

LUKE

Chapter 20

The Authority of Jesus Challenged

One day, as Jesus was teaching the people in the temple and preaching the gospel, the chief priests and the scribes with the elders came up 2 and said to him, “Tell us by what authority you do these things, or who it is that gave you this authority.” 3 He answered them, “I also will ask you a question. Now tell me, 4 was the baptism of John from heaven or from man?” 5 And they discussed it with one another, saying, “If we say, ‘From heaven,’ he will say, ‘Why did you not believe him?’ 6 But if we say, ‘From man,’ all the people will stone us to death, for they are convinced that John was a prophet.” 7 So they answered that they did not know where it came from. 8 And Jesus said to them, “Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.”

Luke has reported that Jesus was teaching daily in the temple (19:47–48). Now Luke’s report of this teaching begins (20:1–21:36). It will be composed of a series of discussions and controversies with the religious leaders who are unable “to catch him in [his] word in the presence of the people” (20:26; similarly 20:20). Jesus takes his rightful place in God’s house as the authoritative Teacher of God. But his legitimate claim to be *the* Teacher is seen by the religious leaders as the most serious threat possible to their own (claimed) authority. By taking his stand *in the temple*, Jesus asserts that his authority is that of God himself. Jesus carefully answers each attempt by the Sanhedrin to trap him. In the process, the hearer receives Jesus’ final teaching before the passion narrative begins. (CC p. 753-754)

20:1 The events of 20:1–21:36 all occurred on Tuesday of Passion Week—a long day of controversy. (CSB)

One day. Not specified, but Mark’s parallel accounts (Mk 11:19–20, 27–33) indicate that this day (Tuesday) followed the cleansing of the temple (Monday), which followed the Triumphal Entry (Sunday). (CSB)

Jesus, having cleansed the temple court (see diagram, p 1690), now teaches in it, identifying Himself with it and His Father. (TLSB)

The scene opens with Jesus teaching and proclaiming the Good News in the temple. Luke introduces it with a familiar construction that shows historical continuity, καὶ ἐγένετο, “and it came to pass,” linking this passage with the previous one. The two participial phrases that follow emphasize the *locale* of Jesus’ teaching. It cannot be said too often that the following teachings (Luke 20–21) take place in the *temple*. Divine presence comes to divine presence to signal the profound shift that is about to occur in the cosmos. Luke also repeats that Jesus’ audience is “the people” (τὸν λαόν), i.e., faithful Israel. This provides another line of continuity with what went before. And when he adds that Jesus is “proclaiming the Good News,” Luke shows that Jesus is doing here what he has done all along, for εὐαγγελίζομαι, “proclaim the Good News,” is a Lukan word that occurs at critical points in the narrative. (CC p. 754-755)

The truths of the kingdom of God (cf 4:18, 43; 7:22; 8:1; 9:6; 16:16). (TLSB)

The chief priests, scribes, and elders are the three groups that make up the Sanhedrin, the chief priests representing the Sadducees, the scribes the Pharisees, and the elders the laypeople. From the beginning of Jesus' teaching in the temple, the hearer knows that the religious establishment wants to kill Jesus and that this establishment is the very council of God's people that decides spiritual and legal matters of the highest importance. When Jesus claims the highest authority in Israel, this establishment resents it fiercely. (CC p. 755)

20:2 *Who gave you this authority?* They had asked this of John the Baptist (Jn 1:19–25) and of Jesus early in his ministry (Jn 2:18–22). Here the reference is to the cleansing of the temple, which not only defied the authority of the Jewish leaders but also hurt their monetary profits. The leaders may also have been looking for a way to discredit Jesus in the eyes of the people or raise suspicion of him as a threat to the authority of Rome. (CSB)

The priests and Levites had divine appointment (Lv 8; Nu 1:47–54). Likewise, the Pharisees legitimately taught the people (Mt 23:2). Elders had always counseled God's people. These leaders raise a natural and proper question, but in circumstances that point to their failure to exercise their authority rightly by holding to God's Word. (TLSB)

εἰπὸν ἡμῖν ἐν ποίᾳ ἐξουσίᾳ ταῦτα ποιεῖς, ἢ τίς ἐστὶν ὁ δούς σοι τὴν ἐξουσίαν ταύτην—The Sanhedrin asks Jesus two questions in synonymous parallelism, so they are essentially one and the same question. Both questions are interested in the source, with the first concerned with the origin of his authority, and the second with the “person” who gives him authority (the Father). (CC p. 753)

Jesus has entered his Father's house (2:49). The temple leadership recognizes that Jesus, by his words and actions *in the temple*, is asserting the authority of God himself. Therefore, they put before him a question as to the source of the authority that allows him to teach in the temple. Where does he get his authority—from whom?

L. T. Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*, 308, notes the following about these two questions: “The authorities are clever enough. They are the only ones who could give ‘human authority’ to teach in the Temple. They seem to force Jesus into a claim to ‘divine authority’ that they could use against him on a charge of blasphemy.” (CC p. 755)

“Authority” frames the dialog, with Jesus using the same language as the Sanhedrin in the final verse (20:8): “By what authority I do these things” (ἐν ποίᾳ ἐξουσίᾳ ταῦτα ποιῶ). The hearer knows where Jesus' authority comes from and has been aware of this authority *since the infancy narrative*, where Jesus is called Son of the Most High (1:32), inheritor of the throne of David (1:32), ruler over the house of Jacob (1:33), Son of God (1:35), Savior, and Christ (2:11, 26).

Jesus' authority comes from heaven. The person who gives him his authority is the triune God—of which he himself is a person. The Father and the Spirit audibly and visibly affirmed Jesus' authority at his baptism, where the heavens opened, the Spirit descended *in bodily form*, and the voice of the Father said: “You are my Son, the beloved, in you I am well pleased” (3:21–22). The question of authority leads the hearer to remember all the instances where Jesus' authority was affirmed. Jesus' baptism stands supreme as *the public declaration by the Trinity* that all authority is given to Jesus to fulfill the divine plan of redemption. That authority is first manifested in the temptation in the wilderness (4:6), where Jesus triumphs over the greatest power of evil. Following Jesus' initial flurry of teaching, the people are in “amazement at his teaching, because his word was with authority” (4:32). (CC p. 755)

these things – The reference to “these things” that Jesus does (20:2, 8) may be the temple cleansing (at least in the minds of the Sanhedrin). But it also includes all the teaching and miracles that Jesus has done since his sermon in Nazareth (4:16–30). For in his teaching, Jesus overturned the oral code of the Pharisees, particularly with respect to the laws governing the Sabbath, table fellowship, purity, and kinship. From the beginning, Jesus has directed his teaching against the Pharisees for their hypocrisy and greed (see Luke 12). The Sanhedrin’s focus on Jesus’ teaching is similar to the charges that will be leveled against him by the religious authorities in his trial before Pilate: “He incites the people, *teaching* throughout all Judea, and having begun from Galilee until here” (23:5). (In 20:21 spies of the Sanhedrin will acknowledge to Jesus that “in truth you teach the way of God.”) (CC pp. 755-756)

The issue here is Jesus’ teachings. J. Fitzmyer, *Luke X–XXIV*, 1273, notes: In Mark the *tauta* [“these things”] must include the purging of the Temple. ... But Luke, with his reference to Jesus’ daily teaching in the Temple and with his distancing of the challenge from the foregoing incident (“one day while he was teaching” [v. 1]), puts the main emphasis on Jesus’ teaching. ... the main referent in *tauta* has to be understood as his authority to teach. (CC p. 756)

20:3 To answer a question with a question was a typical rabbinic rhetorical practice. (TLSB)

20:4 *baptism of John ... from heaven, or from men?* By replying with a question, Jesus put the burden on his opponents—indicating only two alternatives: The work of John was either God-inspired or man-devised. By refusing to answer, they placed themselves in an awkward position. (CSB)

The authority of John and Jesus belong together from their births. (TLSB)

from heaven. The hearer has already recalled Jesus’ baptism by John the Baptist. But now Jesus, ever full of surprises, brings John the Baptist into the dialog with the religious establishment. Jesus answers their question with a question, a typical rabbinic ploy. By asking the Sanhedrin to consider whether John’s baptism was from heaven (a reverent circumlocution for God) or whether it was from men, Jesus forces them, the people, and *the hearer of the gospel* to go back and reconsider the *entire gospel*. For John the Baptist—and his cousin Jesus—are either prophets from God who usher in the new era of salvation, or they are false prophets, who should be put to death (Deut 18:20). The people clearly believe that John is a prophet, and the Sanhedrin fears stoning if they say John’s authority is from men. The hearer cannot help but remember the step-parallelism of the infancy narrative, where John is portrayed as the precursor to Jesus, the Messiah. If John the Baptist is a prophet from God, then all the people know that Jesus is greater than John. (CC p. 756)

Perhaps the hearer recalls Jesus’ discourse with John the Baptist’s disciples and the people about his relationship to John (Lk 7:18–35). There Jesus answers the question of John and his disciples as to whether he is “the Coming One” (7:20; cf. 19:38) by performing miracles in fulfillment of the OT (see verses cited at 4:18–19) and teaching the people about the prophetic character of John’s ministry. In the context of that discourse only Luke records something that is prophetic for the rest of Jesus’ ministry: “And all the people and the tax collectors having heard, they acknowledged God as just, being baptized with the baptism of John. But the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected the plan of God for themselves, not being baptized by him” (7:29–30). Within Jesus’ ministry, John’s baptism has already functioned as the measure of whether someone accepts or rejects God’s plan of salvation—in *John and Jesus*. From the beginning, the Pharisees

and lawyers refused to repent and be baptized by John; thus they rejected both John and Jesus, whose way John prepared. They claimed that John was possessed with a demon because he came “not eating bread nor drinking wine” and accused Jesus of being a glutton and drunkard because he came “eating and drinking” (7:33–34). Ironically, according to Deut 21:21, the crime of gluttony and drunkenness leveled against Jesus by his opponents was worthy of stoning—the very same punishment they now fear from the people (cf. Lk 13:34).

