching, including the judgment (see 12:5, 8–10, 54–59).¹ Moreover, it is reasonable to see Jesus’

1. Johnson, *Luke*, 205; see 12:4–5, 8–9, 21, 33–34, 40, 44, 46–48, 58–59; 17:20–24, 30; compare 12:54–56; JST 12:41–44; and JST 17:24, 37–40.

thinking about judgment in light of his earlier confrontation with authorities (see 11:37–52). It seems, therefore, that Jesus gives expression to a number of these matters early on, as reflected in chapters 12 and 17, perhaps not in any broadly connected fashion, and then brings them together in his sermon delivered on Olivet.

GOD'S INFLUENCE (12:1–12)

(Compare Matt. 10:19–20, 26–33; 12:31–32; 16:5–6; Mark 3:28–30; 8:14–15; 13:11)

King James Translation

1 In the mean time, when there were gathered together an innumerable multitude of people, insomuch that they trode one upon another, he began to say unto his disciples first of all, Beware ye of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. 2 For there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; neither hid, that shall not be known. 3 Therefore whatsoever ye have spoken in darkness shall be heard in the light; and that which ye have spoken in the ear in closets shall be proclaimed upon the housetops. 4 And I say unto you my friends, Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. 5 But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear: Fear him, which after he hath killed hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, Fear him.

6 Are not five sparrows sold for two farthings, and not one of them is forgotten before God? 7 But even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not therefore: ye are of more value than many sparrows.

8 Also I say unto you, Whosoever shall confess me before men, him shall

New Rendition

1 Meanwhile, when a very large crowd had gathered, so that they trampled on one another, he began to speak to his disciples first, “Guard yourselves against the yeast of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. 2 And there is nothing concealed that will not be revealed, and nothing hidden that will not become known. 3 Therefore, whatever you speak in the dark will be heard in the light, and what you whisper in your secret chambers will be preached upon the housetops. 4 But I say to you, my friends, do not fear those who kill the body, and after that, cannot do anything more. 5 But I will show you whom you should fear; fear the one who, after killing you, has power to throw you into Gehenna. Yes, I tell you, fear him.

6 “Are not five sparrows sold for two copper coins? And not one of them is forgotten before God. 7 But even all the hairs of your head have been counted. Do not fear. You are worth more than many sparrows.

8 “And I say to you, everyone who acknowledges me before men, the Son of Man will acknowledge him before

the Son of man also confess before the angels of God: 9 But he that denieth me before men shall be denied before the angels of God. 10 And whosoever shall speak a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but unto him that blasphemeth against the Holy Ghost it shall not be forgiven.

11 And when they bring you unto the synagogues, and unto magistrates, and powers, take ye no thought how or what thing ye shall answer, or what ye shall say: 12 For the Holy Ghost shall teach you in the same hour what ye ought to say.

the angels of God. 9 And he who denies me before men will be denied before the angels of God. 10 And everyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven.

11 “And when they drag you to synagogues and rulers and authorities, do not be anxious about how you will defend yourselves or what you will say. 12 For the Holy Spirit will teach you in the very hour what you should say.”

Notes

12:1 *an innumerable multitude*: The Greek term *myrias* comes into English as “myriad” and means literally “ten thousand.”² By this means, Luke stresses the huge crowds that greet Jesus during his travels from Galilee to Jerusalem (see 9:51), particularly this one just outside the home of the Pharisee which evidently gathers because of the disagreeable commotion inside and outside the house.³

***they trode one upon another*:** This vivid expression has to do with a crowd so tightly packed that people are stepping on one another’s feet (Greek verb *katapateō*).⁴ The verb also appears at 8:5, “trodden down.”

***first of all*:** The KJV translators render the full expression “he began to say to this disciples first of all.” The question is whether the adverb here (Greek *prōton*) ties to Jesus’ words to his disciples (“*first* he spoke to his disciples”), only engaging the crowd after a person asks a favor (see 12:13), or whether it goes with what follows (“*above all*, beware of the leaven”). The better solution points to Jesus first speaking with the disciples, with the crowd overhearing, and later turning to those gathered at the Pharisee’s home.⁵

***Beware*:** Jesus repeats this sort of warning in other contexts (see 17:3; 20:46; 21:34), drawing on the same verb (Greek *prosechō*).⁶

2. BAGD, 531.

3. Plummer, *Luke*, 317.

4. *TDNT*, 5:941, 944; BAGD, 416.

5. Marshall, *Luke*, 511.

6. BAGD, 721.

leaven: Jesus points to the hidden element in flour dough that invisibly and silently makes it rise. In other contexts, Jesus speaks negatively about leaven in sayings that seem to be related to this one (see Matt. 16:6; Mark 8:15). At base, this leaven consists of sourdough, a fermenting agent, kept aside until it is time to use a portion of it. Then it is added to fresh dough and, hidden within, it acts as a raising agent, changing the character of the dough.⁷

the Pharisees: In this context, these words tie back to Jesus' accusation inside the house that Pharisees are "as graves which appear not" (11:44). In related sayings, Jesus links the Pharisees to Sadducees (see Matt. 16:6) and to Herod Antipas (see Mark 8:15).

hypocrisy: Though in its more ancient meaning the Greek term *hypokrisis* has to do with acting and poetic recitation, by the New Testament era it carries a fully negative sense (see the Note on 6:42). Here the term connotes both "the jarring contraction between . . . the outward appearance and the inward lack of righteousness" and the Pharisees' concern "about their status with men rather than their standing before God."⁸ In each case, it is sin (see 12:56; 13:15; D&C 50:6–9).

12:2 *there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed:* This sweeping declaration of a future openness mirrors an earlier saying, though the occasions that draw forth Jesus' words differ from one another (see 8:16–17). Within this saying may lie an allusion to his coming Atonement (see the Note on 8:17). But the stronger tie links back to the prior verse, that is, to the unseen and silent leaven or hypocrisy of the Pharisees that will surely be uncovered, no matter their efforts to hide it (see also D&C 1:3).

12:3 *whatsoever ye have spoken:* Jesus directs his words to "his disciples," offering a warning to them that they not fall into the traps of plotting and hypocrisy because, in the future, "vengeance cometh speedily . . . upon my house shall it begin, and from my house shall it go forth" (D&C 112:24–25).

spoken in darkness: Turning to the images of darkness and light, Jesus brings an emphatic conclusion to his points about hidden actions and words, about concealment and openness in one's heart. In Jesus' hegemony, his disciples' "works shall [not] be in the dark" (2 Ne. 28:9). Besides the general principles that he enunciates, we sense on the edge of his words an allusion to the now re-energized plot to take his life (see the Analysis on 11:37–54).

7. Harrell F. Beck, "Leaven," in *IDB*, 3:104–5; Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 2:954–55.

8. *TDNT*, 8:567–68.

proclaimed upon the housetops: This expression appears in other contexts, though with the same basic meaning—at the end, all will be made known (see Morm. 5:8; D&C 1:3).

12:4 *I say unto you:* Sprinkled liberally both in this chapter (see 12:5, 8, 22, 27, 37, 44, 51, 59) and in the rest of Luke’s record,⁹ Jesus draws on his own authority to make definitive, divinely driven statements about what is and what is not (see the Notes on 6:27 and 7:26). In the case of the Baptist, who repeats this expression, John draws on the divine authority that he has received (see 3:8).

my friends: These words of endearment appear nowhere else in this Gospel, though Luke repeats the term for “friend” or “friends” without the possessive (Greek *philos*) more frequently than other New Testament writers.¹⁰ Only John preserves the warm greeting “my friends,” which Jesus extends specifically to the Apostles who “do whatsoever I command” (John 15:14). In later references to his mortal ministry among his Apostles, the Savior speaks of modern Apostles as “my friends” (D&C 84:63; 93:45; 98:1; 104:1; 109:6), the same “as my friends in days when I was with them, traveling to preach the gospel” (D&C 84:77; also 88:3). In this light, Jesus’ words addressed to “my friends” in the passage here may well be aimed particularly at the Twelve. More broadly, of course, his friends are those to whom he shows his will through “the voice of my Spirit” (D&C 97:1) and to whom he brings comfort and reassurance (see D&C 88:62; 100:1).

Be not afraid of them that kill the body: This instruction may well point to Jesus’ own looming death at the hands of others. He does not fear them because, as soon as he dies, they can exercise no more power over him (compare D&C 122:9—“fear not what man can do”; also D&C 98:14; 101:36). In a comprehensive sense, Jesus effectively says that death is merely a change of environment that no one need fear. Death, in his view, does not bring an end to a person’s existence.

12:5 *I will forewarn you:* This verse is the most important in the chapter. This warning is a strong signal that the main topic of Jesus’ words has to do with the end of time since it speaks of “him, which . . . hath power to cast into hell,” an allusion to the final judgment (see also D&C 63:4). Incidentally, the verb (Greek *hypodeiknumi*), in its senses of “to warn” and “to show,” appears in 3:7 and 6:47 respectively.¹¹

9. See 4:24, 25; 5:24; 6:27; 7:9, 14, 26, 28, 47; 9:27; 10:12, 24; 11:8, 9, 51; 13:3, 5, 35; 14:24; 15:7, 10; 16:9; 17:34; 18:8, 14, 17, 29; 19:26; 21:3, 32; 22:16, 18, 37; 23:43.

10. See 7:6, 34; 11:5, 6, 8; 12:4; 14:10, 12; 15:6, 9, 29; 16:9; 21:16; 23:12.

11. BAGD, 851–52.

power: The term regularly means “authority” (Greek *exousia*), but here carries the sense of power, as in 4:6, which the translators correctly understand.¹²

hell: This word occurs only here in Luke’s writings (Greek *geenna*) and derives from an Aramaic phrase that means “land of Hinnom” in reference to the Valley of Hinnom that circles the southern edge of Jerusalem where practices sacred to the god Moloch have been carried out in an earlier era, thus earning the valley a bad reputation (see 2 Kgs. 16:3; 17:17; 21:6; 2 Chr. 28:3; 33:6; Jer. 19:4–6; 32:34–35). Doctrine and Covenants 63:4 repeats the term “hell.” In other passages, Luke writes the Greek term *hadēs* (see 10:15; 16:23; Acts 2:27, 31). In general, *hadēs* is the place of temporarily punishing a person’s spirit before the resurrection whereas the Greek word *geenna*, derived from Aramaic, designates the place of the long-term punishment of both spirit and body following the resurrection.¹³

12:6 five sparrows sold for two farthings: Jesus draws the attention of his hearers to the smallest of transactions in the marketplace. Why? It appears that, by setting out a sharp contrast, he is underlining that God not only works on a grand scale when he reveals all (see 12:2) but yet is aware of the tiniest incident when he both hears what is “spoken in the ear in closets” (12:3) and numbers “the very hairs of your head” (11:7).

farthings: Another piece of Jesus’ intent may appear at this juncture. He points to a small Roman coin, the *as* or *assarius*, equivalent to one-sixteenth of a *denarius* which is a silver coin that a laborer typically earns in a day (see the Notes on 7:41; 10:35).¹⁴ He then ties this discussion with that about God keeping track of “the very hairs of your head” (12:7) and the prophetic statement about his Apostles receiving help from the Holy Ghost when they find themselves in custody (see 12:11–12). Importantly, on a later occasion Jesus draws attention to a widow carrying two of the smallest copper coins (see 21:2) just before speaking both of “an hair of your head” (21:18) and of his personal assistance to the Twelve when they find themselves in synagogues, prisons, and “before kings and rulers” (see 21:12–15). Somehow, in both instances, Jesus connects the small coins with God’s generous assistance to his representatives. Two possible interpretations emerge. First, God will assist his followers even though they possess little or what seems to be of little value as the world measures assets. Second,

12. TDNT, 2:562–74; BAGD, 277–78.

13. TDNT, 1:148, 657–58.

14. BAGD, 117; Jeremias, *Jerusalem*, 111; Schürer, *History*, 2:64; Carol H. V. Sutherland, “Coinage, Roman,” in *OCD*, 261–63.

the tiny things that seem to be of little earthly value may actually be of high worth, for “God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty” (1 Cor. 1:27; also D&C 35:13; 124:1).

not one of them is forgotten: Jesus’ words reassure his disciples that God both pays attention to the small ones among them and values humans more than he does animals, as he will emphasize in the next verse. Moreover, he begins to lift away the fear that he ties to God’s powers that operate after death (see 12:5).

