

# LUKE

## Chapter 17

### Temptation to *Sin*

**Jesus said to his disciples:** “Things that cause people to sin are bound to come, but woe to that person through whom they come.<sup>2</sup> It would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a millstone tied around his neck than for him to cause one of these little ones to sin.<sup>3</sup> So watch yourselves. “If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him.<sup>4</sup> If he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times comes back to you and says, ‘I repent,’ forgive him.”<sup>5</sup> The apostles said to the Lord, “Increase our faith!”<sup>6</sup> He replied, “If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, ‘Be uprooted and planted in the sea,’ and it will obey you.<sup>7</sup> “Suppose one of you had a servant plowing or looking after the sheep. Would he say to the servant when he comes in from the field, ‘Come along now and sit down to eat?’<sup>8</sup> Would he not rather say, ‘Prepare my supper, get yourself ready and wait on me while I eat and drink; after that you may eat and drink?’<sup>9</sup> Would he thank the servant because he did what he was told to do?<sup>10</sup> So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, ‘We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.’”

This is the final passage in a long discourse that seems to begin at 14:25 (see comments at 13:22–30, 31–35; and 14:25–35). Once again, the Lukan hearer is confronted with a series of sayings that seem only loosely related to the context. Four sayings of Jesus are positioned after the account of the rich man and Lazarus (16:19–31) and before Luke’s third travel notice (17:11) and the healing of the ten lepers (17:12–19). They continue Jesus’ teaching on discipleship and instructions to the disciples concerning their future leadership in the church. (Lk 9:1–6, 10, 18–22, 23–27, 43b–45, 46–50, 52–56, 57–62; 10:1–24; 12:35–48; 14:25–35; 16:1–13) As the following schema suggests, they have a certain unity and are also a fitting interlude in Luke’s continuing narrative about God’s merciful order as it is reflected in the kingdom. (CC pp. 640-641)

**17:1 said to his disciples** – The evangelist records another shift in the audience—from the Pharisees (whom Jesus has been addressing since 16:14) to his disciples in 17:1. (Lk 16:1 is also addressed to Jesus’ disciples.) In Luke’s terminology, “disciples” includes more than the Twelve; it likely includes the seventy (-two) sent by Jesus in 10:1–12, as well as other followers. But in 17:5, only the Twelve, the “apostles,” respond by requesting an increase in faith. So this whole pericope is for Jesus’ close group of followers, especially those whom he sends out to minister on his behalf. The first two sayings of Jesus to his disciples conform to the first phase of Luke’s prophet Christology, teaching and miracles: he warns the disciples to be careful in their *teaching* so that it will not become a stumbling block to believers (17:1–2), and he admonishes them to *forgive*. The forgiveness of sins is one of the miracles of release that Jesus brings in the new era of salvation (17:3–4). Earlier examples include 5:20–24, where forgiveness is just as much a miracle as a healing, and 7:47–50. See comments at 4:18. (CC pp. 641-642)

*sure to come* – ἀνένδεκτόν ἐστιν τοῦ τὰ σκάνδαλα μὴ ἐλθεῖν—The double negative could be smoothed out into a positive statement, as the RSV does: “Temptations to sin are sure to come.” On τὰ σκάνδαλα, see comments at 7:23. (CC p. 639)

skandalon - A “scandal” a *trap stick* (*bent sapling*), that is, *snare*. This draws to the mind of the original hearers/readers the stick an animal stumbles over, causing the trap to shut. The Jews would see the crucifixion of the Messiah as a stumbling block because anyone killed on a cross was cursed. It was scandalous to think that their God was executed as a criminal.

Jesus' words here are harsh and parallel the kind of warnings that he has spoken against the Pharisees. This is the first "woe" in Luke that is addressed to the disciples. The only other woe addressed to the disciples occurs at Jesus' discussion of his betrayal at the Last Supper (22:22), where the two words *πλήν οὐαί*, "nevertheless, woe," are also found together. Otherwise in Luke woes are directed to the religious establishment (11:42–52), to all humanity (6:24–26; 21:23), and to two cities for their lack of repentance (10:13). As a result, the hearer is alerted to the seriousness of these words. The community of disciples will bear a grave responsibility. (CC p. 642)

*woe to the one through whom they come* – Hebrew *'oy* and *hoy*, also translated "oh!" or "alas." Interjection expressing sadness or warning. The prophets frequently begin pronouncements of judgment with this term, which may introduce a series of condemnations. (TLSB p. 108)

Understanding the meaning of this woe depends on determining the meaning of two ideas: "stumbling blocks" (*τὰ σκάνδαλα*)/"stumble" (*σκανδαλίση*) and "these little ones" (*τῶν μικρῶν τούτων*). The only other occurrence in Luke's gospel of the noun "stumbling block" or the verb "stumble, scandalize" is in the context of a beatitude: "Blessed is he who is not scandalized by me" (7:23). A related phrase appears in the parable of the workers in the vineyard, where Jesus cites Ps 118:22: "What, therefore, is this that is written, 'The stone that the builders rejected, this has become the head of the corner'? Everyone who *falls on that stone* will be dashed to pieces; on whomever it falls, it will crush him" (Lk 20:17–18; cf. Acts 4:11). The scandal in Luke 7 is Jesus, who is a stumbling block for those who refuse to see him as the Messiah prophesied in the OT. They take offense at him because he comes bringing mercy, compassion, and forgiveness, instead of vengeance. This is the language of the theology of the cross, and the cross is also a stumbling block. (Rom 9:33; 11:9; 1 Cor 1:23; 1 Pet 2:8) (CC p. 642)

In Luke 17, however, Jesus is speaking of a different kind of stumbling block, namely, any impediment that might keep a believer from confessing that Jesus is *the* stumbling block, since his way of salvation is contrary to the world's expectations. This impediment may be a temptation to sin, as the RSV and many translations render it, or it may be apostasy, since that involves turning to another supposed way of salvation that does not embrace Jesus as the scandalous Savior. In the context of Jesus' teaching here, apostasy is probably meant, particularly the apostasy Jesus lamented earlier: the lawyers hold the key of knowledge and yet prevent members of the community from entering the kingdom (11:52, the final woe in a long series of woes). Jesus' warning about hypocrisy and the misuse of possessions in the previous chapter should be included as background to this woe. The disciples are in danger of succumbing to the same things as the Pharisees did, especially now that Jesus is giving them the key of knowledge. (CC pp. 642-643)

**17:2 millstone.** A heavy stone for grinding grain. (CSB)

These were used to grind grain to flour and were so large that it took a donkey to turn it.

*one of these little ones.* Either young in the faith or young in age (cf. 10:21; Mt 18:6; Mk 10:24). (CSB)

Leading esp a young or immature believer to fall away from Christ. Even infants can believe or trust (cf 18:15), as shown by the way they long to be held by parents rather than by strangers. (TLSB)

"Little ones" refers to believers, and "these" (*τούτων*) suggests those who are present with the disciples and Jesus. This is the only place in Luke's gospel where Jesus uses the expression *τῶν μικρῶν τούτων*, "these little ones," for his followers, (Cf. Mt 10:42; 18:6, 10, 14) although Jesus has called his

community “little flock” in Lk 12:32, and there may be a parallel in his reference to infants at 10:21. Since this is the community that is journeying with Jesus to Jerusalem and the passion, “these little ones” could well allude to the disciples *as catechumens* who are preparing for their initiation into Jesus’ death and resurrection and for the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost (see the excursus “Baptism in Luke-Acts”). These “little ones” include also the seventy (-two) and the Twelve, as will be evident when Jesus speaks his only other woe at the Last Supper to the one who will betray him. Possessions and the love of power overcome Judas and he apostatizes. D. Moessner expands this idea of “little ones” as catechumens when he views them as the disenfranchised who have been the object of Jesus’ teaching and miracles. Doing so provides one more connection to 7:18–35:

The identity of these “little ones” is widely debated. Are literal children signified here? Or does Jesus mean weaker and more vulnerable disciples? Or are perhaps the “poor” in the sense of 14:13, 21; 15:1–2; 16:20, 22, i.e., the sick and “sinner” outcasts of society, in mind? We have already demonstrated Luke’s symbolic value of μικρός [“small”] for a “childlike” response to Jesus’ authoritative presence in 7:18–35 and 9:46–48. It is significant that in the former passage the “poor,” including the “blind,” “lame,” “deaf,” and so forth, are posed as examples of those who receive salvation by Jesus in the presence of the crowds just before Jesus refers to one who is “least” being greater in the Kingdom than John. Moreover, this same passage refers to “taking offense” or “stumbling” (7:23) with respect to Jesus’ bringing salvation as he eats and drinks with tax collectors and sinners (7:34). Further, the Pharisees’-scribes’ reaction is contrasted to that of the *laos* [“people”] and Wisdom’s children (7:29–30, 35). With all of these themes and actors present immediately before 17:1–10 in 14:15–16:31, and, as we have seen, active in positive response to Jesus in the midst of growing rejection, the reference to the “children” or “little ones” here as the “poor” and outcast is forcefully corroborated. (CC p. 643)

Thus, the disciples, as future leaders in the church, must exercise extreme caution in their preaching and teaching so that the catechumens in their care, the poor and outcast, may not be led into apostasy. (CC pp. 643-644)

**17:3** *pay attention to yourself* – προσέχετε—This is the first of ten imperatives in this section (cf. 17:3: ἐπιτίμησον; ἄφες; 17:5: πρόσθε; 17:6: ἐκριζώθητι; φυτεύθητι; 17:7: ἀνάπαισε; 17:8: ἐτοιμάσων; διακόνει; 17:10: λέγετε). One might also include here ἀφήσεις (17:4), a future with the force of an imperative. On προσέχετε, see comments at 12:1; 20:46; 21:34. (CC 639)

A transitional imperative (“beware”) connects these first two sayings. It is not clear whether 17:3a belongs with the previous woe (17:1–2) or with this section on forgiveness (17:3–4). But could it not be a warning that applies to both sayings? The disciples have already heard a similar command in a parallel teaching (12:1). Here Jesus commands, “Beware [προσέχετε] for yourselves,” both to avoid causing catechumens to stumble and also to forgive those within the community who sin against the disciples. (CC p. 644)

Each one bears responsibility for guiding the brother away from sin and for being ready to forgive. (TLSB)

*your brother.* See Mt 18:15–17; cf. Mt 12:50. (CSB)

Two other imperatives here portray the rhythm of Christian life together, particularly for those who are leaders in the church: “If your brother sins, rebuke [ἐπιτίμησον] him, and if he repents, forgive [ἄφες] him.”