Stoning was a punishment for blasphemy (Jn 10:31–33) or false prophecy (Deut 13:1–11). I. H. Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, 725, says: “The penalty for a false prophet was stoning (Dt. 13:1–11 [cf. Deut 18:20]); here the same penalty is inflicted on those who deny the legitimacy of a true prophet, and the people appear as the representatives of the true Israel in threatening to stone unworthy leaders.” (CC p. 757)

But as the hearer knows from Luke 7, Jesus is “guilty” of an even greater “crime,” worthy of crucifixion (Deut 21:22–23)—he is the friend who eats and drinks at table with tax collectors and sinners. (CC pp. 756–757)

20:5 To admit that John was a true prophet would condemn themselves because they had rejected God’s spokesman. (TLSB)

20:6 *will stone us* – Now that Jesus is in Jerusalem, standing as the authoritative teacher in the center of Israel’s worship life in the temple, the stakes are high. The Sanhedrin’s question and Jesus’ counter-question are so serious that their consequences are either life or death—both physical and spiritual. Either the religious establishment will be stoned by the people for saying that John the Baptist is *not* a prophet from God, or they will put Jesus to death for blasphemy and false prophecy. (CC p. 757)

Punishment for blasphemy. (TLSB)

they were convinced – ὁ λαός ... πεπεισμένος γάρ ἐστίν—The perfect participle is singular because ὁ λαός is the subject, but English sense requires the plural translation. On λαός, see comments at 1:10, 17, 77; 18:43. (CC p. 753)

At this moment, the Sanhedrin is on the horns of a dilemma. To answer Jesus’ question by acknowledging that John—and therefore Jesus too—are from God is to admit they are guilty of the ancient crime for which Israel and Judah were sent into exile: ignoring God’s prophets. (E.g., Jer 25:4; 26:5; 29:19; 35:15) But to say that God’s prophets are false (“from men”) is to risk stoning by the people. They choose what is natural for them: ignorance, an expression of their hypocrisy. By refusing to confess the truth, they confess a lie. Hypocrisy comes from fear of confessing unpopular truth, truth that will demand a change in their whole way of living. The Sanhedrin chooses hypocrisy because, from the beginning, this is how they have reacted to Jesus and his messianic claims. Jesus devoted an entire discourse to the hypocrisy of the Pharisees where he warned the disciples, “Beware for yourselves of the leaven, which is hypocrisy, of the Pharisees” (12:1). Jesus grants an opportunity for the Jewish religious establishment to reverse their longstanding rejection of him. But instead, they reject him again in fear (cf. Mark 11:32). This final rejection sets the tone for the rest of Jesus’ teaching in the temple. Everything he will now say during the Great Week (the early church’s term for Holy Week) may be used against him when he is brought to trial. (CC p. 757)

John was a prophet. In contrast to these leaders, John proved faithful and true, including his prophecy about Jesus (3:16). (TLSB)

20:7 They pleaded ignorance, even though it was their duty to give instruction on such basic issues. In a debate, this pushed the question back toward the one who raised it. (TLSB)

20:8 *neither will I tell you* – Jesus does not answer their question directly here because he has already answered it by means of ταῦτα, “these things,” the things that he has done and taught all along, beginning with his Nazareth sermon (4:16–30). That is why Jesus’ response mirrors their own words: “Neither I myself tell you by what authority I do these things” (20:8; ταῦτα ποιῶ). The Sanhedrin must deal with “these things.” They know the answer to their own question concerning Jesus’ authority, and they may even believe that it is true, but they reject it nonetheless. To keep alive their hypocrisy, they must kill him who is the truth, since he is revealing their well-hidden motives. The next parable will prophesy their motives and actions. Jesus knows what they will do and why. (CC pp. 757-758)

Jesus sharply ended the debate because they forfeited any right to have their original question answered. (TLSB)

20:1–8 Jesus would not allow detractors to take away His right to teach in the temple. His teaching still commands authority and priority today over all other teaching. Subject all things to His reign and the wisdom of His Word. Pray for bold faith that rightly honors Christ and His prophets. He claims you as His holy temple, that He may rule your heart in forgiveness, peace, and love. • “ ‘Hosanna in the highest!’ That ancient song we sing; For Christ is our Redeemer, The Lord of heav’n our King. Oh, may we ever praise Him With heart and life and voice And in His blissful presence Eternally rejoice!” Amen. (LSB 443:3) (TLSB)

The Parable of the Wicked Tenants

9 And he began to tell the people this parable: “A man planted a vineyard and let it out to tenants and went into another country for a long while. 10 When the time came, he sent a servant to the tenants, so that they would give him some of the fruit of the vineyard. But the tenants beat him and sent him away empty-handed. 11 And he sent another servant. But they also beat and treated him shamefully, and sent him away empty-handed. 12 And he sent yet a third. This one also they wounded and cast out. 13 Then the owner of the vineyard said, ‘What shall I do? I will send my beloved son; perhaps they will respect him.’ 14 But when the tenants saw him, they said to themselves, ‘This is the heir. Let us kill him, so that the inheritance may be ours.’ 15 And they threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. What then will the owner of the vineyard do to them? 16 He will come and destroy those tenants and give the vineyard to others.” When they heard this, they said, “Surely not!” 17 But he looked directly at them and said, “What then is this that is written: “‘The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone’?”

In each of the previous two major sections of the gospel there have been programmatic pericopes that set the tone for the whole section. (CC p. 761)

In his Galilean ministry (4:14–9:50), Jesus’ sermon at Nazareth (4:16–30) sets the agenda for what is to follow; in Jesus’ journey to Jerusalem (9:51–19:28), his commission of the seventy (-two) (10:1–24) shows that the journey will be catechetical. Both his Nazareth sermon and the commissioning of the seventy (-two) occur at the beginning of these major sections and summarize the major themes of that section: a prophetic Christology of teaching, miracles, rejection, and a commissioning to continue this prophetic ministry. (CC p. 761)

Now that Jesus has arrived at Jerusalem (19:29–40), lamented over her (19:41–44), cleansed the temple (19:45–46), begun his teaching (19:47–48), and rebuffed a questioning of his authority (20:1–8), he tells a parable that is programmatic not only for his Jerusalem teaching (19:47–21:38), but also for his passion (22:1–23:56a), resurrection, and ascension (23:56b–24:53), that is, *for the rest of the gospel* and also for the church (Acts) until his second coming. This parable prophesies his rejection and exaltation within the context of salvation history and includes what is to come as the climax of God’s plan of salvation. It looks back on God’s prophetic intervention in the OT. It is spoken to the people—the faithful remnant (see comments on λαός at 1:68, 77; 7:29; 18:43)—and also within the hearing of the Jewish religious establishment (who understand that it is directed against them [20:19]). As such it will serve to remind *all Israel* of God’s comprehensive program for their redemption. (CC p. 761)

After an introduction (20:9a), the straightforward narration of the parable (20:9b–15a) is followed by an interpretation (20:15b–18) and an application to one group among the hearers (20:19). (CC p. 761)

20:9-15 The owner is God, the vineyard is Israel, the tenants are the religious leaders, the servants are the prophets, and the beloved son is Jesus. The parable’s background fits absentee landlord arrangements of the first century. The point is not the vineyard’s productivity but the caretaker’s actions. (TLSB)

20:9 *tell the people* – The same audience of hearers continues from 20:1–8, i.e., the receptive people (τὸν λαόν) *and* the chief priests, scribes, and elders (the constituency of the Sanhedrin). But Jesus addresses the parable only to *the people*. The religious leaders, though not mentioned explicitly, also hear, for they later acknowledge that the parable was spoken against them (20:19). The “people” who hear this parable (20:9a) represent the same “people,” who for the most part, hear and believe Jesus’ teaching (1:68, 77; 7:29; 18:43). The religious establishment fears these “people” when the parable is over (20:19). Yet to come is the “hour” of the religious leaders, who wield “the power/authority of darkness” in the “hour” of Jesus’ passion (22:53). (CC P. 761)

planted a vineyard – ἐφύτευσεν ἀμπελῶνα—In the OT, a vineyard often represented Israel. (E.g., Is 5:1–7; 27:2; Jer 2:21; Ezek 19:10–14; Hos 10:1–4; Ps 80:8–13) See comments at 13:1–9. Mt 21:33 and Mk 12:1 make this correspondence even more explicit. (CC p. 759)

let it out to tenants – God leased it to Jewish religious establishment, namely, the Sadducees and chief priest in charge of the public ministry in Jerusalem. (CC p. 762)

went into another country – ἀπεδήμησεν—The idea of the master embarking on a long journey is found also in the parable of the talents (Mt 25:14, with this same verb) and in the parable of the minas (Lk 19:12). (CC p. 759)

The parable is allegorical and describes the history of Israel in the same way as the song of the vineyard (Is 5:1–7). God is the Lord of the vineyard, which he has leased to tenants, the Jewish religious establishment, namely, the Sadducees and chief priests in charge of the public temple ministry in Jerusalem and the Pharisees and scribes who govern the peoples’ piety outside Jerusalem. The hearer will note that the chief priests, the scribes, and the foremost of the people (the Sanhedrin) were seeking to destroy Jesus but were reluctant to do so because the people were carefully listening to Jesus’ teaching (19:47). The previous teaching of Jesus has fully developed the prophet Christology (see the excursus “Luke’s Prophet Christology”), which has prepared for this parable.