12:7 *Fear not:* In contrast to his warning to fear God who “hath power to cast into hell” (12:5), Jesus offers his glowing guarantee of God’s ultimate concern and love.

ye are of more value than many sparrows: We note two important aspects of Jesus’ words that touch the animal kingdom. First, he indicates clearly that animals possess value, even though it is less than other living beings (see D&C 49:19). Second, he provides a relative scale in which humans carry much more worth than do citizens of the animal kingdom.¹⁵

12:8 *Whosoever shall confess me:* The deeply personal nature of the connection between the Savior and the one acknowledging him signals the presence of a bond or covenant strong enough that the person, if threatened, will be “not afraid of them that kill the body” (12:4).

before men: Jesus’ first imagined scene lies in the mortal world, almost as if one were standing in a court of law (see 8:47; 21:36; 24:19; the Note on 1:75).¹⁶ But his next words embrace the notion that what is done in this world carries enormous weight in the next.

confess: The Greek verb (*homologeō*) bears a wide array of meanings, from promising to confessing. But here, as in the Baptist’s words at John 1:20 (John “confessed . . . I am not the Christ”), it bears the sense “to declare” or “to make a statement [in a legal setting],”¹⁷ a notion at home as if in a heavenly courtroom “before the angels of God.”

the angels of God: Such persons, it appears, will serve as witnesses of the Son of Man’s confession in a heavenly setting, just as they stand as witnesses elsewhere (see 2:13; 12:9; 15:10; 1 Tim. 3:16; Rev. 14:10; also Job 38:7; D&C 62:3; 88:2; 90:34). These beings are apparently tied to the divine assembly that surrounds Jehovah.¹⁸

15. Sandra Bradford Packard, “Animals,” in *EM*, 1:42–43.

16. Marshall, *Luke*, 515.

17. *TDNT*, 5:207–8; *BAGD*, 571.

18. *TDNT*, 1:78, 79, 84; *TDOT*, 2:157; 8:322–23; 10:174–75; E. Theodore Mullen Jr., “Divine Assembly,” in *ABD*, 2:214–17.

12:9 *he that denieth me:* Jesus takes up this matter elsewhere with his disciples. He raises it in a context of losing oneself by engaging in God’s work instead of seeking to “gain the whole world” (9:25). In this other passage, Jesus also titles himself as “Son of man” and all occurs in the presence of “the holy angels” (9:24–26). Similarly, here Jesus aims his remarks at disciples, for the Joseph Smith Translation adds an unusually long statement about them that spells out the reason for Jesus’ declaration about those who deny him: “Now the disciples knew that he said this, because they had spoken evil against him before the people; for they were afraid to confess him before men.” In fact, according to the JST version of Mark’s Gospel, the disciples are surprisingly still “wondering” about Jesus’ messiahship after the Last Supper (see JST Mark 14:36). In Luke’s passage here, Jesus’ statements are directed specifically to the disciples, and they know it. At this point, they begin to worry: “And they reasoned among themselves, saying, He knoweth our hearts, and he speaketh to our condemnation, and we shall not be forgiven” (JST 12:10–11). This expressed fear, that underlies their response to Jesus’ words about denying him, opens the occasion for Jesus then to affirm that “whosoever shall speak a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him” (12:10; see the Note below). The disciples’ denial in the face of public pressure, of course, mirrors and anticipates Peter’s later denial—on a historical plane, not literary, because the JST fills in the historical background (see the Note on 22:57; the Analysis on 22:54–62).

12:10 *And whosoever:* At this point, the Joseph Smith Translation adds an important pair of expressions that form a transition from the disciples’ fear of condemnation to Jesus’ next statement (see JST 12:11). We read, “*But he answered them, and said unto them, Whosoever . . .*” (JST 12:12; emphasis added). It becomes clear that Jesus is doing more than mouthing a truism—his next point frames an answer to their fear.

speak a word: The expression can carry both the sense of a simple uttered word or a long complicated speech, because the term translated “word” offers these meanings (Greek *logos*).¹⁹ Usually, Luke repeats this term when pointing to a divine communiqué (see 1:20, 29; 3:4; 4:22, 32; 5:1; 6:47; 7:7; 8:11; etc.).

against the Son of man: To this phrase the Joseph Smith Translation adds a key pair of words: “and repenteth” (JST 12:12). In a vivid sense, this brief addition makes all the difference. Forgiveness will come to one who “shall speak a word against the Son of man” only if that person repents.

19. Liddell and Scott, *Lexicon*, 1057–59; BAGD, 478–80.

shall be forgiven: The basic sense of the verb (Greek *aphiēmi*) is to let go, as when the hand holds an object tight and then lets it go, either dropping, throwing, or releasing it. By extension, the verb means “to pardon.”²⁰

blasphemeth: This strong verb (Greek *blasphēmeō*) appears in two other passages in Luke (see 22:65; 23:39) and the noun in one (see 5:21). In one way or another, each points to God, always with the sense of desecrating his name or depreciating him.²¹

it shall not be forgiven: In similar sayings, a person learns that forgiveness will come “neither in this world, neither in the world to come” (Matt. 12:32; also Mark 3:29), making it “the unpardonable sin” (see D&C 76:31–48).²² Of this sin, Joseph Smith said, “What must a man do to commit the unpardonable sin? He must receive the Holy Ghost, have the heavens opened unto him, and know God, and then sin against Him. . . . He has got to say that the sun does not shine while he sees it” (see D&C 132:27 for a further definition of this sin).²³

12:11 And when they bring: The Joseph Smith Translation adjusts this opening of the verse and makes Jesus’ prediction more sure and vivid: “And again I say unto you, They shall bring . . .” (JST 12:13). The term “again” may point to an earlier occasion when Jesus warns his disciples about a future laced with frightening trials, as he will do on a later occasion (see 21:12–19).

unto the synagogues: The administration of justice, conducted in a synagogue building, is known especially from a later era; one New Testament passage highlights such justice, including beatings inside the buildings (see Acts 22:19; also 26:11; 2 Cor. 11:24–25).²⁴ Intolerable actions that required judicial response, according to the Dead Sea Scrolls, include “disobeying superiors” and “murmuring against the authority of the Congregation.”²⁵ Jesus reinforces this dire prediction of his disciples’ painful future in his sermon on the Mount of Olives during the last week of his life (see 21:12–19).

magistrates, and powers: These officials are most likely Gentiles, although they could be Jewish (see 21:12). These two nouns (Greek *archē* and *exousia*) appear in singular form at 1 Corinthians 15:24, Ephesians 1:21

20. Liddell and Scott, *Lexicon*, 289–90; BAGD, 125–26; *TDNT*, 1:509–12.

21. BAGD, 142; *TDNT*, 1:621–24.

22. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ*, 268–69; McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 739–40.

23. *TPJS*, 358.

24. Levine, *Ancient Synagogue*, 395–96.

25. Schürer, *History*, 2:432–33; *Rule of the Community*, 6:25–27; 7:18–19, in García Martínez, *Dead Sea Scrolls Translated*, 10–11.

and Colossians 2:10, where the words may also point to heavenly authorities (see D&C 121:29).²⁶

take ye no thought: The Greek verb (*merimnaō*) does not mean to remain thoughtless but to be full of anxiety or care, offering the sense, “be not anxious.”²⁷ Chiefly, Jesus is addressing one’s anxiety for oneself, rather than a person’s distress for others, making the point that a person who lives a committed life before God need not worry (see 21:14; Isa. 51:16).²⁸

12:12 the Holy Ghost shall teach you: This aiding influence comes to those who receive the gift of the Holy Ghost and is a manifestation of his power among believers (see John 14:26; 1 Cor. 2:13; also D&C 84:85–86).²⁹

in the same hour: Significantly, the proffered divine prop comes only when it is needed (see 21:14–15), not a long time beforehand, and certainly not afterward: “it shall be given you in the very hour” (D&C 84:85). This pattern is well known only among those who experience it.

Analysis

The Savior’s concern for the end-time lies broadly across these sayings, including a solemn sense of the final judgment and the disclosures that will then occur. Threateningly, Jesus warns his hearers that “nothing covered . . . shall not be revealed” and that, in their concerns for this life, they should not lose sight of him who “hath power to cast into hell” (12:2, 5). Moreover, those who turn from Jesus in this life “shall be denied before the angels of God,” and those who blaspheme “against the Holy Ghost . . . shall not be forgiven” (12:9–10).

But laced into these dark omens runs a bright and colorful band of glowing assurances that God is aware even of sparrows and numbers “the very hairs of your head” (12:6–7). Further, the Son of Man will “confess before the angels of God” those who acknowledge him and will forgive those who speak against him (12:8, 10). Finally, as a lovely ornament that rests atop a faithful person’s life, “the Holy Ghost shall teach you . . . what ye ought to say” in moments of anxiety and crisis (12:12).

All of this is to say that the here and now carries enormous weight in face of the coming judgment, whether our small acts or our grand, daring enterprises.³⁰ God, who sees all, is fully aware of our best and our worst. Remarkably, and almost unbelievably, he stands ready to demonstrate that

26. Marshall, *Luke*, 520; Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 2:966.

27. BAGD, 506.

28. *TDNT*, 4:589–93.

29. *DNTC*, 1:330–31.

30. Marshall, *Luke*, 516; Morris, *Luke*, 228–31.

we “are of more value than many sparrows” (12:7); he stands ready, with the Son of Man, to acknowledge our discipleship and to forgive us in heavenly realms; he stands ready, with the aid of the Holy Ghost, to inspire us in our hour of deepest need.

The proof of such inspiration, of course, comes into the lives and ministries of his disciples when, under pressure of some sort, they receive heaven’s guiding touch (see Acts 2:14–36; 4:8–20, 31; 5:27–33). For Jesus evidently directs his remarks to the Twelve, calling them “my friends,” a title reserved for them (see the Notes on 12:4 and 12:9). Such a notation points back to an eyewitness account that is preserved among these men, though the common scholarly wisdom holds that Luke draws his information from a written source shared with Matthew and is responsible for creating the setting for Jesus’ sayings.³¹ In response, the observation that he turns from one audience to another, from disciples (see 12:4, 22) to members of the accompanying crowd (see 12:13–14, 54),³² suggests a vivid memory of the occasion when Jesus utters most or all of these sayings, much as the Resurrected Savior does among his New World hearers (see 3 Ne. 11:9, 21–22; 12:1; 13:25; 14:1; 15:1, 11; 17:1; 18:5, 10, 17, 26, 37).

Lying tantalizingly among Jesus’ words rests the point that, as Jesus’ suffers harassment and persecution, so will his closest followers. As he, they will not escape. As he, their woes will come not just from Jewish authorities but from gentile officials as well. The whole world will fight against them (see 20:17; 1 Ne. 11:34–36). But their consolation is that, unlike with human connections where one party often abandons the other in crises, even in families (see 21:16), Jesus will not leave them without comfort and reward in their difficulties. For in their distress “there shall not an hair of your head perish” (21:18), they will “possess [their] souls” (21:19), and he will send the Holy Ghost to aid them “in the same hour” (12:12).³³

A final coloration requires comment. In a gospel that features so much of forgiveness, how does Jesus’ saying about forgiveness for the one who speaks “a word against the Son of man” play into Luke’s larger portrait? Is this merely a generic promise? It seems not. A person need look no farther than Peter’s denial.³⁴ In this account, three times Peter denies the Savior in strong language (see 22:55–60). Can Peter obtain forgiveness for such

31. Marshall, *Luke*, 510–11; Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 2:956–57, 962–63.

32. Green, *Luke*, 486–87.

33. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ*, 570–71.

34. Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 2:964–65.

an act? After all, Jesus threatens, “he that denieth me before men shall be denied before the angels of God” (12:9), effectively drawing down upon Peter’s head a divine condemnation. But triumphing over this frightening prospect rises the cleansing, restoring powers of forgiveness wherein Peter can bathe and find freshening freedom.

EARTHLY TREASURES (12:13–21)

King James Translation

13 And one of the company said unto him, Master, speak to my brother, that he divide the inheritance with me. 14 And he said unto him, Man, who made me a judge or a divider over you? 15 And he said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man’s life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.

16 And he spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: 17 And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? 18 And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. 19 And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. 20 But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? 21 So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.

New Rendition

13 And someone in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, tell my brother to share the inheritance with me.” 14 And he said to him, “Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbitrator over you?” 15 And he said to them, “Watch out and be on your guard against every form of greed, because a man’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.”

16 And he told them a parable, saying, “The land of a certain rich man produced a good crop. 17 And he thought to himself, ‘What should I do? For I have nowhere to gather my crops.’ 18 And he said, ‘I will do this. I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will gather all my grain and my goods. 19 And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have many goods stored up for many years. Relax, eat, drink, and be glad.’ 20 And God said to him, ‘Fool, tonight your life will be demanded from you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?’ 21 So it is with the one who stores up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God.”

Notes

12:13 *one of the company*: It appears that the next two verses (see 12:13–14), wherein Jesus deals with a seemingly irrelevant request that he act as a mediator between two brothers over a property dispute, may be out of place. Certainly, modern commentators seek to determine the origin of this interaction, but without unanimity.³⁵ Clearly, however, it forms an introduction to the following parable and reflects the practice of people taking their disputes to rabbis.³⁶ Instead, if the material in this chapter grows out of an eyewitness account (see the Analysis on 12:1–12), it seems better simply to accept Luke’s placement on the grounds that the man’s request genuinely ties to Jesus’ prior instructions. All teachers have experienced so-called irrelevant questions from students who, because of their own train of thought or recent experience, find meaning in a teacher’s comments—perhaps a word or a phrase—and raise a question that seems out of place. It is reasonable to see that sort of situation here. What is impressive is that Jesus redirects the conversation back to his main theme, that of God’s influence in our lives, while also addressing consequences of becoming too tied to the things of the world, an issue that the man’s question raises (see 12:15–21).³⁷

***Master*:** At base this frequent title means “teacher” (Greek *didaskalos*).³⁸ In Luke’s account, it applies not only to Jewish teachers (see 2:46) but also to John (see 3:12). Here, the sense is roughly equivalent to “rabbi,” though it does not describe fully what and who Jesus really is (see the Notes on 7:40; 10:25; 11:45; and 21:7).³⁹

***divide the inheritance*:** The Old Testament takes up issues of inheritance in Num. 27:1–11, 36:6–10, and Deut. 21:15–17. Because these directives do not cover all possible inheritance issues, people regularly go to authorities to resolve disputes, as later rabbinic law demonstrates.⁴⁰

12:14 *who made me*: The verb here (Greek *kathistēmi*) means “to appoint” (see 12:42) and even “to ordain” (see Titus 1:5; Heb. 5:1; 8:3).⁴¹ We notice that those who become arbiters of such matters go through a recognized

35. For example, Marshall, *Luke*, 522, assigns these verses to “Q”; Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 2:968, assigns it to Luke’s special source “L.”

36. Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 2:968–69.

37. Green, *Luke*, 486.

38. *TDNT*, 2:148–57.

39. Marshall, *Luke*, 310; see 6:40; 8:49; 9:38; 18:18; 19:39; 20:21, 28, 39; 21:7; 22:11.

40. *Mishnah Baba Bathra* 8–10.

41. BAGD, 391; *TDNT*, 3:444–45.

training regimen, as is expected of Jesus to become a teacher (see 20:1–2; John 2:18; 7:28; 8:13–18).⁴² On the edge of Jesus’ question stands a respect for recognized procedures such as those by which he commissions the Twelve and the Seventy (see 9:1–3; 10:1–2).

a judge or a divider: In a context of proper legal procedures, we expect to see the term “judge” (Greek *kritēs*). In fact, “divider,” a rare word that appears only here in the New Testament (Greek *meristēs*), is unattested in ancient Jewish legal terminology except as the name of a Jewish sect.⁴³

12:15 beware of covetousness: The Greek expression is strong and means “guard against all forms of greediness.”⁴⁴ This warning applies equally to rich and poor. It is not specific to a certain social class. But one must also read the warning in light of the man’s request that Jesus has just turned aside, for the man exhibits covetousness (see 12:13–14). In this light, and in light of his following stories about the rich man (see 12:16–21) and about nature (see 12:22–30), Jesus underlines that people must not become so tied to earthly possessions that they run the risk of losing their eternal perspective and reward (see D&C 84:105, 112).

a man’s life: As Jesus points out just before, God influences a person’s life, both in this world and in the next, and possesses power to make it good or bad in the hereafter (see 12:5). Moreover, a genuinely lived life has little to do with material possessions but everything to do with a person’s response to, and place in, Jesus’ kingdom, including divesting oneself of those possessions that may engender greed (see 12:23, 31, 33–34).⁴⁵

12:16 parable: This term (Greek *parabolē*) has already appeared in Luke’s report with a number of meanings. It generally introduces a short story that carries “one single point of comparison” (see the Notes on 4:23, 5:36 and 8:4).⁴⁶

The ground: The man of the parable is already wealthy because the term (Greek *chōra*) generally has to do with a region or district, indicating a very large farm.⁴⁷

42. Jeremias, *Jerusalem*, 235–36; Schürer, *History*, 2:331, 332–34.

43. Liddell and Scott, *Lexicon*, 997, 1104; BAGD, 454, 506; Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 80.4.

44. Plummer, *Luke*, 322–23; Morris, *Luke*, 232; BAGD, 673; *TDNT*, 6:271–73; 9:236–41.

45. *TDNT*, 2:861–65.

46. Dodd, *Parables*, 18; also Talmage, *Jesus the Christ*, 295–99; Plummer, *Luke*, 125–26; *TDOT*, 9:64–67; *TDNT*, 5:744–61.

47. BAGD, 897.

12:17 *What shall I do:* The question illumines the fact that his farm has just produced an enormous harvest that his storage facilities cannot handle.

to bestow: Both here and in 12:18, the verb (Greek *synagō*) means at base “to gather.” Its noun, *synagogē*, rendered in English as synagogue, carries the sense of a “gathering place.”⁴⁸

my fruits: Plainly, the landowner does not understand that he is the steward of the goods that have come to him, not their owner (see 12:15). To claim possession of what belongs to God means crossing a threshold that draws divine ire. Moreover, because of his evident position as a large landowner in a peasant society, his withholding of goods from the market, storing them in his planned barns, will raise prices for those who can hardly afford them and net him a larger profit, a practice that Jesus condemns here.⁴⁹

12:18 *I will pull down my barns:* The landowner, of course, will not do the physical work, but those whom he hires, indicating the level of his wealth. His language, which consistently points to himself, shows that his real interest rests on himself.

fruits: The earliest manuscript (P⁷⁵) and others read “grain” (Greek *sitos*).⁵⁰ Some texts preserve the reading in the King James Version while others simply read “produce” with no reference to “goods.”⁵¹

my goods: This general term for property or goods (Greek *agatha*) makes the parable applicable to those who may not own much land.⁵²

12:19 *soul:* This term bears a wide set of meanings in the New Testament, from the life-force that resides in living creatures, including humans, to the individual spirit or persona, and to the whole person, both body and spirit (Greek *psychē*).⁵³ In this last sense, it represents mortal life, as the next verse and others illustrate (see 12:20, 22–23).

for many years: The man’s miscalculation, of course, has to do with the vagaries of mortality and the inability to guarantee the length of one’s life. Jesus’ story both accepts and underscores these characteristics.

take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry: Jesus’ words picture a man who is little concerned for those around him, as in the story of the rich man and Lazarus. And, as with that rich man, the threat of torment in the afterlife is just as real for this man (see 16:19–31).

48. BAGD, 789–91.

49. Green, *Luke*, 498, 490–91.

50. BAGD, 759.

51. Marshall, *Luke*, 523; Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 2:973.

52. BAGD, 3; Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 2:973.

53. BAGD, 901–2; *TDNT*, 9:637–40.

12:20 fool: Frighteningly, the term comes on the lips of God (Greek *aphrōn*) and stands opposite the word for wise or intelligent (Greek *phronimos*).⁵⁴ The term for “fool” constitutes a most unkind judgment of one’s character and abilities.

thy soul shall be required: The expression is not in the passive voice and instead reads “they shall require thy soul,” almost as if certain celestial creatures come for the person’s soul. But grammatically the simple plural indicative can express the passive if the subject is indefinite, pointing to God as the one who acts.⁵⁵

12:21 he that layeth up treasure for himself: Jesus now brings hearers to the first half of his emphasis. The act of laying up treasure for oneself does not bring condemnation unless it is undertaken for its own sake without the broader view of the needs of the kingdom and a recognition of the source of that wealth (see 12:31; the Notes on 12:15 and 18:27).

is not rich toward God: Within these words lies the other half of Jesus’ emphasis. Wealth, directed only toward satisfying one’s wants, leaves a person at risk in the long-range view of life, particularly the afterlife. The most secure wealth is that deposited in heaven “where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth” (12:33).

Analysis

Luke alone preserves this account, and it fits neatly within his larger interest in money matters. Only Luke records a number of the Savior’s sayings and experiences that pointedly have to do with wealth and position (see 14:7–14; 15:8–10, 11–32; 16:1–9, 10–12, 19–31; 19:1–10). The general thrust of these reports carries a sharp warning about allowing one’s life to become inextricably intertwined with the goods and values of this world, thus potentially degrading one’s connections to heaven (see the Note on 18:27).

On one level, Jesus shows off his skills at parrying an irrelevant inquiry from a man involved in a dispute over property and turning the question to the main thrust of his remarks, the decisive influence of God in one’s life, whether in this life or the next, and whether one recognizes it or not. The man who makes the request has already fallen into the grasp of greed and essentially demands that Jesus render a judgment on property that is in favor of the man against his brother. To this demand—the verb *to speak* is

54. BAGD, 127, 874.

55. Blass and Debrunner, *Greek Grammar*, §2)130); Marshall, *Luke*, 524; Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 2:974.

in the imperative (12:13)—Jesus responds with his story about a man whose greed is fueled by his abundance but who exercises no real control over his future.⁵⁶

In the marrow of Jesus' response, in the form of the story about the landowner, grows the issue of one's attitude toward wealth and possessions. Within these lines, especially in 12:17–19, the pronouns *I* and *my* jump out at the reader. In the story, the landowner's interest rests chiefly, almost exclusively, on himself—to such a pitch that he becomes self-indulgent, blind to the needs of others, blind to the thanks properly owed to God for his abundance, even blind to constructing a more meaningful life for himself.⁵⁷ His possessions have so captured him that, in their grasp, he loses perspective, identifying his “soul” with the privileges of possessing, much as the rich young ruler will do (see 18:18–25). The landowner has reduced his life to the ownership of things.

More than this, Jesus' response to the man's request that he serve as judge in a dispute over property discloses that some earthly matters do not require divine aid, such as questions over inheritance. The laws and customs for such matters are already in place and do not require special intervention, a heavenly intervention in this case, because of who Jesus is. Luke's story, because he and his readers know who Jesus is, stretches beyond the workaday world and raises a question about divine intervention in routine matters of life. Within Jesus' response stands a firm respect for custom and law in his society, aspects that he will not overturn, as in the case of paying taxes to Caesar (see 20:21–25).

Finally, Jesus' question to the man with a dispute, “who made me a judge?” (12:14), brings forward the issue of Jesus' respect for proper, even formal, procedure. His question, in fact, underlines his lofty respect. On one level, he is not a breaker of laws and customs. On another, he embraces them and follows them, including an ordered approach to established procedure. The Gospels and other scriptural sources offer testimony to the formal nature of his own commissioning by his Father (see the Notes on 3:2 and 4:18). Notably, in both the calling and empowering of the Twelve and Seventy, he scrupulously follows a pattern of praying, calling, instructing, and then sending forth his emissaries, much as a king or governor would (see 6:12–13, 20; 9:1–6; 10:1–11).

56. Green, *Luke*, 487–89.

57. Morris, *Luke*, 232–33.

GOD AS PROVIDER (12:22–34)

(Compare Matt. 6:19–21, 25–34)

King James Translation

22 And he said unto his disciples, Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat; neither for the body, what ye shall put on. 23 The life is more than meat, and the body is more than raiment. 24 Consider the ravens: for they neither sow nor reap; which neither have storehouse nor barn; and God feedeth them: how much more are ye better than the fowls? 25 And which of you with taking thought can add to his stature one cubit? 26 If ye then be not able to do that thing which is least, why take ye thought for the rest?

27 Consider the lilies how they grow: they toil not, they spin not; and yet I say unto you, that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. 28 If then God so clothe the grass, which is to day in the field, and to morrow is cast into the oven; how much more will he clothe you, O ye of little faith? 29 And seek not ye what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink, neither be ye of doubtful mind. 30 For all these things do the nations of the world seek after: and your Father knoweth that ye have need of these things. 31 But rather seek ye the kingdom of God; and all these things shall be added unto you.

32 Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. 33 Sell that ye have, and give alms; provide yourselves bags which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not, where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth. 34 For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

New Rendition

22 And he said to his disciples, “Therefore I say to you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat, or about your body, what you will wear. 23 For life is more than food, and the body than clothing. 24 Consider the ravens, they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storeroom nor barn, and God feeds them. How much more worth do you have than birds? 25 And who among you by being anxious can add an hour to your life? 26 If then you are not able to do the smallest thing, why are you anxious about the rest?”

27 “Consider how the lilies grow. They neither toil nor spin. And I say to you, not even Solomon in all his glory was dressed like one of these. 28 And if God so clothes the grass in the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he clothe you, you of little faith! 29 And do not seek for what you will eat and drink, and do not worry. 30 For the nations of the world seek all these things, and your Father knows that you need them. 31 But seek his kingdom, and these things will be given to you.

32 “Do not fear, little flock. For your Father has resolved to give you the kingdom. 33 Sell your possessions and give alms. Make purses for yourselves that do not wear out, an inexhaustible treasure in the heavens, where a thief does not come near and a moth does not destroy. 34 For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”

Notes

12:22 *his disciples*: Jesus turns back to his disciples from “the company” (12:13), drawing up lessons for their future, full-time service and assuring them of God’s constant care in their activities, just as he will do among his Twelve in the New World (see 3 Ne. 13:25–33). In this light, his words apply to all believers who serve him. Jesus thereby strikes again his main theme of God’s deep influence in our lives. Within these next verses (12:22–34), a reader will find parallels in Matthew’s record of the Sermon on the Mount (see Matt. 6:25–34, 19–21).

***Take no thought for your life*:** Although Jesus’ expression may seem radical, the underlying intent is to pull us away from the alluring ties that can strap us to materiality (see D&C 84:81). Instead, we should bind ourselves to God (see 12:28, 30–31). We observe further that Jesus here begins instruction with a series of imperatives, marking the following verses as directed to his disciples (see 12:24, 27, 29, 31, 32, 33; D&C 84:81–82, 84–86; 101:37).

***life*:** This word and that in 12:23 are the same as in 12:19–20 (Greek *psychē*). Here, the term has to do with one’s mortal life, though its meanings are many (see D&C 101:37 and the Note on 12:19).

12:23 *meat*: The term (Greek *trophē*) is a general term for nourishment or food.⁵⁸

12:24 *the ravens*: With a characteristic twist, Jesus nods toward one of the most unclean of birds—it is a scavenger and lives on carrion (see Lev. 11:15; Deut. 14:14). Yet, he affirms, “God feedeth them.” The addition of “nevertheless” before “God feedeth them” in the Joseph Smith Translation adds emphasis to the unclean status of ravens (see JST 12:26).