This is a parallel to Jesus' more elaborate instructions for community wholeness in Matthew 18. (CC p. 644)

Forgiveness is one of the miracles of release that Jesus came to bring to his creation (see comments at 4:18–19). Because of the reference here to sin, one may want to interpret the “stumbling blocks” in the previous saying primarily as sins, but perhaps the situation here is different. Perhaps the focus is not on misdeeds of disciples/apostles, but on the transgressions of the “poor,” that is, ordinary members of the church. (CC p. 644)

Jesus is telling those who will be his ministers to beware that when those under their care fall into sin, which they will, the leaders must do everything they can to restore them back to the community by rebuking the sin, seeking repentance, and forgiving the members when they confesses their sin. The hearer cannot help but be reminded here of the petition in the Lord's Prayer “forgive to us our sins, for we ourselves also forgive everyone who owes us” (11:4) and the parable of the prodigal son (15:11–32). In other words, the disciples are not to become stumbling blocks by withholding forgiveness that should be extended to repentant sinners. This is to be so ingrained in the leaders that, even if these poor little ones who are being brought into the kingdom sin often and repent repeatedly—seven times a day—the disciples *will forgive them* (a future with the force of an imperative). The act of forgiving sins must be a constant in the Christian community because absolution is how creation is released from its bondage through the power of Christ's death and resurrection. (CC p. 644)

L. T. Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*, 258–59, notes that this “is entirely within the framework of Jewish piety, for which forgiveness offered by God to those who repent is endless, and demands similar forgiveness of the neighbor (cf. e.g., *Aboth de Rabbi Nathan* 41).” Cf. also I. H. Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, 643. (CC p. 644)

*rebuke* – Drawing attention to the sin is a loving warning. “Necessity requires one to speak of the evil, to prefer charges, to investigate, and to testify.... Governments, father and mother, brothers and sisters, and other good friends are under obligation to one another to rebuke evil wherever it is needful and profitable” (LC I 274–75). (TLSB)

*if he repents, forgive him* – As God does the same. (TLSB)

**17:4** *seven times*. That is, forgiveness is to be unlimited (cf. Ps 119:164; Mt 18:21–22). (CSB)

Keep forgiving, as God likewise forgives you. Aug: “What then is ‘seven times’? Always, as often as he shall sin and repent” (*NPNF* 1 6:452). (TLSB)

ἐπιτάκις τῆς ἡμέρας—The daily ritual of forgiveness reminds the hearer that only Luke has the command to take up the cross “daily” (9:23). Bearing the cross is the opposite of seeking vengeance. (CC p. 639)

*forgive him* – ἀφήσεις αὐτῷ—The future tense has the force of an imperative, “you shall forgive him.” (CC p. 640)

**17:1–4** Disciples need to guard the faith of others with forgiveness and a helping hand. Exercise special care for the young and the young in faith. How ready God is to forgive, as He demonstrates in the love of Christ. • Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. Amen. (TLSB)

*Increase Our Faith*

**5 The apostles said to the Lord, “Increase our faith!” 6 And the Lord said, “If you had faith like a grain of mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, ‘Be uprooted and planted in the sea,’ and it would obey you.**

**17:5** *apostles said* – οἱ ἀπόστολοι—The “disciples” were addressed by Jesus in 17:1. Out of that larger group, “the apostles” are the ones who request more faith. See comments at 6:13. (CC p. 640)

At 17:5 the audience shifts from the “disciples” to the “apostles.” They ask Jesus (whom Luke refers to as “the Lord”), “Add to us faith.” This suggests that they understood Jesus’ previous words (17:1–4) to be addressed to themselves as well as to the larger group. In Luke, “the apostles” always refers to the Twelve. (Lk 6:13; 9:10; 11:49; 17:5; 22:14; 24:10) In the midst of this discourse, this shift is most remarkable. It suggests to the hearer that the next two sayings should be understood as directed primarily to the apostles, since this is how the apostles would understand them. (CC p. 645)

Note that v 1 has “disciples.” At times, the terms are used interchangeably in Lk. (TLSB)

*Increase our faith!* They felt incapable of measuring up to the standards set forth in vv. 1–4. They wanted greater faith to lay hold of the power to live up to Jesus’ standards. (CSB)

The disciples see they are unable to live up to the teaching of Jesus. The Lord shows that faith is a quality more than a measured quantity. (TLSB)

πρόσθετε ἡμῖν πίστιν—“Add to us faith,” instead of the more common “increase our faith,” accents the dative here as an indirect object instead of a dative of advantage. (CC p. 640)

The apostles’ request arises from their recognition that they are unable to do what Jesus has asked in 17:1–4 because they lack the necessary faith. Whether the apostles have any faith or not is not the issue here, since at this point in the ministry of Jesus no one has faith that fully grasps who Jesus is and what he came to do. Such faith will not exist *until after the resurrection*. But clearly, the apostles have heard Jesus’ hard words about discipleship and realize that they are not up to the task. Though Jesus’ words sound harsh, they are meant to offer the apostles encouragement. Even though the apostles do not realize it, they have enough faith to do miraculous things, even something as remarkable as transplanting a mulberry tree, with its deep root system, into the sea. (CC p. 645)

W. Arndt, *Luke*, 368, says: “The power of faith is as unlimited as God’s power itself.” Arndt also observes, “In order to have a faith which plants trees in the ocean one must have the assurance that it is God’s will that such a miracle occur” (p. 368). (CC p. 645)

In 13:18–21, Jesus used the picture of the mustard seed to show both the hiddenness of the kingdom (represented in the small size of the mustard seed) and the fullness of the kingdom that comes when that seed grows into a tree.

The apostles have already forgotten how they were sent out to preach the kingdom and heal and that their first mission met with remarkable success (cf. 9:1–6, 10). (CC p. 645)

The success of the seventy (-two) in 10:17–20 appears to have been even more remarkable than that of the Twelve! (CC p. 645)

The apostles will be given faith to preach the kingdom of God and heal and thus keep the catechumens from stumbling (17:1–2). And they will be given faith to forgive seven times a day and thus show how true healing in the kingdom takes place (17:3–4). *The hiddenness of the kingdom in their preaching,*

*healing, and forgiving may make them feel as if they do not have enough faith, but like a mustard seed, the smallness of their faith in Christ conceals Christ's great power and through them Christ will produce great wonders for the kingdom. (CC p. 645)*

**17:6** *faith like a grain of mustard* – ἰ ἔχετε—“If you *have* faith” leaves open the possibility that the disciples do have faith. The RSV is overly pessimistic when it translates it “if you *had* faith,” a contrary to fact condition implying that they don’t have any. BDF § 372 (1) (a) names this a mixed condition, with the present tense in the protasis and the imperfect in the apodosis: “Lk 17:6 is pregnant: εἰ ἔχετε πίστιν ..., ἐλέγετε ἄν ... ‘if you really (v. 5) have—(but you do not; yet if you had), then ...’.” But the protasis is *not* clearly contrary to fact; that would require εἰ plus an augmented tense. (CC p. 640)

Ephesians 3:20-21 “<sup>20</sup>Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, <sup>21</sup>to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.”

*mulberry tree* – A deep-rooted tree. (TLSB)

*planted in the sea* – Faith is capable of otherwise impossible things. (TLSB)

*would obey you* – The unclean spirits (Mk 1:27) and the winds and water (Lk 8:25) were seen to obey Jesus, so faith connects the Christian to the power of God. (TLSB)

**17:5–6** The tiniest faith accomplishes remarkable things. Like the apostles, we may feel a weakness in our faith. Today, pray for the Lord’s strength. His gift of faith is anything but weak, and He will grant you strength to accomplish the impossible. • I believe; help my unbelief, O Lord. Increase my faith in You. Amen. (TLSB)

*Unworthy Servants*

**7 “Will any one of you who has a servant plowing or keeping sheep say to him when he has come in from the field, ‘Come at once and recline at table’? 8 Will he not rather say to him, ‘Prepare supper for me, and dress properly, and serve me while I eat and drink, and afterward you will eat and drink’? 9 Does he thank the servant because he did what was commanded? 10 So you also, when you have done all that you were commanded, say, ‘We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty.’”**

**17:7-10** This string of sayings concludes with an illustration only found in Luke’s gospel.

The language is reminiscent of a previous parable about the slaves (δοῦλοι; 12:37) who are blessed by their Lord because he finds them alert (12:35–40, which occurs in the context of Jesus’ teaching about watchfulness at the coming of the Son of Man at 12:35–48). However, there is a radical difference in these two meals in terms of the slave’s service. In the parable in Luke 12, the master girds his loins and serves his slaves—a complete reversal of normal practice—whereas here, the slave will serve his master. In the Luke 12 discourse, there is a clear Christological application to Jesus’ own table service of his disciples as he serves them at his Supper. The disciples, therefore, are called by Jesus to be faithful and prudent stewards of the Lord’s gifts (12:41–46). Is there a similar Christological application here to the apostles, although with a different twist, since the slave is called to serve his master at the table? In both cases, application can be made to the Lord’s Supper, where the Lord serves his servants and the pastor serves both the Lord of the banquet and the invited guests. (CC pp. 645-646)

The net result is to counsel the apostles to humility as they serve. They should be more mindful of their slave relationship to their Lord than of the powers they might manifest through faith. The stamp of the cross is on their service, even as it is on their Lord's. (CC p. 645-646)

Perhaps these few verses subtly unveil the cruciform shape of apostolic ministry. "Slave" (δοῦλος) is often used of the apostles and prophets, and in Luke Jesus frequently uses the slave/master (δοῦλος/κύριος) imagery in his parables, (Lk 12:35–48; 14:15–24; 19:11–27; 20:9–19) especially parables that deal with the activities of the apostles. Lk 17:7–10 mentions the activities of plowing (17:7), shepherding (17:7), and deaconing/serving at tables (17:8). Each of these is used elsewhere as an image of the activities of pastors: on plowing, see 9:62; on shepherding, see 15:3–7; on serving at tables, see 9:16–17; 12:35–48; 22:24–27; and especially Acts 6. These three activities could correspond to the apostolic work of the early church, i.e., "the duties of traveling evangelists (cultivating the field, searching for lost sheep, inviting people to the banquet table, 14:21–23) and the duties of the more sedentary deacons." These tasks are "all the things that are commanded of you" (17:10) by the Lord for the good and faithful apostle. Those called to the field and to the shepherding are not to denigrate the work of serving at tables, for all three activities are fundamental to the apostolic office. The slave who works in the fields and keeps the flocks should not be surprised if he must also wait on tables. And he shouldn't look for thanks from his Master (17:9), for this is his calling as an unworthy slave who has simply done what he ought to have done (17:10). (CC p. 645)