E.g., Jesus' rejection in Nazareth as the Prophet who comes teaching and healing to set creation free from its bondage (4:16–30); the woes against the Pharisees and scribes concerning the persecution and death of the prophets (11:47–53); and the culmination of this prophetic rejection in Jesus, who must die in Jerusalem like all the prophets before him (13:31–35). (CC p. 762)

This parable is about the rejection of God's emissaries to Israel, which culminates in the rejection of God's beloved Son. (CC pp. 761-762)

20:10 *when the time came* – To collect the rent at harvest. (TLSB)

he sent a servant. This parable (v. 9) is reminiscent of Isa 5:1–7. The servants who were sent to the tenants represent the prophets God sent in former times who were rejected (see Ne 9:26; Jer 7:25–26; 25:4–7; Mt 23:34; Ac 7:52; Heb 11:36–38). (CSB)

The first four stanzas (20:9b–12) retell the history of God's work through the prophets for the salvation of Israel. Every time God sent a prophet to Israel, it created a "critical time," a "right season" (καρῶ; 20:10), because prophets speak for God. They declare his salvific intentions and his judgment upon those who reject him. God supports their preaching through miraculous deeds. The hearer will note that Jesus has just wept over Jerusalem "because you did not know the appointed time of your visitation" (τὸν καιρὸν τῆς ἐπισκοπῆς σου). He will also remember that Jesus exhorted the crowds "to examine this critical time" (καιρὸν; 12:56). Now this parable tests the ability of the people and the religious establishment to discern whether the "critical time" is upon them in the life and ministry of Jesus. Are they able to see that Jesus is speaking this parable about his own rejection in Jerusalem? Will the parable's indictment of their participation in that rejection lead them to repentance? *The critical time is now*, in this final week in Jerusalem, where Jesus is destined to die. (CC p. 762)

δοῶλον – Three slaves represent the OT prophets and can be compared to the three servants in 19:16-23. (CC p. 760)

The three slaves who are sent into the vineyard are not to be identified as three specific prophets. They simply represent God's prophetic activity during the OT era, when the prophets called people to repentance and to show fruits of repentance, but when that call fell so often on deaf ears. (Cf. 1 Ki 19:10, 14; Jer 7:25–26; 25:4; Ezek 2:3–7) Certainly the hearer will recall how John the Baptist was the final prophet of the OT period who called the people to repentance (3:3) and to bear fruits of repentance (3:8). The first fruit of repentance these religious leaders should have shown was submission to John's baptism, which the hearer knows they have not done (7:30). The slaves come with requests from the Lord of the vineyard, who desires fruits of repentance, but the slaves are beaten and sent away (20:10); beaten, treated shamefully, and sent away (20:11); and wounded and thrown out (20:12). In the words of Is 5:7, "He looked for justice, and behold, bloodshed; for righteousness, but behold, a cry!" John prepared the way of the Lord, as did all the prophets who led up to him. The preparatory catechesis is over; now it is time for God's own Son to visit the vineyard. But the abuse suffered by all God's servants will fall upon his Servant: "The reproaches of those who reproached you fell upon me" (Rom 15:3, quoting LXX Ps 68:10 [MT69:10; ET 69:9]). It is the hour for the Son to be killed. (CC pp. 762-763)

give him some of the fruit. In accordance with a kind of sharecropping agreement, a fixed amount was due the landowner. At the proper time he would expect to receive his share. (CSB)

beat him – Symbolizes Israel’s rejection of the prophets. (TLSB)

20:11 *sent another servant* – Note God’s patience. (TLSB)

treated him shamefully – They added insult to the violence. (TLSB)

20:12 Crescendo of abuse. (TLSB)

20:13 *owner of the vineyard* – ὁ κύριος τοῦ ἀμπελῶνος—“The Lord of the vineyard” calls to mind Is 5:7, where “the vineyard of Yahweh of hosts is the house of Israel.” (CC p. 760)

my son, whom I love. The specific reference to the beloved son makes clearer the intended application of the son in the parable to the Son, Jesus Christ (see 3:22; Mt 17:5). (CSB)

Jesus (cf 3:22; 9:35), God’s last and most gracious attempt to win over His people. (TLSB)

τὸν υἱόν μου τὸν ἀγαπητόν—“The beloved” stands in apposition to “my son.” Both phrases allude to Jesus’ baptism and transfiguration. See comments at 3:22 and 9:35. (CC p. 760)

20:14 *they said to themselves* – διελογίζοντο πρὸς ἀλλήλους—This is a durative imperfect which suggests that their decision was not immediate but came after a lengthy period of deliberation. The end result of such deliberation by Jesus’ opponents is always evil. See the similar use of this verb in a parable in 12:17, and see the textual note and comments at 5:21–22. (CC p. 760)

inheritance may be ours. Because the son/heir would be dead. They failed to reckon with any subsequent action by the owner. (TLSB)

ὁ κληρονόμος—This also recalls Isaac, who is both the beloved son and the heir (Gen 21:10). (Cf. Rom 4:13–14; 8:17; Gal 3:29; 4:1, 7, 30; Heb 1:2; 6:17; 11:7)

20:15 *they threw him out of the vineyard and killed him* – Jesus’ crucifixion outside Jerusalem. (TLSB)

καὶ ἐκβαλόντες αὐτὸν ἔξω τοῦ ἀμπελῶνος ἀπέκτειναν—Mk 12:8 has a different order: “And they took him and killed him and cast him out of the vineyard.” Luke’s order preserves a possible reference to Jesus’ crucifixion outside the city walls (cf. Jn 19:17; Heb 13:12–13). Cf. L. T. Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*, 306; R. Stein, *Luke*, 493; for an opposing opinion see I. H. Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, 731; J. Fitzmyer, *Luke X–XXIV*, 1284–85; and J. Nolland, *Luke 18:35–24:53*, 952. (CC P. 760)

See comments at 10:24 on the seventy (-two) being sent out as sacrificial lambs. The hearer would also know that Stephen’s martyrdom took place “outside the city” (Acts 7:58). (CC p. 760)

And that is exactly what happens when the Lord of the vineyard sends his Son, the beloved. In the “beloved Son” there are echoes from both the OT era and the ministry of Jesus. The near sacrifice of Isaac, Abraham’s beloved son, foreshadowed Christ’s bloody sacrifice (Gen 22:2, 12, 16 [LXX]) But the most significant echoes are from the gospel itself. This is the Son of whom the Father said at his baptism, “You are my Son, the beloved, in you I am well pleased” (3:22). The Father repeated this in similar language at the transfiguration: “This is my Son, the Chosen One; listen to him!” (9:35). The beloved Son first was baptized in the waters of the Jordan and then received his anointing by the Spirit to carry out the plan of the Trinity; now the same beloved

Son, the heir, will undergo the “bloody baptism” of the cross outside the vineyard (see the excursus “Baptism in Luke-Acts”). “For the bodies of those animals whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest as a sacrifice for sin are burned outside the camp. So Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood” (Heb 13:11–12). (CC p. 763)

what then will the owner of the vineyard do – Jesus shatters the assumption of the owner’s permanent absence. (TLSB)

τί οὖν ποιήσει αὐτοῖς ὁ κύριος τοῦ ἀμπελῶνος—Jesus asks the same question concerning the Lord of the vineyard that the Lord of the vineyard himself asked (Lk. 20:13). Structurally, this is not part of the parable but is the beginning of Jesus’ interpretation. (CC p. 760)

The meaning of the parable is clear. Jesus is talking about himself! But at this point, he breaks off the parable and interprets the significance of his own death for salvation history. He begins with a question: “What, therefore, shall the Lord of the vineyard do to them?” (τί οὖν ποιήσει; 20:15b). This question rephrases the earlier question the Lord of the vineyard put to himself (τί ποιήσω; 20:13). Luke uses a similar expression at 3:10, 14; 10:25; 12:17; 16:4; 18:18 (cf. 15:17–19), and more importantly, there is also a link to Is 5:4 (LXX) where God asks, “What more shall I do [τί ποιήσω] for my vineyard that I have not done in it?” The answer in Isaiah is clear: the fruitless vineyard that has become a thicket of thorns must be destroyed (5:5–6). Equally clear is Jesus’ answer to his own question: “He will come and destroy these farmers and will give the vineyard to others” (Lk 20:16). The hearer of Jesus’ words know that Jesus was weeping over the city of Jerusalem and prophesying its destruction in A.D. 70, when the Jewish religious establishment would come to an end (19:41–44). The hearer also knows that, after Pentecost, the vineyard will not be *leased* to new farmers but will be *given* to them (Lk 12:32). These new farmers do not include the previous abusive tenants. They begin with the twelve apostles who, through their commission (9:1–6; 22:21–38), reconstitute the church as the new Israel. (CC p. 763)

20:16 *give the vineyard to others*. Not the old religious establishment (cf Ac 13:46–47). (TLSB)

he will come...will destroy...will give – ἐλεύσεται ... ἀπολέσει ... δώσει—The three future tenses indicate that Jesus’ interpretation will have a future application. (CC p. 760)

surely not now – Expression used frequently by Paul, but only here in the Gospels. (TLSB)

μὴ γένοιτο—This is the only place in the gospels where this expression occurs. (It occurs thirteen times in the Pauline corpus.) It reflects the Hebrew *לֹא־יִהְיֶה*, which sometimes is used by people who are not entirely sincere (e.g., Gen 44:7, 17). (CC p. 760)

The people’s response is fear. “Let it not happen” (20:16) probably refers to all three events: the killing of the Son, the killing of the farmers, and the transfer of the vineyard to others. But it must happen, for the inexorable plan of God calls for his eschatological prophet to die in Jerusalem. (CC p. 764)

20:17 *is written* – Jesus cites Ps 118:22 in speaking of the Messiah’s rejection, but He also points to the resurrection. The events of the next few days will answer His question. (TLSB)