***how much more are ye better than the fowls*:** Two observations are in order. First, in the scale of valuing those who share the earth, humans count for much more in God’s sight than other creatures (see also 12:7). Second, the general word for “fowls” (Greek *peteinon*) fits nicely as a summary notice about God’s care for all creatures, but fits even better Matthew’s version of this saying wherein he quotes Jesus as pointing to “the fowls of the air” (Matt. 6:26).

12:25 *stature*: The term usually touches on a person’s age (Greek *hēlikia*).⁵⁹ Only in 19:3 does it clearly mean “stature” or height, and this sense appears

58. Liddell and Scott, *Lexicon*, 1827; BAGD, 835.

59. BAGD, 345–46; *TDNT*, 2:941–43.

in 3 Nephi 13:27. In the Greek meaning, Jesus draws attention to a person trying to extend the length of life merely by thinking about it.

one cubit: This length stretches from a person’s elbow to the tip of the extended middle finger, approximately eighteen inches.⁶⁰ Metaphorically, the term (Greek *pēchus*) points to a small amount, as 12:26 hints.⁶¹ Jesus’ reference to such growth points up an obvious impossibility, for people cannot increase their height, or length of life, by mere thought.

12:27 lilies: The noun can apply to several varieties of lilies (Greek *krinon*),⁶² some of which grow in profusion during the Galilean springtime. Notably, modern scripture adopts this imagery (see D&C 84:82).

toil: The sense of the verb (Greek *kopiaō*) is “to weary” or “to wear out by hard labor,” in some instances the hard labor of military battle.⁶³ Jesus appears to be drawing attention to the work of men.

spin: In concert with “toil” (see above), Jesus apparently points to the work of women. Hence, as lilies grow, they stand beyond the workaday world of both men and women.

Solomon in all his glory: Jesus draws attention to accounts of Solomon’s storied wealth as he displays it before the Queen of Sheba (see 1 Kgs. 10:4–5, 21, 23; 2 Chr. 9:4, 20, 22). In an interesting twist, and with a nod toward the second of Jesus’ temptations (see 4:5–6), Doctrine and Covenants 84:82 reads: “the kingdoms of the world, in all their glory, are not arrayed like one of these.”

12:28 If then God so clothe the grass: All the initiative comes from God, and he clothes even grass in beauty. Visually, of course, grass in its beauty appears to be several steps below lilies and other blooming plants. But Jesus’s saying points to his own appreciative view of nature and her loveliness. With a different twist, Doctrine and Covenants 124:7 pictures unresponsive government officials as grass and flower “which soon falleth.”

will he clothe: These words do not appear in the Greek text of this verse, but are inferred, as their italicized form in the KJV indicates. Significantly, the Joseph Smith Translation adjusts these words to read “will he provide for you,” broadening the principle about God’s aid that Jesus is teaching (JST 12:30).

ye of little faith: Jesus’ expression continues his interest in featuring the small (ravens, lilies, grass) in contrast to the large and important (rich

60. Marvin A. Powell, “Weights and Measures,” in *ABD*, 6:899–900.

61. Liddell and Scott, *Lexicon*, 1402; BAGD, 662.

62. BAGD, 452; Marshall, *Luke*, 528; Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 2:979.

63. *TDNT*, 3:827–29.

landowner, Solomon). The term “little faith” (Greek *oligopistos*) occurs not only here in Luke, but in several passages on Jesus’ lips in Matthew’s Gospel (see Matt. 6:30; 8:26; 14:31; 16:8). Evidently, Jesus becomes aware that some of his followers have begun to worry, perhaps about their families, and so he commands them not to do so, with the reassurance that God will look out for all their needs.⁶⁴ This sense finds support in an adjustment made in the Joseph Smith Translation by the reading, “if ye are not of little faith” (JST 12:30).

12:29 *neither be ye of doubtful mind:* The verb (Greek *meteōrizomai*), which appears only here in the New Testament, can mean on a metaphorical level “to lift oneself up” or “to be arrogant.” But here it carries the sense “to be anxious, restless,” even “to hover between fear and hope.”⁶⁵ Hence, the meaning is stronger than the translation in the King James Version and bears a sense of constant anxiety.

12:30 *the nations of the world:* Borrowing a Rabbinic view, Jesus draws attention to pagans who lack faith in God and therefore cannot trust that he will truly assist them in their needs.⁶⁶ To be sure, in commissioning the Seventy, Jesus begins to address this serious lack among Gentiles (see the Note on 10:1).

your Father knoweth: The pronoun *your* stands in an emphatic position, marking a strong contrast between the disciples’ access to aid from their Father and that of the pagan nations.⁶⁷ Moreover, Jesus offers gentle reassurance that the Father, who cares for creatures and even plants (see 12:24, 28), knows the disciples’ situation, and will respond. The Joseph Smith Translation makes a moderately clarifying addition by reading “your Father who is in heaven” (JST 12:32; also D&C 84:83), but then adds an entire statement that connects to the “nations of the world” and the future mission of Jesus’ disciples among the gentile nations—“And ye are sent unto them to be their ministers, and the laborer is worthy of his hire; for the law saith, That a man shall not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn” (JST 12:33). The latter part of this addition draws attention to the value of the disciples when engaged in their ministry and the fact that God will not withhold from them (see D&C 84:87–88).

12:31 *rather seek ye the kingdom:* In plain sight, Jesus now places his highest priority in front of his followers, leaving no doubt about his own

64. BAGD, 566; Morris, *Luke*, 235.

65. TDNT, 4:630–31.

66. Marshall, *Luke*, 529.

67. Marshall, *Luke*, 529–30.

set of values. The preferred reading for “the kingdom” is “his [the Father’s] kingdom,” which a number of important manuscripts preserve, in contrast to “the kingdom of God,” which others preserve. In light of 12:32–33, seeking the kingdom has to do with earnestly pursuing the heavenly blessings that come from God and turning away from a consuming quest for earthly wealth (see 12:21; also D&C 11:7; 38:37–39; 106:3). The Joseph Smith Translation substitutes the term “Therefore” for the words “But rather” at the beginning of the verse, bringing a strong conclusion to what Jesus says about God’s assistance in a disciple’s life (JST 12:34). Because God helps, a disciple “therefore” is obliged to seek the kingdom.

all these things: Jesus points back to what he has just said—God feeds the ravens and beautifies the flowers and clothes the grass (see 12:24, 27–28). For Jesus’ followers, his Father will do likewise (see D&C 106:3). Incidentally, the word “all” is omitted by the earliest (P⁴⁵ and P⁷⁵) and other important manuscripts.

12:32 *Fear not:* These words echo those spoken to Zacharias, Mary, and the shepherds (see 1:13, 30; 2:10), drawing the reader’s attention to the connection between the stunning messages that came to these individuals and that which now comes to the disciples.

flock: This term (Greek *poimnion*), which later comes to describe the entire body of believers (see Acts 20:28–29; 1 Pet. 5:2–3), clearly stems from Jesus, for elsewhere he speaks of his followers as sheep (see Matt. 10:6; 25:32–33; 26:31; Mark 14:27; John 10:2–4, 7–8, 11–13, 15–16, 26–27; 21:16–17). In doing so, he repeats a word, “flock,” that anciently comes to apply to God’s people (see Ps. 77:20; Isa. 40:11; Ezek. 34:2–3, 6, 8).

your Father’s good pleasure to give: Amidst warnings and strong counsel, Jesus lifts to view his Father’s abundant willingness to give what each person needs, including an all-important membership in the kingdom.⁶⁸

12:33 *Sell that ye have, and give alms:* At issue is whether Jesus requires followers to adopt a life of penury and need. Clearly not. At moments during his ministry, his actions affect the home of a disciple, and he does not require the person to give up all. For example, he accepts of the hospitality of Martha in her home (see 10:38–42) and later commends his mother into the care of his beloved disciple who takes her to his own home (see John 19:25–27).⁶⁹ A second matter has to do with the disciple’s gift to others for which no reciprocal gift is expected in return, a full reversal of

68. Morris, *Luke*, 236.

69. Morris, *Luke*, 236; but see Jesus’ demand of the ruler in 18:22.

contemporary social norms. God will repay the giver, not the one who receives the gift. Therefore, a true disciple should be most generous.⁷⁰ The Joseph Smith Translation adds a transition at the beginning of the verse that links Jesus' words of the prior verse and the fact that he is addressing his disciples directly: "This he spake unto his disciples, saying . . ." (JST 12:36).

bags which wax not old: This sort of bag for valuable items takes on both a physical, tangible aspect that a person can grasp with the hand—a plain hint at a physical hereafter—and an ever-enduring quality which does not suffer from the effects of natural elements (rusting, etc.) or from human intervention (theft, confiscation, etc.). The usual repository for items of high value is a treasure chest or temple treasury.⁷¹ The Joseph Smith Translation makes an interesting adjustment, effectively acknowledging that all bags grow old: "provide not for yourselves bags which wax old" (JST 12:36).

a treasure in the heavens: Although Jesus does not specify what the treasure might be,⁷² the term (Greek *thēsauros*) anticipates a lasting item that one can handle and put into a purse, again looking to a fully physical state in the next life.⁷³ In this sense, Jesus' promise ironically highlights connections both to the present material world, which he is inveighing against, and to the eventual spiritual state of the next life.

where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth: As with all valuables, the challenge is to store them in a place beyond the reach of those who would take them, whether thieves (see 12:39) or conquering armies who raid temple treasuries. Jesus' addition of the "moth" discloses that some valuables consist of fabric made into nice clothing or home decor.

thief: Generally, the word (Greek *kleptēs*) points to a person who comes quietly and steals,⁷⁴ in contrast to the *robber* who takes goods with violence (Greek *lēstēs*).⁷⁵ But Jesus does portray thieves as taking forceful action when entering a home, breaking through an exterior wall (see 12:39; Matt. 6:19–20).

thief approacheth: In the similar saying in Matthew 6:19–20, Jesus refers to thieves (plural) "who break through and steal," a level of hostility

70. Green, *Luke*, 495–96.

71. *TDNT*, 3:136–37.

72. Marshall, *Luke*, 532.

73. BAGD, 362; *TDNT*, 3:136–38.

74. BAGD, 435; *TDNT*, 3:754–55.

75. BAGD, 474; *TDNT*, 4:257–62.

against personal property that he does not envision here, though the seeming softer tone does not exclude a thief's damage of property while taking what does not belong to him or her.

12:34 *your heart*: Here Jesus equates one's heart (Greek *kardia*) with one's concerns, with one's deepest interests. Such influences, always residing in the heart, shape the ultimate values and direction of a person's life.

Analysis

Although Luke's original design of his report does not include dividing his Gospel into chapters, a later phenomenon from the thirteenth century,⁷⁶ the teachings of the Savior that he gathers into chapter 12 are bracketed by the noisy exchange that ends chapter 11 (see 11:39–54) and the dual news of Pilate's execution of some fellow Galileans and a terrible accident in Jerusalem (see 13:1–5). Within chapter 12 we reach a discoverable mid-point of these teachings, in 12:31, typically an emphatic position. Here, we come upon Jesus' directive, "seek ye the kingdom of God," a fitting climax and forceful focus to his words.

As a strengthening strand, Jesus reinforces these words within seconds when he utters, "where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (12:34). The measure of a person's mortal intentions, unlike the earthly driven goals of others, will consist in whether "the kingdom of God" holds the top rung in earthly priorities, whether the heart pines after "a treasure in the heavens" (12:33), and whether believers are "like unto men that wait for their Lord" (12:36).

Luke's notation that the Savior intends the teachings of this section for his disciples (see 12:22), while the larger crowd stands nearby (see 12:1, 54), finds reinforcement in the series of imperatives—commandments—that Jesus utters, knowing that he holds leverage with his devoted followers. At first, Jesus' directives are mild and involve mostly acts of thinking: "Take no thought" (12:22), "Consider the ravens" (12:24), and "Consider the lilies" (12:27). But then they grow more forceful, and impact how one lives life, how a person meets basic physical and spiritual needs: "seek not what ye shall eat" (12:29), "neither be anxious" (12:29), "seek ye the kingdom" (12:31), "Fear not, little flock" (12:32), and "Sell . . . give alms . . . provide yourselves bags" (12:33). Even the following imperatives fit within this crescendoing pattern, bringing further unity to the whole: "Let your loins

76. Stanley L. Greenslade, ed., *The Cambridge History of the Bible*, 3 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963), 3:419.

be girded” (12:35) and “Be ye therefore ready” (12:40). In this light, Jesus has moved his disciples from a contemplative reception of his words to a response of needed action and specified direction.