Now, the apostles began this discourse when they asked Jesus to add to their faith because of the demands he has placed on them concerning their teaching (17:1–2) and their ministry of release (17:3–4). Jesus tells them they already have enough faith to uproot a tree and plant it in the sea, and therefore they have enough faith to accomplish the apostolic duties of plowing, shepherding, and deaconing that are part of the first phase in Luke's prophet Christology. But could these concluding words refer to the second phase of the evangelist's prophet Christology, in which the disciples are called to suffer as Christ has suffered? Does Jesus hint that there lies ahead *suffering* that the apostles will endure and for which they will be given sufficient faith? Jesus suffered as the slave who first girded his loins and served us with his life. So the apostles too must suffer for the kingdom they proclaim and nourish through their apostolic ministry. After all, the Table at which they serve was prepared by the giving of the Master's body and the shedding of his blood. (CC pp. 646-647)

P. Minear, "A Note on Luke 17,7–10," 85, asks,

Is it entirely coincidental that the same idioms are found in two other Lucan passages in which the master's relations to his apostles are so central—in 9:1–17, in which his command for them to "wait on tables" followed directly upon the conclusion of their field trip, and in 22:14–46, where after the conclusion of Jesus' field work they obeyed his command to prepare the Passover supper for him (22:8, 13)? Should we forget the fact that those two suppers were immediately conjoined to references to the Master's sufferings, so that the picture of the table-waiter had begun to coalesce with the picture of the servanthood of the Son of Man (9:22; 22:15, 27)? (CC p. 647)

**17:7** *a servant*. A slave, used to illustrate performance of duty (cf. 12:37). (CSB)

Perhaps the household's only slave tending to outside and inside duties. (TLSB)

**17:8** *will – ἀλλ'*—This is a strong adversative, which points at the exact opposite of what was said in the previous verse. (CC p. 640)

*come in from the field – παρελθών*—This is another example of Luke's use of a participle as an imperative. (CC p. 640)

*dress properly* – Clothes worn for farm labor are replaced by those fit for waiting at table. (TLSB)

**17:9** *does he think* – Obviously not; a rhetorical question. (TLSB)

**17:10** *done all that you ere commanded* – περιζωσάμενος—On girding the loins, see comments at 12:35–48, where a Passover context is suggested by this expression. (CC p. 640)

*we are unworthy servants* – Perfect service is a reasonable return to our Master, who deals mercifully with us and calls us to deal mercifully with others (vv 3–4). “These words clearly declare that God saves by mercy and because of His promise, not that it is due because of the value of our works” (Ap V 213). (TLSB)

μη̄ ἔχει χάριν τῷ δούλῳ ὅτι ἐποίησεν τὰ διαταχθέντα... —The expected answer to this question is “No!” See BDF§ 427 (2). (CC p. 640)

**17:7–10** We owe God our full service and truly can do Him no favors. God does not owe us thanks for our obedience. In Christ, He does not forever punish us for our disobedience but forgives us graciously. When He returns, we will eat and drink in His kingdom as He has served us. • Grant me a willing heart and able hands, O Lord, to render thanks to You and care to my neighbors. Amen. (TLSB)

*Jesus Cleanses Ten Lepers*

**11** On the way to Jerusalem he was passing along between Samria and Galilee. **12** And as he entered a village, he was met by ten lepers, who stood at a distance **13** and lifted up their voices, saying, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us.” **14** When he saw them he said to them, “**Go and show yourselves to the priests.**” And as they went they were cleansed. **15** Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice; **16** and he fell on his face at Jesus' feet, giving him thanks. Now he was a Samaritan. **17** Then Jesus answered, “**Were not ten cleansed? Where are the nine? 18 Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?**” **19** And he said to him, “**Rise and go your way; your faith has made you well.**”

I. H. Marshall agrees with most interpreters when he says of the structure of Luke's gospel: “With considerable hesitation we regard a new section as commencing at 17:11.” Since Jesus first turned his face to go to Jerusalem at 9:51, there has been only one other such notice, at 13:22. Lk 17:11 is the third mention of the fact and place of Jesus' journeying to Jerusalem. (CC p. 650)

After 13:31–35 the evangelist has made scant mention of Jesus' destination in Jerusalem. “Today and tomorrow and the coming day” (13:33) are not three literal days, but Jesus is close *in time* to his destiny, even if not necessarily close in distance. See comments at 13:31–35. (CC p. 650)

(The final travel notice in 19:28 immediately precedes his arrival in Jerusalem.) From the gospel itself there is no reason to believe that Jesus has left the Galilee-Samaria border. Jesus clearly intends to move toward Jerusalem (9:51) and seems to enter Samaria immediately following his announcement (9:52). He apparently travels to Bethany,

Lk 10:38–42 does not actually name Bethany as the home town of Mary and Martha, but Jn 11:1; 12:1–3 does. Luke refers to Bethany only in Lk 19:29; 24:50. (CC p. 650)

which is on the outskirts of Jerusalem, but there are no references to any specific place until the evangelist announces that Jesus is “passing through the middle of Samaria and Galilee” (17:11). If the gospel is



strictly chronological, then it would imply that Jesus, after moving quickly and with determination to the very vicinity of the Holy City, returned north to the border of Galilee and Samaria. (CC p. 650)

In fact, following the report of Jesus' repast with the sisters in Bethany (10:38–42), Luke offers large discourses that could be told in one sitting. (I.e., Lk 11:1–36, 37–54; 12:1–13:21; 13:23–14:2; 14:25–17:10) The impression that is given in this “journey” to Jerusalem is that it occurs over a brief period of time and in very few locations. At this point, Jesus seems to be moving from north to south through the middle of Galilee (in the north) and Samaria (in the south), not along the Jordan River. Thus the sixth and penultimate discourse in Jesus' journey to Jerusalem (17:11–18:34) may very well have been told in one sitting in the village in Samaria where Jesus cleansed the ten lepers. (CC p. 650)

The previous parable (17:7–10) concluded with a hint that the apostles would suffer as part of their service to Jesus, their suffering Master. By immediately following the allusion to suffering with a clear reference to Jesus' journey to the city of his passion, Luke shows that the following healing miracle (17:12–19) and Jesus' teachings about the last things (17:20–37) occur during the last leg of Jesus' movement to Jerusalem, to the Passover, and to the cross, yet while he is still in Samaria, a crucial locale of the apostolic mission in Acts. (CC pp. 650–651)

Dillon, *From Eye-Witnesses*, 251–52, offers these insights into Luke's accent on Samaria and Samaritans:

Let us observe, first, that three pericopes ... have a *Samaritan color*, and all three are located in the “journey section” of the gospel: the Samaritan rejection story (Lk 9:52–56), the “good Samaritan” parable (Lk 10:29–37), and the miracle of the ten lepers (Lk 17:11–19). Except for Mt's mission directive to avoid Samaritan cities (Mt 10:5), which Luke does not reproduce, these are the only reference to Samaria and the Samaritans in the Synoptics. ... In all three instances, special importance is attached to the Samaritan identity of persons involved in the story: the inhospitable townfolk (οὐκ ἐδέξαντο αὐτόν) whom the Master would not allow his ἄγγελοι [“messengers”] to afflict with Elia's “samaritan” curse (Lk 9:54 = 2 Kgs 1:10–12), the parable's model of ministering to the unfortunate, and the one leper won over by his cure. All these suggest that Luke's tradition accords the outcast Samaritans a special status; and that status is clearly not without pertinence to the *Christian mission to Samaria*, whose great success through the superior *thaumaturgy* [miracle working] of Philip (Acts 8:5–25) supports its pivotal position in the Acts history as *threshold of the mission to the Gentiles* (emphasis Dillon). (CC p. 651)

**17:11** *on his way to Jerusalem – πορεύεσθαι*—This is part of Luke's journey vocabulary and links this notice with his other similar notices at 9:51; 13:22; and 19:28. See comments at 1:39. (J. Nolland, *Luke 9:21–18:34*, 845, notes that “Eight of the opening nine words are to be found in a similar configuration in 9:51.”). (CC p. 648)

*along between Samaria and Galilee.* From this point Jesus seems to have journeyed to Perea, where he ministered on his way south to Jerusalem. (CSB)

διὰ μέσον Σαμαρείας καὶ Γαλιλαίας—This is doubtless the correct text but a difficult phrase to translate because of the accusative that follows the prepositional phrase διὰ. Normally this means “because of,” but BAGD and BDF record the rare occasions where it has a local meaning, “through” (BAGD, B I; BDF, § 222). It could mean either “through the middle of,” a north to south movement, or “between,” an east to west movement along the border, as W. Arndt suggests (*Luke*, 370–71). See comments below and at 13:31–35. (CC p. 648)

Luke is highlighting the fact that Jesus was deliberately going the long way to Jerusalem. He wanted to minister to as many people as possible on his way to Jerusalem. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 8, Part 4)

**17:12** *entered a village* – Jesus deliberately went into this village, almost certainly because he wanted to encounter people to whom he could minister. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 8, Part 4)

εἰς τινα κώμην— Luke’s reference here to “a certain village” gives no help in placing Jesus in a specific location. (CC p. 648)

*who stood at a distance* – According to the requirements of the Law (Lev 13:46; Num 5:2-4), these 10 lepers would have been outside of the village, and would have had to warn Jesus that they were unclean before they approached him. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 8, Part 4)

The law required the separation of lepers from the community (cf Lv 13). (TLSB)

**17:13** *Jesus Master* – ἐπιστάτα—This title is only found in Luke’s gospel, and this is the only time it is used by someone other than the disciples. See comments at 5:5. (CC p. 648)

*have mercy on us* – Their cry *eleison* is carried on in our present day (kyrie). (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 8, Part 4)

Adopted in the Church’s liturgy as a cry for salvation. (TLSB)

The frame of this cleansing miracle shows that the occasion for a Samaritan’s worship of Jesus begins with an appeal by ten lepers for mercy (A—17:12–13; ἐλέησον, “have mercy,” is an imperative). This is a cry for salvation. A leper has already appeared in Luke’s gospel as one of the first outcasts that Jesus healed during his Galilean ministry (5:12–16). Now there are ten, and the cry is not for cleansing (5:12) but for mercy. This introduces the theme of salvation, which will give rise to worship. Correspondingly, the account ends with Jesus announcing that the Samaritan’s cry for mercy was heard as a cry of faith and salvation has been granted (A’—17:19). Jesus’ command, “Arise, journey,” could be understood as an invitation for the cleansed leper to rise and journey with him to Jerusalem. There the leper might see the basis for his cleansing: the atonement, where Christ shows God’s ultimate mercy by cleansing all humankind from the leprosy of sin that plagues the fallen creation. This is Lukan vocabulary for God’s gracious visitation of release for those who are in bondage to sin, death, sickness, and demon possession. The lepers begged for mercy as they saw Jesus approach their city; mercy wrought their salvation, salvation that comes through faith. (CC p. 652)

