LUKE 18:1-30: KINGDOM OF GOD AND SOCIAL RELATIONS

By

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To my first teachers of reading and critical thinking, my parents,
Elijah and Lillian Green,
and my greatest supporter, my sister,
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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

In her interview on *Fresh Air* with Terry Gross, journalist Nikole Hannah-Jones makes an astute observation about systemic injustice as perpetuated by individual actions. As a writer for *The New York Times Magazine*, she investigates racial injustice in U.S. society. This particular conversation with Gross illumines the impact of race—racism, white privilege, and unequal access to information, policy, and policymakers—on decisions that maintain the (de)segregation of public schools.[1] Her reporting reveals a hypocrisy among progressives, who claim they are against inequality but whose individual choices belie such beliefs. Hannah-Jones offers, "And I also think it was - that it is important to understand that the inequality we see - school segregation is both structural, it is systemic, but it's also upheld by individual choices. As long as individual parents continue to make choices that only benefit their own children, you can support equality as a principle all you want, but we're not going to see a change."[2] Hannah-Jones, in concurrence with Dr. Martin Luther King Jr, acknowledges that "integration is about the sharing of power." In her article "Choosing a School for My Daughter in a Segregated City" and her *Fresh Air* interview, Hannah-Jones describes and explains how personal decisions about where we live and where we send our children to school are also political.

[1] Nikole Hannah-Jones, "How the Systemic Segregation of Schools is Maintained by 'Individual Choices,'" interview by Terry Gross, *Fresh Air with Terry Gross*, WHYY NPR, January 16, 2017, http://www.npr.org/sections/ed/2017/01/16/509325266/how-the-systemic-segregation-of-schools-is-maintained-by-individual-choices.
[2] Hannah-Jones, "Systemic Segregation of Schools," January 16, 2017.

Luke's vision of the kingdom of God illustrates the power of individual choices either to maintain or to eradicate systemic oppression and injustice. His polyvalent view of the Kingdom includes theological, political, as well as personal transformations. Additionally, it includes humanity as transformative agents that co-create a realm of justice, accessibility, and sufficiency through sociopolitical relationships. Read together as a narrative whole, the parables of a widow and judge and a Pharisee and a tax collector as well as stories of the Jesus' blessing the children and the certain ruler in 18:1-30 present humanity's call to respond to the kingdom of God by transforming sociopolitical relationships in their personal encounters. By changing these dynamics, humanity would be able to overhaul social structures that perpetuate the injustice, indignity, and inhumanity perpetuated in their lived experiences. Humanity's active participation is a crucial component to God's plan as preached, taught, and lived by disciples who continue the mission of Jesus. This element accompanies Luke's many visions of the Kingdom of God.

In this project, I will contend that Luke 18:1-30—as a literary, theological, and ideological whole—envisions polyvalent views of the kingdom of God involving a temporal and eternal realm in which all humanity actively participates in creating a domain free from subordinating power relations. This society equally privileges all people to access God's gifts of justice, dignity, and liberation. As a part of my argument, I assert that the kingdom of God is not merely a realm that reverses the status quo of power and privilege for individuals.[3] Rather, the kingdom of God includes a shared system of power in human relations, where reversal balances

[3] cf. Allen Verhey, *The Great Reversal: Ethics and the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1984), 15; John O. York, *The Last Shall Be First: The Rhetoric of Reversal in Luke*, Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991). Verhey and York argue for the reversal of privilege and status as the vision of the kingdom of God. Their interpretations imply that in the reversal, the subordinated groups would maintain their humility so as not to subject the new subordinate class with the same discrimination and injustice. Furthermore, the interpretations seem to exempt both parties from any responsibility in participating in the reversal system. Their respective arguments seem not to recognize that God's creative and redemptive work happens through humanity.

power and privilege. Consequently, those who are underprivileged and disempowered from freedom must be in an environment where power is shared so that everyone may benefit. Luke's polyvalent vision emphasizes just living in human relationships as a response to God's kingdom.

Past scholarship interprets the parables of a widow and judge, a Pharisee and a tax collector, along with the stories of Jesus blessing the children and the certain ruler as, morality narratives. Older scholarship often has a theological orientation that contends that God transforms individuals in their acts of piety. More recent scholarship analyzes the sociopolitical dynamics of the parables and stories to demonstrate the Gospel's resistance to the status quo of ancient Roman society. It argues that the kingdom of God is a political space that privileges the poor and the powerless. The theological and sociopolitical discourses assert that God and Jesus are responsible for transforming individuals and society to the exclusion of humanity's participation or agency in the process. Humanity are mere recipients of God's work.

Recognizing individual agency and choice as components to God's transformation of society, my aim is to extend the discourse of Luke's theology of the kingdom of the God as illustrated in Luke 18:1-30. The Gospel's theological and political visions require personal commitment, actions, and even sacrifices to redistribute power and property to manifest God's kingdom in the present reality. I assert that this narrative unit demonstrates Luke's theology as being simultaneously political and personal. Another aim is to analyze Luke's message that those who are oppressed and who are socially and economically privileged are mutually responsible in reversing the social sphere so "the first shall be last and the last shall be first." In other words, they, too, are creators of status reversals. The concept of status reversal is problematic because it suggests that God simply turns earthly social and political realms and ideals upside down and topsy turvy—reassigning social position, privilege, and prestige to produce another binary. This

project, instead puts forward a notion of reversal that strives to redistribute power, privilege, and prestige throughout humanity to transform society and to facilitate justice, dignity, and access.

The sociopolitical relationships in the parables of a widow and judge and a Pharisee and a tax collector along with the stories of Jesus blessing the children and a certain ruler depict the Gospel's theology and politics of transformation as occurring through humanity's response to the kingdom of God. The transformation challenges many aspects of Roman oppression and colonialism, counters imperial narrative, and fosters postcolonial consciousness. Therefore, Luke 18:1-30 is partly a subversive text that hides in plain sight a counter-narrative to the status quo, one which uplifts power, prestige, and property. James C. Scott's theory of hidden transcripts provides a framework for examining the subversive aspects of Luke's vision of the Kingdom. [4] Plot analysis of characters and themes in these four stories will illustrate that God cares about people's social, political, and economic well-beings as lived through their horizontal relationship as well as their spiritual lives through a vertical relationship with God.

As a consequence of not interpreting Luke 18:1-30 as a single narrative unit, biblical scholarship narrows Luke's vision of human responses to the kingdom of God either as individualistic and spiritual acts or as anticipation of God's transforming work to overturn Rome's kyriarachal status quo. While excluding vv. 1-8 from the analysis, scholars examine the stories as theological lessons for the individual to cultivate disciplines of prayer, humility,

[4] cf. Amanda C. Miller, *Rumors of Resistance Status Reversals and Hidden Transcripts in the Gospel of Luke*, Emerging Scholars (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress Press, 2014); John T. Carroll, *Luke: A Commentary,* The New Testament Library (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012); Richard Horsley, ed., *Hidden Transcripts and the Arts of Resistance: Applying the Work of James C. Scott to Jesus and Paul* (Society of Biblical Literature Semeia Studies) (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2004). Biblical scholarship that engages Scott's theory focuses on the lived hidden transcripts that are developed in the daily lives of people. This use of the theory engages the theory as a tool for socio-historical analysis. Although scholars analyze the Lukan narrative for insights about the social, political, and economic contexts of Jesus's time and times of early Christianity, I will use Scott's framework for examining the Gospel itself as a cultural product that is a hidden transcript.

hospitality, and almsgiving. Utilizing interdisciplinary approaches, including feminist and ideological studies, later scholarship contend that the stories' theological message is political in nature, commenting on the systemic oppression that effects the audience's daily lives.

Literature Review

Luke 18:1-30 illustrates a vision, which is most clearly seen when interpreted as a whole unit, of the kingdom of God where individuals and communities are called by God to be active participants in the transformation of human society. Because this section includes four stories, the best scholarly sources for analyzing multiple narratives in a unit are commentaries. In this survey, I review a representative sample of major commentaries of literary analyses of the Gospel. I examine each work's argument for how the scholar interprets the sequencing of the stories and their messages about the kingdom of God. Contrary to earlier scholarship, this project argues for the narrative unity of the Luke 18:1-30, not just through textual proximity or arrangement, but through the images and discussions of the kingdom of God.

Because content informs the structure and sequencing of the stories, I explore the critical interpretations and narrative structure of Luke 18:1-30 by Robert Tannehill, Luke Timothy Johnson, Joel B. Green, Sharon Ringe, and John T. Carroll.[5] Their conclusions about each pericope undergird their logic regarding the narrative structure of the unit. Scholars agree that Luke 18:1-30 is a part of the travel narrative in Luke (9:51-19:48), a collection of stories set

[5] Commentaries in the late 1980s through 1990s moved away for historical-critical approaches toward a literary analysis, becoming the dominant method for interpreting the Gospels. *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation* by Robert C. Tannehill, first published in 1986, is the pioneering literary commentary on Luke-Acts. Literary analysis offers alternative readings of the story of Jesus within the narrative, and not just as a story that provides pieces to the historical context of Jesus. Although this analysis of the biblical texts became ubiquitous, it often referred to historical aspects of the 1st century CE to offer cultural context for understanding the story. Mostly, these commentaries examine Luke's theology, particularly as it relates to the Gospel's presentation of Jesus as the messiah.

during Jesus's final journey to Jerusalem. Within this major section, scholars contend that Luke 18:1-30 discusses different aspects of the kingdom of God, namely, anticipation of its coming and appropriate responses for entering it. Mostly, scholarly consensus is that the parables and stories do not all belong in the same unit. However, they do agree that Luke 18:1-30 emphasizes Jesus's teachings of moral living as expressed in an individual's vertical relationship with God. For various reasons, these interpretations assert that the stories convey only a theological message about worshipping God with no political implications. For a small minority of scholars, though, the theological message is separate from a political one.

Theological is not Political: Tannehill, Johnson, and Green

In the 1970s, social-scientific and literary criticism emerged in biblical scholarship. They emphasized an understanding of the historical and political context of Jesus's time in first century CE. Palestine as paramount for interpreting the Gospels. Most of the scholarship was in social-scientific studies, as part of the evolution of the preferred methodology of historical criticism. When literary-critical methods blossomed in the late 1980s into the 1990s despite the hegemony of the historical based methods, Robert C. Tannehill, Luke Timothy Johnson, and Joel B. Green wrote major commentaries with a focus on Luke as narrative.

Robert Tannehill's *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: Literary Analysis* was the preeminent and comprehensive commentary on Luke. Using literary analysis, Tannehill argues that Luke's theology foregrounds the triumph of the mission of God through Jesus and the early church despite repeated rejections by Jesus's community. By focusing on the roles of major characters through their actions and interactions within the plot of the two narratives, he is one of

the first to fully elucidate the unity of Luke and Acts.[6] Until this volume, scholars, according to Tannehill, could not comprehend the narrative unity of Luke-Acts due to its size.

Unlike a traditional commentary, which provides an interpretation of every story in the Gospel, *Narrative Unity of the Luke-Acts* offers analyses of major characters and plot developments based on broad theological themes and narrative connections. While providing no extensive commentary on the parables and stories in Luke 18:1-30, Tannehill gives minimal attention to the author's sequencing of these stories. He explains that the continuous nature of Luke-Acts broadly serves as a narrative arc that connects the four stories by sequence. Evidence of theme connecting them is sparse. For example, in the chapter, "Jesus and the Authorities," he asserts that the parable of a Pharisee and a tax collector (vv. 9-14) and the narrative unit of the certain ruler (vv. 18-30) comment on religious leaders. Surmising the thematic connection, he writes "In chapter 18 [*sic*] a parable and narrative episode provide further comment on religious leaders. The emphasis is again on their self-exaltation, their rejection of sinners, and their attachment to riches."[7] Primarily, Tannehill argues that Luke 18:1-30 is simply four stories in sequence. Traditional commentaries on the Gospel reveal stronger thematic connections across the narrative unit.

For Tannehill, the theological message that God's kingdom intervenes on behalf of the oppressed and excluded is ubiquitous in Luke-Acts and serves as the thematic adhesive for Luke 18:1-30. He contends, "In his ministry, Jesus intervenes on the side of the oppressed and excluded, assuring them that they share in God's salvation and defending them against others who want to maintain their own superiority at the expense of such people."[8] Discussing the

[6] Robert Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation*, vol. 1, *The Gospel According to Luke* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986).
[7] Tannehill, *Luke-Acts*, 186.
[8] Tannehill, *Luke-Acts*, 103.

significance of Jesus' mission to release the captives, Tannehill suggests that God's plan is broad in its description, referring to those who are oppressed by the economic system, by demons, as well as by sin.[9] The characters of the widow, the children, and the tax collectors featured in Luke 18 appear in his chapter "Jesus' Ministry to the Oppressed and Excluded." Later he states, "Human society perpetuates structures of injustice and exclusion, but God intervenes on the side of the oppressed. The disruptive effect of this intervention is often presented in Luke as a reversal of the structures of society: those with power, status, and riches are put down and those without them are exalted."[10] Although he acknowledges the political aspects of Luke's vision of the Kingdom through discourses on economic oppression and reversal of structures, Tannehill's tome primarily focuses on theological themes within Jesus' healing, preaching, and teaching ministries, with little mention of, let alone commentary on, Jesus's socio-political context.

In *The Gospel of Luke*, Luke Timothy Johnson, like Tannehill, is deeply interested in Luke's narrative contours. As one of the first traditional commentaries on Luke with a central focus on the narrative construction, it also touches on historical and theological issues.[11] Johnson asserts, as does this project, that the narrative sequence is as important as the story's content. He explains:

> To regard Luke-Acts as a *story* means, at least, that we do not read it as systematic treatise. Rather, we must seek Luke's meaning through the movement of the story. It is of primary importance to locate *where* something occurs in Luke's narrative. The connection between individual vignettes are as important as their respective contents. The sequence itself provides the larger meaning.[12]

[9] Tannehill, *Luke-Acts*, 103.
[10] Tannehill, *Luke-Acts*, 109.
[11] Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*, Sacra Pagina Series, ed. Daniel Harrington (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1991), 1.
[12] Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke,* 4.

The purpose of the Lukan gospel, according to Johnson, is to serve as an apologetic situating Christianity in the same political context as Judaism in order to demonstrate that it was no threat to Rome.[13] He explains, "The fact that Luke has a positive view of Gentiles and of Roman officials, in particular, has led some to suggest that Luke wrote an apology for the Christian movement as such. The Christians were politically harmless and should be allowed the same freedom given by Rome to 'other Jews.'"[14] By connecting the story of Jesus to the story of Israel, the Gospel is primarily theological but with a political subtext designed to safeguard the nascent community.

The political message that Johnson finds in Luke is not against Rome, rather it is against human action in the world. He writes, "The prophetic imagery of Luke-Acts is joined to a prophetic critique of human religious expectations as social values. In the 'visitation of the people' by the Prophet, a great reversal is proclaimed and enacted. Human security and complacency are challenged by the Gospel."[15] Like Tannehill, Johnson observes the Gospel's treatment of the poor, powerless, and marginalized: the powerful and wealthy have their consolation on earth, whereas those who are deemed as unworthy and marginal are accepted by God and restored by God's people. Although he claims that the narrative offers a political commentary on the human actions in the world, he does not argue that this political message has any ramification for change in the sociopolitical landscape that governs people's lives.

In general, Johnson approaches the narrative structure of Luke 18:1-30 as consisting of two sections: 1) parables and 2) stories. His organization of the unit facilitates his interpretation of the parables of a widow and judge and a Pharisee and tax collector as being primarily about

[13] Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke,* 8.
[14] Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke,* 8.
[15] Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke,* 22.

prayer. Of the two parables, Johnson provides a substantive analysis of the former, suggesting that the hearers could relate to the widow's suffering and oppression as illustrative of a general suffering within the human condition. However, his analysis lacks any criticism of systemic societal ills particular to their context that cause and maintain their suffering. Summarizing the general message of the Luke 18:1-8, Johnson asserts that the parables illustrate prayer as faith in action, and not simply as an act of piety. Regarding prayer, he writes, "It *is* that relationship with God."[16] However, prayer seems to be the only action required for changing the human condition.

As Luke 18:15 returns to the stories of Mark, Johnson examines the stories of Jesus blessing the children and the certain ruler's inquiry as a narrative unit that relays a message about entering God's kingdom. In the first story, he suggests that the nature of the babies as hospitable is illustrative of the hospitality of the kingdom of God. He concludes, "In Luke, therefore, the *hos paidion* refers not to the spirituality of the one entering the kingdom, but rather to the character of the kingdom: hospitality and the reception of the outcast are essential to the kingdom ruled by the compassionate God."[17] Johnson's shifts the focus away from the babies as the epitome of hospitality, as suggested by many scholars, to the kingdom of the God.

Turning to the story about the certain ruler, Johnson posits that entering the kingdom of God requires one to let go of possessions in order to receive the gifts of the Kingdom. The letting go of possessions is not for the sake of almsgiving or redistributing wealth; rather, it is for the sake of being open to live in accordance with the gospel unencumbered. He writes, "The point of the rich man's disposal of his property was not another 'good work' or observance of Torah, but precisely to abandon all possessions in order to receive the good news as one who was poor."[18]

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[16] Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke,* 274.
[17] Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke,* 280.
[18] Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke,* 281.

Solidifying his interpretation that Jesus is not condemning wealth through this encounter, Johnson argues that the pronouncement was that those with possessions, which is different from simply being with wealth, have difficulty entering the Kingdom.[19] Pushing this claim, he writes, "It is just as hard to leave family and friends and boats and tax collector's booth, as it is to leave 'great wealth' when it means throwing one's life completely over to God in faith."[20] Therefore, anyone with possessions, no matter how meek or grand, is susceptible to missing the gospel. Yet, according to Johnson, by being able to let go of material and relational dependency, one can become more dependent upon God. Johnson's division of Luke 18:1-30 facilitates a theological interpretation that has a superficial connection, and therefore solution, to the politics that perpetuate human suffering.

Reading Luke as ancient historiography, Green argues that it is a cultural product shaped by imbued meaning of the story and not by the strictness of veracity of the account. He writes, "That is, as literary text, the Gospel of Luke is itself a representation of the values and contexts within which it was generated, so any attempt to dislodge the Gospel from its own world would render it in some ways incomprehensible."[21] To perform a close reading of Luke, Green asserts that one must pay attention to the co-text, intertext, and context of Luke.[22] Establishing that historical-critical work on Luke has been well accounted for, Green focuses on Luke's interpretation as an account of events surrounding the life of Jesus.

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[19] He arrives at this interpretation by translating *χρῆμα* as "possessions" instead of the more traditional translation as "wealth."
[20] Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke,* 281.
[21] Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke,* The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 11.
[22] Green, *The Gospel of Luke,* 13. The co-text refers to the language and progression of literature within the Gospel itself. The intertext refers to the intertextuality within the Gospel, meaning the writer drawing from the LXX and other texts of the larger linguistic frame rather consciously or unconsciously. Context incorporates the perspectives of the period in which Luke was written.

While acknowledging the significance of the Roman imperial context, Green reads Luke 18:1-30 with a theological focus on salvation as represented in his organization of the narrative. Although the unit is included in a section called "Responding to the Kingdom" (17:11-19:27), the parable of a widow and judge functions as the closing story of a subsection he calls, "Faithfulness at the Coming of the Son of Man (17:20-18:8), and the rest of the pericope is in the section he titles "How to Enter the Kingdom (18:9-19:27)."[23] Thus, Green interprets the parable of a widow and judge as a concluding story regarding the end of days rather than a story inclusive of the how one enters the Kingdom.

Despite his claim that Roman imperialism context is central to interpreting the Gospel, like Tannehill and Johnson, Green does not use this context as a critical lens to engage the stories. Beginning with the parable of a widow and judge, he argues that the followers of Jesus should, like the widow, be tenacious and hopeful during their present ordeal without contextualizing any aspect of that ordeal.[24] Using 17:22-27 for the narrative context of 18:1-8, Green writes, "This is the eventuality that his followers will encounter hostility, look for the deliverance that accompanies the consummation of the kingdom, and not finding it, become disenchanted."[25] By not utilizing the sociopolitical context of the greater Lukan narrative as part of his analytical lens, he makes the hostility seem like a ubiquitous quality of life with no assailant—oppression without an oppressor. In addition to those who may be against the Jesus movement, i.e. fellow religious leaders, the Roman Empire imposes living conditions that cause people to struggle daily.

[23] Green, *The Gospel of Luke,* 627.
[24] Green, *The Gospel of Luke,* 637.
[25] Green, *The Gospel of Luke,* 637.

According to Green, Luke 18:9-30 begins the third section describing how to gain entrance into the Kingdom (18:9-19:27). While asserting that vv. 1-8 connects to a later section through the theme prayer, Green explains, "Indeed, Luke provides no textual markers to suggest that the narrative has taken a significant turn with 18:9."[26] Further, he observes that 18:9-19:27 lacks a narrative structure and is only connected loosely by important themes. Green asserts, "An important ribbon tying all of this material together is the motif of division, between those who have faith/act faithfully and others, the self-possessed, those concerned with their own honor and position themselves as a barrier between the needy and the compassionate God at work in Jesus' ministry."[27]

Connecting the parable of a Pharisee and a tax collector along with the stories of Jesus blessing the children and the certain ruler is their use of status reversal to illustrate fitness for the kingdom of God. Like the preceding parable, the Pharisee and tax collector presents a person of lower social rank as a moral example for Jesus's followers.[28] Status reversals continue in stories of Jesus' blessing the little children and the certain ruler. In addition to status reversal, Green suggests that the stories of the little children and a certain ruler extend the theme about the kingdom of God, particularly as it relates to soteriology and discipleship.[29] Hospitality is an important attribute for a disciple, meaning that one must receive the children to be able to receive the kingdom. Green explains,

> "Receiving the little children" is tantamount to granting them hospitality, performing for them actions (washing of feet, kiss of greeting, and anointing the head—7:44-46) normally reserved for those of equal or higher status. That is, Jesus is asking his followers to embrace a topsy-turvy system of values and to extend respectful service to that social group most often overlooked.[30]

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[26] Green, *The Gospel of Luke,* 643.
[27] Green, *The Gospel of Luke,* 643
[28] Green, *The Gospel of Luke,* 644.
[29] Green, *The Gospel of Luke,* 653.
[30] Green, *The Gospel of Luke,* 651.

He interprets this message as counter to worldly politics. Yet, he does not analyze or critique the worldly politics that generate such marginalization. Connecting the story of the little children with the certain ruler, Green asserts, "As we noted earlier, the juxtaposition of 'little children' and a wealthy ruler ties these two incidents (vv 15-17, 18-30) together as an apt illustration of the principle of status transposition Jesus articulates in v 14 (cf. 1:541-53; 2:34; 6:20-26; et al.)."[31] In addition to highlighting soteriological interests in vv. 18-30 in reference to the kingdom of God (e.g. eternal life, vv. 18, 31), this story illustrates the call to discipleship that requires leaving the old life for a new one.[32] For all three narratives in vv. 9-30, Green interprets transformation in status as God's work through Jesus, uplifting the character and faithful comportment of those of a lower status as worthy of emulation over those whom the world deemed as a model.

In summary, scholars such as Tannehill, Johnson, and Green examine Luke 18:1-30 primarily as theological narratives that describe God's call for spiritual and social transformation as a response to the Kingdom. Spiritual transformation includes a call to be more prayerful, humble, hospitable, and generous. Social transformation includes a recognition that God intervenes in human society by disrupting systems of injustice, exclusion, and oppression to relieve human suffering by creating and requiring reversals in political, social, and religious realms. Social transformation does include a political element: the politics of human action in the world in general and within the contemporary Jewish community of Jesus in particular.

As the theological perspectives of Tannehill, Johnson, and Green illumine the call for the spiritual and social transformations in Luke 18:1-30, they either ignore or understate human participation in God's kingdom and transformation process. By their assessment, God and Jesus

[31] Green, *The Gospel of Luke,* 653.
[32] Green, *The Gospel of Luke,* 654.

are the primary and sole agents of change, while the rest of humanity is merely the recipient—not an active agent—of transformation. Discussing the status reversals in the text, Tannehill, for example, does not articulate the need for human action and interaction as part of the gospel message. In other words, God, through Jesus, facilitates transformation, but, there is no discussion about what the transformation may look like and how it may come to pass. While I agree that God, through Jesus, is the primary agent of change, I argue that Luke 18:1-30 illustrates humanity's responsibility to transform *themselves* as well as society, by actively responding to God's kingdom.

Tannehill, Johnson, and Green theological foci suggest that Luke is not concerned with the geopolitics, and therefore the oppression, of the Roman Empire. Their commentaries essentially ignore the negative and heinous impact of Roman colonial rule on the lives of its subjects. For example, Johnson describes the Gospel as an apologetic that is harmless to Rome. In so doing, he interprets Luke's critique of those who have consolation on earth, i.e., the rich, to be about basic human nature and does not implicate the Roman system for creating and perpetuating structures of inequality. Johnson's interpretation of Luke 18:1-8 indicates a general suffering without using any narrative and social data to pinpoint the cause. While equating the people's suffering with the widow's, he misses that their shared agony is from the hands of injustice of the Roman Empire. Even as Green argues that Luke is a cultural product of its sociopolitical context, like Johnson, his analysis of the stories does not engage the colonial context as a hermeneutic. Rather, he asserts that the status reversals that counter worldly ideals are the outcome of discipleship. Therefore, by this estimation, disciples abdicate responsibility for engaging the sociopolitical systems that cause marginalization and oppression among the

people.[33] The theological message includes God's call for sociopolitical transformations as well as spiritual transformations among the participants in the kingdom of God.

Cognizant of the impact of Roman imperialism on the writing of Luke, other interpreters acknowledge a connection between the theological and political. For them, the Gospel claims the theological is political.

Theological is Political: Ringe and Carroll

Taking the sociopolitical contexts seriously, Sharon Ringe and John T. Carroll utilize ideological critical methods, which foreground unequal power relations of dominance and subordination, to inform their literary analyses of the Gospel of Luke. For them, the social, political, and economic worlds (milieux) of Luke's context are important to understanding Luke's context and the wider Christian movement. Ringe notes, "It is thus important to become familiar with Luke's context—the social, economic, *political*, cultural, and historical circumstances and the wider Christian movement in which Luke has portrayed Jesus" (italics mine).[34] Similarly, Carroll is sensitive to the social, political, and culture milieu of Luke as dictated by Roman imperialism. Influenced by postcolonial biblical criticism, Carroll asserts, "One thing is clear: the setting within the Roman Empire is an important contextual marker for the narrative, its rhetorical working, and interpretation."[35] Both Ringe and Carroll's interpretations of Luke acknowledge the political context of the Roman Empire as informing the narrative elements of setting, characters, and plot in the Gospel. Jesus's teachings do not occur in

[33] In addition to being concerned with human actions in the world as a response to God's kingdom, this project addresses individual actions that perpetuate the Empire's systems of injustice and dehumanization.
[34] Sharon H. Ringe, *Luke,* Westminster Bible Companion (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), 4.
[35] John T. Carroll, *Luke: A Commentary*, The New Testament Library (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2021), 3. In the introduction, Carroll immediately refers his audience to the "see *Excursus: The Reign of God and the Roman Empire,* at 20:26." Even though the excursus is found later in the commentary, mentioning it at the beginning of the commentary is a way to foreground his appeal to postcolonial criticism in his read of the text.

a vacuum; they are not wise sayings or altruistic actions unprovoked by circumstances or experiences of his community. Therefore, scholars like Ringe and Carroll study the sociocultural milieu of Jesus to analyze Luke's rhetoric of liberation against various forms of captivity, oppression, exclusion, and inferiorization. For them, to understand Luke's theology is to understand his politics.

In *Luke,* Ringe organizes Luke 18:1-30 as a single narrative unit, unlike many others. However, in the section entitled, "Following Jesus Luke 18:1-19:28," she unites the parables of the Widow and the Judge and the Pharisee and the Tax Collector under the banner of the "Parables of God's Justice"; then, she treats the story of Jesus blessing the children as a separate narrative nugget about following Jesus; and finally, labels the story of a certain ruler as a section on "Discipleship and Security."[36] Other than the reversal theme she finds in each story, Ringe connects the four stories loosely by their placement and with the theme of discipleship, i.e. following Jesus.[37]

Ringe's assertion that the theological is political is most poignant in the section containing the parables of a widow and judge and Pharisee and tax collector. Here, she does not ignore the presence of the Roman Empire in her interpretation.[38] For the parable of a widow and judge, she, unlike many of her scholarly predecessors, suggests that Jesus's story was more about the widow's pursuit of justice than his injunction to pray without ceasing. Asserting that the widow is one of the most vulnerable in Jesus's context, she argues that the sociopolitical aspects of the story leads her to conclude: "The widow's untiring pursuit of justice is translated into the

[36] cf. Ringe, *Luke,* ix, 223, and 226.
[37] Ringe, *Luke,* 225-227. Ringe's commentary on the reversal theme in 18:9-30 was published prior to Green's commentary. A feminist interpreter, Ringe is one of the first to note a reversal in the Parable of the Widow and the Judge.
[38] Ringe, *Luke,* 41.

'faith' that should mark the church's welcome of the awaited of Son of Man."[39] The pursuit of justice as faith is both theological and political. Theologically, the church waits for the second coming of the Son of Man, who will realize the eschatological presence of God's kingdom on earth. Politically, it is about the business of pursuing justice in the meantime, which is faith in action. Although framed as a parable about prayer and as an illustration regarding the Son's second coming, it teaches that justice can and must come in immediate situations. Her interpretation suggests that one may pray to have God release captives of gender and economic injustice purveyed by the colonial courts in the present.

Similarly, Ringe notes that the parable of the Pharisee and tax collector is about justice. In both parables, God dispenses justice by upending societal conventions and creating reversals in status. Ringe argues, "Both verdicts are portrayed as coinciding with God's will, and both fly in the face of the judgments of the judge and the Pharisee, who are locked into the systems of social and economic competition and the hierarchy of honor and prestige that favor the dominant classes in their society."[40] The reversals in status are for the sake of justice.

The stories of Jesus blessing the children and a certain ruler continue to illustrate the aphorism of the reversal of the humble and exalted. Concurring with other scholars, Ringe interprets the children, who have nothing to give (like the widow) or honor to claim (like the tax collector), as those who are deemed most worthy to receive God's reign.[41] For the following story, Ringe argues that the ruler, who has power and prestige, comes to Jesus and learns that he is unable to receive the kingdom of God. She asserts, "The 'one thing' that Jesus demands is that the ruler divest himself of all of the wealth that has established his position in society—

[39] Ringe, *Luke*, 224.
[40] Ringe, *Luke*, 225.
[41] Ringe, *Luke*, 226.

possessions, home, land—everything that he has come to count on and that is at the center of his life where only God belongs."[42] Therefore, by divesting himself of possession and that which created his wealth, the ruler becomes dependent upon God, and not on his wealth; he restores himself to God and receives God as a little child would. Additionally, he is open to God's reign as a free gift, not purchased by one's catechesis. As she demonstrates the connections of the four stories by their sociopolitical reversals, Ringe illustrates an aspect of Luke's polyvalent vision of the Kingdom that is equally theological and political.

In his commentary on Luke, John T. Carroll places Luke 18:1-30 in a larger section he titles, "Ministry Continues as Jesus Journeys to Jerusalem" (9:51-19:27). More particularly, he includes 18:1-8, like Green, within the narrative subsection of 17:20-18:8, which he titles "Jesus Teaches Pharisees and Disciples about the Present and Coming Reign of God." In a subsection titled "Lessons about God's Realm for the Status Conscious," he interprets 18:9-30, along with vv. 31-34, as a single narrative unit. Concurring with previous scholarship, Carroll divides the narrative unit of Luke 18:1-30 into two subsections having in the parable of a widow and judge (vv. 1-8) in a separate section from the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector, which is included along the seceding stories of Jesus Blessing the Children and a Certain Ruler (vv.9-30).

The Roman imperial context and its sociopolitical dynamics are foregrounded in Carroll's narrative analysis of Luke. He asserts, "One thing is clear: the setting within the Roman Empire is an important contextual marker for the narrative, its rhetorical working, and interpretation (see *Excursus: The Reign of God and the Roman Empire,* at 20:26)."[43] Regarding the parable of a widow and judge, he argues that it admonishes God's chosen ones to be persistent with faith in the face of an unjust, oppressive world and teaches that God will

[42] Ringe, *Luke*, 227-228.
[43] Carroll, *Luke: A Commentary,* 3.

vindicate them. Carroll acknowledges that the people suffer "within Rome-occupied Palestine in the first century, but in other times and places as well—of oppression and injustice suffered by persons to whom the judicial, economic, and political systems continually turn a cold, silent shoulder."[44] Although he, like Ringe, foregrounds the systemic oppression of colonial rule, Carroll—similar to his predecessors—does not address an individual's role in breaking the cycles of oppression.

Analyzing the stories in Luke 18:9-30, Carroll further argues for the significance of vertical and horizontal status reversals in response to the kingdom of God. However, as Green interprets the status reversal theme among these stories as a theological commentary on worldly politics, i.e. humanity's prideful sinfulness, Carroll extends this view of status reversals as a political commentary against the systemic oppression imposed by Roman colonialism.

In summary, Ringe and Carroll take untraditional approaches to analyzing Luke by taking seriously the social, political, and colonial contexts as important for understanding Luke's theology. They raise Luke's political commitment to a just society, as part of his theology as illustrated in Luke 18:1-30. They foreground the sociopolitical dynamics and hierarchy of Roman imperialism and their role in creating crises that demand God's attention and transformation. According to the sociopolitical order of Roman imperial hierarchy, those who are without privilege, power, and prestige deserve respect and dignity. Yet, God vindicates those who are oppressed by social, economic, and political systems through a reversal system where the first shall be last and the last shall be first (cf. Luke 13:30). Ringe and Carroll argue for interpretations of Luke's theology that are contextual, and yet transcendent. Their interpretations expand and deepen a call for responding to God's kingdom that is spiritually and theologically

[44] Carroll, *Luke: A Commentary*, 356.

grounded in transforming the social and political lives in daily existence. God's work creates a spiritual as well a political change.

Like most scholars, Ringe and Carroll describe God as the primary and sole agent of transformation with little to no acknowledgment of human agency. God will intervene on behalf of those who are oppressed by various social, political, economic, and judicial powers orchestrated by Roman domination. They expand Johnson's suggestion that waiting for God to act is faith in action, revealing one's commitment to a relationship with God. It is a belief that God will turn injustice into justice. Tannehill, Johnson, Green, Ringe, and Carroll all describe humanity's transformation as happening without any individual or collective human work to change human attitudes or to shift the axis of privilege, power, and prestige. Consequently, their interpretations mitigate humanity's participation in creating a just world of dignity and respect as a response to God's kingdom. Their interpretation may offer what Bonhoeffer would describe as "a cheapening of grace."[45]

Ringe and Carroll's interpretation of God's kingdom as a realm of activity that breaks down the barriers that create systemic oppression show that the theological is political. However, their interpretation misses that the political is also personal.

Theological is Political; Political is Personal[46]

[45] cf. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, vol. 4, ed. Geffrey B. Kelly and John D. Godsey, trans. Martin Kuske and Ilse Todt, (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2001).

[46] Carol Hanisch, "'The Personal is Political': The Women's Liberation Movement Classic with a New Explanatory Introduction," *Writings*. Accessed March 20, 2021. http://www.carolhanisch.org/CHwritings/PIP.html. Hanisch wrote a memo that became known as "The Personal in Political" in 1969 as a response to another staffer of the women's caucus of the Southern Conference Educational Fund (SCEF) who argued that consciousness-raising in the Women's Liberation Movement (WLM) was therapy and not political. A complaint was that women gathering to discuss their oppression to raise their consciousness was personal therapy; it appeared that they were bringing their personal problems into the public arena. Hanisch thwarts accusations that women's oppression resulted from their individual responsibility—personal problems—and asserts that male supremacy is not only a system but also a set of interpersonal power relations. Through her work in WLM, she learned that so-called personal problems (seemingly

Roman colonialism is a significant component of the sociopolitical and cultural milieu in all of the Gospels, especially Luke.[47] In various degrees, Johnson, Green, Ringe, and Carroll attest to its importance and acknowledge Luke as its cultural product. However, as many Lukan scholars take cues from the Lukan narrative, they do not examine how Luke's theological agenda regarding the kingdom of God in this pericope contests with the oppression, derision, and hegemony inflicted by Roman colonialism in personal as well as institutional ways. Indeed, previous interpretations do not recognize the possibility that Luke's call to action for believers include a personal stake, accountability, and responsibility in transforming social structures of oppressions as individual and collective responses to the kingdom the God.

Theological, social, political, and personal transformation in people's lives and in their interactions emerge as a major theme that connects the parables of a widow and judge and the Pharisee and the tax collector with the stories of Jesus blessing the children and a certain ruler as a unit. By examining these transformations in the character interactions and plot of each story, this project continues the trajectory set by the scholarship of Tannehill, Johnson, Green, Ringe, and Carroll in interpreting acts of faith as participation in God's kingdom. In order to understand the discourse on responding to God's kingdom, an examination of Lukan scholarship on the kingdom of God is paramount. A survey of scholarship on God's kingdom illustrates polyvalent vision of Luke. It follows a similar discursive trajectory as the commentary presented in this section.

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individual issues) are political problems (experienced among the collective), and therefore, needs collective action for a collective solution.

[47] Luke foregrounds the imperial context at the beginning of chapters 1-3, thus emblazing the imperial context as a significant lens for understanding the setting of the gospel of story and the conditions of people's lives in the first century CE.

Kingdom of God and Transformation

The kingdom of God in the Gospel of Luke emerges as a polyvalent vision in which humanity experiences God's power, authority, love, justice, and grace in both the present and eschatological realms. The parables and stories of Luke 18:1-30 depict these aspects of Luke's vision. Historical and literary critics have interpreted the Kingdom as a realm where humanity undergoes spiritual transformation through an encounter with Jesus. Sociocultural and ideological critics have depicted it as a counter-hegemonic realm that confronts social structures that privilege, legitimate, and concentrate power among the political and economic elite. These approaches to the Kingdom assert a vision where God is either the primary or only actor in the transformation of individuals and societies. They suggest that humanity plays a limited role in the activities of the kingdom of God.

In traditional scholarship, as represented by Tannehill, Johnson, and Green's work, the kingdom of God in Luke describes God's actions as promised to the descendants of David and manifested in the ministry of Jesus. This interpretation arises from reading Luke as an apologetic narrative that describes the followers of Jesus and the message of the gospel as politically harmless to the Roman Empire. Rooted in historical and literary criticism, these scholars assert the purpose of Luke's narrative is to describe Jesus, his disciples, and subsequent followers as non-confrontational members of the Jewish community.[48] The followers of the Way (cf. Acts 9:2, 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22: *τοσ όδός*), later identified as Christians (cf. Acts 11:26), are a cultic society that shares the good news of the kingdom of God in Jesus's salvific ministry of healing the sick, resurrecting the dead, and reconciling humanity to God. The power of God is in

[48] Benjamin H. Isaac, *The Invention of Racism in Classical Antiquity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), 447-49. Julius Caesar and Augustus, along with various documents written by the senate and governor magistrates, provide protection for Jewish groups throughout the empire. Jews were allowed to continue their customs and gather in meetings without harassment.

the spiritual transformation and eschatological promises of a reign beyond the present time. In the Kingdom, God reverses aspects of the human condition through physical healings, communal reconciliations, and social relationship through the piety of followers and "God's strong arm" (cf. Luke 1:51).

Adhering to and expanding upon the scholarship of previous generations, recent scholarship, as represented by Ringe and Carroll, includes Luke's political commentary on human social relationships as part of his theology.[49] With the emergence of ideological biblical criticism, along with the emergence of social scientific methods that began to pay attention to cultural contexts, scholars analyze the sociopolitical dynamics illustrated in Luke's theology of God's kingdom. Luke's gospel depicts varying aspects of the kingdom of God through a lens of intersecting systems that include a vertical relationship with God and horizontal relationships throughout humanity. In a vertical relationship, one is to respond to God's kingdom with "faith in action," which includes spiritual practices that cultivate a closeness to God through prayer, humility, hospitality, and almsgiving. Another view of the kingdom of God comes in the intervention of God through Jesus on the behalf of the socially, politically, economically, spiritually oppressed from human and spiritual structures of injustice.[50] Jesus's teaching on the Kingdom includes political commentary on human action in the world and social values.[51] God's intervention comes as a collection of status reversals, revealing that what humans presume as faithfulness and worthy of God's preferences differ greatly from what God desires in the characteristics of the faithful.

[49] Green, Johnson, Ringe, and Carroll's interpretations of Luke 18:1-30 follow the same trajectory of expanding theological scope of their interpretations to include sociopolitical dynamics in participating in the work of God's kingdom.
[50] Tannehill, *Luke-Acts*, 103.
[51] Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke,* 22.

The status reversals, also known collectively as the great reversal, are central to the sociopolitical vision of the kingdom of God in Luke. This concept describes God's creation of a reversal of social and political relations in society that uplifts those who are treated and conscientized as socially and politically inferior and reduces those who legitimate and maintain their own superiority. Although reversal themes can be found in the other Gospels, Luke is the only text explicit about the great reversal as a major component of Jesus's ministry and God's kingdom. For example unique to Luke, Mary introduces the message of the reversal in the Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55). Similarly, in Luke 4 Jesus inaugurates his ministry of reversal by proclaiming the good news of the Kingdom (cf. Isaiah 61:1-2; 58:6). Traditional scholarship interprets Jesus's ministry of reversal in his work on behalf of God to transform individual lives as well as social relations, so that all may be included in the vision of God's kingdom.

Within the discipline of ideological biblical criticism, postcolonial scholarship examines Luke's depiction of the kingdom of God and its great reversal as a contrapuntal narrative to the imperial propaganda of Rome's uncontested superiority and sovereignty. Scholarship on Luke's kingdom rhetoric represented in the works of Gary Gilbert, John Dominic Crossans, Richard Horsley, and Virginia Burrus assert that God's reign includes social and political transformations whereby unjust geopolitical tyrants, who build their kingdoms upon the subjugation and destruction of others, are subverted and even toppled over.[52] By requiring loyalty, coercing acculturation, and squashing any possibility of subversion, Rome maintains its dominance. Therefore, telling the story of Jesus as the anointed one and God's kingdom as mightier than

[52] Gary Gilbert, "Luke-Acts and Negotiation of Authority and Identity in the Roman World," in *The Multivalence of Biblical Texts and Theological Meanings,* ed. Christine Helmer (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2006); John Dominic Crossan, "Roman Imperial Theology," in *In the Shadow of Empire: Reclaiming the Bible as a History of Faithful* Resistance, ed. Richard A Horsley (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008); Richard A. Horsley, "Jesus and Empire," in *In the Shadow of Empire*, ed. Richard A. Horsley (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008); Virginia Burrus, "The Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles", in *A Postcolonial Commentary on the New Testament*, eds. Fernando F. Segovia and R.S. Sugirtharajah (London: T&T Clark, 2009).

Rome – basically using the similar propaganda as Roman—is a dangerous and treasonous proposition. To conceal this subversion, Luke constructs his counter-imperial narrative a vision of the kingdom of God as a hidden political transcript within his theological message.

Read as a single literary, theological, and ideological unit in the Gospel, the parables and stories in Luke 18:1-30 describe various aspects of the kingdom of God. Embedded in its theological discourse are depictions of an alternative sociopolitical and economic world order, God's order, where people participate in God's plan for justice and liberation.[53] A major component in advancing the Kingdom is a transformation in the power dynamics in social relationships and societal dynamics to reify God's realm. The theological message insists upon individual choices and relations that reflect the politics of the Gospel. In sum, I argue that Luke 18:1-30 presents the kingdom of God as a realm that calls for humanity's active participation in God's plan for justice, dignity, and inclusion and against hegemony. This Lukan narrative encourages readers to understand that the theological is political, the political is personal, and the personal is theological.

Critical Approaches

The plot, character, and sociopolitical dynamics in each parable and story in Luke 18:1-30 reveal the Gospel's mandate for humanity's active participation in God's kingdom. Narrative criticism engaged with a postcolonial hermeneutic illumines Luke's subversive messages that advocate for those who are without power and hold accountable those with it. By analyzing characters, plot, and narrative rhetoric, I interpret these passages as a single literary unit of four

[53] During the first century CE, religion was not a separate sphere from the politics and economics of society. The three spheres were interwoven. Therefore, by offering an alternative socio-political and economic world order, religious orientation and loyalties also may shift.

tightly woven episodes that offer various, and yet complementary, interpretations of the kingdom of God as a realm of social transformation rooted in the dynamics of sociopolitical relationship.[54] The analysis focuses on the temporal and spatial world constructed by the Gospel.

As a cultural product of Roman colonized communities, Luke reflects the colonial and postcolonial politics of its subject, and subsequently its first audience. Postcolonial criticism facilitates a theological and ideological reading of the parables and stories as they depict multiple facets of God's kingdom. They include subversive visions and rhetoric of the kingdom of God that include just social relations, engineer a reversal of social power, and empower resistance to Rome's oppressive colonialism and social hierarchies. Postcolonial criticism is a postmodern literary critique that describes and analyzes the sociopolitical period and cultural products of formerly colonized peoples of Africa and Asia. Biblical scholarship has evolved to understand postcoloniality as a conscientization that exists prior to geopolitical upheaval and the liberation of colonized people: its liberationist and subversive imagination questions, defies, decenters, and deconstructs colonizing hegemonic claims. Although written during Roman colonialism, the Gospel of Luke and its multivalent vision of the kingdom of God reflect a postcolonial consciousness that proclaims the salvation of God while presenting a counter-imperial claim.

Narrative Criticism

Approaching the Gospel in general, and this section in particular, as a narrative, I analyze the characters, their interactions, the plot, and the discourse to understand to whom, for whom,

[54] Although the analysis of the characters will be derived primarily in characterizations told and shown to the reader, socio-historical context is helpful in understanding characters revealed in Luke's as well as Jesus stories. For a modern reader, one may determine that a character is flat, fitting a limited stereotype or caricature about a community of people. However, socio-cultural context enables a reader to understand the characters as a round and dynamic. cf. Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, "Narrative Criticism: How Does the Story Mean?" in *Mark and Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies*, ed. Janice Capel Anderson and Stephen D. Moore (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2008), 34-42.

and about whom Luke writes. Storytelling is a rhetorical tool to transform society and empower lives as a response to the kingdom of God. Transforming uneven social relationships as response to the kingdom of God emerges as a theme in the four stories that make up the unit.

Narrative criticism facilitates an examination of social relationships that Jesus critiques and seeks to change in order to reify the gospel in people's daily lives. Characterizations and sociocultural milieu are equally pertinent for analyzing the interactions and circumstances in Luke 18:1-30. Character and plot analyses present evidence of social traits and geopolitical dynamics of colonialism that maintain social hierarchy, power, and privileges, which the kingdom of God dismantles. The Lukan author and audience share knowledge about the characters and their representations in the narrative. The protagonists and antagonists are privileged differently in the social, political, and economic hierarchies in the Empire, and their engagement in the stories reveal power differentials along these lines. As such, a postcolonial approach is an appropriate hermeneutical lens for reading the text as a whole and this section in particular, insofar as such criticism offers an optic for analyzing imperial-colonial formations and relations as they appear in the Gospel.

Finally, this project uses narrative criticism to analyze the stories' rhetoric of liberationist and subversive theology. Behind the veil of Luke's seemingly apologist tale is a more nuanced story revealed in the narrative rhetoric. Using a transcript that hides and obscures ideals of political, personal, as well as theological righteousness, it communicates colonial ambivalence, ideological resistance, and imperial subversion. Because Luke's message about the teaching and impact of Jesus's ministry resists Roman power, it declares allegiance to another kingdom, i.e. the kingdom of God. This dangerous undertaking requires discretion "so that seeing they do not see; hearing, they do not understand" (Luke 8:10b). It is subversive in content and furtive in

tone. Survival is an important aspect of resistance. Therefore, the Lukan Jesus must communicate a story that survives the scrutiny of Roman oppressive powers while spreading among the people.

Postcolonial Hermeneutic

The Gospel of Luke makes it explicitly clear that the narrative setting is the Roman colony of Palestine. By listing the emperors, governors, tetrarchs, and client leaders in chapters 1-3, Luke emphasizes the tumultuous and oppressive space of colonial subjectivity in the stories of Jesus in the Gospel and the nascent Jesus movement in Acts.[55] Roman colonial politics shape the social order, economic stratification, and power dynamics of the Palestinian region. Luke foregrounds geopolitical context to construct a hermeneutic for listening, reading, and comprehending his story. Therefore, a postcolonial hermeneutic is a logical interpretive tool for reading the Gospel.

Postcolonialism is an interdisciplinary framework that is the foundation of postcolonial biblical criticism. R.S. Sugirtharajah asserts, "Postcolonial studies emerged as a way of engaging with the textual, historical, and cultural articulations of societies disturbed and transformed by the historical reality of colonial presence."[56] Thus, the discipline analyzes power differentials created by the geopolitics of domination and subordination that are the offspring of imperialism and colonialism; examines constructions of the colonized by colonizers; and foregrounds the

[55] cf. Luke 1:5; 2:1-2; 3:1-2. Luke's account of the imperial leadership and the decrees associated with them are problematic because the historical references do not always fit the chronology. Scholars have determined that the Luke 2:1-2 does not align with any historical records, which questions the specificity connected to the historicity of the Luke's narrative (cf. Carroll, *Luke: A Commentary*, 65). Carroll, with whom I agree, explains, "It is impossible to salvage historical accuracy for Luke's report; however, it is instructive to consider the role of the census within the narrative" (p. 65).

[56] R. S. Sugirtharajah, "Charting the Aftermath: A Review of Postcolonial Criticism," in *The Postcolonial Biblical Reader* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub., 2006), 7.

perspectives of the colonized as a counter-discourse to cultural hegemony. Preeminent postcolonial scholar Homi Bhabha contends, “Postcolonial criticism bears witness to the unequal and uneven forces of cultural representation involved in the contest for political and social authority within the modern world order.”[57] Such studies emerged out of the analysis of the presence and role of western European imperialism in Africa and Asia.

Postcolonial biblical criticism is an interpretive method that unites postcolonial studies and biblical studies to interpret biblical texts as cultural products of people under the rule of foreign empires. It falls under the general paradigm of ideological criticism, which examines relationships of dominance and subordination.[58] In “Mapping the Postcolonial Optic in Biblical Criticism: Meaning and Scope,” Fernando Segovia contends that postcolonial criticism foregrounds the uneven relationship of power in geopolitics formed in imperial-colonial formations.[59] Because Luke was written during a colonial period, the “post” in post colonialism does not refer to a historical period after decolonization or the process representing the onset and conclusion of colonization, rather, the “post” refers to a liberationist conscientization.[60] As a cultural product by and for the colonized one that deploys a rhetoric of resistance to Roman imperial propaganda, Luke’s narrative illustrates a conscientization of the problematic nature of domination and subordination.

Furthermore, the Gospel of Luke includes themes of resistance culture that mirror themes in traditional postcolonial texts. Ideological resistance is a result of physical and military

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[57] Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, Routledge Classics (Abingdon, Oxon, OX: Routledge, 1994), 171.
[58] Stephen D. Moore and Fernando F. Segovia, "Postcolonial Biblical Criticism: Beginnings, Trajectories, Intersections," in *Postcolonial Biblical Criticism: Interdisciplinary Intersections*, ed. Stephen D. Moore and Fernando F. Segovia (London: T & T Clark International, 2005), 10.
[59] Fernando F. Segovia, "Mapping the Postcolonial Optic in Biblical Criticism: Meaning and Scope," in *Postcolonial Biblical Criticism: Interdisciplinary Intersections*, ed. Stephen D. Moore and Fernando F. Segovia (London: T & T Clark International, 2005), 23.
[60] Segovia, “Mapping the Postcolonial Optic,” 23-78.

opposition to colonialism. It renews and restores a community's cultural and political cohesion as well as identity against the colonial system.[61] Studying the literary productions of colonized people of former British and French colonies in Africa and Asia, Edward Said observes four themes of resistance culture: 1) adoption of the colonizers' literary motifs in order to ascribe new meanings; 2) reimagination of colonizing literature with a postcolonial interpretation of characters; 3) recuperation and reading of native culture; and 4) creation of a new nationalism with the aim of developing human community for the liberation of all persons. [62] These same themes exist in literature that predates the modern decolonization of Asian and African nations.

Critical readings of the Lukan narratives reveal themes of resistance culture that Said identifies in the postcolonial literature of the 20th century. Such themes that include: the adoption of colonizers' literary motifs, the recuperation of native culture, and the construction of a new nationalism. Scholars, including John Dominic Crossan, note that Luke-Acts is an epic that draws from the literary themes and motifs of the Virgil's Aeneid.[63] By utilizing oral and written traditions of ancient Judaism and the nascent Jesus movement—including the parables of, prophecies of, and liturgies about Jesus—Luke recuperates and reads the native culture of Jewish and Galilean communities of first-century Palestine. Luke, similarly and yet distinctively from other Gospel writers, creates a new nationalism with the aim of developing a human community through visions of the kingdom of God, which include changes social relationship and status reversals. In its own way, Luke resists themes of Roman imperialism, ideology, and hierarchy.

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[61] Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1994), 209.
[62] Said, *Culture and Imperialism,* 209-220.
[63] cf, John Dominic Crossan, "Roman Imperial Theology" in *In the Shadow of Empire: Reclaiming the Bible as a History of Faithful Resistance*; ed. Richard A. Horsley (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 59-74; Dennis R. MacDonald, *Luke and Vergil: Imitations of Classical Greek Literature*, New Testament and Greek Literature, vol. 2 (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014), 1; Marianne Palmer Bonz, *The Past as Legacy: Luke-Acts and Ancient Epic* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2000).

Yet, the Gospel bears an ambivalence and mimicry to the colonialism that lives in its literary DNA, as it is pure neither in its resistance to nor assimilation of colonialism.

Biblical scholars usually fall into two camps in interpreting Luke's engagement with imperial Rome. As discussed above, scholars like Johnson have interpreted the Gospel as an apologetic text meant to cast the Christians as political harmless. Others, like Gary Gilbert, interpret Luke's rhetoric as resistance. Although I generally analyze Luke's rhetoric as subversive, I contend that the narrative is ambivalent toward Rome, revealing an attraction to and repulsion from imperialism.[64] This ambivalence makes Luke's rhetoric complicated and nuanced, making a scholarly consensus of the Gospel's purpose elusive—vacillating between accommodationist and adversarial. The work of Homi Bhabha elucidates some of the rhetorical tension in Luke. In "Signs Taken for Wonders," Bhabha writes, "The ambivalence at the source of traditional discourses on authority enables a form of subversion, founded on the undecidability that turns the discursive conditions of dominance into the grounds of intervention."[65] Luke's writing features the sovereignty of God and proliferation of God's kingdom, it unveils the fragility of Rome's power and supremacy and develops a discourse of subversion.