These verses also brim with Jesus’ refined acquaintance with his Father. Plainly, he knows his Father’s mind; he knows his Father’s will; he knows his Father’s actions. The sheer density of Jesus’ declarations about God, his Father, strikes the ears of a hearer: “God feedeth [the ravens]” (12:24), “God . . . clothe[s] the grass” (12:28), “your Father knoweth that ye have need” (12:30), “it is your Father’s good pleasure to give” (12:32), “[God] will make [the obedient servant] ruler over all” (12:44), and “[God] will cut [the disobedient servant] in sunder” (12:46). These observations, of course, buttress the main theme of this chapter—the ever-present influence of God in a person’s life, whether in this life or the one to come, whether recognized or not. The natural companion of this dawning recognition features the assuring realization that people do not live in a chaotic world, though it may seem so, but one controlled by God (see D&C 84:81–84).⁷⁷

The whole matter of wealth and possessions that slithers through this chapter, beginning with the man’s request that Jesus settle his inheritance quarrel (see 12:13), threatens both rich and poor.⁷⁸ With practiced perception, Jesus brings forward the corrupting power of wealth and warns against its trapping tentacles which, in the case of the foolish landowner, lead him to believe that he holds control over the course and length of his life (see 12:19–20). Elsewhere in scripture, we read that the poor can fall into a cycle of envy that is difficult to escape: “whose bellies are not satisfied, . . . and whose eyes are full of greediness” (D&C 56:17). In a remarkable reassurance, Jesus affirms that even mundane pursuits of daily life that involve concerns for food and clothing and shelter are shared by God. This means that we can off-load our worries, laying them on him. To be sure, we cannot turn our backs on the necessity of providing for the needs of those within our families and stewardships. But we should not worry because God can and will make up our deficiencies.

With these verses, Luke reenters a stream of teachings shared by Matthew (see Matt. 6:19–21, 25–34). Significantly, we notice that the order in the accounts in Matthew and Luke differs, an aspect that raises the question whether they are following a common source. One judgment about the relationship between the reports in Matthew and Luke holds that both depend on

77. Johnson, *Luke*, 202.

78. Morris, *Luke*, 233.

Q, a theoretical written source of Jesus' sayings that is available to both Gospel writers (Q from German *Quelle*). Others suggest that either Matthew depends on Q and Luke depends on his special written source, or Matthew depends on Q and Luke depends on an oral report. Common to these possibilities is the notion that the accounts are reworked and added to the two Gospels either by the early church or by the Gospel writer.⁷⁹ The fact that scholars paint so many possible portraits should give pause to anyone who seeks to offer a final answer to the question of literary relationships between the two Gospels, particularly in this section of Jesus' teaching. The majority opinion tends to conclude that the accounts in Luke and Matthew are independent of one another. From this view, it is an easy step to surmise that Jesus gives similar teachings on different occasions, as the settings in each Gospel imply.⁸⁰ This observation finds corroboration in seeing the close connections between Jesus' words recorded in Matthew 6:19–21 and 6:25–34 and the Savior's language in Doctrine and Covenants 84:81–84, but in a completely different order.

PARABLE OF THE PREPARED SERVANTS (12:35–40)

(Compare Matt. 24:42–44;
Mark 13:33–37)

King James Translation

35 Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning; 36 And ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their lord, when he will return from the wedding; that when he cometh and knocketh, they may open unto him immediately. 37 Blessed are those servants, whom the lord when he cometh shall find watching: verily I say unto you, that he shall gird himself, and

broken through. 40 Be ye therefore ready also: for the Son of man cometh at an hour when ye think not.

New Rendition

35 “Let your loins be well-girded, and your lamps burning. 36 And you be like men who are waiting for their master when he returns from the wedding celebration, so that when he comes and knocks they may immediately open the door for him. 37 Blessed are those servants, whom the master finds watchful when he comes. Truly I say to you that he will gird himself and have them

79. Bultmann, *History*, 84, 111, 327; Marshall, *Luke*, 525, 529, 531; Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 2:976, 981–82.

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

make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them. 38 And if he shall come in the second watch, or come in the third watch, and find them so, blessed are those servants. 39 And this know, that if the goodman of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched, and not have suffered his house to be

recline, and when he comes he will serve them. 38 And if he comes in the second or third watch and finds it so, blessed are those servants. 39 But know this; if the master of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be

broken into. 40 And be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour that you do not expect.”

Notes

12:35 *Let your loins be girded:* This expression, similarly framed in other sources (see Isa. 11:5; Jer. 1:17; Eph. 6:14; 1 Pet. 1:13; D&C 27:16; etc.), recalls distantly the ancient sport of belt wrestling wherein contestants wore a large belt and the object is to grab the opponent’s belt and force him from his feet, a skill shared by Utnapishtim and Enkidu in their famous wrestle in the Gilgamesh Epic. The sense of pressing preparedness may reflect the command to be ready to depart in the Passover celebration (see Ex. 12:11).⁸¹

lights burning: The imagery fits with what Jesus will say next about a nighttime activity that requires lit lamps (Greek *lychnos*).⁸² Jesus’ words imply that, when “the Son of man cometh” (12:40), darkness will reign.

12:36 *ye yourselves:* The simple plural pronoun *you* is emphatic and points directly at the disciples. The Joseph Smith Translation strengthens the connection to the disciples even more by adding the word “That” just before “ye yourselves,” so that the passage reads, “That ye yourselves may be like unto men who wait for their Lord” (JST 12:39).

men that wait for their lord: Jesus draws his audience inside the world of servants, with the strong implication that his disciples are servants and that the actions he describes will be theirs.

lord: The term (Greek *kyrios*) simply points to a master of a household in this context, but Jesus apparently intends his followers to see him in this

81. *TDNT*, 5:496–97; Robert C. Dentan, “Loins,” in *IDB*, 3:149–50; “The Epic of Gilgamesh,” tablet II, in James B. Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, 3d ed. with suppl. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 78.

82. *BAGD*, 484; *TDNT*, 4:324–27.

person, for the word is one of Luke’s favorites in picturing “the Lord” (see 2:11; 6:5; 7:13, 31; 11:39; 12:42; 13:15; 14:23; 17:6; 18:6; 22:31, 61; 24:3).⁸³

the wedding: In the plural, as here, the term for wedding (Greek *gamos*) can also point to a banquet.⁸⁴ The lord in the parable evidently attends the celebration as a guest. If it is a wedding, which is likely because of the late hour of his return,⁸⁵ it is not his own. His immediate willingness to attend to the needs of his servants buttresses this observation. Although none of the usual symbolism associated with marriage attaches to this saying, Jesus’ overt pointer to marriage indicates his interest in holding the home, even in its beginning moments, front and center in his teaching by adding this small but relevant detail (see the Note on 14:8).

when he cometh and knocketh: Three allusions spring to mind. First, we recall Jesus’ words in another context about knocking (see 11:9–10; also 2 Ne. 9:42; 32:4; 3 Ne. 27:29). Second, we think of the words, “I stand at the door, and knock” (Rev. 3:20). We come upon a third allusion in the act of keeping the door shut, marked with blood, when the angel of death invades Egypt (see Ex. 12:7, 13, 22–23).

immediately: Jesus now intones the key word in his story (Greek *eutheōs*) that underlines its essential message:⁸⁶ the servants are well prepared and eagerly wait for the master to arrive, unlike the servant in the following story (see 12:45–47).

12:37 Blessed are those servants: Jesus repeats this expression at the end of 12:38, rounding off and bringing closure to this part of his story. On the term “blessed” (Greek *makarios*), see the Note on 6:20. It is worth noting that the Joseph Smith Translation adds the following at the beginning of Jesus’ words to bring emphasis to this verse: “Verily I say unto you” (JST 12:40).

watching: Of all the characteristics that Jesus would like to see in his disciples, this one stands among the most important, a point sharpened in the term’s frequent appearance not only in Luke’s writings but elsewhere (Greek *grēgoreō*—see 12:39; Mark 13:34, 35, 37; 14:34, 37, 38; Matt. 24:42–43; 25:13; Acts 20:31; 1 Cor. 16:13; Col. 4:2; also D&C 50:46; 82:5; 133:11; etc.).⁸⁷

make them to sit down: The verb (Greek *anaklinō*), here in the active sense, means “to cause to recline” (see 2:7; 9:15; 12:39; Mark 6:39). The

83. BAGD, 459–61; *TDNT*, 3:1058–62, 1086–93.

84. BAGD, 150; Jeremias, *Parables*, 26.

85. *TDNT*, 1:648–49.

86. BAGD, 320.

87. BAGD, 166; *TDNT*, 2:338–39; Marshall, *Luke*, 536.

intransitive form bears the meaning “to recline,” usually at a meal (see 7:36; Matt. 8:11; 14:19).⁸⁸

he shall gird himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them: The surprising portrait paints a master who will serve his servants. Of all of Jesus’ sayings, this one runs against every social convention. Who in his society has ever heard of a lord serving his servants? But Jesus achieves one of his aims: to repeat a story that people will remember. He also achieves another: the discerning follower will see the Savior in this story as the one who serves, as Jesus later will make abundantly clear (see 22:24–27; Mark 10:45; also Rom. 15:8; compare Isa. 58:9). Within these words, we detect a strong reference to the coming messianic banquet at which the faithful will sit as guests of the Lord (see the Notes on 4:3; 12:37; 13:25, 28; 14:15; 22:16–18, 30; the Analysis on 4:1–13; 9:10–17).⁸⁹ In fact, as a point of emphasis, the Joseph Smith Translation later repeats this entire expression (see JST 12:40, 43). After the first repetition, the Joseph Smith Translation adds the following sayings from Jesus that add clarity about how often he will come: “For, behold, he cometh in the first watch of the night, and he shall also come in the second watch, and again he shall come in the third watch. And verily I say unto you, He hath already come, as it is written of him” (JST 12:41–42).

12:38 *if he shall come:* The Joseph Smith Translation takes away some of the uncertainty by reading, “again when he shall come” (JST 12:42).

the second watch: Chiefly for military purposes, the night is divided into watches for sentry duty. Romans held to a system of four watches between 6 p.m. and 6 a.m. (see Mark 6:48) while Jews worked with a system of three.⁹⁰ The Joseph Smith Translation, in an exceptional addition, notes three watches (see JST 12:41; the Note on 12:37).

or come in the third watch: By flipping to a different time of night, Jesus pushes away any notion that, if we see Jesus as the lord in the story, we can predict the time of his return. In a word, the timing remains within the hidden agenda of God, illustrated by its coming as a thief in the night (see 12:39; also Matt. 24:43–44; Acts 1:6–7; 1 Thes. 5:2, 4; 2 Pet. 3:10; Rev. 3:3; 16:15; D&C 106:4–5).

blessed are those servants: In the Greek text, this repeated expression ties off Jesus’ saying in 12:37–38. But the Joseph Smith Translation repeats

88. BAGD, 55.

89. *TPJS*, 66; Morris, *Luke*, 182; Madsen, “Marriage Supper of the Lamb,” 2:860; Smith, “Messianic Banquet,” 4:788–91.

90. Marshall, *Luke*, 537; Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 2:988.

this expression and then adds words that reinforce the main point in 12:37: “blessed are those servants when he cometh, that he shall find so doing” (JST 12:42). It is at this point that the JST introduces for the second time the words from 12:27: “For the Lord of those servants shall gird himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them” (JST 12:43). Moreover, following this sentence the JST adds the following saying from Jesus that adds clarity about how he will return: “And now, verily I say these things unto you, that ye may know this, that the coming of the Lord is as a thief in the night” (JST 12:44). This buttresses his point in 12:40: “the Son of man cometh at an hour when ye think not.”

12:39 *And this know:* This entire introduction to this verse is replaced in the Joseph Smith Translation by a saying of Jesus and then words from the disciples about their grasp of Jesus’ meaning, turning the content of 12:39 into a saying of the disciples. Thus, a person hears first the words of Jesus and then those of the disciples: “And it is like unto a man who is an householder, who, if he watcheth not his goods, the thief cometh in an hour of which he is not aware, and taketh his goods, and divideth them among his fellows. And they said among themselves, if the good man of the house had known what hour the thief would come” (JST 12:45–46).

if the goodman of the house had known: If we take the order of the Greek text, and see Jesus solidifying his point about preparedness, we see that he switches to a completely different situation to make the lesson more memorable. Two features bear weight. First, the Apostles will soon become the stewards of the house, of the kingdom. Above all others, Jesus charges them with the responsibility of watching for evil forces that can and will force themselves into the house. He has taken control and “swept and garnished” the property (11:25). But it is still not safe from danger (see the Notes on 11:24, 26). Second, to know or be forewarned about an impending threat brings one to a state of readiness. In the end, it does not matter whether the thief delays coming or not. The proper focus lies on the homeowner’s state of preparedness. Jesus’ message does not engage a supposedly delayed Second Coming.

the thief: For the distinction between a thief, who generally comes quietly, and a robber, who causes major damage, see the Note on 12:33. The image of the Lord, or the day of the Lord, coming as a thief, of course, appears frequently in scripture (see Matt. 24:43; 1 Thes. 5:2, 4; 2 Pet. 3:10; Rev. 3:3; 16:15; D&C 45:19; 106:4–5; etc.).

he would have watched: The earliest manuscript (P⁴⁵) and other texts omit this expression. Scholars suggest that later copyists may have added it to harmonize with Matthew 24:43.⁹¹

to be broken through: The verb (Greek *dioryssō*) has to do with digging through a wall, probably of a home constructed of sun-dried bricks (see Matt. 6:19–20; 24:43; also D&C 104:86).⁹² At this point, the Joseph Smith Translation adds a further expression that reflects the experience of the householder: “and the loss of his goods” (JST 12:46).