τὸ γεγραμμένον τοῦτο—This is Luke’s unique formula for introducing an OT citation (cf. 18:31; 21:22; 22:37; 24:44). (CC p. 760)

Jesus looks at (ἐμβλέψας) the people to communicate nonverbally that these words are *for them*. His eyes see what lies ahead for himself and its meaning for them. Jesus looked upon his disciples just before the Sermon on the Plain for the same reason (6:20): he was about to tell *them* how God’s blessing paradoxically comes through suffering—his own suffering on their behalf. They would be joined to him, and their cruciform lives would imitate his. Jesus, the chief catechist, looks with enlightened eyes at the crowds because he knows the end of the story and the meaning of the Scriptures (24:25–27, 44–49). But do they? He asks them in the form of a question, “What, therefore, is this that is written, ‘The stone that the builders rejected [ἀπεδοκίμασαν], this has become the head of the corner?’” (20:17). Jesus gives no answer, because the events of his life in the next few days will provide the answer. The people and the Jewish religious establishment already have had the answer for a long time in the Scriptures. After the resurrection, Jesus will chide the Emmaus disciples as “foolish and slow in heart to believe in all the things that the prophets spoke” (24:25). They should have known that according to Moses and all the prophets, it was “necessary that the Christ suffer these things and enter into his glory” (24:26). (CC p. 764)

rejected – ἀπεδοκίμασαν—This is the same word used in the first prediction of Jesus’ passion (Lk 9:22). (CC p. 760)

the capstone. Jesus, rejected by official Israel, is exalted by God, who builds His Church on Jesus as the “Church’s one foundation” (LSB 644:1). (TLSB)

λίθον ὃν ἀπεδοκίμασαν οἱ οἰκοδομοῦντες, οὗτος ἐγενήθη εἰς κεφαλὴν γωνίας—Luke does not include the next verse (Ps 118:23), which both Matthew (21:42) and Mark (12:11) have: “This was the Lord’s doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes.” (CC p. 760)

The people who heard Jesus’ words and the community that received them as gospel easily identified the stone as Jesus and the builders as the leaders of the Jewish religious establishment (cf. Peter’s use of Ps 118:22 at Acts 4:11). Jesus uses the psalms to support his upcoming rejection by the Sanhedrin. And Jesus links this foreshadowing of his own death with his first prediction of his passion by using the same word, ἀποδοκιμάζω, “reject,” to describe the Son of Man’s rejection by the Sanhedrin (representing “the elders and chief priests and scribes”; 9:22). Up until his Galilean prediction, Luke used the language of rejection to describe Jesus’ destiny in Jerusalem, because this is what must happen to all prophets, especially God’s final, eschatological prophet (see the excursus “Luke’s Prophet Christology”). However, the rejection of this Prophet is different. What is so extraordinary about Jesus’ imminent crucifixion is that *his rejection is the means by which he will become the cornerstone* and is therefore a reference to his glory. This is the culmination of the Great Reversal theme that runs through Luke (see comments on 1:46–55): the stone’s rejection by the builders is the stone’s exaltation as the head of the corner. (CC p. 764)

J. Fitzmyer, *Luke X–XXIV*, 1282, describes the “head of the corner”: “*Kephale gonias*, lit. ‘(the) head of (the) corner,’ designated in antiquity the stone used at a building’s corner to bear the weight or stress of the two walls. It would have functioned somewhat like a ‘keystone’ or ‘capstone’ in an arch or other architectural form. It was the stone which was essential or crucial to the whole structure.” See also R. Stein, *Luke*, 493; I. H. Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, 732; and J. Nolland, *Luke 18:35–24:53*, 953. (CC p. 764)

God’s glory is manifested in the rejection of God’s Son. This also affirms what Jesus predicted in his first passion prediction, that the Son of Man will “on the third day be raised” (9:22). The theme of the Great Reversal first appeared in the Magnificat (1:52–53) and has reappeared throughout the gospel (13:30; 14:11; 18:14). Jesus himself is the icon of reversal (cf. Phil 2:5–

11). Note again the order of suffering before glory in Jesus' revealing question to his disciples: "Was it not necessary that the Christ *suffer* these things *and enter into his glory*?" (24:26). (CC p. 765)

At the very beginning of the gospel, Simeon predicted: "Behold, this child is destined for the fall and resurrection of many in Israel, and for a sign spoken against" (2:34). Throughout the ministry of Jesus, the hearer has watched this come true as those whom one would most expect to receive Jesus (the religious leaders who knew the prophecies of the OT [7:30]) reject him instead, while those who seem least likely to believe that Jesus was bringing God's kingdom (the tax collectors and sinners [7:29]) receive him in faith. To accent this irony, Jesus restates the consequences for those who strike the stone, that is, Jesus himself. Jesus and the kingdom he brings—a kingdom that reverses the values and wisdom of the world—will become a stumbling block to some ("everyone who falls on that stone will be dashed to pieces") and to others a destructive meteor ("on whomsoever it falls, it will crush him"; 20:18). (CC p. 765)

Most commentators also note a close correspondence to a saying from the rabbis in *Midrash Esther* 3:6: "If a stone falls on a pot, woe to the pot! If the pot falls on the stone, woe to the pot! Either way, woe to the pot!" See R. Stein, *Luke*, 493–94; I. H. Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, 732; J. Fitzmyer, *Luke X–XXIV*, 1286; C. Talbert, *Reading Luke*, 189; and J. Nolland, *Luke 18:35–24:53*, 953. (CC p. 765)

20:18 will crush him. As a pot dashed against a stone is broken, and as one lying beneath a falling stone is crushed, so those who reject Jesus the Messiah will be doomed (see Isa 8:14; cf. Da 2:34–35, 44; Lk 2:34). (CSB)

Jesus uses OT imagery to speak of the inevitable judgment. The image of the stone is twofold: one may stumble over it or be crushed by it. All who reject Christ will feel its sharpness and pain. (TLSB)

Everyone will be broken or crushed. Those who believe in him, disciples, must fall into the brokenness of repentance in order to be raised again as new beings, living stones in Christ, the temple of God. But upon unbelievers comes the crushing blow of judgment. The hearer would recall that Jesus had just prophesied that "they will dash you to the ground and your children in you, and they will not leave a stone upon a stone within you, because you did not know the appointed time of your visitation" (19:44), a reference to the stones of the buildings in Jerusalem that crushed inhabitants in the destruction of the city in A.D. 70. Those who stumble over Jesus will receive the judgment precipitated by rejection of him, and when the stone falls on them they will be utterly crushed.

Perhaps Jesus is also recalling another passage from Isaiah: "And he will become a sanctuary, and a stone of offense, and a rock of stumbling to both houses of Israel, a trap and a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. And many in them [the two houses] shall stumble; they shall fall and be broken; they shall be snared and captured" (Is 8:14–15; cf. also Dan 2:34–35, 44–45). (CC p. 765)

The hearer knows that Jesus' crucifixion will become the ultimate stumbling block, as St. Paul relates to the Corinthians: "We preach Christ crucified—a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles" (1 Cor 1:23) and to the Romans: "They have stumbled over the stumbling stone, as it is written, 'Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone that will make men stumble, a rock that will make them fall; and he who believes in him will not be put to shame' " (Rom 9:32–33, citing Is 28:16 and 8:14; cf. 1 Pet 2:8). (CC pp. 765-766)

20:9–18 By parable and psalm, Jesus warns against rejecting the Messiah. God’s mission in Christ will succeed; we reject it at our great peril. Despite all opposition, God will build His Church on the crucified and resurrected Jesus. • O God, grant that we may always build our heavenly hope on the one sure cornerstone You have provided, our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. (TLSB)

Paying Taxes to Caesar

19 The scribes and the chief priests sought to lay hands on him at that very hour, for they perceived that he had told this parable against them, but they feared the people. **20** So they watched him and sent spies, who pretended to be sincere, that they might catch him in something he said, so as to deliver him up to the authority and jurisdiction of the governor. **21** So they asked him, “Teacher, we know that you speak and teach rightly, and show no partiality, but truly teach the way of God. **22** Is it lawful for us to give tribute to Caesar, or not?” **23** But he perceived their craftiness, and said to them, **24** “**Show me a denarius. Whose likeness and inscription does it have?**” They said, “Caesar’s.” **25** He said to them, “**Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.**” **26** And they were not able in the presence of the people to catch him in what he said, but marveling at his answer they became silent.