By adopting literary motifs and propaganda of Roman culture while integrating the theological material of Israel, Luke is a hybrid text. Its hybridity is not simply an improvisation on literary cultures, rather it is also a resistance text hiding in plain sight. Bhabha notes, "Hybridity is the revaluation of the assumption of colonial identity through the repetition of discriminatory identity effects. It displays the necessary deformation and displacement of all cites of discrimination and domination."[66] An impact of Luke's rhetoric is its display of the

[64] cf. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, "Ambivalence," in *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*, second edition (New York: Routledge, 2007), 10-11.
[65] Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 160.
[66] Bhabha, *The Location of Culture,* 159.

fractures in the dominance of political, economic, social, and rhetorical spaces that Rome uses to maintain hegemony and subjugation. The narrative is a form of civil disobedience that features the ambivalent relationship between the colonized and colonizer.

Because postcolonial criticism has its foundations in materialist readings unequal relationships, it compliments other critical readings that analyze power dynamics. Colonialism is a category that contributes to inequality of social relationships that intersects with gender, class, ethnicity, race, and sexuality. In addition to geopolitical power struggles and indignities suffered as colonized people, Luke 18:1-30 tells stories about the plight of women and the poor in society. The struggles of colonization intersect with the oppressions of patriarchy as well as economic class.

Many characters experience and transform multiple power relationships simultaneously. The oppressions and liberations intersect colonialism with gender and economic class. Like postocolonialism, intersectionality is a postmodern term that existed before the development of the theory. Law professor and lawyer Kimberlé Crenshaw broke theoretical ground in 1989 and 1991when she theorized the term "intersectionality" in her work analyzing African American women's experiences of greater marginalization of labor practices and domestic abuse.[67] Intersectional areas are subsumed in the traditional binaries of discrimination. Since Crenshaw's groundbreaking work, many scholars continue to investigate the phenomenon of intersectionality and its relationship to multiple inequalities. They analyze and theorize issues regarding intersectionality to understand the complexities of inequalities that ensue in the various layers of

[67] Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color," *Stanford Law Review* 43, no. 6 (July 1991): 1244, DOI: 10.2307/1229039; Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics," *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 1989, no. 1 (1989): Article 8, https://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/uclf/vol1989/iss1/8 ; Sylvia Walby, Jo Armstrong, and Sofia Strid, "Intersectionality: Multiple Inequalities in Social Theory," *Sociology* 2012, vol. 46 no. 2 (2012): 224-240.

identities associated with an individual and a collective. Analyzing various dimensions of identity politics that occur in the Luke 18:1-30 contribute to the study of social transformations in Luke's vision of the kingdom of God.

Social relationships negotiated through gendered circumstances, social standing, and geopolitical associations are evident in the parables and stories of Luke 18:1-30. Examining the transformation of these unequal social relationships among the characters is pertinent to interpreting the social transformation that the Kingdom of God requires of believers. Gender is a key factor in the construction of social order in the Roman Empire. Attention to the institution of the household, with a focus on the role of the *pater familias* and the subordinate members, such as women and children, throughout the Empire is imperative. In writing about the Kingdom of God, Luke depicts a discourse of resistance against the structure of the *pater familias* and the inferiorization of women and those in the domestic sphere. Several of the stories in Luke 18:1-30 address male-female and public-domestic formations and relations: while gender relations are at work in the parable of a widow and judge, domestic-public relations are operative in the story of the Jesus blessing the children.

Socio-economics constitutes another pivotal factor in the construction of social order in the Roman Empire. Attention to the imperial economy, in which wealthy landowning elites benefit most by the production of the underclasses, is essential. In writing about the Kingdom of God, Luke illustrates a discourse of resistance against the imperial economy as well. Several of the characters in Luke 18:1-30—the widow and the judge, the Pharisee and the tax collector, the disciples and the rich ruler—belong to different social classes of imperial society. To account for the myriad of social relationships and their power dynamics, I examine unequal relationships

rooted in gender and socioeconomic power relationships along with postcolonial criticism.[68] Such status represents a key factor in their interaction within their respective stories.

Overview

The parables of a widow and judge and the Pharisee and the tax collector as well as the stories of Jesus blessing the children and a certain ruler are rich and complex narratives on Luke's polyvalent vision of the kingdom of God as a theological, political, and personal space for transforming the power dynamics in social relationships. They reveal the significance of human participation, especially in individual choices, in the dismantling of systemic injustices that perpetuate social, political, and economic poverty and powerlessness. Luke 18:1-30 demonstrates a vision of the Kingdom as being rooted in power sharing that occurs when individual chose to reverse status quo.

As a cultural product, Luke's narrative reflects the context shared by its audience. This shared knowledge establishes a basis for interpreting the themes and dynamics that unify the parables and stories in 18:1-30 as a narrative unit. In chapter 2, I describe Luke's political, economic, social, and rhetorical context that establishes, legitimizes, and maintains the power dynamics that are familiar to his audience. Additionally, the chapter describes the literary setting and narrative themes in the four stories that demonstrate the coherence of their placement. In chapters 3-6, I analyze each parable and story for theological, political, and personal response to the kingdom of God as revealed in Luke's vision. Chapter 7 demonstrates God's salvific power runs concurrently with humanity's active participation, individual choices, and a profound recognition that the theological is political and personal.

[68] Segovia, "Mapping the Postcolonial Optic," 75-76.

CHAPTER 2

Resistance to Rome: Exploring Kingdom Motifs in Luke 18:1-30

Power dynamics in interpersonal relationships are, in part, a consequence of the social, cultural, and political structures in a society. They do not form in a vacuum. To transform oppressive power structures, one must understand the systems that establish, legitimate, and maintain unjust ideological practices of dominance and the individual choices that perpetuate them. Luke's polyvalent vision of the kingdom of God as a space where humanity works in cooperation with God through Jesus's ministry to create a society of justice and liberation reflects the power dynamics of its time as overturned by God's reign.

As a product of first-century Roman colonialism, the Gospel of Luke reflects its social consciousness and relations, including class relations. Analyzing the rhetoric of Luke illustrates how the ideology of its time influences the development and content of the work. In *Marxism and Literary Criticism*, Terry Eagleton explains that a person's material experiences form their consciousness.[1] Therefore, Roman ideology and the people's resistance are factors that shape Luke's storytelling and rhetoric. The set of parables and stories in 18:1-30 illustrate aspects of Roman imperialism and colonial resistance.

The political, economic, social, and rhetorical contexts of Roman colonialism shape the author's creation, the audience's reception, and the narrative arc of Luke's gospel and its vision of the kingdom of God. I contend that Luke 18:1-30 describes political subversions, reversals of unjust power dynamics, and individual accountability as espoused in Jesus's teachings. Because

[1] Terry Eagleton, *Marxism and Literary Criticism* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1976), 4.

context matters for understanding the urgency and significance of Jesus's teaching and ministry, it is imperative to consider the milieux that affect the various landscapes of daily life among Luke's audience. To read Luke as a hidden transcript, we must be aware of the public transcript about which the text furtively articulates the injustices, oppressions, and frustrations of the people for and about whom he has written.

As the Roman Empire and its vassals dictate the lives of Jesus and his followers, the colonial context shapes the story and the writer of Luke. In the following section, I will briefly discuss the power and influence of Roman colonization for the narrative period as well as Luke. Geopolitics sets the political, economic, and social power dynamics of the temporal and regional space, evoking militaristic, cultural, and ideological resistances that shape postcolonial consciousness. Richard Horsley asserts, "The lifetime of Jesus and his followers was framed historically by widespread popular revolts against both the Romans and their client rulers."[2] This cultural context is fodder for Jesus's mission and message regarding the kingdom of the God and Luke's subversive recording of this aspect of Israel's rebellious history.

Roman Colonialism: Political, Economic, and Social Power

The Gospel of Luke is literature developed out of the social and cultural milieu of the latter half of the 1st century CE of the Roman Empire. Because Luke's composition contains material from the Gospel of Mark, scholarly consensus dates it after the destruction of Jerusalem's second temple, ca 70 CE. John Carroll asserts, "Even apart from that source hypothesis, the narrative presented multiple allusions to the destruction of the second temple (13:34-35; 19:43-44; 21:20-24), and that textual marker, too, would place the book's writing

[2] Richard A. Horsley, "Jesus and Empire," in *In the Shadow of Empire*, ed. Richard A. Horsley (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 81.

after 70."[3] Additionally, the Lukan writer claims to be a member of a second or third generation of believers who received an account of Jesus' ministry from those who had witnessed it from the beginning (1:1-3). Thus, general scholarly consensus situates the Gospel between 85 to 95 CE.[4] Source hypothesis and textual evidence suggest composition of Luke in the last quarter of the first century.

Although Luke's audience was not composed of contemporaries of Jesus or his movement, they were familiar with the socio-historical setting of the narrative. In their social history of the first century of the Jesus movement, Ekkehard W. Stegemann and Wolfgang Stegemann explain that the socio-cultural conditions of the later generation would have been indistinguishable from those at the time of the movement.[5] Despite the inaccuracies of dating based on rulers mentioned in Luke 1-3, which problematize interpreting the narrative as a recorded history or a reliable text based on present historical standards, Luke's audience probably recognized the socio-cultural context of the narrative as a mirror to their own. The abuses of Roman imperialism, its leaders, and its vassals involved many travesties throughout generations, provoking widespread revolts in nations throughout the Mediterranean.[6] The colonial experiences of Judea would have resonated with the experiences of other peoples and nations dominated by Roman forces.[7] Therefore, reading about the community in Luke would have been similar to reading about one's own.

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[3] John T. Carroll, *Luke: A Commentary*, The New Testament Library (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012), 4.
[4] cf. Carroll, *Luke: A Commentary,* 4. In footnote 11, Carroll delineates arguments of several scholars who argue that Luke was composed at the beginning of the second century, as late as 125 CE. He argues that at best the range is between 75 to 125 CE. cf. Michael Wolter, *Das Lukasevangelium*, HNT 5 (Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2008).
[5] Ekkehard W. Stegemann and Wolfgang Stegemann, *The Jesus Movement: A Social History of Its First Century* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2009), 102.
[6] cf. Horsley, "Jesus and Empire," 81.
[7] Due to the sophistication of his Greek and his references to Theophilus in (1:4; Acts 1), scholars contend that Luke was written by a Gentile, someone who is a believer of God and Scriptures and who is committed to the Jewish

Political Landscape

The political history of Roman domination in Israel is foundational to the setting of Luke's story. Immediately after his prologue, he dates the life of Jesus alongside the reigns of various vassals, rulers, and emperors at the time. According to Luke, Jesus's story begins during the reign of Herod of Judea. Historical data accounts for Herod the Great as ruler during 37-4 BCE, and as an ally of Augustus Caesar, who reigned 27 BCE - 14 CE.[8] As an ally, Herod's power was limited. Jeremy Patterson notes that allies loyal to Augustus unequivocally conceded to the Roman Empire, making them Rome's subjects.[9] By introducing Jesus's story during the reign of Herod (1:5), Luke highlights the significance of the colonial context of his birth. During his lifetime and into the period in which Luke wrote, Rome had eleven emperors.

The constant turnover of emperors, colonial governors, magistrates, and high priests colluded to maintain imperial presence and dominance in Judea. Cults, as described by the Romans, existing in the Empire had an intimate relationship with politics.[10] Horsley asserts, "Herod and the Romans kept the Jerusalem temple-state intact as a key institution in the imperial order."[11] Therefore, the temple-state was as much a symbol of Roman power as the military garrisons, the Herodian kingship, and the Roman governors.[12] Luke corroborates this relationship in his list of imperial and temple leadership, which descends through the political hierarchy from

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people (cf. Carroll, *Luke: A Commentary,* 2). Luke is probably writing to or from communities located in an urban center in the eastern Mediterranean. Carroll notes, "One thing is clear: the setting within the Roam Empire is an imprint contextual marker for the narrative, its rhetorical working, and interpretation" (p. 3).

[8] Jeremy Patterson, "Rome's New Kings (31 BC-AD 476)," in *The World of Rome: An Introduction to Roman Culture*, eds. Peter Jones and Keith Sidwell (London: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 52.

[9] Patterson, "Rome's New Kings,"52.

[10] Simon Price, "The Roman Mind" in *The World of Rome: An Introduction to Roman Culture*, eds. Peter Jones and Keith Sidwell (London: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 236.

[11] Horsley, "Jesus and Empire," 79.

[12] Horsley, "Jesus and Empire," 80.

Caesar to high priest (3:1-2). Interconnections between the temple and state were not unique to Judea, as they were a critical tool for domination and exploitation throughout the Empire.

Rome's ideology of superiority came in its belief of divine destiny, which was rooted in the relationship of cult and state. Maintaining divine favor through displays of public piety, an integration of local worship and politics, Rome acculturated subjugated peoples through its rhetoric of destined dominance. People across the Empire would connect with the imperial face of Rome through Judea's temple-state, because it was like the temple-states in their particular region. Luke's political frame was accessible and understandable to all colonized people.

Although Augustus' reign was punctuated with a narrative of peace, many regions throughout the Empire were anything but peaceful.[13] Many Judeans suffered and resisted imperial oppression. Although factually inaccurate, Luke's description of the census decree and Quirinius as governor of Syria (2:1) illustrates the environment of political subjugation and military occupation in Judea surrounding Jesus' birth. Insurrections were a conspicuous outcome of the political tyranny as well as the imperial economic assaults, which involved crippling taxation and perpetual pauperization of the masses.

Economic Landscape

Exploitation through taxes and land confiscations contoured the economic landscape of deep poverty for many in Judea. After Pompey's intervention in Judea's civil war in the mid first century BCE, the economic landscape of the country changed. During the preceding Hasmonean

[13] cf. Jeremy Patterson, "Rome's New Kings," 55. Peace was a dominant theme in Augustan narrative near the end for the first century BCE. Unlike the period of the Republic, which was dominated by militarism and war, Augustus' main idea was peace, punctuated with the building of the Altar of Peace dedicated in 9 BCE. The era known as Pax Romana was officially inaugurated during the reign of Vespasian, with the conclusion of the destruction of the Jewish Temple in 70 CE (cf. 72-73).

period (135-104 BCE), Jewish small farmers were free from the heavy tax burdens levied by the Greek rule of the Seleucids (312-135 BCE).[14] Although the Hasmoneans owned large amounts of land as royal property, landless small farmers were either leaseholders on these properties or owners of land.[15] Under Pompey, though, economic conditions mirrored the Greek colonizers with burdens of high taxation and land confiscation for imperial power and prosperity, particularly for Herod and his descendants. The taxation served as a revenue source for Rome as well as a tool of humiliation for conquered peoples.

Herod the Great, as vassal to Pompey, eliminated coastal, urban centers in Judea as part of the property of Jewish communities, forcing tradespeople and many small farmers inland to settle on smaller amounts of lands. The loss of the urban coastal region meant a loss in trade and an increase of agricultural pressure.[16] In their social history of the Jesus movement, Stegemann and Stegemann assert, "Whether he used these as his own royal domains or gave them to his favorites, the land was now tilled more and more by tenants, day laborers, and slaves. In this way, considerable land passed into the hands of non-Jewish owners, while the numbers of Jewish leaseholders increased, and this naturally raised the potential for social conflict."[17] Herod's economic tyranny created a land shortage per capita in the population for small farmers. Having less land to farm and oppressive taxes, small famers became less self-sufficient, creating a vicious cycle of land loss, taxation, and more poverty.[18] The system of declining poverty, in which they go from landowners to day laborers to slaves, was a usual concurrence.

[14] Stegemann, *The Jesus Movement,* 110.
[15] Stegemann, *The Jesus Movement,* 110.
[16] Stegemann, *The Jesus Movement,* 110.
[17] Stegemann, *The Jesus Movement,* 110.
[18] Stegemann, *The Jesus Movement,* 112.

Additionally, as small farmers and tradespeople were unable to sustain their lives through income of their own making, their general debt burden increased. Changes in Jewish tax laws that eliminated the jubilee year, although intended to help the poor secure loans to sustain their families, allowed the loans to continue, practically into perpetuity. Stegemann and Stegemann contend,

> It is clear that this pauperization of the peasantry created a considerable potential for robbery and revolutionary movements. Not coincidently, again and again the now powerless Hasmonean circles recruited from among the small farmers crowds of followers for their struggles against Roman and Herodian powers. For the revolutionary climate, which gave birth to the restructuring of Palestine by Pompey, also remains a socio-political characteristic of the whole epoch up to the First Jewish Revolt, in which it was no accident that the Jerusalem debt records were burned at the very beginning (Jos. *War* 2.427). Here sprouted, as it were, the seed that that been sown more than a hundred years earlier by Pompey.[19]

The pauperization of first-century Palestine is the economic landscape of Jesus's audience. Since the First Jewish Revolt occurred within a decade or so of the writing of Luke, the conditions of high taxes and the inability for small farmers to make a living would make for an epoch that would continue to cloud the generations hearing and reading the Luke.

Furthermore, other regions colonized by Rome experienced similar economic conditions. Stegemann and Stegemann note that ancient societies were mostly agricultural, with the elite in control of most property and small farmers who incur large tax burdens with little opportunity for sustainability.[20] Therefore, the economic life of first-century Palestine reflects economic reality throughout the Empire. Although urban centers were less impoverished due to magistrates providing market oversight, Luke's urban audience would understand that the economic reality

[19] Stegemann, *The Jesus Movement,* 112.
[20] Stegemann, *The Jesus Movement,* 42.

of the cities and rural areas included mostly people living at subsistence or below.[21] As Luke's audience sees Jesus and his community, they also see themselves.

The economic oppression of Judeans was also an outcome of the collusion between the priesthood and Roman imperial authorities, given the region's status as a temple-state. When Pompey conquered Judea and Galilee, he kept the temple-state model and used the high priests to govern and to collect tribute.[22] Additionally, as the people made sacrifices, paid tithes, and brought offerings to the God of Israel, high priests, also, made sacrifices to Rome. The taxes and tribute escalated and perpetuated economic pressures upon the poor, provoking the various revolts and insurrections throughout the region."[23] Horsley contends, "Between the revolts of 4 BCE and 66-70 CE scribal groups as well as peasants and Jerusalemites protested repeatedly against the rulers, and peasants formed several movements of resistance and renewal. Many of these protests were deeply rooted in Israelite traditions of independence, including covenantal principles of life directly under the kingship of God."[24] The impoverishment, hunger, and debt of the economic landscape were conditions that Jesus, and therefore the Gospels, addressed.

Social Landscape

Ethnic Politics

Rome's military dominance nurtured ideologies of superiority and inferiority based on geopolitics and ethnicity. With his analysis of classical literature, Benjamin Isaac posits a direct connection linking Roman views of foreign people to their ideology of expansion.[25] He asserts,

[21] Stegemann, *The Jesus Movement,* 31-34, 51-52. As urban centers were slightly better economically, mass poverty existed in urban areas as well (cf. 51).
[22] Horsley, "Jesus and Empire," 78-79.
[23] Horsley, "Jesus and Empire," 80.
[24] Horsley, "Jesus and Empire," 81.
[25] Benjamin Isaac, *The Invention of Racism in Classical Antiquity*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), 2.

"I do not discuss the mechanisms of ancient imperialism, but again, the attitudes of mind that created an atmosphere in which wars of expansion were undertaken—or not undertaken."[26] Such attitudes included a people could be dominated or conquered. Rome regarded groups of people as superior or inferior based on their stereotypes of weakness or strength. Generalizations and stereotypes as a basis for discrimination, inferiorization, and domination are what Isaac calls proto-racism.[27] Because of its ability to amass large number of troops and exploit human, land, and financial resources of conquered people, Rome's sense of superiority grew. An ideology of war fed their ideology of conquest.[28] Classicist Jeremy Patterson asserts, "Roman conquest came to bind: your services were required, your land was at risk. Roman victory brought obligations, not just humiliation and transient loss. In this way the Roman concept of *imperium* spawned the reality of empire."[29] Its military-industrial complex, undergirded by the pillaging resources of those they conquered, perpetuated a cycle of tyranny, an ideology of dominance, and social hierarchies of "proto" racism and ethnicisation.

Romans connected their military superiority to an imperialistic prosperity gospel of divine favor. As their armies decimated nations and kingdoms in North Africa and the Mediterranean and exalted themselves as world conquerors, Roman leaders and authorities argued that their dominance had been ordained by the gods. Isaac notes, "Cicero, as suitable in a speech about religious matters, ascribes their excellent religiosity as the true source of Roman superiority."[30] Rome proved to be superior in the art of war.[31] Its narrative of divine favor and

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[26] Isaac, *The Invention of Racism in Classical Antiquity,* 2.
[27] I disagree with Isaac's argument that protoracism existed as a progenitor to racism; rather I argue that racism simply exists on its own accord.
[28] Jeremy Patterson, "The Idea of Rome," in *The World of Rome: An Introduction to Roman Culture*, eds. Peter Jones and Keith Sidwell (London: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 14.
[29] Patterson, "The Idea of Rome," 15.
[30] Isaac, *The Invention of Racism in Classical Antiquity*, 321.
[31] Isaac, *The Invention of Racism in Classical Antiquity*, 322.

superiority perpetuated their drive to conquer and dominate; their ability to conquer fed their self-understanding of divine favor and superiority. As imperial forces conquered nations with the death and destruction of war, they controlled minds through ideology, theology, and rhetoric.

Using their massive military, political, and economic might to colonize and subjugate the Palestinian region, Romans viewed Judeans, like the many other peoples they had conquered, as culturally inferior and weak. However, due to their deference to antiquity and ancestral religions, Roman philosophers and imperialists gave the Jewish diaspora and their ancient customs special consideration in regard to their piety. Illustrating both disgust and respect with Judeans, Seneca as quoted by Isaacs, incites, "Meanwhile the customs of this accursed people (the Jews) have gained such influence that they are now received throughout all the world. The vanquished have given laws to their victors…." Considering the constant rebellions and unrest in first-century Judea, Seneca asserts that Rome's allowance of Jewish religious observances had undermined their absolute control over the population.[32] Recognition of the significance and richness of Jewish traditions did not deter Rome from using its power to display their social and cultural superiority through its ravishing of Palestinians land, service, and humanity.

Gender Politics

Another aspect of social dominance in Roman society is its patriarchal system. The ideology of conquest continued from the battlefield and into the home, by way of gender-related matters. Patriarchy subordinated women to men in both domestic and public spheres with its establishment of norms and mores of women and their place in society. Expanding the binary of superior/inferior power relationships among men and women, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza coins

[32] Isaac, *The Invention of Racism in Classical Antiquity*, 322.

the neologism of kyriarchy to describe the sociopolitical system of dominance with the rule of the lord, master, and father.[33] She writes, "Rather than accepting the prevalent feminist definition of patriarchy as the domination of men over women, I sought an analytic concept of patriarchy that was historical and at same time could express the changing social relations of domination/subordination which are structured by the economic political discourses not only of gender but also, race, class, and colonialism."[34] Schüssler Fiorenza's neologism is aligned with the Roman titles of pater patriae and paterfamilias. Augustus Caesar wanted to be considered as pater patriae, father of the country, i.e., the oldest male and head of household, instead of dictator or consul, making him not only the (beneficent) lord of the Empire but also of all its subjects. Paterfamilias is the male head of household. Margaret Brucia and Gregory Daughtery explain, "Besides his role as head of the family, the paterfamilias was the legal owner of everything and everyone in the household and guardian of all of its religious rituals. The paterfamilias was the only male in the family who enjoyed full legal rights and protection under Roman law."[35] Evidence shows that women experienced subjugation in various degrees based on class, connections, and family ties.[36]

In addition to the home, gender politics were significant in the public sphere. Ideally, women were socially invisible. Carolyn Osiek and Margaret MacDonald argue, "According to ancient text as well as modern anthropological theories, the public domain of temples, theatre, forum, assemblies, and law courts or, in the countryside among peasants, the town square and the

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[33] Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins*, Tenth Anniversary Edition With a New Introduction, (New York, NY: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1994), xix.
[34] Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, xviii.
[35] Margaret A. Brucia and Gregory N. Daugherty*, To Be a Roman: Topics in Roman Culture* (Mundelein, IL: Bolchazy-Carducci Publishers, Inc, 2007), 9.
[36] cf. Carolyn Osiek and Margaret Y. MacDonald, *A Woman's Place: House Churches in Earliest Christianity* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2006), 2-3.

fields is the world of men in which women do not mix, while the domain of house and garden, domestic production, and childcare is the private domain of women."[37] The presence of women in courthouses or among the crowds in Galilee illustrate that the lines between public and private spheres were not rigidly enforced. However, their silence from the record and their impressionistic appearance in the crowds suggest that the public discourse may have preferred women to be quiet and invisible.

Rhetorical Landscape

The Roman propaganda of superiority was an omnipresent reality in the public transcript throughout the Empire. John Dominic Crossan calls this propaganda, particularly as created in the Augustan period, imperial theology.[38] Analyzing the imperial theology infused in *The Aeneid*, coinage, statues, altars, images, and other cultural history in public life, he notes, "It was, I emphasize, a narrative theology, a story told in a multimedia context that could have learned but little from Madison Avenue."[39] For example, *The Aeneid*, a poetic presentation of a mythological account of the founding of Rome and prophecy of Augustus as divine conqueror, was a significant transmitter of the imperial narrative. It includes the divine decree from Jupiter that Rome through Augustus, a descendant of the gods, would rule the world with an empire unlimited by time and space.[40] The decree divinizes Rome's supremacy. Furthermore, the epic poem reifies divine favor upon Augustus Caesar by calling him the Son of God, Lord, Redeemer,

[37] Osiek and MacDonald, *A Woman's Place,* 3.
[38] Roman imperial theology is different from the cult of empire, which comes from emperors and emperor families being deemed and even worshipped as deities or divinities.
[39] John Dominic Crossan, "Roman Imperial Theology," in *In the Shadow of Empire: Reclaiming the Bible as a History of Faithful* Resistance, ed. Richard A Horsley (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 61.
[40] Virgil, *The Aeneid: A New Prose Translation,* trans. David West, (London: Penguin Books, 1991), 1.255-285; 6.788-800; 8.678-800.

and Savior of the World.[41] Imperial propaganda perpetuated the public script of Roman supremacy with its ideological hegemony: it constructed, legitimated, and maintained stereotypes, aspirations, and social positions created by the dominant group.

Another means of indoctrinating imperial theology and assimilating local elites came through public art and culture. A multimedia campaign of Roman ideology was on display in currency, public art, buildings, and festivals, and education. *The Aeneid* was a primary course book in the classroom and the town squares. Male students between the ages of 12 to 15 studied, recited, and analyzed it as part of their curriculum in public and private education.[42] Lines from the epic poem were inscribed in public arts throughout the colonies. Simon Price illumines, "Under the Empire a primary position was given to Virgil's *Aeneid*. Knowledge of this can be seen in mosaics from Britain (fig. 8) and in graffiti from Pompeii quoting the opening lines of the first two books."[43] Roman imperialism etched on public edifices and ingrained through education seared in the minds of the colonized the ideologies of superiority/inferiority and dominance/subordination.

Political, economic, and social infrastructures of Roman domination created and facilitated an ideological environment that reified the power dynamics of dominance and subordination in social relationships. Laws, customs, values, economics, policies, ethics, arts, politics, and religion—superstructures in society—legitimized, perpetuated, and maintained the infrastructures that gave the colonial elites control of production and resources as well as the authority to exploit those they deem inferior. People's rhetoric, ideologies, and consciousness, as

[41] Crossan, "Roman Imperial Theology," 73.
[42] Price, "The Roman Mind," 238.
[43] Price, "The Roman Mind," 238.

materialist philosophy explains, do not form from abstract thinking; rather they form out of a person's material experiences.

Political and Rhetorical Resistance

Roman political, economic, social, and ideological systems colluded to propagate imperial expansion, exploitation, and dominance. As the imperial machine deepened the poverty, deprivation, and humiliation of colonized and conquered peoples, political and ideological resistance ensued. Public forms of resistance—such as peasant revolts and military uprisings—were common responses among freedom fighters in the context of social and geopolitical oppression of Jesus and his followers.[44] Horsley notes, "Again, thirty-some years after Jesus' mission, after multiple provocations by insensitive or arrogant Roman governors and predatory practices of the high-priestly families, widespread revolt erupted."[45] Hence, Titus Flavius Vespasianus wreaked havoc in Judea with military violence, pillaging, and ravaging in order to suppress revolts and uprisings, ultimately destroying the second Temple circa 70 CE. However, most people suffering from various forms of slavery, colonialism, and other types of political subordination did not resist publicly and forcibly because of fear of reprisals. Instead, they communicated fears, frustrations, and hopes for liberation through stories, culture, and rituals away from the public sphere in what political scientist James C. Scott calls hidden transcripts.

As a refuge from the material, bodily, and psychic tyranny of their subjugated reality, subordinate groups create arenas where they can express their frustration, critique the socio-political relationships, and speak truthfully about the fallacy of the public transcript in the dominant group's ideology and rhetoric. Scott coined the term "hidden transcript" during his

[44] Resistance movements are ubiquitous through history as a form of protest and liberation for oppressed people.
[45] Horsley, "Jesus and Empire," 81.

study of the social existence of the subordinate classes in slave, serfdom, and caste systems throughout history and the world. In sequestered settings, a shared critique of domination coalesces into a subversive, counter narrative and counter culture and develops a transcript hidden from the public. In *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*, he asserts, "By definition, the hidden transcript represents discourse—gesture, speech, practices—that is ordinarily excluded from the public transcript of subordinates by the exercise of power. The practice of domination, then *creates* the hidden transcript. If the domination is particularly severe, it is likely to produce a hidden transcript of corresponding richness."[46] There, people reveal different aspects of the dominant groups' impotence and self-constructed oppression.

The severity of Rome's economic exploitation (through labor, land confiscation, and taxation), ideology of domination, and collusions with cultic practices facilitated varied and supple forms of resistance found throughout the colonized nations in the Empire. Because the forms of domination among Romans are similar to the methods of those used by imperial and dominating classes in modern history, Scott's theories regarding the art of resistance are applicable for analyzing the Gospels, particularly Luke.[47] Perpetual colonization, exploitation, violence, and abuse at the hands of the Roman superpower—and past conquerors—shaped a postcolonial consciousness and a resistance culture among Jesus and his contemporaries as well as their ancestors and their successors.

While conceding to the Roman public script for survival, Judeans and Galileans secretly contested their subordination with their own transcript. Through acts, dialog, rituals, and ideals, similar to those discussed by Scott, they created a hidden transcript: linguistic disguises

[46] James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990), 21.
[47] It is most likely modern practices of domination are derivatives and expansions of the atrocities committed by the ancients.

(parables), ritual codes (table-fellowship, last Passover), sequestered sites (wilderness), and content of dissent (resistance martyrs and returning prophets unique to their ancient culture of prophecy and Davidic theology).[48] The work, interactions, and stories of Jesus, the kingdom of God, and his movement are elements of a hidden transcript unique among first-century Palestinians who wanted freedom from Rome's oppression. This hidden transcript eventually spread throughout the Empire. The matrix of theology, politics, and personal experiences interweaves with the subversive acts and discourses represented in the Jewish traditions.

The ancients created a rhetorical culture of resistance, especially through literature and writings, through the hidden transcripts in their social, political, economic, and religious practices. Scholars apply the concept of hidden transcripts to analyze the historical and contemporary events that undermined the domination. Although a political science theory, New Testament scholars have applied it to socio-historical studies of Jesus, Paul, and other Judean communities of the first century. They contend that deeds, speeches, and sequestered social spaces, as chronicled in Q, the Gospels, and epistles, are acts of resistance similar to those analyzed in Scott's work.[49] Their approach seems to miss that the Gospels and epistles are also a mode of hidden transcripts, just as speeches and fellowships. I use the concept as an interpretive lens within postcolonial literary analysis, focusing on the narrative as a mode of furtive

[48] Cf. Scott, "*Hidden Transcripts*," xi.

[49] Richard Horsley, ed., *Hidden Transcripts and the Arts of Resistance: Applying the Work of James C. Scott to Jesus and Paul* (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2004); Amanda Miller, *Rumors of Resistance: Status Reversals and Hidden Transcripts in the Gospel of Luke*, Emerging Scholars (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2014); John T. Carroll, *Luke: A Commentary,* The New Testament Library (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014). The use of the Scott's theory burgeoned in the New Testament studies. In *Hidden Transcripts and the Arts of Resistance: Applying the Work of James C. Scott to Jesus and Paul*, scholars relate Scott's work to their historical analyses of the Gospels, Q, and Paul's epistles, documents about the historical Jesus and Paul. Scott's theory is a hermeneutic for interpreting the popular resistance in peasant revolts in the first century, as well as apocalypticism. Using social-historical methods, Amanda C. Miller applies Scott's theory in the language of status reversals found in Mary's Magnificat, Jesus' first sermon, and the parable of Lazarus and the Rich Man in R*umors of Resistance: Status Reversals and Hidden Transcripts in the Gospel of Luke*. She focuses on Luke's vision of living as Christians in the midst of imperial rule.

communication and not just as a means for communicating covert affairs. The concept can be used as a hermeneutic for engaging the rhetoric of literature itself as a cultural product alongside the events as told in the literature.

As a collection of hidden transcripts, Luke along with the other Gospels represent cultural material produced as resistance literature by colonized people. They convey the very same elements that Scott describes in the concept of hidden transcripts: parables, ritual codes, sequestered locations, and cultural dissidents.[50] Not simply a means of communicating past hidden transcripts, they are the hidden transcript that continues to be read, preached, recited, and lived today. Admittedly, Horsley asserts, "Not only do the earliest Gospel sources Mark and Q portray Jesus as delivering most of his teaching as a hidden transcript, but the Gospel texts themselves can only be understood as hidden transcript, albeit very 'well-cooked' ones."[51] Their ambiguity toward Rome and their liberationist messages seem to illustrate the depths and sophistication of their transgressive and subversive rhetoric.

Luke's Rhetoric of Resistance

While communicating the history of subversion among Jesus and his followers, Luke undermines Roman imperial rule in its narrative of resistance. Rome's psychological, economic, and political terrorism of its colonies evoke Luke's well-cooked hidden transcript. Rooted in Jewish scriptures, it is a theological response to political oppressions and relational dysfunctions among the people. The liberating messages of the gospel traveled among subordinated groups throughout various geopolitical landscapes undetected by dominant classes of readers and

[50] Various forms of subversive and violent protest against domination are transcultural, transnational, and trans temporal.
[51] Horsley, *Hidden Transcript*, 64.

hearers as revolutionary texts. Subversive aspects of Luke are undetectable because the writer's rhetoric uses layered storytelling to create a sequestered space in the narrative, covertly aiming for specific groups. Jesus would describe this type of messaging in terms of "looking, they will not see; hearing, they will not understand" (8:10); today, moder readers may call it dog whistles. Luke casts his polyvalent vision of the kingdom of God in a sophisticated postcolonial hidden transcript, which is included in the narrative unit of the parables and stories of 18:1-30. Luke's vision resists colonial and social dominance using linguistic disguises embedded in parables, characterization, plot, and rhetoric.

Luke's Rhetorical Roots

As a cultural product of Rome's colonialism, the Gospel of Luke resists imperial theology by using the literary conventions and rhetoric from Greco-Roman and Jewish contexts. The narrative style reflects a classical Greek education and a study of the prophets in the Septuagint. The synthesis of these literary conventions demonstrates a hybridity produced by a postcolonial setting. This hybridity is similar to Said's theory of resistance literature, where colonized writers use the literary motifs of the colonizer to subvert dominance and expose the impotence of imperial rule.[52] Furthermore, Luke's presentation includes the counter imperialism that can be found in the theology of Jewish scriptures. Luke's subversive narrative transmits a hidden transcript of hope and an ideology of an alternative world longed for by oppressed groups that are transnational and transhistorical.

Like Greek philosophers of his day, Luke borrows rhetoric from the imperial theology and recasts it to discredit Roman propaganda. In "Luke-Acts and Negotiation of Authority and

[52] Cf. Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1994), 209-220.

Identity in the Roman World," Gary Gilbert argues that Luke and the Second Sophistic writers share common rhetoric about and perspectives of Rome.[53] Second Sophistic writers were intellectuals who used their literary works to discuss their firsthand knowledge of Roman power as subjects of eastern Mediterranean colonies and its effects on Greek identity.[54] Considering that elites like Luke had similar education, it is not surprising that they shared discursive tools and rhetorical strategies against Roman politics to analyze and write about their experiences. Like them, Luke criticizes Rome's contests for power and divine claim of world domination by identifying narrative elements of Roman propaganda and transposing them upon Jesus and the spread of the gospel. Gilbert notes that the Gospel, like its literary contemporaries, embeds subversion in conciliatory tones.[55] Integrating the linguistic codes of his geopolitical context, Luke transfers rhetorical and ideological language from Roman imperialism to the lordship of Jesus and the kingdom of God. Gilbert explains, "The language of nation appears in several narrative elements, including the identification of Jesus with the title *savior* and as the bringer of peace, the description of Jesus' ascent into heaven, and catalogues of geographic authority."[56] Focus on the language of savior and bringer of peace, which are delineations of the ruler of the Roman Empire, suggests that the kingdom of God is part of Luke's alternative narrative to the kingdom of Rome.[57]

Second Sophists and Luke share a claim to a superior knowledge over Roman rulers that allows them to reject imperial propaganda. Elevating Jesus and his Kingdom as more than a

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[53] Gary Gilbert, "Luke-Acts and Negotiation of Authority and Identity in the Roman World," in *The Multivalence of Biblical Texts and Theological Meanings,* ed. Christine Helmer (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2006), 98.

[54] Gilbert, "Luke-Acts," 90-91. Many elites in this circle had civic and professional lives including doctors, magistrates, philosophers, and orators. Although Gilbert does not identify Luke as one, he acknowledges, "Luke, the author of Luke-Acts, shares some of these same characteristics with those of the Second Sophistic."

[55] Gilbert, "Luke-Acts," 91.

[56] Gilbert, "Luke-Acts," 100.

[57] cf. Gilbert, "Luke-Acts," 104.

competitor, Luke demonstrates that they are a superior power over Rome. Luke, according to Gilbert, also confirms that knowledge of the gospel gives Jesus' followers the intellectual acumen to reject Roman propaganda as truth. Also, they recognize that they can use Roman structures and infrastructure for spreading the gospel. Gilbert assesses that Luke-Acts is a counter-imperial narrative that envisions a transformation of the Roman imperial social context.

Referring to Jesus as savior, lord, and redeemer, the same titles used for Caesar, is seditious. Luke's imperial language for Jesus and the kingdom of God, which draws upon the rhetorical work of Roman-dominated Greeks, is a rejection of Roman propaganda. Although Gilbert contends that the works of Luke and the Second Sophistic writers do not constitute a hidden transcript due to the lack of rigorous critique of Roman domination, my analysis of Luke asserts an acute subtlety in rhetoric to extend the work's shelf life and to broaden its audience reception. If the narrative were boldly subversive, Roman colonial history suggests that the followers of Jesus, the Movement, and the Gospels would have been annihilated, burned, and suppressed. The integration of Jewish teachings, and therefore some interpreters' hyper focus on its messages of personal piety and eschatological hope, may hide the political intensity of Luke's critique. The teachings of piety and the subtle criticisms may have encouraged the Gospel's reception among the elite classes throughout the Empire. Lastly, the blunt force of Luke's attack against Rome may also betray his own ambivalence toward Roman imperialism with his attraction as well as repulsion to such power.

The Jewish scriptures are another significant force in Luke's rhetoric. God's covenant through Abraham, Moses, and David as well as God's work of liberation against Israel's oppressors engage Rome's might in the Lukan narrative. Through them, the reader engages her current circumstance with a hermeneutic of God's promise and power as witnessed in scripture.

In "Women Prophets of God's Alternative Reign," Barbara Reid asserts that Mary's Magnificat, which proclaims God's anticipated work through the fruit of her womb, uses language that mirrors and reverses the imperial rhetoric of lordship, military conquest, and savior. In addition to Jesus's birth, Mary prophesizes to God's work of reversal of Roman ideology, creating not just a reversal of fortunes but also a call for redistribution of wealth among the poor and the rich.[58]

While traditional scholarship compares the Magnificat with Hannah's prayer (1 Samuel 2:1-10), recent scholarship interprets the thrust and themes of her words with victory hymns sung by Miriam (Exodus 15:1-21), Deborah (Judges 5:1-31), as well as a reinterpretation of Hannah's prayer.[59] They exult in God's might in humbling imperial powers and uplift God's work in saving God's covenant people. While extolling God's victory in geopolitical contests, they describe God's work in overturning social and economic conditions (cf. Exodus 5:17; Judges 5:6-7; 1 Samuel 2:5, 7-8).[60] Regarding the Magnificat, Ringe explains, "Conversely, the social transformation portrayed in the central verses prevents our sentimentalizing the affirmation of God's mercy."[61] Luke's inclusion of the Magnificat magnifies the prophetic witness of God's reversal in theological, political, and personal terms as included in the Jewish scriptures.

In light of the recent destruction of the Temple, Luke's audience may interpret Zechariah's Benedictus (1:67-79) as a promise of salvation through God's mercy and peace. Zechariah speaks of salvation as a multivalent term of religious and sociopolitical significance.[62]

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[58] Barbara Reid, "Women Prophets in God's Reign," in *Luke-Acts and Empire: Essays in Honor of Robert L Brawley,* ed. David Rhoads, David Esterline, and Jae Won Lee, Princeton Theological Monograph Series 151, (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2011), 44-59.
[59] cf. Miller, *Rumors of Resistance,* 95-100; Reid, "Women Prophets," 51.
[60] cf. Sharon H. Ringe, *Luke*, Westminster Bible Companion (Louisvile, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), 35; Carroll, *Luke*, 52. Carroll points out that God's social transformation is part of the ancient story.
[61] Ringe, *Luke*, 35.
[62] Carroll, *Luke*, 59; Joel Green, *The Gospel of Luke,* The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmanns, 1997), 114-115.

Horsley argues, “In response to the coming of Jesus, his mother, Mary, like Zechariah and Simeon, sang militant victory songs in anticipation that God ‘has brought down the powerful from thrones, and lifted up the lowly’ (Luke 1:46-55; cf. Luke 1:67-79; 2:29-32).”[63] The Magnificat and the Benedictus are examples of literary motifs, themes, prophecies, and teachings from the Jewish scriptures. Used uniquely in Luke as rhetorical salvos against Rome’s propaganda of superiority and eternal dominance, they also celebrate God’s reign on earth.

Kingdom of God

Luke envisions God’s reign as a multidimensional space that responds to people’s theological, political, and personal needs. As a theological space, the Kingdom is for individual, moral transformation through encounters with Jesus. As sociopolitical space, God’s reign creates a community and society of liberation and dignity as an alternative world to the oppressive realm of Roman dominion. Furthermore, God’s work through the Kingdom affects the daily existence of personal lives, enabling and empowering economic, political, communal, and physical health and wellbeing. Luke casts visions of God’s reign being reified in the transformation of human society. In addition to God’s work through Jesus, the Kingdom is equally the work of everyday people. In 18:1-30, Luke’s visions hold those with and without power responsible for transforming society, and, therefore, reifying the Kingdom on earth while anticipating it in the last days.

For Every Time

[63] Horsley, “Jesus and Empire,” 84-85.

The depiction of God's providence and prerogative in transforming human reality is an exercise in prophetic as well as apocalyptic eschatology. Differentiating the two, John Dominic Crossan states: "First, prophetic eschatology was concerned with an ending of the world, while apocalyptic looked to *the* ending of *this* world. Second, the former had no concept of another world above or beyond this one (for example, heaven), while the latter could only accept the ending of this one so easily because it envisaged a far better one elsewhere."[64]

A prophetic eschatology evokes changes in the current state of the world; it is a transformative power that effects individuals and society now. An ending of the world suggests an eradication of behavior, beliefs, and institutional systems that are antithetical to the precepts of the Torah and the teachings of the gospel. Prophetic eschatology has its roots in the Old Testament scriptures, the theological foundation of Jesus's ministry. Similar to Crossan's prophetic eschatological approach, Allen Verhey offers the following description: "The kingdom of God is something that people enter, not something that enters people. It is a state of affairs, not a state of mind."[65] Jesus's teachings on God's reign present a realm of God that is within this existing reality, evoking a prophetic call to act now.

An apocalyptic eschatology promises an eternal dimension of the afterlife without the destruction and corruption of human imperialism, injustice, and suffering. Further, it suggests that the full manifestation of God's reign is limited to another realm, albeit eternal, that extends beyond the current one. Apocalyptic eschatology offers a relief to those suffering in powerless and subordinated classes with the knowledge that they will one day experience liberation and a reward that is far greater than their lifetime of suffering. It serves as a warning to people, who

[64] John Dominic Crossan, *In Parables: The Challenge of the Historical Jesus*, 2nd edition (Sonoma: CA: Polebridge Press, 1992), 25.
[65] Allen Verhey, *The Great Reversal: Ethics and the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1984), 13.

mistreat those proscribed to the underclasses, of the possibility of damnation. Adversely, the rhetoric of a delay in the full manifestation of God's kingdom assuages imperialists' fears of divine or human repercussions in the present life. Oppressive powers could doubt any possibility of change in the status quo and might relieve themselves of any guilt in the absence of condemnation. As it brings hope to the oppressed and indomitability to the powerful, an apocalyptic eschatology potentially dampens any urgency for transformation due to its distance in time and space.

Jesus's teaching on the realm of God as a domain of activity and not as a location facilitates an interpretation of 18:1-30 as a message of prophetic eschatology. Saying that the Kingdom is neither here nor there (17:20-21), Jesus shares that the realm is not something to which one can point. Rather, it is among us, which suggests a state of affairs for individuals through their actions and among them in the midst of human interactions.[66] This phrase suggests a complexity in the narrative description of God's reign in two planes: 1) a present reality within the text, and 2) a present reality for a reader engaging the text. Through the Magnificat and Jesus's ministry, Luke characterizes God's reign as a state of affairs that critiques, reverses, and transforms a status quo that privileges the politically powerful and the economically elite over the disenfranchised, vulnerable, and marginalized.

[66] In this pronouncement, the Greek prepositional phase may be translated as "within you" or "among you." Luke 17:22-37 illustrates an apocalyptic eschatology. The mix of apocalyptic eschatology would seem to have two effects. First, apocalyptic eschatology gives hope to a community that the current oppression is not an eternal situation that would haunt them in the afterlife. The current life is temporary and the afterlife is forever. Therefore, it is the afterlife that matters most. Second, apocalyptic eschatology alongside prophetic eschatology has the ability to conceal the threat of resistance from the dominating powers. Apocalyptic eschatology offers a false sense of security for dominating forces in that it suggests that groups made subservient are willing to settle for their current horrible lot as they anticipate something better. However, this apocalyptic eschatology generates hope to survive the current situation while stoking fires of righteous indignation that call a person to act today in order to ensure their place in God's kingdom in the afterlife.

Theological, Political, and Even Personal Space

In the limited literature on the kingdom of God in Luke, two essays represent the foundation and evolution of scholarly interpretations of theological, political, and personal dimensions of God's reign. Robert O'Toole interprets the Kingdom strictly in theological terms with a greater focus on it as a space for moral transformation of individuals through their encounters with Jesus. Halvor Moxnes asserts that Luke describes the Kingdom as a sociopolitical space where first-century Judeans imagine and create a world that is a counter-narrative to Rome. Both essays offer valid interpretations rooted in Luke's storytelling.

Using redaction criticism with a biblical-theological approach, O'Toole's extensive essay, "The Kingdom of God in Luke-Acts," describes the kingdom of God as a multidimensional realm that transforms individual lives through their interactions with Jesus and his message. As both gift and action brought by God and Jesus, the Kingdom is a present reality as well as an eschatological hope in Luke's vision.[67] He writes, "Consequently, even though the kingdom of God is already in some sense present for Luke, it is still eschatological (messianic) because these are the end-times."[68] In that vein, the kingdom of God exercises its power over Satan, bringing salvation to Christians in present and eschatological realities.[69] In addition to opposing the powers of Satan, God's kingdom has power over earthly rulers, with Jesus being declared as the anointed one (Christ) in the earthly line of Davidic rule as well as in the divine rule of God.[70] A major characteristic of the Kingdom is that it confers dignity on its members, including Gentiles.[71] O'Toole suggests it bestows dignity upon those who are treated with

[67] Robert O'Toole, "The Kingdom of God in Luke-Acts," in *The Kingdom of God in 20th Century Interpretation*, ed. Wendell Willis (Peabody:MA: Hendrickson, 1987), 155-157.
[68] O'Toole, "The Kingdom of God in Luke-Acts," 157.
[69] O'Toole, "The Kingdom of God in Luke-Acts," 155.
[70] O'Toole, "The Kingdom of God in Luke-Acts," 147.
[71] O'Toole, "The Kingdom of God in Luke-Acts," 151. Although he does not use the term status reversal, O'Toole alludes to this social impact as he argues that the kingdom of God confers dignity, especially upon those in society

indignity—increasing their self-worth—through status reversals. The Kingdom is also unlike worldly kingdoms, because it is one of service. In God's kingdom, the great leaders acquire prestige and recognition through their service, and not by wealth, land, or ancestry.

Overall, O'Toole emphasizes the power of God's and Jesus's activities in the Kingdom, while ignoring any human involvement in the enterprise. Essentially, his argument suggests that humanity is a passive recipient and receptacle of the gifts of the Kingdom, without any role or responsibility as bearers of those gifts. In summary, he explains that Luke's polyvalent vision of the reign of God calls Christians to remain steadfast and faithful in their discipleship as they wait for it to fully manifest.

Although the theological interpretations of the kingdom of God illustrate the polyvalence and multifaceted nature of Luke's vision, they tend to ignore the sociopolitical dimension of its message. The discourse on God's power over Satan's kingdom does not account for humanity's acts of evil; it does not hold humanity accountable for political and personal activites that create injustice, indignity, and inferiority. Furthermore, past theological discourse does not explore the political implications of the salvific claims regarding God's sovereignty in the imperial language of kingdom, lord, throne, and Davidic lineage as part of the counterhegemonic discourse against unjust societies. Finally, the theological interpretations of the Kingdom of God suggest that status reversals are simply the result of God's work to transform society, rather than also a means through which transformation occurs.

A major critique of O'Toole's interpretation, including the other essays in the volume *The Kingdom of God in 20th Century Interpretation,* is in the book's foreword authored by Amos Wilder. Wilder admonishes the volume for its lack of examination of Kingdom politics. He

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who were mostly treated with disrespect and disregard. Treating them with dignity is to reverse the communal codes regarding who deserves deference.

notes, "'These had to do not only with God's sovereignty but with power-status, social roles, and liberation, at least in an underground way, vis-a-vis the structural authorities of the time, whether in Palestine or in the provinces'."[72] O'Toole's lack of analysis of Jesus's critiques of his society's culture and politics reflects the theological hermeneutics at work in the narrative criticism of his scholarly generation.[73] Evident in the work of Halvor Moxnes is another branch of biblical scholarship, one that addresses the sociopolitical aspects of Luke's vision of the kingdom of God.

Later scholarship analyzing Luke's depiction of the kingdom of God focuses on the social and political dimensions as part of the theological discourse. Moxnes asserts that scholarship on the meaning of Kingdom focused heavily on time: future eschatology or realized eschatology or a combination of the two.[74] Consequently, the work failed to analyze its political dimension, and therefore its call to transform social structures. Asserting that the ancient Mediterranean world conceptualized time differently, Moxnes contends that the Kingdom is a multidimensional space occupying social, political, economic, and cosmological realms.[75] His essay takes up the challenge in Wilder's foreword.

Continuing the work of social-scientific critic Bruce Malina, Moxnes's essay examines the multivalence of the kingdom of God and its power to transform social structures, particularly

[72] Amos Wilder, "Foreword," in *The Kingdom of God in 20th Century Interpretation*, ed. Wendell Willis (Peabody:MA: Hendrickson, 1987), ix.
[73] This observation may be made about the scholars featured in the literature review in chapter 1 as well.
[74] Halvor Moxnes, "Kingdom Takes Place: Transformations of place and power in the Kingdom of God in the Gospel of Luke," in *Social Scientific Models for Interpreting the Bible: Essays by the Context Group in Honor of Bruce J. Malina,* ed. John J. Pitch (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2001), 177. This eschatological framing is similar to the apocalyptic and prophetic eschatology as described by Crossan.
[75] cf. Moxnes, "Kingdom Takes Place," 177; Bruce J. Malina, *Social World of Jesus and the Gospels* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1996), 179-204.

in the Roman colonial context of Palestine.[76] To guide his interpretation, he explains, "I suggest that recent sociological and geographical studies of 'place' and 'social relations' can be of help to organize Luke's presentation of 'given' social structures as well as the structure of the Kingdom that he envisages."[77] Although his analysis of Luke's vision illustrates spaces of political contestation and societal transformation, he admits that Luke counters Roman hegemony indirectly. Like O'Toole, Moxnes's interpretation of the kingdom of God underemphasizes human activity and agency in God's kingdom. His analysis insists that God's work in dismantling the hegemonic and structural injustices perpetuated in Roman social, political, and cultural imperialism is a consequence of God's intervention and Jesus's ministry alone.

By describing God and Jesus as the sole agents of transformation in the Kingdom, O'Toole and Moxnes miss the interpersonal dynamics at work in the theological and political messages of their interpretations. In their scholarship on Luke's visions, they relieve individuals and communities of any responsibility in their social-political relationships and as change agents in God's kingdom work. As O'Toole and Moxnes describe the theological and political

[76] Moxnes, "Kingdom Takes Place," 176 and 178. cf. Malina, *Social World of Jesus and the Gospels*, 137-140. Moxnes notes that the Malina's argument, "The Kingdom of God is about the transformation of social structures," inspires interpretation of the kingdom of God as discussed in his essay.

[77] Moxnes, "Kingdom Takes Place," 179. Moxnes analyzes the multiple dimensions of the kingdom of God as presented in the Gospel of Luke. In these dimensions, he looks at the Kingdom of God in opposition to the Roman empire, as it relates to the relationships of the 'rich' and the 'poor', and in relation to cosmology (particularly in the battle between God/Jesus and the devil). Using a three-dimensional theory on space by David Harvey, Moxnes analyzes the kingdom of God in Luke as a combination of space (e.g. House) and as God's reign. The first dimension of representation is in spatial practices, which include production, exchange, and reproduction resources of the familial and state household. Moxnes includes the empire in this category, citing the political dimension that Luke introduces to the context for interpreting the God's kingdom. The second dimension is shared codes, which includes geopolitical contexts and references. Here, he suggests that this concept of God represents the subversive desires of Luke and his audience, who seek a transformation in the social and political structures that Rome uses to oppress, victimize, and subjugate its colonies. The third dimension of space is Luke's imagination of new structures and new practices in spaces of representation of the kingdom of God. Introduced by Jesus's first address, this new space includes a vision of a liberated space that counters the sociopolitical contexts. Throughout the study, Moxnes offers numerous examples in which the new vision reverses the tables of domination and fortunes, creates new households and identities, opens national space toward a globalized view, and wins over the cosmic space.

complexities and richness of the Kingdom motif, their interpretations have the potential to facilitate paralysis and powerlessness among those working to manifest. Also, their respective analyses suggest an absolution for those with sociopolitical power and privilege and their culpability for the poverty, subjugation, and abuse spurred by their individual and corporate choices. The gospel of the Kingdom to encourage, empower, and equip those who are disenfranchised, marginalized, and impoverished gets lost.