12:40 *Be ye therefore:* Because the Joseph Smith Translation attributes the saying in the prior verse to the disciples, these words needed to be reattributed to Jesus. Moreover, the JST adds intensity to Jesus’ saying with the term *verily*: “And he [Jesus] said unto them, Verily I say unto you, be ye therefore . . .” (JST 12:47).

Be ye therefore ready: Jesus summarizes his main thought. Readiness has nothing to do with any perceived delay in Jesus’ coming. It has everything to do with a person’s inner spiritual state.

the Son of man cometh: This line captures the main point of Jesus’ discussion, beginning with “Let your loins be girded about” (12:35). His sketches about the servants and the master, about the second and third watches of the night, about the house owner and the thief, all aim toward the Son of Man coming “at an hour when ye think not.” Although some regard this entire verse as the creation or expansion by later believers in light of the delay of Jesus’ Second Coming,⁹³ there is ultimately no compelling reason to dismiss it as something that Jesus does not say, for from this moment on in his ministry his sayings about the Son of Man consistently point to his future roles, especially as the future judge, lending weight to their authenticity (see 17:22, 24, 26, 30; 18:8, 31; 19:10; 21:27, 36; 22:69).⁹⁴ An additional element ties to the verb “to come” (Greek *erchomai*), for it points to the “coming one” (see the Notes on 3:16; 19:38; 20:16 and 21:8, 27; the Analysis on 3:7–20; 19:28–40; 22:39–46).⁹⁵

at an hour when ye think not: The term hour (Greek *hōra*) normally draws no special meaning to itself in the Synoptics. But later in Luke’s report, Jesus ties this term to a critical moment, thus conferring importance

91. Marshall, *Luke*, 538; Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 2:989.

92. Plummer, *Luke*, 331; BAGD, 198.

93. Marshall, *Luke*, 538–39, for references.

94. Johnson, *Luke*, 204.

95. *TDNT*, 2:666–69.

on it—in this instance, that of his betrayal and arrest (see 22:53; compare also 12:39, 46; 22:14; 23:44).

when ye think not: These words embrace the principle found in many passages that no one knows, or can know, when the Son of Man will come. That information does not belong in the human realm, nor even among angels (see Matt. 24:36 [JS–M 1:40]; Mark 13:35; Acts 1:7; also 1 Thes. 5:1–6; D&C 39:21; 49:7; 133:11).

Analysis

The first verse of this section (12:35) changes the focus of the Savior’s words and introduces a series of stories that focus on readiness and stretch to the end of the chapter (see 12:35–59). Notably, the additions and changes in the Joseph Smith Translation add emphasis to Jesus’ interaction with his disciples about readiness (see JST 12:39–47). For instance, the JST adds the emphatic expression, “Verily I say unto you,” just before “Blessed are those servants, whom the lord . . . shall find watching” (12:37; JST 12:40). Moreover, a person finds an entire verse appended to 12:37 that stresses Jesus’ multiple arrivals in this world, implying strongly the need for readiness because events occur at night: “For, behold, he cometh in the first watch of the night, and he shall also come in the second watch, and again he shall come in the third watch” (JST 12:41). Furthermore, a new saying of Jesus appears that brings emphasis to his sudden arrival: “And now, verily I say these things unto you, that ye may know this, that the coming of the Lord is as a thief in the night” (JST 12:44; see 1 Thes. 5:1–6; 2 Pet. 3:10; Rev. 3:3; 16:15; D&C 106:4–5). As a further addition, Jesus warns the one who “watcheth not his goods, [that] the thief cometh in an hour of which he is not aware, and taketh his goods, and divideth them among his fellows” (JST 12:45). Hence, the unready person loses all.

Many see Jesus’ sayings in this section of Luke’s report as reshaped by a later Christian response to the delay in the Second Coming, assuming that people are expecting Jesus to return in the near future.⁹⁶ Others understand the sayings as coming from later Christians because Jesus’ audience, including his disciples, would not have comprehended his references to a Second Coming.⁹⁷ But these viewpoints assume that Jesus does not talk about his Second Coming and the need for proper preparation, no

96. Dodd, *Parables*, 120–28; Bultmann, *History*, 118; Beare, *Earliest Records of Jesus*, 170; Jeremias, *Parables*, 55, 86–87.

97. Citations in Marshall, *Luke*, 533–34.

matter the circumstances, at any time during his ministry. In response, one observes that a similar set of sayings appears in Matthew 24:42–51 and in Mark 13:32–37, including Jesus’ story about the irresponsible servant that one finds in Luke 12:42–46. To be sure, the settings in the Gospels differ and the language of the sayings is not the same, elements that lead scholars to see Christian motives at work because of the delay in Jesus’ return. But the possibility that Jesus teaches the same principles on different occasions cannot be set aside lightly.⁹⁸ Moreover, interest in preparation for the future, no matter what the future brings, has always been a verifiable part of Jesus’ teaching from the beginning (see 6:46–49; 9:23–26; 10:13–15; 11:29–32; 12:4–5; 13:1–9, 24–28; 17:20–37; Mark 1:14–15).⁹⁹

That Luke is likely compiling his materials independently arises from the fact that the parable-like story about the lord and his servants does not appear in any other account (see 12:35–38). This story, of course, may go back to his special source that underlies much of his unique material.¹⁰⁰ This said, the unity of the block of sayings, which brings a refined focus on watchfulness, strikes the reader. Clearly, Luke has found a way to offer Jesus’ teachings on this topic in a compelling way, underscoring the unrelieved requirement for a follower to prepare and to be ready for any crisis or need.

In this light, we can ask the question whether Jesus’ words about readiness extend to more than just his Second Coming. In light of his constant return to this theme, the answer has to be yes. Of course, the Second Coming forms much of the motivation for proper preparation, as Jesus’ saying illustrates: “the Son of man cometh” (12:40). But unforeseen events always take a toll on those who have prepared little. One of those moments is merely months away—Jesus’ Crucifixion.¹⁰¹ If, in fact, the lord of the parable is metaphorically tied to Jesus, and the watchful servants represent his disciples, as is evident, then this possibility becomes even stronger. For Jesus’ death will catch his closest followers off guard, temporarily scattering them (see Matt. 26:31; Mark 14:27).

Almost unnoticed at the beginning of Jesus’ story is his explicit nod toward “the wedding” that the “lord” returns from (12:36). In Jesus’ narration, his appeal might be to any occasion that takes the master away from

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

99. Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 2:987.

100. Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 2:984.

101. Morris, *Luke*, 237.

his home. But Jesus chooses a wedding to garnish his story. Why? Because, it seems, he is pushing forward an emphasis on the home for anyone who will pay attention, an emphasis that one sees, for instance, in 11:14–26 and 14:1–24, passages that precede and follow this one, adding prominence to “the wedding” rather than subtracting from it (see the Note on 12:36, the Analysis on 11:17–26, and the introduction to chapter 14).

PARABLE OF THE UNFAITHFUL SERVANT (12:41–48)

(Compare Matt. 24:45–51)

King James Translation

41 Then Peter said unto him, Lord, speakest thou this parable unto us, or even to all? 42 And the Lord said, Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his lord shall make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of meat in due season? 43 Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing. 44 Of a truth I say unto you, that he will make him ruler over all that he hath.

45 But and if that servant say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming; and shall begin to beat the menservants and maidens, and to eat and drink, and to be drunken; 46 The lord of that servant will come in a day when he looketh not for him, and at an hour when he is not aware, and will cut him in sunder, and will appoint him his portion with the unbelievers. 47 And that servant, which knew his lord’s will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. 48 But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes.

For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more.

New Rendition

41 And Peter said, “Lord, are you telling this parable to us or to everyone as well?” 42 And the Lord said, “Who is the faithful and wise steward, whom the master will appoint over his servants, to give them their food allowance at the proper time? 43 Blessed is that servant, whom his master will find doing so when he comes. 44 Truly, I tell you that he will appoint him over all his possessions.

45 “But if that servant says in his heart, ‘My master is taking a long time in coming,’ and begins to beat the menservants and maidservants, and to eat and drink and get drunk, 46 the master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour that he does not know, and will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the unfaithful. 47 And that servant who knew the will of his master but

did not prepare or act according to his will, will be severely beaten. 48 But he who did not know but did deeds worthy of blows will be beaten a little. And from everyone to whom much is given, much will be required. And the one to whom much has been entrusted will much more be asked.”

Notes

12:41 *Lord*: This term of address (Greek *kyrios*) is most respectful because it recalls the title reserved for Jehovah (see 2:11; 6:5; 7:13, 31; 11:39; 12:42; 13:15; 14:23; 17:6; 18:6; 22:31, 61; 24:3; also the Note on 12:36).¹⁰²

speakest thou this parable unto us, or even to all: Peter’s question raises the issue of focus: Does Jesus speak particularly to the Twelve, or mainly to believers in the crowd, or universally to all present? The answer is an ambiguous yes. To be sure, as the Joseph Smith Translation additions in the prior verses underscore, Jesus aims his words almost exclusively toward his disciples: “This he spake unto his disciples”; “Verily I say unto you [disciples]”; “And verily I say unto you [disciples]”; “And now, verily I say these things unto you [disciples], that ye may know this”; and finally, “Verily I say unto you [disciples]” (JST 12:36, 40, 42, 44, 47). But a crowd is hovering around his followers and is listening to all that he says, lending a universal quality first to the scene and second to Jesus’ words (see 12:1, 13, 54).

this parable: In what sense is Jesus’ prior story a parable? Or are the two prior stories in Peter’s mind? Unlike other such stories, the first one (see 12:35–38) does not match common experiences in hearers’ lives, but Jesus does repeat the word “like” (see 12:36), an indicator of parabolic discourse (see 6:47–49). Instead, this story turns social norms upside down, with the lord graciously helping his servants. In the second, Jesus drops his discourse into metaphorical language about his coming. In both cases, the term *parable* can be applied.¹⁰³

12:42 *the Lord*: Luke mirrors Peter’s form of address in the prior verse (Greek *kyrios*), adding both a layer of respect for Jesus and clarifying who he is, as he does elsewhere (see 1:43; 2:11; 5:8, 12; 6:5, 46; 7:6, 13, 31; 9:54, 57, 59, 61; 10:1, 17, 40; 11:1, 39; etc.; the Notes on 5:8 and 10:1).¹⁰⁴ Jesus also repeats this title as he begins his story here, adding a sense that the lord of the steward is himself.

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

103. Dodd, *Parables*, 120–21; Jeremias, *Parables*, 48, 55.

104. TDNT, 3:1058–62, 1086–93; 5:273; TLNT, 2:341–52.

the Lord said: Immediately after these words, the Joseph Smith Translation adds words of Jesus that clarify the audience—in this case, the disciples: “I speak unto those whom the Lord shall make rulers over his household” (JST 12:49).

faithful and wise steward: This expression stands as one of the most important for setting a standard for future and current leaders of Jesus’ church (see 16:8; 1 Cor. 4:2; see the Notes on 9:50, 60 and 10:2, and the Analysis on 9:49–50). The word “steward” (Greek *oikonomos*) secures this interpretation that Jesus is addressing the characteristics of his leaders.¹⁰⁵ Moreover, the Joseph Smith Translation attributes these words, and the question that embeds them, to the disciples: “And they said, Who then is that faithful and wise servant?” (JST 12:50). Plainly, on this view, the disciples are seeking to know how they are to fulfill Jesus’ expectations for his leaders. The JST continues, adding words of Jesus that he guides toward his leaders: “And the Lord said unto them [the disciples], It is that servant who watcheth, to impart his portion of meat in due season” (JST 12:51), bringing emphasis to the watchful care that a leader is to exhibit in his church.

his lord: The expression is “the Lord” (Greek *kyrios*), as earlier in this verse and in the next verse. This term points to Jesus, as noted above.

shall make ruler: The future tense of the verb anticipates the fuller organization of Jesus’ followers into a formal church. At base, as in 12:44, the verb has to do with installing in an office (Greek *kathistēmi*).¹⁰⁶ The plural “rulers” in the Joseph Smith Translation secures the meaning of Jesus’ saying—he is talking about his church leaders (see JST 12:49).

to give them their portion: The Joseph Smith Translation changes this phrase to read “to give his children their portion,” effectively saying that Jesus speaks here about those of his church, “his children” (JST 12:49).

portion of meat: The meaning of the word (Greek *sitometrion*) has to do with a ration or food allowance.¹⁰⁷ In this context, the sense hovers within it of a spiritual portion that comes through an honorable steward.

household: In the New Testament, this term carries two basic senses, that of people in the service of a master and that of physical healing or the healing at the end-time (Greek *therapeia*; see 9:11; Matt. 24:45; Rev. 22:2).

105. BAGD, 562; Marshall, *Luke*, 540. Jeremias sees these verses as applying to current Jewish leaders, one possible interpretation (*Parables*, 57–58).

106. BAGD, 391; *TDNT*, 3:444–46.

107. BAGD, 759.

The fact that the master places the steward over others in the house, in addition to his goods (see 12:44), points to the leaders among the disciples,¹⁰⁸ perhaps to Peter himself.

due season: Here the term (Greek *kairos*) bears the meaning of traditional meal times, but it generally carries the sense of a decisive moment, pointing to a time of decision (see 1:20; 8:13; 18:30; 19:44; 20:10; 21:8, 24, 36; the Note on 12:56).¹⁰⁹

12:43 servant: The newly appointed steward is really one of the servants in the household of his master, but has been temporarily elevated to preside over the rest, for his authority will expire with the arrival of the lord of the house. This concept of stewardship lies at the base of Jesus' organization.