20:19 *teachers of the law.* The “scribes.” For their opposition to Jesus see 5:30; 9:22; 19:47; 22:2; 23:10. (CSB)

Some of the same opponents as in 19:47. (TLSB)

οἱ γραμματεῖς—These scribes are leaders of the Pharisees and represent the Pharisaic party on the Sanhedrin (see the excursus “The Opponents of Jesus in Luke”). (CC p. 760)

sought to lay hands on him – They cannot because, again, the people support Jesus (cf 18:43; 20:6). (TLSB)

From the moment Jesus entered the holy city of Jerusalem, the scribes and chief priests were seeking an opportunity to seize him. His teaching in the temple—*particularly this parable*—confirmed how dangerous Jesus was for them and how important it was to “lay hands on him” (20:19). But they were equally aware that many believed his teaching, and they were afraid to arrest Jesus because of how the people might react (cf. 19:48). More importantly, these religious leaders were fully aware that Jesus told this parable against them. They saw their fleeting place in Jesus’ reading of salvation history. They even may have been aware that Jesus’ reading was in accordance with the Scriptures. Jesus spoke the parable as a warning call to repentance and faith in him who would become the “head of the corner” (20:17). In the posture of unbelief and rejection, the parable’s application to them was Law (20:16, 18). (CC p. 766)

Jesus made it clear in the previous parable that the religious establishment of Israel will be guilty of killing him and that after his rejection and death he will be exalted and avenged. And the parable ends with the evangelist recording that “the scribes and the chief priests were seeking to lay hands on him in that very hour, but they feared the people, for they knew that he spoke this parable against them” (20:19). Thus, at this point in Jesus’ teaching in the temple, he has claimed that his authority is from God, pointing to his ministry and that of John the Baptist to support this fact. Jesus then narrated a climactic parable that describes *in symbolic language* what will take place in the coming week. He has pushed his antagonists to the point of no return. The hearer

knows that Jesus' opponents are members of the leading council in Israel, the Sanhedrin, made up of chief priests (Sadducees), scribes (Pharisees), and elders. As the narrative unfolds, they will become key players in Jesus' passion, trials, and death. The hearer might think that there is little left for Jesus to do but proceed to his death, and the parable of the workers in the vineyard could lead directly to Jesus' passion. (CC p. 770)

But Luke includes two extended discourses of Jesus before the passion narrative begins at 22:1. These discourses are important for understanding Jesus' passion. The first discourse is related to the theme of Jesus' teaching that began at 20:1, "conflict with the religious establishment in the temple." It is the final section of controversy in the gospel, and it is shaped by the evangelist to accent some of his key themes in Luke-Acts. These discussions with the religious establishment of Jerusalem (20:20–21:4) include Jesus' brief reflection on the widow's mite (21:1–4), which is more closely related to his discussion with the Sadducees and scribes than to his final extended discourse, whose theme is "sayings and signs of the end times" (21:5–38). (CC p. 771)

20:20-26 In these five sections, it important to be mindful of the protagonist and antagonist(s). Even though the Pharisees are not mentioned by name, *these discussions are really against them*. The scribes are *Pharisaic scribes* (see the excursus "The Opponents of Jesus in Luke"), and it is important for Jesus to respond to the hypocrisy of the Pharisees by warning them and by instructing his disciples not to fall into the same sin. Jesus charged the lawyers (part of the Pharisaic block) with the most serious offense: they "took away the key of knowledge" (11:52) from the people. This "key" is "the key of David" (Is 22:22; Rev 3:7), who is the Messiah; he exercises the office of the keys himself (Is 22:22; Rev 1:18) and through his apostles (Mt 16:19). The Pharisees know from the Scriptures the truth concerning the Messiah. But they abused the key by locking the kingdom instead of opening it: "You yourselves did not enter in, and those entering in you prevented" (Lk 11:52). This entire section began with a remarkable display of hypocrisy when the Sanhedrin feigned ignorance concerning the origins of John the Baptist's authority (20:7). Now the section concludes with comments by Jesus aimed at their teachings, which shut people out from the way of salvation. Jesus' temple teaching repeats *in a new way* the same teachings against the scribes, Pharisees, and lawyers that are recorded in Luke 11–12. (CC p. 771)

20:20 *sent spies* – ἀπέστειλαν—No subject is given in this passage for those who sent the spies. The nearest logical antecedent is the scribes and chief priests in the previous verse, who knew that Jesus spoke the parable of the workers in the vineyard against them. This makes sense, for both the Sadducees (chief priests) and scribes are Jesus' chief antagonists in 20:20–47. (CC p. 768)

spies – ἐγκαθέτους—BAGD gives "hired to lie in wait" for this rare and colorful word, citing Josephus, *War* 2.27 (2.2.5); 6.286 (6.5.2), and Job 31:9. (CC p. 768)

Luke provides an introduction (20:20) that sets the tone for the entire discussion (20:20–21:4). The "spies" sent by the Sanhedrin resemble Pharisees as depicted earlier: the Sanhedrin is "watching closely" (παρατηρέω; 20:20), the same word used of similar activity by scribes and Pharisees at 6:7 and Pharisees at 14:1. Luke describes the spies as "hypocritically pretending themselves to be righteous" (ὑποκρινομένους ἑαυτοὺς δικαίους εἶναι), using a verbal form related to the noun for "hypocrisy" (cf. 12:1). The phrase is reminiscent of previous descriptions of the Pharisees at 16:15 and 18:9–12. The intent of the spies also suggests the nefarious plans of the Pharisees and recalls earlier plans (6:11; 11:53–54; 19:47): they want "to deliver [παραδοῦναι] him to the rule and the authority of the governor" (20:20). Jesus had revealed their secret intent in parabolic form in 20:9–19. The governor (τοῦ ἡγεμόνος) is Pontius Pilate. He has already

appeared in the narrative at 13:1 as the ruthless ruler who ordered his soldiers into the temple to kill the Galileans. (CC pp. 771-772)

might catch him – ἐπιλάβωνται—In the sense of “catch, ensnare,” the verb takes a double genitive: “to capture someone in or by means of something” (cf. BAGD 2 a). The verb occurs again in 20:26 with a similar double genitive. (CC p. 768)

to deliver him – παραδοῶναι—This is part of Luke’s vocabulary of betrayal. It occurs in a result clause (ὥστε with the infinitive) to express the intentions of the religious authorities. The active voice here indicates that the scribes and chief priests are now actively fulfilling the plan of God by seeking Jesus’ death. See comments on previous passives at 9:43b–45. (Cf. A. A. Just Jr., *The Ongoing Feast*, 121–27.) (CC p. 768)

jurisdiction of the governor. Fearing to take action themselves, the Jewish religious leaders hoped to draw from Jesus some statement that would bring action from the Roman officials and remove him from his contact with the people. (CSB)

Unable to overcome Jesus by themselves, they turn to the Romans’ power. (TLSB)

20:21 *teacher* – διδάσκαλε—Jesus’ opponents often use this title for him; it appears three times in this section (also 20:28, 39). See comments at 2:46 and 7:40. (CC p. 768)

In Lk, only strangers and critics use this title for Jesus (vv 28, 39). (TLSB)

show no partiality – οὐ λαμβάνεις πρόσωπον—Literally “you do not take up a face.” This represents the Hebrew idiom פָּנֵי אִשָּׁה לֹא יִקַּח and means “you do not show favoritism,” “you do not take into consideration the identity or reputation of the other person when you teach God’s way.” (CC p. 768)

The controversy begins with an example of the peacockery of the Pharisees, *and of their hypocrisy*. They feign flattery as easily as they feigned ignorance (20:7). But just as their ignorance showed that Jesus’ authority is from God, now their flattery shows that Jesus’ teaching is true. Their hypocrisy notwithstanding, they acknowledge publicly *in the temple before all the people* that Jesus teaches correctly, that he shows no partiality, and that “*in truth you teach the way* [τὴν ὁδόν] *of God*” (20:21). Again, ὁ ὁδός, “the way,” is catechetical language for the entire plan of salvation from John’s preparation through Jesus’ fulfillment (see comments at the Benedictus [1:76–79]). Here the religious *teachers* and rulers acknowledge that Jesus’ catechesis is from heaven and from God. In doing so, they indirectly acknowledge that Jesus’ authority is from heaven, something they were unwilling to do at the start of Jesus’ temple teaching (20:1–8). This is an extraordinary admission by the religious leaders and shows the desperate position in which they now find themselves. They realize that the stakes are raised. Jesus’ claim of divine authority contradicts theirs, and there is not enough room in the temple for both. The Sanhedrin must find a new charge against Jesus and eliminate him or else face elimination themselves. (CC p. 772)

They flatter Jesus to entrap Him in a bold statement. (TLSB)

20:22 *lawful.* Jewish religious law. (TLSB)

tribute to Caesar. To agree to the taxes demanded by Caesar would disappoint the people, but to advise no payment would disturb the Roman officials. The questioners hoped to trap Jesus with this dilemma. (CSB)

A Roman-imposed poll tax, detested by the Jews, because it marked them as subjects of Rome. If Jesus says yes, He could lose the support of the people; if He says no, His opponents would have a charge to take before Pilate. (TLSB)

Καίσαρι—This is the third time Caesar, the title for the emperor (here it is Tiberius), has appeared in Luke’s narrative. Caesar was mentioned at Jesus’ birth (2:1; Augustus) and at the beginning of John’s ministry (3:1; Tiberius). (CC p. 768)

Therefore, the hearer should be listening intently for the various charges that might be laid against Jesus. These Pharisaic scribes attempt to trap him in the offense of treason against the nation. Their question is clever and takes a page from Jesus’ own question to them concerning John the Baptist (20:4): they attempt to place Jesus in a no-win situation. The question, “Is it permissible for us to give a tax to Caesar or not?” (20:22), cannot be answered without angering someone. If Jesus answers yes, the people of Israel who are supportive of him might turn against him, for they despise paying taxes to the pagan Gentile whose military forces occupy their country. If Jesus answers no, then he opens himself up to the charge of rebellion against the political authorities. (Jesus’ opponents will falsely accuse him of this in his first trial before Pilate: “This man we found subverting our nation and preventing tribute taxes to be given to Caesar” [23:2].) Already now we see how the Sanhedrin will use secular political power to carry out their plans. (CC p. 772)

20:24 *a denarius.* A Roman coin worth about a day’s wages. (CSB)

20:25 One’s loyalty to God can exist with loyalty to earthly authority, but the state’s claims can never usurp God’s claims. (TLSB)

to God the things are God’s. Luke says that Jesus perceives their cunning, another example of Jesus’ divine knowledge of even the thoughts of the opposition (cf. 5:22; 6:8). Jesus counters with a simple yet profound response. He has them condemn themselves by asking for a denarius that bears the image and inscription (εἰκόνα καὶ ἐπιγραφήν) of the emperor. The inscription would read, “Tiberius Caesar, Son of the Divine Augustus, Augustus.” “Not only the image of a face but also the designations ‘divine’ and ‘augustus’ bring the coinage into the realm of idolatry. The fact that they had a coin to produce shows that they used the currency and therefore were as much implicated by its suggestions of idolatry as if they paid the tax.” Jesus portrays publicly the hypocrisy of his questioners. Since they hold in their very purses the image and inscription of Caesar, they must then agree that it is permissible to give back to Caesar what they themselves use in their daily transactions, thus “give back the things of Caesar to Caesar” (20:25). Since money is coined by the authority of the state (instituted as God’s servant), then the state has the right to govern financial concerns. (CC p. 773)