While I agree with O'Toole's and Moxnes's assessment of God's work in transforming society, I incorporate a humanist approach. The manifestation of God's reign is a consequence of humanity's work in creating status reversals and pursuing justice through changes in sociopolitical relationships. Luke 18:1-30 illustrates the author's postcolonal liberationist viewpoints on humanity's call to respond to the kingdom of God in their reaction to and interaction with God's movement. By analyzing the text's power dynamics as shaped by the social, cultural, and political contexts in the characters, I assert that Luke's vision of God's reign includes interpersonal transformations and accountability to the theological and political dimensions of one's present time.

Luke's rhetoric of the Kingdom poses an indirect challenge to imperial context that is difficult to ascertain. The subtlety in his subversive message facilitates dominant readings of the Gospel as a theological text with no association with the politics of its time or the time of Jesus. Hence, scholarship has vacillated on whether Luke is an apologetic narrative of a nascent Christian movement—a branch of the highly respected religion of Abraham and David—that is not a threat to Roman imperial rule or is a counter hegemonic text rich with political subversion. O'Toole and Moxnes represent these scholarly trajectories in their interpretations of Luke's visions of the kingdom of God.

Reflected in Luke's rhetoric is ambivalence about the imperial structure that governs and dictates the life of the people. Adding to their interpretive conclusions, I argue that Luke's inconspicuous critique of Rome communicates a hidden transcript that has a postcolonial ambivalence, with both attraction to and repulsion from imperial hegemony. This ambivalence is apparent in the history of interpretation of Luke, which reads the narrative as both accommodating and subverting Roman imperialism. As the sociopolitical structure of kingdom is infused with how the people see and understand the world they live in, Luke's rhetoric tries to resist colonialism. Although I fall in the camp that interprets Luke as subversive, this project takes a more nuanced approach to this categorization.

The power of a kingdom to deeply affect the life and death of people is compelling and attractive. It has the power to oppress and to liberate; to subjugate and to raise up. Simultaneously, it can tear down and dehumanize. The common denominator is power. Luke 18:1-30 is a response on how to use it for an abundant life for all who are affected by it. It is a world where individuals and communities are called by God through Jesus to be active participants in the transformation of human society. This active participation hinges upon both parties, the oppressed and the oppressor, revising their roles to create an ideal society where no one suffers indignities, injustices, and lack of access to life's abundance.

Luke's rhetoric forms a colonial articulation of power that is a hybrid. Hybridity is a modern term used to describe colonial sites where assimilation to the dominant culture reveals the distortion, and even degradation, of its power rather than replication of its glory in a diminutive sense. Homi Bhabha develops this term in his literary analysis of modern-era colonial narrative and its applicability to ancient ones. Describing hybridity, he asserts, "It displays the necessary deformation and displacement of all sites of discrimination and domination. It

unsettles the mimetic and narcissistic demands of colonial power but reimplicates its identifications in strategies of subversion that turn the gaze of the discriminated upon the eye of power."[78] Bhabha's conceptualization is visible in Luke's description of the kingdom of God, which illustrates a displacement and deformation of Roman's rhetoric of salvation and its inferiority to the reign of God.

Radical Reversals

In addition to the theological and political dimensions, Luke's message about the kingdom of God is quite personal. In reversals, God uplifts the poor, oppressed, and disenfranchised, while humbling the rich, the powerful, and the privileged. Typically, Luke characterizes the poor and the oppressed as people with little economic resources, women, and sinners; this group usually includes widows, children, and tax collectors. By contrast, the powerful and privileged have high economic and cultural standing, and they include the rulers and religious leaders.

Shattering a prosperity gospel that proclaims a person's success to be a reflection of God's favor, Jesus's good news to the socially, politically, and economically oppressed masses dominated by Roman colonialism include visions of a new kingdom ruled by God that reverses society's conclusions regarding who God favors. In *The Great Reversal: Ethics and the New Testament*, Allen Verhey explains, "The present order, including its conventional rules of prestige and protocol, pomp and privilege, is called into question by Jesus' announcement of the coming kingdom."[79] The realm of God transforms present reality and disrupts human judgment, which insist upon a status quo that privileges powerful elites as worthy recipients of God's

[78] Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, Routledge Classics (Abingdon, Oxon, OX: Routledge, 1994), 159-160.
[79] Verhey, *The Great Reversal,* 15.

grace.[80] While quoting D.J. Hawkin, John Dominic Crossan asserts that the paradoxes in the reversal message contradict personal worldviews in that "ordinary values are reversed and reasonable judgments are disqualified."[81] God's power changes society to empower those disadvantaged and to humble the arrogant.

Continuing in the prophetic tradition of his heritage and people, Jesus proclaims the realm of God as intervention in and providence over the human realm. God's realm demonstrates God's faithfulness to Israel and God's sovereignty over all nations.[82] As scholars have noted, Mary's Magnificat (1:46-55) describes God's kingdom as a space where God dethrones human kings and uplifts the poor and lowly. Jesus's inaugural sermon announces that God's spirit anoints him to preach the good news to the poor and release to the captives (cf. 4:16-20). Jesus preaches the news of God's realm throughout the region (4:43), which includes the message of reversal from the Sermon on the Plain, particularly the blessings and woes (6:20-26). In the kingdom of God, the current world order is topsy turvy with reversals in status. In Luke, reversals explain and anticipate God's reign as demonstrated in the discourse and deeds of Jesus's ministry.

Personal dimensions of reversals occur in vertical relationships with God and horizontal relationships in human interactions. In vertical relationships, those who are perceived as sinners are reconciled to God or declared righteous, while those who assume that they are righteous are warned against arrogance. In horizontal relationships, God reverses the power dynamics of social relationships to facilitate the health and well-being of the poor and to dethrone and humble those

[80] Crossan, *In Parables*, 76. Crossan contends that the reversals announce God's activity in shattering expectations and status quo of contextual milieu of right behavior and aspirations.
[81] Crossan, *In Parables*, 78.
[82] Robert Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation*, vol. 1, *The Gospel According to Luke* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 55.

who oppress, subordinate, and marginalize with injustice. Scholars interpret the paradoxical state as part of the purpose and consequence of God's reign, which disrupts cultural norms, social conventions, and political relationships that continuously privilege the powerful.[83] God's kingdom transforms personal circumstances and daily lives for economic, political, and existential liberation.

Reversal also serves as a rhetoric that communicates a subversive program of hope and action in the face of oppression. As a hidden transcript, Scott would argue that Jesus's description of status reversal in the kingdom of God illustrates a fantasy life of oppressed Jews under Roman domination. Scott notes, "Fantasy life among dominated groups is also likely to take the form of *schadenfreude:* joy at the misfortunes of others. This represents a wish for negative reciprocity, a settling of scores when the high shall be brought low and the last shall be first."[84] Reversal as rhetorical resistance is a familiar literary tool for Luke's audience. The prophetic traditions of the Hebrew scriptures contain various forms of reversals that communicate a promise of God's reign, justice for the people of Israel, destruction of enemy oppressors, as well as personal lessons for righteous living. Hearers would have been able to deconstruct the polyvalent vision of the kingdom of God in Luke's narrative by way of the intertextuality of scriptures and contextual cues from their political, economics, and social, and cultural milieux.

In the study of biblical narrative, scholars have observed three types of reversals: single, double, and polar. A single reversal is a change in circumstance for one character. For example, Job is the only character who is humbled in the narrative. When two or more characters experience a similar upheaval in life's circumstances, the reversal is a double or parallel one.

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[83] cf. Carroll, *Luke,* 10.
[84] Scott, *Hidden Transcripts,* 44.

However, in the Gospels polar reversals of opposing worlds or spheres are normative.[85] With vivid detail, Crossan explains,

> If the last becomes first, we have the story of Joseph. If the first becomes last, we have the story of Job. But if the last becomes first *and* the first becomes last we have a polar reversal, a reversal of world as such. When the north pole becomes the south pole, and the south the north, a world is reversed and overturned and we find ourselves standing firmly on utter uncertainty. The parables of reversal intend to do precisely this to our security because such is the advent of the Kingdom.[86]

In addition to parables, polar reversals are evident in other episodes of the Gospel narrative. In some episodes, Jesus highlights the occurrences of reversals through aphorisms and pronouncements.

In Luke 18:1-30, I identify polar reversals throughout the parables and stories by way of theological, political, and personal instructions of admonishment, hope, and resistance. This claim expands most previous scholarship on these texts. Scholars recognize reversals in some, if not all, of the parables and stories in the narrative unit. They assess the reversals as a literary device that 1) reinforces the stories' moral tales about appropriate behavior and theological postures of being a disciple and 2) illustrates God's salvific intervention among individuals and in society.[87]

When interpreting polar reversals, scholars suggest that such reversals signify an inversion of power that involve an equalization or an exchange of power in God's kingdom. Influenced by liberationist, feminist, minoritized, and postcolonial hermeneutics, recent scholarship contends that the reversals in the units also share an empowering message for the oppressed to seek

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[85] Crossan, *In Parables,* 55.
[86] Crossan, *In Parables,* 55..
[87] Cf. Tannehill, *Luke-Acts,* 109; Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke,* Sacra Pagina Series, vol. 3, ed. Daniel J. Harrington (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1991), 22; Green, *The Gospel of Luke,* 644; Ringe, *Luke*, 225. Ringe interprets the reversal in the parables of The Widow and The Judge along with The Pharisee and The Tax Collector as God's saving work through the upending of institutional rules that facilitate oppressive social and economic contests of honor and status.

justice. However, in her discussion of reversals, Sharon Ringe cautions, "The powerful no longer get to exercise power over others, but nothing is said about the 'lowly' now getting to do what has been done to them."[88] These arguments, though, place the onus of active justice-making and self-discipline upon the oppressed. Even Ringe's assertion regarding the call of those with power to cease subordinating others suggests a passive response.

Ostensibly, the stories do not offer any explicit instructions regarding the powerful as having any responsibility for dismantling structures and for reforming practices and systems to change the political, economic, and social landscapes. Luke does not clearly prescribe or describe how the kingdom of God reorients relationships and transforms communities. Considering the imperial context and the hidden transcript of Luke's postcolonial rhetoric, the reversals in 18:1-30 demonstrate a radical discipleship that calls individuals to confront the systems that perpetuate indignities and violence suffered through debt, poverty, hunger, and enslavement as well as those who maintain and legitimate those systems. Jesus's teaching empowers and animates faith in God's power to transform society and move individuals to become change agents in those systems, starting with themselves and their individual choices.

Responding to the Kingdom in Luke 18:1-30

The parables and stories of Luke 18:1-30 illustrate responses to the kingdom of God that call for transformation in social relationships as resistance to hegemonic rule. A counter-hegemonic vision of status reversal ensues as individuals and communities shift the power dynamics of social relationships to secure justice, dignity, and liberation as a manifestation of God's reign. The characters, plots, and rhetoric of each story call those in position of power as

[88] Ringe, *Luke,* 35. Ringe's interpretation is similar to other feminist scholars;

well as those seemingly without power to examine their positions and make personal choices rooted in their theological understanding to change the politics and circumstances in individual lives. The political, economic, social, and ideological landscapes along with the narrative setting unveil the hidden transcript of liberation in the parables and stories. In this section, I make the case for interpreting Luke 18:1-30 as a narrative whole. In early interpretations of narrative criticism, particularly Robert Tannehill, stories are simply related by proximity. I counter that Luke composes a narrative arc with these units, synthesizing unique material with stories from the Gospel of Mark. The themes, characters, and rhetoric unite the parables and stories into a coherent arc. This section of Luke's travel narrative could be titled transformations in social relationships and the kingdom of God.

The Narrative Setting

The parables and stories in Luke 18:1-30 come near the end of Luke's extended travel narrative (9:51-19:27). The setting and plot of sociopolitical transformation as a salvific work of the kingdom of God connect the four stories and illustrate Luke's polyvalent vision of the Kingdom. There are other connections as well.

Luke uses geography as a rhetorical element for framing his narratives. Although Luke describes his version of the gospel as an "orderly account," biblical scholars have noted the geographical inaccuracies and incongruences with the parallel Gospel accounts.[89] C. C. McCown notes, "His geographical settings are intended to give life and color to the picture he was drawing. They are a literary artifice like the pastoral scenes of Hellenistic and Roman

[89] C.C. McCown, "The Geography of Luke's Central Section," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 57, no. 1 (1938): 51-66, doi:10.2307/3259543.

poets."[90] Samaria and Galilee are the geographical focus beginning with Luke 17:11 until 18:34.[91] Jesus's discourse in 18:1-30, the two parables of a widow and judge and a Pharisee and tax collector as well as the stories of the Jesus blessing the children and his encounter with a certain ruler, are thus included in this larger section.

In addition to the geographical setting, Luke uses the presence of crowds to demonstrate continuity in a narrative. From 17:20 through 18:30, Luke sets Jesus's exchanges with the Pharisees, his disciples, and others among large gatherings of people.[92] Luke's narrative cues include: a recognition of the audience as Jesus tells the parable of a Pharisee and tax collector (Εἶπεν δὲ καὶ πρός τινας τοὺς cf. 18:9); the reference to people bringing infants (v. 15); and the appearance of a certain ruler (v. 18). At 18:31, the story shifts with into a private setting where Jesus takes the twelve aside to foretell his death a third time.[93] The crowd, like the geographical setting, are more than an recorded details rather they serve as a literary trope that Luke uses to cohere the stories.[94] While the demographic frame begins at 17:20 with Jesus's exchange with the Pharisees about the coming of the kingdom of God, transformations in sociopolitical relationships begin in chapter 18 and unify the various plots of vv. 1-30.

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[90] McCown, "The Geography," 56.
[91] At 18:35, the narrative shifts with Jesus journeying out of the rural areas and into Jericho.
[92] Luke 17:11-19 includes the story of Jesus' cleansing of the lepers. Verse 12 narrows the location setting to a certain town that Jesus and the disciples enter, where they encounter ten lepers. The lepers leave the geographical and narrative field as they go to the priests to confirm their healing. Because the lepers do not appear again following this text, Luke uses the characters' absence to relocate the text outside this certain village into a space where he engages a larger, more diverse crowd.
[93] As Jesus talks to the disciples in 17:22, the story does not shift in setting. Rather, it just shows a shift in the specific audience of Jesus's address. Noteworthy is the Luke's characterization of the audience as disciples. The term in the narrative denotes a general group versus Jesus's intimate group of twelve. When the conversation shifts in 18:31, the narrator explains that Jesus is speaking explicitly to the twelve.
[94] McCown, "The Geography," 57-58. McCown notes that large crowds, as also described in Mark, following Jesus does suggest a Galilean setting. However, he mentions that Luke presents some scenes in Galilee where the Markan text sets them in Jerusalem. This discrepancy enhances Luke's use of geography as a literary device to frame his story and drive the rhetoric in particular ways even as they run counter to other known and established Gospel recordings and the Q source.

Narrative Frame

The parables and stories of Luke 18:1-30 are framed by Jesus's conversation with the Pharisees and disciples about the Kingdom of God (17:20-37) and Jesus's third prediction of his death and resurrection (18:31-35). The first story introduces the Kingdom as an interpretive lens for understanding the subsequent stories, whereas the final one shifts the Gospel narrative toward its climax.

In his robust discussion with the Pharisees and disciples, Jesus establishes that the Kingdom of God is a present reality as well as an eschatological event. The unit begins with the Pharisees' inquiry about when the Kingdom is coming (17:20). Key to Jesus's response is that the Kingdom is not an object or place that can be observed, but rather that it is to be found among them (ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ ἐντὸς ὑμῶν ἐστιν, v. 21). The phrase "among you" carries incredible theological and narrative weight. The Pharisees' question is eschatological and future-oriented. However, Jesus presents the Kingdom as already present among or "in the midst of" them. This perspective is concurrent with announcements of the in-breaking of God's reign.[95]

Scholarly consensus is that the kingdom of God being "among you" refers to the present activity of God's reign in Jesus's healing ministry.[96] Furthermore, the Gospel describes God's activity in the changing of human hearts and the transformation of human institutions and relationships.[97] These perspectives resonate with Moxnes's interpretation that the Kingdom of God is a space unbound by contemporary conceptions of time. Therefore, 18:1-30 project these perspectives of God's kingdom activity through Jesus's teachings about the work discipleship. More than a biography of Jesus, Luke is resistance literature with the rhetorical prowess—like

[95] Announcments of the in-breaking of God's reign in Luke include Mary's Magnificat (1:46-55), Zechariah's Benedictus (1:68-79), Jesus's first sermon (4:16-21), and Jesus's teachings beginning at 11:16.
[96] Carroll, *Luke*, 346; Green, *Luke*, 629; Ringe, *Luke,* 222.
[97] Ringe, *Luke,* 222.

The Aeneid—to influence future generations' understanding of the present and ongoing work of God's Kingdom.

The second part of Jesus's discussion about the Kingdom is with the disciples (17:23-37). Common in Luke, Jesus moves between talking with the Pharisees and instructing his disciples immediately afterwards.[98] Although the text turns Jesus's attention away from the Pharisees and to his disciples, the narration does not suggest that the leaders had left the crowd whom Jesus continues to teach (18:1 and 18:9). The discussion with the disciples illustrates both the allusive and polyvalent nature of the God's reign.

As the first part of the discussion describes Kingdom as a present reality, the second part features its eschatological and apocalyptic nature. Jesus speaks of the "day" and "days" of the Son of Humanity.[99] The former refers to Jesus's present ministry and the latter refers to the Kingdom's future work as done through his followers.[100] Carroll asserts, "Having just affirmed the present activity of the reign of God, Jesus proceeds, in the first of two major eschatological discourses, to orient disciples to the future coming of the Son of Humanity (vv. 22-37; cf. 21:5-36). Only the vigilant need apply."[101] These themes call for vigilance, which connects closely with themes featured in the parable of a widow and judge. Because of these connections, most scholars include 18:1-8 as the concluding narrative for this section, separating it from vv. 9-30.[102] Lastly, this section of Kingdom discourse points to Jesus's suffering and crucifixion (17:24-25), which foreshadows the climax of the Gospel as well as anticipates the third prediction of his death in the closing narrative frame (18:31-34).

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[98] Green, *Luke,* 631.
[99] Most translations, using the Greek, refers to the Son of Man. However, as anthropos refers to humanity, I prefer Son of Humanity as used in Carroll's translation and the Common English Bible.
[100] Green, *Luke*, 632.
[101] Carroll, *Luke*, 347.
[102] Luke 18:1-8 is a pivot story with narrative evidence that justifies its placement as the concluding narrative for Luke 17:22-18:8 or as the initial one for 18:1-30.

The closing-frame story at Luke 18:31 shifts the narrative's focus from the crowd to the twelve disciples and from rural areas towards Jerusalem. Here, Jesus addresses the twelve (δώδεκα) exclusively. Although the writer follows the language of Mark 10:32, referring to the twelve is a linguistic cue for a setting change and suggests that Jesus is no longer among the large crowd to whom he had been speaking in 17:20-18:30.[103] Further indication of Jesus speaking exclusively to the twelve is the decision to take them aside (παραλαβὼν). This physical description suggests that Jesus is drawing his group closer by removing them from the rest of the crowd. While alone, he declares that they are headed to Jerusalem and toward the final leg of his journey on earth. At this point, Jesus is ready to leave the rural region between Samaria and Galilee to enter the capital for his final imperial conflict.

Thematic connections

As Jesus enters the final stage of his travel to Jerusalem, he teaches about the kingdom of God as a present reality that transforms the future. With a postcolonial consciousness of liberation from Rome's colonialism, Jesus calls his disciples to be active in the social transformation of God's realm. Colonial reality, eschatological promise, and present action are three themes that link the Lukan narrative in 18:1-30.

The characters of the judge, the Pharisee, the tax collector, and the ruler have associations with Rome's ubiquitous colonial presence. The judge's lack of fear of God or humanity suggests that his role in the community connects more to the values and mores of Roman society than

[103] At 17:21ff, Jesus addresses his disciples at different points. However, during these moments, Luke does not provide any linguistic evidence that he is speaking to the twelve removed from the larger crowd. The narrator shares when Jesus turns to address them, which is different from taking them aside. At no time does Luke refer to the disciples as the twelve in this section. This nomenclature picks up again at 18:31. Although his use of the twelve corresponds with the Markan source, Luke's decision to keep the wording suggests its significance in showing a setting shift through demography and geography.

those of the Jewish community.[104] The Pharisee is an ambiguous, colonized character. Although the parable does not discuss any known affiliation with colonial leadership, the Lukan narrative has characterized some Pharisees as part of the ruling class and in cahoots with Rome. The livelihood of the tax collector and the ruler connect most directly to the Roman Empire. The tax collector is an administrator of its policies and the face of its exploitation. The ruler, who is rich, benefits from its political and economic systems. Although the story of the blessing of the children does not include characters who have a direct relationship with colonial powers, it illustrates the social effects of colonized beings who mimic its kyriarchal values. Through the characters, the colonial presence provides a rhetorical link for the stories.

The eschatological hope of God's justice is another constant in the four units. Luke concludes each story with Jesus describing a promise of God's reign to come and God's expectations about humanity's response. Concluding the parable of a widow and judge, Jesus shares that God will grant justice to those who cry out and wonders whether he will find any faithful upon his second coming.[105] The concluding aphorism of 18:14 anticipates a time when God will humble those who are exalted. The stories in vv. 15-30 discuss responses for entering or inheriting the kingdom of God in an unspecified future and anticipate God's promises to overturn oppression, to uplift the humble, to offer hospitality, and to provide for the poor.

The eschatological vision is thoroughly connected to the present reality. Justice comes with the reversal of present oppression, exploitation, and subjugation. This reversal is a significant

[104] The parable of a widow and judge does not describe the municipality or nature of the judgment. Therefore, one could argue that he is a local judge of the Judean laws of the community. However, in the narrative world of the Gospel, the judge's characterization is aligned as one who enforces the law the of colonial rule.
[105] Because he discusses a period before his second coming in 17:20-37, most scholars argue that the 18:1-8 is the narrative unit to that part.

theme in the four stories in 18:1-30.[106] God transforms the status of those considered poor, lowly, and inferior by raising them up, and God humbles those considered rich, powerful, and superior. Uniting the stories are the character interactions and engagements, which illustrate individual choice and human participation in the social transformations that occur during the status reversal. The audience's knowledge of the political, economic, and social contexts facilitates an interpretation of the character, plot, and interpersonal dynamics that depict God's transformation in people's lives. The social and political implications of status reversals pose a threat to imperial Rome and its perceived superiority. Creating reversals and realizing God's kingdom on earth are not merely a cultic imagining of a promised future, but practical instructions for a subversive present.

Rhetorical Analysis

Luke synthesizes rhetorical styles to convey his visions of God's kingdom in this set of parables and stories of Jesus. The narrative section disavows colonial power by employing rhetoric that resists the ideology of Roman imperialism and ushers a new reality of God's justice.[107] Luke facilitates a postcolonial consciousness of subversion in the rhetoric of apocalypticism, status reversal, and imperial characterizations.

Using the rhetorical elements of apocalypticism, the parables and stories illustrate God's promise to end the current human order of oppression and evil in a future reality of justice, liberation, and abundance. Present powers will be brought down by God's reign (cf. 1:51-52) and God will save the people of Judea (cf. 1:77). Jesus's ministry inaugurates the eschaton of God's

[106] Recent scholarship concurs that the parable of the Pharisees and Tax Collector along with subsequent stories in the unit include the reversal theme. However, I argue that the parable of a widow and judge also includes a reversal theme.
[107] Bhabha, *Location of Culture,* 159.

reign as described in the apocalyptic elements in the parable of a widow and judge and the foretelling of a future reality in God's kingdom.

While describing hidden transcripts, Scott asserts that subordinate groups depict the last days as a form of millennial imaging of a utopia. He writes, "Most traditional utopian beliefs can, in fact, be understood as a more or less systematic negation of an existing pattern of exploitation and status degradation as it is experienced by subordinate groups. That is not only present in the Judeo-Christian religions, but among other communities." [108] Jesus's pronouncements on God's justice (18:7), righteousness (v. 14), the presence of the Kingdom (v. 17), and eternal life (v. 30) offer a rhetorical resistance whereby to encourage civil disobedience, criticize the current rule, and empower change. Based on Scott's theory, Luke's rhetoric of God's reign negates Rome's colonial social, political, and economic exploitation.

The parables and stories also share the literary element of status reversals as rhetorical acts of resistance. Status reversals can be complicated and nuanced, not only revealing lessons for morality rooted in discipleship, but also revealing individual, as well as communal, responsibility in changing power dynamics in social relationships to achieve divine justice. As subordinated people envision a society that negates their oppressive and exploitative social order, they create a counterculture of resistance. This ideology helps the group reconstitute itself from the wounds and humiliation of colonialism.[109] Scott's argument that visions of status reversal occur during the lived experience of domination shows that postcolonial consciousness is atemporal. Therefore, Luke's status reversals in the narrative unit display a postcolonial consciousness that challenges Rome's ideology of its natural superiority with seemingly inferior characters actively frustrating systems of colonial privilege and power.

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[108] Scott, *Hidden Transcripts*, 81.
[109] Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1994), 209.

Although Lukan scholarship does not agree, each parable and story in chapter 18 contain a status reversal. The reversal for the Pharisee and tax collector is most obvious, especially due to the aphorism in v. 14. Furthermore, scholars have used v. 14 as a lens for interpreting the status reversals that appear in the stories of the blessing the children and the certain ruler: the children, not the disciples, exemplify the hospitality of the Kingdom, while the certain ruler, who is rich, does not have heavenly treasures of the Kingdom, whereas the disciples, who are poor, do. Less obvious is the status reversal that appears in vv. 1-8. Because of its strong eschatological tone and its narrative frame on prayer, the reversal has been overlooked at best, or confined only to the parable, giving no credit to Luke. Ringe interprets it as an illustration of God's reversal of a judgment against a societal system that privileges the dominant class with honor, while showing dishonor in their behavior and attitudes towards others. The status reversal, though, has implications for the nation of Israel, not just for individuals.

While status reversals are in the plot of each unit, Luke demonstrates resistance to Rome through the embarrassment of imperial characters. Judge, Pharisee, tax collector, and ruler experience confrontations that challenge, question, or reduce their social status. Because the characters are regional, Luke's affront to the Roman colonial system seems indirect and subtle, dulling the subversive edge in the message. Scholars, like Green and Johnson, interpret the judgment against these characters as prophetic critiques against human expectations, with the humbled characters viewed as moral examples. As biblical scholars accept that social and cultural contexts shape human expectations, behavior, and societal structures, interpreters, including Ringe and Carroll, recognize that Luke's criticisms include the actual agents who legitimatize, maintain, and perpetuate Rome's ideology. Therefore, the narrative judgments

against imperial characters convey Luke's judgment of Rome.[110] At the same time, by focusing on Luke as an anti-Rome commentary, some scholars minimize the individual responsibility at work in perpetuating injustices. Further analysis of reversal paradigms reveals that Luke's holds protagonists and antagonists—the powerless and powerful—accountable in the transformative work of the kingdom of God.

Luke uses a rhetoric of resistance—by way of eschatology, status reversals, and negative imperial characterizations as literary elements—to unite the parables of widow and judge and a Pharisee and a tax collector as a narrative unit with the stories of Jesus blessing the children and engaging a certain ruler. As a hidden transcript, his subversive message goes undetected by Roman authority, power elites, as well as modern-day scholars, who are often members of the dominant classes of gender, race, class, educational access and achievement, etc. Luke does not present a narrative that abolishes imperialism, but rather a story that uplifts a different imperialism, the Kingdom of God. The subversive elements of his message is lost in his ambivalence toward Roman imperialism. The absence of direct criticism of imperialism and the use of imperial literary motifs suggest that Luke's ambivalence towards empire is shaped by, repulsed from, and attracted to its power.

[110] Western biblical scholars become aware of the social, political, and economic injustices as they learn from the theologies of scholars from racialized, minoritized, and oppressed communities of scholars. Realizing that the first century Roman imperial setting is more than temporal marker in Luke, scholars interpret the social and cultural context in shaping Jesus's gospel and Luke's theology

CHAPTER 3

A Parable on Humanity's Power and God's Justice

(Luke 18:1-8)

[1]And he was telling them a parable about their need to pray at all times and not be discouraged, [2]saying, "In a certain city, there was a certain judge who neither feared God nor respected people. [3]And in that city, there was a widow, and she was coming [continuously] to him saying: "Give me justice from the one who is being unjust to me." [4]For a while, he would not. But later, he said to himself, "Though I neither fear God nor respect people, [5]because this widow causes trouble for me, I will give her justice, so that in the end, while coming, she does not blacken my eye."

[6]And the Lord said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says. [7]And will not God produce justice to God's chosen people who cry out day and night? And is God delaying [to do this] for them? [8]I tell you that God will produce justice for them with a quickness. But, when the Son of Humanity comes, then will he find faith on earth?" [My translation]

Introduction

Transformation in society begins with individual choices. A series of individual choices culminate to create communal and social order. It sets norms and practices, establishes customs and taboos, as well as makes laws and regulations. With each choice, the work of God's kingdom becomes realized in people's daily lives. Jesus's teaching of the parable of a widow and judge illustrates the power of choice to facilitate justice and inspire courageous acts, even in the

face of the Roman empire. Luke 18:1-8 envisions status reversals, promotes faith in God's eternal rule, and confronts Roman colonialism. While part of Jesus's public discourse before a diverse crowd, it is a hidden transcript that conceals a counter-hegemonic message of liberation from Roman political and social systems. Through a widow's daring pursuit of justice and a judge's choice to grant her claim, sociopolitical dynamics shift and transform lives.

In this chapter, I argue that Jesus teaches God's justice and humanity's role in realizing God's reign on earth, a lesson with theological, political, and personal implications. To pray at all times and not lose courage are calls for human participation in God's justice. Using the parable as a lens for interpreting the narrative frame, a prayer is more than a petition of words to request one's needs. The parabolic widow demonstrates that prayers are people's persistent actions of advocacy and ethical choices that contribute to God's promises of liberation, flourishing, and justice. Furthermore, I contend that the judge's response is equally critical and instructive for participating in God's kingdom. He represents a powerful and privileged constituency whom the Lukan Jesus challenges to act justly. Using the parable about a widow and judge, he encourages listeners to resist the oppression of their current world, to fight temptations to mimic their oppression, and to be open to participating in God's justice in accordance to God's reign.

In the shadow of Jerusalem, the region's capital and colonial center, Jesus tells a story that expresses frustrations with the colonial civic order and encourages people's perseverance in eradicating its harms. The parable of a widow and judge reflects a public transcript that is a typical encounter with the colonial justice system. Simultaneously, the story's characters and plot belie prediction of its ending with a reversal of expectations, illustrating a fantasy—a hope—of another reality in the coded language of its hidden transcript. Moreover, a cultural product of

colonized people, the parable of a widow and judge is a discourse of resistance that criticizes the social, political, and cultural authority of Roman ideology and colonialism.[1] Although developed during a colonial period, it depicts a conscientization of liberation from the colonial hegemony.[2] However, the parable's postcolonial impulses hide in its theological encasement. A spiritualized frame of prayer and the *parousia* (Luke 18: 1, 7-8) conceals any political implications for applicability in the current reality. Instead, it seemingly anesthetizes expectations of liberation in this temporal life with hopes of a life of freedom and justice in the next life. However, supported by a theological mandate to treat the most vulnerable with care or suffer divine consequences and retribution, the story is wrought with social and political matters that affect people's daily lives.

Scholarly interpretations of Jesus's teaching of the parable of a widow and judge focus on a message that the Kingdom of God requires unceasing prayer and persistent faith. Beginning with the early fathers of Christianity, commentaries interpreted the story as literary discourse on personal individual prayer.[3] In the late twentieth century biblical commentaries, similar interpretations persist.[4] Also during this period, scholars began to interpret the parable as a metaphor for Israel's persistent prayer to God for liberation from their colonial oppressor. As Luke Timothy Johnson and Fred Craddock reference reader's oppression broadly, Joel Green, David Crump, and John Carroll argue that the parable represents Israel beseeching God to free

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[1] Cf. R.S. Sugirtharajah, "Charting the Aftermath: A Review of Postcolonial Literature," *The Postcolonial Biblical Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 7.
[2] c.f. Fernando F. Segovia, "Mapping the Postcolonial Optic in Biblical Criticism: Meaning and Scope," in *Postcolonial Biblical Criticism: Interdisciplinary Intersections*, ed. Stephen D. Moore and Fernando F. Segovia (London: T & T Clark International, 2005)," 23.
[3] Arthur A. Just, Jr. ed., *Luke*: *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture*, *New Testament, vol 3* (Downers Grove, Il: InterVarsity Press, 2003). 275.
[4] Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke X-XXV*, Anchor Bible Series (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1985), 1177; R. Alan Culpepper, "The Gospel of Luke," *The New Interpreter's Bible: A Commentary in Twleve Volumes*, vol. 9 (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1995), 335; Fred B. Craddock, *Luke* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1990), 207.

them from the injustices of the current rulers.[5] Yet, none of the scholarship connects the people's suffering to their immediate colonial context. Furthermore, while interpreting the parable as one that encourages prayer and persistence of faith, the interpreters do not analyze the story as support for people's participation in the work of God's kingdom and pursuit of justice.

Jesus uses the parable of a widow and judge to encourage his audience to continue fighting for justice against Roman oppression, legal aggression, and individual choices. It depicts the ability for institutional and individual power to deny needed resources for daily living. The judge, representing the legal system and presumably reinforcing kyriarchy's sexism, uses his power to act unjustly toward the widow. His mistreatment of the widow reflects Roman judicial oppression and androcentric cruelty. By the institutional power invested him and by the desire of her antagonist, the parabolic judge chooses to deny her access to the resources that she seeks.

The parable further illustrates a rebalance of power as the judge later grants the widow her justice, but not without her consistent protest and provocation. Individual actions by both characters shift the power dynamics of their relationship: the powerless gains power by convincing the powerful to share it. Rebalancing the power dynamics to allow justice and unencumbered living actualizes a prophetic eschatology of God's promised reign. God's reign of justice and righteous is present in current reality, and not simply anticipated as part of the joy of the afterlife. God's kingdom is not an otherworldly event; it is happening now. Interpreting the parable (vv. 2-5) as a story about the necessity to pray through its narrative of frame (1, 6-8) overlooks Jesus's subversive messages, which include theological, political, and personal transformation through shifts in sociopolitical dynamics.

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[5] Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke,* Sacra Pagina Series, vol. 3, ed. Daniel J. Harrington (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1991), 270; Craddock, *Luke*, 208, Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 642, David Crump, *Knocking on Heaven's Door: A New Testament Theology of Petitionary Prayer* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 79.

Another way to interpret this story as transformative is by allowing the parable to interpret its narrative frame. The parable's depiction of a widow confronting and demanding justice from a judge and his acquiescence creates a hermeneutical lens—undergirded by the story's narrative context in Luke and theological context of the Hebrew scriptures—that adjusts the meanings of prayer (18:1) and God's vindication (vv. 7-8). This interpretive shift reveals the incorporation of individual choices and human participation in Luke's polyvalent vision of the kingdom of God. The parable of a widow and judge and its narrative frame demonstrate the impact of individual choices either to maintain or to eradicate systemic oppression and injustice, while testifying to God's work of destroying all violent forces, particularly the geopolitical one, against God's chosen ones. The story depicts transformations in political, personal, and social power dynamics. Deftly packed with meanings, parables can be as mysterious as they are instructive. As Jesus explains, "I speak in parables, so that 'looking they may not perceive, and listening they may not understand'" (8:10). Exploring the many facets of parables is paramount to understanding the parable of a widow and judge and its connection to the kingdom of God.

About the Parables

Parables are a medium for people to analyze their daily lives and the socio-political dynamics of their circumstances. In the Gospels, Jesus uses them as literary illustrations for insights about God's work in people's daily existence and participating in God's kingdom. Significant tools for instructing and challenging his audience, parables provide social commentary as well as direction for living abundantly in communities of justice and compassion. Appearing as secular stories that illustrate daily life, they seem familiar, and even ordinary parables create a distance that allows a reader to observe, analyze, and critique its narrative as

heavily filtered lens for examining one's circumstance without directly indicting, blaming, or vilifying self or others.[6] Simultaneously, they compel a reader to imagine new possibilities and influence a change in behavior. Because they are rhetorically nimble folktales, Jesus uses them to obscure, reveal, protect, and disseminate his messages about God's reign while subverting Rome's presumed superiority.

Constituting about half the content in Luke, the most of any Gospel, the English term "parable" is a transliteration of the Greek *parabolē*. Bernard Brandon Scott explains, "*Parabolē* means literally 'to set beside,' 'to throw beside,' and so functions as a comparative term, indicating similarity or parallelism."[7] Additionally, it is a translation of the Hebrew *mashal,* meaning a proverb, riddle, or wise saying. Although Scott asserts that the Greek and Hebrew terms do not refer to a specific literary genre, C.H. Dodd's categorization of Jesus's parables as figurative sayings, metaphors, or tales is widely referenced among scholars.[8] Dodd would call the parables of a widow and judge as well as a Pharisee and tax collector "somewhat long" tales with a beginning, middle, and end.[9] As narratives, they contain developed characters, setting, plot, climax, conflict, and resolution; they create a practical vehicle for explaining and illustrating broad concepts and their praxis. Furthermore, narrative parables are short stories with actions and characters identifiable and relatable to a listener.[10] A listener recognizes the people,

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[6] Klyne R. Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent: A Comprehensive Guide to the Parables of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008), 23.
[7] Bernard Brandon Scott, *Hear Then the Parable: A Commentary on the Parable of Jesus* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1989), 19.
[8] Cf. Scott, *Hear Then the Parable*, 7; C.H. Dodd, *The Parables of the Kingdom* (New York: Scribner, 1961), 6-7; Richard Lischer, *Reading the Parables* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014), 18. Lischer asserts that Dodd's definition of parable excludes narratives from his list. However, Dodd does incorporate narratives in his category of tales or parables proper.
[9] Cf. Dodd, *The Parables of the Kingdom*, 7. Lischer, *Reading the Parables*, 18. Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, 11; Brad H. Young, *The Parables: Jewish Tradition and Christian* Interpretation (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing, 2012), 15-25.
[10] Lischer, *Reading the Parables*, 18.

circumstances, and contexts. The parables in Luke 18 have identifiable characters and situations to which the Lukan audience recognize within their contexts.

Interpreting parables require knowledge of the cultural milieu that shape the literature and its literary setting. Jesus's parables reflect the *Sitz im Leben*, the setting of life, of his audience. Using experiences and circumstances of daily life, which includes the political, social, and economic context, Jesus's parables represent the folk culture of his context. Brad Young explains:

> Rabbinic and Gospel parables are authentic representations of the folk culture. The themes of the stories reveal a people's rich cultural heritage. Royal and aristocratic families are viewed through the eyes of the common folk. Agricultural laborers fill the dramatic scenes of the stories. They are filled with both evil and good while they make use of a fascinating cast of villains and heroes. These stories are fond of contrast, exaggeration, intrigue, and surprise. Money, power, greed as well as generosity, humility, and compassion generate the interest of the listener.[11]

Being "true to nature and to life" means that parables depict observable aspects of nature, recognizable characteristics of people's actions, and expected circumstances with an occasional twist or surprise ending.[12]

Therefore, scholars agree that understanding the sociopolitical context of the parables, as well as the Gospels, is paramount for their analyses. As folk material that reflects layers of particular culture and commentary, they are efficient transmitters of hidden transcripts in public spaces. Parables provide detailed settings and excursuses on the story's politics; thus, the audience uses its various contexts as background for their interpretations. New Testament critics have interpreted them as a social commentary on first century Palestine.

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[11] Young, *The Parables*, 15.
[12] Dodd, *The Parables of the Kingdom*, 9

Because parables offer clues about the sociopolitical contexts of the Gospels, they open a window into first century Palestinian life. In *Parables as Subversive Speech*, William Herzog engages socio-historical methods to interpret parables as pedagogical tools for social commentary and political analysis of the time's everyday life. With them, a reader or listener is able to examine the oppressive societal structures where social, political, and economic oligarchies justify their power and privilege to maintain degradation and dehumanization of the masses.[13] He asserts "Instead of reiterating the promise of God's intervention in human affairs, they explored how human beings could respond to break the spiral of violence and cycle of poverty created by exploitation and oppression. The parable was a form of social analysis every bit as much as it was a form of theological reflection."[14] However, the parable's ability to transform society goes beyond its illustration of social conditions and exploitations. It conveys theological claims about the Kingdom's impact on personal assumptions, individual actions, and social interactions in regard to just and compassionate living. As a cultural product that examines systems of oppression, Jesus's parables facilitate a postcolonial conscientization to liberate people's mind from the absurdities of colonialized logic and to imagine a new order in the kingdom of God.

Social commentaries in Jesus's parables break oppressive bonds as they describe the Kingdom of God and offer a theological reflection on God's disruptive and creative work in establishing human flourishing. Luise Schottroff argues that social commentaries are critical for understanding Jesus's message of praxis and living in accordance to his teachings.[15] While using

[13] William R. Herzog, *Parables as Subversive Speech: Jesus as Pedagogue of the Oppressed* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994), 28. Herzog does not deny the possibility that parables have theological purposes; however, he puts a primacy on interpreting them as scenes "from the larger world of agrarian society and the political control of aristocratic rule" (p. 73).
[14] Herzog, *Parables as Subversive Speech*, 3.
[15] Luise Schotroff, *The Parables of Jesus,* trans. Linda M. Maloney (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), 1.

social-historical method to contextualize parables "in order to name their liberating or oppressive potential—in relation to concrete social relationships then and now," she joins most scholars who interpret parables as discourses on the kingdom of God.[16] In New Testament studies, scholars generally agree that parables illustrate God's interactions with humanity in ordinary experiences. As Richard Lischer puts it, "The implication of the parables is clear: if one cannot meet the kingdom of God amid the pots and pans of daily life, of what earthly use is the kingdom."[17] As a disruptive force, the Kingdom's interaction in daily life imposes a countercultural existence and subverts the rules and values of hegemonic forces.[18] While concurring with established scholarship, this study emphasizes parables as illustrations of human interactions and Jesus's evocative teachings to transform attitudes and praxis so as to reflect God's commandments to love one's neighbor.

In the parables, the promises of God's kingdom and the convictions of Jesus's teaching actualize in present eschatological messages of hope and anticipation. In the mid-twentieth century, New Testament critics began to interpret parabolic references to the kingdom of God as a realized eschatology.[19] A term coined by C. H. Dodd, it describes a space where Jesus confronts humanity to respond to God's in-breaking reign in their present circumstances as individuals and a society. [20] Realized eschatology is similar to John Dominic Crossan's term prophetic eschatology as discussed in the previous chapter and deployed throughout this work.[21]

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[16] Schotroff, *The Parables of Jesus,* 2, 86; Lischer, *Reading the Parables,* 20; Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent,* 2.
[17] Lischer, *Reading the Parables,* 11.
[18] While apocalyptic eschatology is present in the narrative frame of many parables in the Gospels, the poignancy of God's kingdom work in daily occurrences is a prominent theme in contemporary parabolic interpretation.
[19] Early Christian churches used allegorical interpretations that espouse an apocalyptic eschatology to reconcile the kingdom of God references in the parables with their experience of the delayed of *parousia*. Allegorical interpretations of God's reign in parables dominated biblical scholarship until the end of the twentieth century and continues to persist in the interpretation of some, if not all, parables.
[20] Lischer, *Reading the Parables,* 26.
[21] John Dominic Crossan, *In Parables: The Challenge of the Historical Jesus*, 2nd edition (Sonoma: CA: Polebridge Press, 1992), 26.

Although similar, prophetic eschatology connotes an urgency in the work of God's reign to transform lives and society. The range of theological implications include a concern with personal piety as well as God's justice in eradicating oppression from society. Parables execute discursive and transformative power. In their social commentaries and illustrations of prophetic eschatology, they evoke humans to respond to God's kingdom by changing personal and sociopolitical dynamics and breaking the bonds of oppression. Theological, political, and personal responses to Jesus's teachings through parables negatively impact the spiral of violence, cycle of poverty, the perpetuation of human degradation, and the ubiquity of inferiority.

Therefore, parables are stories with intent with complicated meanings. As tools for revolutionary teachings, Jesus's parables could be interpreted as dangerous texts. Seemingly simple folktales, they are exceptional conduits of a hidden transcript. Known as complex, mysterious literary tools ranging in size and insights, their meanings are neither straightforward nor exclusively based in piety or a morality that is easily grasped upon first hearing.[22] Reading Jesus's parables as subversive speech uncovers a revolutionary theme underscoring the entire gospel. Herzog articulates a shared conclusion among many scholars about the radical nature of Jesus's ministry: "If Jesus was a teacher of heavenly truths dispensed through literary gems called parables, it is difficult to understand how he could have been executed as a political subversive and crucified between social bandits."[23]

As a hidden transcript, Jesus's parables disguise from public view the grievances, concerns, and revolutionary visions of subordinated peoples across and within his social context while maintaining the anonymity of various characters. For example, the parable of a widow and judge illustrates the corruption and capriciousness of the region's judicial system and its defiance

[22] Lischer, *Reading the Parables*, 7.
[23] Herzog, *Parables as Subversive Speech*, 9.

of the godly decree to protect vulnerable members of the society, especially widows. While describing the judge as unjust, the story seems to accuse one individual; however, the story leaves room to recognize that this could be any judge because the system in general is unjust. Therefore, analyzing cultural and literary contexts of Jesus's parables as presented in their respective Gospels are crucial for interpreting their hidden transcript as liberative teachings for transformative living.

In Luke 18:1-8, Jesus tells an ordinary story about a widow and judge to illustrate the work of God's kingdom. Interpreters use the narrative frame (vv. 1, 7-8) as a hermeneutical tool for analyzing the story as Jesus's teaching on faithfulness in prayer and apocalyptic eschatology.[24] Consequently, scholars promote the story as a moral tale about pious living and recently as a portrait of a female empowerment. In contrast to previous scholarship, I use the parable as a lens for interpreting the narrative frame. By inverting the interpretive framework, the parabolic definition of prayer expands beyond begging God for relief from an oppressive situation. Prayer becomes advocacy through words and deeds that participate in the transformation of dynamics that perpetuate injustice and politics against a person and community. Furthermore, by reading narrative frame through the lens of the parable, God's relationship with God's people shifts from being analogous with the unjust judge to being

[24] Cf. Dodd, *The Parables of the Kingdom*, 16. Dodd contends that the application of the parable accompanied in the text reflects the earliest traditions of church as understood by those closest to the situation. Some applications may be authentic to the source material and others may not. According to Crossan, parables found in each of the Synoptic Gospels reflect a particular tradition where they appear (*In Parables,* 4-7). Although unique to the Lukan text, parables of a widow and judge along with Pharisee and tax collector are likely included because they fit Luke's agenda. Some studies of parables without their narrative frames reflect an unease with accepting the frames as definitive commentary. They claim the frames restrict interpretation of the parables, at times domesticating and dulling the sting of its point into platitude (Cf. Amy-Jill Levine, *Short Stories by Jesus: The Enigmatic Parables of a Controversial Rabbi* (San Francisco: Harper One, 2015), 16). While interpreting the parables without their frames facilitates helpful insights and social commentary of the cultural context, reading the frames with the parables connects them to the agenda of the particular Gospel in which they appear. Poignancy of interpretation of these teachings of Jesus is not diluted by its frame, but by an interpreter's inability to recognize the politics of disguise. Its hidden transcript nurtures and even protects scandalous and seditious meanings as disseminated in seemingly pious platitudes or domesticated stories.

reflective of God as liberator, one congruent with the Hebrew scriptures. In other words, this mode of reading reveals the parable's answer to what it means to steadfastly pray, to be courageous, and to have faith during Jesus's absence. As a hidden transcript, Jesus's teaching with the parable of a widow and judge replies with a plot twist that transforms sociopolitical power dynamics through individual choices as part of a theology of prayer in action.

Ordinary People

The parable of a widow and judge only appears in the Gospel of Luke. It begins with the setting and cast: a certain city, a certain judge and a widow. Despite the generic descriptions of the setting and characters, Jesus's audience would likely identify with the story within their colonial context, as it is common for a person to hear and read through their own perspective.[25] In addition to the cultural milieux of first century audiences, narrative context provides setting and character details that reveal layers of meaning in the parable (18:2-8) and its frame (vv. 1, 7-8). The location, a certain city, is the most explicit clue. Jesus's audience would likely imagine a sea port, an administrative center, or marketplace. Regardless of the city's actual political or economic purpose, it is an urban area, suggesting a social hierarchy inclusive of a ruling class, economic elites, merchants, tradespeople, subsistent workers, and slaves. As a judge in a city, the character is a member of the urban elite and therefore connected to the Roman imperial system. In short, the judge has power. As the story's urban setting offers some clues about the judge and his sociopolitical power, it provides no aid for understanding the widow's positionality. Instead, Luke's narrative and its historical-cultural context impact the characterizations of the parabolic

[25] Levine, *Short Stories by Jesus*, 1.

judge and widow, the dynamics of their sociopolitical relationships, and the consequences of their choices in the name of justice.

The Judge

In first-century Palestine, a judge exercises institutional power through his profession. Therefore, the parabolic judge has authority to administer justice for the widow; she has limited social, political, and economic resources and recourses of her own. On the surface, the parable provides an ambiguous picture of the judge. The narration does not explicitly describe him or his moral character: he is neither a model of righteousness nor a personification of corruption. The judge's self-depiction as one who neither fears God nor respects people suggests a high value on being uninfluenced by divine decrees or human persuasion. He is impartial toward ideology, religion, and politics; his personal beliefs do not impede his ability to be objective while enforcing the law. While arguing that the parable does not condemn the judge, Meira Kensky observes that it describes his behaviors and attitudes for readers to draw their own conclusions based on personal or colloquial experiences.[26] At best, the judge's character may be viewed as objective due to a propensity toward fairness. However, fairness is not synonymous with just.

The parable is emphatic in its description of the judge as lacking a fear of God and respect for people. The narration (v. 2) and the judge's self-description (v.4) repeat this characterization. Describing the judge as unjust (v. 6), Jesus confirms a negative connotation imbued in the redundancy of the judge's reputation. The judge's character, therefore, suggests a shamelessness unperturbed by divine mandate or sociopolitical pressure. Referring to the scholarship of Kenneth Bailey, Herzog asserts, "The judge is beyond shame; neither an appeal to

[26] Meira Z. Kensky, "Courtrooms in Luke-Acts," *Biblical Research* 55, (2010), 72.

God's justice nor an appeal to human need can evoke a sense of shame."[27] Another possibility is that he lacks a desire or ability to reflect society's ideals of humanity and justice. The judge admits in his self-incriminating monologue that his delayed ruling on the widow's behalf is evoking her vexation. His recognition evinces an awareness of the egregious nature of his inaction.[28] The parable's double reference along with Jesus's commentary shine a negative light on the judge's character.

Furthermore, analyzing the judge's character as morally ambiguous decontextualizes the story from its historical-cultural and narrative settings. Despite generic descriptions of the judge as well as the widow, the parable mirrors the cultural context of the greater narrative, and therefore, Jesus's audience. Lacking a geographical location and ethnic specificity seems to indicate an insignificance to the story.[29] However, this absence may also serve as an element of a hidden transcript, disguising a subversive nature to the story in order to avoid direct confrontation with hegemonic powers.[30]

Describing the politics of disguise in hidden transcripts, James C. Scott explains that anonymity can facilitate double meanings or allow concealment of identities while in public view.[31] Therefore, a generalized setting hides direct accusations against the judicial system, while nurturing the imaginings of sociopolitical transformations among a people who suffer

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[27] Herzog, *Parables as Subversive Speech,* 221.
[28] Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 639.
[29] Levine, *Short Stories by Jesus*, 232.
[30] In Luke, Jesus avoids direct confrontation with the Roman political system (cf. 20:21-26; 23:1-4, 8-10, 13-17). The Gospel is so convincing that Luke Timothy Johnson calls Luke an apologetic historian (Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 10). He asserts, "The fact that Luke has a positive view of Gentiles and of Roman officials in particular has led some to suggest that Luke wrote an apology for the Christian movement as such. The Christians were politically harmless and should be allowed the same freedoms afforded to 'other Jews' by Rome (Green, *The Gospel of Luke* 8).
[31] James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990), 19. The politics of disguise and anonymity enable a subversive culture among oppressed or subordinated groups that include among other rumors, folktales, jokes, songs, and euphemisms. What Scott describes, "a good part of the folk culture of subordinate groups."

oppressive cruelties. The parable does not accuse any particular judge or extols a particular freedom-fighting widow. However, audiences throughout the Roman Empire oppressed by these systems are able to identify the hidden transcript that validates their experiences with corrupt judges; models courage for confronting those who defraud them of their livelihood and dignity; and inspires hope for a transformation in people and policies that create and perpetuate unjust systems. Herzog asserts that Jesus's audience would associate the characters in the parables with social types in their agrarian societies, and the audiences' presumed perspectives on the ruling class, bureaucrats, and peasants would be present in them as well.[32] The absence of specificity enables an elasticity of the parable. In essence, the judge's actions correspond to the audience's culturally specific experiences with their judicial systems.

For Jesus's Judean audience, judges are supposed to revere God and respect humanity, especially that of the least privileged. Ideally, they render just decisions, show impartiality, and never take bribes.[33] While addressing newly appointed judges, King Jehoshaphat of Judah reminds the group that their work is for God and the fear of God should be upon them (2 Chronicles 19:6-7). Moses's father-in-law, Jethro, counsels him to find people who fear God and are trustworthy to serve as judges among the Israelites (Exodus 18:22). Therefore, the parabolic judge's confession of having no fear of God demonstrates unfaithfulness or lack of adherence to the covenantal community.

Among Luke's audience, which would include other colonized nations, the judge's description is a formulaic expression in Roman colloquialism. In the *History of Rome,* Greek historian and rhetorician Dionysius of Halicarnassus presents a Roman tribune's description of aristocrats, who conspired to disenfranchise plebeians, as men who neither fear the anger of gods

[32] Herzog, *Parables as Subversive Speech*, 73.
[33] cf. Deuteronomy 16:18-20.

nor respect men's indignation.[34] Theological and political indifference to the personal well-being of fellow citizens is not simply a trait of a morally ambiguous judge, but a dishonorable judge. Transculturally throughout the ancients, having no fear of God or respect for people is a disreputable trait for any judge.