**17:14** *he saw them* – ἰδών—Jesus responds to the lepers when he *sees* them. Only then does he tell them to go see the priests. In the very next verse (17:15), the Samaritan leper, seeing (ἰδών) that he was healed, returns to worship Jesus. J. Nolland, *Luke 9:21–18:34*, 846, notes that “ἰδών, ‘seeing/saw,’ propels the action as it did in v 14.” J. Fitzmyer, *Luke X–XXIV*, 1155, also says “in the Lukan story this [seeing] is an awakening; his eyes of faith were opened.” On eyes and sight as a metaphor for seeing God’s salvation in Jesus, see comments at 2:21–40. (CC pp. 648-649)

GO – πορευθέντες—Here is another example where a participle functions as an imperative. See comments at 7:22 and 13:32. (CC p. 649)

But what intervenes between the cries for mercy and the announcement of salvation through faith? As the story narrows toward the climax of the thankful Samaritan’s worship of Jesus, the miracle of cleansing comes first (B—17:14). The occasion for the miracle is that Jesus “sees” the lepers and then speaks to

them. Jesus responds to their imperative plea for mercy with an imperative of his own: “Go [πορευθέντες functions as an imperative], show [the imperative ἐπιδείξατε] yourselves to the priests.” These are the same instructions he gave to the first leper whom he cleansed (5:14), only then he had first performed the miracle of cleansing (5:13) and then given the command. (CC p. 652)

*show yourselves to the priests.* Normal procedure after a cure (see Lev 13:2–3; 14:2–32). (CSB)

To verify the healing (Lv 14). (TLSB)

πορευθέντες ἐπιδείξατε ἑαυτοὺς τοῖς ἱερεῶσιν—This same instruction was given to the first leper Jesus cleansed in Luke’s gospel (5:14; ἀπελθὼν δεῖξον σεαυτὸν τῷ ἱερεῖ). See comments at 5:12–16. Here “priests” and the Greek commands are plural, and the command to offer sacrifice (cf. 5:14) is implied, not stated. (CC p. 649)

The fact that Jesus told them to show themselves to the priest was normal procedure after a cure from leprosy. (Lev. 13 and 14) The Greek word *lepra* signifies a dreaded condition of the skin, including what is now regarded as leprosy, as well as certain other types of infectious skin diseases, resulting in a person’ being regarded as ceremonially unclean and thus excluded from normal relations with other people. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 8, Part 4)

The key issue in ancient Israel was not the virulence or contagiousness of the disease, but the religious and social dimension. Those who had been diagnosed as lepers by the priest were required to separate themselves from the community. This was not for medical but for religious reasons. Biblical lepers were treated not as ill but as ritually unclean. The priest had no technique for healing lepers; he only determined whether or not they had been healed. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 8, Part 4)

*they were cleansed – ἐκαθαρίσθησαν*—This word is taken from the vocabulary of Leviticus. It describes what happens when sickness comes up against the one who releases from bondage, and it is repeated by Jesus at the end of the story (17:17). This verb and the related noun are also key terms in the first healing of the leper (5:12, 13, 14) See comments at 5:12.. (CC p. 649)

Lepers were regarded as “unclean” due to association with the death of the affected body parts. (TLSB)

In cleansing lepers Jesus teaches a number of things that would be insightful for those who are catechizing Gentiles and for their Gentile catechumens. First, the miracle is a sign that the messianic era of salvation is present in Jesus (7:22). Second, the cleansing comes from Jesus, whose holy flesh reaches out in compassion and mercy to a leper. The one who is “clean” crosses over the boundary to one who is “unclean” in order to make him clean. The border between Galilee and Samaria also separated those who were “clean” (Jews) from the “unclean” (Samaritans). Third, Jesus supersedes the OT holiness code (Leviticus 12–26) with his own holiness. The cleansing of these ten lepers, however, is connected to a fourth circumstance. Jesus sends them to the priests *to be cleansed spiritually*. (CC pp. 652–653)

Lev 14:1–32 states that a healed leper is to show himself to the priests and offer sacrifice. Jesus’ purpose in sending these lepers to the priests is to fulfill the OT, but also to do something more. Jesus wants the cleansed lepers to go to *the place of sacrifice* (Lk 5:14) and offer themselves as testimony that a corresponding spiritual healing accompanies the physical cleansing he bestows. The sacrifices in the temple (commanded in 5:14 and implied here) would include the shedding of blood, looking forward to the cleansing atonement of the Messiah, who was traveling to Jerusalem to offer his blood as the final, once-for-all cleansing. Jesus wants the priests in the temple to confirm that the miracle has taken place. The miracle will also confirm that Jesus is who he says he is: the one who cleanses the entire sin of all humanity. (CC p. 653)

In this instance, unlike 5:12–16, the cleansing happens *while the ten lepers are traveling to the temple*.

Lev 14:2–32 directs the cleansed person to offer sacrifices after being certified as clean by a priest. Those sacrifices would be offered at the central place of worship—in Jesus’ day, the temple in Jerusalem. There is no support for the suggestions of J. Fitzmyer, *Luke X–XXIV*, 1154, and I. H. Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, 651, that the lepers might find priests somewhere in the area or that the Samaritan would find a Samaritan priest (cf. also R. Stein, *Luke*, 433). (CC p. 653)

They go by faith, having confidence from Jesus’ previous healing activity that they too will be healed as they follow his command to go to the temple. Their sacrifices will foreshadow Jesus’ own bloody sacrifice in fulfillment of Moses and the entire OT (Lk 5:14; 24:27, 44). (CC p. 653)

The corresponding section in the chiasm is Jesus’ description of the miracle to the one leper who returned (B’—17:17–18). The parallelism between these two sections consists of the word for “they were cleansed” (ἐκαθαρίσθησαν; 17:14, 17). The irony here is this: the ten lepers were happy to journey to the temple with the expectation that they would be cleansed, but only one leper, *after the cleansing*, was willing to return to give glory to God—God in the person of Jesus, whose presence in the world and whose sacrifice on the cross would bring an end to temple worship. *And the chief irony is this: the one who returns is a “foreigner,” a Samaritan, an outcast!* (CC p. 653)

D. Moessner, *Lord of the Banquet*, 166, summarizes the significance of the Samaritan:

A Samaritan ... serves as a foil not only to the apostles but to the whole stubborn nation of Israel as well ...: (a) He submits to Jesus’ authority (vv. 15–16a) by giving Jesus thanks (v. 16a; cf. 17:10); and (b) his *faith* (cf. 17:5–6) is the instrument not just of miraculous healing but also the presence of eschatological salvation among Samaritans over against the mass of a recalcitrant Israel. (CC p. 653)

He responds in faith, as did the Good Samaritan, who responded in compassion and love (10:33). (CC p. 653)

One of the chief functions of the holiness code in Leviticus 12–26 was to separate Israel, the clean people of God, from the unclean Gentiles. Circumcision, the kosher dietary laws, and the many liturgies for different kinds of cleansing all set Israel apart from the other nations. However, just as Jesus crossed the boundary separating clean from unclean when he touched the leper in 5:12–16, so too Jesus’ cleansing of the Samaritan and his reception of the Samaritan’s worship show that another OT boundary has been crossed. Jesus brings a new kind of holiness. It is not a holiness based on circumcision, dietary laws, or the Jerusalem temple with its priests and sacrifices. Rather, it is a holiness based on his own person as the sinless Son of God and on his sacrifice as the perfect, unblemished Lamb who takes away the sin of the world. The holiness of Jesus, given to all who will be baptized in his name, will transcend all ethnic and cultural boundaries as it purifies the people of God’s new covenant in Christ (Gal 3:27–29). The cleansed Samaritan points toward the multitudes of foreigners who will be incorporated into the church in Acts and beyond. (CC pp. 653–654)

**17:15** *turned back...praising God* – Began his praise from a distance. (TLSB)

δοξάζων—The present participle suggests continuous action. (CC p. 649)

In contrast to the worshipful Samaritan are the nine who do not return, and the implication of Jesus’ words are that the nine are Jews. (CC p. 654)

The whole context prompts this conclusion. R. Stein, *Luke*, 434, notes: “The nine were the Jewish lepers who were healed, in contrast to the ‘foreigner.’ For Luke’s Jewish readers the pathos of these questions would have been great (cf. Rom 9:2–5). Once again the last had become first and the first last (Luke 13:30).” See also J. Fitzmyer, *Luke X–XXIV*, 1155. (CC p. 654)

They do not realize the eschatological significance of what happened to them, i.e., God’s kingdom has arrived in Jesus. The very next passage (17:20–21) reinforces that message. The presence of Jesus is the presence of God’s kingdom. Jesus is the very presence of God in human flesh, in the world, among humans. Here again are the two groups that Jesus has confronted throughout his ministry: the outcasts who receive him by faith and the religious establishment, which rejects him. This passage continues Jesus’ ongoing ministry to the marginal people of society as part of the gospel theme of the Great Reversal. In the kingdom of God, things are the opposite of what one might expect. (CC p. 654)

The center of the passage begins with a simple frame of references to the Samaritan. This alerts the hearer that the Samaritan’s insight and worship are central to the passage. Luke is subtle in introducing him simply as “one of them” (εἷς δὲ ἐξ αὐτῶν), leaving the hearer to wonder which one of the ten lepers returned (C—17:15a). The corresponding line in the chiasmic structure gives the ironic, surprising answer: “And he was a Samaritan” (C’—17:16b). Luke links this center section to the previous one by means of the word “seeing” (ιδών) and the word “healed” (ιάθη; 17:15). Just as Jesus, “seeing” the lepers, sent them to the priests to be declared clean (17:14), so the Samaritan, “seeing” that he “was healed,” is moved by Jesus’ mercy to return to him to give him worship. (CC p. 654)

**17:16 Samaritan.** Normally Jews did not associate with Samaritans (Jn 4:9), but leprosy broke down social barriers while erecting others. (CSB)

The Jews despised the Samaritans because of historic betrayals and heretical beliefs. (TLSB)

They were all outcasts. Jesus didn’t care what social standing they had; his love extends to all. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 8, Part 4)

At the very center of this Samaritan frame stands the Samaritan’s worship, which is a confession of his faith. (CC p. 654)