But Jesus adds to this imperative about obligations to *human* authorities a word that speaks to the heart of the matter of people’s obligations *under God*. By shifting the discussion from *coram hominibus* to *coram Deo*, Jesus sums up his entire life and ministry: “give back ... the things of God to God” (20:25b). Jesus turns the clever questioning of his opponents into an opportunity to show them that *as the Son of God* he is giving back to God the creation *in a restored condition*. Jesus is the Creator of all things. He has taken on flesh to re-create his creation through death and resurrection, to begin a new creation. Jesus, to whom all things belong, is about to give back to God what rightfully belongs to him: all of humanity—upon whom had been stamped *God’s*

image—and all of creation. God’s ownership of the entire creation is the foundation for stewardship. It calls for the kind of radical obedience and faithfulness that only Jesus is capable of accomplishing. To give back the things of God to God is to return to the Lord all that belongs to him: the gifts of creation and the new creation. Questions about paying taxes pale into insignificance. Consider how this applies to Jesus’ statements about discipleship that sound so harsh: one must be willing to give up *everything*, since all belongs to God (12:32–34). You cannot serve two masters (16:13). The call to be a catechumen is a call to complete devotion to God. (CC p. 773)

20:26 *were not able...catch him* – ἐσίγησαν—This is an ingressive aorist, “they became silent.” This is similar to the response by the lawyers and Pharisees after Jesus heals on the Sabbath and questions them about it (14:4). (CC p. 768)

Luke began this scene with the Sanhedrin closely watching Jesus and then sending spies to “catch him in [his] word” (20:20; ἐπιλάβωνται αὐτοῦ λόγου) so as to deliver him to the secular authorities. They likely had complete confidence that they would succeed. The evangelist now concludes this account with a statement of their utter failure, for “they were not able to catch him in [his] word *in the presence of the people*” (20:26; ἐπιλαβέσθαι αὐτοῦ ῥήματος ἐναντίον τοῦ λαοῦ). Jesus’ opponents immediately realized that they were defeated, and their fear of the people still holds (20:19). That they marvel shows how devastating his response was for them. They thought they had him in their grasp, but he turned the tables on them, caught them in their hypocrisy, and then taught them something about the nature of his entire life and ministry. Jesus’ opponents had no option but silence. (CC pp. 773-774)

Even his opponents admit His victory as they retreat in silence. (TLSB)

20:19–26 Jesus outwits His opponents and teaches the proper relationship between earthly authority and God. Not even the legitimate claims of government usurp our loyalty to God. Jesus’ perfect allegiance to His Father brought the state’s condemnation, that He might forgive our divided allegiance. • Lord, grant that we may serve You faithfully as citizens in this world. Amen. (TLSB)

Sadducees ask about the Resurrection

27 There came to him some Sadducees, those who deny that there is a resurrection, **28** and they asked him a question, saying, “Teacher, Moses wrote for us that if a man’s brother dies, having a wife but no children, the man must take the widow and raise up offspring for his brother. **29** Now there were seven brothers. The first took a wife, and died without children. **30** And the second **31** and the third took her, and likewise all seven left no children and died. **32** Afterward the woman also died. **33** In the resurrection, therefore, whose wife will the woman be? For the seven had her as wife.” **34** And Jesus said to them, “**The sons of this age marry and are given in marriage, 35 but those who are considered worthy to attain to that age and to the resurrection from the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage, 36 for they cannot die anymore, because they are equal to angels and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection. 37 But that the dead are raised, even Moses showed, in the passage about the bush, where he calls the Lord the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob. 38 Now he is not God of the dead, but of the living, for all live to him.**” **39** Then some of the scribes answered, “Teacher, you have spoken well.” **40** For they no longer dared to ask him any question.

This second controversy introduces the Sadducees for the first and only time in Luke’s narrative (cf. Acts 4:1; 5:17; 23:8). The chief priests came from this party, which claimed as their ancestor

the high priest under David, Zadok (1 Ki 1:26); “Sadducee” means “Zadokite.” The party also included laypeople. Sadducees came from wealthy and privileged families in Jerusalem. Religiously they were completely devoted to the temple cult, but sociologically they were cut off from the rest of the people. Many of them were attracted to Hellenism. They were considered theological liberals because they denied the resurrection and the existence of angels. They held to the written code of the law, especially the Pentateuch, because of the sacrificial instructions contained there, but considered the oral code an aberration. Thus, they were theologially opposed to the views of the Pharisees (scribes) regarding the oral law, doctrines such as the resurrection, and their stance toward the Greek and Roman culture. Outside of their implication in the death of Jesus during his trials, the Sadducees/chief priests play a very minor role in Luke’s gospel. The teaching of Jesus could easily have moved from the question of paying taxes to Caesar (the secular king) to Jesus’ discussion of the Messiah being David’s Son (the king of Israel). But instead, there intervenes this encounter with the Sadducees. What is the point? (CC p. 774)

20:27 Sadducees. An aristocratic, politically minded group, willing to compromise with secular and pagan leaders. They controlled the high priesthood at this time and held the majority of the seats in the Sanhedrin. They did not believe in the resurrection or an afterlife, and they rejected the oral tradition taught by the Pharisees (Josephus, *Antiquities*, 13.10.6.). (CSB)

In Lk, mentioned only here. (TLSB)

First, and in some ways most important for Luke’s narrative, this controversy between Jesus and the Sadducees has its strongest *effect on the scribes*. At the beginning of Luke’s account (20:27) the Sadducees are the main characters and the issue is important to them (whether or not there is a resurrection). But the narrative concludes with *the scribes* no longer daring to ask him anything (20:40).

There are two possibilities for the subject of ἐτόλμων, “were daring”: the Sadducees (last referred to in 20:34) or the scribes (the closest antecedent [20:39]). One should ordinarily opt for the closest antecedent (the scribes), even though the Sadducees are the main characters at the beginning of the narrative. J. Fitzmyer, *Luke X–XXIV*, 1307, accepts the scribes as the antecedent. But L. T. Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*, 314, chooses the Sadducees, since they are the main characters in the story. J. Nolland, *Luke 18:35–24:53*, 968, notes that Mark’s “nobody” becomes an ambiguous “they” and suggests it is uncertain, although the Sadducees probably are in the mind of the evangelist. (CC p. 774)

And from this point on, the scribes are the chief antagonists: they would be more interested in the exegetical point of 20:45–47 than would the Sadducees;

Curiously, L. T. Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*, 314, who does not see the scribes as the subject of 20:40, does see them become the indirect object of Jesus’ sayings about the Messiah as the Son of David at 20:41. Once the scribes enter at 20:39, they remain in view throughout the rest of the narrative. Even when Jesus addresses the disciples at 20:45, the scribes are the object of Jesus’ warnings. (CC p. 775)

Jesus’ warnings to the disciples are against *the scribes*, not the Sadducees (20:45–47); and the warning about the widow’s mite (21:1–4) recalls earlier suggestions that the scribes/Pharisees are “lovers of money” (16:14; cf. 12:13–34; 16:1–31; 18:18–30). Once the scribes have appeared in this temple-teaching narrative, they remain in view throughout. Even when the question is put by Sadducees, the (Pharisaic) scribes are the chief opponents. This reflects the fact that the

Sadducees' party and teaching are not so serious a threat to the teaching of Jesus and God's plan of salvation. Their influence is limited—spatially (Jerusalem) and temporally (until A.D. 70). The Pharisees are Jesus' most serious opponents, for they teach a completely different way, what they believe is an alternate path to salvation, while *at the same time* believing in the resurrection and the existence of angels. They could quite easily become his disciples—as some of them did (Acts 15:5). Therefore, Jesus must also set down firm teachings to counter any tendency they might have to go back to their Pharisaic ways *after coming to faith*. The hypocrisy and greed of the Pharisees are dangerous to Jesus' teaching (see Luke 12); he takes them seriously. The Pharisaic scribes remain the chief antagonists also in this scene. (CC pp. 774-775)

who deny that there is a resurrection – οἱ [ἀντι]λέγοντες—There is some strong attestation among the manuscripts (e.g., ⋈ B C D L N Θ) for οἱ λέγοντες, although the more difficult reading is [ἀντι]λέγοντες because it creates a double negative with μή, literally, “who speak against resurrection not to be.” In Greek, generally speaking, a double negative is a stronger negative, not a positive. The meaning is clearly that the Sadducees did not believe in a resurrection. (See B. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary*, 171–72. Cf. also J. Fitzmyer, *Luke X–XXIV*, 1303.) This verb is used at 2:34 to describe Jesus as a sign who will be “spoken against.” (CC p. 769)

resurrection – ἀνάστασιν—Throughout this passage (20:33, 35, 36), “resurrection” refers to the raising of all the dead for the final eschatological judgment. (CC p. 769)