12:44 he will make him ruler over all: Anchored firmly at the base of this saying, whose verb has to do with a formal commissioning (see the Note on 12:42), stands the principle that faithful stewards, in the end, will receive authority equal to that of the lord,¹¹⁰ elevated in Paul's language to become "heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ" (Rom. 8:17); stepping, in Benjamin's words, beyond the status of servant and becoming "the children of Christ, his sons and his daughters" (Mosiah 5:7); demonstrating an ability and willingness, in the parlance of the Risen Savior, to receive the "Father's kingdom" so that "all that my Father hath shall be given unto [them]" (D&C 84:38).

12:45 But: Immediately after this word, the Joseph Smith Translation adds a clarifying saying of Jesus that tells hearers plainly about his meaning, "the evil servant is he who is not found watching" (JST 12:54). Surely, such a servant stands within the community of disciples but chooses not to watch, both neglecting the duty of a watchman and neglecting to watch out for others, as a later JST addition makes clear (see JST 12:51).

if that servant say in his heart: The Joseph Smith Translation expands this clause to read, "if that servant is not found watching, he will say in his heart" (JST 12:54). Here the Prophet Joseph Smith elucidates motive—a person who chooses not to watch or pay attention to the important elements of stewardship that Jesus sets out will eventually slip into a rationalizing mode that distorts good judgment.

108. BAGD, 359; *TDNT*, 3:131; Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 2:989.

109. *TDNT*, 3:455-56, 458-61.

110. Marshall, *Luke*, 541.

that servant: A historical example, close at hand, may lie in Jesus’ reference to the unfaithful servant, likely to those in his society who have neglected their duties as leaders, as he charges in the prior scene in the home of the Pharisee (see 11:37–53).¹¹¹

My lord delayeth: Jesus’ words anticipate that some of his followers will grow impatient at his apparent delay in coming the second time. In this parable he effectively warns them not to be influenced thereby either in their thinking or in their actions, as King Saul is when the prophet Samuel is delayed (see 1 Sam. 13:5–13).

the menservants: The term (Greek *pais*) bears both an age meaning—typically a child between seven and fourteen years of age, male or female (see 2:43; 8:51, 54; 9:42)—and a social meaning—a person of the servant class (see 1:54, 69; 7:7; 15:26).¹¹² The picture that Jesus evidently paints is one of an older steward in charge of younger teenage servants, an accurate depiction of a household with servants.

to eat and drink, and to be drunken: In contrast to the steward who holds the reins over the master’s goods and properly apportions the “portion of meat” to fellow servants (12:42), this one allows himself to dip into his lord’s food stores in an irresponsible way, taking authority to himself that the lord of the house has not entrusted to him, an act that will bring to him “his portion with the unbelievers.” The warning against drunkenness with power also appears in Jesus’ sermon on the Mount of Olives (see 21:34; Matt. 24:49).

12:46 in a day when he looketh not: On its edges, the expression recalls the “day of the Lord” from the Old Testament which arrives suddenly with dire consequences for the wicked (see 17:24, 30, 31; 21:34; Isa. 2:12; 34:8; 61:2; Joel 1:15; 2:1, 11, 31; Mal. 3:2; 4:1, 3, 5; also 3 Ne. 21:20–21; the Note on 10:12).

will cut him in sunder: Punishment is to be severe. The verb (Greek *dichotomeō*) points to an ancient punishment, and it means to cut or saw in half. Here the meaning is likely metaphorical because the servant undergoes further punishment, although no other passages from ancient literature carry this figurative sense (see Matt. 24:51; also D&C 85:9).¹¹³ The Joseph Smith Translation agrees with this metaphorical reading: “will cut him down” (JST 12:55).

111. Dodd, *Parables*, 119–20; Jeremias, *Parables*, 57–58, 166.

112. BAGD, 609–10; TDNT, 5:637–39.

113. BAGD, 199; TDNT, 2:225–26; Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 2:990; Johnson, *Luke*, 205.

the unbelievers: At base, the noun points to the unfaithful, in contrast to the “faithful” steward (see 12:42), although the word can refer to unbelievers (Greek *apistos*; see D&C 85:9).¹¹⁴

12:47 *that servant, which knew his lord’s will, and prepared not:* The contrasts between the servant in this verse and the next servant are sharp: one “knew his lord’s will,” the other “knew not” (12:48). Luke is the only writer to preserve these sayings. Jesus’ words grow out of the world of legal responsibility, a matter addressed in the Old Testament—Does the person know the law? (see Lev. 4:13–35; Num. 15:22–31; James 4:17). In a real sense, his saying carries legal overtones that tie to the principles that underlie judgment and “degrees of punishment,”¹¹⁵ illustrating that in Jesus’ world one punishment and one reward does not fit all.

prepared not himself: The King James translators added the word “himself,” implying that the main sense of Jesus’ words is to prepare oneself. But the Joseph Smith Translation changes the clause to read, “prepared not for his Lord’s coming” (JST 12:56). The sense may therefore have to do with Jesus’ Second Coming, but more likely with the arrival of the servant’s master.

according to his will: The will in question is that of the servant’s lord, for the two words translated “will” in this verse are identical (Greek *thelēma*)¹¹⁶ and form a homophonous tie when a person reads these lines orally, the regular practice in antiquity: “Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear” (Rev. 1:3) and “he [Lehi] read, saying” (1 Ne. 1:13).

12:48 *he that knew not:* To introduce clarity, the Joseph Smith Translation expands this clause to read, “he that knew not his Lord’s will” (JST 12:57). The principle of excusing from judgment those who sin ignorantly has generated much comment in scripture, and rightly so.¹¹⁷ Here, Jesus does not fully excuse the servant in the story, implying that a person in such a state of servility bears some responsibility for what happens in the master’s household because the servant should try to learn what the master wants from his servants.¹¹⁸ All such observations, of course, will apply to

114. BAGD, 85; *TDNT*, 6:204–5.

115. Jeremias, *Parables*, 104.

116. BAGD, 354–55.

117. Lev. 4:13–35; Num. 15:22–29; Ps. 19:12–13; John 9:41; 15:22, 24; Rom. 4:15; 5:13, 20; 7:7–13; JST Rom. 7:7–17; Gal. 3:19; 2 Ne. 9:26; Mosiah 3:11; Alma 9:16.

118. Morris, *Luke*, 239.

officers in Jesus' church,¹¹⁹ that is, they are to seek to learn his will for fellow church members.

For unto whomsoever much is given: The middle voice of the verb (Greek *paratithēmi*) bears the meaning “to entrust” by ordination, a much richer sense than simply “to give” (see 1 Tim. 6:20).¹²⁰ With these words, Jesus draws out an important strand of his prior remarks, that of personal responsibility and accountability in his church and kingdom (see also D&C 82:3). Drones are not a part of this portrait.

of him they will ask the more: The Joseph Smith Translation makes a minor adjustment and then adds a major statement: “of him will men ask the more. For they are not well pleased with the Lord's doings” (JST 12:57–58). These added words from Jesus may point to the servant's master but more likely to Jesus himself as the one who reaps the clouded criticisms of men. The saying also sets up the next section of Jesus' teaching.

Analysis

Peter's question initiates the Savior's enormously important response. It is almost as if Jesus is waiting for someone to ask a question that allows him to disclose both the principles and the promised events that lie within these lines. Peter, the chief of Jesus' Apostles, shows his acumen in grasping the significance of Jesus' prior words, “Lord, speakest thou this parable unto us, or even to all?” (12:41). He not only seeks clarity in his own mind and in the minds of his fellow believers about Jesus' Second Coming but also wants to fix proper standards for expected service, to which Jesus' sayings about the needed response of servants and the house owner point (see 12:36–39). Notably, in responding, Jesus enunciates both principles and approaching events to the Twelve loudly enough that all can hear because a large crowd hovers around them at this moment (see 12:1, 13, 54). What he says is for all.

In mild contrast, in a series of significant additions the Joseph Smith Translation clarifies that Jesus aims his stories principally toward the disciples; anyone else can listen in, of course: “the Lord said, I speak unto those whom the Lord shall make rulers over his household” (JST 12:49); “the Lord said unto them [the disciples]” (JST 12:51); as a warning to them, “the evil servant is he who is not found watching” (JST 12:54); unlike the disciples, “they [men] are not well pleased with the Lord's doings” (JST 12:58). Taken as a

119. Johnson, *Luke*, 205.

120. BAGD, 628; *TDNT*, 8:163–64.

whole, these changes place Jesus' parable-like sayings clearly in the realm of leadership instruction. For within the language of expectation for the Second Coming, he is plainly pushing and cajoling his disciples into grasping fully his expectations for them as his leaders.

Within the Greek text, pointers to this conclusion also stand conspicuously visible. For example, in all of these stories Jesus assumes a setting in a house or estate. This point becomes all the more clear when he mentions "house" and "household" (12:39, 42). It is a small step to see the house of Israel or the household of the church in these scenes. Second, the double and therefore emphatic verb form "shall make ruler" (12:42, 44) brings forward a formal installing in an office, or a setting apart for official functions.¹²¹ Third, the differing responses of the masters, stewards, and servants in Jesus' stories illustrate proper and improper relationships that characterize those in positions of responsibility, a matter that is readily transferrable to a church leadership setting. In fact, this aspect is so clear that some scholars have postulated an influence of the later church in this dialogue, essentially saying that much in these stories goes beyond what Jesus would have said because they are so clearly aimed at later church leaders.¹²² Such a view, of course, presumes that Jesus does not concern himself with ecclesiastical matters during his ministry, a view that cannot be maintained in light of this and other evidence (see the Introduction IV.B).¹²³

The second common thread that binds all of these stories together is that of Jesus' eventual return. This theme weaves itself through each of Jesus' sayings, creating a colorful tapestry of expectation and almost mystery about the future. And in light of statements such as, "there be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the kingdom of God" (9:27) and "My lord delayeth his coming" (12:45), almost all scholars conclude that these parables treat the postponed Second Coming, believing that Jesus sees his return as immediate, which does not happen.¹²⁴ But among the earliest references to the Second Coming in the New Testament, from the Apostle Paul, stands a view of much time passing: "we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, . . . That ye be not soon shaken in mind . . . that the day of Christ is at hand . . . except there

121. BAGD, 391; *TDNT*, 3:444–46.

122. Bultmann, *History*, 119, 193; Beare, *Earliest Records of Jesus*, 170–71; other citations in Marshall, *Luke*, 533–34.

123. Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 2:987; Johnson, *Luke*, 206.

124. For example, Dodd, *Parables*, 118–28; Beare, *Earliest Records of Jesus*, 170–71; Jeremias, *Parables*, 48–58.

come a falling away first” (2 Thes. 2:1–3). Plainly, Paul envisions both a long time passing and, to complicate the picture, an apostasy or “a falling away” or, more properly, an internal rebellion, as the Greek term shows (*apostasia*).¹²⁵ Actually, the expression is “the apostasy,” for Paul writes the definite article as though his readers will know exactly what he means. From these observations, it is plain that the earliest Christians already understand that the Second Coming is in the distant future and that much will happen before that day.

The last aspect that draws a reader’s gaze highlights Jesus’ treatment of sin. This dimension runs rich throughout his stories, burnishing their details into a shining statement about choices made for good or for ill, about responsibility kept or ignored, about authority respected or gone mad. On the first level, all culminates in his dual judgment about “that servant, which knew his lord’s will” and the servant “that knew not.” The issue centers on punishments, “beaten with many stripes” and “beaten with few stripes” (12:47–48). From the words that must have lingered in his hearers’ minds, we learn first and foremost that one punishment does not fit all; rather, “different degrees of punishment” hang in Jesus’ words.¹²⁶ The mirror image logically extends to rewards as well—God grades the rewards that he hands to recipients; not all are the same, as both Jesus and the Apostle Paul specify: “In my Father’s house are many mansions” and “There are also celestial bodies, and bodies terrestrial . . . So also is [the reward of] the resurrection” (John 14:2; 1 Cor. 15:40, 42; also D&C 76:50–92; 88:20–24; 131:1–4).

The second part concerns sinning knowingly or unknowingly. Those who know, of course, bear the full weight of their decision to turn away from the instructions of the master and “shall be beaten with many stripes” (12:47; also 2 Ne. 9:27; Mosiah 3:12; 3 Ne. 6:18). For those who sin in ignorance, the resulting punishment goes much lighter, “few stripes” (12:48). But this prospect does not exhaust the matter. Other scriptural sources point to an even lighter outcome. In the words of an angel who appears to King Benjamin, “[the Savior’s] blood atoneth for the sins of those . . . who have died not knowing the will of God concerning them, or who have ignorantly sinned” (Mosiah 3:11). Similarly, the prophet Alma declares that “it shall be more tolerable for them [the Lamanites] in the day of judgment . . . for it is because of the traditions of their fathers that caused them to remain

125. Liddell and Scott, *Lexicon*, 218–19; *TDNT*, 1:513–14; BAGD, 97.

126. Jeremias, *Parables*, 104.

in their state of ignorance; therefore the Lord will be merciful unto them” (Alma 9:15–16). More than this, “those who have part in the first resurrection . . . are they that have died before Christ came, in their ignorance, not having salvation declared unto them” (Mosiah 15:24). Plainly, Jesus’ Atonement graciously satisfies the demands of punishment for those “who have ignorantly sinned.”

