

# LUKE

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## Chapter Twenty

### Luke 20:1-2

*On one of the days while He was teaching the people in the temple and preaching the gospel, the chief priests and the scribes with the elders confronted Him, (2) and they spoke, saying to Him, "Tell us by what authority You are doing these things, or who is the one who gave You this authority?"*

This is a continuation of “chapter 19” as the same people are present in both situations while Jesus was teaching and preaching the gospel. Luke is the only evangelist who adds that Jesus was preaching the gospel. People had seen Jesus heal the sick, the lame, and the blind as well as exorcise demons and these temple people wanted Jesus to tell them the authority under which He was doing these things. They also wanted to know who gave Him this authority as also recorded by Matthew and Mark:

- Matt 21:23 *When He entered the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to Him while He was teaching, and said, "By what authority are You doing these things, and who gave You this authority?"*
- Mark 11:28 *and began saying to Him, "By what authority are You doing these things, or who gave You this authority to do these things?"*

The temple leaders regarded themselves as in charge of the temple and they thought their responsibility was to know the source of any teaching done there such as:

- Luke 7:16 *Fear gripped them all, and they began glorifying God, saying, "A great prophet has arisen among us!" and, "God has visited His people!"*
- Luke 7:26 *"But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I say to you, and one who is more than a prophet.*
- Luke 7:39 *Now when the Pharisee who had invited Him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet He would know who and what sort of person this woman is who is touching Him, that she is a sinner."*
- Luke 11:15 *But some of them said, "He casts out demons by Beelzebul, the ruler of the demons."*

However their questions are not sincere as they are hoping to catch Him in a trap. If He claims to do these things by divine authority they can attempt to attack Him as a false prophet. If He says that He does these things by human authority then they can attack Him as a troublemaker against Roman rule.

### Luke 20:3-8

*Jesus answered and said to them, "I will also ask you a question, and you tell Me: (4) "Was the baptism of John from heaven or from men?" (5) They reasoned among themselves, saying, "If we say, 'From heaven,' He will say, 'Why did you not believe him?' (6) "But if we say, 'From men,' all the people will stone us to death, for they are convinced that John was a prophet." (7) So they answered that they did not know where it*

*came from. (8) And Jesus said to them, "Nor will I tell you by what authority I do these things."*

Instead of answering them Jesus turns the tables by asking them a question that they cannot answer without incriminating themselves. John began his ministry during the priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas (3:2). In Jesus's question, "heaven" is a circumlocution for God. The baptism of John was also a bypass of the temple cult for it rejected the ways one was taught to become right with God by temple sacrifices. If John's baptism was from heaven then the temple had become obsolete and the work of the temple authorities was also obsolete. If the baptism was only from man then John was a false prophet and deserving of the death under Herod. They then discussed the matter among themselves. They could not say that John's baptism was from men for the people believed John was a prophet as stated by Zechariah (Luke 1:76 *"And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; For you will go on BEFORE THE LORD TO PREPARE HIS WAYS;"*) If they say that John's authority was from God then they will be accused for having ignored it and refusing to be baptized. It seems then that the fear of the people outweighed their fear of God and they refused to answer Jesus. Jesus then told them that He also would not tell them His authority but He then gives them a parable that does answer their question.

#### **Luke 20:9-18**

*And He began to tell the people this parable: "A man planted a vineyard and rented it out to vine-growers, and went on a journey for a long time.*

The vineyard is an obvious image from OT for God's interactions with Israel and the temple leaders would admit that the parable is about them (20:19). There was a huge golden grapevine with grape clusters surrounding the entrance into the temple sanctuary. Luke writes how Jesus came to the temple and found it not attaining to God's standards (19:45-46). There is a reference to God planting a vineyard as reported in Isaiah 5:1-7 but there are differences. In Isaiah the owner did not receive a harvest because the vineyard did not produce an adequate crop. In the parable of Jesus, the vineyard produces fruit but the tenants withheld it from the owner. Thus in Isaiah the problem rests on the vineyard and in the parable of Jesus the problem rests on the tenants so the vineyard is given to others. The reference to a journey lasting a long time is to the forbearance of God as His patience gives the tenants more time.