C. Talbert, *Reading Luke*, 165–66, notes:

The faith of foreigners is a Lukan concern (e.g., 7:9; 10:25–37; Acts 10–11), as is the contrast between their faith (cf. Acts 26:16–18 where the Gentiles’ eyes are opened) and the unbelief of Jews who are unable to see God’s work in Jesus (cf. Acts 28:26–27 where the Jews do not see). This story, then, foreshadows the rejection of the gospel by the Jews and its enthusiastic reception by foreigners which we see in the narrative of Acts and which was already established at the time Luke-Acts was written. (CC pp. 654-655)

Luke uses the same grammatical construction to accent the two aspects of the Samaritan’s worship: an aorist followed by a present participle. He returned, giving glory to God (ὑπέστρεψεν ... δοξάζων τὸν θεόν); he fell, giving thanks to Jesus (ἔπεσεν ... εὐχαριστῶν αὐτῷ). This is the innermost ring of the chiasm (D/D’), the mystery of the correspondence of God and Jesus. By using such a structure, Luke leads the Gentile catechumen to see himself in this foreigner, this Samaritan, who has seen the connection between the presence of God in the temple and the sacrifices there and the presence of God in Jesus, who is God’s final sacrifice. The Samaritan returns to Jesus, glorifying God the Father for the miracles that he is bringing to the world through Jesus. (CC pp. 654-655)

Others throughout Luke’s gospel have done this, e.g., 2:20; 5:25, 26; 7:16; 13:13. Note that the glory given God in 5:25 results from the forgiveness of sins given to the paralytic in 5:20, 24. (CC p. 655)

But now he recognizes that the glory he gives God is to be expressed in *worship of and thanksgiving to Jesus*, who is God in flesh, and whose cleansing atonement supersedes the cleansing rites of the priests in the temple. Every other instance of εὐχαριστέω, “give thanks,” is a giving of thanks to God.

On εὐχαριστέω in Luke-Acts, see Lk 18:11; 22:17, 19; Acts 27:35; 28:15. (CC p. 655)

This is the only place in the entire NT where εὐχαριστέω refers to the giving of thanks *to Jesus!* (CC p. 655)

*fell on his face* – Note that he praises God at Jesus’ feet. (TLSB)

ἔπεσεν ἐπὶ πρόσωπον—The first leper healed in Luke also fell on his face when he saw Jesus (5:12). (CC p. 649)

The Samaritan’s posture is one of worship—falling on his face at Jesus’ feet. It is possible that the Samaritan never made it to the temple, for when he saw that he was healed, he realized that the locale of God’s presence had shifted from the temple in Jerusalem to the body of Jesus. His worship confesses his faith, this conviction about God in Jesus. The place to give thanks for cleansing is wherever Jesus is, anticipating worship in the NT era down until this day. In Jn 4:20–26, this Christological basis of true worship is revealed to another Samaritan, this time a woman. Notice that here in Luke, Jesus is not chastising the man but simply wondering why the others did not come to the same theological conclusion this Samaritan did. He alone had faith that God’s presence is now in Jesus and with that presence comes God’s mercy and cleansing. (CC p. 655)

*giving him thanks* – εὐχαριστῶν—The present participle suggests continuous action. (CC p. 649)

The apostles, who in the previous passage were instructed not to expect thanks for doing what they were called to do (Lk 17:7–10), are shown here that true faith gives thanks to the one who brings salvation. This Samaritan’s faith uproots trees and plants them in the sea, for it brought a foreigner to the temple—to Jesus, the true temple wherein God’s presence resides (cf. Jn 2:18–22). (CC p. 655)

**17:17 WHERE ARE THE OTHER NINE** – The lack of gratitude to Jesus is a lack of gratitude to God. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 8, Part 4)

Ingratitude is the response of the majority. (TLSB)

οἱ δὲ ἐννέα ποῶ—The Greek word order emphasizes “the nine” and accents Jesus’ question. (CC p. 649)

In essence, we have two different groups of catechumens here: the Samaritan and the nine Jewish lepers. The Samaritan responds in faith because his “catechesis” led him to the presence of God in Christ and to worship the one who gives him new life. He is among those represented by the seed that fell on fertile soil, who “heard the Word with a noble and good heart, hold it fast and bear fruit in steadfast endurance” (Lk 8:15). But the nine are like those who “receive the Word with joy, and yet these have no roots, who for a time believe but in time of temptation apostatize” (8:13). (CC pp. 655-656)

**17:18 give praise to God** – δοῶναι δόξαν τῷ θεῷ—This infinitive of purpose shows the reason the nine should have returned. (CC p. 649)

*this foreigner* – ὁ ἀλλογενῆς οὗτος—This means “of another race or genealogy,” i.e., not an Israelite, and thus is translated “foreigner.” This is its only occurrence in the NT. (J. Nolland, *Luke 9:21–18:34*, 847, notes that “it [ἀλλογενής] is the term used in the temple inscription that forbade the entry of foreigners into the Jerusalem temple.”) (CC p. 649)

United in their affliction, the Samaritan and Jewish lepers tolerated one another. Now the one least expected to associate with Jesus, a Jew, returns thanks. (TLSB)

**17:19** *rise and go* – ἀναστὰς πορεύου—The Samaritan must “arise” because he is prostrate before Jesus. Here again, Luke uses a participle like an imperative. These two words are used together by the prodigal when he decides to return to his merciful father (15:18). This Samaritan is set upon the journey of faith with Jesus. πορεύομαι often is part of Luke’s vocabulary for Jesus’ journey to Jerusalem. R. Dillon, *From Eye-Witnesses*, 36, asks, “Is Jesus’ command to the thankful Samaritan, πορεύου, a bid to join the ‘journey’ to Jerusalem, in view of the man’s saving πίστις and the use of the thematic πορεύεσθαι in the pericope’s introduction?” (CC p. 649)

*your faith has made you well.* See Mt 9:22. The phrase may also be rendered “your faith has saved you” (7:50). The fact that the Samaritan returned to thank Jesus may indicate that he had received salvation in addition to the physical healing all ten had received (cf. 7:50; 8:48, 50). (CSB)

The healed Samaritan received an additional blessing from Jesus, his faith has saved him for eternity. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 8, Part 4)

Finally, Jesus tells the Samaritan to arise and “journey.” Faith has sealed his salvation. As one raised to life, he is set in motion with Jesus and the pilgrim band. Jesus draws a connection between the Samaritan’s worship of him as the locale of divine cleansing and Jesus’ final passion, death, and resurrection in Jerusalem, where divine cleansing will take place as the fulfillment of salvation history. The hearer of the gospel may catch the connection between the call to “journey” to Jerusalem and Jesus’ suffering there, because the evangelist has provided the clue by beginning this cleansing miracle with his third travel notice. Jesus is close to the Holy City, and even a Samaritan leper may learn that it is the place of the atonement. The Lukan hearer may also hear in the giving of thanks to Jesus (εὐχαριστῶν αὐτῷ) an allusion to the church’s ongoing Eucharist. (“Eucharist” comes from the Greek verb for “giving thanks” used here and also in the Words of Institution [22:17, 19].) In the Eucharist, the church prostrates before the presence of the crucified and risen Christ, who gives his body and blood in a meal where his divine cleansing is for all who, like the Samaritan, are saved through faith. As we will soon hear, “the kingdom of God is among you” (17:21), for the kingdom is wherever the King is, and the King is in his church. (CC p. 656)

**17:11–19** Jesus commends the faith of a Samaritan leper who alone gives thanks for his healing. Daily God’s mercy extends to the unworthy—including you. Give praise to Him, who bore no grudge toward you but came to save you. • Thanks be to You, O God, as we go our way, made whole by Jesus. Amen. (TLSB)

*The Coming of the Kingdom of God*

**20** Being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, he answered them, **“The kingdom of God is not coming in ways that can be observed, 21 nor will they say, ‘Look, here it is!’ or ‘There!’ for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you.”** **22** And he said to the disciples, **“The days are coming when you will desire to see one of the days of the Son of Man, and you will not see it. 23 And they will say to you, ‘Look, there!’ or ‘Look, here!’ Do not go out or**

**follow them. 24 For as the lightning flashes and lights up the sky from one side to the other, so will the Son of Man be in his day. 25 But first he must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation. 26 Just as it was in the days of Noah, so will it be in the days of the Son of Man. 27 They were eating and drinking and marrying and being given in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all. 28 Likewise, just as it was in the days of Lot—they were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building, 29 but on the day when Lot went out from Sodom, fire and sulfur rained from heaven and destroyed them all— 30 so will it be on the day when the Son of Man is revealed. 31 On that day, let the one who is on the housetop, with his goods in the house, not come down to take them away, and likewise let the one who is in the field not turn back. 32 Remember Lot's wife. 33 Whoever seeks to preserve his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life will keep it. 34 I tell you, in that night there will be two in one bed. One will be taken and the other left. 35 There will be two women grinding together. One will be taken and the other left.” 37 And they said to him, “Where, Lord?” He said to them, “Where the corpse is, there the vultures will gather.”**

There appears to be some continuity between the healing of the ten lepers (17:12–19) and Jesus’ teaching about the coming of the kingdom (17:20–37). It is best to regard these teachings as the second episode in the final leg of Jesus’ journey to Jerusalem. It is clear that there are two teachings, one to the Pharisees (17:20–21) and one to the disciples (17:22–37), the first about recognizing the presence of the kingdom *now* (as the healed Samaritan leper did), the second about recognizing the coming of the Son of Man in judgment (the *not yet*). (CC p. 660)

**17:20** *asked by Pharisees* – ὑπὸ τῶν Φαρισαίων—The question involves both this life and the life to come. See the commentary and the textual notes on 17:21–23. It is natural for the Pharisees to ask this question because they believed in the coming age and the resurrection (cf. Acts 23:6–8), whereas the Sadducees did not believe in them and so had an entirely different way of thinking about the kingdom. (CC p. 657)

Once again, the audience shifts. The Pharisees last appeared as the recipients of Jesus’ teaching from 16:14 to 16:31. At 17:1 the audience shifted to the disciples and then to the apostles (17:5) before the record of Jesus’ journey to a village where he met the ten lepers (17:12–19). Perhaps these Pharisees witnessed this miracle and the return of the Samaritan to give thanks and decided to ask Jesus a challenging question to put him on the spot. They surely know by this time that Jesus has been talking very pointedly about them (see 20:19), particularly in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (16:19–31). Perhaps they wondered whether Jesus considered *them* to be like the nine *Jewish* lepers who did not return to give thanks. Their question about the “when” of the kingdom of God shows how much they have missed the point because those with eyes of faith—“opened eyes”—have already seen it come in Jesus.