Furthermore, despite specificity of details, the narrative and historical contexts suggest that the judge is culturally Roman. Context clues in Luke's greater story, knowledge of ancient Jewish beliefs, and social stereotypes of civic officers would inform Luke's audience of the parabolic judge's cultural, or at least judicial, orientation. Shamelessly lacking deference for God is evidence that the judge is not a member of the Torah court. Although both Herzog and Scott assert that he is a corrupt or impious judicial official of the Torah, the judge's transparency about his lack of fear of God seems to contradict their argument. Their explanation represents him as an uncharacteristic member who falls short of the ideal type described in the Torah, a depiction that reflects human reality that ever person is not ideal. However, the judge's self-description suggests a great audacity and possibly a flaunting of his defiance of the law that he is to administer and uphold.[35] Even in a short fable, it is difficult to imagine an unrepentant judge, who willfully disobeys the mandates of his office, would go unpunished by either divine decree or social consequence. Although they may have had Torah courts, Jesus's audience would be subject to the Roman juridical system as a colonized community. Being culturally Roman in

[34] Cf. Scott, *Hear Then the Parable*, 180.

[35] As a member of the Torah court, the judge would recognize his self-description is counter to the attitudes of the Deuteronomistic texts. However, William Herzog asserts that Jesus's public ministry addressed internal oppression, using the Torah as a foundation to his teachings since he does not speak against Roman oppression (*Parables as Subversive Speech*, 221-222). Jesus's silence about Roman oppression may not have been evident due to his utilization of the politics of disguise that he plausibly implemented to safeguard himself and his audience from Roman violence if sedition was suspected. Brandon Scott contends that Judean courts allowed an individual judge to rule over certain cases. He explains, "But there is no apparent reason to suggest that this parable envisions a situation demanding a secular court, although the description of the judge indicates that he is not a pious Pharisee" (*Hear Then the Parable,* 184).

actions and perspectives that mimic, maintain, and reify Roman ideology and authority, the parabolic judge seems to define himself with colonialized principles and sensibilities instead of those of the Jewish traditions.

In Lukan narratives, judges are administrators of Rome. They adjudicate its laws and require its punishment.[36] They are the public face of Roman imperialism.[37] Additionally, the audience would know from their ordinary experiences that judges wield power, authority, and terror as they deliver their verdicts.[38] As such, Luke illustrates a popular perception that judges cannot be trusted. Jesus tells his audience to resolve the disputes among themselves instead of taking them to a magistrate for judgment (12:58). In his admonishment to avoid judges who would put them in jail, Jesus suggests that a culture of corruption is normal in their judicial system and that judges care more about punishment than justice or reconciliation.

Historical investigations of Roman court systems corroborate with the Lukan narrative this problematic aspect of the judicial system. Citing the work for Deborah Hobson, Wendy Cotter explains, "Hobson shows that most people tried to resolve disputes on their own by meetings between the parties, or by mediation or arbitration. But if none of these brought results, the courts were the last stage."[39] The evidence shows that Roman citizens, who would experience the judicial system differently from colonized and non-citizens, made major efforts to resolve their issues and find justice among themselves before resorting to courts. If the case does go to court, Hobson notes that the verdict would most likely side with the wealthiest or influential person. Although reasons for delaying interaction with the court system could include costliness

[36] When describing proceedings in Torah courts, Luke explicitly calls them councils and refers to them by their judicial, ethnic, or geographical contexts (see Luke 22:60, 23:50; Acts 4:13, 5:21-41, 6:12, 22:3-5, 22:30, 23:1-8; 24:10-21).
[37] Jill Harries, *Law and Empire in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 171.
[38] Harries, *Law and Empire in Late Antiquity*, 171.
[39] Wendy Cotter, "The Parable of the Feisty Widow and the Threatened Judge (Luke 18:1-8)," *New Testament Studies*, 51, no. 3 (July, 2005): 337.

in money, time, and process, historical evidence suggests that the avoidance was due to a nefarious cause: corruption.

As Jesus's audience perceives judges as categorically corrupt, they would interpret the Roman court systems with a similar outlook. Historical data in court accounts and Roman narratives testify to contemporary and popular views of Rome's judicial system as perverse. Jill Harries explains, "The reputation of the *iudex* in general had little chance when confronted with the prevailing discourse in both laws and rhetoric of powerful provincials on corruption and accountability."[40] Along with rhetoric about the corruption and corruptibility of the justice system, public records attest to the susceptibility of judges to the influences of wealthy elites, powerful leaders, and increasing prestige. Harries comments, "Such was the way the system had worked, throughout Roman imperial history."[41] Lower judges, who needed powerful allies, were most vulnerable to the authority of politically, socially, and economically elite citizens regardless of justice.

Although the parable does not identify the judge ethnically, his professional affiliation within a city and lack of deference toward God identifies him with a Roman construct. Because of their socio-political context, Jesus's audience would expect the judge in the parable to be politically Roman, complying to the ethnic and imperial superiority of the Roman ideology. The parable's characterization of the judge mirrors historical reputation of Roman judges. Historically, local elites served as administrators and judges in the colonies.[42] As a colonized person who is the face of Rome, the judge operates with Rome's judicial sensibilities as a retainer of its justice, and therefore its ideology of supreme authority.

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[40] Harries, *Law and Empire in Late Antiquity*, 171.
[41] Harries, *Law and Empire in Late Antiquity*, 171.
[42] Géza Alföldy, *The Social History of Rome* (New York: Routledge Press, 1988), 108.

The parabolic judge mimics his Roman colonizers. As Homi Bhabha would assert, the judge is a "reformed, recognizable Other, *as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite.*"[43] The judge is not quite Roman because he is actually Judean and would never be accepted as fully Roman in society; as a Romanized Judean or Galilean, his Roman affiliation hinders acceptance and trust by Jesus's audience. His lack of fear of God, a disrespect for humanity, a disregard of the widow's plight, and nonobservance of the Torah in this judicial matter are evidence of his loyalty to and mimicry of Roman culture. As a colonized local judge, his susceptibility to privileging wealth and maintaining injustices in Roman laws suggest a high probability for corruption as endemic to the Roman judicial system. The parabolic judge embodies malfeasance of the Roman court system.

The parable's characterization of the judge's mimicry reveals a postcolonial consciousness of the storyteller as one who identifies and displays the cultural ambivalence of colonialism in its assimilation of those being colonized. As the parabolic judge is unable to maintain his stance against the widow either legally or ideologically, the story exposes cracks in his authority and in the supremacy of Roman law. It problematizes the superiority of colonial presence by demonstrating instability of its power.[44] Luke's representation of the judge as Romanized native demonstrates a slippage of colonial authority as absolute and sovereign. The characterization reminds the audience of the fallibilities in Rome's narrative as supreme authority and uncovers fragility in Roman colonial efforts. A theological implication is that the judge's change signifies God's power to destabilize and dismantle Roman oppression. A

[43] Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, Routledge Classics (Abingdon, Oxon, OX: Routledge, 1994), 122.
[44] cf. Bhabha, "On Mimicry and Man", *The Location of Culture*, Routledge Classics (Abingdon, Oxon, OX: Routledge, 1994), 121-131. Bhabha asserts that colonial mimicry shows the disruption of the colonial ideological discourse.

personal implication is that it illustrates an individual's ability to combat injustice and oppression in daily life to ensure human survival and dignity. A political implication includes small changes in judicial system build cases for a prevalence of justice.

The narrative and cultural contexts paint the parabolic judge as a Roman official who exercises an egregious act of injustice in the widow's case. An ostensibly generic description of the judge hides Jesus's challenge to Roman socio-political hegemonies. However, as hidden transcript of a colonized community, his critique of the Empire is clear among people who witness the corruption of its judges, suffer the abuses of its courts' malfeasance, and champion its humiliation in the face of righteousness.

The Widow

As with the judge, the parable gives a limited description of the widow. However, in the quest for justice, her words and deeds are feisty, importunate, inopportune, and one would even say vengeful.[45] A woman of limited resources, she is a constant presence in the court as she has no one to advocate on her behalf in an androcentric world. Her sights are on the one judge who refuses her request for justice. Impolite and demanding, the widow refuses to use pleasantries and honorifics as she addresses the judge. Cultural and narrative contexts of a widow's life along with her actions in the story reveal insights about her character, her radical nature, and her subversive power.

[45] Despite the lacking an explicit description in the parable, the widow's actions and words have generated characterizations that scholars include in the titles of their articles. cf. Wendy Cotter, "The Parable of the Feisty Widow"; Fitzmyer, *The Gospel according to Luke X-XXIV*; John Mark Hicks, "The Parable of the Persistent Widow (Luke 18:1-8)," *Restoration Quarterly*, 30 no. 4 (1991), 209-223. Levine has characterized the widow's behavior as vengeful. Ultimately, she describes the judge as being without a moral compass and the widow as vindictive (Amy-Jill Levine, "This Widow Keeps Bothering Me" (Luke 18:3)," in *Finding a Woman's Place: Essays in Honor of Carolyn Osiek, R.S.C.J*, ed. David L. Balch and Jason T. Lamoreaux (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2011), 130); Levine, *Short Stories of Jesus*, 245.

As a woman, a widow is subordinate according to the gender norms of Rome's kyriarchal structure. Kyriarchy was an institutionally supported sociopolitical structure throughout the Roman Empire, and therefore a familiar aspect to the daily existence of Jesus's audience. Rooted in sexism, a widow's plight was a result of intersectional oppression that extends into social, political, and economic subordination. Women were wards of male adults in their households: wives were dependent upon their husbands, daughters were dependent upon their brothers and fathers, and therefore, widows were dependent upon their sons or other male relations. Generally, widows relied on men's financial resources for the household and sociopolitical dealings in public life.[46] Men provided economic security and societal protections in the public sphere; women had limited agency and independence.

In addition to being subordinated because of their female gender, widows were economically vulnerable. They depend on the commitment of sons, husbands' families, and their own family for economic and communal welfare. Although male relations were their primary caretakers, the patriarchal systems of ancient Israel and Greco-Roman society had provisions for their care and support. Many widows were financially stable due to provisions in via customs and laws. Research suggests that widows varied in levels of destitution and support. In ancient Israel, widows may have had financial support through their marriage dowries and other means.[47] Roman laws protected and supported older Roman widows through their dowries as

[46] In the domestic sphere, women managed the household affairs including food preparation, child rearing, etc. Women contributed to the economic sustainability. However, its generally understood that women's economic contribution supported the financial base of the household, even though a family's wealth could have been based on her inheritance or dowry.

[47] Cf. Scott, *Hear Then the Parables*, 180; Levine, "'This Widow Keeps Bothering Me' (Luke 18:3)," 129. Ketubah, a marriage contract, delineates a husband's obligation to his wife and care for her with his estate on his death. She does not inherit the land, but is able to stay on her husband's property unless she opts to return to her family's household or remarry.

well.[48] Therefore, one should not automatically assume that a widow was poor. Although normal in practice, provisions were not universal. If the family denied her dowry or she no longer had male relatives, the economic situations of a widow could be quite dire.

Throughout Israel's scriptures, widows tended to live in society's margins. The Torah commands protections for widows along with orphans and foreigners from abuse and mandates provisions for their economic care as they were among society's most vulnerable.[49] Exodus 22:22-24 declares God's wrath and swift retribution upon anyone who abuses widows or orphans. The psalms and prophets proclaim God's special protection of widows along with orphans and foreigners and declare blessings and curses upon God's people in accordance to their treatment of this special population.[50] Unnamed widows in the Hebrew narratives are in states of destitution and desperation perpetually. Like those in the Hebrew scriptures, widows in Luke are typically recipients of mercy; rarely are they purveyors of activism and advocacy for justice. However, the parabolic widow continues in the tradition of Tamar, Abigail, Naomi, Ruth, and Judith as widows who champion for themselves, their families, and their communities as co-producers of justice with God for God's people. These named widows are fearless, beautiful, strategic, clever, self-sufficient, and advocates for themselves and others.[51] Even with wealth, beauty, and audacity, widows were vulnerable to social and political structures that limited their power and agency for procuring an abundant life.

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[48] Bruce Winter, *Roman Wives, Roman Widows: The Appearance of New Women and the Pauline Community* (Cambridge: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 2003), 125-126. Winter asserts, "The Graeco-Roman world sought to make sure that a widow had security by giving her shelter with her dowry in the household (οἶκος) of her eldest son, her other sons or her father."

[49] cf. Exodus 22:22-24; Deuteronomy 10:14, 16-18; 14:28-29; 24:17-21, 26:12-13;27:19.

[50] Cf. Psalm 68:5; 94:6, 23; 146:9; Isaiah 1:16-17, 23; 10:1-2; Jeremiah 7:5-7; 22:3 Ezekiel 22:6-7; Zechariah 7:8-12; Malachi 3:5.

[51] cf. Genesis 38:2-26; the book of Ruth; 1 Samuel 25:2-3; Judith 8:1-8.

Luke perpetuates literary tropes of widows as vulnerable. In his Gospel, they are helpless (the widow of Nain, 7:11-17), poor (the widow's mite, 21:1-4), and powerless (the widow and the judge, 18:1-8). The prophet and widow Anna is an exception: her social and economic circumstances are unclear (2:36). Since becoming a widow, she has lived and worshipped at the temple by her own volition, demonstrating her piety with daily prayers and fasting. This description suggests that either she chooses not to live in her family's home or she has no home. Since the Torah directs the temple priests to care for the orphans and widows, they are likely providing for Anna as well. Equally plausible, Anna could be providing for herself, and therefore her life of piety—and not poverty—at the temple stands as a testimony to her dedication to God and to Luke's description of her as a prophet. In Luke, Anna is an anomaly among the other widows. As most Galileans and Judeans suffered from Rome's crushing economic policies and lived below subsistence, the widows, such as Peter's mother-in-law and Jesus's own mother, likely lived in economically precarious conditions, dependent on the mercy of male relations and others.

Because of the social context of Roman colonialism and rhetorical context of the scriptures, Jesus's audience would envision the parabolic widow as defenseless, destitute, and desperate. Although the tropes of her character are familiar, the widow is not as one would expect. At best, her social and economic status is ambiguous. She comes to the judge alone, which suggests that she is without male support.[52] Yet, by her actions and words, she is shameless and bold; she berates the judge with her constant presence.[53] Belonging to the

[52] Because it is very unusual in this period of time for a woman to enter an administrative space without a male surrogate, scholars tend to agree that she is without male protection and is very likely that her case is against male relatives who are keeping her from receiving the resources of the estate of her dead husband or other relation.
[53] Scott, *Hear Then the Parable,* 183.

domestic sphere, this widow acts against the modesty codes of Roman society with her persistent presence in court.[54]

Wendy Cotter asserts that her lack of modesty through her frequent appearances in the public male domain of the court could incite unwanted male attention.[55] The widow's persistence undermines the stereotype of feminine meekness and weakness. Cotter writes, "Certainly these examples allow us to conclude that if the author of the parable had intended to convey the image of this widow as conventionally meek and subservient, he would not have begun his description of her with the statement that she was constantly going to the judge."[56] Ancient Roman culture was intolerant of wealthy, powerful, and privileged women being involved in court proceedings, therefore its intolerance and frustration for colonized women would be even greater.[57] The widow's presence would have been hugely problematic due to her colonized status, class, and gender.

As the kyriarchal structure of Rome's hegemony subordinates and subjugates her person, she uses her limited resources of time, physical strength, and mental courage to preserve her dignity and obtain her due. Often characterized as desperation, the widow's appearance before the judge demonstrates a determination that forces a political system to act as a vehicle of justice for everyone, including herself. Instead of acquiescing to her circumstances or resigning to consequences of inaction, the parabolic widow's behavior depicts her resolve to live with the dignity that justice would provide.

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[54] According Roman social order, men occupy and control the public sphere; women occupy the domestic sphere. Exceptions exist in historical and biblical documents female presence outside of the home. Luke documents in both his Gospel as well as in Acts many examples of women functioning in the public square working, following Jesus, among the disciples, and in worship.
[55] Cotter, "The Parable of the Feisty Widow," 333.
[56] Cotter, "The Parable of the Feisty Widow," 335.
[57] Cotter, "The Parable of the Feisty Widow," 335.

Contravening a stereotype of meekness, the widow is vocal and disruptive. She speaks to the judge frankly, dispensing with formal speech and decorum ordinarily used to honor a judge. People of the ancient Roman Empire would address judges and magistrates with great deference and grand titles such as "My Lord" or "*Pater Civitatis*."[58] Instead, the widow talks to the judge candidly, using imperatives in her speech to articulate her demand. Gaylyn E. Ginn Eddy asserts that the lack of decorum in the widow's speech demonstrates her socio-location on the margins of society.[59] Furthering this argument, Eddy explains, "The widow's persistence may be a form of persuasion, of wisely playing out cultural roles to her benefit. Because she is on the edge of society, she is able to say and do what others who are integrated into a social matrix could not say or do."[60] Thus, she uses her dishonored status to shamelessly harass the judge and to speak to him with frankness.[61] Unlike the judge, she is unconcerned about her reputation, especially in a social environment that has already discounted her via her colonial, marital, and economic status. Eddy's analysis suggests that the widow uses perceptions of inferiority, and therefore ignorance, to cloak her brash behavior. Alternatively, Cotter argues that the widow speaks in imperatives out of her feistiness and frustration; she is intentionally and explicitly subversive.[62] Whether she is playing a role or simply exasperated, the widow's disruptive address to the judge is confrontational and unexpected. Her behavior and language characterize her as empowered to demand justice. She is her own advocate.

Extraordinary Choices

[58] Cotter, "The Parable of the Feisty Widow," 336.
[59] Gaylyn E. Ginn Eddy, *Contributing out of Her Poverty: A Study of the Widow in Luke-Acts,* (Ph.D. diss., Vanderbilt University, 1999), 227.
[60] Eddy, *Contributing out of Her Poverty,* 228.
[61] Eddy, *Contributing out of Her Poverty*, 227.
[62] Eddy, *Contributing out of Her Poverty*, 227.

Luke 18:1-8 reveals cracks in the ideology of Roman imperialism and provides a path for resistance and justice through extraordinary choices. The parabolic widow and judge act in ways that could cause relief from colonial oppression. With justice as a major theme, the story depicts the ability of choice to disrupt the status quo and to contest power.

The widow comes to the judge repeatedly for justice against the one who has been unjust to her. Her opponent has power to allude justice; the judge has power to administer it; and she has limited power to access it. Derivatives of the Greek verb to judge (δικαιόω) appears in this story four times.[63] It appears in the widow's address (ἐκδίκησόν με, v, 3), as the designation for her accuser (τοῦ ἀντιδίκου, v. 3), in the judge's decision (ἐκδικήσω, v. 5), and in Jesus's description of the judge (ἀδικίας, v. 6). The story does not share information about the actual offense or her accuser.[64] A legal term meaning opponent or adversary, I translate τοῦ ἀντιδίκου literally as the unjust one to mirror its Greek's root of justice. [65] Her opponent is treating her unjustly.

The parabolic widow is socially and politically vulnerable to the injustice of her opponent and the corruption of the judge. As F. Scott Spencer asserts, "So it seems to be two against one—two justice-spurning men (judge and opponent), possibly in active collusion, against an oppressed widow."[66] Scholarly consensus is that the widow's complaint is probably financial in

[63] Cf. Frederick W. Danker, Walter Bauer, and William F. Arndt, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature,* 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000). In the BDAG, δικαιόω has four definitions: 1) to show justice or do show, 2) to render a just verdict or vindicate, 3) to release someone from invalid institutional claims, and 4) prove to be right.
[64] Culpepper, "The Gospel of Luke," 337. Culpepper contends that absence of the identity of the adversary demonstrates that the character is unimportant to the story.
[65] cf. John Hicks, "The Parable of the Persistent Widow," 216. Several English Bible translates the term as opponent or adversary (New Revised Standard Version, New International Version, King James Version, and Common English Bible).
[66] F. Scott Spencer, *Salty Wives, Spirited Mothers, and Savvy Widows: Capable Women of Purpose and Persistence in Luke's Gospel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012), 267-268.

nature against a derelict male family member.[67] However, the content of her case is unknown. What is known is that the widow's reason for coming before the judge is that someone, mostly likely a man, has treated her unjustly. Without the distraction of the case's content, the audience's focus is on the relationship between the widow and the judge.

The judge's use of power and authority evokes the widow's protest. For some time, he refuses the widow's plea for justice despite her persistence. He relents, "because this widow causes trouble for me, I will give her justice, so that, in the end, while coming, she does not blacken my eye" (Luke 18:5). Inopportune and disruptive, the widow's constant presence becomes unbearable for the judge. However, the judge does not take responsibility for being the cause of the harassment. His constant refusal to tender her call for justice reflects his individual choice to deny her, and he asserts this power of choice, repeatedly. With a popular perception that judges sell their rulings along with assumptions that most widows are economically fragile, the judge's inaction connotes the widow's inability to bribe him. Her economic powerlessness may have evoked the judge's obstinacy.

Another reason for the judge's refusal could be her colonized and ethnicised status. Modern history has revealed that formal judicial systems enforcing colonizing laws provoke wide discrimination against a colonized people by state-sanctioned agents. For example, in the United States during the era of Jim and Jane Crow, white people were judges, jurists, prosecutors, law enforcers, and executioners both officially in the courts and de facto in mob settings for cases effecting black women and men. Often, expectations of fair proceedings were nonexistent. Although internal colonialism produced and enforced Jim and Jane Crow in a different time and place, similar oppressive geopolitics and their subsequential hegemonies

[67] Spencer, *Salty Wives, Spirited Mothers, and Savvy Widows*, 276.

transcend geography, time, and space, and reflect even in the systemic disparities and expectations of colonized settings like first-century Palestine.[68] Despite his own colonial status, the judge's actions reflect his assimilation into an imperial judicial ethic that deprives and disparages widows. Recognizing in this parable their own experiences in colonized communities across the Roman Empire, Luke's audience in addition to Jesus's audience would interpret the widow in the story as a colonized woman coming before a Romanized judge with low expectations of colonial justice. Therefore, it would be surprising for a judge to be incentivized to act on the widow's behalf.

Another possible reason for the judge's refusal is the widow's gender. Although the parable does not describe the widow's accuser with any detail, the Greek does inform the reader that her opponent is a man with the gender inflection in τοῦ ἀντιδίκου (ὁ ἀντίδικος). As a woman transgressing society's gender boundaries with her constant presence in the judicial, and therefore masculine space, the widow's protest would draw the ire of men whose job includes policing all aspects of civil society. The audacity of her presence alone is offensive, let alone her speech. Furthermore, kyriarchy promotes privilege, power, priority, and prerogative of men; the widow has little credibility while confronting the male assailant treating her unjustly, despite the possible evidence in her favor. The judge's inaction could be interpreted as one of simply being undeterred by this woman's pursuit.

As economic class, colonial status, and female gender could each be an individual basis for the judge's obstruction of justice, a combination of these dimensions of power was likely what induced his refusal. The sameness and difference that the parabolic widow embodies

[68] cf. Fernando F. Segovia, "Mapping the Postcolonial Optic in Biblical Criticism: Meaning and Scope," in *Postcolonial Biblical Criticism: Interdisciplinary Intersections*, ed. Stephen D. Moore and Fernando F. Segovia (London: T & T Clark International, 2005), 23-78.

challenge any unidimensional analysis of discrimination being enacted upon her. However, as a first step, accounting for power differential and oppression succumbed through the individual categories of class, geopolitical status, and gender provides a basis for analyzing their impact when combined.

The widow has a unique identity in the Romanized social order of first-century Palestine as a colonized woman probably with limited financial means without her husband. Her experiences in society and her engagement with the judge are an outcome of a synthesis of perceptions and power dynamics that occur in the intersectionality of these identities.[69] To be poor, colonized, *and* woman would make the widow too inferior or unworthy for the judge's time or moral consideration. Fluidity through these intersecting categories of power constricts the parabolic widow to the social stations she occupies. Consequently, the judge's multidimensional discrimination deepens the widow's peril with delays in access to resources for living. His refusal could create a potentially fatal existence through the intensification of her poverty and her continued erasure from the sociopolitical landscape of her community.

However, the widow is not to be ignored, and the judge observes her escalating frustration. In his soliloquy, the judge remarks that he would finally give the widow her justice before she blackens his eye (Luke 18:5). This rhetoric emphasizes the widow's intense exasperation, which is at the brink of violence.[70] Expressing her anger through physical assault would place her at risk of greater legal punishment, humiliation, and marginalization. If an

[69] Cf. Sumi Cho, Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, Leslie McCall, "Toward a Field of Intersectionality Studies: Theory, Applications, and Praxis," *Signs* 38, no. 4 (Summer 2013): 7; Gaytri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?", *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, eds. Carey Nelson and Larry Grossberg (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 306.
[70] Barbara E. Reid, "A Godly Widow Persistently Pursing Justice: Luke 18:1-8," *Biblical Research*, 45 (2000): 29; John T. Carroll, *Luke: A Commentary*, The New Testament Library (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012), 356.

ordinary person insulted a prestigious person, she would endure severe punishment.[71] As a member of the *humiliores* (lowly in status) group of the Roman social and legal structure, the widow would be subjected to harsh punishments including floggings, torture, forced labor, and gladiatorial shows.[72] The intensity of her frustration is palatable enough for the judge to comment. Her fury comes from justice delayed, time wasted, and vital resources denied.

Because the idea of a widow attacking a male political official seemed absurd, scholars interpret this rhetoric as humor. Scholars may have misinterpreted the boxing term for blackening an eye (ὑπωπιάζω) as comical due to their own sexism and inability to recognize the widow as a formidable threat. If Luke's audience viewed this scene as comical, it may be due to its politics of disguise.[73] Humor enables the storyteller to critique functions and actors of culture and society without offending individuals and casting particular blame. It protects them from harsh punishments for perceived or real slights against the privileged classes, some of whom were present in Jesus's audience and readers of Luke. It conceals Jesus's illustration of the people's frustration with the colonizing conditions and inhumanity as perpetuated through its judicial systems. The hidden transcript allows both the storyteller—whether Jesus or Luke—and the audience space to express their discontent and dissension from dominant powers and culture.

The parable seems innocuous while infused with a rhetoric of resistance. From a postcolonial perspective, its humor reflects a slippage in the grasp of Rome's presumed superior power and authority of the people. Not only does the widow seem poised to pummel the judge, she is symbolically positioned to strike Rome and its unjust judicial system. In this moment,

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[71] Alfödy, *The Social History of Rome*, 110.
[72] Alfödy, *The Social History of Rome*, 109; Cf. Willliam E. Dunstan, *Ancient Rome* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2011), 343. Dunstan explains, "*Honestiores*—consisting of senators, equestrians, decurions, civil servants, soldier, veterans, and their families—faced lighter penalties for their crimes than *humiliores,* who routinely experienced degrading and harsh punishments such as flogging and gruesome persecutions."
[73] James C. Scott, *Domination and the Art of Resistance, Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990), 19.

Rome is no longer in control; it is losing its legal standing. Additionally, the story presents a hybridity of knowledge that creates a subtle shift in the site of authority.[74]

Instead of discouraging the use of the Roman court system, the story creates a new precedent for justice—protection for the vulnerable versus favors for the privileged. Authority moves from the power of bribes and privileged social standing to mandates of care for disadvantaged and poor people. Although the judge's transformation does not reflect a fear of God, it does reveal respect for at least one person, the widow. Considering the harsh punishment the widow could suffer, the boxing term's (ὑπωπιάζω) significance is not in its potential as humor; it is significant because it is true. Rome's militaristic and brutalizing force does not allow Jesus's audience to demonstrate their exasperation and resistance with their fists and survive; yet the parable is a vicarious way to speak and think freely the shared sentiments of the widow.

At the parable's conclusion, the judge choses finally to grant the widow her justice. Because the narrator introduces the parable as being about prayer, most scholarship argues that the widow's persistence causes the judge to change his mind. However, the judge's motive for change is absent from the story. First, as one with no fear of God or respect for humanity, it is unlikely that the judge's reason would include a concern for his public reputation in the face of the widow's ubiquitous protests for justice. Second, as a man and a judge, he would be able to handle both physically and legally any blows from the widow's hands. Therefore, he would not worry about his physical safety or ability to exact greater harm to her and her well-being through the judicial system. Third, as a person of administrative significance, he may have grown weary

[74] Cf. Homi Bhabha, "Signs Taken for Wonders," *Location of Culture,* Routledge Classics (Abingdon, Oxon, OX: Routledge, 1994), 169-170. Bhabha discusses the colonial spaces where intercultural, and therefore hybrid, demands challenges the colonial boundaries and pushes the discourse subtly. The shift creates another colonial space of negotiating cultural authority. As a result, the new space becomes a hybrid of colonial authoritative knowledge and the recasting of knowledge fashioned by the colonized adaptations.

by her harassment. Considering the widow's constant presence, direct speech, and escalating frustration, the parable offers little regarding a dissolution of the judge's recalcitrance. If only for this case, the judge uses his judicial power to provide justice for the widow. While recounting the judge's individual choice to act justly, the parable presents a political choice to no longer support her oppressor.

With the judge's transformation, the parable celebrates the widow's audacity and protest. More than persistence, the plot suggests that her protest created political pressure and precedent for justice on behalf of people like herself. While a socially, politically, and economically vulnerable member of society, her constant trespassing into the colonizer's male dominant space places her into physical jeopardy. She chooses repeatedly to return to the courthouse. Receiving unwanted male attention puts her at risk of further social isolation. No matter the cost, the widow protests and advocates for herself. The parabolic widow chooses to pursue justice and facilitates political, social, and economic transformation in her life and potentially the lives of others.

Kingdom of God and Human Agency

Jesus's telling of the parable of a widow and judge illustrates polyvalence in Luke's vision of God's kingdom. The Kingdom is a sociopolitical space that shifts conventional standards for judging who deserves life's privileges and promises of abundance as exercised in freedoms of choice, access, just living, respect, and dignity. Radical reversals and transformations of human relationships facilitate an evolution in society that reflect the mission of the kingdom of God. The parable depicts a world where God's power of transformation and justice reifies a prophetic eschatology of God's reign for the present into forever.

Radical Reversal

Kingdom of God delivers a radical reversal in current state affairs that balances power, privilege, and prestige. It disrupts social, political, and economic paradigms that suffocate human flourishing. Sharon Ringe writes, "For Luke the problem lies imbalanced—when some have nothing, while others have more than enough."[75] The widow's advocacy and the judge's acquiescence illustrate God's work of radical reversal that abides in prophetic eschatology. Both actors make decisions that effectuate the Kingdom's provision of sustenance for the most vulnerable and redistribution of social power in the present reality. For the Lukan audience, the world is turned upside down when a widow successfully advocates for her justice and a corrupt judge chooses to champion the rights of poor over payments from the rich. Instead of an eschatological hope for God's reign and eternal freedom, the promises of God become a present-day endeavor. A radical reversal is a confluence of divine intervention and human participation. It empowers, encourages, and challenges humanity to envision God's order and to live into it. The parabolic widow and judge challenge the audience's stereotypes about who has power to create change and how one choice can make a difference.

Defiant and inspirational, the parabolic widow acts against type and reverses expectations about power dynamics. At this point in the Gospel, the audience would assume that the parabolic widow would be as powerless as other widows. However, she contravenes Luke's portrayal of unnamed widows, who are often defenseless against life's vicissitudes. The widow demonstrates resolve, power, and strength. She stands boldly in personal power and in the power of knowing that her case is valid. By breaking stereotypes, she models a subversive behavior for the audience

[75] Sharon H. Ringe, *Luke* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), 10.

that has the potential of encouraging them to reverse societal expectations. An instrument of God's justice, the parabolic widow is an unexpected catalyst for transformation.

Despite the expectation of being self-serving and corrupt, with a bias for rewarding the privileged, the parabolic judge responds with aid to society's most vulnerable. With institutional authority and the kyriarchal structure, the judge is powerful. Luke's audience understands that he has authority to render death through punitive measures or life through restorative actions. Ironically, the widow's power compels the judge to reconsider his position. The judge chooses to act in favor of the widow. This twist in the parable's plot shatters the audience's expectations with situational irony. Consequently, Jesus's audience, who experiences powerlessness against social and political systems, sees that even corrupt judges can change their minds; maintainers of their oppression can yield and possibly be transformed.

Additionally, powerful members of Jesus's audience—including some Pharisees (17:20-37), a local ruler (18:18), and even the disciples (17:20-18:30)—may recognize their ability to decide whom they will serve and respect in their communities. Jesus illustrates a situation upended by one of the most vulnerable members of society, offering a vision of a sociopolitical space liberated from the hegemonies of the current social and political order. The parable of a widow and judge demonstrates the power of choices and radical reversals in the transformation of sociopolitical outcomes.

Transforming Human Relations

Radical reversals transform human relationships to balance power differentials in sociopolitical dynamics experienced in daily living. The parable depicts these changes within the relational dynamic between the parabolic widow and judge. The narrative begins as a

contestation of power: the widow wrestles with the judge to receive justice and the judge withholds it. However, the plot reveals a performance of power as a strategy by the characters to achieve their goal. As Michel Foucault explains, "In other words, individuals are the vehicles of power, not its points of application."[76] People exercise and endure power in their interactions. They are not simply its targets, upon which power crushes, subdues, or strikes. Neither widow or judge is an object of power; they are conveyors of it. The widow channels her limited power to influence the judge's verdict. The judge exercises his state-sanctioned, and therefore wider-reaching, power to stop her harassment and eventually to administer her justice. At the parable's conclusion, power dynamics shift from a zero-sum game to a calibrated force of influences to achieve the same result, albeit through different means and resources. Eventually, their respective use of power transforms their sociopolitical relationship, equalizing their positions of influence.

Power does not invert: the widow and judge do not exchange positionality in the social hierarchy and therefore take on the other's suffering or fortune. They do not reflect a literal interpretation of the aphorism that the first shall be last, and the last shall be first. Uplifting the widow does not require belittling of the judge. Stereotyped as powerless and powerful, the widow and judge respectively become partners in redressing issues of justice. Human actions manifest the kingdom of God by actualizing changes in daily existence and social relationship, transforming power and positionality to equalize influence in, access to, and opportunity for experiencing human flourishing.

Kingdom Perils and God's Promises

Imperial Perils

[76] Foucault, Michel, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*, ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 98.

Embedded in Jesus's explanation of the parable is a covert commentary on geopolitical affairs that critiques Rome's hegemony and inspires future liberation. As Jesus raises a rhetorical question about God's willingness to produce justice for his chosen ones (v. 7), he uses doublespeak to refer to individual believers of God as well as to Israel, a political state. "God's chosen ones" is language used throughout the Hebrew scriptures to signify Israel.[77] Israel's crying out to God hearkens to the nation's suffering from violence and terror at the hands of other colonizers throughout its history.[78] In Luke-Acts, God's chosen ones would include those who received the gospel as well as the Jewish diaspora scattered throughout the Roman Empire. The identity of Israel expands to incorporate people of many nations.

Additionally, the liberation narrative featured in Exodus begins with Israel's "groans" and "cries" to God for freedom from slavery: "The Israelites groaned under their slavery and cried out. Out of the slavery their cry for help rose up to God" (2:23, NRSV). Israel has "cried out" to God while being attacked and subjugated by other ancient near eastern nations as narrated in Judges, the Babylonians and Persians as narrated in the prophets, and the Greek rulers as narrated in other writings. In each case, Hebrew scriptures recount God's response: liberating Israel and destroying its enemies. Although Jesus does not detail causes of the people's suffering, by deploying the rhetoric of "God's chosen ones" who "cry out," he points to a collective suffering that Israel as a nation has experienced. Subversively, Jesus's explanation is a closing argument to a criminal case against Rome.

Furthermore, Jesus's appeal to the rhetorical culture of the Hebrew scriptures is an act of resistance to the present kingdom. His commentary contributes to an ideological warfare against

[77] cf. Deuteronomy 7:6, 10:15, 14:2; 1 Kings 3:8; 1 Chronicles 16:13; Psalms 105:6,43; 106:5
[78] Descriptions of Israel's crying out to God as they suffer the oppression from other political actors are found throughout the books of Judges, 1 Samuel, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, and the minor prophets.

Rome.[79] The prophetic language of God's wrath against those who oppress widows applies to any nation that oppresses Israel. The geopolitical layer is wrapped in the story of an individual widow.[80] As a hidden transcript, Jesus uses this parable to assure his audience and warn their enemies of God's wrath upon those who oppress God's people. More subversively, Jesus's use of Hebrew scriptures cultivates an identity to the gospel and develops a consciousness that resists the cult of Rome and its cultural hegemony as an act of theological, ideological, and political welfare.[81] Although subtle, Luke's condemnation of Rome is clear for those who understand the linguistic world of Jesus's community.

Luke's rhetorical resistance in Jesus's telling of the parable of a widow and judge aligns with his political messaging that begins his narrative. In Jesus's birth narrative, Mary proclaims God's strength and God's work to dethrone the powerful and uplift the lowly (1:51-52). Carroll elucidates, "In the past, the Mighty One performed deeds of power to liberate Israel, and Mary praises God for now acting decisively to do so again."[82] As the only Gospel writer with Mary's testimony, Luke declares to Rome that its imperial supremacy has an expiration date like every other kingdom that has mistreated Israel. Ostensibly, this passage appears as innocuous folk culture, preserving traditions of a past generation. Yet, Barbara Reid interprets Mary's Magnificat as a prophetic message that offers a counter-ideology to Roman imperialism in the line of female

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[79] Cf. Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1994), 209. Edward Said describes the ideological warfare as a secondary resistance that comes after the primary resistance, which is akin to military warfare. His argument uses postcolonial as chronological event that occurs after a period of colonialization. However, a postcolonial consciousness that critiques colonialism, envisions a liberating state of affairs, counters the culture, and commits to subversive acts of protests plants the seeds and cultivates the human resources to wage the so-called primary resistance. Culture of resistance using ideology, philosophy, and even theology materialize soon after the onset of subjugation, and therefore not bound to an aftermath of a physical and militarized liberation.
[80] In Lamentations 1:1, a widow is a metaphor for Israel. The symbolism of Israel as widow adds to an argument that the parable addresses a geopolitical concern. Cf. Ania Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, The New Critical Idiom (London: Routledge, 1998), 129.
[81] cf. Said, *Culture and Imperialism,* 218.
[82] Carroll, *Luke: A Commentary*, 50.

prophets such as Deborah, Judith, and Miriam, who have all proclaimed God's power and victory over oppression of foreign rulers.[83] Luke 18:1-8 is part of Luke's rhetorical defense against Roman imperialism and its colonizing effects on people's lives and minds.

Regarding personal affairs, the parable is protest literature that encourages the hearers to continue to fight for justice using whatever powers and influence at their disposal. In addition to her petition for a just verdict, the widow's protest illumines the corruption of the judicial and political system. While highlighting the judge's refusal to administer an appropriate ruling, the widow's case exposes gender and colonial injustices embedded in social relationships and their power dynamics. Despite the corrupt judicial system, constructed gender politics, and the rhetoric of colonial inferiority in their socio-ethnic positionality, the widow perseveres. The widow's victory and the judge's concession reframe the initial explanation about unceasing prayer and courage. Persistent prayer becomes an admonishment to the audience for persistent action toward justice and living. Human dignity and just living are theological, political, and personal concerns for individuals. The parable demonstrates power of prayer to transform one's daily life and current situation through personal action and protest against imperialism corruption with assurance of God's protection.

God's Kingdom Promises

Jesus connects the parable to an eschatological hope that God's kingdom will end suffering, oppression, and subjugation of God's chosen ones. The parable provides a double vision of God's justice through its characters and its hidden transcript. Both widow and judge are

[83] Reid, Barbara, "Women Prophets of God's Alternative Reign." In *Luke-Acts and Empire: Essays in Honor of Robert L. Brawley*, eds. Robert L. Brawley, David M. Rhoads, David Esterline and Jae-won Lee (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2011), 44-59.

actors in God's production of justice, operating as examples for the Lukan audience.[84] In Luke's vision, human participation is essential to God's plans for transforming society with liberation and justice. Moreover, Jesus's commentary later on the parable (18:7-8) bespeaks of God's geopolitical plan to produce justice for God's chosen ones. A subversive message, it reveals the fragility of Rome's supremacy before the God of Israel.

The parable of widow and judge reminds Jesus's audience and Luke's readers that God administers justice in unexpected ways and through unexpected people. Through her agency, the parabolic widow facilitates God's promises of life's necessities, liberation, and flourishing. She executes God's kingdom work by exposing breaches in Roman authority during her confrontation with the judge. Her courageous action and strong voice model for audiences an alternative definition of unceasing prayer and courage when grappling with an unjust system

[84] Although Jesus's brings the audience's attention to the judge immediately in 18:6 before his rhetorical turn to declare God's inexhaustible fight for justice, the narrative and cultural contexts of the parable deny comparisons between the parabolic judge's response and God's response to petitions and requests. However, because of their juxtaposition, interpreters make comparisons. Scholars agree that Jesus analogizes the judge to God in a lesser-to-greater comparison similar to the story of a hospitable neighbor in 11:5-13. As Carroll explains, "Much as the reluctantly hospitable neighbor in that parable points to the abundantly more generous hospitality of a trustworthy God, this parable's unjust judge… points, despite himself, toward the reliable commitments of a faithful, just God" (*Luke: A Commentary*, 357). This argument asserts that the God is not like the unjust judge in that God is much better than the judge. The lesser-to-greater model loses its validity, though, as a mode of interpreting v. 7 because it is different from the explicit comparative formulation in the parable of the hospitable neighbor. F. Scott Spencer explains, "For one thing, Luke does not incorporate the 'how much more' (*posō mallon)* formula here, as elsewhere (11:13; 12:24, 28)" (*Salty Wives, Spirited Mothers, and Savvy Widows*, 295). Therefore, there is no comparison between God and the judge at least not within this rhetorical convention. Another comparison interprets the judge as diametrically opposite to God in character or antimetaphor: God is nothing like the judge. As Scott posits, "God does not need to be badgered into listening to the pleas of oppressed widows, responding only grudgingly to protect God's semblance of honor. Again we insist: God is not this unjust judge, is nothing like this unjust judge, and is actively set against everything this unjust judge stands for" (*Salty Wives, Spirited Mothers, and Savvy Widows*, 296). Although Spencer insists that no comparison can be made, he persists in his assertion that unlike the judge one can depend on God to act justly.

Requiring less maneuvering to understanding the narrative flow, Spencer's interpretation of the juxtaposition is more convincing than the lesser-to-greater than paradigm. Yet, like other scholars, he allows the narrative framing of prayer and the eschatological discourse to shape a theological interpretation of the parable. Both models of comparison share a hermeneutic of prayer as given by the narrative frame in 18:1. Uniformly, they interpret the widow's confrontation with the judge as analogous with a widow, or any person in need, petitioning God. Despite warrant for any direct comparisons between the judge and God, the juxtaposition is present, which indicates having a purpose. Narrative evidence suggest that the Lukan Jesus has no desire to construct a correlation between to the parabolic judge and God. Rather, he is simply emphasizing that God is always actively providing justice for God's chosen ones.

(18:1). Luke's initial framing of the parable invites readers to understand prayer differently through her character. As a hidden transcript, Luke uses prayer to promote communicating with God and to cloak his subversive message of encouraging politically shrewd and persistent protests. The parabolic widow is unexpected agent of God's justice.

The judge, who Jesus describes as unjust, is instrumental in administering God's justice as well. Ironically, even as he expresses an indifference toward divine mandate and rebuffs the widow constantly, the judge eventually chooses to grant the widow her justice, and consequently fulfills God's promise. A message for power brokers in the audience, including Pharisees, rulers, and disciples who are like the judge, the parable and the judge's example admonish them of their responsibilities in God's kingdom to reify promises of God's justice, righteousness, and mercy with their decisions that affect the lives of others. Answering Jesus's rhetorical question (cf. 18:7) about God's work to produce justice for the chosen ones are words, deeds, and actions of the parable's widow and judge.

While addressing injustice in daily life, the parable depicts God's justice at work in the arena of colonialism and geopolitics. Rome's oppressive hegemonic structures create and maintain injustices Jesus discusses in the parable's content and subsequent narrative frame (vv. 7-8). However, scholars have interpreted his teaching on God's justice as message against injustice in general or among individuals. With the exception of Carroll, they disconnect the audience's immediate context with Jesus's, consequently treating Jesus's admonishment as encouragement for cultivating one's piety through unceasing prayer and unshakable faith. Yet, Jesus does not speak in general terms; his words connect to the immediate narrative context (the parable) and his audience's social context (life under Roman rule).

Through the parable, Jesus juxtaposes the fictional situation with his audience's current suffering under Roman authority. He compares the situation in the parable with the oppressive experiences and quests for liberation by Israel on a geopolitical scale. Jesus's use of "chosen ones" and "crying day and night" alludes to God's emancipatory work on behalf of Israel throughout the Hebrew scriptures, especially in Exodus, arguably one of the most significant stories is Israel's history and traditions. The turning point in Israel suffering under Egypt's ruthless regime begins when God declares to Moses:

> I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters…The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them. So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt" (Exodus 3:7, 9-10, NRSV).

Hearing Israel's suffering and destroying of their oppressors are common refrains throughout Hebrew scriptures. Allusions in the scriptural rhetoric in v. 7 answer emphatically Jesus's question regarding God's ability to hear Israel's cries and by extension everyone's. The Lukan Jesus does not detail God's response to his context's geopolitics, yet he relies on his audience's knowledge of Jewish tradition to understand his hidden transcript.

Additionally, the Gospel's hidden transcript is so well-cloked that Jesus's subversive message is elusive not only to Roman society and those it privileges but to published interpreters throughout millennia. Instead of reading God's promise against the suffering of geopolitical tyrants, scholars interpret Jesus's commentary as comforting remarks for any type of suffering. Also comparing the parable situationally to people's life experiences, F. Scott Spencer writes, "But we are meant, I think to compare *situationally* the courtroom drama of the widow and judge with the worldly experience of God's suffering prayerful people; and we are meant to be honestly bothered by the association."[85] Scholars interpret the closing narrative frame as a commentary on

[85] Spencer, *Spirited Mothers, and Savvy Widows*, 295.

God's work for justice for suffering people against the ubiquitous presence of evil in a world among individuals and societies.[86] Their analysis decontextualizes Jesus's charge against a specific evil, i.e. Roman oppression, as presented in Luke's metanarrative of subversion. Through the politics of disguise, Jesus counter-hegemonic teaching transcends his audience's immediate circumstances without neglecting it. For those with ears that can hear, Jesus prophesizes the fulfillment of God's promise to defend God's people against Rome's oppression, violence, abuse, and ruthlessness specifically while warning hegemonic participants of God's power to devest from their fiefdoms as well.

As God's justice against Rome is delayed, Jesus's commentary on its quickness challenges scholars to reconcile the contradiction in the story. They interpret the Kingdom's delay as part of an apocalyptic eschatology.[87] Difficulty in harmonizing Jesus's words with the reality arises from translating ἐν τάχει as "quickly."[88] Quickly connotes speed and temporality. It creates an expectation that God produces justice immediately, especially when dealing with the exigencies of people's suffering. However, this translation of ἐν τάχει frustrates and confuses readers perpetually, because it is incongruent with their experiences with God's justice. To harmonize the cacophony, scholars have connected Luke 18:7-8 to the quickness of God's justice at the *parousia*. Consequently, the remedy for reconciling Jesus's message about the quickness of God's justice is to postpone the expectation of its speed until the end times when current reality ceases to exist.

[86] Spencer, *Spirited Mothers, and Savvy Widows*, 295.
[87] Cf. Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke,* The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 642.
[88] Cf. New Revised Standard Version, Common English Bible, New International Version, and New American Standard Bible.

However, reading ἐν τάχει as quickness not only misrepresents the audience's experience with God's justice, it is incongruent with Israel's scriptures and history. According to Exodus, God liberated the Israelites from Egyptian rule after four hundred years (3:7; 12:40-42). Stretched from the late 7th century BCE and continued until the audiences' era of the first century CE, the children of Abraham, Jacob, and Isaac survived destruction, oppression, exile, and colonialism by the Babylonians, Persians, Greeks, and their present Roman captors. Suffering people understood that God's justice and liberation as delayed actions. In addition to the eschatological hope in God's absolute reign in the end times, God's kingdom is reified in the actions among the present generation and generations to come.

While Jesus acknowledges God's reign at the end of times (v. 8), his parable illustrates God's promises at work in present time. Another translation of ἐν τάχει as quickness focuses on the term as an adverb that connotes effect as well as time, making it synonymous in meaning with suddenly or unexpectedly. This definition connotes effect and impact. Although the apocalyptic vision of Jesus's pronouncement is appropriate, Jesus presents a prophetic eschatology of God transforming lives in the present time. With the parable as a hermeneutic, Jesus describes God's justice to be as unexpected and swift as the work of widow and judge.[89] Spencer illumines, "Though Jesus' immediate commentary after the parable of the widow stresses *God's* acting *en tachei* to bring final justice, the wider Lukan narrative also allows us to appreciate the *widow's* working *en tachei*—rapidly, resolutely, decisively, as well as persistently—to obtain a measure of interim justice in a callous world."[90] Additionally, the judge's ruling for the widow's case demonstrates how the arc of justice can bend suddenly. Although the conclusion of the parable is open-ended, the audience imagines that the widow's

[89] cf. Spencer, *Salty Wives, Spirited Mothers, and Sassy Widows*, 311.
[90] Spencer, *Salty Wives, Spirited Mothers, and Sassy Widows*, 311.

crisis is over, and she experiences immediate relief from her distress. Suddenness of God's enacted justice points to God's work in the present reality to relieve suffering while signaling God's final work at the end times. It arrives seemingly as a watershed event that reverses current cultural, social, political, and economic order from its destructive and oppressive status quo.

God's work occurs through incremental and individual choices and actions that accumulate over time and through various experiences to inevitably bend the arc of the moral universe toward justice. Whether through a large event, such as the removal of a colonial power, or a righteous ruling of an unjust judge, God produces divine justice and retribution in partnership with humanity to transform society and to deliver Kingdom promises. The parable of a widow and judge depicts the Lukan Jesus's call to pray at all times and not lose courage as an invitation for human participation in God's justice. Using the parable as a lens for interpreting the narrative frame, a prayer is more than a petition. The parabolic widow demonstrates that prayers are people's persistent actions of advocacy and ethical choices that contribute to the promises of God. Through human actions in the current plane and God's work in the eternal one, the promises of God's kingdom and justice come suddenly.

Lament and Hope

Luke depicts lament and hope in Jesus's telling of the parable of the widow and judge. Featuring a familiar situation of injustice, the story dramatizes political, economic, and social stressors that plague the audience. The parable itself is a lament that concludes with hope as it illustrates people's suffering and God's response to it.[91] Furthermore, verses 7 and 8 demonstrate an honesty in the sense of delay in God's redemption in the current moment while being hopeful

[91] A subtext to the Pharisees question about the when the kingdom of God will come (17:20) seems to be the underlying suffering of God's people.

in a belief that God will suddenly bring justice. Jesus's message acknowledges the audience's continual suffering while encouraging faithfulness in believing in and living into God's promises.

Hope lives in the faith of the hearers. Jesus concludes this parable by asking whether he will find faith when he returns (18:8). Although his language connotes an apocalyptic eschatology similar to his instructions in 17:22-37, Jesus's inquiry speaks to a present reality. Carroll posits, "In such moments, when history deals unrelenting, unjust suffering and when God has seemed distant and silent, why go on believing in God?"[92] Jesus's telling of the parable of the widow and judge encourages the audience to persist in an active faith that pursues justice, confronts colonialism, and chooses beyond self-interest. In addition to faith in God's promise to produce justice, Jesus seeks faith displayed in current human action. While concluding with an open-ended question, the parable points to power in human agency to transform current reality as a testimony of God's kingdom presence and as source of hope of things to come.

Conclusion

The Lukan Jesus tells the parable of a widow and judge to transform society. He inspires hope, encourages activism, and confirms responsibility upon the audience in participating in the justice-oriented work of God's kingdom. Using the cultural encodings of a hidden transcript, Jesus reveals elements of the hegemonic oppression of Roman colonialism and the corruption in its justice system that deprives dignity and resources daily from the poor, marginalized, and vulnerable members of society. He assures the audience that the God who liberated the Israelites from the bonds of Egyptian slavery will release them from Rome's colonialism. Furthermore,

[92] Carroll, *Luke: A Commentary*, 357.

with the parabolic widow as an example, Jesus teaches the crowd to advocate for themselves that which they deserve and have earned. Simultaneously, he admonishes those in positions of power, like the parabolic judge, of their responsibility to protect and champion the rights, dignity, and resources for communities disregarded and disparaged by society. God's transformation of society requires human participation in the political and personal realms of life as a reflection of their theological commitment of reifying Kingdom's promises. Jesus tells a parable of humanity's power to produce God's justice.

CHAPTER 4

A Parable on Piety, Power, and Prayer

(Luke 18:9-14)

9 And also he said to some who have trusted in themselves that they were righteous [a] and treated others with contempt: 10"Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. 11The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed these words: 'O God, I thank you that I am not like other people, thieves, the unjust,[b] adulterers, or even like this tax collector. 12 I fast twice a week. I pay a tithe on everything I possess." 13And the tax collector, stood at a distance, would not even lift his eyes toward heaven; rather, he was beating his chest, saying, 'O God, show mercy on me, a sinner.'" 14I say to you, this man went down to his house justified alongside[c] the other [one]; for all who lift themselves up will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be lifted. [My translation]

Translation Notes:

[a] δίκαιοι (δίκαιος) may be translated as just or righteous. The temple setting invokes a translation of righteousness as it is the structural and symbolic location where people sought absolution, resolution, reconciliation, and communion with God. The BDAG defines the term as "being in accordance with high standards of rectitude, upright, just, fair." The lexicon asserts its usage in the New Testament connects just conduct with a responsibility to God. For Luke 18:1-8, I translate the lexeme using the word family of 'just' primarily due to parable's judicial setting. Linguistically connected, 'righteous' and 'just' describe acts that intertwine theological, political, and personal considerations. Theologically, God creates the standard of living justly or righteously. In this process, God facilitates humanity's justification in communing with God. Through commandments, statues, and ordinances, God legislates just living (i.e. justice): what it looks like and how it should impact the community. As examples, Deuteronomy includes protections for widows and those without families (10:17-19), provisions for the hungry (24:19-21), and remissions of debts (15:1) in addition to the Ten Commandments. These laws establish the politics of the covenantal community and the affairs of the land to ensure each person

receives respect, maintains their dignity, and have rights to sustainable living regardless of social location. Personal interactions and self-interests inform one's assessment of the other; they shape perceptions of the other as friend or foe, as refuge or threat. Personal perceptions have the ability to develop into stereotypes and generalizations of entire groups and later become the basis for decisions and policies (i.e. political ramifications) by those with authority and institutionalized power. They are foundational in shaping a political landscape, especially as part of a collective power, and have the ability to create and maintain justice and oppression. Righteousness and justice are bonded as theological, political, and personal concepts.

[b] ἄδικοι (ἄδικος), as a literal translation, is "unjust" or "unrighteous." Within the parable's context, it signifies amorality connected to "being an unjust person." The Vulgate, King James Version, the Reina Valera (1909), and the New American Standard Version translate it as "the unjust ones." The Common English Bible and the New International Version translate the term as "evildoers," which is similar to the meaning "wrongdoers" as found in Lidell-Scott-Jones Greek-English lexicon.

[c] παρ᾽ ἐκεῖνον, the preposition παρά + the accusative in this passage is commonly translated as a comparative marker. The prepositional phrase may also be rendered literally to mean "by" or "alongside."