COMING JUDGMENTS (12:49–59)

(Compare Matt. 5:25–26; 10:34–36; 16:2–3)

King James Translation

49 I am come to send fire on the earth; and what will I, if it be already kindled? 50 But I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished! 51 Suppose ye that I am come to give peace on earth? I tell you, Nay; but rather division: 52 For from henceforth there shall be five in one house divided, three against two, and two against three. 53 The father shall be divided against the son, and the son against the father; the mother against the daughter, and the daughter against the mother; the mother in law against her daughter in law, and the daughter in law against her mother in law.

54 And he said also to the people, When ye see a cloud rise out of the west, straightway ye say, There cometh a shower; and so it is. 55 And when ye see the south wind blow, ye say, There will be heat; and it cometh to pass. 56 Ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky and of the earth; but how is it that ye do not discern this time?

57 Yea, and why even of yourselves judge ye not what is right? 58 When thou goest with thine adversary to the magistrate, as thou art in the way, give diligence that thou mayest be delivered from him; lest he hale thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and the officer cast thee into prison. 59 I tell thee, thou shalt not depart thence, till thou hast paid the very last mite.

New Rendition

49 “I have come to cast fire upon the earth, and how I wish that it was already kindled! 50 But I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how distressed I am until it is completed. 51 Do you think that I have come to give peace on the earth? No, I say to you, but rather dissension. 52 For from this time on there will be five in one household divided against each other, three against two, and two against three. 53 They will be divided father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother,

mother-in-law against the bride and the bride against the mother-in-law.”

54 And he said to the crowds, “Whenever you see a cloud rising in the west, immediately you say, ‘A rainstorm is coming,’ and so it happens. 55 And when the south wind is blowing, you say that it will be hot, and it happens. 56 Hypocrites, you know how to recognize the appearance of the earth and the sky. But how do you not recognized this time of crisis?”

57 “And why do you also not judge for yourselves what is right? 58 For when you are on your way with your opponent to the judge, take pains along the road to reach a settlement with him, in order that he not drag you before the judge, and the judge hand you over to the bailiff, and the bailiff throw you into prison. 59 I tell you, you will not get out until you have paid the last cent.”

Notes

12:49 *I am come to send fire:* The possible meanings of Jesus’ declaration have caused wide debate. One interpretation holds that the fire consists of judgment which points to Jesus’ cross, as 12:50 hints (see also 3:9; 9:54; Gen. 19:24; Ex. 9:24; 1 Kgs. 18:36–40).¹²⁷ A second understanding has to do with the fire of strife that kindles against those who embrace Jesus’ message, as following verses specify (see 12:52–53; also 21:16).¹²⁸ A third urges that fire acts as a cleansing or purifying agent, both physically and spiritually, preparing a people for the end-time (see Lev. 13:52; Num. 31:23).¹²⁹ To be sure, fire is also a source of light and heat. But such ties are not obvious. Instead, the three other interpretations point to Jesus’ ministry: it brings judgment, persecution for believers, and cleansing. In this connection, the Joseph Smith translation supports the notion of judgment. For, at the beginning of this verse, the Prophet adds that certain men “are not well pleased with the Lord’s doings.” At this juncture, he inserts the term “therefore,” indicating that Jesus sends fire because of the ill intent of those who “are not well pleased” (JST 12:58).

12:50 *I have a baptism to be baptized with:* Although some have denied that, at this point in his ministry, Jesus would speak of baptism, ancient sources illustrate that baptism does not belong entirely to the early Christian community as a concept and practice (see Mark 10:38).¹³⁰ It is worth

127. Morris, *Luke*, 240; Johnson, *Luke*, 207.

128. Plummer, *Luke*, 334; McConkie, *DNTC*, 1:335.

129. *TDNT*, 6:944; Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 2:996.

130. Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 2:996–97.

observing that Jesus joins baptism and fire here, very similarly to how the Baptist joins them when speaking about the coming one (see 3:16).¹³¹

how am I straightened: This expression might be better rendered, “how hard pressed I am” or “how great is my distress.”¹³² Significantly, this verse reveals some of the inner anxiety that Jesus experiences at the prospect of his future suffering (see the Notes on 9:22 and 17:25).¹³³ Very few verses hint at this anxiety (see Matt. 20:22; 26:38; Mark 10:38; 14:33–34; John 12:27–28). Of course, it is the case that he does not fear those who will put him to death (see 12:4–5; the Note on 19:28).

be accomplished: The verb (Greek *teleō*) means “to complete, to bring to perfection,” with a sense of consecrated action (see LXX Ex. 29:9, 29, 35; Lev. 4:5; 16:32; etc.).¹³⁴ Here, the passive voice implies a helping agent, namely, the Father (see the Notes on 13:32; 14:11; 16:11; 18:31; 22:37; 24:31, 44).¹³⁵

12:51 *peace . . . division:* The contrast, which certainly applies after his departure (see 21:9–17), mirrors the varying responses to him during his ministry. Though his coming brings peace (see 1:79; 2:14), such peace lies within a person’s heart (see 2:29; 7:50; 8:48).¹³⁶

12:52 *five in one house divided:* Any divided household, including Satan’s kingdom, collapses and fails (see 11:17–18). With a touch of irony, Jesus holds that his message will carry this dividing impact among hearers. Incidentally, these five persons appear in the next verse as members of a household: father, mother, son; daughter-in-law who has come to live with the family, and the daughter (the mother and mother-in-law are the same person; see the Note below).¹³⁷

12:53 *The father shall be divided against the son:* Jesus brings his hearers into the sacred spaces of the home and elaborates in almost frightening detail the deep divisions that will erupt among family members as they respond to him and his message (see 21:16; Micah 7:6; the Notes on 18:20; 21:16).

the mother; the mother in law: These two women are really the same person—for certain persons in the home she is the mother, for the daughter-in-law she is the mother-in-law.

131. TDNT, 1:536–38; 6:944; Marshall, *Luke*, 547.

132. TDNT, 7:884; Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 2:997.

133. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ*, 441; for a different view, see TDNT, 7:884–85.

134. BAGD, 817–18; TDNT, 8:58–59, 80–81.

135. TDNT, 6:291, 295; Blass and Debrunner, *Greek Grammar*, §§313 ,(1)130; Jeremias, *Parables*, 122, n. 33; Marshall, *Luke*, 898; Johnson, *Luke*, 227.

136. Morris, *Luke*, 240; Johnson, *Luke*, 208.

137. Morris, *Luke*, 240–41.

12:54 *he said also to the people:* At this point, Jesus turns away from his disciples and purposely addresses the surrounding crowd that is present throughout the events of this chapter (see 12:1, 13).

a cloud rise out of the west: Jesus notices what agrarian people notice—the signs of coming rain showers blowing in from the Mediterranean Sea that lies to the west (see 1 Kgs. 18:43). Jesus’ reference does not point to the time of year when he utters these words—that is the rainy season—because he quickly turns his hearers to the dry, hot season or summer (see 12:55).

12:55 *the south wind:* This wind, which springs up in Arabia, can bring searing heat (see Jer. 4:11; 51:1–2). Generally, it is the east wind that people in this region worry about because it brings heat from the Syrian desert (see Job 27:21; Hosea 12:1; 13:15; Mosiah 7:31; 12:6).

12:56 *hypocrites:* This most unkind title (Greek *hypokritēs*) has to do with actors who suppress their true character and take on another person’s character during a play. By New Testament times, the term carries a decidedly negative sense (see the Notes on 6:42; 12:1).¹³⁸ Here, in Jesus’ mouth, the word points to a conscious ignoring of his message and presence.

this time: In other contexts, the Greek term translated “time” (*kairos*) concerns the critical moment of decision or crisis, the sense that it bears here (see 1:20; 18:30; 19:44; 21:8, 24; the Notes on 8:13; 12:42; 19:44).¹³⁹

12:57 *judge ye not:* Jesus’ words anticipate his sketch of a legal dispute in the next two verses. But more rests in his saying than earthly legal matters. For on Jesus’ lips judging rightly carries heavenly implications: “Judge not, and ye shall not be judged: condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned” (6:37, and the Note thereon; also 22:30).

what is right: At base, the expression (Greek *to dikaion*) means what is just, what is righteous. But in this context, with the verb “to judge,” it means what is right or correct.¹⁴⁰

12:58 *When thou goest with thine adversary:* Jesus paints a scene known probably from small towns wherein the two opponents in a legal contest end up walking on the road to justice together. His words also hint that, in an evident case of debtor and creditor, the debtor schemes to look for and then walk with the creditor so that he can make an attempt to settle the debt and its payment before reaching the magistrate’s door. At this point, the Joseph Smith translation makes a significant addition, changing the tenor of Jesus’ parable, effectively urging that followers settle disputes out

138. TDNT, 8:559–61, 566–68.

139. TDNT, 3:455–56, 458–61.

140. BAGD, 194–95; TDNT, 2:188.

of courtrooms: “Why goest thou to thine adversary for a magistrate . . . ?” (JST 12:67; also 1 Cor. 6:1–7).

give diligence: At base, the expression (Greek *dos ergasian*) is likely a Latinism, *da operam*, and means to “take pains” or “make an effort,” pointing to a conscious, planned act to reach a settlement.¹⁴¹

delivered: Discussion has arisen whether the form of the verb (middle or passive form of the Greek *apallassō*) points to a reconciliation with the adversary or to freedom from the adversary’s demands.¹⁴² In either case, the debtor stands unchained from the paralyzing weight of threat and, turning to Jesus, can now respond freely and fully to his message.

officer: This person (Greek *praktōr*) is an official in a Roman court who is in charge of a debtor’s prison and acts under the direction of a judge.¹⁴³ When a person is placed in this officer’s custody, all options to negotiate or to make a plea come to an end, adding a sense of finality to Jesus’ words.

12:59 mite: This coin is the smallest of Roman coins (see 21:2) and is worth one eighth of a cent. Mark 12:42 gives the value of a *leptos* as half a farthing or quadrans.¹⁴⁴ In this light, four of these coins would purchase five sparrows (see the Notes on 12:6; 21:2).

Analysis

Without relief, a sense of urgency swarms through these verses (12:49–59). It is as if a drum sounds with an endless, relentless beat, or a fire burns unquenched. The Savior raises the warning of waxing warmth by kindling the looming prospect of his own suffering and death, and what this means for people’s decisions about him. For in one of the most unusual passages of scripture, he holds up the crisis of decision that the last months of his ministry and following Atonement will present to all: “I am come to send fire on the earth” (12:49). Almost instinctively, he utters how all of this affects him, how it burns in him: “I have a baptism to be baptized with” (12:50). Fire and his suffering and divided households and lackadaisical responses and threats of judgment, all combined in these verses, press into Jesus’ final journey to Jerusalem, sharpening the need for individuals to make a decision about how to respond to him. A reader sees this intensifying demand popping up in the parables of his last few days—they no longer embody

141. BAGD, 193, 307; Marshall, *Luke*, 551; Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 2:1002.

142. TDNT, 1:252–53; Jeremias, *Parables*, 43–44; Marshall, *Luke*, 551.

143. BAGD, 704; TDNT, 6:642; Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 2:1003.

144. BAGD, 473; Lane, *Gospel according to Mark*, 442–43.

mainly important principles dressed in the fabric of home-spun stories but push forward a message that is both direct and blunt: respond or face severe consequences, as his final parables of the pounds, of the wicked husbandmen and of the cornerstone amply demonstrate (see 19:12–27; 20:9–16, 17–18).

At the center of this demand stands the Atonement, the one act that will both make sense of what Jesus requires of followers and smooth off the hard edges of his trumpeting call for responsive action. Although he offers it as a gift from himself—no one else has to face what he does, for it is his “baptism to be baptized with” (12:50)—to activate his gracious offer of forgiveness for sin, a person must repent and change course in life, turning to him “with a sincere heart, with real intent” (Moro. 10:4). The price of suffering that he pays for all, bleeding from “every pore” (Mosiah 3:7; D&C 19:18; see the Note on 22:44), endows him with the right to set standards and to insist that followers measure up to them.

Only Luke preserves this striking cluster of Jesus’ teachings. The sole exception seems to lie in his treatment of the debtor and creditor (see 12:58–59). From the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew preserves a similar saying about a debtor agreeing with a creditor “whiles thou art in the way with him; lest at any time the adversary deliver thee to the judge, . . . and thou be cast into prison” (Matt. 5:25–26). To be sure, most ascribe this pair of sayings to Q, seeing a common source.¹⁴⁵ But even those who hold this view see such differences not only in the respective contexts but also in the thrust of Jesus’ story¹⁴⁶ that the question naturally arises whether Jesus spoke similarly on different occasions, a genuine possibility.¹⁴⁷ Such a possibility finds support in Luke’s coupling of the obviously independent tradition of Jesus’ sayings that appear just before these verses, in 12:49–57.

145. Bultmann, *History*, 96; Marshall, *Luke*, 542; Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 2:1001.

146. Beare, *Earliest Records of Jesus*, 172; Jeremias, *Parables*, 43–44.

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