F. Danker, *Jesus and the New Age*, 291, puts it this way: “The attitude of the nine lepers is reflected in the misunderstanding that lies behind the question of certain Pharisees concerning the arrival of the *kingdom of God*” (emphasis Danker). L. T. Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*, 263, notes:

The reader does not by this time expect a neutral question from the Pharisees, who have consistently been portrayed as opponents of the Prophet; all their questions up to this point have had a hostile intent (5:21, 30; 6:2; 10:29). In the narrative context, the question is particularly obtuse since the whole burden of Jesus’ proclamation is that ‘the kingdom of God has arrived’ (or: approached, *engiken*; 4:43; 6:20; 8:1; 9:2; 10:9–11; 16:16). (CC p. 661)

And since it has come in Jesus, the only real question is how to *recognize* it. (CC pp. 660–661)



*can be observed* – μετὰ παρατηρήσεως—The noun is a hapax legomenon in the NT and the LXX although the verb occurs in the Lukan corpus at Lk 6:7; 14:1; 20:20; and Acts 9:24. “Close observation” refers to the Pharisees’ posture as self-appointed analysts of “religious phenomena.” No one can “identify” the kingdom or predict the end by cabalistic sifting for “signs” in creation and/or history. L. T. Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*, 263, has the following observation about Luke’s use of this phrase here:

The phrase *meta paratereseos* has two levels of meaning. The most obvious is that the kingdom of God comes with inexorable power and not by the careful analysis of subtle signs. The second level of meaning derives from Luke’s use of *paratereo* in the narrative, for the Pharisees have twice been identified as “keeping Jesus under close scrutiny” (6:7; 14:1). The response contains a subtle rebuke to the Pharisees’ own approach: they do not perceive the kingdom because they are not open to it.

Signs of the presence of the kingdom are plain enough for those with eyes to see (12:54–56). They include the testimony of Moses and the Prophets (16:29) and Jesus’ fulfillment of the OT in his teaching, miracles, death, and resurrection. (CC pp. 657-658)

The Pharisees fall into the category of those who are looking for “signs” that the kingdom of God is near or here. This is why Jesus says that “the kingdom of God does not come with close observation,” that is, is not declared to have arrived by human arbiters who make esoteric analyses of unusual (but “naturally” observable) phenomena or events. (CC p. 661)

R. Dillon, *From Eye-Witnesses*, 43, shows how this is a manifestation of the “theology of the cross”: “The design of God for the eschatological consummation is thus being carried out in a *hidden* fashion, without ‘observation,’ right in the midst of those seeking evidence of it (ἐν τῷ ὑμῶν); and the ‘Son of Man’ is the one whose determined course is carrying it out. The mystery of the suffering and rejected Son of Man (17:25) is therefore part of the great *mysterium* of God’s plan for the end of things” (emphasis Dillon). (CC p. 661)

It comes by being brought and announced and given as a gift. It comes through the spread of the Gospel. But some will try to entice people into discerning such signs: “Behold, here [is the kingdom] or there [is the kingdom] (7:21).” These are charlatans who are continually trying to impress people that they have prophetic powers to predict the future.

Perhaps the Pharisees are reflecting the popular idea at the time that the Messiah would come during the Passover (especially in connection with 17:34). This intriguing suggestion is difficult to demonstrate, but it would further support the notion that the Passover is very close indeed. See e.g., I. H. Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, 667, and J. Nolland, *Luke 9:21–18:34*, 862. (CC p. 661)

This discussion sounds all too familiar. It is reminiscent of an earlier discourse Jesus had with the crowds when he announced, “But if by a finger of God I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you” (11:20). Jesus went on to criticize those who demand signs: “This generation is an evil generation; it seeks a sign, and a sign will not be given to it except the sign of Jonah. For just as Jonah became a sign to the Ninevites, so also the Son of Man will be to this generation” (11:29–30). What the crowds missed was that the kingdom had come already *now* in the person of Jesus and in his ministry of release to the captives, whether that release be in the form of casting out demons (11:14–19) or healing lepers (17:12–19). In either case, both of Jesus’ actions of releasing those who are in bondage prompt him to announce the presence of the kingdom in him (11:20; 17:21). Jesus has already provided more than enough signs. Jesus’ teachings and his miracles signal that he is the final, eschatological prophet who is fulfilling the promises of the OT (7:23). After all, the kingdom has even come in the preaching and healing of the seventy (-two) (10:9, 11) through which Satan was caused to fall like lightning from heaven (10:18; see comments there). Therefore, Jesus told the crowds, “You hypocrites, the face of the earth and

of the heaven you know how to examine, but how is it you do not know to examine this critical time?” (12:56). It should be obvious to anyone familiar with the OT that Jesus’ ministry brings this *critical* time of the kingdom’s presence. (CC pp. 661-662)

See the excursus “The OT Witness to Christ.” L. T. Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*, 266–67, describes the kingdom of God in the rest of Luke-Acts: “We shall see, shortly, that Jesus is proclaimed as a king (19:38), and disposes of rule with the kingdom (22:29); he dies as a king (23:38) and provides a place in his kingdom (23:42–43). He continues to instruct his followers about the kingdom of God after his resurrection (Acts 1:3), and his resurrection is an enthronement by God (Acts 2:34); people in fact ‘enter the kingdom’ (Acts 14:21)” (p. 267). (CC p. 662)

They searched in vain for the wrong kingdom (11:29). (TLSB)

**17:21** *here...there* – ἰδοὺ ὧδε ἢ ἐκεῖ—The referent here is to the kingdom that comes *now* with Jesus and his ministry continued through his ministers. (cc P. 658)

*the kingdom of God is in the midst of you.* Probably indicating that the kingdom is spiritual and internal (Mt 23:26), rather than physical and external (cf. Jn 18:36). However, the immediate context (v. 20) may favor the former interpretation, namely, that the kingdom is spiritual and so not visible. If this is the correct view, the pronoun “you” in the phrase “within you” is to be taken in a general sense rather than as referring to the unbelieving Pharisees personally. The kingdom certainly was not within them. (CSB)

Christ, the King, was in their midst. Augustine: “Let every one then wisely receive the admonitions of the Master, that he may not lose the season of the mercy of the Savior, which is now being dealt out, as long as the human race is spared. For to this end is man spared, that he may be converted, and that he may not [exist] to be condemned. God only knows when the end of the world shall come: nevertheless now is the time of faith” (NPNF 1 6:442). (TLSB)

Even though the natural meaning of ἐντός ὑμῶν is “within you,” it can mean “among you,” and that is how it must be read here. “Within you” would introduce a foreign theology that is not reflected in Jesus’ theology in any of the gospels.

As an example of this common reading of ἐντός ὑμῶν as “among you,” see R. Stein, *Luke*, 438: In 17:20–21 the emphasis is on the already realized dimension of God’s kingdom. The expression “within you” (*entos hymon*) can mean “in your hearts,” “in your midst,” or “in your reach.” The first interpretation (“within you”) was much in favor in theological liberalism, which saw God’s kingdom as God’s rule in the human heart. *But nowhere else in the Scriptures is God’s kingdom portrayed as an inner condition of the human heart or life.* Furthermore the saying is addressed to the Pharisees, who were most unlikely candidates for Jesus’ saying that God rules within their hearts. Even if one makes “you” indefinite and not limited to the Pharisees, the first argument is conclusive: “Jesus speaks of men entering the kingdom, not the kingdom entering men” (Stein citing I. H. Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, 655; emphasis added). (CC p. 662)

The coming of the kingdom is never an interior event solely within the hearts of people. The kingdom always comes from outside a person, from above, externally through the person of Jesus, his teaching and miracles, and the incarnational means through which the Spirit works to bring faith in Jesus: the Word and Sacraments. Equally important is the fact that Jesus speaks these words to Pharisees. In view of Jesus’ relationship with the Pharisees in the gospel up until this point, he would hardly suggest that his kingdom is within them. Thus, when Jesus says, “For behold, the kingdom of God is among you,” he is

announcing, once again, that the kingdom is present in himself, a clear statement of “inaugurated eschatology.” (CC pp. 662-663)

**17:22-37** To begin, an overview of this discourse is necessary in view of the parallels in Luke 9 (especially 9:21–24). There is not only a shift in audience at 17:22 from the Pharisees to the disciples, but also a shift in outlook. The rest of this teaching by Jesus is about how one should recognize and be prepared for the coming of the Son of Man in judgment, i.e., the coming of the kingdom in its consummation (the *not yet*). The period of preparation Jesus is speaking about is the time from Pentecost to the Last Day, the period of the church as she waits for Jesus to be fully revealed (17:30; ἀποκαλύπτεται). Although Jesus does not use the word “parousia” here, Jesus is talking about his second coming in judgment. (CC p. 663)

He says three things: First, the final coming of the kingdom will be *clear* for all to see. The unmistakable clarity of the coming of God’s eschatological judgment frames this section (17:22–24; 17:37). The second point is related to the first: The days of the Son of Man will come *suddenly*. His coming will overtake unwary people, preoccupied with the things of this world and not mindful of the imminent judgment. Two figures from the OT illustrate this suddenness, the example of Noah (17:26–27) and the example of Lot (17:28–29, 32). There are “days” and then there is *the* day, the day of wrath, *that* day. So will the coming of the Son of Man be (17:30–31). Finally, in view of the clarity and suddenness of the Lord’s coming, we have the third point: when the Lord does come, some will be taken up into glory, and others will be left behind (17:34–35). The implication is that this will come as a great surprise for some. (CC p. 663)

These are the obvious points pertaining to the kingdom that has *not yet* come. But there are subthemes in this discourse that also speak about the relationship between the kingdom that has come *now* in Jesus and his ministry and the kingdom that is coming when the Last Day arrives. Here the evangelist reiterates a theme from Jesus’ teachings at the end of his Galilean ministry in Luke 9: that the order of the kingdom is suffering first and only afterward glory. (CC pp. 663-664)

There are verbal and conceptual parallels between Luke 17 and Luke 9.