Introduction

Jesus continues teaching his polyvalent views of kingdom of God and God's justice with the parable of a Pharisee and tax collector.[1] The parable depicts elements of God's work that undermine human assumptions about righteousness, require human participation in Kingdom activity, and subvert societal and institutional power structures. Within the kingdom of God, the Pharisee is not superior to the tax collector, and the tax collector is not greater than him. Jesus's declaration disrupts ancient and modern reader presumptions about God's justice. The inclusion

[1] There is a general consensus that the parable of a Pharisee and tax collector is about the kingdom of God. Cf. Timothy A. Friedrichsen, "The Temple, A Pharisee, a Tax Collector, and the Kingdom of God: Rereading a Jesus Parable (Luke 18:10-14a)," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 124, no. 1 (Spring 2005): 89-119, doi:10.2307/30040992. Richard Lischer, *Reading the Parables,* Interpretation Series (Westminster John Knox Press, 2014), 110; John Dominic Crossan, *In Parables: The Challenge of the Historical Jesus* (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1973), 69; John T. Carroll, *Luke: A Commentary,* The New Testament Library (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012), 357-361; Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke,* The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmanns, 1997), 644; Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*, Sacra Pagina Series: vol. 3, ed. Daniel J. Harrington (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1991), 273.

of the repentant tax collector demonstrates God's concern and care for society's marginalized and God's disinterest in status. Consequently, Jesus turns the audience's expectations upside down with teachings on righteousness as justice, radical reversals, and resistance to Rome.

Justice permeates throughout this Lukan story unexpectedly. Its placement in the narrative context reinforces this theme. Due to its proximity to the parable of a widow and judge (Luke 18:1-8), scholars identify prayer, along with humility, as central to the parable's theme regarding entrance into the kingdom of God. Continuing these thematic elements, Jesus uses the parable of a Pharisee and tax collector to teach that just treatment of others begins with one's regards for them. Justice partners with right relations, and this understanding forms the strongest narrative bond among the stories in Luke 18:1-30.

The parable of a Pharisee and tax collector continues a vision of the kingdom of God that calls for a transformation in human relationships and invokes human action in facilitating God's justice. In addition to appealing for a change in personal behaviors, Jesus's message includes radical reversals of theological assumptions about righteousness as well as subversions of the political landscape of Roman colonialism. As an indictment against self-aggrandizement, the parable poses a threat to any entity—human or institutional—that exalts itself, including the Roman Empire. Rhetorically, Jesus demonstrates that change comes with human employment of attitudes and actions reflective of Kingdom values of dignity, justice, and liberation. In addition to its lesson against self-righteousness, Jesus makes connections between theological perspectives and personal politics to maintain oppression and to facilitate justice in the form of right relations. Ultimately, he shows the superiority of God's power, even in the midst of imperial ambivalence, to transform sociopolitical dynamics in God's declaration of righteousness.

By justifying the parabolic Pharisee alongside the tax collector, God disrupts personal and social perceptions of righteousness and the dynamics of power, privilege, and status that sustain them. In this chapter, I argue that the parable of a Pharisee and tax collector is a reversal story that depicts multiple dimensions of God's justice and righteousness in God's interventions and human participation in subverting ideals of privilege in God's kingdom. The analysis clarifies that personal attitudes contribute to the oppression and liberation of others and correlates God's command to love with right relationships of one another and with God. As a result of these theological considerations, perspectives about power dynamics in social relationships shift, enabling investigations and subversions of broader political spheres of daily living, specifically in its Rome context and with applicability to any hegemonic reality. This story demonstrates that one's theology connects with personal attitude and work, both of which impact political space created by influence, policies, and practices as derived by a group's perceptions. The parable of the Pharisee and tax collector upends human expectations and upholds God's sovereignty through perils and promises toward justice.

Justice Continues in Righteousness

Righteousness frames the parable of a Pharisee and tax collector. The narrator introduces the parable as meant for those who have trusted in themselves to be *righteous* (18:9). This motif appears in Jesus's concluding pronouncement that each man went home *justified* (v. 14).[2] The Greek root δίκη appears in the terms righteous (v. 9) and justification (v. 14). This linguistic

[2] Luke's narrative frame for the parable of a Pharisee and tax collector sets a hermeneutic as well as interprets the story. Foundational elements of the commentary are not explicit in the parable. Simultaneously, meaning potential of both the frame and parable are abundant while the narrative and cultural contexts limits them from being infinite. Even with Luke's frame and Jesus's conclusion, the story remains complex with various layers that address a multitude of audiences within Jesus's world, among Luke's global readers, and throughout generations.

element and theme connects the parable of a Pharisee and tax collector to the parable of a widow and judge; both use various forms of the Greek root throughout their respective stories. Although scholars traditionally wed the parables by their theme of prayer, justice and right relationships form the strongest narrative bond.

Justification and righteousness describe God's nature and God's work. God is righteous and the one who justifies acting with love, justice, and righteousness (cf. Jeremiah 9:24). The salvation history of Israel for liberation from various empires, God's ordinances of protection for societies vulnerable and oppressed, and God's hope and courage for those who believe in and try to imitate God's nature—these are examples of God's justification. Justification and righteousness are recognizable in God's deliverance of people, and Luke 4 draws from passages of Isaiah to describe them: "to bring good news to the poor, proclaim release to the captives, recover sight to the blind, and let the oppressed go free." Justification of the parabolic Pharisee and tax collector illustrates God's nature, intervention, and deliverance.

Furthermore, God calls for justice and righteousness in communal relations. Participation as membership in God's community—God's kingdom—involves doing right.[3] Justice making in right living testifies to one's relationship with God and the covenant community. Hebrew and Christian scriptures underscore God's mandates for justice in the Torah, the Prophets, the Psalms, the Gospels, and Paul's letters. In outlining right living, Psalm 15 includes a person would not choose to insult or despise one's neighbor (v. 3). Jesus's teachings, especially in Luke 18, demonstrate orchestrations of justice through divine intervention and human action. In the

[3] Cf. John Reumann, "Just, Justice, Justification, Justify, Righteous, Righteousness," in *The Westminster Theological Wordbook of the Bible*, ed. Donald E. Gowan. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 270-271. Reumann asserts that admission requires doing right. Yet, the Pentateuch, as well as other Hebrew scriptures, offer many examples of human failure in consistent right living without terminal excommunication from the covenant community.

parable of a widow and judge, the judge presumably gives the widow her justice and Jesus reassures the audience that God's grants justice to the chosen ones.

Righteousness semantically yokes the parable of a widow and a judge to the parable of a Pharisee and tax collector, expanding the conversation on justice. In their marginalized positions, the parabolic tax collector and widow model tenacious pursuits for God's mercy and justice. Barbara Reid argues, "By coupling this story with that of the widow and the judge in 18:1-8, Luke provides a fuller picture of righteousness. Right relations is expressed in both prayer for God's mercy and persistent action in the pursuit of justice."[4] Her assertion uplifts the parabolic tax collector and the parabolic widow as expressions of righteousness. I add that their privileged counterparts also offer lessons as flawed characters regarding righting relationships and justice, though inconspicuously. Their depictions provide reflection and insight for the audience to examine their roles as similar to them and transform accordingly. God sets the context for righting relationships and creating justice.

Jesus concludes the parable of a Pharisee and tax collector by declaring that God has made both characters righteous. His audience would consider this judgment to be absurd. According to their standards, the two are unequal. Historically, the Pharisee was known to be the moral superior; modern interpreters, instead, elevate the tax collector as exemplar. However, neither interpretation adequately captures the radical teachings of Jesus and his social commentary through this parable. Both characters present moral examples and demonstrate human frailty. Neither a condemnation of Pharisees nor a condonation of tax collectors, Jesus's introduction in v. 9 serves as a warning to everyone that God is the one who declares righteousness and has the final say on the parameters of power in social relationships. Through

[4] Barbara Reid, *Parables for Preachers: The Gospel of Luke, Year C,* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2000), 244.

radical reversals, the story continues a vision of the kingdom of God that transforms human expectations, instructs human relationships, and calls for human action in facilitating God's justice.

Understanding and Inverting Power

The parable of a Pharisee and tax collector depicts a transformation in power dynamics rooted in status hierarchy. Historical accounts and the Lukan narrative attest to the Pharisaic group's high status and tax collectors' relatively low status in the social, political, and cultural structures of Galilee and Judea. The social relationship of the titular characters is contentious, but not contested. Unlike the parabolic widow and judge (Luke 18:1-8), the Pharisee and tax collector are not competitors; they do not engage in direct conflict. Instead of a strategic performance to achieve a material goal, the power play comes in the perceived dominance the Pharisee has over the tax collector in their community.[5] As a group, Pharisees had social and political influence to educate and police the people's cultural and worship activity; on the contrary, tax collectors are treated as social pariahs or burdens.[6]

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[5] Cf. Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*, trans. and ed. Colin Gordon (New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 1980), 98. Within the narrative milieux, the parabolic Pharisee and tax collector likely wield various types of power as well as being objects of God's power and imperial influences. In the temple setting, the parabolic Pharisee articulates his moral authority and exercises it rhetorically in his criticism of others, particularly the tax collector. He is a vehicle of power as a member of this sociopolitical and religious network. Foucault's discourse on power describes it as polymorphous strategies of domination and subjugation not attributed to one entity rather the complicity of many individuals. Foucault explains that power is not simply the consolidated domination of one person or class of people over another. Rather, power functions as a network that engulfs and interweaves among subjects and objects. As part of his argument, he explores power's ability to create a discourse that legitimates systems of dominance and obligation to obey. He writes, "Power is employed and exercised through a net-like organization. And not only do individuals circulate between its threads; they are always in the position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising this power. They are not only its inert or consenting target; they are always also the elements of its articulation." The Gospel depicts power circulating Pharisees and tax collectors. The parabolic Pharisee is an articulation of power undergirded in his group's sociopolitical network, which encompasses their religious authority and imperial influencing. At least on the matter of his pious observances, the Pharisee makes this claim in his prayer. Likewise, as the tax collector's profession connotes an exercise of imperial power, his verbal and kinetic expression conveys his position as an object of God's power.

[6] As subjects to Roman imperialism, Pharisees and tax collectors had limited power in the hegemonic system. Pharisaic influence on colonial politics was relative to members' engagement with local rulers and their ability to

As a master pedagogue, Jesus uses the parable of a Pharisee and tax collector to teach subversive expectations about status and power in the kingdom of God. The story's lessons invite revisions to humanity's criteria for conferring privilege, prestige, and power. They illustrate theological consequences for people's attitudes and their attitudes' significance beyond an internal dialogue; rather, they intimate that social power has the potential to convert into political power and material consequence.[7] While human participation is necessary, Jesus ultimately asserts that God's work is at the core of achieving justice and righteousness in present reality.

Pharisees and tax collectors occupied different extremes in the status hierarchy based on communal standards and expectations. Social capital accrued or depreciated in accordance with approved observable behaviors. Because of their diligence in observing the Torah and maintenance of ancestral customs, Pharisees received high esteem and status, resulting in a high sociopolitical authority. According to status characteristic theory by David Willer, Michael Lovaglia, and Barry Markowvsky, "Members for whom the group holds expectations for high competence have higher status and influence than do members for whom groups hold expectation for low competence."[8] The inverse is true as well. People generally derided tax

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facilitate the will of the state on the people. Although all Pharisees did not possess this legitimated civic power as individuals, the collective's reputation was formidable. Ordinary tax collectors, as civil servants, were inconsequential to governance outside of their role of gathering funds. They were a necessity for the rulers and a nuisance for the people.

[7] Cf. Ralph Ellis and Amanda Watts. "Tennessee preacher-cop calls for execution of LGBTQ people," *CNN*, June 17, 2019, https://www.cnn.com/2019/06/14/us/tennessee-preacher-cop-lgbtq/index.html. In 2019, a preacher, who served as a Knoxville County Sheriff Office detective, gave a sermon from his pulpit that LGBTQ people should be executed by the government. He proclaimed that God gave civil government the power to have police arrest, convict, and put to death LGBTQ people. Yet, the detective explained that his theological perspectives do not interfere with his work in law enforcement. Because of his personal words expressed through his theological convictions, Tennessee authorities began investigating all of his cases and made themselves available to hear any complaints about the detective. This contemporary incident indicates potential in personal beliefs and theology, especially of those with institutional powers, to cause political and material harm or aid to others.

[8] David Willer, Michael J. Lovaglia, and Barry Markovsky, "Power and Influence: A Theoretical Bridge," *Social Forces* 76, no. 2 (December 1997): 581, doi:10.2307/2580725.

collectors because of the exploitative nature of their work for the Empire, whose values were hostile towards the statue and ordinances of the Jewish faith and God's kingdom. Tax collectors received low regard and little social power.

Jettisoning the expectations of Jesus's audience, the parable neither perpetuates high praise for the Pharisee's moral character nor embarrasses the tax collector for his presumed sinfulness. Rather, it moderates the parabolic Pharisee's power in the community as a religious leader, and it declares the story's tax collector as righteous. Receiving God's justification, the tax collector experiences a change in status in the community as suggested by Jesus's concluding aphorism (18:14). Both parabolic characters experience a reversal in status. Their standings are not inverted: the Pharisee and the tax collector do not replace each other on a continuum of righteousness, with one usurping the other on the socio-theological hierarchy. Countering modern interpretations, I assert that God transforms the social power dynamics by elevating the tax collector to be equal in status with the Pharisee. This shift is a radical reversal that reinterprets historical data and defies modern exegetical conclusions.

Furthermore, the parabolic characters demonstrate a postcolonial consciousness that destabilizes the superiority of Roman imperialism and ideals. Generally, both Pharisees and tax collectors were in relationship with the colonizers. Pharisees were a sociopolitical group who demonstrated power within the imperial halls while influencing the lives of the masses. Tax collectors were agents within its political economy. Despite these relationships with the Empire, the Pharisee and tax collector's worship in the temple communicates a belief in the sovereignty and supremacy of YHWH, God of Israel.[9] Their presence in the temple and desire to be faithful to its theology reveal an ambivalence toward their colonial contexts; they illustrate a disruptive

[9] The God of Israel commands against having no other gods who have primacy in the people's worship and against idol worship (cf. Exodus 20:3-6; Deuteronomy 5:7-9).

space of agonism between colonial authority and true divine superiority.[10] The characters depend on the temple as a place to receive affirmation from the God of Israel and to attest to their sufficiency as a people whose Jewish identity is grounded in the knowledge that their God saves them from colonizing forces. As such, they were loyal to God's commandments, ordinances, and statutes, which emphasize love, justice, and humility (c.f. Micah 6:8) and prescribe a counterhegemonic system against imperial institutions. Jesus's framing and telling of the parable rhetorically screens subversive messages that upend social values and pierce perceptions of Rome's superiority. Through subtle storytelling, Luke 18:9-14 communicates the temporary nature of the Roman Empire.

Radical Reversals

Luke 18:9-14 illustrates God's kingdom practice of radically reversing human expectations and social status. It is a subversive discourse on praxes within the various contexts of audience's community and expectations about the life in kingdom of God. Jesus punctuates the story with a pronouncement that destabilizes assumptions about God's justice and mercy. While humbling for the parabolic Pharisee, the story's conclusion does not condemn him to a

[10] Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, Routledge Classics (Abingdon, Oxon, OX: Routledge, 1994), 126, 156. Bhabha's analysis of colonial literature unpacks the discursive space of agonism between colonial authority and the partial presence of colonized subjects who (re)present the similarities and differences of colonial forces. He asserts,

> A desire that, through the repetition of *partial presence*, which is the basis of mimicry, articulates those disturbances of cultural, racial, and historical difference that menace the narcissistic demand of colonial authority. It is a desire that reverses 'in part' the colonial appropriation by now producing a partial vision of the colonizer's presence; a gaze of otherness, that shares the acuity of the genealogical gaze which, as Foucault describes it, liberates marginal elements and shatters the unity of man's being through which he extends his sovereignty.

Jerusalem's temple and its campus included architecture and statues signifying Rome's dominance and superiority over the colony's people and religion. However, its partial presence continued to disturb the colony's demand of subjugation or claim of dominance. Rome co-opted the temple as a subjugating force, making it a feature of its colonializing presence. Despite this, the temple still remained a powerful transmitter of Jewish culture and epicenter of theological teachings that subverted any force claiming superiority over YHWH.

state of lowliness; conversely, as the story elevates the tax collector, he does not become the epitome of righteousness. The parable confounds and challenges ancient audiences who revere Pharisaic piety and modern interpreters who degrade it.

God's justification of both parabolic characters demonstrates the equal value of their humanity in the Kingdom. One character does not replace the other on the continuum of righteousness.[11] With a translation παρ᾽ ἐκεῖνον as the prepositional phrase "alongside the other," God places the characters on par with each other.[12] This conclusion subverts readers' expectations.[13] The Pharisee's actions were in accordance to the Torah; the tax collector's prayer of seeking and relying on God's mercy for atonement was acceptable as well. Additionally, elements of the narrative suggest other outcomes of God's justification: it frees the parabolic

[11] Cf. Amy-Jill Levine, *Short Stories by Jesus: The Enigmatic Parables of a Controversial Rabbi,* (New York, NY: Harper One, 2014), 194-195. Levine interprets the tax collector justification alongside the Pharisee as part of a collective repentance generated by the temple system. The parabolic tax collector receives God's generosity of justice from the Pharisee's good deeds. Clarifying her logic, Levine explains, "We all have something to contribute, even if what we give is the opportunity for someone else to provide us a benefit. If we take more seriously this necessary interrelationship, we might be more inclined to consider others, because our actions, whether for ill or for good, will impact them" (195). Her assessment rightly demonstrates the impact that deeds have within a community. However, her argument suggests that humanity bears the weight of God's decision to provide justice.

[12] Cf. Levine, *Short Stories by Jesus,* 169; Juan B. Cortés, "The Greek Text of Luke 18:14a: A Contribution to the Method of Reasoned Eclecticism." *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 46, no. 2 (April 1984): 269-272. In addition to my translation, Levine is the only published scholar who translates *para* as a prepositional phrase in v. 14: "To you I say, descending to his house, this one is justified, alongside that one." Using text-criticism, Juan B. Cortes explains that the language in v. 14 contains a complex textual problem rooted in the variants of the Greek text that scholars presume as closest to the original text of the Lukan narrative. Most critics agree that the parable ends at v. 14a. Cortes argues that most translations use the Alexandrian manuscripts due to the date and character. However, using the text-critical principle that *difficilior lectio potior*, "'the more difficult reading is the best,'" Cortes argues that the Antiochian manuscript is best because it is seemingly more primitive and the foundational text for the scribal edits. Its textual variant of v. 14a is *ē gar ekeinos*, which he translates in the verse as, "I assure you, this one (the publican) went down to his house as one whose prayer God had heard. Were you perhaps thinking of the former (the Pharisee)?" (269). Although he argues for a textual variant counter to manuscripts that most text critics claim as authoritative, Cortes subscribes to the same interpretive conclusion as others that reject the Pharisee. He rationalizes it as befitting the general tone of Jesus's teachings about the Pharisees at the end of his ministry (272).

[13] Cf. William R. Herzog, *Parables As Subversive Speech: Jesus As Pedagogue of the Oppressed* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994), 189; John R. Donahue, "Tax Collectors and Sinners an Attempt at Identification," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 33, no. 1 (January 1971): 39–61; Bernard Brandon Scott, *Hear Then the Parable,* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1989), 94; Luise Schottroff, *The Parables of Jesus,* trans. Linda M. Maloney (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2006, 8. Schottroff identifies the audience's expectation to see the Pharisee as careful observer of the law, and the audience surprise that the tax collector would be in the temple. Bernard Scott notes, "The temple conjures up a religious standard that gives value to both characters. The Pharisee is good and the tax collector bad, because of the religious standard represented by the temple" (94).

Pharisee from trying to make himself seem righteous, while liberating the titular tax collector from the burdens of his sins and isolation from the covenantal community. One being justified alongside the other anticipates both characters experiencing a transformative state in their relationship with God and within the Kingdom.

Jesus's commentary challenges the audience's assumptions for receiving God's favor. The tax collector asks God for mercy and expiation of his sins without demonstrating any form of contrition, particularly in the temple setting; he does not sacrifice, tithe, or repent.[14] Therefore, presuming the audience's shock by Jesus's declaration is a reasonable scholarly argument. Because the parable does not prescribe any particular teachings or exhortation to obey the commandments, God's justice for the tax collector is, like for the parabolic widow, unexpected and, for some, unreasonable.[15] Richard Lischer asserts, "Thus the story does not merely exemplify actions and attitudes *in* the kingdom, though it does do that, but it also reveals the divine reversal of all human rules and norms of righteousness. Because it is ultimately about God, it is a true parable of the kingdom."[16] Therefore, the parable's focus is not on the disposition and attributions of the Pharisee or the tax collector; it showcases the merciful and just characteristics of God.[17] Neither human precepts nor actions can make one righteous; rather, righteousness is the work of God alone.

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[14] Scott, *Hear Then the Parable*, 97. Scott maintains that the hearer of the parable, absent of its narrative frame, would not have a lesson to learn. He posits that that neither character provides behavior worth emulating (97). Because characters are justified on their way home, the parable suggests that the temple is no longer a metaphor for God's kingdom. "Given this metaphorical system, things associated with the temple are holy and in the kingdom, and things not associated with the temple are unholy and outside the kingdom. In the parable, the holy is outside the kingdom and the unholy is inside the kingdom" (97). Scott contends that the temple is no longer the only standard bearer of the righteousness or the site of God's kingdom. This claim may be one of hope for the Lukan audience who were the heirs of the temple's second destruction by Rome.

[15] Klyne R. Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent: A Comprehensive Guide to the Parables of Jesus,* 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2018), 468.

[16] Lischer, *Reading the Parables,* 110.

[17] Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent,* 476.

Because most scholars translate the Greek παρά plus the accusative as "rather than," they conclude that the tax collector went down to the house justified rather than the Pharisee.[18] According to their analyses, God deprives the Pharisee justification because he has forgotten the commandment to love. While criticizing his neglect, scholars ignore the tax collector's obligation for reconciling with members of the community and, therefore, his neglect of the love commandment. The parabolic characters and commentators seem to misunderstand that one's social and personal relationships with all members of society reflect one's theology. While the parable does not make this explicit connection, the narrator asserts in the premise of 18:9 that one's relationship with others effects their relationship with God.

In addition to radical reversals for the characters, this parable presents a reversal in some visions of liberation. As an enigmatic literary device of rhetorical resistance, it contradicts a narrative that revels in a fantasy life of *schadenfreude*, a joy in the misfortune of others. This disruption comes in the realization of the expansiveness of God's inclusion, which ultimately results in an ultimate good for all. As Green posits, "Like other 'sinners' in the Third Gospel, he [the Pharisee] finds himself included among God's people (5:29-32; 7:29, 34; 15:1-2)."[19] The seeming demotion of one and the elevation of the others are elements of the radical reversal. Each character's standing radically shifts directions. Yet, in this parable, the radical shift brings the characters closer together in social status. What one may describe as misfortunate may be the

[18] Carroll, *Luke: A Commentary,* 358. Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke,* 268; Green, *The Gospel of Luke,* 644; Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke X-XXIV: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, The Anchor Bible series (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1985), 1183; Martin M. Culy, Mikeal C. Parsons, and Joshua J. Stigall, *Luke: A Handbook on the Greek Text,* Baylor Handbook on the Greek New Testament (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2010), 570. Fitzmyer notes, "The best reading of par' ekeinon, "beyond that one." Rightly, he explains that the preposition plus the accusative expresses a comparative, similar to the one Luke presents in 13:2. BDAG refers to the use as a "marker of comparative advantage." Translations using the comparative include the following: New Revised Standard Version, New International Version, New American Standard Bible, King James Version, New English Translation Bible, and the Common English Bible. However, interpreting the unit as a simple prepositional phrase is equally valid.

[19] Green, *The Gospel of Luke,* 649.

disappointment in a realizing that God values all equally. By insisting on justice and equal dignity for all members in the Kingdom, God requires human participation in the facilitation and maintenance of justice and righteousness as part of the realized eschatology of everyday life.

A reversal whereas the Pharisee is brought down low and the tax collector is raised up perpetuates an interpretation of God's justification as dependent on humanity's actions. While different in nature from fasting and tithing, the tax collector's prayer is as active and participatory in observant living. Uplifting him over the Pharisee fails to recognize God's agency to provide justice in accordance to God's precepts, many of which remain mysterious to the human mind. The idea that the aphorism is instruction against behaving as the Pharisee and in advocacy of behaving as the tax collector misleads. The contrasting reading of 18:14 is an oddly obvious and conventional interpretive choice for a parable, which by its literary genre, is designed to challenge and confound the audience with its radical rhetoric.

Transformation of Human Relationships

While the parable of a Pharisee and tax collector is ostensibly about prayer and self-righteousness, it is also about human relationships. The story evokes the audience to consider their attitudes toward one another, especially members of their community they judge harshly. Although the characters do not engage each other, the Pharisee interacts with the tax collector through his words and attitude, which has deeper implications as the Pharisee has the power to turn his contempt into action. Individual behaviors and actions collectively determine cultural norms and socio-political systems. The Gospel writer demonstrates these consequences throughout Luke-Acts with Pharisees being primary actors in setting and maintaining norms and customs. The parabolic Pharisee chooses to set himself as morally superior to the tax collector.

With his social power, he is able to influence the community to marginalize, denigrate, and discriminate against those whom he disapproves or to support, uplift, and protect those whom he respects. Cautioning the crowd to be unpretentious and conscientious of their treatment of others, Jesus instructs them to transform their attitudes, actions, and subsequently their relationships because rhetoric and social environments have the ability to facilitate oppression or liberation within a community.

Interpersonal and political interactions are theological concerns. Participation in the kingdom of God requires people to regard and behave in ways reflective of God's justice. Jesus's parabolic lesson reflects his teaching on treating people, particularly enemies, with respect and dignity (e.g. his sermon on the plain in Luke 6:27-36). The thesis of his kerygmatic proposition is to love one's enemies (v. 27). This command to love is not about affection, but about action: respectful treatment of others (e.g., to do good, v. 27, 30, 33, 35), economic support (e.g. to lend, v. 34, 35), and a just politic. His exhortation "Do to others as you would have them do to you" (v. 31, NRSV) echoes instructions from the levitical code.[20] Reflecting the teachings of the Torah through social relationships and prioritizing human dignity signify fealty and obedience to God.

The parable hearkens its audience to reflect on the theological mandates that defined them as a people. This covenantal living often put them at odds with their geopolitical neighbors and colonizers. The crowd is to avoid unhealthy privileging and power dynamics that perpetuate social and political systems of oppression. Carroll notes, "This way of life, though subversive and countercultural, mirrors God's own character and commitments and is therefore the mode of

[20] Leviticus 19:17-18. The Torah instructs God's covenantal community in an ethic of right living. This ordinance concludes a list of prohibitions against maltreating, defrauding, stealing, slandering and bullying vulnerable members of society. The code suggests that actions reflect attitudes, and attitudes fuel actions.

living adopted by those who are truly God's children."[21] In Luke's vision of God's kingdom, Jesus calls his followers to do likewise: transform human interactions, eradicate privileging, and equalize power dynamics to form a just community.

Gaining power and privilege in the spatial reality of God's kingdom requires transformation of social relationships through treating person with dignity and managing one's self-perception. Jesus's warning to those who may view themselves as righteous and treat others with contempt was not an indictment upon any particular group; it admonishes all audiences hearing and reading the story. Schottroff suggests that the pedagogical aim is to help readers to be self-critical.[22] Ultimately, the parable is not about Pharisees and tax collectors. Instead, it calls individuals and communities to engage in critical self-examination to determine whether they are maintaining privileges and power established in God's Kingdom or human hegemony. Subverting behavioral and relational norms that characterize high competencies for social status, the Lukan Jesus reinterprets the basis for social power and disrupts the perceived hierarchy in the kingdom of God.

Interpreting various meanings of the parable of a Pharisee and tax collector requires a brief social history of their role and context in first century Palestine. Jesus's message about the kingdom of God depends on the audience's shared experiences and familiarity with the histories of these groups. As a consequence, the storyteller does not provide any background information and infers certain generalities about them with exception to the details given in the parable. With this assumed knowledge, Jesus's launches into his tale.

Historical-Cultural Context

[21] Carroll, *Luke: A Commentary,* 153.
[22] Schottroff, *The Parables of Jesus,* 8.

Pharisees

Pharisees had social, political, and theological influence upon the Jewish community. From the later part of the second century BCE during the Seleucid period until the destruction of the second temple during the Roman era around 70 CE, they collectively maintained a high status within the Palestinian Jewish community and among colonial rulers. As astute interpreters of the laws of Moses, they were known for upholding the traditions of their Jewish forefathers and foremothers as well as the observances of the written word.[23] Maintaining the written laws and oral traditions of their foreparents and encouraging these practices in preservation of their Jewish identities, Pharisees received the respect and confidence of the general masses.[24] According to Josephus, the liturgies and prayers in worship were conducted based on Pharisaic specifications.[25] They were theological authorities and arbiters. Their social power shaped many of the standards of Jewish life in the Greco-Roman period.

While they were not a formal political faction, the Pharisaic leadership among the general population made them formidable and intimidating to colonial rulers. Salome Alexandria (76-67 BCE), the last Seleucid ruler in the region prior to Rome's conquest, solicited the Pharisees to help her govern the region at the behest of her dying husband Alexander Janneus, who experienced widespread revolt during his reign.[26] According to Josephus, the Pharisees became the real public administrators during her rule.[27] The Pesher Nahum of the Qumran scrolls

[23] Josephus, *A.J.,* 13.10.6.
[24] Shaye J. D. Cohen, *From the Maccabees to the Mishnah*, 3rd ed (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014), 143. Josephus, *A.J.*, 13. 15. 5 ~401.
[25] Josephus, *A.J.,* 18.1.15.
[26] Cohen, *Maccabees to the Mishnah*, 139. Cohen references Josephus, *A.J.,* 13.15.5.
[27] Josephus, *B.J.*, 1.5.2. As a practitioner of the faith of the Judeans, Alexandria had already trusted Pharisees as religious leaders and sought their counsel before becoming ruler. According to Josephus, the Pharisees took advantage of the relationship to increase their political power. Therefore, leadership under Alexandria became inevitable.

corroborates Josephus's accounts on the Pharisees' political influence.[28] Their reputation for having sway with the people was well-known.

Pharisaic politics continued beyond Hellenistic rulers into the Roman era. Because they could be certain of their powers of persuasion over perception and policy, they had leverage to incite insurrections and opposition to regional kings.[29] Cohen notes, "When Herod came to power, Pollio the Pharisee counseled the people to accept Herod as their leader; as a result, Pollio and the Pharisees who numbered six thousand, were respected by Herod."[30] Pharisees maintained their collective power until the end of the Second Temple period.

Because the Jewish communities of Greco-Roman Palestine did not function in a social, cultural, and political vacuum, Pharisees likely functioned with colonial ambivalence, a mix of attraction and repulsion to colonial authority. Regarding ambivalence, Bill Ashcroft et al. explains, "Rather than assuming that some colonized subjects are 'complicit' and some 'resistant,' ambivalence suggests that complicity and resistance exist in a fluctuating relationship within the colonial relationship."[31] Many of the Pharisees may have interpreted their close proximity to colonial authority as a service to and a protection for the people against a more brutalizing political, economic, and social existence. Therefore, representing the concerns and values of the people and exerting power over the ruling elites were most likely viewed as positive; however, as their intervention did not liberate the people from the colonialism, people

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[28] David Flusser, *Judaism of the Second Temple Period*, trans. Azzan Yadin, vol. 1, *Qumran and Apocalypticism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Hebrew University Magnes Press + Eerdmans Publishing, and Jerusalem Perspective, 2007), 219. According to Flusser, Qumran's scrolls has a less positive perspective on the Pharisees than Josephus. Condemning them for preaching and teaching their smooth translations of the Torah, Pesher Nahum describes the Pharisees as deceitful and hypocritical. Quoting the scroll, Flusser writes: " 'Cities and clans will perish through their advice, nobles and leaders will fall due to the ferocity of their tongue' (2.8-10)."

[29] Cf. Josephus, *A.J.*, 17.24.41.

[30] Cohen, *Maccabees to the Mishnah,* 139.

[31] Bill Ashcrost, Gareth Griffins, and Helen Tiffin, *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts,* 3rd ed. (New York, NY: Routledge, 2013), 10.

probably viewed Pharisaic political associations as a form of collusion with hegemonic forces.

Eventually, Pharisaic collusion and collaboration with the colonizers were no match to the people's struggle for freedom from Roman oppression. Cohen explains, "The last time the Pharisees appear in a political context is in the year 66 CE, when, just before the outbreak of the revolt, they joined the 'principal citizens' and the chief priests in beseeching the revolutionaries not to begin a war that they could not win. Their advice was ignored."[32] While some Pharisees cooperated with the rulers, others did not serve the colonial machine. Cohen explains, "During the first year of the war, the Pharisee Simon ben Gamaliel was a member of the revolutionary presidium in Jerusalem, and three other individual Pharisees are mentioned in his company."[33] Rome's military campaign against the insurrections climaxed with the temple's destruction and the disruption of Jewish institutions. However, Pharisaic traditions became the life preserver for the people.[34] Pharisees became progenitors of rabbinic traditions, which scholars often date to around 70 CE. Perpetuation of their practices into the rabbinical movement testifies to the group's popularity, power, and influence well into the second century. The confluence of their theological, political, and social power made Pharisees a force that inspired the masses and scared rulers. This historical data suggests that Jesus's audience would generally have had a positive view of the parabolic Pharisee.

The Lukan writings also demonstrate the theological, social, and political power of Pharisees in the region. Unlike Josephus and Qumran, Luke makes no assertion or pronouncement regarding Pharisaic influences in social and political arenas. Instead, he intimates a portrait of their power through characterization: associations, words, and deeds. Often, they

[32] Cohen, *Maccabees to the Mishnah,* 143-144.
[33] Cohen, *Maccabees to the Mishnah,* 144.
[34] Schotroff, *Parables of Jesus,* 7. Schotroff suggests that the anti-pharisaic texts in the Gospels began during the late first century CE.

appear with scribes, Torah teachers, and lawyers when engaging Jesus about Sabbath practices or interpretations of the law.[35] Publicly, they challenge Jesus's authority to forgive sins (5:21), interrogate him on many issues (11:53), scrutinize his Sabbath healings (6:7; 14:1), and disapprove of his infidelity to practices of handwashing and fasting (5:33; 11:7). Debating Jesus publicly, Pharisees display a confidence in the people's belief in their authority in the law and as stewards of traditions. Their attempts to criticize Jesus and his disciples implicitly testify to their ability to police the masses on matters of observant behaviors.

Furthermore, the Gospel confirms the Pharisees' political connections. Warning Jesus of Herod's plot to kill him, the Pharisees are privy to imperial machinations and conversations. [36] In Acts 5, Gamaliel, a Pharisee, convinces the political powers of high priests and elders in Jerusalem not to imprison Jesus's apostles. Luke's implicit characterizations of Pharisees as socially and politically powerful concur with explicit descriptions and explanations of the period's ancient historians.

Luke's depiction of Pharisees suggests a shift in the group's reputation from positive to negative in the late first century CE. Presented as both allies and foes of Jesus, they are round characters who dine with him as well criticize his teachings. Scholars agree that the Luke's characterizations of the Pharisees are at best puzzling or ambiguous.[37] While amassing respect and popularity, Pharisees drew suspicion and ire from crowds as well. Cohen asserts, "Rabbinic texts show that many Jews had this oxymoronic attitude toward the rabbis of the second and third centuries, and the New Testament suggests that some Jews already had this attitude toward the

[35] Luke 5:17, 5:21, 5:30, 6:7 11:53, 14:1, 15:1. In 7:30, Jesus speaks against Pharisees and lawyers who rejected John's baptism. His allegation suggests that Pharisees and lawyers do not concur with the theological lawfulness of participating in this enactment of John.
[36] The Pharisee's admonishment for Jesus to stop his disciples and crowds from praising him as king and liberator in Luke 19:39 may stem from their concern for Jesus's life, which is being threatened by Herod, and their concern of the military state punishing the people for seditious pronouncements against the emperor.
[37] Carroll, *Luke: A Commentary,* 604.

Pharisees in the first century."[38] The mutual antagonism between Pharisees and Jesus's early followers suggests a hostility that was less about sectarian competition and more about negativity toward authority figures.[39] As indicated by their dating, the Gospel traditions negative views of Pharisees reflect attitudes after Jesus's lifetime.

Tax Collectors

Whereas Pharisees amassed a high social status, tax collectors experienced the opposite reception from their community. Tax collectors were generally despised and regarded as accessories of imperial oppression. Their occupation carried a reputation of corruption; their treachery was conspicuous.[40] Society reviled them as traitors to the people.

Two types of agents exacted tribute for the Empire: tax collectors and toll collectors. Tax collectors were often slaves and hirelings of royal officials who garnished various land, head, and direct taxes.[41] Toll collectors were low level subsistence workers, who exacted indirect taxes on sales, travel, commerce, customs, and tariffs. They would bid on contracts from the government and paid the tolls immediately; in turn, they were repaid by what they collected from the people. Socially unprotected, the collectors would take the job out of desperation, with many

[38] Cohen, *Maccabees to the Mishnah*, 149.
[39] Cohen, *Maccabees to the Mishnah*, 149.
[40] Tax collectors' reputation as corrupt is akin to the reputation of local judges in the first century Roman colonies. Jesus's audience and Lukan readers of the Empire would likely hold concurrent perspectives on tax collectors and judges. While a historicized narrative, Pharisees, tax collectors, and judges in the Gospels are flat characters that conform to the characterization of the context's popular imagination. When Luke rounds characters with greater depth, the story's details inform the readers of the ways in which the person behaves or speaks differently than expected.
[41] John R. Donahue, "Tax Collectors and Sinners an Attempt at Identification," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 33, no. 1 (January 1971): 42. Donahue's argument regarding the distinction between the tax and toll collectors echoes the scholarship of Joachim Jeremias. Donahue explains that the Greek is not a translation of the Latin *publicannus*, which does not appear in the Gospels. However, he agrees that tax collector, the preferred translation in this chapter, is acceptable translation used as a general term for all collections. Tax collectors, as lowly officials, were economically, politically, and bodily vulnerable to retaliation and violence by both imperial rulers and the people from whom they exact taxes.

of them overcharging to the point of abuse and exploitation. Barbara Reid purports, "Their extortionary practices kept them from the brink of starvation, but made them hated by all."[42] Tax and toll collectors were the bane of people's material lives.

Tax and toll collectors were local members of the community. In Judea, they were imperial employees collecting directly for the Empire; in Galilee, they were officials of the tetrarch.[43] Unlike Judea, Herod Antipas and Agrippa controlled the financial administration, and therefore taxes were paid to them instead to the Romans.[44] According to John Donahue, this distinction would be significant to the people, because paying Herod did not seem the same as paying taxes directly to Rome.[45] With centuries of experience with colonial oppression, client rulers, and foreign powers, Galileans would recognize the thin veil of independence signified by their local rulers. Donahue's assessment of their lack of antipathy toward paying taxes to Herod's agents versus a Roman official suggests a naiveté among Galileans of their political, economic, and social circumstances under colonial rule. Judeans and Galileans knew their economic burden was exacted by colonialists. Whether they were collecting for Rome directly or indirectly, tax and toll collectors participated in their oppression. As social pariahs, they were politically unprotected by the civic authorities as well as the community. Occupation and reputation kept their sociopolitical status anchored in the lower ranks.

Luke's portrayal of tax collectors follows a historical script of suspicion of the group that alleges corruption and betrayal. He characterizers them as self-aware sinners. Amplifying their sinfulness, Luke pairs tax collectors with sinners on three occasions, further acknowledging their marginal place in the community, and some Pharisees condemn Jesus for being friends with

[42] Reid, *Parables for Preachers,* 245.
[43] Donahue, *Tax Collectors and Sinners,* 48.
[44] Donahue, *Tax Collectors and Sinners,* 46.
[45] Donahue, *Tax Collectors and Sinners,* 45.

them, a known sinful group (cf. 5:29-30; 7:34; and 15:1-2). They are among the crowds gathered before John seeking baptism and guidance for repentance. Acknowledging a specific aspect of their sin, John the Baptist admonishes them to stop collecting more than the prescribed amount (3:12). They listen to Jesus's teachings in the wilderness and at banquets (5:29, 15:1, and 19:1-10).[46] Zacchaeus, a chief tax collector, makes an unsolicited promise to give to the poor and repay anyone whom he may have defrauded by fourfold (19:8). His declaration appears more as a public display of penitence in connection with his profession than a spontaneous response to Jesus's ministry. Grumbling, the surrounding crowd expresses disapproval of Jesus's plans to dine with Zacchaeus, his profession being the singular detail to incite their annoyance. Luke's general description of tax collectors suggests a concurrence with popular thought and expectation. His characterization of tax collectors, like Pharisees, recognizes common attitudes as well as contradicts them.

Throughout the Gospel narrative, though, the tax collectors appear as sympathetic characters. Constantly portrayed as seeking God's righteousness, they evoke the audience's empathy as relatable people in search of a transformative experience as they listen to John and follow Jesus. Jesus summons Levi, a tax collector, from a toll booth to have him become one of his disciples (Luke 5:27). In choosing him, Jesus reminds the audience that tax collectors are redeemable members of God's covenant community. Later, Luke seems to defend tax collectors within the community by contrasting their acknowledgment of God's justice through their participation in John's baptism with the Pharisee's rejection of it (7:29-30). Consequently, Luke presents a case for their inclusion into God's kingdom.

[46] Even when Luke does not explicitly mention tax collectors in the crowd, a reader can assume their presence. Luke does not tell the reader the tax collectors are in the crowd in chapter 18; however, their ubiquity in other gatherings and use of parable with a Pharisee and tax collector suggest that they were.

The socio-historical and narrative contexts of the parable of a Pharisee and tax collector lay the foundation for an inconspicuous tale of *schadenfreude* in the guise of an example story about prayer and humility. Pious elements veil messages of God's ultimate power to transform society and counter hegemony through justice, radical reversals, and shifts in human interaction.

The Narrative

In his telling of the parable of a Pharisee and tax collector, the Lukan Jesus counters conventional thinking about who deserves power and how to use it. While presented as an example story involving contrasts of two characters, the parable's pedagogy conveys broad instructions in the form of a hidden transcript that subverts Rome's emphasis on power, prestige, and privilege as currency for human dignity.[47] Its instruction against self-righteousness and contempt is not a condemnation of Pharisees, as a group, or this particular Pharisee.[48] Rather, it serves as an indictment against and warning for everyone, whether an individual, community or an empire. God's kingdom expects constructive use of power and influence for the edification of the whole community, and God exacts justice by reversing dynamics to ensure the Kingdom program. Reifying God's kingdom into the temporal world requires humanity's participation in acts of justice through their participation in the transformation of social and political power

[47] cf. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke X-XXIV,* 883,1183. Example stories instruct their audience with a model of conduct or attitude. Fitzgerald adds, "It supplies a practical model for Christian conduct with radical demands and the approval/rejection of certain modes of action" (838). Although the Lukan Jesus may have less likely attributed model behavior to a "Christian" conduct, he would have certainly taught it as being aligned with righteous behavior of those participating in the Kingdom.

[48] Scott, *Hear Then the Parable,* 93. Scott insists v. 9 sets up the reader to reject the Pharisee and to see his religiosity as false . However, the frame does not single-out the Pharisees as the only audience of the story's warning (Reid, *Parables of Jesus,* 239; Levine, *Short Stories by Jesus,* 173.) Other scholars argue that the parabolic Pharisee is not a caricature or a stereotype of Pharisees. They contend that the Pharisee and tax collector are to be seen as particular characters (cf. Robert Doran, "The Pharisee and the Tax Collector: An Agonistic Story," *The Catholic Bible Quarterly* 69 (2007): 269; Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent,* 469; Schottroff, *The Parables of Jesus,* 8).

structures. Therefore, this parable admonishes everyone in the listening and reading audience to use their personal influence and status to treat others charitably and promote each other's well-being. The parable reveals theological, political, and interpersonal elements of living in the kingdom of God.

Set in the temple, the parable portrays a Pharisee and tax collector praying. Located apart from each other, they posture themselves differently and communicate divergent self-perceptions in their respective prayers to God. The story is a depiction of contrasts. The parabolic Pharisee stands by himself likely in a common prayer posture; the tax collector stands at a distance, praying with his eyes down and beating his chest. The Pharisee says a long prayer; the tax collector's prayer is short. The parable seemingly presents the Pharisee as exemplar and the tax collector as dishonorable.[49] At the end of the story, Jesus astounds his audience—ancient and modern— with his pronouncement that God justified the tax collector alongside the Pharisee (18:14). Theological and social power rebalances. God's justice defies convention and expectation.

Unlike most narratives, the story's climax is not a consequence of a verbal altercation or a competition of wills, as in the parable of a widow and judge (18:1-8). Rather, the embodiment and content of the prayers reflect the characters' attitudes toward each other and their perspectives on God. Subversive elements of this story are elusive until Jesus's concluding comments (v. 14), and they have remained as such through millennia.

Participation in the kingdom of God and the work of justice begin in human perceptions of one another, which materialize into interpersonal interactions, reify in politics, and codify in community. Through the parabolic characters, their internal attitudes, and their verbalized

[49] Carroll, *Luke: A Commentary,* 359; cf. Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent,* 462; Scott, *Hear Then the Parable,* 94, 97.

prayers, the Lukan Jesus invites the audience into introspection to learn and to transform their ideas of righteousness, power, and privilege within the Kingdom. The story admonishes the gathered crowd to listen to Jesus (cf. 17:20-37) and to consider carefully their attitudes and actions toward others; its rhetorical tapestry chastens their expectations about God's judgement, and therefore their own judgements, of those worthy of God's justice.

Pharisee: Not like the others

Luke introduces the parable of a Pharisee and a tax collector as one against self-righteousness and the mistreatment of others through contempt. At this point in the Gospel, Jesus has had encounters with Pharisees questioning his righteousness (6:1-11; 7:36-50; 11:37-54; 15:1-32) and the righteousness of tax collectors (cf. 5:29-32; 15:1-2). Although various Pharisees demonstrate a range of attitudes toward Jesus, from scorn to occasional respect, Luke narrates their ability to cause him political havoc (e.g. make accusations [6:7]) and to warn him against peril (13:31)).[50] Attitudes birth motivations to treat others unjustly or ethically. Coupled with power and authority, these motivations can fuel systemic oppression and legislate justice, affecting people's social, political, and economic lives. Luke's introduction to this parable (18:9) establishes a hermeneutic to recognize a connection between attitudes and power. An analysis of vv. 9-14 reveals the various components of the sociopolitical dynamics that the Jesus criticizes and evokes the audience to transform.

Both the Pharisee's posture and his prayer reinforce his sociopolitical position within the

[50] Describing Jesus's various encounters with Pharisees, Luke flattens the leaders to the extent that a reader would imagine them as the same group appearing in each pericope. Rather, his exchanges are likely with different groups of Pharisees, representing a diversity of perceptions of Jesus and his teachings. Furthermore, as Jesus continues in ministry, the Pharisees invite him to meals (7:36; 11:37), warn him of danger (13:31; cf. 19:39), and ask genuine questions (17:20).

community. Standing by himself, he is set apart from the general crowd in the temple. The parable does not describe his stance as unusual. In contrast to the tax collector, whose eyes are lowered (18:13), the parabolic Pharisee is at least comfortable, if not confident.[51] He is likely a recognizable authority whom the people generally respect and expect to see there. Furthermore, his prayer paints a complex view of his character. While a self-assessment of his righteousness, it shows a disregard for others. Contrasting himself with others accentuates not only his piety and obedience to the law, but also has the effect of highlighting his social status and power in the community.

Consequently, the parabolic Pharisee describes his social superiority through juxtaposition. He uplifts his character before God against those whom he perceives as having a deficiency in character. Within a prayer of gratitude, he articulates solace in being unlike other people—namely thieves, the unjust, adulterers, and even the tax collector (18:11). While specifically calling out thieves, the unjust, adulterers, and tax collectors, the parabolic Pharisee notes that he is unlike other people in general. The Greek syntax does not signify a distinction between people and the Pharisee's cast of sinners in his prayer. [52] Although his prayer may seem boastful and self-righteous, it may also be a simple acknowledgement of his pious nature and the privilege granted by his religious reputation. The comparisons emphasize the Pharisee's

[51] cf. Herzog, *Parables As Subversive Speech,* 185. Herzog reasons that the Pharisee's stance and self-induced isolation emphasize his prominence in the community. Although the literary and cultural contexts support this possibility, the parable itself does not include an explanation to accompany its description of the Pharisee's embodied prayer.

[52] The syntax of the Greek in 18:11 includes a comma between other people and thieves (οἱ λοιποὶ τῶν ἀνθρώπων, ἅρπαγες,…), and not a period above the line, which is translated as a semicolon or colon. The New Revised Standard Version and the American Standard Bible treat the comma as a colon, suggesting that the following list is about the specific people of whom the Pharisee is speaking. The translations interpret the Pharisee as setting himself apart from sinners, and not all people in general. The Common English Bible and New International Version signify the first comma as an em dash, which emphasizes the Pharisee's comparison of himself with the thieves, the unjust, and the adulterers; however, they do not eliminate an interpretation that the Pharisee is differentiating himself from the general public. The use of a comma in the Greek can suggest a parenthetical function, rather a serial one. Older English translations, such as the King James Version, American Standard Version, and the English Revised Version, maintain the comma as a serial and therefore include it between people (men) and thieves.

understanding of his higher rank within society.

The Lukan Jesus advocates respectful treatment of everyone in society regardless of social status. Jesus exemplifies this attitude and models it for his followers.[53] In regard to tax collectors, he dines with them twice (5:29; 19:1-7; cf. 15:2), invites one to be an intimate follower (5:28), and has a reputation of being their friend (7:33).[54] Simultaneously, the Lukan narrative generally depicts Pharisees as having contempt toward tax collectors (5:30; 15:2); therefore, using the parable of a Pharisee and tax collector to address the treatment of distain toward others comes as no surprise to the reader.

Although the parable is about members of distinct social groups, Jesus is clear that the story addresses anyone who perceive themselves as righteous and choose to treat people with contempt. His pedagogical aim is to create justice and a culture that upholds human dignity as inherent to participation in God's kingdom. For example, Greco-Roman banquets were displays of honor and contests of power, and Jesus used them to welcome everyone, even those of disrepute.[55] In a countercultural move, Jesus treats the meals as an extension of hospitality beyond those who can reciprocate or enhance one's power and privilege (cf. 14:7-24). His mission develops a community of respect and full inclusion; it is not about a culture of niceness. He is building God's kingdom to be countercultural, which begins with right attitudes and actions towards all.

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[53] Unlike Mark and Matthew, Luke does not contain a parallel for the story with the Syrophoenician woman (Mark 7:24-30) or the Canaanite woman (Matthew 15:21-28), where Jesus disrespects them upon introduction with name-calling and with an initially refusal to help their daughters. Because of their persistence and challenge, he transforms his attitude about them and his ministry with a final act of respect and aid.

[54] In addition to tax collectors, Jesus treats several marginalized people with deference and dignity throughout the narrative. They include a Roman centurion, his slave, the demon-possessed man in Gerasene, Samaritans, lepers, hemorrhaging woman, etc. Luke does not include Jesus's hesitancy to help a Syrophoenician woman (Mark 7:24-30) or a Canaanite woman (Matthew 15:21-28). The absence of this story undergirds the Gospel's narrative description of Jesus as a non-discriminating liberator of the oppressed.

[55] John T. Carroll, *Jesus and the Gospels: An Introduction* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2016), 150.

Contemporary scholars argue that the Pharisee's prayer is consistent with faithful practices of the period. Extensive bodies of scholarship have compared the parabolic prayer with select prayers from the Babylonian Talumd, the Qumran texts, and the Torah to determine whether it is unique to this story or follows a historical tradition.[56] Herzog notes, "It is quite possible that Jesus' hearers would accept the prayer as expressing gratitude to God and encouraging fidelity to the Torah in Pharisaic style."[57] Amy-Jill Levine contends that the comparisons of the Pharisee's prayer with selected prayers from the Qumran, Talmud, and the early rabbinical period serve as a defense against potential anti-Jewish interpretations.[58] She argues further, "Consequently, as we've seen throughout these studies of the parables, it is highly problematic to take a rabbinic statement, unsupported by any other text of the first century, and understand it to be representative of practices at the time of Jesus."[59] The extrabiblical sources were written centuries later and offer little evidence as models for prayers worthy of emulation during Jesus's context. Due to the lack of contemporaneous material, the Pharisee's prayer necessitates interpretation on its own accord within the Lukan narrative on the kingdom of God.

Without the comparisons, the prayer by the parabolic Pharisee emerges as self-righteous and boastful, acting as a counterexample rather than a model. Fitzmyer describes his prayer formula as beginning with a negative expression through his comparison, and then ending positively with his list of righteous deeds.[60] Herzog explains that the prayer is pointed, meant to

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[56] For comparisons and analyses of the Pharisaic prayer with prayers from the various second-century Jewish texts, including Qumran, see Scott, *Hear Then the Parable,* 95. Also found in Friedrichsen, "The Temple, A Pharisee," 94; cf. Levine, *Short Stories by Jesus*, 184; Reid, *Parables of Jesus,* 239-240; Schottroff, *The Parables of Jesus,* 9; Herzog, *Parables as Subversive Speech,* 185. With the historical analyses, scholarly arguments have proven that elements of the prayer's content can be found in Qumran and the Talmud. However, this evidence is not a validation. Furthermore, those prayers postdate the parable.
[57] Herzog, *Parables as Subversive Speech,* 185.
[58] Levine, *Short Stories by Jesus,* 178.
[59] Levine, *Short Stories by Jesus,* 178.
[60] Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke X-XXIV,* 1184.

call out the tax collector.[61] He posits, "What appears to a be a serial list of sinners, 'extortioners, swindlers, and adulterers', can also be read as three ways of describing the toll collector."[62] Scott contends that Christian bias arrogantly depicts the Pharisee's prayer as self-righteous.[63] However, in his footnote, he adds that Pharisees acknowledged problems of self-righteousness among their members.[64]

While an antipode of Jesus's teaching on prayer, an interpreter needs to be cautious against using this caricature of the parabolic Pharisee and his prayer as a basis for anti-Semitic interpretation. Francois Bovon warns Christian interpretations with anti-Semitic conclusions have prevailed throughout the centuries.[65] Neither the parabolic Pharisee nor the tax collector serves as an archetype for their respective groups; rather, they are narrative examples upon which Jesus builds a pedagogical moment. With Luke's introduction to the parable and his general treatment of Pharisees, a negative interpretation of the parabolic prayer is inevitable.