Second, the intrusion of this scene at this point fulfills an important purpose for Luke. Just before Jesus' final discourse on the end times (21:5–38), his final teaching to the disciples about his future and theirs (22:1–38), and his passion and death (22:39–23:56), it is good to speak of the resurrection. The controversy between Jesus and the Sadducees becomes the opportunity to present a word of Jesus about this doctrine. Once again, the topic naturally includes the subplot of the disagreement between the Sadducees and the Pharisees over the resurrection. (This will become a significant issue in Acts where the Pharisees support Paul before the Sanhedrin because they believe in the resurrection, angels, and spirits, whereas the Sadducees do not [Acts 23:6–12].) So there are really three participants in this controversy in the temple: the Sadducees, who begin the questioning (Lk 20:27–33); Jesus, who responds (20:34–38); and the scribes, who respond to Jesus positively about his answer (20:39). (Note how Luke frames Jesus' response with the participation of the Sadducees and then the scribes, focusing our attention on what Jesus says and not on the issue raised by the Sadducees.) The scribes would agree with Jesus that the question posed by the Sadducees reveals their ignorance about the nature of resurrection life. (CC p. 775)

20:28 *take widow*. The levirate law. (CSB)

20:29–33 Extreme example to attempt to make the resurrection look ridiculous. (TLSB)

20:33 *wife* – ἡ γυναῖκα/γυνή/γυναῖκα—This word may be translated as “woman” or as “wife,” according to context. (CC p. 769)

But what is the deeper issue here? The Sadducees attempt to trap Jesus concerning levirate marriages, where the brother of a man who dies childless must marry his dead brother's wife in order to provide a son to keep the family name alive (cf. Gen 38:8; Deut 25:5). This is a particularly significant Mosaic statute, and the Sadducees would be well versed in it since they accepted only the Pentateuch as canonical. The situation they pose to Jesus is almost impossible to imagine, with seven brothers taking the same woman and each one dying before producing a

son. She will have had seven husbands, and thus the question: In the resurrection, whose wife will she be? (20:33). Jesus ignores the issue of levirate marriage,

One hesitates to venture into OT legal technicalities, but the purpose of the biblical statute suggests that she is wife only of the first brother. Since any child born subsequently counts as heir of the dead first brother, the subsequent brother-husbands are neither the legal “father” to the child nor “husband” of the wife, but only substitutes for their first brother, the “real” husband. (CC p. 776)

but addresses the question of the resurrection. The Sadducees have it all wrong. They are equating this age with the age to come. In this creation, God established marriage so that humanity could reflect the communion of God, multiply and fill the earth, and receive the post-fall promise of a Savior in the Seed of the woman (Gen 3:15). Christian marriage reflects the mystical union of Christ and his bride, the church, who now waits for his return and the consummation. But in the age to come, there will be no marriage, for those whom God deems worthy (Lk 20:35; i.e., faithful hearers of the Word who receive Jesus’ kingdom by faith) will live forever as “equal to angels ... sons of God ... sons of the resurrection” (20:36). (Jesus’ words include a subtle rebuke also of the Sadducee’s denial of the existence of angels.) (CC pp. 775-776)

None of the brothers in the example had begotten an heir or had an enduring marriage with her. (TLSB)

20:34 *sons of this age* – οἱ υἱοὶ τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου—This same expression is used also in the parable of the unjust steward (16:8) for all persons who are “alive” with the “life of this world.” (CC p. 769)

People living in the present world. (TLSB)

marry and given in marriage – γαμοῦσιν καὶ γαμίσκονται—γαμέω can refer to either men or women, meaning “to marry, enter matrimony.” γαμίζω means “to give (a woman) in marriage”; the passive here refers to women who would be “given in marriage” (see BAGD 2). The words are repeated in 20:35. Marriage is for this age only and not for the age to come. (CC p. 769)

20:35 *considered worthy* – οἱ δὲ καταξιωθέντες—This aorist passive participle is a theological passive: “the ones deemed worthy” by God. This must be understood in the context of the whole gospel, i.e., not a consideration of worthiness because of works, but because they receive Jesus’ kingdom through faith. Cf. “I am no longer worthy” in 15:19, 21, spoken by the prodigal, who represents those received into the kingdom. (CC p. 769)

Through repentance and faith, they have entered God’s kingdom. (TLSB)

neither marry nor are given in marriage. The question is irrelevant; in heaven, people neither marry nor remarry, die nor give birth. (TLSB)

age...resurrection – τοῦ αἰῶνος ... καὶ τῆς ἀναστάσεως—Both καταξιώω in the passive and τυγχάνω rule the genitive. It is more consistent to construe both genitive phrases with τυχεῖν, an infinitive after καταξιωθέντες, than to construe one with the infinitive and the other with the participle. (CC p. 769)

20:36 *equal to angels*. The resurrection order cannot be assumed to follow present earthly lines. In the new age there will be no marriage, no procreation and no death. (CSB)

Possessing an endless heavenly glory. (TLSB)

sons of the resurrection. Those who are to take part in the resurrection of the righteous (cf. Mt 22:23–33; Mk 12:18–27; Ac 4:1–2; 23:6–10). (CSB)

The sad brothers and the widow, who had no heir, inherit God’s kingdom and the joyous benefits of the resurrection. (TLSB)

υιοί εἰσιν θεοῦ τῆς ἀναστάσεως υιοὶ ὄντες—Jesus speaks of the disciples as “sons of the marriage chamber” in discussing with the Pharisees his fasting practices (5:34). He describes catechumens as “sons of the highest” who love their enemies (6:35). He calls one receptive to the preaching of the seventy (-two) a “son of peace” (10:6) and contrasts the “sons of this present age” with the “sons of light” in the parable of the steward of unrighteousness (16:8). The ultimate sonship is expressed here, where those deemed worthy to attain the resurrection are called “sons of God” because they are “sons of the resurrection.” Cf. Adam as a “son of God” in 3:38. (CC p. 769)

20:37–38 The Sadducees had referred to Moses; Jesus does the same as He points to Ex 3:6, 15 to affirm the resurrection. God had said, “I am the God of ...” Though at Moses’ time the patriarchs were long dead, God identifies Himself as being their God. Only living people can have a God; therefore, if He is their God, they are alive, their souls are with Him, and their bodies will be raised. (TLSB)

20:37 *about of the bush*. Since Scripture chapters and verses were not used at the time of Christ, the passage was identified in this way, referring to Moses’ experience with the burning bush (Ex 3:2). (CSB)

dead are raised – ὅτι δὲ ἐγείρονται οἱ νεκροί—This indirect speech is placed at the beginning of the sentence for emphasis. It is dependent on “Moses made known” (Μωϋσῆς ἐμήνυσεν), the main subject and verb of the sentence. ἐγείρονται is a theological passive: “the dead are raised” *by God*. (CC p. 769)

of Abraham – ἐπὶ τῆς βάρτου—This was a way to refer to portions of Scripture before chapters and verses were numbered: “in the passage about ...” (cf. BAGD s.v. ἐπί, I 1 a γ). (CC p. 769)

20:38 *God of* – δέ—The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is *even now* a God of the living (cf. RSV quoted in the next paragraph). (CC p. 769)

God...dead...living – θεὸς δὲ οὐκ ἔστιν νεκρῶν ἀλλὰ ζώντων, πάντες γὰρ αὐτῷ ζῶσιν—The Greek word order places “God” at the beginning of the sentence. (RSV: “Now he is not God of the dead, but of the living.”) The dative “in him” (αὐτῷ) in the last phrase may mean “in his sight,” “as far as he is concerned” (cf. 4 Macc 7:18; 16:25; I. H. Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, 743) or “by his power,” “in communion with his life.” In any case, the point is that all “sons of God” (20:36), whether in “this present age” (20:34) or in “that age” (20:35), are alive. (CC p. 770)

Jesus demonstrates the truth of the doctrine of the resurrection in a surprising way. Instead of invoking the Prophets or Writings, (E.g., Job 19:26; Ps 16:9–11; Is 26:19; Dan 12:2) Jesus refers to the *Pentateuch* (Moses, the Sadducees’ canon). He quotes from the passage about the burning bush (Exodus 3; cf. Acts 7:30–34)—where the Lord tells Moses that he is the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob—to show that *at the time of Moses*, the patriarchs (who had died hundreds of years previously) were still alive *in God*. Thus Jesus concludes that *even now*, God is a God of the living and not the dead, *because all are living to/in him* (αὐτῷ—to/in God; see textual note on Lk 20:38). Since Jesus has made clear that his authority is from God, and the hearer knows that he is *the Son of God* (E.g., Lk 1:35; 3:38; 4:3, 9, 41) and the *Messiah* (9:20), Jesus is essentially saying here that he is the resurrection and the life (Jn 11:25), for all are living *in him*. Jesus is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and in a few days he will prove to the Sadducees that there *is a resurrection from the dead*. Just as he hinted that he is the one who will return all things to God in the new creation (in his answer to the question about paying taxes to Caesar), so now he shows the Sadducees and Pharisees that *in him* all things live because *he* is the God of the living and not the dead. Since the Creator has come to his creation as a creature to bring in a new creation, all things *must* have their life *in him*. Thus, with αὐτῷ (“to/in him”), Jesus is referring, finally, also to himself *because his own resurrection is imminent*. For the hearer, this speaks to the reality that has been hinted at throughout the gospel but is stated boldly here by Jesus: *already now* those who are catechumens of Jesus are part of the eschatological community (“with angels and archangels and with all the company of heaven”) that includes Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and all the OT saints. This is a most profound statement of inaugurated eschatology in the teaching of Jesus. (CC pp. 776-777)

20:40 *dared* – ἐτόλμων—This imperfect “were daring” implies that *the scribes* would continue to be reluctant to question Jesus about anything. See below on the scribes as the subject of this verb. (CC p. 770)

The reaction of the scribes is partisan. They acknowledge that Jesus *is* a great teacher and commend his response to the Sadducees: “Teacher, you have spoken well” (20:39). But this is not because the scribes now will be students of Jesus’ teaching. Rather, they simply are happy to find support in their dispute with the Sadducees (cf. Acts 23:6–12). This shows that all is not harmonious in the Sanhedrin. Both the Pharisees and Sadducees will go to great lengths to reach a compromise among themselves in order to accomplish the common goal of killing Jesus (though some, such as Joseph of Arimathea [Lk 23:50–51], will dissent). The scribes are also greatly impressed at Jesus’ ability to argue from the Pentateuch. They stand in awe of his exegetical and analytical skills and realize that it would be suicidal to dare to ask him anything else (20:40). From now on, there will be no more questions or challenges from Jesus’ opponents. Jesus will provide the narrative with his own teaching and his own agenda (20:41–21:38). (CC p. 777)

This ended their questions, but now Jesus would examine them. (TLSB)

20:27–40 Jesus demonstrates that the Lord is the God of the living. The patriarchs, though dead from an earthly perspective, are still alive with God. Our human reason dare not come between us and God’s sure promises. Jesus’ certain resurrection shows that He is our living God and hope of life. • I praise You, Lord of life, for the resurrection promised in Your Word. Grant me faithfulness unto the Last Day. Amen. (TLSB)

Whose Son Is the Christ?