Parallels include “kingdom of God” (9:27; 17:20–21) and “Son of Man” (9:22, 26; 17:22, 24, 26, 30). There are other parallels of this kind in the gospel. For example, in the travel narrative there is a lament over Jerusalem (13:31–35) and then an eschatological discourse (17:20–37); when Jesus finally arrives in Jerusalem, he laments over the city (19:41–44) and then has a second eschatological discourse at the very end of his teaching before the passion (21:5–38). (CC p. 664)

Luke purposefully arranges three teachings/events of Jesus’ final days in Galilee to highlight this. First there is Peter’s confession that gives way to Jesus’ first passion prediction, “It is necessary [δεῖ] that the Son of Man suffer many things and be rejected [ἀποδοκιμασθῆναι] by the elders and chief priests and scribes and be killed and on the third day be raised” (9:22). Then follows Jesus’ teaching about the condition of discipleship that is summarized in this statement of reversal: “For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; whoever loses his life on account of me, this one will save it” (9:24). Finally, after the distressing news that Jesus and his disciples must suffer, he gives them a glimpse of his glory in the transfiguration as he takes Peter, James, and John up the mountain into the very presence of God’s eschatological kingdom, where Moses and Elijah are also witnesses to Jesus’ glory (9:28–36). In chapter 9, Luke clearly wants the hearer to see that there is an order in the kingdom in which suffering precedes glory. (CC p. 664)

Jesus will repeat this very theme *after the resurrection*, when, on the road to Emmaus, he chastises the two disciples for not seeing that according to the OT it was “necessary [δεῖ] that the Christ suffer these things and enter into his glory” (24:26). (CC p. 664)

The first three sections of 17:22–37 correspond to the arrangement of topics in Luke 9. Following Jesus' statement that when the Son of Man comes, it will be clear as lightning in the heavens, he *concludes* by saying that “first it is necessary [δεῖ] that he suffer many things and be rejected [ἀποδοκιμασθῆναι] by this generation” (17:25; note the similarities with 9:22). The order of the kingdom is this: first the Son of Man must suffer and enter into his glory, *and then* the end will come. (CC p. 664)

R. Tannehill, *Narrative Unity I*, 258, notes:

Because they do not recognize that suffering and rejection are necessary parts of the realization of God's plan, they expect an immediate fulfillment of God's eschatological promises. Jesus is warning his disciples that approaching Jerusalem does not mean that God's reign is going to appear “immediately” (19:11); it means that Jesus is approaching rejection and death. Furthermore, rejection and persecution will be continuing parts of the developing mission in Acts. Indeed the disciples' question at Acts 1:6 gets an imprecise answer (1:7); instead Pentecost generates mission and “much tribulation.” (CC pp. 664)

Second, following Jesus' examples of Noah and Lot as precursors of God's final coming, where preparedness is necessary because of the suddenness of God's eschatological judgment, Jesus *concludes* this section with a repetition of 9:24: “Whoever seeks to preserve his life will lose it; whoever loses it will preserve it alive” (17:33). The condition of discipleship is this: if you are concerned with the things of this world and try to preserve them, when the end comes you will be eternally lost. What was first spoken in connection with the daily bearing of one's cross to follow Jesus is now connected to the impact of this daily cross-bearing on one's preparedness for the Last Day. (CC pp. 664-665)

Finally, a third parallel exists between Jesus' taking (παραλάβων) Peter, James, and John up the mountain, where they have a glimpse of the coming glory (9:28–36), and one who is taken away (παραλημφθήσεται) into glory while others are left behind (17:34–35). When the Son of Man is revealed, those who have lost their lives through Baptism into his death and resurrection will be taken along up into the glorious life that is his *because he was crucified*. (CC p. 665)

It was necessary for Jesus to set down the order of the kingdom at the end of his Galilean ministry because he was about to turn his face to go to Jerusalem (9:51). He told his disciples about the hard road he must follow and how they will follow after him if they are truly his disciples. He did not want them to be ashamed of him or his teachings when he returned in glory with the Father and the holy angels, for if they were, then *the Son of Man* would be ashamed of them (9:26). These words of warning alert the disciples that there is an order to coming of the kingdom. First, that the kingdom has come in Jesus, his teaching and miracles, his suffering, death, resurrection, and ascension, i.e., the whole of Jesus' movement from heaven to earth, through his ministry, death, burial in the grave, resurrection, and ascension back to heaven. In this sense the kingdom is inaugurated *now*, and so he can say to his disciples in Galilee, “But I say to you truly, there are some of those standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God” (9:27). (He is referring to his kingdom that comes through his death and resurrection and ascension.) (CC p. 665)

But there is also a future dimension to this kingdom, and to participate in that glorious future kingdom, one must understand by faith *the order of the kingdom!* Here in Luke 17, and even more explicitly in Luke 21, Jesus teaches about the need to prepare for that consummation on the Last Day, but his teaching in both of these places could not be fully comprehended by his followers unless the order of the kingdom had already been established at the beginning of his teaching. “The instructions concerning response to this final ‘visitation’ of God are therefore consistent with those required by the present ‘visitation’ through the prophet [Jesus].” (CC p. 665)

**17:22** *the days are coming* – ἐλεύσονται ἡμέραι—See comments at 5:35, where this same expression is used of the period of time after the atonement, resurrection, and ascension (“when the bridegroom is taken away from them”), but before the coming of the Son of Man in judgment. J. Nolland, *Luke 9:21–18:34*, 858, notes: “The coming days here are not those of eschatological (?) judgment as in 21:6, but rather of the absence of what was being experienced by the disciples in the presence of Jesus’ historical ministry.” (CC p. 658)

The days between the first and second comings of Jesus, when the Church waits longingly for His return. (TLSB)

*will desire to see.* In time of trouble, believers will desire to experience the day when Jesus returns in his glory and delivers his people from their distress. (CSB)

When Jesus is no longer physically visible among them, His followers will recall those days when He walked among them and they will eagerly anticipate the day when He returns in glory. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 8, Part 4)

*days of the Son of Man* – μίαν τῶν ἡμερῶν τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου—This refers to the *now* of the kingdom that is present in Jesus during his time on earth (when the bridegroom is with them) or to the day of consummation when he comes in judgment. The “Son of Man” who returns in “his day” has had days (days of his flesh, Heb 5:7) when he is on earth with his glory veiled. The disciples’ longing for what is past is directed to the arrival of *the* day to come. (CC p. 658)

**17:23** *Do not follow them.* Do not leave your work in order to pursue predictions of Christ’s second advent. (CSB)

Some still look for visible signs. (TLSB)

καὶ ἐροῦσιν ὑμῖν ... μὴ ἀπέλθῃτε μηδὲ διώξητε—R. Stein, *Luke*, 439, suggests that this should be understood as a conditional sentence with an “if” inserted at the beginning, thus, “If they will say to you ... do not go away or pursue.” This seems to capture the sense of Jesus’ words. (CC p. 658)

ἰδοὺ ἐκεῖ, [ἧ] ἰδοὺ ὧδε—The antecedent here is “one of the days of the Son of Man,” i.e., the kingdom that first came in Jesus and that is now yet to come in its consummation. (CC p. 658)

In time, people will claim that Jesus has returned, or that His kingdom has been established, or that they know exactly when He is going to return. Such false statements might deceive God’s people. In the decades after Jesus’ death and resurrection, the early Church confronted a number of messianic pretenders. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 8, Part 4)

**17:24** *like the lightning.* His coming will be sudden, unexpected and public (cf. 12:40). (CSB)

The Son of Man’s return will be as evident as lightning that fills the sky. (TLSB)

ἡ ἀστραπή ἀστράπτουσα—This is the language of theophany, as in Ex 19:16–19; Ezek 1:4; Job 37:5; 38:1; Ps 29:3–9. The two other places in Luke where this language is used suggest that Jesus is talking about the end times as both now and not yet. Jesus says to the seventy (-two) that he saw Satan fall “like lightning [ὡς ἀστραπήν] from heaven” (Lk 10:18)—now through the preaching of the Gospel, though Satan is not yet completely vanquished before Judgment Day. In the resurrection, the clothes of the angels

are “dazzling” (24:4; ἀστραπτούση), and this glimpse of eternal glory comes now to the witnesses of Christ’s resurrection. (CC p. 658)

The above overview constructs a context in which to comment on details. In this first section, the clarity of the signs is the issue. The hearer must determine the exact references to the numerous occurrences of “days” (17:22), “one of the days” (17:22), or “day” (17:24). The clearest reference among the three is the final “in his day” when the Son of Man comes like lightning in the heaven (17:24). This refers to his coming in judgment. That leaves the first two uses. What is probably envisioned in the reference to “days will come” (17:22) is the period of the church, between the ascension/Pentecost and the Last Day. When that time comes, the disciples might wish they were again with Jesus during his earthly ministry, that is, during “one of the days of the Son of Man” (17:22). To go back is not possible, so the desire shifts to “see” the future day at the end of the age. (CC pp. 665-666)

*in his day* – ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ αὐτοῦ—Even though this is omitted by some of the earliest manuscripts (P<sup>75</sup> B D), the Nestle-Aland text places it in the text in brackets because of the strong manuscript evidence (⋈ A L W Θ Ψ f<sup>1,13</sup> among others). It demonstrates continuity with the other occurrences of ἡμέρα in this chapter (17:27, 29, 30, 31). (CC p. 659)

**17:25** *he must suffer*. Jesus repeatedly foretold his coming death (5:35; 9:22, 43–45; 12:50; 13:32–33; 18:32; 24:7; see Mt 16:21), which had to occur before his glorious return. (CSB)

As glorious as the Lord’s return will be, deep will also be His humiliation and suffering, which must take place to atone for the sins of the world. (TLSB)

*be rejected* – ἀποδοκιμασθῆναι—This word, along with δεῖ, connects this to Jesus’ first passion prediction in Luke (9:22). ἀποδοκιμάζω also occurs in Jesus’ citation of Ps 118:22 in the parable of the workers in the vineyard (20:17). (CC p. 659)

If we take these three references in this way, every subsequent period in salvation history is covered: the time of Jesus (“one of the days of the Son of Man”), the time of the church (“days will come”), and the time of glory (“in his day”). Understanding these three periods of time in this way helps make clear the general thrust of this section. There will be people *during the time of the church* who will suggest to the disciples that the kingdom is here or there (a recapitulation of Jesus’ words to the Pharisees), and they may be tempted to chase after these false prophets (cf. Mt 24:24). But Jesus warns: No, when the Son of Man comes, it will be as clear as lightning in the heavens. But first he must suffer (Lk 17:25; see above). (CC p. 666)

*by this generation* – ἀπὸ τῆς γενεᾶς ταύτης—See comments at 7:31, where this is described as a technical term for the religious establishment. In the first passion prediction (9:22), Jesus refers to the Sanhedrin (elders, chief priests, and scribes) as those who will reject him. Here he is more inclusive. (CC p. 659)