Despite its dismissive tone towards certain members of society, the Pharisee's prayer attests to his discipline in observing the law. Testifying about living an upright life is neither self-righteous nor boastful. He expresses self-righteousness through his judgment of others as morally inferior to him. Johnson posits, "His prayer is one of peripheral vision. Worse, he assumes God's role of judge: not only does he enumerate his own claims to being just, but he reminds God of the deficiency of the tax-agent, in case God had not noticed."[66] The parabolic Pharisee is able to take such a stance—and others are able to accept his posture—because of the

[61] Herzog, *Parables as Subversive Speech,* 186.
[62] Herzog, *Parables as Subversive Speech,* 186. For the translation of *adikoi* as swindlers, Herzog references Jeremias 1963, 140.
[63] Scott, *Hear Then the Parable,* 96.
[64] Scott, *Hear Then the Parable,* 96, fn. 82.
[65] Francois Bovon, *Luke 2: A Commentary on the Gospel of Luke 9:51-19:27*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2013), 547.
[66] Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*, 274.

disciplined aspects of his observances and his elevated social status in the community.

Piety, Privilege, and Performance of Fasting and Tithing

In addition to his commitment to worship, the parabolic Pharisee's proclamation about his fasting and tithing reveals his economic class and privilege. He fasts twice a week and pays his tithes on everything he purchases. He goes beyond the commands and observances of the Torah, even by the strictest standards. As expressions of supererogation, they are performances of prosperity and privilege that appear pious. To fast twice weekly without deleterious effects, one must be sufficiently nourished and in good health; to tithe without burden, one must be financially stable. While these practices suggest self-sacrifice and a commitment to please God and serve the community, frequent fasting and copious tithing signify abundant food access and high economic status.

The Pharisee's financial security and privileges are unattainable for most people. The majority of the population was poor. Hunger was common, and subsistence was not guaranteed, primarily due to over taxation and indebtedness.[67] Michael Farris concludes, "In these ways too he was not 'like other people' and, of course, thankful for it."[68] In Roman colonialism, his economic position would facilitate his ability to navigate political structures that privilege those with wealth. This particular Pharisee would be among an elite socioeconomic group. Wealth and privilege would neither preclude the parabolic Pharisee's devotion to God nor discredit him as a servant leader. Essentially, his undoing is his lack of regard for others.

While devoted to his supererogation of fasting and tithing, the parabolic Pharisee is

[67] Ekkehard W. Stegemann and Wolfgang Stegemann, *The Jesus Movement: A Social History of Its First Century* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2009), 51.
[68] Michael Farris, "A Tale of Two Taxations (Luke 18:10-14b)," in *Jesus and His Parables,* ed. V. George Shillington (Edinburgh, Scotland: T&T Clark Ltd, 1997), 27.

blinded by arrogance and antipathy. Although his practices could be an example of using one's privilege to benefit others, the Pharisee's rhetoric betrays his piety and highlights his contempt. A critical theme of this episode furthers Jesus's earlier point regarding these practices: generally, they should not supplant one's care of the individual and community or distract from the work of God's justice and love (cf. 11:42). In his gratitude for not being financially or morally bankrupt, the parabolic Pharisee seems to be unconcerned about those around him.

Relationships Reflected in Practice

The prayer of the parabolic Pharisee discloses an ambivalent relationship with his community and a disconnection from God. As pious observances, fasting and tithing function as acts of communal solidarity. Some scholars argue that the Pharisee's constant fasting and tithing are in harmony with the community. However, neither the story nor he connects his actions to the well-being of others. Fulfilling the law contributes to his self-worth; simultaneously, it is a source for dismissing members of the covenantal community. Ultimately, his prayer reveals an understanding that supererogation is a substitute for God's requirement to love and care for others. The parabolic Pharisee seemingly misses the connections between practice and relationship with God and community as presented in the Hebrew scriptures.

As a component of worship and ritual observance, fasting often accompanied prayers and acts of discernment in the Old and New Testament. In the Hebrew scriptures, the only command to fast is the annual observance for Yom Kippur (Leviticus 16:29 and 23:27). Other references connect fasting with increasing the efficacy or intensity of one's repentance, mourning, or openness to divine revelation.[69] By the first century CE, national holidays, e.g. Purim, included

[69] Reid, *Parables of Jesus,* 240-241. Reid provides Hebrew scriptures that illustrate this point. Cf. Psalm 35:13, 2 Samuel 12:13-25, 1 Kings 21:27, 2 Samuel 1:12, and Daniel 10:3.

fasting as part of the observances.[70] The Lukan narrative depicts fasting with prayer in the story of Anna (2:37), and later in Acts as a practice among the disciples in their discernment (13:2-3 and 14:23).[71] Because fasting likely required some isolation, it facilitated mutual support among fellow practitioners.[72] According to one scholarly assertion, the parabolic Pharisee's fasting may be an intercessory practice inclusive of those whom he is unlike.[73] Therefore, his gratitude for being unlike the others may be in appreciation for his ability help his community and by extension facilitate a constructive relationship with the community. However, this explanation does not justify distinguishing himself from thieves, the unjust, adulterers, and the tax collector.

Money and provisions for tithing contributed to the material and spiritual health of the covenantal community. They supplied economic relief for temple employees and those who relied on it for survival (cf. Deuteronomy 26:12).[74] The parabolic Pharisee's tithe is in accordance with the law. Yet, his payment on everything he possesses suggests that his giving is either beyond what is required or what most are able to afford. Timothy Friedrichsen asserts that his generous tithing is on behalf of those who did not pay or were unable to pay.[75] Generally, the public would perceive his practice as laudable (cf. Luke 5:33-39). Neither the parable nor Jesus

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[70] Friedrichsen, "The Temple, A Pharisee," 110.
[71] Reid, *Parables of Jesus,* 241.
[72] Reid, *Parables of Jesus,* 241. Reid references a certain group of Pharisees known for their stricter practices of fasting and prohibition of eating with outside groups. She notes that this group represents a small group in the Pharisaic tradition, and therefore are not emblematic of the practices of all Pharisees. E.P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (Philadelphia: PA: Fortress Press, 1985), 174-211. Cf. Friedrichsen, "The Temple, A Pharisee," 111; Farris, "Tale of Two Taxations," 28; Levine, *Short Stories by Jesus,* 188; Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent,* 467.
[73] Farris, "Tale of Two Taxations," 28.
[74] Some critics accuse the Pharisee of using his tithing and prayer to promote a temple taxation system (cf. Farris, Tale of Two Taxations," 23-34; Herzog, *Parables as Subversive Speech,* 178-191). Barbara Reid also accuses the Pharisee of being a toll collector (Reid, *Parables of Jesus,* 245). However, instead of demanding tithes, the Pharisee, she counters, uses his position to look down on those who cannot meet the financial payment. Levine asserts that these charges against temple taxation and the tithing system were problematic: "The Temple was not a 'domination system' in the way many New Testament commentators describe it. It was not a place known for overtaxing the population, exploiting the poor, in full collaboration with Rome, or profaning the covenant" (Levine, *Short Stories by Jesus* 179). Neither the parable nor its Lukan context suggests a disagreement with tithing and its appropriateness.
[75] Friedrichsen, "The Temple, A Pharisee," 111.

delegitimates the Pharisee's demonstrations of his faith. However, they do question this particular Pharisee's perception of his observances as currency for privilege and prestige in the covenantal community and God's kingdom.

With the articulation of his supererogation, the parabolic Pharisee magnifies the difference between him and those he meticulously calls out in his prayer. While elevating himself before God using the disrepute of others, his language removes him from communion with the rest of the covenantal community as suggested the Greek syntax. His solidarity with members of the covenantal community has limits.

Generally, the Lukan narrative creates a hermeneutic of suspension on the Pharisee's supererogation. Regarding their tithing, Jesus speaks a woe to Pharisees because they are seemingly more concerned about giving their herbs than God's love and justice (11:42). Even in the narrative's ambivalence toward the group, Luke characterizes many of them as unsympathetic due to their disapproval of Jesus's various interactions and acts of compassion (dining tax collectors and sinners, 5:30; plucking grain while hungry on the Sabbath, 6:1-4; Sabbath healings, 6:6-11). His suspicion continues into this parable's opening frame (18:9), casting doubt on the possibility of earnestness in the Pharisee's prayer. The narrative context orients readers to see a detachment between this Pharisee's practice and his personal connection with people, and therefore a disconnection with God.

As the Pharisee's prayer illumines aspects of his social relationship with the covenant community, it illustrates his distance from God. As established in the Ten Commandments and amplified through the Pentateuch, loving humanity *is* loving God. The parabolic Pharisee misses this point, which becomes evident when comparing his prayer to a similar one found in Deuteronomy. Deuteronomy 26:12-15 is an accountability prayer. It contains two parts: giving

witness to what God has done and giving witness to what a person has done.[76] Fredrick Holmgren explains, "The worshipper stands before God, and in this holy moment he speaks *to God* of the kind of person he is. He confesses that he has done what God expects of him; he has been responsible."[77] Like the Pharisee, the worshipper uses many "I" statements in his confession to express his keeping of the commandments. However, the worshipper bookends his prayer with a preface acknowledging God's grace through Abrahamic covenant, the exodus, and promised land (vv. 5-9) and concludes in supplication for God's continued blessing upon the land and the people.

In contrast, the Pharisee barely recognizes God's power in his achievement. Instead, his rhetoric treats God as a spectator of his work; he does not need God.[78] He has a limited view of God's direct action or grace operating in his material life. Another significant departure between the two is that the worshipper articulates an understanding that the bounty of his labor is for the support and care of others in the covenant community. By not connecting his work to the well-being of the people, the parabolic Pharisee succumbs to an asymmetrical theology with a focus on his vertical relationship with God and a dismissal of his horizontal relationship with others as represented in his lack of thoughtfulness and care.

By disconnecting his social responsibility to care for those whom he perceives as the morally least within the covenantal community, the parabolic Pharisee disobeys the most important commandment: to love. The Torah, prophets, and Luke agree that the greatest commandment is to love God fully and wholly (cf. Deut 6:5; Luke 10:27); the second greatest

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[76] Frederick Carlson Holmgren, "The Pharisee and the Tax Collector: Luke 18:9-14 and Deuteronomy 26:1-15," *Interpretation* 48, no. 3 (July 1994): 257.
[77] Holmgren, "The Pharisee and the Tax Collector," 257; cf Levine, *Short Stories by Jesus,* 185. After giving thanks to God, the farmer shares with the assembly that he has given a portion not only to the Levites as his tithe, but also to the resident alien, widows, and orphans, along with confessing other ways in which he followed the commandments.
[78] Reid, *Parables of Jesus,* 242.

command is to love others (cf. Lev. 19:18; Micah 6:8; Luke 10:37).[79] Contempt is irreconcilable with these commands. Diligent fasting and tithing do not supplant God's requirement for treating others with dignity and respect. Klyne Snodgrass posits that the Pharisee's mistake was not the prayer itself but his belief that he could obey the law without obedience to the love commandment.[80] Reid notes, "He is neither in right relation with God nor with other people."[81] God necessitates an ethic of justice, compassion, respect, and dignity as expression of worship and service. The second table of the Decalogue evinces the connection and interdependence of theological, personal, and political relationships as expression of rightness with God. The prayer of the parabolic Pharisee illustrates a theological problem that dissociates his treatment of other people with his relationship with God.

Because the theological is personal and the personal is political, the Pharisee's relationship with members of the community likely has some political ramifications and consequences for those he supports and opposes. For example, Pharisees warn Jesus of Herod's desire to kill him (Luke 13:31). In the companion volume of Acts, Gamaliel, a Pharisee, convinced the Jerusalem council not to execute the apostles but to have them released (5:33). In each occurrence, a Pharisee provides safety and protection to people for whose humanity and welfare he has respect, if not compassion. Luke's testimony regarding Pharisaic influences suggests that the parabolic Pharisee has the political power to turn his disdain for the tax collector into something consequential. Hence, he is able to perpetuate the marginalization of the

[79] In Luke 18:18-30, Jesus tells the certain ruler that his preoccupation with following commandments will not secure his salvation if he does not distribute all he has among the poor. Although Jesus does not explicitly say love his neighbor, the act of dispossession in order to share with the poor would signify a commitment, responsibility, and love for others in a rather selfless way. Even in that circumstance, a rebuttal is that the ruler's charity would not be for the sake of his neighbor, rather it would be a selfish act rooted in the desire of his own salvation. A critical component is that Jesus does not seem to care about one's internal logic or feelings about the action as long as one's actions reflect the justice and care that epitomize the dynamics of God's kingdom.
[80] Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent,* 472.
[81] Reid, *Parables of Jesus,* 242.

tax collector more expansively in ways that could have a real material, economic, political, and personal impact. The Pharisee has a choice to treat the tax collector, and other members of his community, differently in his rhetoric. More than his personal attitudes and politics, his choices signify his theology.

A Tax Collector's Lonely Place

Like the Pharisee in this parable, the tax collector stands alone. However, the story explicitly locates him at a distance without indicating from what or from whom. Once again in this narrative, the character's position within the temple seems to signify his social status in the community. The tax collector is away from other worshippers, a possible outcome of his decision to voluntarily disassociate himself due to fear.[82] Nothing in the text indicates worshippers actively ostracizing him.[83] Herzog argues that worshippers have marginalized him due to ritual impurity.[84] Historical and narrative contexts do not support purity concerns. Countering this argument, Levine contends, "There is no reason to see the tax collector outside the Temple as any more or less impure that the average Jew; inside the Temple, he is necessarily ritually pure. Moral purity is not the same thing as ritual impurity."[85] The tax collector's isolation is most likely due to his profession.[86] Volunteering his distance implies a self-assessment of inferiority, which likely aligns with communal attitudes of his status.

Within the sacred and secular spaces, tax collecting was a disreputable profession. Green

[82] Cf. Luke 19:8; Levine, *Short Stories by Jesus,* 189. Due to the economic injustice associated with the tax collector's work, he may have feared reprisals from people who felt exploited by his extortionist practices.
[83] Levine, *Short Stories by Jesus,* 189.
[84] Herzog, *Parables as Subversive Speech,* 185.
[85] Levine, *Short Stories by Jesus,* 188.
[86] Cf. Herzog, *Parables as Subversive Speech,* 185; Levine, *Short Stories by Jesus,* 189; Bovon, *Luke 9:51-19:27,* 549.

notes that he has no place within the social world due to his low status and deviance.[87] The parabolic Pharisee's prayer depicts the tax collector as one being on par with thieves, adulterers, and the unjust; they are sinners and violators of the Torah.[88] The story does not indicate whether the two characters knew each other personally, which suggests that the Pharisee is generalizing based on popular perceptions.[89] Although not ritually impure, the tax collector's moral purity would be questioned especially because of his relationship with the Roman Empire and its economic oppression. Consequently, the community's theological relationship with the tax collector would transfer into the social sphere. As the audience would presume that the parabolic judge is corrupt, they would also presume as much, if not worse, about the tax collector. Furthermore, the tax collector self-identifies as a sinner (18:13). His posture and prayer reflect his humility.

A Tax Collector's Humility

While enacting his social stance with his distance, the tax collector's embodied prayer reveals his relationship with God. His eyes are downward, indicating humility. The narrator details: "[he] would not even lift his eyes toward heaven" (18:13). Bovon contends, "Whereas the temple was the place where, by tradition, one customarily raised one's eyes in order to gaze upon the divine glory, the tax collector did not allow himself to partake of that joy."[90] Although unable to participate in that joy, the parabolic tax collector recognizes the temple as a space accepting of his presence regardless of his moral and social standing.

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[87] Green, *The Gospel of Luke,* 649.
[88] Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke X-XXIV,* 1187.
[89] Cf. Schottroff, *The Parables of Jesus,* 8. Schottroff asserts that an audience would not expect the tax collector to be in the temple due to a presumption that he would be a notorious sinner. The Lukan narrative reinforces this perception through its coupling of tax collectors with sinners throughout the Gospel.
[90] Bovon, *Luke 9:51-19:27,* 549.

In addition to lowering his eyes, the parabolic tax collector beats his chest (v. 13) as a self-deprecating expression. Beating one's chest denotes great mourning and lament. During the crucifixion, both women (23:27) and men (23:48), who witnessed Jesus's execution, beat their chests in grief.[91] With these movements, the tax collector confesses that he is not in right relationship with God. He is demonstrating a self-awareness of falling short of God's mandate on his life. While his presence in the temple acknowledges God, it does not testify to a constructive relationship with the others in community. Ironically, both parabolic characters have problematic relationships within the greater community. The tax collector's embodied prayer correlates with Luke's general assessment of the group who recognize their sinfulness and seek God's mercy.

Unlike the Pharisee, the tax collector offers a short prayer. Simply, he cries out, "O God, show mercy on me, the sinner" (18:13). His plea echoes the opening words to Psalm 51: "Have mercy on me, O God, according to your great kindness."[92] Although the cry for God to have mercy may be a common prayer of petition, its significance in Psalm 51 is noteworthy. Appealing to God's abundant mercy to wipe away his transgressions (v. 3 LXX; v. 1 NRSV), the psalmist is contrite. He confesses that his sins are ever before him; he acknowledges that he deserves God's judgment (v. 6, LXX). The parabolic tax collector invokes the psalmist prayer through his allusion to it, and thus concedes to God's power and prerogative in judging him. Without doubt or equivocation, he knows his existence is wholly dependent upon God's grace. Psalm 51 connects the tax collector's embodied penitence liturgically with his words of penance.

The parabolic tax collector seeks amends with God. Although often translated as "show

[91] Scholars describe the tax collector's chest beating as a typical response of women in mourning (cf. Reid, *Parables of Jesus,* 243).
[92] My translation of the Psalm 51: 3, LXX, which corresponds with v. 1 in English bibles.

mercy," the Greek ἱλάσθητί also means to make atonement for sin.[93] Fitzmyer notes that the Greek is a translation of the Hebrew *yislah*, meaning to pardon.[94] More than asking for compassion, which the English translation connotes, the tax collector pleads to be forgiven so that he may be made righteous through God's mercy. Describing Luke's use of the passive voice for ἱλάσθητί, Bovon explains its power in communicating God's activity—not human activity and piety—in the justification process.[95] Like the psalmist, the tax collector seeks restoration in his relationship with God (cf. 51:10-11). The prayer of the parabolic tax collector and the psalmist underscores God's power to make righteous and to invite participation in God's kingdom.

Right Relationships

With his stance overshadowing his words, the prayer underscores the tax collector's characterization as a sinner. The Lukan text does not provide any insights regarding the nature of his sinfulness. Generally, the characterization refers to an unfaithfulness to the Law, and in his case, likely through his profession. Schottroff explains, "The Luke 18:9-14 text also presumes that the toll collector was unfaithful to the Law and could only make right his relationship to God through acts of repentance."[96] His prayer of contrition demonstrates knowledge that God is the one able to make their relationship right.[97] While God ultimately has the power to justify, the parable affirms human agency and participation in the process. The tax collector, like the

[93] Frederick W. Danker, Walter Bauer, and William F. Arndt, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature,* 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000). s.v. "ἱλάσκομαι." Luke Timothy Johnson mentions that the term is often deployed in contexts of propitiation or atonement (Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke,* 272).
[94] Cf. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke X-XXIV,* 1188. Fitzmyer notes Hebrew translation of yislah from the Greek hilaskomai to mean pardon or to forgive sins is found in 2 Kings 5:18.
[95] Bovon, *Luke 9:51-19:27,* 550.
[96] Schottroff, *The Parables of Jesus,* 9.
[97] Bovon, *Luke 9:51-19:27,* 549.

parabolic widow (18:1-9), had to be courageous, whether due to his shame or fear of reprisal, to come to the temple and enter into God's presence as a known sinner. Although righteousness is a product of God's grace, living as one who has been justified comes from humanity's will.

As the parabolic tax collector asks God for reconciliation, his relationship with members of the covenant community remains ambiguous. The parable provides no evidence regarding the tax collector's relationship with others before or after this particular moment. Like the Pharisee, he seems to forget the love commandment in his lack of verbal concern for the welfare of others; however, unlike the Pharisee, he says nothing about the community either disparagingly or deferentially. One could interpret the neutrality of his silence as better than contempt. The tax collector's presence in the temple facilitates an opportunity to a transformation in his relationships within society through his reconciliation with God. While his character is neither self-righteous nor boastful, the tax collector's humility does not immunize him from critique about his lack of consideration of others in his prayer. However, his humility and prayer do exhibit theological dispositions that often undergird social and personal reorientations toward justice and service to others. His need, recognition, and receipt of God's help for righteousness contribute to an ability to provide and receive support within society.

While in the temple, reasons for the tax collector's justification seem unclear. He does not commit to any work or practice that could reposition him in the community: quit his job, give to the poor, or repay anyone whom he may have defrauded (e.g. Luke 3:13; 19:8). Being of a low socio-economic status, the tax collector may be unable to quit his job or give to others due to his financial precarity. He is not a perfect example of righteousness and his prayer is worthy of both emulation and critique. Yet, God has justified him alongside the Pharisee with a justice that removes him from the margins of society and places him back in community with those who see

him as a scourge. In addition to recasting him in the sociopolitical hierarchy, God disrupts this particular hierarchy all together. Justice is God's intervention in the present reality to transform individual lives and social structures to reflect the values of dignity, respect, health, wholeness, and healing. In this case, a vulnerable member of the covenant community believes God has given him mercy, and he is able to reengage in society. Furthermore, a key element to Jesus's pronouncement is that God justification occurred outside of the temple. This detail does not invalidate the temple as a location for God's grace. It extends the tax collector's experience of reconciliation with God and community in secular spaces and on his journey home. Jesus's conclusion anticipates him transforming his relationship with society

Although he is a representative of colonizers, the tax collector submits to the God of Israel and to the powers of the covenant community. By correcting his relationship with the one true God, who forbids idolatry, the parabolic tax collector reveals the fallacy of Rome's superiority and demonstrates his ambivalence toward the Empire.[98] The parable of a Pharisee and tax collector is a cautionary tale for all entities that perceive themselves as righteous and treat others with contempt. It subverts dominant powers by appearing as a story about individuals or intragroup challenges. Yet, no entity displays more arrogance or contempt than Rome. Jesus's admonishment is for the Empire as well as those within the crowds surrounding him. The story acts as a mirror to aid the audience's critical examination of its mimicry of and ambivalence toward imperial values, ideology, and power.

Kingdom Perils and Kingdom Promises

[98] The Lukan narrative maintains even soldiers and tax collectors, agents of colonialism, have an ambivalent relationship with the Empire that they serve. In 3:10-14, tax collectors and soldiers gather to listen and ask John Baptist about their salvation. Later in the Gospel, a centurion calls upon Jesus, expressing great faith, in the healing of his slave (7:6-10). Even Jesus professes the centurion's faith was greater than he had ever seen in Israel (v.10).

Kingdom Perils

The parable equivocates in its depiction of Roman imperial values of class and power. In its condemnation of self-righteousness and contemptuous attitudes, neither Jesus nor the Gospel writer critiques the elitism of the parabolic Pharisee or the imperial collusion of the tax collector. Their silence implicitly assents to the idolization of privilege, power, and prosperity of the Pharisee and accepts the maintenance of empire through the tax collector's work. Overall, this Lukan story demonstrates an ambivalence toward Rome. Its rhetoric denies Roman superiority by teaching an alternative kingdom that is the inverse of imperial values on prestige, violence, exploitation, and oppression. However, its lack of explicit criticism and open defiance of the creators and retainers of Roman occupation weaken the postcolonial rhetoric of liberation and human dignity imbedded in the story's hidden transcript.

The parabolic Pharisee and tax collector are colonized subjects trapped in an imperial construction that requires obedience for survival. They demonstrate postcolonial ambivalence as they negotiate their colonial subjectivity and their commitments to prioritize the God of Israel above all in the midst of a violent regime. Their worship and maintenance of their Jewish identity at temple affirm their recognition of the superiority of the God of Israel. The story itself echoes Mary's proclamation of God's work to dethrone the powerful and uplift the lowly, allusions to Rome and Israel respectively (Luke 1:52). As David Huddart posits, "So, when we think of colonial discourse, we should not assume that this is simply the colonizer's discourse: colonial discourse necessarily draws the colonized into its circulations of identification and disavowal."[99] Ambivalence is intimacy and estrangement. The characters and the texts express postcolonial rhetoric of resistance to colonizing power structure while remaining silent about the

[99] David Huddart, *Homi Bhabha* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2006), 44.

components that perpetuate it.

As a member of a nominal, if not active, political group, the parabolic Pharisee is a peculiar colonial citizen. Historically, the group provided checks and balances to the machinations of colonial rule and responses to the colonized. Members were not immune to the seductions of the Empire. While some Pharisees participate in the political intrigue of courts, others were noted revolutionaries rebelling against Rome. As colluders, cultural translators, and even conspirators against the Empire, Pharisees, as a collective, demonstrated postcolonial ambivalence to survive and thrive in their sociopolitical world. The parable does not characterize the Pharisee as political or comment on his ability to flourish economically within the imperial system. The Lukan Jesus is neither anti-wealth nor anti-imperialist, and therefore he does not condemn the Pharisee's socio-economic position. The story comments on him insofar as he uses his privilege to disregard, and even disrespect, his fellow worshipper while elevating himself. The parabolic Pharisee loses sight of regarding and treating others on the basis of Torah teachings instead of the hegemonic values of the Empire.

Both a colonial subject and retainer, the parabolic tax collector embodies postcolonial ambivalence as his participation in the temple reveals the fallacious superior claims of the Empire. His profession maintains colonial authority and presence via a tax system. The collected money contributes to the people's political subjugation and economic degradation as the authorities channel the material resources to the Roman citizenry, their elites, military forces, and imperial infrastructure. Additionally, the taxes sustain and promote the Empire's campaign for geopolitical dominance. Although his work fortifies the imperial theology of supremacy, the tax collector's presence in the temple disrupts it. His humbled stance and petition for atonement before the God of Israel signify his belief in a kingdom greater than Rome. The parabolic tax

collector worships the same God who overthrew Egypt and bended the knee of Babylon. He betrays a frailty in Rome's stronghold among those who are colonized, even its employees; colonial colluders submit to the power of God's kingdom. Using narrative rhetoric to subvert Rome's superior presence, Luke provides space for people to examine and critique imperial theology.

Kingdom Promises

A Kingdom promise within the parable of a Pharisee and tax collector is a postcolonial claim that God is sovereign over even the most imposing human dominion. On the surface, the story seems harmless to the imperial regime. Because Roman authorities allowed their subjects to worship ancestral religions, praying to God was not countercultural. Neither civic politics nor sources of livelihood elevate allegiance to colonial influences over God's mandates. The characters' presence in the temple demonstrates their knowledge that God's reign is greater than Roman imperialism. By declaring that God justified the parabolic Pharisee and tax collector outside of the temple, Jesus reminds his audience of God's omnipresence and justice beyond the walls of a worship space. Luke declares God's activity superior to pagan gods (c.f. Acts 17:16-31), transcendent of any practices, imperceptive to Roman authority, and expansive throughout the world.

While subverting Roman imperialism and promoting God's sovereignty, Luke uses this story to continue his vision of God's kingdom promises of justice. Despite the absence of kingdom language, he presents God's work as divine intervention and as human participation advancing justice throughout society. The parable carries this theme from the preceding narrative of a widow and judge (18:1-8). Both stories highlight the treatment of others, individual

behaviors, the righting of relationships, and unexpected reversals courtesy of God's intervention.

With the parable of a Pharisee and tax collector, the Lukan Jesus underscores God's priority in providing justice and determining righteousness. Lexicons translate the term *dikaios* as signifying both righteousness and justice, interconnecting them in concept and etymology.[100] The narrative argument furthers the discussion from the preceding pericope through several occurrences of words rooted in δίκαιος (18:3, 5, 7, 8, 9, 11, and 14).[101] The form appears frequently in both parables: ἐκδίκησις (vv. 3, 5, 7, 8); δίκαιος (righteous) v. 9; ἄδικος (unrighteousness) v. 11, and δικαιόω (to declare righteous) v 14.[102] Lidell, Scott, and Jones' second definition of the term captures the essence of the word best: "observant of duty to gods and men, righteous."[103] The meaning describes actions in response to divine mandates and human needs. While fasting and tithing are acceptable displays of one's obedience to the Torah, neither substitutes nor subordinates the significance of caring for others in attitude and in action.

God dispenses justice widely; however, it does not come in the form of purse, power, and privilege. Those are commodities with fluctuating valuations based on the fickleness of humanity's demands; they are not rewards for righteousness. Justice evokes God's people to manifest it in various ways, including provisions for those living in poverty, dignity for those being dehumanized, and freedom for those imprisoned by imperializing forces. Through reversals, God enacts justice and righteous care for both the parabolic Pharisee and tax collector. The social hierarchy, which elevated the Pharisee above the tax collector, destabilizes under the weight of God's justice. By justifying one alongside the other, God redistributes power and

[100] Cf. Danker, et al. *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament,* s.v. "δίκαιος"
[101] Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent,* 466.
[102] Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent,* 466.
[103] Henry George Liddell, Robert Scott, and Henry Stuart Jones, and Roderick McKenzie, eds., *A Greek-English Lexicon, Revised* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), s.v. "δίκαιος," A.2.

privilege in accordance to God's mandates and prerogatives. Despite their respective professions and social history, God calls them both to be agents of Kingdom promises that were given to them.

Conclusion

Acknowledging human participation in delivering Kingdom promises, the Jesus inspires hope in God's intervention in the present. He espouses a realized eschatology of transformation in the current world instead of an expectation for relief in the afterlife. Therefore, God's justice is as much for the living as it is for the dead. Each person has a role to play. The parabolic Pharisee shares responsibility in reifying human dignity. The tax collector's humble attitude helps him right his relationship with God, which anticipates readdressing his relationship with others. However, having a lower status in humanity's hierarchy does not preclude access to or define status in God's Kingdom. This component of God's justice continues in the succeeding story (Luke 18:15-17) and adds to Luke's vision of God's plan. Francois Bovon writes, "One and the same message is conveyed by the two pericopes, and it has to do with access to God, described in the present passage in terms of justification and elevation in the other, in terms of welcome and entrance into the kingdom of God."[104] Elevating, welcoming, and resourcing the underprivileged in the community are humanity's responsibility in fulfilling Kingdom promises.

Cloaked as an aphorism teaching individual piety, Jesus's conclusion is a hidden transcript that comforts those oppressed by purveyors of power and warns those who use their privileges to demean, cheat, and harm others politically, socially, or economically. While this story presents an intracommunal conflict, its message, as part of the Lukan narrative, appeals

[104] Bovon, *Luke 9:51-19:27,* 543

across communities as they come together as inhabitants of God's kingdom. Overturning human assumptions or desired expectations, God can redeem anyone even the Roman Empire. Luke envisions a Kingdom where God's justice permeates personal relationships and politics, transforming the world into a space that promotes human thriving and flourishing.

CHAPTER 5

BLESSING MORE THAN INFANTS: A LIBERATIONIST IMPERATIVE

(LUKE 18:15-17)

15 [Women and other members of the household][a] were bringing even infants to him so that he might touch them. When the disciples saw this, they berated[b] them. 16 Now, Jesus calls to them saying, "Let the children come to me and do not stop them because the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. 17 Truly, I tell you whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a child will never enter it." [My translation]

Translation Notes

[a] The Greek manuscript begins this verse without a noun as the subject of the sentence. Instead, the subject is within προσέφερον, the third person masculine plural imperfect active indicative of προσφέρω. While "people" is an acceptable translation to replace the inferred gender and number pronoun, historical and sociological contexts of first century Palestine suggests the people carrying and caring for infants would be women and other members of the household or domestic sphere.

[b] Rebuke is a common translation of ἐπιτιμάω.

Introduction[1]

Few would suspect that the story of Jesus blessing the infants is one with liberationist imperatives. It maintains Luke's theme that Jesus came to liberate the oppressed (cf. 4:18-19) by

[1] A previous version of this chapter appears in "'Nobody's Free until Everybody's Free': Exploring Gender and Class Injustice in a Story about Children (Luke 18:15–17)" in *Womanist Interpretations of the Bible: Expanding the Discourse (Semeia Studies)*, eds. Gay L. Byron and Vanessa Lovelace (Atlanta, GA: SBL Press, 2016), 291-310.

inverting power from those that society privileges with rank and stature to those often marginalized and disenfranchised (cf. 1:51-52). A liberationist imperative is a call to act in pursuit of justice for vulnerable populations and to overturn social practices and policies of political, economic, material, and relational violence. After admonishing his disciples' harsh behavior, Jesus elevates the infants and their caretakers and humbles the disciples, who try to prohibit them from experiencing God's kingdom. The disciples' actions reflect their society's status-consciousness and politics, which disregard the invisible and most vulnerable members. Jesus's actions do not. In Luke 18:15-17, Jesus continues his teaching and work for a different politic among the people—the kingdom of God—that shifts social power dynamics by valuing those considered the least and ensuring their well-being and life's abundance. The kingdom of God is a political reality that transforms the social landscape to realize justice, equity, access, and dignity in one's current situation, i.e. a prophetic or realized eschatology. Liberation is the cornerstone of God's kingdom.

The story of Jesus blessing the infants is third in a narrative unit that describes reversals of power in social relationships as a justice-element of God's kingdom activity (18:1-30). It follows Jesus's telling of two parables, one of a widow and judge and the other of a Pharisee and tax collector (18:1-17), both of which illustrate reversals in social and political power as expressions of divine justice. They portray characters who experience shifts in their power dynamics from those with prestigious status positions to those whom society marginalizes and disparages. While examples of *schadenfreude*, the reversals do not empower those treated as least in society to become a new oppressor and vice versa. Rather, they depict God's use of human responses to enact justice and liberation to Israel's people, especially among those whom

politics ignore, economics exploit, and society disregards as well as discards. Within this particular literary context, hospitality and openness as the primary interpretations of Jesus blessing the infants are incongruent and insufficient to the themes of radical transformation the Lukan Jesus evokes in his teachings about the kingdom of God and discipleship.

In this chapter, I analyze the dynamics of gender and class in the sociopolitical relationships in Luke's story of Jesus blessing the infants in Luke 18:15-17. Identifying the children as infants (c.f. Mark 10:13-16; Matthew 19:13-15), the author conveys a postcolonial consciousness of liberation that encourages the marginalized and admonishes the privileged to subvert hegemonic social politics. Its literary context provides a basis for this interpretation. The preceding parables of reversals and power plays (18:1-14) and following account of an encounter with a rich ruler (vv. 18-30) suggest that the story with the infants is in line depict God's kingdom as a disruptor of social, political, economic, and geopolitical hegemonic forces. Therefore, I argue that Luke 18:15-17 continues the liberative, transgressive, and subversive message that God's kingdom is about the work of changing social power dynamics with the help of human participation to provide justice and dignity for all inhabitants.

By welcoming both infants and their mothers and overruling his disciples, Jesus's actions subvert societal norms regarding inclusion, gender politics, and status consciousness, consequently declaring that those hegemonic practices underscored by Roman colonialism have no space in the kingdom of God. While modern interpretations reveal unexpected status reversals among the characters, they underscore traditional themes of hospitality, humility, and openness to the Kingdom. This chapter analyzes the intersectional oppressions the disciples engage in their rebuff of infants and their mothers to examine anti-hegemonic teachings in the story's hidden

transcript.[2] The shortness of the children's story obfuscates Jesus's radical teaching. However, Luke 18:15-17 is a story with nuance about transforming power dynamics from the greatest to least.

On Humility and Hospitality: Traditional Interpretations

Because the social political dynamics in Luke 18:15-17 are not obvious to most, traditional interpretations focus on explicit theological messages in the story. Their work emphasizes v. 16 and tries to understand how Jesus connects discipleship to children, humility, hospitality, and the kingdom of God. As a hidden transcript, the story's liberation imperatives are hard to perceive without analyzing its sociopolitical as well as historical-cultural contexts.

Interpreting Jesus's blessing of the infants as an illustration of humility, traditional scholarship focuses on the characterization of the children in their quest to understand Jesus's saying at the end of the story. Jesus shares that the kingdom of God belongs to children and those like them (18:16). Furthermore, interpreters translate v. 17 to read that "whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as little child will never enter it" (NRSV).[3] Joseph Fitzmyer and Jerome Kodell, among others, assert that the story is an extension of the preceding teaching of the parable of a Pharisee and a tax collector (vv. 9-14).[4] Fitzmyer contends that the children are

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[2] James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990). Hidden transcripts are discourses subordinate groups use to critique power and practices of domination out of view of public spaces (transcripts) or the gaze of those maintaining power. These discourses include, but not limited to, rumors, speeches, gestures, offstage parody, dreams of violent revenge, millennial visions of a world turned upside down, and *schadenfreude*. A key element is the inconspicuous nature of the transcripts from those whom they are critiquing.

[3] King James Version, New International Version, American Standard Version, and the English Standard Version translate 18:17 the same.

[4] Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel according to Luke X-XXV: Introduction, Translation, and Notes*, Anchor Bible Series (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1985); Jerome Kodell, "Luke and the Children: The Beginning and End of the Great Interpolation (Luke 9:46-56, 18:9-23)," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 49, no. 3 (1987); cf. Fred B. Craddock,

humble like the tax collector. Kodell contrasts the children's humility with the privileged and powerful characterizations of the Pharisee (vv. 9-14) and the following story's rich ruler (vv. 18-30). His argument is summed up in this analogy: the Pharisee is to the rich ruler as the tax collector is to the children. Referring to this contrast, Kodell concludes, "Lucan editing has sharpened the theme of lowliness as a mark of discipleship in the story of the children (18:15-17)."[5] For both Fitzmyer and Kodell, the kingdom of God belongs to anyone who has childlike humility. Stephen Fowl offers a different argument. He asserts that the childlike behavior about which Jesus refers is not about humility, but a willingness to drop everything to attach themselves to an object or a person with single-mindedness.[6] To enter God's kingdom, one must solely be dependent on God. Fitzmyer and Kodell make an argument regarding disposition, while Fowl's contention refers to one's self-awareness of their reliance on God.

With an emphasis on identifying the characteristics of children to comprehend Jesus's truism, interpreters across the decades assert that God's kingdom expects humility and openness from its participants. Similarly to Fitzmyer and Kodell, John Carroll connects the story of Jesus blessing the children to the parable of a Pharisee and a tax collector and Jesus's encounter with a certain ruler (Luke 18:18-3).[7] Carroll distinguishes his interpretation by noting that the parable's concluding aphorism (v. 14), which juxtaposes the consequences of those who are humble with

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Luke, A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1992), 212; R. Allen Culpepper, "The Gospel of Luke" in *The New Interpreter's Bible* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1995), 344.

[5] Kodell, "Luke and the Children," 426.

[6] Stephen E. Fowl, "Receiving the Kingdom of God as a Child: Children and Riches in Luke 18:15ff," *New Testament Studies* 39, no. 1 (1993): 158.

[7] John T. Carroll, "'What Then Will This Child Become?': Perspectives on Children in the Gospel of Luke" in *The Child in the Bible*, ed. Marcia J. Bunge, Terence E. Fretheim, and Beverly Roberts Gaventa (Grand Rapids, MI.: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 2008), 187. While he does not footnote them, Carroll's argument echoes premises described in Kodell and Fitzmyer's respective works. Like Kodell, he interprets the parable of a Pharisee and tax collector as a story of contrast punctuated by the reversal aphorism (Luke 18:14). Similar to Fitzmyer, he describes the infants as powerless and low in status.

those who self-aggrandize, beckons the audience to listen for this theme in the following story of Jesus and the infants (vv. 15-17). Categorizing children among the poor and others who are socially marginalized, Carroll acknowledges them as participants in God's kingdom as opposed to the parabolic Pharisee and the rich ruler who emerges from the crowd.[8] He concludes, "Indeed, any who wish to have a place in God's realm should look to these vulnerable, low-status children as the model to be emulated. One enters God's realm by embracing it without pretension to status and power."[9] While referencing the lowliness of infants in the Greco-Roman social structure, Carroll joins Fitzmyer, Kodell, and Fowl in their assertion that one must emulate the unpretentiousness of a child in order to participate in God's kingdom.

Using the narrative to describe the nature of children, interpreters develop their arguments on a premise that all or most children are homogeneous models of humility. If their depictions include infants, then their findings propose that infant personalities can be assessed. Moreover, their analyses suggest that all cultures across time and place value and characterize infants and children the same way. While their assertions challenge a reader to be meek in character, they ignore the roles that power, privilege, and status play in Jesus's admonishment of his disciples as well as his affirmation to those bringing their infants. These interpretations relieve those with power from being accountable to or with those who are suffering from social systems. They excuse those with power from being responsible for transforming unjust sociopolitical relationships within their communities as long as their personal attitudes reflect the

[8] Carroll, "'What Then Will This Child Become?'", 187, 190.
[9] Carroll, "'What Then Will This Child Become?'", 190.

humility of children. Consequently, one may continue to induce injustice, inequities, and inferiority upon others while being humble in spirit before God.[10]

The narrative offers clues for other interpretations that call an audience to recognize in Jesus's theology an admonishment to transform sociopolitical power dynamics in personal and political realms. In addition to a focus on the infants and those who bring them, this study examines the disciples' behavior and undergirding power dynamics that may contribute to their harsh reaction. Jesus's cultural context informs the literary elements of the Gospel, especially this story. While considering historical, cultural, social, political, and economic elements, a narrative analysis reveals a hidden transcript of an anti-hegemonic and justice-oriented gospel of God's kingdom that prioritizes, protects, and promotes the welfare of the least-treated members of society.

Intersectionalities of Oppression and of Privilege: A Narrative Analysis

Luke's account of Jesus blessing the children is not a story that uplifts children's behavior as a model for adults. Rather, it reorients the disciples and others in their understanding of the social politics of God's kingdom and gives insight about how God's kingdom manifests itself. Luke shifts the focus towards power dynamics by making a critical departure from its Markan source. With a small, significant revision, he changes Mark's children (παιδία) to infants

[10] Without intentionality for full inclusion into the community and its decision-making process for life together (politics), harm may come to those who are traditionally under-represented. Concerted effort is necessary for not perpetuating acts that deny equal access to resources, marginalize participation, ignore people's presence, or exclude voices, ideas, or perspectives from multiple strata. For example, a leader or person in power can include someone as a presence in a group without allowing that person to have voice, agency, or authority to participate or share in decision-making.

(βρέφη).[11] Traditional scholars seem to overlook the impact of this change through their kerygmatic interpretations, which feature a child-like humility and openness as the appropriate responses to God's kingdom.

While the scene appears in Mark and Matthew, Luke's introduction of infants instead of children expands the thematic focus of hospitality to encompass power. This distinction emphasizes their powerlessness and their inability to fend for themselves. Infants cannot secure, sustain, or speak for themselves. Dependent on family caregivers for protection and provisions, they also need basic necessities, including feedings, bathing, healthcare, and mobility. Infant lives are more precarious and vulnerable than children. On their own, they are helpless, powerless, and defenseless, even from their parents.[12] In the social hierarchy, infants are the least powerful in that they have no power.

By recasting the children as infants, Luke deemphasizes temperament to emphasize social status as key to Jesus's point. When scholars generally describe children as hospitable and open, they assume a homogeneous positive stereotype about their personalities, which is neither fair nor true. Character traits are hard to ascertain in infants.[13] Therefore, neither the Gospel writer

[11] cf. Mark 10:13-19; Matthew 19:13-15. βρέφη- neuter plural accusative of βρέφος in Frederick W. Danker, Walter Bauer, and William F. Arndt, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature,* 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

[12] cf. Warren Carter, *Households and Discipleship: A Study of Matthew 19–20* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), 102. In Rome's social hierarchy of *paterfamilias*, a father's unrestricted rights over his children include control over whether an infant lives or dies. Carter presses, "In the practice of exposing children at birth, for instance, fathers determine whether a child (especially a girl) will live."

[13] cf. Kåre S. Olafsen, Stein Erik Ulvund, Anne Mari Torgersen, Tore Wentzel-Larsen, Lars Smith, and Vibeke Moe. "Temperamental Adaptability, Persistence, and Regularity: Parental Ratings of Norwegian Infants Aged 6 to 12 Months, with some Implications for Preventive Practice," *Infant Mental Health Journal* 39, no. 2 (Mar, 2018): 183-97. Observational studies of infants began in the early twentieth century and gained traction in the 1970s. Studies focused on developmental trajectories and functionality for adjusting to new experiences and managing emotions. Generally, infant temperament studies are a relatively new science without consistent methods and conclusive data to determine personality types.

nor Jesus is likely looking to infants for their particular behaviors or personalities; instead, they are observing society's general treatment and respect for them. Jesus's focus is on their status.

The social status of infants is crucial for interpreting Jesus's teaching on God's kingdom. Recent scholarship often interprets their underprivileged status as an example of those to whom the kingdom of God belongs—those who are without wealth, prestige, and status.[14] It concludes that the story of Jesus blessing the children is another illustration of the status reversals that occur in God's kingdom.[15] While highlighting God's prerogative to uplift those who are treated lowly (cf. 1:52–53; 4:18–19), these interpretations exclude humanity's responsibility, especially on the part of those with power, in continuing God's transformative work. Luke's version of this story expands upon a theme of the narrative unit that depicts the kingdom of God as attentive to liberative and oppressive dynamics in real-life circumstances. It contains a hidden transcript that holds all followers of Jesus responsible for creating and maintaining alternative societal values that foreground justice and equal access to resources.

Jesus's message to the disciples and the crowd encourages alternative thinking about communal relationships and power. It exhorts the community to evaluate its (mis)treatment of its members on the basis of status. It calls people to transform social power dynamics that maintain and further social, economic, and physical harm upon those whom the culture deems expendable and without value. Themes of hospitality and openness, as posited by most scholarship in this story, are limiting and do not align with the immediate narrative context. Power dynamics, which

[14] Justo L. González, *Luke,* Belief: A Theology Commentary on the Bible (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 214; Carroll, 362.
[15] cf. Sharon H. Ringe, *Luke*, Westminster Bible Companion (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), 226; Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke,* The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Pub., Co., 1997), 650; John T. Carroll, *Luke: A Commentary* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012), 361-362.

appear in Jesus' teachings in the preceding the parables (18:1-14) and the following story with a certain ruler (vv. 18-30), are also operational in his rebuff of the disciples and his declaration about the kingdom of God. Evidence of the Lukan Jesus's commentary on power and on God's call to change unproductive, and even destructive, sociopolitical relationships emerge through analyses of the status of infants and disciples in their cultural context.

Infants and Women: Underestimated

The Greco-Roman world treated children as powerless dependents with little to no rights. In general, the culture viewed them as a liability, a burden, and a commodity. Only as adults do they have value, because then they could contribute to the family and as members of society. This cultural concept of childhood is foreign to U.S. modern readers, and it is absent in most analyses of Luke 18:15-17. Contemporary interpretations utilize popular, current, and Western notions of children, especially infants, as innocent and precious creatures in need of adult protection.[16] However, childhood innocence is a relatively recent phenomenon, which slowly developed during the Enlightenment period and became fully formed in the U.S. during the mid-nineteenth century.[17] Interpreting the dynamics among the characters and lessons communicated

[16] This study does not assume that all modern cultures share views on children, childhood, and infancy or that the dominant groups, who influence and shape perceptions, consider all children the same.

[17] Robin Bernstein, *Racial Innocence: Performing American Childhood from Slavery to Civil Right* (New York: New York University Press, 2011), 4. Bernstein asserts that Calvinists of the United States colonial period believed in a "doctrine of infant depravity." This doctrine espouses the idea that infants are born with original sin, hence inherently sinful and sexual without the self-discipline and rationality that come with age. A doctrine of children's innocence developed in the late eighteenth and early nineteen centuries and began competing with the Calvinist view. According to Bernstein, childhood innocence was described as being sinless, without sexual feelings, and unaware of worldly concerns. In the U.S. antebellum period, childhood innocence was racialized, phenotypically identified with white children as epitomized by Little Eve in *Uncle Tom's Cabin.* Therefore, childhood innocence was a not universal concept afforded to every child, especially as related to race and ethnicity, two constructions within US and European contexts built upon geopolitics of colonialization and slavery.

in the story of Jesus's blessing the children requires an understanding of the cultural constructions of children and childhood that prevailed in Jesus's and Luke's contexts.

In essence, Roman ideology of children assessed them as inferiors. In his study, Warren Carter surveys the ideals and writings of ancient Greco-Roman philosophers and early Jewish historians, Josephus and Philo. He ascertains four features regarding children existence: "Children are dependent on their parents and submit to them. Excluded from adult society, they live a marginal existence. Children are in transition to and in training for their valued future role as adult citizens."[18] That society also viewed children as inherently evil. Carter tracks in Jewish literature—scriptures, history, and apocalyptic works—conceptualizations of children as born rebellious against God's order; many first century texts depict children as depraved, ignorant, lacking in judgment, and irrational—a threat to the social order.[19]

Describing a child's status in ancient society, Ronald Clark explains that adults viewed them as equal to slaves: small people with little rights; unprotected by Jewish law; and subject to abuse.[20] He concludes that children were seen along with women as those without rights. In the Deutero-Pauline and Petrine epistles, household codes are replete with analogies to the effect that fathers are to children as masters are to slaves (Eph. 5:22-6:9; Col. 3:18-4:1; 1 Peter 2:13-3:7). Carter notes, "Philo employs the metaphor of the relationship of master servants to describe the

[18] Warren Carter, *Households and Discipleship*, 107-108. Carter's review includes Aristotle (third century BCE), Neopythagorean philosophers (first century BCE to first century CE), and Hierocles (second century CE Stoic writer).
[19] Carter, *Households and Discipleship,* 104. Carter's survey reviews a number of works by Jewish, Greek, and Romans thinkers from the Greco-Roman period, notably Josephus, Philo, Ben Sirach, Dionysius of Halicarnassus (first century BCE), Epictetus (first century CE), Seneca, and Cicero. Jewish scriptural and apocalyptic literature include Exodus 20:12; 21:15, 17; Deut. 21:18-21; 27:16; Psalms, 4 Ezra, and 2 Baruch.
[20] Ronald R. Clark, Jr., "Kingdom, Kids, and Kindness: A New Context for Luke 18:15-17," *Stone-Campbell Journal* 5, no. 2 (2002): 242. Although Clark's research regarding children is rather reductive, children, despite the varied ways in which their families may have regarded them, were a vulnerable class without power and voice.

parents' authority over children, invoking a model of ownership absolute obedience."[21] The concept of *paterfamilias*, whereby fathers are lords over the entire household both familial and fictive, prevailed during this period. Contextual and cultural constructions of childhood in the ancient world consistently depict a treatment of children as marginal, vulnerable, threatening to and excluded from society.

Despite their low status in the domestic and public spheres, children received love and care. The Jewish traditions and the scriptures of Israel also consider children gifts from God (Ps 127:3-5; 128:3-4; Deut 7:12-14).[22] Practices of valuing and displaying affection to children began to evolve in the first century. In Luke, the births of Jesus and John evoke songs of praise and liberation by Mary (1:46-56) and Zechariah (1:69-80), respectively. Carter notes, "Numerous examples of parents showing affection for children can be noted. Cato, Quintilian and Pliny express affection for their sons, and number of papyri reflect close family relationships."[23] While parental and familial love existed among ancient families and communities, children remained marginal, if not invisible, in society.

Generally, the children of Galilee would be on par with outcasts and the marginalized, having nothing to afford them respect. Both Jewish teachings and Roman sociopolitics would influence ideals about their being and formation.[24] Therefore, as offspring of a colonized people ravished by political, economic, and military occupation, the children Jesus encounters are among the most vulnerable, due to their poverty and lack of imperial citizenship. Furthermore,

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[21] Carter, *Households and Discipleship,* 102.
[22] cf. Carter, *Households and Discipleship*, 108.
[23] Carter, *Households and Discipleship,* 108.
[24] Ptolemy I Soter gained control of Palestine in 301 BCE, inaugurating the Hellenistic period in the region. Pompey, the Roman general, took control of the land in 64 BCE. Therefore, Greco-Roman culture, politics, and ideals had permeated into the social consciousness of the colonized people of Israel for centuries prior to Jesus's ministry and Luke's writings.

social structures categorize children as part of the world of women, confined to the domestic sphere. Robert Tannehill notes, "Girls were raised entirely by women, and boys lived mostly in women's world until the age of puberty."[25] The intersectionality of poverty and colonized status amplifies their low status in the public sphere of adult men. The first audience of this Gospel, whether in Palestine or any another Roman colony, would recognize the intersectionality of oppressions that accompanied geopolitical dominance.

However, in the Gospel of Luke, children are valued. While sharing stories about children with Mark and Matthew, Luke has the distinction of starting its corpus with the birth narrative of John, the baptizer and prophet, as well as with its own version of the birth of Jesus (1:5-2:40).[26] He portrays two families eagerly awaiting, announcing, and celebrating their respective progeny. Furthermore, this storyteller, unlike his synoptic contemporaries, demonstrates a vested interest in the childhood of Jesus, his parents' care, and his education (2:41-52). As an adult, Jesus heals and resurrects children (8:41-56; 9:37-43; 7:11-17), lifts them up as exemplars of the gospel (9:46-48) and models of true leadership (22:24-28).[27] While Luke's storytelling depicts a regard toward children, they had limited to no significance in the first-century social world among adult men. The story of the infants and the disciples' response to them corroborates this reality.

By identifying the children as infants, Luke suggests the presence of another group with limited power: women. They are necessary for their care and feeding.[28] However, the Greek text

[25] Robert C. Tannehill, *Luke* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1996), 268.
[26] cf. Carroll, "'What Then Will This Child Become?'"; Matthew's narrative only includes the birth of Jesus and ends the narrative unit with Herod's slaughter of children (2:16-18).
[27] Carroll, "'What Then Will This Child Become?'" 177. Of these examples, Luke 7:11-17 and 22:24-26 are not found in the other Gospels.
[28] Lynn H. Cohick, "Women, Children, and Families in the Greco-Roman World," in *The World of the New Testament: Cultural, Social, and Historical Contexts*, eds. Joel B. Green and Lee Martin McDonald (Grand Rapids,

obscures the female presence in the person and number of the participle προσέφερον, which translates as "they were bringing." Modern translators perpetuate this offense when they add "people" as the subject of the verb instead of women.[29] As mothers, sisters, grandmothers, nurses, and other female members of the household, women were most likely the ones bringing the infants for Jesus to touch.[30] Without a concrete subject, Luke renders the women invisible, which contributes to the lack of scholarly consideration of the social politics of gender in the story. Not naming the women explicitly, Luke, biblical translators, and interpreters marginalize and silence them; they depict and perpetuate the women's powerlessness and subordination literally and historically in the life of the Jesus movement. Although Luke follows his source material regarding the verb, his use of infants creates an opportunity for gender political analyses in the story.

While Luke's intent for substituting infants for children is unknown, the impact of his redactional choice foregrounds women's concerns for family and themselves. By including infants, the story acknowledges the women along with the children who were in the crowd listening to Jesus and recognizing his power to bring good news and healing. At this point in Luke, Jesus has a reputation for his power to cure terminal diseases and to resurrect the dead (cf. 5:13, 6:19; 7:14; 7:39; 8:44-47). Seeking Jesus's touch for their infants demonstrates their desire

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MI: Baker Academics, 2013), 185. In her study of children in the Greco-Roman world, Cohick notes that children up to the age of seven would have remained in the care of women in the household or a few men, who may act as caregiver. Weaning was around two or three years old.