41 But he said to them, “How can they say that the Christ is David's son? 42 For David himself says in the Book of Psalms, “The Lord said to my Lord, “Sit at my right hand,

43 until I make your enemies your footstool.” 44 David thus calls him Lord, so how is he his son?”

20:41 Jesus takes the initiative and questions the scribes, who believed the Messiah was only David’s earthly son. (TLSB)

20:42–43 In the psalm, David sees his “Lord” invited by God, “the Lord,” to exercise all divine majesty and power. Luther: “Here, as nowhere else in the Old Testament Scriptures, we find a clear and powerful description of His person—who he is, namely, both David’s promised Son according to the flesh and God’s eternal Son” (AE 13:228). (TLSB)

20:42 *right hand*. Place of honor and authority. (TLSB)

20:44 By the incarnation, David’s descendant possesses greater authority than David. The eternal Son of God became David’s Son when He was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. (TLSB)

David calls him ‘Lord.’ If the Messiah was a descendant of David, how could this honored king refer to his offspring as Lord? Unless Jesus’ opponents were ready to admit that the Messiah was also the divine Son of God, they could not answer his question. (CSB)

Everyone knows that the Messiah must come from “the house and family of David” (2:4; see 2 Samuel 7). The Davidic lineage of the Messiah is *not* the question. Rather, the question is properly to *identify* who the Messiah is when he comes. Jesus has just entered Jerusalem as King (Lk 19:29–48); he has claimed that his authority is from heaven (20:1–8); he has taught parabolically that he is the Son of the Lord of the vineyard (20:9–19); and he has just demonstrated his divine understanding of the Scriptures so that the religious establishment in Jerusalem will not dare to ask him anything more (20:20–40). Perhaps there are some scribes who look upon Jesus’ question as a purely academic curiosity, but most know that Jesus is talking about himself: is Jesus the Messiah, David’s Son? In Luke’s narrative, there is no doubt that Jesus has such roots (cf. 1:32, 69; 2:11; 3:31; 18:38–39). From the moment of conception, the angel announced to the Virgin Mary that “the Lord [*Yahweh*] God [*Elohim*] will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will be King over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end” (1:32–33). But is Jesus simply a *human* descendent of David, or is he the *human and divine* Son? Is it possible for the *human* descendent of David to be *at the same time* David’s Lord? *The answer is found in Psalm 110!* David himself clarifies how the Christ can be the Son of David. David, the author of the psalm, says: “The Lord [*Yahweh*] said to my [*David’s*] Lord [*the Lord is the Messiah*].” David himself acknowledges that a descendent of his is the Messiah and that he (David) shall call him (the Messiah) *Lord!* The Messiah is David’s Son and therefore should call David lord, but because the Messiah is who he is, David *must* call the Messiah his Lord. (CC p. 778)

It is also important to note that *Psalm 110 is a significant proof-text in the Old Testament for the resurrection!* This is the meaning of “Sit at my right hand, until I place your enemies a footstool for your feet.” The theme of the resurrection, introduced in the previous controversy, continues here. (The theme of exaltation has already appeared in Jesus’ quotation of Psalm 118 at the conclusion of the parable of the workers in the vineyard [20:17].) David must call his Son his Lord *because he will be exalted to the right hand of the Father*. The catechumen knows that this glory will come to the Messiah only after his utter rejection in crucifixion. And when he quotes from Psalms here just before his passion, Jesus is giving his hearers a hermeneutical clue as to how they should understand his suffering and exaltation from the OT: *read the psalms!* (See the excursus “The OT Witness to Christ.”) Jesus tells them to pay special attention to Psalm 110, and

it will figure prominently in Peter's Pentecost sermon in demonstrating the Christ's resurrection and ascension (Acts 2:25–36). (Cf. also Acts 5:31; 7:56; Rom 8:34; 1 Cor 15:25; Eph 1:20; Col 3:1; Heb 1:3, 13; 5:6; 7:17, 21; 8:1; 10:12–13; 1 Pet 3:22; Rev 3:21) (CC p. 778)

20:41–44 Only the incarnation can answer Jesus' question. He is both man, David's son, and God, David's Lord. Reason dare not reduce the truths of Scripture. David's son has become our Lord through His death and resurrection, and the Father has exalted Jesus to His right hand. • "Hail him, ye heirs of David's line, Whom David Lord did call, The God incarnate, man divine, And crown Him Lord of all." Amen. (LSB 549:4) (TLSB)

Beware of the Scribes

45 And in the hearing of all the people he said to his disciples, 46 "Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes, and love greetings in the marketplaces and the best seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at feasts, 47 who devour widows' houses and for a pretense make long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation."

20:46 *beware of the scribes* – There is a shift in the audience at this point, as Jesus addresses his disciples (τοῖς μαθηταῖς), who were last mentioned at 19:39. But the evangelist also makes a passing reference to the catechetical community gathering around Jesus in the temple: these warnings were spoken "while all the people [τοῦ λαοῦ] were hearing [ἀκούοντος]" (20:45). Even though there is a shift in the audience, Jesus continues to focus his teaching against the Pharisaic scribes. He has given them no opportunity to respond to his question about the Messiah as David's Son and Lord. Now his stern warnings against them make it clear that they have been the target of his temple teaching from the beginning. (CC pp. 778-779)

The disciples, the crowds, and the hearers of Luke's gospel cannot help but go back to the beginning of Jesus' journey to Jerusalem and recall the following incidents: Jesus' woes against the Pharisees and lawyers (11:42–52); the plot of the scribes and Pharisees who were lying in wait to catch him saying something wrong (11:53); Jesus' stern warnings *to the crowds and the disciples* about the Pharisees (12:1); and Jesus' controversy over Sabbath and table-fellowship laws (14:1–24). In fact, the words of warning against the scribes in 20:46 echo previous warnings, heard earlier in the gospel. Comparing these passages also suggests that there is little difference in the dangerous teachings of the Pharisees, scribes, and lawyers. (Both the scribes and the lawyers would be part of the larger Pharisaic party.) (CC p. 779)

Generally, as allies of the Pharisees, they opposed Jesus. (TLSB)

long robes ... important seats. Ornate garments worn by dignitaries on special occasions. (TLSB)

marketplaces. Where people are seen and greeted. (TLSB)

best seats. Benches in the synagogue before the platform. (TLSB)

places of honor. Next to the host. (TLSB)

20:47 *devour widows' houses.* They take advantage of this defenseless group by fraud and schemes for selfish gain. (CSB)

Scribes were often appointed as widows' advisors or agents, mishandling the property to their advantage. (TLSB)

long prayers. To appear more pious and impressive. (TLSB)

receive greater condemnation – Cf. 12:47–48. The higher the esteem of men, the more severe the demands of true justice; and the more hypocrisy (Mt 23:1–36), the greater the condemnation. (CSB)

Jesus adds some new accusations here. These scribes “wish to walk around in long robes” so as to show themselves off before others with flamboyant clothing; they “eat up the houses of widows,” which is one of the most heinous demonstrations of their greed and love of money (16:14); and “in pretense they pray long prayers” as a hypocritical demonstration of their piety.

This the hearer knows well from the public and hypocritical prayer of the Pharisee: “O God, I thank you that I am not like the rest of men—seizing, unrighteous, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I pay tithes on everything I obtain” (18:11–12). (CC p. 779)

All of these are manifestations of the same thing: denial of God’s OT promises that salvation will come through the deliverance of a righteous, suffering Messiah. The scribes have chosen their own way, one that focuses on themselves—their good works and their public displays of piety. They believe that this is an alternate path to salvation, but it is completely contrary to “the way” (see comments on *ὁδός* in 1:76, 79), the Good News of the kingdom that Jesus brings. They are guilty of hypocrisy, malice, and greed. Jesus has shown this again and again, but he *must* repeat it here once more, for the Pharisees represent *the most dangerous opposition to the gospel*. The attitude and beliefs of the scribes are so seriously opposed to Jesus and the trinitarian plan of salvation that Jesus ends on a most ominous note: “These will receive greater judgment” (20:47). Jesus’ first set of woes already alluded to their opposition and their judgment: the lawyers held the key of knowledge but prevented others from entering the kingdom, and they themselves did not enter in (11:52; cf. 10:14–15; 11:31–32, 50–51). This judgment will soon be upon all of Jerusalem, as Jesus prophesied when he entered the holy city (19:41–44) and as he states in his final discourse in the temple (21:5–38). (CC p. 779–780)

20:45–47 Jesus warns His disciples not to be impressed by the scribes’ display. Do not practice the faith simply to impress others. In contrast, for your salvation, Jesus “made Himself nothing, taking the form of a servant.... He humbled Himself” (Php 2:7–8). • Lord, grant me the humility and mind of Christ. Amen. (TLSB)