**17:26-33** *The Examples of Noah and Lot* (CSB)

After his description of the clear signs that will accompany the day of the Son of Man, Jesus now uses two examples from the OT to urge the disciples to prepare now for this final coming. It will not only be clear but sudden, for there are great similarities between the days of Noah and Lot and the days of the Son of Man. People will go on with their daily lives (eat, drink, etc.) as if there were no impending crisis, but all of a sudden destruction will come and it will be too late to repent. So also “it will be on the day when the Son of Man is revealed” (17:30). It will be so sudden that there will be no time to do anything more before the end arrives. If you wait until then to think of preserving your life, you will lose it. Remember

Lot's wife (Gen 19:26) and don't look back. She looked back at Sodom, where all her possessions perished, and she lost her very life. To resist the temptation to look back is part of the cross-bearing of the Christian life in which the Christian suffers with Christ (cf. 9:23–27). But if you have already lost your life by dying and rising with Christ in Baptism and by giving up your devotion to the world and not looking back, you will preserve your life forever. (CC p. 666)

**17:26** *days of the Son of Man* – ἐν ταῖς ἡμέραις τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου—This seems to refer primarily to those days *preceding Jesus' return*, when his glory and his connection with the end-time judgment are veiled, visible only to faith. This is clear from the comparison here to the days of Noah when he built the ark prior to the flood. (CC p. 659)

**17:27** *eating...drinking...marriage* – ἤσθιον, ἔπνον, ἐγάμου, ἐγαμίζοντο—These imperfect verbs describe the ongoing rhythm of everyday life that may distract people from proper preparation for the impending judgment. Another series of imperfects will accomplish the same idea in describing the days of Lot in the next verse (ἤσθιον, ἔπνον, ἠγόραζον, ἐπώλουν, ἐφύτευον, ὠκοδόμου). Taken together they describe what L. T. Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*, 267, calls “pleasures (‘eating and drinking’), relationships (‘marrying and being given in marriage’) or possessions (‘buying, selling, planting, building’).” (CC p. 659)

Going about their lives, thinking “all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation” (2Pt 3:4). (TLSB)

**17:28** *in the days of Lot*. See Ge 18:16–19:28. (CSB)

Judgment of Sodom came while people were absorbed in their business. (TLSB)

**17:29** *Sodom* – ἀπὸ Σοδόμων—Sodom occurs only one other time in Luke's gospel: the final judgment is said to be worse than the destruction of Sodom (10:12). (CC p. 659)

*sulfur rained* – ἔβρεξεν—Following the litany of imperfects, the aorist “it rained” considers this event in its entirety, a forty-day event that is the judgment (indefinite or historical aorist, E. Burton, *Moods and Tenses*, §§ 35, 38). (CC p. 659)

Sudden and inescapable destruction. (TLSB)

**17:30** *Son of Man is revealed*. At Jesus' second coming he will be plainly visible to all (1Co 1:7; 2Th 1:7; 1Pe 1:7, 13; 4:13). (CSB)

On the Last Day, at His return. (TLSB)

ἀποκαλύπτεται—Luke's “is revealed” corresponds to Matthew's “parousia” (24:39; παρουσία). (CC p. 659)

**17:31** *on the housetop*. It was customary to relax on the flat rooftop. When the final hour comes, however, the individual there should not be thinking of going into the house to retrieve some material objects. Matthew and Mark refer similarly to flight at the fall of Jerusalem, and indirectly to the end time (Mt 24:17–18; Mk 13:15), but here the reference is explicitly to Jesus' return (see v. 30; cf. 21:21). (CSB)

The usefulness of goods will have passed. (TLSB)

*not come back* – εἰς τὰ ὀπίσω—This same expression is used in the LXX at Gen 19:26 for Lot’s wife who “looked back.” (CC p. 659)

**17:32** *Lot’s wife*. Example of destructive regret over leaving one’s former life. (TLSB)

**17:33** *whoever loses his life will keep it*. Some will cherish the present and miss life everlasting. (TLSB)

**17:34-35** These are conclusive words, introduced by Jesus’ characteristic “I say to you” and by the movement from “day” to “night” (see textual note on 17:34). The switch from “day” to “night” suggests that the time when one may prepare is now finally ended and also that the event will catch many unprepared, as if they were sleeping. Up until now, the hearer has been prepared for what to expect concerning the signs that will accompany the end—its clarity like lightning and its suddenness as in the days of Noah and Lot. But now Jesus tells what will actually happen to the inhabitants of the world when the end comes. (CC 667)

Some relate this passage to “the rapture”—a term derived from the Latin of 1 Thess 4:17. The theory of the rapture is part of a larger eschatology that has many forms; currently the most popular variation is dispensational premillennialism. According to millennial eschatology, the thousand years (millennium) of Rev 20:1–10 is to be understood as an earthly reign of Christ that begins some time in the future. Prior to that millennium will be a period of tribulation, usually said to be seven years, based on Dan 9:20–27. The theory holds that all Christians on earth will be “raptured” or caught up into the air to be with Christ, though millennialists disagree whether this rapture would be at the start of the seven-year tribulation or halfway through (cf. the forty-two months in Rev 13:5). (CC p. 667)

This theory of a rapture and millennium suffers from many weaknesses and inconsistencies. Perhaps most serious is the misconception that Jesus’ incarnation and ministry was for the purpose of setting up an earthly kingdom, and only the rejection of Jesus by the Jewish people led to his crucifixion and the establishment of the largely Gentile church; God’s original plan did not include the crucifixion and death of Jesus, nor the church age! Obviously the theory fails to understand both testaments of Scripture as a unity centering on Christ’s death and resurrection as the eternal plan of God for the salvation of the whole world (Eph 1:3–14). It also does not take into account OT prophecies of this plan (Isaiah 53; Zech 12:10; Psalm 22; etc.) and the Christian church as the new Israel (Romans 11; Gal 6:16). The binding of Satan referred to in Rev 20:2–3 was accomplished by Jesus during his earthly ministry, as attested by his numerous exorcisms. Jesus himself even speaks of binding Satan in Mt 12:29 and uses δέω, “bind, tie,” the same Greek verb used in Rev 20:2. The “millennium” of Rev 20:1–10 is the church age during which Satan is bound so as not to be able to prevent the proclamation of the Gospel, and the thousand years (ten times ten times ten, one of many *symbolic* numbers in Revelation) represents the complete period of time until the Lord finishes his work on earth through his church and returns to judge the living and the dead. (CC p. 667)

Since the millennial theory with a rapture is not taught in any extended, continuous text of Scripture, it is constructed from short excerpts of diverse texts cut out of their larger contexts and pasted together in the order required by the interpreter’s version of the theory. That is the case with the use of Lk 17:34–35 to support a “rapture” based on 1 Thess 4:17. Note that 1 Thess 4:17 itself speaks of the Christians who are caught up remaining with the Lord *forever*. Therefore, that passage too speaks of the inauguration of the eternal state, not of some event preliminary to an earthly reign of limited duration. (CC p. 667)



In Luke's gospel, Jesus addresses the destruction of the temple and Jerusalem, then the end of the world and the final judgment of all people in 21:5–36. (CC p. 667)

Some will be taken away and others will be left behind. This is equivalent to the separation of the sheep and the goats at the time of judgment (Mt 25:31–46). Those who are taken away ascend to the heavenly place, as when God “took” Enoch (Gen 5:24) and Elijah (2 Ki 2:10–11), whereas those left behind will experience horror as God destroys heaven and earth (cf. Lk 21:33 and commentary on 21:25–36). Jesus is referring to the time when those who have lost their life on earth will preserve it eternally in glory, while those who have sought to preserve their life will lose it (9:24; 17:33). (CC pp. 667-668)

Only some will be taken to God in eternity. Cf Mt 25:31–46. The modern rapture doctrine is based on a misunderstanding of this passage and others. (TLSB)

**17:34** *that night* – ταύτη τῆ νυκτί—Note the switch to “night.” Jesus has been speaking about the “day” throughout this section (17:24, 27, 29, 30, 31). See the commentary below. (CC p. 659)

**17:35** *taken*. Could refer to being “taken to/from destruction” or “taken into the kingdom.” What is clear is that no matter how close two people may be in life, they have no guarantee of the same eternal destiny. One may go to judgment and condemnation, the other to salvation, reward and blessing. (CSB)

παραλημφθήσεται ... ἀφεθήσεται—These two verbs occur in both verses and are theological passives: “one will be taken away” *by God*, and “the other will be left” *by God*. (CC p. 659)

παραλημφθήσεται—This word is used at the transfiguration to describe Jesus taking (παραλαβών) Peter, James, and John up the mountain to pray and where the transfiguration will take place (9:28). (CC p. 660)

**17:37** *Where ... there the vultures will gather*. A proverb. In response to the disciples' question, Jesus explains that these things will take place wherever there are people to whom the event pertains. (CSB)

The Pharisees had asked “when” (v 20). The disciples want a location for the Kingdom, which shows they have not understood. (TLSB)

*corpse ... vultures*. Snappy, ominous answer. The vultures' interest points unmistakably to the corpse, and similarly there will be no doubt about the second coming (cf v 24). (TLSB)

The disciples bring this section to a close by showing, once again, that they have not understood Jesus' teaching. This entire discourse began with the Pharisees asking *when* (πότε) the kingdom of God would come. Now it closes with the disciples asking *where* (ποῦ) the kingdom will come. Jesus returns to his first theme and reiterates to them that they will recognize the coming of the kingdom because it will be abundantly clear to them, as clear as it is when one is looking for a dead body and its location is marked by the vultures hovering over it. That image is similar to those found in Psalm 22: a man with pierced hands and feet (Ps 22:16 [MT 22:17]) surrounded by raging bulls, roaring lions, or encircling dogs (Ps 22:12–13, 16 [MT 22:13–14, 17]). These images find their fulfillment when Jesus' body is nailed to the cross and he is surrounded by hostile enemies; *that is the sign of the coming of the kingdom*. The *place* of the kingdom is *the body of Christ*, and it will remain so in the age of the church—the body of Christ. (CC p. 668)

One is reminded again of Luke 12, where the crowds are exhorted to interpret and understand Jesus and his ministry during this “critical time” (12:56) as easily as they interpret the signs in the heavens (12:54–55). But as the disciples have repeatedly shown, they are *not yet* able to discern the signs. It will be

necessary for the risen Christ to explain the signs to them, using the testimony of the Scriptures (Lk 24:25–27, 44–46). (CC p. 668)

**17:20–37** The kingdom of God will come unexpectedly, but surely, to all. Live in daily repentance rather than put off repentance or take confidence that you can discern the day of Christ's return. Take comfort that we can trust in the Son of Man, who suffered and was rejected for us, so that His Father would not reject us. • Come, Lord Jesus. Take Your people home. Amen. (TLSB)