[29] At best, the King James and American Standard Versions of Luke 18:15-17 render a wooden translation of the story by translating the προσέφερον with simply the third person plural pronoun "they were bringing." Modern translations—including the New Revised Standard Version, the New International Version, along with the New English Translation and the Common English Translation—replace the pronoun with "people."

[30] It is likely that men were among those bringing the infants. Yet, as primary caretakers, they would be feminized in Rome's kyriarchy as members of the domestic sphere. Fathers or *patres* may have accompanied; however, infants would necessitate a mother or a nurse's care for feedings at minimum. The koine Greek grammar dictates that one male figure renders the linguistic plural as masculine.

for preventive and interventionist care for their children's physical and possibly spiritual well-being. Among the privileged classes, 30 to 35 percent of newborns did not live pass their first month and roughly half died by the age of eighteen.[31] Additionally, the women may be in the crowd for their own well-being, as they struggle to survive.

Disciples and Their Privilege

Disciples are followers of Jesus. The Lukan writer does not specify whether the disciples in this story are the twelve whom Jesus chooses as his closest companions or a general group of followers. However, to be able to rebuff visitors and to presume to speak on Jesus's behalf, the members with the nearest proximity to Jesus are likely the twelve, whom he taught (cf. 6:20-49; 8:1) and to whom he gave the power to heal (9:1). They sojourn with him across the regions of Palestine, listen to his stories, observe and even participate in his miracles. Despite living, learning, and working at Jesus's side, they are men shaped by their colonized context as well as by the kyriarchal structures that they respect, revere, and replicate in their status consciousness. The twelve seem to value power, prestige, and privilege (cf. 18:18-30). In this episode with the women and their infants, Jesus works to undo the miseducation of his disciples and of those whom he encounters about God's favor and to whom it is that God's kingdom belongs.

Because the disciples have similar social and economic standing as the women and infants, their behavior toward the group is unexpected for a reader. The twelve men, who likely lived near or at subsistence levels, worked in trades, the fishing economy, and tax collection.[32]

[31] Cohick, "Women, Children, and Families in the Greco-Roman World,"184.
[32] Steven J. Friesen, "Poverty in Pauline Studies: Beyond the So-Called New Consensus," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 26, no. 3 (2004): 340-358.

While sojourning with Jesus, they encounter this particular crowd in the region between Galilee and Samaria on the way to Jerusalem (cf. Luke 17:11). Although the locale is vague, the social and economic landscapes are similar to the places from where the disciples originated: rural and poor. Rural areas had limited resources for income and occupation, with the majority of its occupants living in greater poverty than their coastal or urban counterparts. Their conditions included: agricultural communities with small farms and large tax burdens; laborers who work on property controlled by the local and Roman elites; individual families who live off the land for subsistence.[33] The women and children rebuffed by the disciples live in these conditions. In addition to their poverty, they suffer a compounded burden as financial dependents on adult men in their households. An intersectionality of gender politics, class discrimination, and colonial status forms a triple layer of oppression that cements the status of these women and infants on the lowest rungs of society.

Because the disciples are also colonial subjects of limited means, one would expect that they would facilitate access to Jesus as they have received. Their behavior seems counter to Jesus's earlier teaching that the greatest disciple is one who welcomes a child (Luke 9:46-48). Moreover, a reader would assume that the disciples would recognize the women also as children of Israel like them. However, the disciples' behavior is one of discrimination and reflects class-consciousness.

Therefore, despite their close proximity to Jesus and his teachings of the Kingdom of God's mission to liberate, the disciples demonstrate values of their status-conscious world. They

[33] Ekkehard Stegemann and Wolfgang Stegemann, *The Jesus Movement: A Social History of Its First Century* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1999), 42.

berate (ἐπιτιμάω) those who are vulnerable, marginal, and invisible.[34] By focusing on Jesus's message about receiving the kingdom of God as children, critics note the disciples' behavior as a catalyst for Jesus's teaching without examining their behavior and the power dynamics undergirding it. They contend that the disciples are simply inhospitable or have the wrong attitude.[35] Despite Jesus's previous teaching (9:46-48; 18:9-14), the disciples operate with a status consciousness that treats with disdain not only the children but also the women.[36] Consequently, the disciples' behavior is beyond inhospitable. It is an affront to the personal well-being of their neighbors. It reflects the societal standards and policies on gender and class, which makes it political. It represents their understanding of who can be in relationship with Jesus, which makes it theological.

Luke underscores the disciples' preoccupation with status through the story's placement in the narrative context. Preceding Luke 18:15-17 is the parable of a Pharisee and a tax collector. Jesus introduces the parable as being for and about those who regard others with contempt and themselves as righteous (v. 9). The listening crowd includes disciples, Pharisees (17:20-35), a ruler (18:18), and local community members. Following Jesus's blessing of the infants is his encounter with the rich ruler. In vv. 18-30, the disciples do not hesitate to allow the ruler not only to meet but also to talk with Jesus, which is in stark contrast to their reception of the women

[34] Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, s.v. ἐπιτιμάω. This term is the same Jesus uses to rebuke demons (4:35, 41; 9:42), illness (4:39), and the disciples (9:21, 55) (cf. Johnson, 275-276.).
[35] cf. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel according to Luke*, 1192; Ringe, *Luke,* 226; Tannehill, *Luke,* 267-268; Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*, 280; Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 650-651; González, *Luke*, 214-215; Mikeal C. Parsons, *Luke* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2015), 267. Carroll acknowledges that the narrator leaves unexplained the disciples' intent or motivation for their behavior, and his analysis reflects a caution against filling the gap (361-362). However, Luke offers no clue about his decision to change Mark's παιδία to βρέφη, but this lack does not inhibit Carroll from extrapolating that Luke's intent is to use their vulnerability to depict status reversals as a programmatic element of God's kingdom. The same use of cultural context to comprehend the narrative function of infants in this story may be applied for character analysis of disciples and their behavior in this episode.
[36] Kodell, "Luke and the Children," 424; Clark, "Kingdom, Kids, and Kindness," 240.

and infants. This literary context of Jesus's blessing of the infants suggests that the disciples act with confidence in their discrimination against the women and infants due to their sociopolitical status.

Privilege also plays a role in the disciples' conduct. The obvious privilege comes as members of Jesus's inner circle. This association garners them respect and power among the crowd. In this episode, the disciples take initiative to control the group and who benefits from Jesus's power and presence. However, the disciples' place of privilege is relative in greater society. As fishermen, tax collectors, and subsistence workers without pedigree, patrimony, patronage, and property, the social hierarchy marginalizes them economically and politically. In the public square, their agency in community and on behalf of their families would be limited by their status due to profession, wealth, and colonial subjectivity.[37] However, as members of Jesus's inner circle, they exercise a capacity to allow people interact with him.

The disciples may have rebuffed the women and infants as an exercise of their male privilege. As men, they are able to assert their autonomy, to advocate for their needs, to conduct business in order to sustain a livelihood, and to engage in societal affairs in public sphere. Women's participation in the public is restricted; their place is the domestic sphere of managing the household.[38] The disciples may have reacted to them leaving their homes and engaging a non-kinsman seemingly without male supervision. The women transgress social mores and

[37] The limits of the disciples' privilege become apparent in the following story (Luke 18:18-30). The disciples are a passive entity during the rich ruler's conversation with Jesus, and they wait until its conclusion before speaking. The story is silent about how and why the certain ruler was able to be in conversation with Jesus. In Luke, the characters or people who initiate dialogue with Jesus are, mostly, Pharisees (5:29-36; 6:1-5; 7:36-38; 13:31; 16:14; 17:20; 18:39), rulers, elders, lawyers, and scribes (7:1-14; 10:25-28; 18:18; 20:19-22; 22:66-70; 23:1-5).
[38] Richard Saller, "Women, Slaves, and the Economy of the Roman Household" in *Early Christian Families in Context: An Interdisciplinary Dialogue*, eds. David Balch and Carolyn Osiek (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company), 2003, 189.

ignore their gendered place.[39] Luke's description of the children as infants, which foregrounds their mothers' presence, suggests gender dynamics as a catalyst for the disciples' scorn and for their adverse participation in the moment's social politics. Although women are among Jesus's intimate circle (Luke 8:1-3), these particular women with their infants are not and, therefore, lack clout of membership as well as privileges of maleness. As men and as Jesus's closest associates, the disciples punish the women and infants out of the power and authority afforded to them by gender and the social politics of their context.

For the disciples, the women and infants are the wrong type of people, unworthy of Jesus's attention. Their disadvantage is not poverty, because the disciples themselves have limited economic resources. Their offense is not gender, because the disciples receive financial assistance and companionship from women with privilege, property, and prestige.[40] Their problem is not that they are strangers, because the disciples accept a certain ruler into Jesus's presence. Narrative and cultural evidence suggests the issue is the intersectionality of all three sociopolitical identifying factors. For the safety and health of their infants, these poor women behave out of their audacity and with a hope to see Jesus, for which the disciples punish them. They defy social norms and conventions designed to oppress them so that they may receive God's kingdom promises.

Kingdom Promises

[39] Like the widow in the parable with the judge, these women risk shame and ridicule to achieve justice for themselves and their households (Luke 18:1-8).

[40]cf. Ringe, *Luke*, 112. Luke pauses the narrative to name some and to note the many other women who join the twelve to accompany Jesus through the cities and villages. Ringe asserts, "Apparently, at least some of them were women of means, but instead of hiding in the comfort of their wealth could provide or supporting the missing of Jesus from the safety of their homes, they are said to be traveling with him." The primary reason for mentioning these women is to acknowledge their financial support for Jesus's mission (8:3).

Radical Reversals

By ordering his disciples to let the children come to him (v. 16), Jesus begins to reverse the injustice of their punishing behavior. He receives and rewards the women and children through his touch. The reversal in this moment is threefold: 1) the women and children receive welcome and encouragement, whereas the disciples receive a reprimand; 2) Jesus exalts those who are humbled and humiliated, while humbling those who exalt themselves; 3) the women and children draw nearer to Jesus, whereas the disciples must move to make way. Jesus's words and deeds upend the disciples' expectations regarding access to him and, therefore, the kingdom of God. In his reversals, Jesus brings the women, infants, and disciples into equal status, regard, and reception of God's kingdom promises.

Jesus's welcome signifies God's accessibility to all. Due to gender and economic standing, the women and children represent the least empowered, least resourced, and least respected, even among other poor and rural neighbors. Little to no dignity, status, or honor are afforded to them. The disciples' reaction to the approaching group fits societal norms. However, Jesus declares not only that the women and children are welcome into his domain, but also that the kingdom of God exists for and belongs to (ἐστὶν) them as well. This is a declaration of full inclusion. If the kingdom of God belongs to the least in society, then it is open to everyone.

Jesus's command to allow the vulnerable group near overturns the disciples' exclusionary behavior. Their action seems driven by their self-importance within the crowd and their perceived authority to police the group, rather than by Jesus's example or teachings. Seemingly, the disciples have ignored, forgotten, or misunderstood the lesson that Jesus taught through the parable of a Pharisee and a tax collector about those who regarded themselves as righteous (just)

and showed contempt for others. With his countermand, Jesus rejects their entitled and unrighteous (unjust) behavior.[41] His words and deeds upend not only the disciples' hegemonic performances but also their expectations of his complicity with them. After having exalted themselves through their action, the disciples are humbled. Jesus reverses the disciples' self-identified status among the crowd as well as the women and children's place in his ministry and in God's kingdom. His declaration encourages parity to the sociopolitical dynamics among the group.

Reversals are not always rejections. *Schadenfreude*, the joy over another's misfortune or humbling experience, is a common interpretation of biblical reversals. These analyses point to retribution rather than redemption, punishment rather than justice. In this story, however, Jesus's aim is neither about rejecting nor humiliating his disciples or their humanity. Instead of recasting their status to one of lowliness or marginalization, as the women and children are treated, the reversal repositions everyone as equals. Consequently, the women and children move forward physically and relationally to Jesus, and the disciples shift to facilitate greater access to God's promises through Jesus. These reversals expand an understanding that the kingdom of God belongs to the least in society as well as those in perceived positions of power.[42] Since the kingdom of God belongs to the women and children as well as the disciples, its work includes transforming power relations among the groups so that all may share in the same privileges.

By saying that the kingdom of God belongs to those who are like infants, Jesus does not exclude those whom society privileges from participation or membership in God's justice. Instead, he indicates that the Kingdom belongs especially to those who are considered lowly, to

[41] cf. Luke 18:9-14. Δίκαιος may be translated as righteous or just.
[42] cf. Carroll, *Luke: A Commentary*, 362.

the chagrin of those using worldly standards. Moreover, through his instruction to the disciples and his example before the crowd, Jesus asserts that those who operate with social privileges and power have a responsibility in realizing God's kingdom justice within their communities, especially through their care, decisions, and full inclusion of the most vulnerable. To interpret this story as one that is simply about humility neglects the deeper and more nuanced elements of the gospel embedded in the story.

Seeking Healing as a Sociopolitical Act

The women and others who bring the infants to Jesus recognize his ability to fulfill the Kingdom's promise to heal (cf. Luke 4:18). Jesus's reputation as a healer is widespread throughout the regions of Galilee and Samaria.[43] The group of women comes to him seeking his touch (v. 15, ἅπτω), a form of physical contact, for their children.[44] They desire a divine work that brings transformation as well as healing.[45] Luke 6:17 describes another crowd's attempt to touch Jesus because they understand that healing power comes from him.[46] In addition to caring for an individual's body, physical healings have the power to transform the social, economic, and political circumstances of individuals (e.g., implied in 17:11-19, the ten former lepers are able to return to society and presumably to work, live, and rejoin their families).

By welcoming women and infants, Jesus affirms the group's determination and validates their concerns for their babies. He respects their right to seek healing and protection for their

[43] The literary unit that begins the geographical setting of this story is of Jesus healing the ten lepers (17:11-19).
[44] Matthew imagines a more expansive and explicit request from the group. He writes, "Then they brought children to him so that he would lay hands on them and pray" (19:13).
[45] cf. Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, s.v. ἅπτω.
[46] Other examples in Luke of Jesus's healing touch include 5:13, 7:14, and 8:44.

families. Jesus's response supports their struggles and encourages their transgression of societal norms to acquire justice, equality, and abundance, which God's kingdom promises for their lives and the prospects of their children. He affirms their political actions of navigating the public sphere to care for family and to increase their prospects in society. Jesus demonstrates a commitment to the wholeness of everyone. By evoking the kingdom of God in his response, he connects these political and personal decisions to theological issues. Protecting and caring for infants are as important to Jesus's ministry and God's kingdom as justice, liberation, and human dignity.

Kingdom Promises as Liberationist Imperatives

Luke's version of Jesus touching the infants illustrates liberationist imperatives. Liberationist imperatives are exhortations to dismantle toxic sociopolitical power relationships. The writer's edit of his Markan source intensifies subversive messages against the hegemonic values. By changing Jesus's interaction from children to infants, Luke redirects his audience's attention to the most vulnerable in age, gender, region, and economy. This small redaction compels his readers to consider the sociopolitical realities of those whose lives were shaped by such intersectionality. Luke's subtlety mirrors Jesus's parabolic pedagogy: "He said, "To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of God; but to others I speak in parables, so that 'looking they may not perceive, and listening they may not understand'" (8:10).

The colonial context and Rome's capital punishment perceived, let alone apparent, sedition require the rhetorical stealth before the colonizer, to ensure the survival of both story and storytellers. The narrative itself—including the Gospel—is a hidden transcript designed to be

fully understood by subordinated communities impacted most by the geopolitical domination, those to whom the secrets of the kingdom of God had been given. Coursing through the narrative that many readers have come to understand as about hospitality is a revolutionary teaching that challenges kyriarchal and colonial ideals of power, privilege, and status.

One liberationist imperative is in Jesus's example of affirming and empowering the oppressed and powerless. Beckoning forth the women and infants, Jesus elevates their status as peers among the crowd and disciples. Also, his action subverts colonial propaganda regarding who is worthy of respect and deserving of human dignity. The children's humanity is as sacred in their infancy as in their adulthood. Jesus demonstrates a commitment to the wholeness of everyone in the community. Protecting and caring for infants, the least powerful, is an important component in Jesus's ministry of justice, liberation, and human dignity and in his work in realizing God's kingdom in present life.

Another liberationist imperative is Jesus's example of holding those with authority accountable. While recent interpreters note the disciples' status-conscious behavior toward the women and infants, Clark posits that those in authority must identify with infants and others like them to do the work of social justice.[47] Therefore, one must be humble as outcasts in order to empathize, to understand, and to fight injustices that subordinate and subjugate. His interpretation argues for a reversal in the attitude of those with privilege and power so that they may work in the interests of poor and marginalized communities. This perspective neither requires those with authority to relinquish their power nor exhorts them to participate in systemic

[47] Clark, "Kingdom, Kids, and Kindness," 243. For interpretations that emphasize hospitality and humility as the inverse to the disciples' preoccupation with status, see Ringe, *Luke*, 226; Tannehill, *Luke*, 268; Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 651; Carroll, *Luke: A Commentary,* 362; and Parsons, *Luke*, 268. Tannehill and Parsons also conclude that the story is about status.

change. Even in their voluntary humbled states, those privileged with power do not have to assume responsibility for either the problems or the necessary changes in policy and practices that perpetuate injustices. Humility as a virtue and solidarity as a position are lesser concerns of the story's liberationist imperative. Rather, the imperative emphasizes action-oriented disruptions in practices and policies for social transformation. Jesus does more than identify with children as poor, powerless, and underprivileged; he identifies the sociopolitical dynamics that maintain oppression and overturns them even in his own circle.

While illustrating discriminatory behaviors and lived policies of gender and class injustice, the story demonstrates the power of individuals as change agents in God's kingdom. The disciples' initial choice is to safeguard hegemonic power and gender dynamics. Through Jesus, they must facilitate changes that allow for God's kingdom promises to become manifest for the poor, rural women, and infants. Jesus holds those with power as responsible partners in God's transformative work. As the women push forward, the disciples make way. Jesus's blessing the children illustrates that the kingdom of God requires the participation of everyone—the powerful and the powerless, the privileged and underprivileged—to push forward and pull through widespread transformations.

A third liberationist imperative is receiving the kingdom of God as though it itself were a child. The ambiguity of the Greek permits such an interpretation of 18:17, which positions the kingdom of God as a vulnerable, unseen, and marginal entity.[48] Common interpretations of the verse assert that one is to receive the Kingdom with the humility and meekness of a child (or

[48] Tannehill, *Luke*, 268. Jesus's use of simile between the kingdom of God and a child evokes three possible English translation. Tannehill offers the following option: "(1) 'Whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a child receives….'; (2) 'Whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as one receives a child.…'; (3) 'Whoever does not receive the kingdom-of-God-as-child….' (i.e., the kingdom that is childlike)."

parabolic tax collector).[49] An alternative translation is that one should receive the Kingdom with the hospitality that it displays for children and those who are vulnerable.[50] The least common interpretation identifies the Kingdom itself as a child or infant: "Whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as child [itself] will never enter it."[51] This third way parallels with translations of verse 16 to the effect that the Kingdom belongs to this group.[52] Robert Tannehill posits, "This comparison would fit its present lack of power and status in the world."[53] Therefore, one is to receive Kingdom as Jesus receives the women and infants.

This reading assumes that the disciples and observers have learned from Jesus's example. To tend to the Kingdom and its requirements, they must subvert conventional social and gender hierarchies and transform expectations about those who are worthy of privilege, status, and resources. They must jettison colonizing practices and values to welcome the Kingdom as they must do to welcome infants. More than a change in attitude and identifying with a group's interest, this liberationist imperative insists that the community participates in realizing the health, growth, and flourishing of the Kingdom much like the women for their infants—at any cost.

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[49] Parsons, *Luke*, 268. Parson contends that one's capacity to humble oneself as a child is different from the parabolic tax collector's meekness as one who renders himself subordinate to be justified by God. These distinctions seem not to have a difference. Both characterizations require an autonomous adult to humble oneself either to be worthy of or to participate in God's kingdom. For this reason, this interpreter's distinction seems unclear.
[50] Parsons, *Luke*, 268.
[51] Author's translation.
[52] Tannehill, *Luke*, 268.
[53] Tannehill, *Luke*, 268. For Tannehill, this third view depicts a logical sequence in the child–kingdom comparisons in verses 16 and 17. Consistent with Jesus's remark in 9:48, this interpretation maintains the idea of receiving children, including the kingdom of God as childlike. Furthermore, this perspective exhorts a greater responsibility upon the disciples, the crowd, and those with power in participating in the spread of God's kingdom, realizing its promises in the current times, and engaging in its transformative work of justice in the social and political spheres, especially among the most vulnerable.

Kingdom as Child

To receive the kingdom as though it were an infant, in accordance with Jesus's example, is to bear responsibility as social change agents. Jesus's actions subvert sociopolitical dynamics to invert expectations about who has power, privilege, prestige, and status in God's kingdom. Rural, poor women, and infants are as significant to the community as a rich ruler.[54] As the kingdom of God belongs to everyone, it requires each person to empower the vulnerable and to use one's privilege to ensure everyone's freedom and access to the good news. This interpretation is not about being self-effacing; it is rather about being stewards of one's power, recognizing one's responsibility in changing the sociopolitical realm for the promotion of health and the thriving of the whole community. Consequently, the disciples are to concern themselves with the success of the Kingdom's earthly existence, which requires making sociopolitical changes.

Furthermore, infants signify the potential joys and trials of life, as does the kingdom of God. Although Greco-Roman children were treated as social inferiors, adults anticipated that they would grow, contribute to their lives, as well as bring some challenges. Therefore, disciples should anticipate the Kingdom's huge impact on their lives. Jesus's metaphor of the Kingdom as child may also be a critique of the Roman Empire's acceptance of infanticide as well as the general abuses and disregard of babies. In this matter, the story serves as a hidden transcript to subvert colonial practices.[55] The Kingdom, like a growing child, brings challenges to its stewards. During his travels, Jesus shares the cost of discipleship (Luke 14) and foretells twice

[54] cf. Luke 18:18-30
[55] cf. Parsons, *Luke*, 268.

that it will cause his suffering and death on the cross (9:21-27, 43-45; 18:31-34).[56] As it grows and gains recognition as a force in opposition of colonial politics, economics, and cultures of hegemony, the Kingdom disrupts lives and institutions, even unto death.

Finally, receiving God's kingdom as an infant requires one to be responsive to its activity. Mothers and caretakers nurture and care for the infants in their stewardship. Jesus tends to the women and their children without delay or excuses. Their examples illustrate the manner in which all followers of Jesus should serve in God's kingdom. They are agents of its care.

Kingdom Promises and Sociopolitical Relationship

Luke's portrayal of Jesus blessing the children advocates transformation in sociopolitical relationships. The disciples use their privilege to deny women and children access to Jesus. In the moment, they attempt to create, regulate, and maintain customs for engaging him on the basis of their social and spatial proximity to him. However, by shunning the disciples' acts, Jesus diminishes their power and authority over the women and children, giving them equal access to God's kingdom promise of healing and freedom. Through his assertion that the kingdom belongs to this group of poor women and their infants, Jesus announces a new power dynamic that uplifts and includes them in his family like the disciples. Gender, economic conditions, and an association with Jesus are no longer conditions for participation in the God's kingdom. This story is an antihegemonic vision of Jesus's community. Not only is this Luke's theological message, it is also his political stance on the Kingdom's promise. While Jesus's acts toward the women and children are personal, particularly pertaining to the physical care of the family, they

[56] In Acts, many apostles and disciples experience persecution because they proclaim the kingdom of God in the name of Jesus, including Peter and the apostles (ch. 5), Stephen (ch. 7), and Paul with Silas (ch. 16).

are also political in their restoration of the groups' agency, allowing them to occupy material and theological space in the Kingdom's welcome, hospitality, and identification with them.

Instead of needing permission, the women and children have an open invitation to Jesus. Jesus's hospitality affirms their courage in seeking him and the good news despite potential obstacles of the public sphere. An arc of justice bends towards those whom society deemed unworthy and denied privilege, power, or prestige; it rewards those who fight for the rights of dignity, health, self-determination, and wholeness for all. Luke's redactional and literary choices for this story prove that hospitality is more than providing access, that it is also power sharing— it is political.

Kingdom Perils

The story of Jesus blessing the infants makes no obvious commentary about the Roman Empire. While offering a statement about the kingdom of God, its perceived teaching on hospitality does not instigate subversion of imperial values, culture, or politics. Instead, it presents ambivalence— repulsion and attraction— towards colonial practices among the disciples, the narrator, and modern interpreters.

The disciples mistreat the women and children on the basis of colonial constructions of gender and socioeconomic politics. Yet, Jesus exercises a counter ideology with a welcoming that resists mimicking imperial and hegemonic values of gender and economic superiority. Neither Jesus nor the narrator condemns the disciples' discriminatory behavior; their silence may suggest complicity or mild annoyance with hegemonic schemes. Even recent scholars say little about the disciples. Interpretations include minimizing their behavior by characterizing it as

unsympathetic, highlighting their status consciousness, and hypothesizing a desire to protect Jesus's time.[57] A scholarly consensus is that the disciples accept worldly values and do not understand the gospel message of the kingdom of God. However, these conclusions do not deconstruct the story and its cultural context to analyze the theological, political, and personal actions that lie beneath the surface of the disciples' action or Jesus response. Colonial influences become invisible though operational. Without calling them out, they remain pernicious, passing as wrong attitudes while ignoring misogynistic, class-driven, and colonial power plays.

Simplicity in the storytelling obscures the good news to the poor, radical reversals, and liberationist imperatives in its teachings. Like Jesus's parables, these teachings about the kingdom of God may be "so that looking, they do not see/ hearing, they do not understand."[58] On its surface, the story is nonconfrontational, with a dominical saying that suggests one needs to be open or humble as a child to receive the kingdom of God. Yet, first-century audiences may recognize Jesus's action and rhetoric as resistant to Roman colonialism and intersectional oppressions. As subordinated groups on the underside of society, they recognize the aggressions, discriminations, and vulnerabilities the disciples perpetrate against the women and infants—the same injustices and inequities that are blind to and carried out by those with power, privilege, and prestige.

As a hidden transcript, the narrative wraps the subversive messages against oppressive systems in the enigma of its simplicity. While the Lukan Jesus does not indict Rome and its viral superiority complex that infects the disciples and causes their cruelty, he does not have to,

[57] Fitzmyer, *The Gospel according to Luke*, 1192-1194; Ringe, *Luke*, 226; Tannehill, *Luke*, 269; Parsons, *Luke*, 267-268; Carroll, *Luke: A Commentary*, 361.
[58] Luke 8:10b, author translation.

because the people whom the colonizer disempowers and diminishes already know. Being explicit with its indictment against the imperial power, politics, and policy would attract the oppressors' attention and court destruction as seditious propaganda. The liberative message remains concealed, surviving for those who are able to see and understand. Consequently, the call to transform sociopolitical power relationships as a significant component to participating in God's kingdom becomes muffled by interpretations of moral character, which ignore context and power.

Conclusion

Despite leaving their possessions, following Jesus, and listening to his teachings, the disciples' contempt for the women and infants demonstrates the power of their miseducation as colonial subjects. Such power belies any knowledge, tradition, and values they may have learned from scriptures or observed of Jesus. Their behavior perpetuates sociopolitical power dynamics that privilege gender, social, and economic hegemonies of the Roman Empire. Neither the disciples nor future scholars recognize the liberationist imperatives before them in Jesus's interaction with the women and infants.

The disciples' example indicates vigilance and diligence in daily practices and thinking as necessities for transforming. Although Jesus counters their abuse through his invitation of the women and infants to God's kingdom, he does not address their behavior. His silence diminishes the harmfulness of their actions to the point of characterization as a lack of welcome or child-like humility. Yet, Luke's placement of the story indicts the disciples for not listening to Jesus's previous teachings: about those who presume themselves to be righteous and treat others with

contempt (Luke 18:9), the importance of serving the least as a sign of worship to God (9:47-48), or the need to act justly to vulnerable members of the community (Luke 18:1-8). These lessons anticipate Jesus's encounter with the rich ruler in the following story and his vision of a Kingdom that transforms power dynamics so that all may experience treasures in heaven.

CHAPTER 6

Distributing It All: Property, Privilege, and Power

(Luke 18:18-30)

18 And a certain ruler asked him saying, "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

19 Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone. 20You know the commandments: Do not commit adultery; do not murder; do not steal; do not give false testimony; honor your father and mother."

21 And he said, "I have kept all these since my youth."

22 When Jesus heard him, he said to him, "There is still one thing lacking from you.[a] All that you have, sell and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then, come, follow me.

23 But when he heard this, he became sad because he was extremely rich.

24 When Jesus saw him becoming sad, he said, "How difficult it is for those who have possessions to enter into the kingdom of God. 25 It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than a rich person to enter God's kingdom.

26 And those who heard [this] said, "Then, who can be saved?"

27 He replied, "What is impossible for humans is possible for God."

28 Then, Peter said, "Look, we left our own[b] and followed you."

29 And he said to them, "Truly, I tell you that no one who has left home, wife, brothers, parents, or children for the sake of God's kingdom, 30 who will not receive many times more in this time and in the time to come eternal life.

Tranlsation Notes

[a] Refers to a dative of means. Another translation of the phrase is "by means of you."

[b] Other translations have "all" (King James Version, New International Version (2011), New Jerusalem Bible or "everything" (Common English Bible, Contemporary English Version), repeating the language of Jesus to ruler. The New Revised Standard Version translates as "homes," which is less accurate of a translation of the Greek but may be an encompassing term for the list presented in v. 29.

Introduction

Jesus's conversation with a rich ruler is about power and transforming society. While discipleship and eternal life are conspicuous themes, the story continues Luke's polyvalent vision of God's kingdom as a manifestation of human participation in the transformation of power in sociopolitical relationships. Through redaction and rhetoric of a hidden transcript, it communicates justice and encourages eradication of geopolitical social structures that maintained and perpetuated social, political, and economic oppression. This particular story of a certain ruler culminates the lessons of the Kingdom found throughout the parables and stories in 18:1-30.

Theological teaching and personal actions undergird themes of power and transformation in the narrative unit that concludes with this episode of the rich ruler. Through conversation and storytelling, Jesus teaches the assembled crowd (cf. 17:20-18:30) about the interplay of theology, personal choices, and politics: the theological is personal and the personal is political. While the juxtaposition of the infants (18:15-17) and the rich ruler (18:18-30) illustrate a status reversal as expressed in v. 14, themes of salvation and discipleship unite this whole literary section in their consideration of the kingdom of God.[1] Individual participation is critical to living into Kingdom promises to care for the social, political, and economic health of the whole community. In addition to an eschatological hope, eternal life begins with current reality.

Luke 18:18-30 is an invitation to join God's transformative work. Many scholars interpret this story, with varied nuances, as a lesson on almsgiving.[2] However, renouncing wealth

[1] Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997), 653.
[2] Green, 656; Robert C. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation, Volume One,* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 129; Halvor Moxnes, *The Economy of the Kingdom: Social Conflict and Economic Relations in Luke's Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 119-123; James A. Metzger, *Consumption and Wealth in Luke's Travel Narrative* (Boston: Brill, 2007), 169; Justo L. González, *Luke* (Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 217; Christopher Hays, *Luke's Wealth Ethics: A Study of Their Coherence and Character* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 166; John T. Carroll, *Luke: A Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012), 364; Daniel J. Hays, "Sell Everything You Have and Give to the Poor: The

and giving to the poor provide only a temporary relief to numerous systemic issues that collude in human injustices of economic depravity.[3] In this chapter, I assert that Jesus's conversation with the ruler expands beyond almsgiving to command divestiture and distribution of all that he has—sociopolitical power. His possessions—property, patronage, and patriarchy—amount to power. Divesting includes selling his possessions, disengaging from profiting, and disavowing political systems that benefit him and perpetuate economic disparity and social disempowerment. Distribution apportions wealth and power, flattens hierarchies of social status, and advances people's right to self-determination. While a story about discipleship, Luke 18:18-30 contains a subversive message, which calls not only the ruler but all who are in the crowd to participate in a revolution to upend a social order of power and privilege. Luke's retelling of Jesus's encounter with the ruler describes a reordering of society through social relationships. Such reordering usurps a culture that uses oppression as currency and a theology that assumes earthly prosperity as the primary signifier of God's grace.

Historical-Cultural Context: Property, Patronage, Patriarchy, and Power

A ruler is no ordinary rich man. In Luke's context, he signifies prosperity and power that come from thriving in the Roman colonial system. He maintains a high level of sociopolitical status due to his extreme wealth (v. 23) and standing within the community. By referring to him specifically as a ruler and describing him as very wealthy, unlike the parallel stories in Mark (10:17-31) and Matthew (19:16-30), Luke's redactions are subversive. They are laden with a

Old Testament Prophetic Theme of Justice as the Connecting Motif of Luke 18:1-19:10" in *Journal of the Evangelical Society* (2012), 56-57.

[3] These injustices include colonialization, sexism, classism, extreme taxation, land theft, and geopolitical ethnicization rooted in Roman supremacy.

complex lattice of sociopolitical power, geopolitical concerns, and critical commentary on economic disparity. Jesus's command for the ruler to divest as part of his discipleship represents a great sacrifice of his power, which comes from his possessions and familial networks. By selling and distributing everything, he gives up all his capital—power and leadership.

Property as Currency

As a major form of capital, property was the currency of power in the agrarian society of first-century CE Palestine. A limited resource, it was the primary means for production; the majority of the population depended on the agricultural industry for survival.[4] The acquisition of property equated to wealth accumulation as long as a family could manage lean years.[5] Property is more than land.[6] It includes all possessions: waterways, buildings, animals, produce, agricultural equipment, tools, etc. These possessions had various sources: inherited through patrimony, obtained from insolvent neighbors, or seized through military conquest.[7] As described in chapter 2, various colonial rulers of ancient Palestine dispossessed local people of fertile lands over the course of centuries and distributed them among themselves, allies, and loyal subordinates. Consequently, property and possessions measured wealth and social status. John Stambaugh and David Balch note, "So too in the Galilean world of the Gospels, every rich man whose source of income is identified owes his wealth (with two exceptions) to agriculture (Matt.

[4] K.C. Hanson and Douglas E Oakman, *Palestine in the Time of Jesus: Social Structures and Social Conflicts,* 2nd edition. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 97.
[5] Stambauch and Balch, *The New Testament in Its Social Environment,* 65.
[6] Sharon H. Ringe, *Luke* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), 228.
[7] Stambauch and Balch, *The New Testament in Its Social Environment*, 65; Hanson and Oakman, *Palestine in the Time of Jesus*, 104.

13:3-4; 21:28; 25:14-30; Luke 19:11-27)."[8] While unidentified in the story, the source of the certain ruler's wealth most likely came from property possession and agriculture.

Patriarchy

The *paterfamilias*, the male head of the family, was the property overseer and asset manager. As families accumulated wealth, they controlled production, employment, and indebtedness. Wealth did not automatically equate to high social status; however, every elite member of society had wealth.[9] These elite families did not engage in the agricultural processes directly; rather, they made production decisions, often favoring crops that store well and yielded the greatest commercial value. In addition to the patriarchal system, families formed through kyriarchy—a system with a lord who oversees many families. Elites dominated other families: they leased land to laborers and lent to artisans.[10] Only a few major families of the upper echelons of the Roman Empire—imperial prefects, local governors, and even the high priests—controlled the majority of capital and assets through land rights, leasing systems, and extractive taxation.[11] Peasant families within local villages were beholden to the estate lord. As a result, the elites influenced the region's larger economy.

In addition to their wealth, elite family networks became foundational for consolidating social and political power. They developed reciprocal relationships among themselves by

[8] John E. Stambauch and David L. Balch, *The New Testament in Its Social Environment* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1986), p. 65. The two exceptions include the merchant who finds a pearl (Matthew 13:45-46) and Zacchaeus, a chief tax collector (Luke 19:1-10).
[9] cf. Stambaugh and Balch, *The New Testament in Its Social Environment,* 65.
[10] Hanson and Oakman, *Palestine in the Time of Jesus*, 95-96.
[11] Hanson and Oakman, 107-108. The scholars explain, "Redistribution exchanges were replicated throughout society. Their major impact was to remove goods from the control and enjoyment of most people. The terms *extraction, redistribution,* and *tribute* reflect the political nature of these distributive mechanisms. All of these terms emphasize that the benefits in ancient economy flowed 'upward' to the advantage of the elites" (108).

providing accommodations during travels, loans for investments, and political support during elections and appointments.[12] Reciprocity governed the personal, social, and political relationships.[13] Family connections and wealth were the evidence of social and political standing in the community.

Patronage

Another component of the socio-political power structure was the patron system. The system involves a transaction relationship between a patron and client. K.C. Hanson and Douglas Oakman explain, "Patrons are elite persons (male or female) who can provide benefits to others on a personal basis because of a combination of superior power, influence, reputation, position and wealth."[14] Clients received economic and social support: employment, loans, education, training, housing, and references. In ancient Roman society, one's survival depended upon their connections to family, friends, and patrons.[15] In exchange, clients gave support, votes, and the appearance of importance through tributes and entourages; additionally, they owed labor, debts, and taxes to their patron or familial lord. Power differentials and interdependence between the poor masses and elite families were disproportionate, as patrons extracted much of their clients' time and labor for a social cloak of security.[16] Both patron and client needed the patronage system for personal survival. Their relationship was symbiotic.

[12] Stambaugh and Balch, *The New Testament in Its Social Environment*, 63.
[13] Stambaugh and Balch, *The New Testament in Its Social Environment*, 64.
[14] Hanson and Oakman, *Palestine in the Time of Jesus*, 65.
[15] Hanson and Oakman, *Palestine in the Time of Jesus*, 65.
[16] Cf. Hanson and Oakman, *Palestine in the Time of Jesus*, 65.

While personal, patron-client relationships were also political. Clients provided clout and influence to patrons, who leveraged this support as political capital. These familial as well as fictive kinships created political families. Politics were not simply controlled by individuals, but by one or more political families who dominated other families.[17] Essentially, the patronage system was about survival and politics.

Power and Sociopolitics

Material wealth, patronage, extended families, and fictive kinships were pillars of power in first-century Palestine. They created a gravitational pull towards elite families and patrons for transactions of political and economic favors. As in any society, the familial network, whether genetic or acquired, and wealth were the basis for highly regarded social standings, prestige, leadership roles, political office, and power.[18] Moreover, favor from the colonizers extended a family's sociopolitical influence.[19] Elites engaged in nepotistic appointments to civil servant positions and other offices to maintain and perpetuate dominance.[20] The combination of property, social status, family allegiances, patronage system, financial dealings, and social maneuvering produced political power.

With socio-political power through personal wealth and connections as well through municipal elections, elite members engaged in governing and civil politics. As elected officials or as influential leaders, they invested in the people's favor by sponsoring public games,

[17] Hanson and Oakman, *Palestine in the Time of Jesus*, 75.
[18] Hanson and Oakman, *Palestine in the Time of Jesus*, 181.
[19] Hanson and Oakman, *Palestine in the Time of Jesus*, 61.
[20] Hanson and Oakman, *Palestine in the Time of Jesus*, 75.

financing buildings, and funding public services.[21] Stambaugh and Balch explain, "Social superiors gave food or money to their inferiors; municipal patrons gave buildings and endowments to cities; princes donated aqueducts and temples to client kingdoms."[22] Their philanthropy created another avenue for cultivating a generous reputation and popularity, resulting in greater authority.

While mastering their own destinies, the sociopolitical elites exercised control in other people's lives. Their decisions on economic policy, municipal ordinances, rents, loans, and taxes affected the ability of the masses to work, to feed their families, and to engage in daily affairs. Essentially, local rulers determined the survival of the region's majority who lived at or below subsistence levels. The politics of the land were deeply personal, especially among those living in poverty.

Power over the People

With a social structure established on the basis of transactional relationships, the patronage system was a major vehicle and cultural institution through which sociopolitical and economic superiors related to those determined to be of an inferior status, i.e., the poor. The elites, who were the patrons, relied on laborers and others to maintain society and produce capital; the workers, who were the clients, looked to the patrons for protection and support. Material resources, skilled labor, reputation, and honor were forms of currency flowing through patronage relationships, where the lives of those impoverished by the system depended upon their political relationships for personal well-being. For the poor, the politics were very much

[21] Stambugh and Balch, *The New Testament in Its Social Environment*, 65.
[22] Stambaugh and Balch, *The New Testament in Its Social Environment*, 64.

personal, since perceived underperformance could jeopardize the support and employment given to them.

Due to land confiscation by colonial leaders or out of indebtedness, most rural people worked the properties of patrons and elites. Many were tenant farmers working rented lands of absentee landlords, or slaves.[23] Often, the laborers rented and worked the land that they had once owned, with the profits of production going to urban elites and rulers. While some of the poor worked in the fishing industry and as artisans, the agricultural complex was the prominent employer.

Because poverty was rampant, the wealth and power of elites easily overwhelmed the general population. In the advanced agricultural economy of the period, the majority lived slightly above to below subsistence levels. The group's material concerns ranged from a constant struggle for food, clothing, and shelter for survival to abject poverty where death was always imminent. Heuristic models of Greco-Roman economic scale theorize that approximately 80 to 90 percent of urban populations were economically vulnerable.[24] Rural contexts likely had higher percentages, as their economic lives were more precarious. Urban areas offered more avenues for a robust middling group—including merchants, soldiers, artisans, traders, shop owners, tavern owners—due to land routes and seaways. In contrast, the rural region contained

[23] Bruce W. Longenecker, *Remember the Poor: Paul, Poverty, and the Greco-Roman World* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), 23.
[24] Cf. Longenecker, *Remember the Poor: Paul, Poverty, and the Greco-Roman World*, 44-59. In addition to his own scholarship, Longenecker analyzes and references the heuristic models of economy of scales developed through the various works of Pauline scholar Steven J. Friesen (see Longenecker, 44, fn. 22 for Friesen's bibliography of this topic) and a revised work in a co-authored article by Walter Scheidel and Steven J. Friesen ("The Size of the Economy and the Distribution of Income in the Roman World," *Journal of Roman Studies*, 99 (2009)). Respective economic models by Longenecker, Friesen, and Scheidel with Friesen focused on the Greco-Roman urbanism. One could extrapolate that economic conditions in rural regions were worse than urban areas.

limited avenues for survival through wages and profits. Statistically, seventy to ninety percent of the population depended on the land-rich minority, who governed every aspect of their lives.

The politics and economies of Jesus's audience and the Lukan readers were domains governed by elite families. Amassing property and controlling production, the paterfamilias dictated the lives and livelihood of blood relatives and fictive kin alike, while extracting labor and capital from workers. Their wealth facilitated a perceived, and then realized, social standing as superior. It generated power and influence among sociopolitical peers and intimidated into submission subordinated groups. Property, patriarchy, patronage, and power were possessions of the rich in ancient Palestine.

Power Plays in Luke 18:18-30: A Narrative Examination

By portraying the rich man as a ruler, Luke connects the character's wealth with his kinship and power. Jesus's request for the ruler to sell and distribute all he has includes his family relations, property, position, and potential inheritance.[25] The rich ruler must confront his love of wealth, which includes his estate and its association with his extended biological and fictive families, whom he leads.[26] Jesus's challenge for the ruler to distribute his possession is a call to share his power and property in order to allow for justice and equity throughout the larger community. After introducing and contextualizing the rich ruler and the crowd in this story, this section examines Luke's vision of a community actively participating in God's kingdom call to transform sociopolitical power dynamics in society. Luke's story of a certain rich ruler evokes a

[25] Cf. Yan Yang, "The Rich Ruler (Luke 18:18-30) and Chreia Rhetorical Practice in Roman Empire—Luke's Strategy to Exhort the Rich *Ordo* in Roman Society," *Asia Journal of Theology* 26, no. 1 (April, 2012): 14.
[26] Kenneth E. Bailey, *Through Peasant Eyes: More Lucan Parables, Their Culture and Style* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1980) 164-165.

reader to examine and distribute power as part of their discipleship to change policies, politics, and privileges. Its subversive narrative aims to establish on earth God's kingdom promises, which prioritize those with the least, create equity of material resources among the people, and reorient power structures to secure justice and freedom for everyone.

A Certain Ruler

The narrative's certain ruler has prestige, privilege, and power due to property, patriarchy, and patronage.[27] With the qualifier "certain," Luke allows the audience to imagine him as a ruler within one's particular context. Who he is and what he signifies are not unique to Jesus's time or location. Like the widow and judge (18:1-8), this story can apply to many. To describe the ruler as simply a wealthy man would preclude Lukan themes of power and the kingdom of God from the story. Furthermore, this Lukan depiction advances the writer's hidden transcript and postcolonial critique of the geopolitics at work in the narrative setting of early first-century Palestine as well as in the author's contemporary context in the latter part of the century somewhere in the Roman Empire. The designation as ruler allows the author to comment surreptitiously on colonial values while teaching the gospel of the Kingdom.

The ruler is similar to the parabolic characters of judge and Pharisee as well as to Jesus's disciples in the preceding stories. All have power, stature, and influence to impact the lives of others by making rulings, setting policies, and distributing resources. Like the judge featured in the parable (18:1-8), the ruler has the political, judicial, and administrative power to create or ease other's sufferings. Additionally, like the Pharisee (18:9-14), he is self-assured in his sense

[27] Cf. Carroll, *Luke: A Commentary,* 363.

of piety and righteousness. Like the disciples (18:15-17), he has the ability to exclude people from access to various resources. Finally, like all three, he receives an opportunity to participate in the Kingdom by sharing his own power and, therefore, transforming the sociopolitical power dynamics of his community.

Generally, the term "ruler" is unambiguous with regard to political power. It connotes an ability to shape and influence lives systemically and institutionally through laws, taboos, mores, and customs.[28] Power bestowed upon a ruler comes from either a sovereign or a group who has determined that this individual has superior traits or assets. Rulers have authority to employ resources and police citizens into compliance. While this Gospel story lacks detail or explanation regarding the man's authority, the simple characterization as ruler provides major clues regarding his significance to Jesus's teaching and Luke's narrative.

While a native among the people, the man has economic, social, and political dealings with the Roman Empire. Luke is subtle with this detail. Because Luke has a habit of including ethnicizations of Gentile characters or rulers, the lack of ethnic specification in the story suggests that the ruler is local.[29] As a local leader, he still has a relationship with the colonial authorities, who run politics, control people with the military, and regulate landowners with the ability to seize and levy taxes. To maintain his power, even with the people on his side, the ruler must

[28] Hays, "Sell Everything You Have and Give It to the Poor," 55. Hays observes that New Testament references link ἄρχων to various Jewish leadership positions in synagogues, on Sanhedrin, and in the temple as high priests. Referring to the Lukan scholarship of Darrell L. Bock, he notes, "Although Luke often uses this term for the rulers of Pharisees, especially in contexts where they are opposed to Jesus, Bock suggests that if this man were a Pharisee, then Luke probably would have mentioned it" (cf. Darrell L. Bock, *Luke 9:51-24:53: Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1997), 1476). While Hays seems to concur with Bock's observation that the ruler is magistrate or an official of a high priest, neither scholar provide any literary or historical evidence to verify this characterization.

[29] If the ruler was a Gentile, Luke would have disclosed it either in his description or by their name. The writer often identifies people who were not already considered a child of Israel. Examples include centurions (Luke 7:1-8; 23:47) and Samaritans (9:52; 10:33; 17:16); Augustus (2:1), Quirinus (2:2), Tiberius (3:1) and Pontius Pilate (3:1).

cooperate with Rome and its vassal leaders.[30] Therefore, the generic designation as "a certain ruler" veils the story's geopolitics and renders him as a stock character, obfuscating elements of Luke's counter-imperialist rhetoric. Nevertheless, the ruler's geopolitical ties would be an assumed fact to the crowd present in Jesus's audience as well to Luke's readers.

In addition to his politics, the certain ruler has power through his wealth. Luke depicts him as extremely wealthy (πλούσιος σφόδρα), which likely comprised many residential and agricultural properties.[31] His economic station could have been inherited, gifted, or stolen. Regardless, to cultivate and capitalize on the land, he would have to employ laborers, participate in land leasing, and likely have enslaved people. The toil of mostly poor people would undergird his material wealth.

For those familiar with the Septuagint, mention of a ruler conveys a message about the underside of power. The prophetic literature uses the term to depict leaders as purveyors of injustice. Daniel Hays observes that they were often cited for not practicing justice and for opposing the prophets, which led to their fall under God's judgment.[32] Illustrating his point, Hays cites, as an example, Isaiah 1:23: "Your rulers are rebellious, companions of thieves, loving bribes, seeking after rewards; not pleading for orphans, and not heeding the cause of widows."[33] Luke's frequent use of Isaiah facilitates an association of the term ruler in this story with the

[30] Yang, "The Rich Ruler (Luke 18:18-30)," 6.
[31] The Synoptic Gospel parallels describe the certain ruler as having many possessions (Mark 10:22 and Matthew 19:22). While having possessions connote wealth, Luke's description σφόδρα illustrates a greater extreme of economic abundance. Because this portion of the narrative (Luke 9:52-19:35) takes place in the interior regions from Galilee through Samarian into the Judea, agricultural industry is the most likely source of his wealth.
[32] Hays, "Sell Everything You Have and Give It to the Poor," 56. Hays cites the following scriptural references: Isa 1:10, 23; 3:14; 22:3; 28:14; 29:10; 40:23; 41:25; Jer 1:18; 2:26; 4:9; 8:1; 22:1-5; 33:10-16 [26:10-16 English}; 39:32 [32:32 English]; 44:14-15 [37:15-14 English]; Ezek 7:27; 12:10, 12; 17:12; 19:1; 22:27 [22:20 English]; Hos 5:10; 7:3, 5, 16; 9:15; 13:10
[33] Hays, "Sell Everything You Have and Give It to the Poor," 56.

unjust ones depicted in the prophetic literature.[34] The Gospel writer further encodes a connotation of injustice in the term with its inclusion in the narrative section 18:1-30, which has several references to justice and righteousness (cf. vv. 3, 5, 7-8, 9). Thus, Luke implies that the ruler is unjust through both intertextual allusions to Isaiah and the narratives that precede this story.

Despite implied connections to colonizing politics and scriptural connotations of injustice, Luke reveals the certain ruler's devotion to the God of Israel in his dialogue with Jesus. First, he comes to Jesus in search of understanding eternal life. The inquiry is a sincere one, especially in comparison to a preceding episode where a lawyer poses the exact same question to Jesus, only to test him (10:25). In both scenarios Jesus gives unexpected answers to each respective inquirer, sharing a common, though different, theme in their exchanges: the love commandment.[35] To the ruler, he expresses the love commandment indirectly by asking about his familiarity with the second table of the Ten Commandments: do not commit adultery, do not murder, do not steal, do not give false testimony, and honor one's parents (18:20). While Matthew makes an explicit connection in his list, the other Gospel writers share that the overall meaning of those commandments align with the message to love one's neighbor (cf. Lev. 19:18). Second, the ruler demonstrates his devotion through his reply to Jesus. He confirms that not only is he familiar with the commandments but also that he has obeyed them since his youth (18:21). No doubt, this ruler is a faithful son of Abraham.

[34] Cf. James A. Sanders, "Isaiah in Luke," *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology* 26, no. 2 (April, 1982): 150.

[35] Jesus answers the lawyer with the commandments to love God (Deut 6:5) and neighbor (Lev 19:18). When the lawyer pressed by asking who is my neighbor, Jesus tells the parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:30-37).

As a ruler, and therefore a patron, he is likely a major benefactor in the region. According to local community standards (cf. 18:26) and sociopolitics, he is worthy to inherit eternal life. At first glance, this ruler subverts intertextual expectation as a purveyor of injustice. Jesus's response and his subsequent dialogue with the crowd reverse this favorable perspective of the ruler and introduce opportunities for critical transformations—radical reversal—for everyone: a radical reversal.

The Crowd

The rich ruler is among the crowd present for Jesus's teachings about the Kingdom of God being among them (17:21), his illustrations with parables (18:1-14), and his welcoming of the women and infants (18:15-17). The crowd includes people of various social statuses: those impoverished, day laborers, tax collectors, fishermen, rich people, community leaders, and Pharisees. Luke's audience would recognize the diversity as a reflection of themselves—as many people from urban and rural provinces throughout the Roman Empire. A universal group, all are either current or prospective disciples.

The crowd connects wealth with salvation. When Jesus compares a camel entering an eye of a needle with a rich person entering God's kingdom (v. 25), they register surprise, exclaiming "Then, who can be saved" (v. 26)?[36] Scriptures and society undergird the crowd's expectations that wealth is a symbol of God's salvation. The LXX has many stories, ordinances, and proverbs that teach prosperity as a product of God's grace, a manifestation of faithfulness to God, a

[36] Mark 10:26 and Matthew 19:25 describes the crowd as being 'greatly astounded'(NRSV) by Jesus's commentary about the parable. Although Luke omits this description, the crowd's utterance still reflects upended expectations.

reward for obedience to the Torah, and a consequence of hard work.[37] Therefore, through readings of scripture and teachings of leaders, this ancient version of the prosperity gospel is immanent in the people's theological consciousness. In the rhetoric of sociopolitics, wealth and salvation aligns with Roman ideology of their own supremacy and superiority as a consequence of divine favor and consistent cultic worship; public art, currency, festivals, and Roman iconography inhabiting Israel's sacred spaces underscore this imperial theology.[38] Even without scriptural theology or civil ideology, the crowd could assume that the rich would get everything they want, salvation included.[39] Because the wealthy can afford civic philanthropy and public almsgiving, their good works appear righteous and in accordance to the Torah. The crowd's reaction reveals an assumption that this ruler, who has kept the commandments since his youth and amassed wealth, would be an obvious candidate for receiving eternal life.

Jesus's disciples are also among the crowd, as indicated by Peter's reply to the camel parable. Acting as a spokesperson, he highlights that he and others have already left their possessions—families and property—to follow Jesus. Jesus's response to Peter both implies and assuages potential anxiety regarding the consequence of discipleship. Their scene demonstrates a continued significance of home and family to the people and Jesus's recognition of such. A caveat in Jesus's teaching is that possessions and prosperity are no longer earthly symbols of

[37] Cf. Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 657. According to Deuteronomy 28, prosperity and wealth are rewards for obedience to God and observance of all the commandments; curses and poverty are the consequence for disobedience. Many precepts in Proverbs associate industriousness and righteousness with wealth while linking laziness and wickedness with poverty.
[38] One could argue that its military dominance is an outcome of divine favor that allows Rome to conquer peoples, to confiscate their land, to conscript the male population for the extraction of labor, and even to kill them.
[39] Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel according to Luke X-XXV: Introduction, Translation, and Notes*, Anchor Bible Series (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1985), 1203.

one's faithfulness. Yet, abundance is still an eschatological reward for participation in God's kingdom.

Reversals, Distribution, and Discipleship

Radical reversal in social status, distribution of wealth, and discipleship are components for transforming power in relationships with a goal for wholeness in a community and God's kingdom. While almsgiving is both a valid and consistent reading of Jesus's teachings in Luke's story of the rich ruler, the interpretive variations of this thematic conclusion undercalculate the cost of the discipleship being evoked in the narrative. More than giving away money and property, Jesus calls for a redistribution of power. Almsgiving changes lives; power transforms society.

Radical Reversals

As with the preceding stories in this narrative unit, Jesus's encounter with a certain ruler is a reversal story. The Markan and Matthean parallels conclude their respective versions with the aphorism, "The first shall be last and the last shall be first."[40] Luke appends this saying at the conclusion of his commentary on the parable of a Pharisee and tax collector. Knowledge of the Markan source material (10:31) elucidates Luke's redaction, which fastens this story with the parable, and as a consequence facilitates further connection of all four narratives of 18:1-30 with a reversal theme.

The certain ruler experiences a number of humbling and reversal experiences in the text. As a political leader with sociopolitical power that surpasses almost everyone in the vicinity, the

[40] Mark 10:31; Matthew 19:30.

rich man would recognize other important figures and expect to be recognized as one as well. He acknowledges Jesus's leadership in the areas of Jewish teaching and living. He greets him with a compliment and honorific, "Good Teacher" (Luke 18:18). As a ruler, he would expect a reciprocal compliment per cultural custom.[41] However, Jesus denies him this expression of respect. In addition to answering him without a title, Jesus rebuffs the man for calling him good. Instead of being deterred by Jesus's response, the ruler perseveres and continues to subordinate himself to Jesus's teachings. To this point in the Gospel, the ruler is the highest status person whom Jesus has encountered, and he becomes like every other person in the narrative who solicits his help. Jesus humbles the ruler by engaging him indiscriminately.

Despite having many possessions, the ruler learns that he is lacking. His inquiry implies a sincere understanding that something is missing. Apparently, he is ignorant of some aspects of the kingdom of God and its requirement for eternal life. Perhaps, he needs to do something to secure eternal life (cf. 18:18). His description as a wealthy ruler and his obedience of the commandments should evince favor in God's sight—not a lacking. All three Gospel accounts agree that the ruler missed the point of the listed commandments, which are about human relationships and loving one's neighbor.[42]

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[41] Bailey, *Through Peasant Eyes*, 162.

[42] In Luke 18:20, Jesus asks the ruler whether he knew a certain set of commandments: do not commit adultery; do not murder; do not steal; do not give false testimony; honor your father and mother (18:20). The author does not explicitly associate these commandments with the love commandment. Rather, Matthew takes a direct approach by concluding his list with "you shall love your neighbor as yourself" (19:19); Mark makes this connection by adding to the list an admonition against defrauding others (10:19).

Luke uses narrative rhetoric to demonstrate a dereliction in the ruler's piety. Through analepsis, a reader would recognize the ruler's question as a verbatim of one posed by a lawyer to Jesus (10:25). In the encounter, Jesus affirms the lawyer's answer to his own question: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself" (v. 27). Rhetorically, Lukan Jesus has already answered the ruler's question through his dialogue with the lawyer.

Notably, Jesus's observation is not a devaluation of the Torah; his command to sell and distribute possession reifies the ruler's obedience within the prophetic or realized eschatology of the Torah by living the love commandment through praxis. Jesus's response moves quickly to asking him to work for justice, especially for the poor.[43] The Torah charges the community to live out God's love of justice, mercy, and humility in ways that liberate each person to thrive.[44] Jesus's teaching disabuses the ruler of this notion that obedience stops with his acknowledgment of God's sovereignty and upends a theology that assumed that prosperity on earth automatically translated into treasures in heaven. The ruler's mentality is consistent with one who spends energy, time, and money acquiring power, increasing possessions, and elevating his position in society. Eternal life is the greatest possession—treasure—rewarded at the end of one's life. Ultimately, Jesus explains that eternal life is not an acquisition, but a gift from God for those ready to receive it.

Furthermore, the Lukan narrative reveals a status reversal for the ruler is juxtaposed to the most vulnerable members in the crowd, demonstrating the Kingdom's access to anyone who lives into its values. In the Roman sociopolitical arena, the ruler has power not only through his possessions but also through his gender and age. These privileges automatically position him with prestige in that kingdom, but they do not naturally afford him the same stature in God's kingdom. By preceding this story with Jesus's interaction with women and infants in the crowd, the narrator sets up a comparison between the ruler and them. He is wealthy and powerful; they are poor and vulnerable. He appears confident in his knowledge; they approach Jesus with

[43] Hays, "Sell Everything You Have and Give It to the Poor," 56.
[44] Cf. Micah 6:8; Amos 5:1-24; Isaiah 1:17; 61:8-9; Zechariah 7:8-10; Proverbs 29:7; Leviticus 19:9-16

humility.[45] Hays summarizes, "In the OT Prophets, it is also precisely these rulers who are the arrogant and self-exalted ones who will be brought down (LXX *tapeinow*) in judgment by God because of their unjust actions (especially against orphans, widows, and the poor)."[46] While the story sequence establishes that the women and infants already have gifts of the Kingdom, it is yet to be determined that the ruler will. Their fate has been secured, whereas his still lies in the balance.

Unlike the ruler who has much and still lacks, the disciples have little and possess everything. Peter exclaims that he and the other disciples have left homes, essentially all their possessions, to follow Jesus (18:28). Jesus replies that they will receive exponentially more in this life and in the coming age (18:29-30). This reversal of fortune undermines theological assumptions connecting wealth with righteousness. Peter's speech describes the discipleship of many people and not simply the twelve. To prove that possessions are not a guarantor of Kingdom promises, Jesus tells the ruler that he must distribute all of his possessions—material, familial, patronage, and political wealth—to the poor, the vast majority of the community.

Distribution and not Almsgiving

The Lukan Jesus wants the ruler to participate in the transformation of the local economic and political institutions through a distribution of his wealth. The respective narratives in Mark and Matthew report Jesus's command to sell one's possessions and give (δὸς) the money to the poor, which are acts of almsgiving.[47] Almsgiving is an act of giving resources and money to

[45] Hays, "Sell Everything You Have and Give It to the Poor," 56.
[46] Hays, "Sell Everything You Have and Give It to the Poor," 56.
[47] Mark 10:21 and Matthew 19:21

those who are impoverished. Alternatively, Luke's Jesus wants him to sell and distribute (διάδος) all he has (18:22). Luke's redaction of having a rich ruler distribute his wealth to the poor changes this story from generosity to justice.

An act of generosity, almsgiving promotes social connections. It is a radical act that closes social distance, facilitates internal solidarity through positive reciprocity, and affirms boundary-breaking moral values.[48] While almsgiving has the power to transform communities and relieve economic violence inflicted upon poor people, its potency is limited due to its connotation as a personal gesture and its lack of focus on institutional change.

Distribution is a communal activity with a potential to change social structures. It connotes dispersals among many or spreading across space.[49] While almsgiving and distribution may be acts of an individual for an individual or a group, distribution includes multiple recipients, therefore having greater impact. Scholars agree that the rich ruler's distribution impact would ease the suffering of the poor and create solidarity across social strata through performance and modeling.[50] While many scholars recognize this action beyond an individual

[48] Halvor Moxnes, *The Economy of the Kingdom: Social Conflict and Economic Relations in Luke's Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 119-123. Moxnes argues that almsgiving narrows gaps and interactions between groups of people who would not ordinarily occupy the same social spaces. Everyone becomes full members in community. Sharing has the possibility of ameliorating social boundaries and values created to stratify and exclude. Positive reciprocity is a non-exploitive relationship between socio-economically privileged and underprivileged people. It represents a care of the other's humanity and needs versus capitalizing on one's lack and vulnerability. Moxnes idealizes the aim of almsgiving in the theological narrative of Luke in the following: "The moral value of this act is not explicitly expressed here. It is, however, part of the whole context of Luke's Gospel with its heavy emphasis upon God's option for the poor and his reversal of the present power structures to defend the poor" (120). However, almsgiving is a temporary or piecemeal approach that treats the symptom of economic inequity without curing problem of systemic economic injustice. It does not transfer power in these sociopolitical and economic relationships or create institutional changes to eradicate societal inequalities.

[49] Cf. "distribution" www.dictionary.com access February 06, 2020.

[50] Hays, "Sell Everything You Have and Give It to the Poor," 56-57; Carroll, *Luke: A Commentary,* 364; Moxnes, *The Economy of the Kingdom*, 120; Hays, *Luke's Wealth Ethics*, 166; Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 626. Robert C. Tannehill, *Luke* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 270. Justo L. González, *Luke*, Belief: A Theological Commentary on the Bible (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010, 217.

act to include economic institutional changes, possible transformations in political dynamics escape their hermeneutical gaze.[51] The ruler's ability to manage capital markets of food, land, labor, and money speak to his capacity to give away more than material resources; he has power to transform the economy, and therefore social politics, in the community. The subtle redaction of "ruler" to describe the rich man reveals a hidden transcript that critiques local leadership and their economic hegemony, while calling for a radical solution to poverty issues.[52] The imperative to distribute all of one's possessions connects the personal with the political.

Scholars have struggled to interpret the Lukan Jesus's command to distribute all possessions. The primary point of contention is whether "all" is a mandate of partial or total renunciation of wealth. Much has been written and various arguments have been proposed.[53] Among the latest research to date, Christopher M. Hays and James Metzger present opposing sides to the issue in their respective works.

Hays asserts that Luke's wealth ethic regarding almsgiving by the rich ameliorates disparities between them and the impoverished. While claiming inspiration from liberation

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[51] Cf. Carroll, *Luke: A Commentary*, 364. Recent scholarship interprets Jesus's call to distribute all his possessions to the poor as an exhortation for participation in institutional changes of an oppressive economic system. While focusing on the story's teaching against the inequities of material resources, they do not analyze the political dynamics of the ruler's power in addition to his wealth. Green falls short of calling it an institutional change, rather he speaks of it with terms such as social conventions. He writes, "In short, Jesus' answer to the ruler's question takes seriously how wealth is intricately spun together with issues of status, power, and social privilege. His answer has the dual effect of defining the commitments and behaviors characteristic of the community of his followers and of undercutting completely the social conventions that governed the ruler's life and community" (*The Gospel of Luke,* 656). While asserting that Jesus's demand is for the rich ruler and people who maneuver within the system of inequality, Hays implies the political structure but focuses on the economic structure as occupied by leaders and rulers ("Sell Everything You Have and Give It to the Poor," 57). Yang acknowledges the ruler's political power, but he focuses on Jesus's social teachings as a corrective to the economic sphere ("The Rich Ruler (Luke 18:18-30)," 11, 14). Metzger asserts that Jesus's primary teaching for the rich ruler pertains to equitable redistribution of resources for the poor's benefit without referencing his political power to advocate or create changes in the local economy (*Consumption and Wealth*, 169).

[52] Through narrative and rhetoric, Luke envisions a realized eschatology where those with power—who control production, policy, and politics—participate in God's kingdom by transforming the sociopolitical system and repenting of their actions that create and perpetuate poverty.

[53] Cf. Hays, *Luke's Wealth Ethics*, 1-20. Hays literature review outlines the biblical discourse from 1964 to 2010.

theology, he contends that renunciation comes in various forms in accordance to one's vocation and wealth, allowing everyone to make material sacrifices, as witnessed by Peter's proclamation.[54] Hays interprets Jesus's command as not a total divestiture in everything one owns: Jesus would approve of the ruler keeping his home and bringing a few items for his itinerancy as a disciple.[55] Therefore, the Lukan Jesus requires all potential disciples to divest in accordance to their personal situations. Hays's argument facilitates a maintenance of wealth as long as it serves Jesus's movement and demonstrates that anyone can participate no matter how little they possess. It allows a perpetuation of economic disparity within a community, even as members give some portion of their property. His interpretation of Luke's wealth ethic asserts an equitable sharing of one's possession as expression of one's participation in God's kingdom.

Jesus's mandate to the ruler may also be interpreted as a command of total renunciation. Metzger argues the story's wealth ethic is a guide for a total redistribution of wealth. With Jesus's programmatic sermon (Luke 4:16-19) as his hermeneutic, he interprets Jesus's instructions to the ruler as a continuation of the messianic mission and as an unequivocal command to help the poor: sell the entirety of his possessions (cf. 14:33).[56] Metzger reasons, "Only the elimination of personal wealth itself coupled with a fair distribution of the earth's resources can be received as good news by the poor. Anything short of this allows the elite to retain control of capital and essential resources while continuing to spend extravagantly on their own desires."[57] As a consequence, the rich ruler joins of the poor.[58] His interpretation of Jesus's

[54] Hays, *Luke's Wealth Ethics*, 24. Hays explores Jewish and Hellenistic opinions on money, particularly since Jesus's views on money seem to both complement as well as contrast with his contemporaries.
[55] Hays, *Luke's Wealth Ethics*, 174.
[56] Metzger, *Consumption and Wealth*, 170.
[57] Metzger, *Consumption and Wealth*, 170.
[58] Gonzalez, *Luke*, 217.

imperative aligns with Luke's narrative themes of radical reversals—the first shall be last and the last shall be first.

While various types of wealth renunciation to alleviate poverty facilitate different meanings of Luke's ethic in the story, the particular command for the ruler to sell and distribute all he has is about power. Disposing of all one's property is not a requirement of every disciple.[59] Whether one reads Jesus's directive to the ruler as a partial or full renunciation, the interpretations only focus on his material resources. They are temporary solutions that do not address systemic causes of economic disparities and inequities. Simply selling and distributing all of one's property does not change the policies, politics, and practices embedded in sociopolitical systems that generate, maintain, and perpetuate poverty. The ruler's most valuable possession is his power. By sharing it with the poor, he disrupts and transforms the sociopolitical dynamic in the area. Spreading his power would allow distribution of economic and political control of material wealth generated by laborers, domestic workers, tradespeople, and the poor. Jesus's command is not about changing individuals; it is about changing institutions.

Changes to policies and politics can ensure a fair distribution of earth's resources. Almsgiving is a limited proposition of performative beneficence. Neither the story nor Jesus questions the ruler's generosity towards his neighbors. By saying that he lacks one thing, Jesus affirms the ruler's piety while challenging his commitment to live a life of justice described by the prophets and inherent to the kingdom of God. However, to participate in the radical transformations reflected in Jesus's preaching (Luke 4) and teachings in the preceding parables

[59] While Jesus commands his disciples to sell their possessions, he does not prescribe a total renunciation (Luke 12:32). His lack of specificity suggests an encouragement to raise enough of money to ease others suffering. Jesus's disciples are among the working poor as mostly subsistence workers.

(Luke 18:1-17), the ruler must relinquish his political monopoly and share his power for the sake of the Kingdom. Jesus invites him to help dismantle the apparatus of economic violence against the poor and eradicate systems of perpetual suffering. In addition to financial security, the good news for the poor is a new socioeconomic reality where everyone thrives through food justice, self-determination, mutual compassion, and equitable access to resources.

The call for the ruler to sell and distribute all his possessions is an invitation to and requirement for discipleship. Costs for following Jesus includes giving up one's possessions (cf. Luke 12:33; 14:33). Power, possessions, and property are transient earthly treasures. Treasures in heaven—eternal life—are available to those willing to transform their lives and live in service to God through care of one another. Regarding Jesus's teachings on possessions and discipleship, Green summarizes, "Discipleship demands that one no longer be a slave to wealth or cling to possessions as though they were one's source of security or social position, and that one give precedence to the family of God and especially to those in need."[60] Jesus requires a prioritization away from an ethos of economic prosperity toward a Kingdom ethic, which raises equally all people as children of God regardless of earthly status. This ethic goes beyond hospitable treatment of economically disadvantaged people through generous acts of almsgiving and benefaction.[61] Not only does Jesus want the ruler to transform society through a distribution of his material and political wealth, he wants him to be transformed by participating in the kingdom of God through a life of discipleship.

[60] Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 229.
[61] Cf. Carroll, *Luke: A Commentary*, 375. Carroll interprets Jesus's message as one about hospitality and largess that simply requires the rich to share the abundance of their resources while either maintaining or releasing their wealth incrementally as a practice of generosity.

Call to Discipleship

After Jesus tells the ruler to sell and distribute all his possessions, he extends an invitation to discipleship. With three simple words, "Come, follow me," he summons him, as he does other men and women, to join him; they voluntarily renounce everything to become his disciples. According to Luke, Peter, James, and John leave everything at the shore and follow him (5:11). Levi, the tax collector leaves everything to follow him too (5:28). Mary Magdalene, Joanna Susanna, and many other women leave their homes and share their possessions (8:1-3). As gathering crowds seek to accompany Jesus, he explains that they must deny themselves first and take up their cross (9:23-27). Discipleship is a self-denial, which includes leaving networks of kinship as well as any sense of property or home to join a new family (8:19-21).[62] The ruler's sadness over Jesus's directions conveys a recognition of the sacrifices being required of him. To relinquish everything is essentially to give up his life.

The immediate context of the story of a certain ruler underscores themes of self-sacrifice and discipleship. It precedes Jesus's third prediction of his suffering (Luke 18:31-34), which is the closing inclusio that begins with Jesus's first prediction (9:21-22). At both points, Jesus shares that the path of discipleship includes losing one's life. In 9:23-24, he forewarns the crowd that following him means denying oneself and losing their lives for the sake of saving it. They give up relationships, their world and theological conceptions, and familial practices for Jesus's path to salvation.[63] Jesus's makes admonishment clearer in Luke 14 where he discloses that discipleship requires: (1) to hate one's family; (2) to hate life itself; (3) to carry the cross; and (4) to follow him (vv. 25-28). Just as love is not an affective position but an action, the same is true

[62] Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 372.; Carroll, *Luke: A Commentary*, 213.
[63] Green, *The Gospel of Luke,* 374.

about hate. Hate is a disavowal.[64] It includes a relinquishment of one's safety, a path with Jesus—eternal life—of social, political, and corporal death in the forms of shame, abuse, suffering, and even crucifixion.[65] As the story preceding the closing inclusio of a narrative section on discipleship and sacrifice, it illustrates and punctuates this point: one must leave their life to follow Jesus and to inherit the treasures of heaven. Jesus does not change this requirement.

While the cross is absent in Jesus's teaching of the ruler, its symbolism and pedagogical significance as a sign of discipleship reverberate throughout the story. Explaining the cross's meaning-potential for discipleship, Joel Green asserts, "Such persons would live as though they were condemned to death by crucifixion, oblivious to the pursuit of noble status, finding no interest in securing one's future via securing obligations from others or by stockpiling possessions, free to identify with Jesus in his dishonorable suffering."[66] In renouncing his livelihood and lifestyle to follow Jesus, the ruler would lose his power, privilege, and prestige as patriarch, patron, politician, and proprietor. By eschewing status and security, he would live as an already condemned man not living in this world. Despite the dialogue between the ruler and Jesus, this instruction is for the entire crowd overhearing it. The invitation to follow Jesus and to give up one's life are open to everyone.

Kingdom Promises

Kingdom of God is a central motif in the story about the rich ruler. Besides three specific mentions (vv. 24, 25, 29), there are two other references in the narrative: eternal life (v. 22) and

[64] Cf. Green, *The Gospel of Luke,* 565.
[65] Carroll, *Luke: A Commentary*, 307.
[66] Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, *566.*

treasure in heaven (v. 22). While broaching Jesus for further understanding about eternal life, the ruler's inquiry suggests that it could be acquired like an inheritance.[67] Along with obedience to the Torah, Jesus's response reveals that Kingdom promises are not entitled possessions for the taking, but rather God's gifts freely given according to God's prerogative.

While thus commonly interpreted and soundly rooted in scriptures, the ruler's theology about access to God's kingdom focuses on individual acts of obedience of the Torah. His eschatological understanding has scriptural warrants in Deuteronomy and Daniel. Deuteronomy 6:15-25 establishes a relationship between obedience to law and inheritance of the promised land; Daniel 12:1-2 (LXX; cf. NRSV) recontextualizes God's deliverance into the promised land as an apocalyptic inheritance of eternal life.[68]

Jesus does not disabuse the ruler of his theology; rather, he expands it. His reply to the that the ruler must distribute his possession and power is concurrent with interpretations of the prophets, such as Isaiah and Jeremiah, who call rulers to jettison the status quo of incurring unscrupulous wealth to become purveyors of justice for the poor.[69] As with his sermon on the plain (Luke 6:17-49), in which he broadly interprets the Torah, Jesus offers a customized lesson of the Ten Commandments for the ruler that broadens understanding. The ruler assumes his obedience to the law is about securing his place within God's kingdom, whereas following the commandments is about realizing God's reign for everyone while living on earth.

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[67] Luke uses the concept of eternal life only twice in his Gospel. In addition to this story, the other occurrence is in 10:15 where a lawyer asks Jesus the same question by verbatim. Jesus's responses in 18:18-30 suggests that eternal life, treasure in heaven, and kingdom of God are interchangeable concepts.
[68] cf. Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 655.
[69] Hays, "Sell Everything You Have and Give It to the Poor," 56.

Sacrifice is a major component for participating in God's kingdom. The ruler's sadness intimates the magnitude of Jesus's requirements on his life. Sharing his property, privilege, and power is a sociopolitical sacrifice that also connects to his family and fictive kinships. Yet, distributing the ruler's power is not a punishment; rather, it is a reordering. God's kingdom is for everyone on earth as well as in heaven. Paradigm shifts regarding who holds power in society involve material, social, political, and economic resources to all. According to Jesus's teaching, God's kingdom serves and benefits everyone.[70] The language of inheritance limits this vision to those who are seemingly deserving or privileged through mysterious or material means. While the ruler grieves the sacrifice required of him, he does not fully reject it. Unlike the Matthean and Markan accounts, he stays in the scene, fading into silence in the same manner in which he emerged with his question. The ruler remains present despite his discomfort.[71] While not overly sympathetic about the man's sadness, Jesus reassures him that the Kingdom is open to him as well.

Camels Entering the Kingdom

Using a camel parable about a possible impossibility, Jesus indicts and encourages the rich ruler and other members of the crowd with his illustration of God's kingdom. Responding to the rich man's sadness, Jesus uses the parable to illustrate the difficulty for a person deeply invested in their possessions to enter God's kingdom. He concludes that a camel's entrance

[70] The Epistle to the Colossians, a contemporaneous New Testament writing with the Gospels, highlights in the Christ Hymn (1:15-20) Jesus's ministry as a benefit to all creation including every life form.
[71] Matthew 19:22 and Mark 10:22 share the narration of the rich man going away grieving after hearing Jesus's reply. Also, in the respective accounts, the rich man came to Jesus (Matthew) or ran up to him (Mark), which indicates that he was not a part of the crowd when Jesus welcomed the children. He missed Jesus's rejoinder that that the Kingdom belongs to the most vulnerable population—poor children.

through a needle's eye is easier than a rich man's admittance into the Kingdom (cf. Luke 18:24-25). While the rebuke is clear, the message is complex.[72] It points to the challenge of changing one's loyalty from their possessions, including their security of power, privilege, and prestige. Kenneth Bailey shares, "Jesus is demanding that loyalty to him must be higher than loyalty to even such a treasured symbol."[73] Furthermore, God's kingdom requires complete allegiance (cf. Exodus 20:2-6). Putting one's possessions above the requirements of eternal life is a direct objection to the first table of the Ten Commandments.

Jesus addresses multiple constituencies through this teaching moment with the parable. In addition to the rich ruler, the camel is a metaphor for anyone who privileges power over responsibility as purveyors of justice. Luke's narrative structure includes Jesus's conversation with the rich ruler in the same setting as his encounter with the Pharisees (17:20-34), his parabolic teachings (18:1-14), and his care for infants and their guardians (18:15-17). Therefore, his reply includes: some Pharisees; his disciples; tax collectors; those with a righteous self-perception; and anyone in the crowd with power—whether economic, social, or political—who may abuse it to maintain their security at the expense of the vulnerable and disadvantaged. While most likely men, women also maintain and participate in kyriarchal structures of power, privilege, and prestige. Oppressive systems are gender-blind regarding their recruits and victims.

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[72] Bailey, *Through Peasant Eyes*, 165-166. Bailey briefly summarizes a history of interpretation of the camel parable. Two interpretations dominate scholarly literature. One interpretation depends on a transcription mistake whereas *kamēlon* (i.e. camel) is read as *kamilon* (i.e. rope) due to its appearance in some ancient manuscripts. A possible theory is that a copyist wanted to demonstrate a possibility for the rich man to enter the kingdom as a thin rope could possibly go through a large a needle. This interpretation was debunked in the eleventh century. Another interpretation imagines a loaded camel, which would usually enter an ancient Middle Eastern village through very large double doors, walking through a needle's eye, a small door used by people. In the 19th century, an author living in the region shared that this door was never identified as such. While citing E. Earle Ellis's *The Gospel of Luke* (1966), Baily concludes the parable should be read literally.

[73] Bailey, *Through Peasant Eyes*, 165.

As a pedagogical tool, the parable of the camel is a theological lesson about God's power to include the least expected candidates. The crowd's reaction suggests that a rich person—whether due to the prosperity gospel of the period or the perception of a rich person's benefaction—is an obvious candidate for salvation (Luke 18:26). Jesus's deployment of this parable conveys the opposite. The crowd's presumption reflects the values of the privileged and Roman society; Jesus's insights amplify the exhortations of the prophets and the Torah's greater concern for the community's vulnerable population.

According to the scriptures, a ruler is least likely to cede his power, possessions, property, and privilege to uplift the poor and most likely burdened by his desire for security and comfort. While identifying possible character and behavior limits of those with power and responding to the crowd's reaction, Jesus asserts God's ability to transform and create possibilities beyond human imagination and achievements (18:25). Despite the ruler's myopic understanding of the Torah, God can help him participate in and benefit from Kingdom promises through divestment and reordering. Furthermore, Jesus's teaching upends the crowd's theology that net worth and social status are signifiers of God's treasure. By having the ruler remain present for Jesus's commentary, Luke demonstrates his openness to the teacher's command to follow him. The parable only declares that the camel and the rich have difficult tasks, but not insurmountable ones; it is a hyperbole and not a point of fact.

Treasure in Heaven

Treasure in heaven is available to those who follow Jesus. On the surface, it seems interchangeable with kingdom of God and eternal life; however, Luke includes narrative clues

that differentiate them. Treasure in heaven is a tangible benefit of faithful discipleship rooted in communal relationships as well as an after-life reward. Responding to Peter's declaration that disciples have left their homes to follow him, Jesus reassures them that they will receive much more through their new kinship as members of his movement (Luke 18:29-30). By leaving their families, the disciples choose to reorient their lives away from traditional family values toward the countercultural ethic of the gospel.[74] Their choice is dangerous: it reverses norms, subverts imperial theology, and consequently forfeits their lives (cf. 14:25-27).

As a treasure, the new family of Jesus's movement acts differently than society's familial and fictive kinships. It seeks to provide livelihood and care even for its weakest members. Members are to avoid uplifting their personal status or those of their immediate circles for political, social, or economic gain. Furthermore, Jesus's movement promises even more treasure in the coming age, particularly eternal life. His response returns to the ruler's question.[75] The crowd and the ruler learn that eternal life comes with their participation in the kingdom of God.

Jesus's disciples, encompassing those who follow him and his teaching, receive their heavenly treasure during their current reality through their involvement in the Kingdom. Luke's gospel presents it as a space for transformation, inclusive of social, political, economic as well as cosmological realms in contemporary time.[76] Manifesting prophetic and apocalyptic eschatologies, the gospel message, according to Luke, evokes changes in current states of injustice and manifests the fullness of God's eternal reign. In 12:32-34, Jesus tells his disciples that God enjoys giving them the Kingdom. As illustrated in the preceding narrative of Jesus

[74] Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 658.
[75] Green, *The Gospe of Luke*, 659.
[76] Moxnes, *The Economy of the Kingdom*, 176-178.

blessing the babies (18:15-17), the Kingdom is both gift and obligation.[77] Jesus describes treasure in heaven as a consequence of disciples' activity and agency in their participation of God's kingdom.

Kingdom's Non-Discriminating Promises

Kingdom promises and commitments do not discriminate. By keeping the rich ruler in the scene, Luke signifies to his readers that the Kingdom anticipates and requires that those of the dominant classes as well as the impoverished contribute to and benefit from God's salvation plan. Gender, material wealth, and nationality are not barriers to participating in just living. Jesus's audience, like Lukan readers, includes those who are among the most powerful, like the rich ruler, and those who are among the most vulnerable, like poor babies.

As he proclaims God's kingdom as good news for the poor and oppressed (e.g. Luke 4:18; 6:20; 7:22), Jesus repudiates Rome's status hierarchy and encourages countercultural participation in society. He advocates subordinate acts of disassociating from Rome's economic violence (5:27-32), of sharing resources (8:1-3), of distributing possessions (18:18-30), and of rejecting greed (19:1-9). Therefore, the Lukan Jesus calls the wealthy, albeit politicians or influencers, to undermine society's hegemony and to transform the utility of their power toward a common good that supports everyone. His subversive teachings—while inconspicuous to some readers—solicit the region's powerful elite to switch allegiances from Rome's empire to God's kingdom. His conversation with the ruler suggests that transformation is not only possible but also expected. Consequently, the Lukan Jesus reveals the cracks in Rome's veneer of dominance

[77] Cf. Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 495.

and superior culture. He reflects a subversive and liberating consciousness that later 20th-century scholars Homi Bhabha and Edward Said would respectively frame as postcolonial.

The Lukan writer demonstrates the superiority of God's kingdom over Roman domination. While displaying radical reversals such as the one that the rich ruler experiences in the story, counting on the audience's knowledge about their colonialization, and relying on their familiarity with scriptural critiques of rulers, the writer presents a *schadenfreude*—delight in other's misfortunes—in the subversive rhetoric of his hidden transcript.[78] Identifying the man as a rich ruler, requiring him to distribute all that he has, and reporting his sadness, the story reveals fragility in the imperial political and economic power structure. The ruler's conversations with Jesus suggests a desire for fulfillment or hope that his colonial status seemingly does not provide. As it reveals the ruler's receptivity to the Kingdom, it demonstrates the Kingdom's indiscriminate openness to him despite his colonialization, political connections, and social status. Subsequently, the story demonstrates the power of God's kingdom to upend the façade of Roman cultural, political, and economic superiority with a band of mostly poor Galileans. These massive radical reversals of geopolitical and cultural arenas would reverberate for a long time to come.

God's kingdom promises greater security for those who are impoverished and recognizes dignity as inalienable. In Luke 18, the poor reclaim their power (e.g. parabolic widow, vv. 1-8), advocate for their place before God and those with power (e.g. tax collector (vv. 9-14), and transgress boundaries (e.g. caretakers of babies, vv. 15-17). Jesus reassures and empowers those

[78] Cf. James C. Scott, *Domination and the Art of Resistance, Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990), 41. *Schadenfreude* is a German term that expresses joy and delight one experiences with the knowledge of another's failures and humiliation. According to Scott, it expresses a fantasy among dominated groups of a negative reciprocity that is a reprisal for the oppression imposed by those in power.

whom society exploits, neglects, and denies with reminders of God's consistency in bringing liberation against oppressive empires, providing property for subsistence, and healing. Physical and social deaths lose their imminence and permanency. All who engage in Kingdom life enjoy treasure in heaven: new communities of solidarity; (re)new(ed) priorities of caring for society's vulnerable; (re)new(ed) politics benefitting everyone justly; and new power structures of equal rights, voices, and self-determination.[79] God's kingdom promises the poor a safety net with relational, political, and economic resources that inoculates them from social death, restrains illness' fatal impact, and comforts them with the anticipation of eternal life's glory.

Another promise of the Kingdom is to transform power in social relationships for the benefit of the entire community. Therefore, God's alternative reign is as much a present condition as it is an apocalyptic vision. Luke presents God's kingdom as a space requiring conscientious engagement in decisions and deeds to reify radical reversals. It prioritizes mercy, love in action through justice, and support for the poor (cf. 11:42). The poor gain community with avenues for their thriving that do not exploit their bodies or extract their energies to enrich the coffers of the State or the wealthy. The wealthy divest from the maintenance and perpetuation of other's poverty, starvation, indebtedness, and death; they choose to be in solidarity with and to advocate for the well-being of everyone regardless of status. The burden and gifts of work, living, and obedience to the Torah are shared, equalized, and evenly distributed throughout the community. The Kingdom's call to transform sociopolitical power

[79] Cf. Carroll, *Luke: A Commentary*, 376. The commands and values of God's kingdom are not new to Luke's Jewish readers because their scriptures, traditions, and practices already commend the theology, politics, and personal engagements that Jesus teaches.

dynamics requires a reorientation of the social systems to facilitate freedom, self-determination, and agency for everyone's life and existence.

Kingdom Perils

Lacking in condemnation against imperial politics and economic violence, the story of a certain ruler's encounter with Jesus evinces perils in Luke's vision of God's kingdom. Neutrality toward the ruler in narration and in Jesus's teaching suggests a tacit approval of worldly practices of exploitation. The narrative does not overtly critique his association with the Empire. Jesus does not level criticisms, judgments, or warnings against the ruler as he does against Pharisees (11:39-44), lawyers (11:45-52), chief priests and scribes (20:9-19). Only through an invitation to discipleship does Jesus propose to hold him accountable for justice within the sociopolitical space of God's kingdom. The Lukan Jesus demonstrates leniency and restraint toward the ruler and his hegemonic practices.

Another peril of Luke's vision of the kingdom is its mimesis of total allegiance. Jesus requires disciples to relinquish one's life for citizenship in the divine kingdom. An insistence on total allegiance mimics the Empire's demand of sworn loyalty of its subordinates. Instead of reproducing imperial culture and ethos, God's kingdom distorts the colonizer's authority and image to appropriate it in new forms of knowledge for positionality. As a consequence, God's kingdom—signified through the faith, literature, customs, and traditions of the Jewish people along with the status of colonization by Rome's presumed supremacy—is truly the preeminent political and social power; those with this knowledge are therefore superior.

Homi Bhabha calls this mode of postcolonial mimicry doubling: "Doubling repeats the fixed and empty presence of authority by articulating it syntagmatically with a range of differential knowledges and positionalities that both estrange its 'identity' and produce new forms of knowledge, new modes of differentiation, new sites of power."[80] While Bhabha provides a term in the latter twentieth century, the concept has existed for millennia. This postcolonial rhetoric is not unique to the Lukan writer; it shares the subversive literary tenets of the Second Sophists.[81] Yet, Luke's mimesis perpetuates an ideology of superiority, changing the name from Rome to God's kingdom. One of the similarities is that Rome requires absolute devotion to the Empire and its imperial cult, while God's kingdom, as expressed in this story, expects a person to give their lives and livelihood to its activity.[82] As the ruler would expect fealty from his clients and tenants, so Jesus requests faith and possessions from his disciples. Jesus's movement bears a metonymic strategy that menaces the colonial discourse while replicating aspects of it. As it mimics Rome, it shows the cracks in the Empire's veil of superiority and seals its own visage in a cloak of dominance.

In its mimicry of Roman imperialism and its lack of admonition against the ruler as a signifier of colonial violence, the earthly manifestation of God's kingdom becomes susceptible to humanity's proclivity toward hegemony. As the movement spreads the gospel on imperial roads, it reconceptualizes Jerusalem as a new geopolitical center with Rome and other Gentile nations at its margins. In this process, members of the new movement demonstrate that even

[80] Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, Routledge Classics (Abingdon, Oxon, OX: Routledge, 1994), 171.
[81] Cf. Gary Gilbert, "Luke-Acts and Negotiation of Authority and Identity in the Roman World," in *The Multivalence of Biblical Texts and Theological Meanings,* ed. Christine Helmer (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2006).
[82] While one may continue to worship their own gods and participate in local economy, they must not neglect their obligations to civic religion and their economic activity as they are always in service to imperial prosperity.

Rome can be subordinated. In turn, the movement also reinscribes hegemonic inequities against others on the basis of gender, ethnicity, and other social constructions, just as they had been borne against them.

Jesus's movement struggles with various modes of discrimination as evinced in Luke 18:1-30: the contrast between the disciples' receptivity of the ruler talking with Jesus and their refusal of women and children coming near him (vv. 15-17). The preceding parables, regarding a widow and a tax collector respectively, caution against injustice and mistreatment of others, especially vulnerable community members. By fastening this unique material (vv. 1-14) with the Markan narrative arc (vv. 15-30; cf. Mark 10:13-31), Luke acknowledges and addresses abuses of power in sociopolitical relationships through his redaction of Mark.

Such rhetoric reflects Bhabha's analysis of postcolonial subversive writings of his modern context: "Resistance is not necessarily an oppositional act of political intention, nor is it the simple negation or exclusion of the 'content' of another culture as difference once perceived. It is the effect of an ambivalence produced within the rules of recognition of dominating discourses as they articulate signs of cultural difference and reimplicate them within the differential relations of colonial power—hierarchy, normalization, marginalization and so forth."[83] Luke's storytelling serves as admonishment and caution to the reader against adopting hegemonic practices.

Reimagining Rome's realm as a conduit for God's kingdom reveals a colonial ambivalence in the narrative. Colonial ambivalence demonstrates a subject's attraction to and repulsion from the colonializing culture; it incorporates imperial culture and values while

[83] Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 157.

resisting them. In the Gospel, any critique of Rome as an oppressor of Israel is subtle and synthesized in its hidden transcript. Luke's later volume, the Acts of the Apostles, depicts the gospel of Jesus as a mimesis of the Empire, spreading throughout the world on the same paths created by colonizing military, economic, social, and political, forces. A theological claim advanced is that God uses imperial powers and resources to accomplish God's purposes.[84] This observation of colonial ambivalence also asserts an understanding of God's sovereignty over both Rome and her ideology. While framing this strategy as subversive to human dominant forces, this claim unwittingly suggests that God's plan is a beneficiary of imperial structures and not simply its adversary. This interpretation undermines Luke's subversive rhetoric that not only proclaims God's power to humble imposing forces like Rome but also empowers those oppressed by hegemonic forces to upend the system and reify God's kingdom on earth.

Another peril comes with an interpretation of the Kingdom as an alternative reality that coexists peacefully with human empires or affirms them through its mimicry. Consequently, this vision may suggest that God's kingdom accepts or is complicit in systemic injustices. The hidden elements of Luke's subversive rhetoric become construed thereby as an apologetic that does not hold human powers accountable. Thus, for example, John Carroll's commentary describes God's Kingdom as unassertive and nonconfrontational toward systemic oppression. He posits, "The movement serves an alternative *kyrios* but poses no political threat, even if some accuse it of turning the world upside down (Acts 17:6; cf. Roe, *Upside Down* 148-150)."[85]

However, Edward Said describes another interpretive possibility of alternative realities constructed in resistance literature by colonialized communities. This literature, Said asserts,

[84] Carroll, *Luke: A Commentary,* 404.
[85] Carroll, *Luke: A Commentary*, 404.

presents an "alternative way of conceiving human history" through a new narrative that speaks to the colonizing culture.[86] This new narrative serves as a means for resisting and subordinated cultures to mix with or transform the colonializing geopolitical center.[87] This form of resistance may be effective among those who are most affected by society's abuse, which is silent in the public discourse and historical accounts. Simultaneously, if a reader lacks intimacy with the violence and abuse of the empire's systems, such a person may miss some or all the subversive subtleties of the text's rhetoric. Luke's story of a certain ruler represents an indirect criticism of Roman political and economic systems as well as of the ruler's participation in such systems. The story casts a vision of God's kingdom where everyone leaves all to follow Jesus's teachings and to resist human realms of social, political, and economic oppression.

Claims that God uses imperialism to advance God's purposes evince significance in human participation in God's kingdom work. Systemic oppression—via political dominance, economic exploitation, and social violence—is a consequence of human ideas, power relations, policies, and enforcement. Equally, upending these injustices comes through human agency as well. Regarding the State and the revolution, Michel Foucault makes an analogous observation: "I would say that the State consists in the codification of whole number of power relations which render its functioning possible, and that Revolution is a different type of codification of the same relations."[88] Hence, upending hegemony and transforming social power require the same human resources—action and agency—that create and maintain stratification and subordination. Realizing God's justice, which includes the eradication of poverty and the distribution of social-

[86] Edward Said, "Themes of Resistance Culture," *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage, 1994), 216.
[87] Said, "Themes of Resistance Culture," 216.
[88] Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Writings 1972-177* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 122.

political power, necessitates human activity. People must be vigilant to avoid subsuming imperialistic perils as they develop relationships and community ethos within the Kingdom.

While Jesus's silence about the ruler's participation in the colonial enterprise suggests a tacit acceptance of his work, it also poses a rhetorical opportunity for resistance. A lack of judgment on this matter seems to lower the ruler's defenses as signified by his quiet and continued presence in the narrative. Because Luke does not describe the rich man as leaving the scene vexed (cf. Matthew 19:22; Mark 10:22), the Gospel writer creates an avenue for interpreting his staying as listening and receiving Jesus's teachings for a possibility of transformation. Instead of repulsed, the ruler seems attracted to the eternal life available in God's kingdom. The Gospel's writer rhetorical strategy encodes a hidden transcript that criticizes the ruler and holds him accountable to the counterhegemonic values of Jewish scriptures and the Torah.

Conclusion

The Lukan Jesus requires the rich ruler to transform his life and the lives of others through the distribution of all his possessions—power. While established scholarship on this story contends differently, neither money nor almsgiving alone are capable of achieving Jesus's gospel mission of changing society (Luke 1:46-55, 72-79; 4:18-19). Such benevolences would provide temporary relief for those suffering from economic hardships but would not eradicate the injustices that created those adversities. Instead, Jesus calls the rich ruler to participate in the realized eschatology of God's kingdom. In addition to reorienting his life for discipleship, his

invitation is on condition that he uses his power to reshape the lives of the whole community and to change who profits from politics, policy, and production.

Yet, Kingdom work is messy. Through human participation and lack of imagination, elements of the kingdom of God mimic human frailty and values, where wealth signifies righteousness and piety marks obedience to God's commands. The story of a certain ruler concludes Luke's narrative arc that envisions the kingdom of God as humanity's participation in justice-oriented radical reversals that dismiss social status, privilege, and prestige as communal currencies. While radical reversals illustrated in Jesus's teaching and Luke's storytelling may be interpreted as *schadenfreude* and even retribution, their primary functions include restoration, reconciliation, and renewal. Within geopolitics, radical reversals restore Israel through liberation from its colonizing captors. Within sociopolitics, they reconcile communities through a transformation of power dynamics undergirded by policies, practices, and privileges. In personal spiritual practices, they renew one's commitment to life of humility and self-reflection espoused in the teachings of scripture and Jesus's preaching.

Kingdom's work to transform power dynamics of sociopolitical relationships is the responsibility of everyone in Jesus's crowd, Luke's audience, and the gospel movement. While the story begins as an exchange between the rich ruler and Jesus, it broadens to include all present, making it clear that Jesus's message spares no one who has access to and responsibility for personal and political power. Gender, class, age, social status, or occupation does not exempt anyone from the Kingdom's promise or its requirements to participate as active agents in realizing God's justice and in upending hegemony in society. Living in the kingdom of God is as integrative existence where the theological is personal and the personal is political.

Chapter 7

Conclusion

In August 2019, staff writers from The New York Times Magazine, led by Nikole Hannah-Jones, published a long-form journalist project that commemorated the 400th anniversary of the arrival of the first enslaved Africans to the Virginia colony.[1] An ongoing initiative, The 1619 Project claims, "It aims to reframe the country's history by placing the consequence of slavery and the contributions of black Americans at the very center of our national narrative."[2] Each essay focuses on a different aspect of U.S. history and society to examine their origins and connections to chattel slavery and the racial segregation of black people. Commercialized slavery gave European colonizing powers the resources needed to become dominant geopolitical players and expanded for settler-invader colonizers access to stolen lands. Among many outcomes, The 1619 Project explores the histories of various sectors in society to reveal individual choices and collective decisions, policies, and politics that spark, fuel, maintain, and spread institutional racism. As a result, it has facilitated understanding of how individual and collective actions contribute to the development and dismantling of racism and other systemic oppressions.

[1] "The 1619 Project," *The New York Times*, August 17, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/08/14/magazine/1619-america-slavery.html. The United States of America began as thirteen British colonies with the first colony occupying the lands of the indigenous people between 1585.
[2] "The 1619 Project."

Luke 18:1-30 envisions a realization of God's kingdom that grows through humanity's participation in bringing the good news to the poor, release to the captives, and freedom to the oppressed. Throughout this project, I examine two parables of Jesus, a widow and judge and the Pharisee and tax collector, as well as two stories of Jesus, the blessing of the children and the engagement with a rich ruler. Using narrative criticism and intersectional approaches with postcolonial hermeneutics, I contend that they illustrate views of the kingdom of God as a temporal and eternal realm in which all humanity actively participates in creating a domain free from subordinating power relations. The kingdom of God is a space that includes a shared system of power in human relations, where social status reversals redistribute power and privilege among everyone in order to ensure lives of justice, dignity, safety, and security. Luke's polyvalent vision emphasizes justice in human relationships as critical to one's response to God's kingdom.

Exploring the Discourse on the Kingdom of God

As I explored the parables of a widow and judge and of the Pharisee and tax collectors and the stories of Jesus blessing the children and of his engagement with a rich ruler, a pattern of transformations in the social relationships and outcomes in the lives of characters emerged. In each story, one character (or set of characters), who is powerless, marginal, or vulnerable, seeks a resource from another character (or set of characters), who has power to provide or deny access to this resource that could aid, sustain, or improve a life.

Each story depicts a drama of power. From the Greek, *δρᾶμα* is action. It appears in the contention and tension between the characters as displayed in the plot. The parabolic widow goes

to a judge demanding him to use his judicial and administrative power to give her justice from an accused?. While the parabolic tax collector does not ask the Pharisee's help in obtaining righteousness, the Pharisee, as one to whom the community looks for guidance on right worship, does wield an influential power to help recognize and reconcile him in God's family. The disciples use their power as members of Jesus's inner circle to deny women and their infants access to Jesus's healing touch, although they do not hesitate in allowing a rich ruler to hold a conversation with him. Jesus calls the rich ruler to distribute all he has—property, patronage, privilege, and power—among the poor in his response to the kingdom of God. The characters operate from various positions within the relational power structures undergirded by the political, social, and economic policies and processes. While illustrating different forms of systemic oppression, injustice, and abuse, the parables and stories demonstrate God's work through human choices and actions to realize justice in the temporal realm as a foretaste of the treasures of heaven in the eternal realm.

Interpersonal power dynamics develop within the political, economic, and social structures of society constructed by various rulers, leaders, and dominant forces. To apprehend the power interplay in each story, I analyze characters' social standing based on the historical-cultural evidence of the Roman colonial context and their representations within the Gospel narrative. This examination illumines the personal elements to the politics, which are embedded in the dialogue and actions. While those whose status as powerless, marginalized, vulnerable, and poor in the community take courage to pursue justice, mercy, healing, and liberation, theirs are not the only examples for responding to and participating in the kingdom of God.

In the parable of a widow and judge, the open-ended conclusion suggests that the judge grants her justice. Disciples learn that their privilege as Jesus's associates does not permit them to dehumanize those whom society marginalizes. Although the rich ruler was sad upon hearing that, in addition to obeying the commandments, he must sell and distribute all he has to have treasures in heaven, he remains in the scene instead of leaving, which suggests receptivity to Jesus's teaching. Luke's portrayal of the decisions, actions, and continued engagement of characters who are politically, socially, and economically privileged demonstrates that they are equally responsible in the works of justice of God's kingdom, which upend societal standards of who deserves power, privilege, resources, and respect. The parables and stories are personal, political, and theological.

Furthermore, Luke 18:1-30 depicts a postcolonial consciousness. A postcolonial hermeneutic of liberationist conscientization helps to foreground the unequal relations of geopolitics. Characters are individuals as well as signifiers of Rome, the colonizer, and Israel, its colony. The judge, tax collector, and ruler are retainers of the Roman authority among the Galilean and Judean communities. The widow, Pharisee, women with their infants, disciples, and crowds stand as the people of Israel. Transformation in sociopolitical power dynamics among the characters is not only of the people but for the people, as these changes represent the work of God's kingdom to reveal the fragility of Roman rule and its violent social, political, and economic regimes. As the characters overturn the hegemonic forces among themselves, they destabilize and dismantle the parts that contribute to the colonial whole. Status reversals are not only for the uplift of the people but also for the anticipation of the subordination of Rome.

While delivering a message of resistance to colonial rule, the parables and stories also feature postcolonial ambivalence. Neither the Gospel nor Jesus critiques Rome or its colonial agents and sympathizers with open condemnation. Another example of ambivalence is Jesus's mimesis of Rome through his demand of his disciples' total allegiance. In his discussion of discipleship in 18:18-30, Jesus requires any who follow him to relinquish their life and all their possessions for citizenship in the divine kingdom. Although Rome allows for worship of other gods and for practices of native traditions, ultimately colonial subjects, regardless of citizenship status, must participate in imperial cults and commit their lives and livelihoods in service to the Empire. In addition to accounting for God's kingdom promises, which subvert colonial hegemony, my interpretation of each story includes an analysis of kingdom perils, which may suggest complicity through the text's silence or reflect accommodations to Roman value. These observations make plain that realizing God's justice, even or especially as members of God's kingdom, requires constant vigilance and devotion to understanding contributing factors to destructive social relations that are antithetical to the mission.

Such revolutionary and liberationist theology, which stands against the status quo, must be communicated and disseminated out of view—but in plain sight. Swift and deadly action against the appearance of sedition terrorized communities into submission and fortified Roman supremacy over millions of people and hundreds of states. Therefore, stories about of a new nationalism with the aim of developing human community for the liberation of all persons would have given cause for the Roman authorities and sycophants to destroy the message and messengers.[3] In the fields of political science and history, hidden transcripts describe the

[3] Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1994), 209-220.

subversive actions, storytelling, and culture in sequestered settings produced by subordinate groups to critique oppression and the practices of domination. It is my contention that Luke 18:1-30 is a hidden transcript that conceals its liberationist consciousness through a rhetoric that appears to be moral tales about good human virtues: prayer (belief in the divine), humility, hospitality, and generosity through almsgiving. These are celebrated messages easily accepted by most.

While conceding to the Roman public script for survival, Judeans and Galileans secretly contested their subordination with their own transcript. Through acts, dialog, rituals, and ideals, they created a hidden transcript: linguistic disguises (parables), ritual codes (table-fellowship, last Passover), sequestered sites (wilderness), and content of dissent (resistance martyrs and returning prophets unique to their ancient culture of prophecy and Davidic theology).[4] The work, interactions, and stories of Jesus, the kingdom of God, and his movement are elements of a hidden transcript unique among first-century Palestinians who wanted freedom from Rome's oppression, which eventually spread throughout the Empire. Furthermore, Luke's story integrates subtle critiques of the political, social, and economic ideology and infrastructure that have miseducated people into internalizing their subordination or believing in their inclusion into Roman dominant classes. To create a culture of mutual dependence for the growing God's kingdom, Luke's rhetoric takes a furtive approach that allows the wealthy and powerful to be as impacted by Jesus's teaching and example as the poor and oppressed whom he proclaims to come and save. A matrix of theology, politics, and personal experiences interweaves with the subversive acts and discourses represented in the Jewish traditions to spread a liberationist

[4] Cf. James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990), xi.

consciousness of the gospel across empires. The challenge is that the kingdom of God can remain a secret for those who do not perceive or understand (Luke 8:9).

Continuing the Discourse

Within the trajectory of Lukan studies, this project continues to prioritize the colonial context and its influences as significant for apprehending the stories, teachings, and activities of the narratives and for understanding the lived experiences and conditions of the masses to whom and for whom it was written. I approach the text from a postcolonial hermeneutic and expand studies on the narrative itself as not only reporting on liberative features of Jesus's movement to usher the kingdom of God but being itself a revolutionary document that contains nuanced radical messages to empower subordinated groups and to admonish those with power of their responsibility to bring good news (4:18). Lukan scholars agree that these are premises upon which Jesus teaches and ministers and upon which disciples are called to continue the mission of the kingdom of God.

Whether through a historical-critical or literary-critical lens, Lukan studies offer theological interpretations of narratives. Generally, traditional scholarship focuses on the text's teachings on individual piety and moral development, which are seen as expressions of one's vertical relationship with God through Jesus. When ideological criticism with its emphasis on power relations emerged in biblical studies, scholars began to interpret Luke's vision of the kingdom of God as a critique of systemic oppression and societal evils rooted in Roman colonial rule. Even in their political readings, they, too, acknowledge the text's evocation for human behavior to reflect justice, love, compassion, generosity, hospitality, and faith as characteristics

of God's people and the presence of the kingdom of God. These two trajectories of interpretation share in their assertions that God and Jesus are the sole participants in the individual and societal changes of the kingdom of God. This contention seems pertinent for ascertaining a source of faith for readers searching for a reprieve from systemic oppression.

While concurring with scholarly arguments that center God and Jesus as primary actors in realizing the kingdom of the God, my aim is to advance this discourse by examining humanity's participation in and responsibility to transforming society as well. The parables and stories in Luke 18:1-30 reveal that humanity's attitudes, choices, and actions are critical in eradicating injustice, dismantling oppression, and actualizing the promises of God. Unequal power dynamics that produce subordination and domination in geopolitics, gender relations, economic status, and various other relations do not exist by their own making. These are not created in a vacuum as omnipresent, ominous specters haunting humanity. Collective attitudes, decisions, policies, and actions of individuals create, maintain, perpetuate, and advance power differentials that lead to justice and oppression.

The concluding actions and presence of the powerful and influential antagonists in the stories prove to be of value for the kingdom of God. While interpreters analyze and celebrate the courage, bravery, and empowerment of vulnerable, marginalized, and powerless characters, they often either ignore or dismiss antagonistic counterparts. I read Luke's open-ended conclusions to the parables regarding an antagonist's decision and his redactional choices of having antagonists to remain in the scenes as suggestive that their choices and presence remain critical to his storytelling. The writer communicates that the behaviors of these characters may be assets for the fulfillment of God's promises. Their responses suggest that they are either open or persuaded to

transform their roles, power, privilege, and status in society in their response to God's kingdom. This study advances an understanding that the theological is political and the political is personal when it comes to humanity's participation in the kingdom of God.

Areas of Growth for the Discourse

As the Lukan project continues to develop as a research field, more research that uses interdisciplinary approaches to examine various forms of unequal power relations would be invaluable for the study of the text and its subjects. Power takes many forms, be it political, economic, social, personal, and theological. Because it functions within a complex matrix, the Lukan project could expand its exploration and examination of power from multiple angles. The narrative's theological discourse presents personal and political critiques of individual and societal behaviors to facilitate people's hopes and to motivate their participation in the kingdom of God. The theological, political, and personal messages of the gospel (εὐαγγέλιον) are interconnected. When scholarly analyses disaggregate these components without reconnecting them, interpretations may become atomized to a point that moral tales of good behavior become their conclusions. When analyses focus on systemic oppression or cosmic warfare without investigating their sources, interpretations move the work of the gospel outside of human agency. Intersectionality and nuance aid research methods in a recognition that Luke's theology of perichoresis among God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit also includes humanity. As such, the Luke project may develop a hermeneutical perichoresis for research that acknowledges that the theological is political and that the political is personal.

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