#### **Luke 20:10-12**

*"At the harvest time he sent a slave to the vine-growers, so that they would give him some of the produce of the vineyard; but the vine-growers beat him and sent him away empty-handed. (11) "And he proceeded to send another slave; and they beat him also and treated him shamefully and sent him away empty-handed. (12) "And he proceeded to send a third; and this one also they wounded and cast out.*

But God's patience will not last forever and there will be a time of harvest. Luke states that three slaves were sent to the vineyard and were badly treated. These three summarize the mistreatment

of God's prophets throughout the history of Israel. The following is an important background for understanding this parable and its references to the mistreatment of prophets:

*2Chron36:14-16 Furthermore, all the officials of the priests and the people were very unfaithful following all the abominations of the nations; and they defiled the house of the LORD which He had sanctified in Jerusalem. (15) The LORD, the God of their fathers, sent word to them again and again by His messengers, because He had compassion on His people and on His dwelling place; (16) but they continually mocked the messengers of God, despised His words and scoffed at His prophets, until the wrath of the LORD arose against His people, until there was no remedy.*

The persecution of the prophets occurs often in NT accounts (Matt 5:12, 23:31-39; Luke 13:33-34; Acts 7:52; 1 Thess 2:15; Heb 11:36-38.) In the parable the owner represents God; the son, Jesus; the tenants, the religious leaders responsible for the religious life of Israel; and the servants represent the prophets. The accounts in Matthew and Mark are only slightly different (Matt 21:34-44; Mark 12:5-11).

### **Luke 20:13-15**

*"The owner of the vineyard said, 'What shall I do? I will send my beloved son; perhaps they will respect him.' (14) "But when the vine-growers saw him, they reasoned with one another, saying, 'This is the heir; let us kill him so that the inheritance will be ours.' (15) "So they threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. What, then, will the owner of the vineyard do to them?"*

God never becomes frustrated as we do for He knows everything and His plans are perfect but the expression, "What shall I do", indicates that His plan is coming to an end. He now sends His beloved son to the vineyard. This connotation as the beloved son was also used in:

- Luke 3:22 *and the Holy Spirit descended upon Him in bodily form like a dove, and a voice came out of heaven, "You are My beloved Son, in You I am well-pleased."*
- Luke 9:35 *Then a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is My Son, My Chosen One; listen to Him!"*
- Isa 5:1-2 *Let me sing now for my well-beloved A song of my beloved concerning His vineyard. My well-beloved had a vineyard on a fertile hill. (2) He dug it all around, removed its stones, And planted it with the choicest vine. And He built a tower in the middle of it And also hewed out a wine vat in it; Then He expected it to produce good grapes, But it produced only worthless ones.*

However the tenants did not respect the son but reasoned that if they killed him then they would own the vineyard since this was also the only son and heir. In this era, the tenants had no share of ownership of the vineyard but only worked it for the owner. Executions took place outside of the city as to avoid defiling it (Acts 7:58) and later readers would identify this aspect with the crucifixion of Jesus being outside of the city gates (Heb 13:12).

Jesus then begins to bring the parable to a conclusion by asking what the owner of the vineyard will now do since His Son has been killed. The temple leaders surely understood by now the reality of this parable by Jesus so His next statement would be quite a shock to them.

### **Luke 20:16-19**

*"He will come and destroy these vine-growers and will give the vineyard to others." When they heard it, they said, "May it never be!" (17) But Jesus looked at them and said, "What then is this that is written: 'THE STONE WHICH THE BUILDERS REJECTED, THIS BECAME THE CHIEF CORNER stone'? (18) "Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces; but on whomever it falls, it will scatter him like dust." (19) The scribes and the chief priests tried to lay hands on Him that very hour, and they feared the people; for they understood that He spoke this parable against them.*

In the parable, the owner has now morphed from an impotent owner into a being who is capable of bringing about great destruction and giving His kingdom to others. Undoubtedly it is the temple rulers who blurt out "May it never be" for the destruction of the temple would take away their role as religious leaders and, since it served as the economic center of the nation, such would badly damage Jerusalem. The people did not ask what they might do to correct the situation but preferred to live in denial that such a thing could happen. Jesus quotes from a Psalm as a proof text that what they dread will indeed happen: *The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief corner stone.* (Psa 118:22) The verb translated "rejected" above also appears in the first passion prediction of Jesus by Luke: *saying, "The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed and be raised up on the third day."* (Luke 9:22) The builders is a very transparent reference to the religious leaders of Israel. Since the original stone is to be rejected, the implication is that a new "building" will be erected and the second volume written by Luke will make it clear that the new structure is not literally made of stone: *"However, the Most High does not dwell in houses made by human hands; as the prophet says: (Acts 7:48) Jesus then states that whoever trips over the cornerstone will be destroyed and on whomever the stone falls, they will be totally taken out of the picture and not even remembered as they will be as dust. The religious leaders would certainly have taken this prediction as meaning the total loss of their ruling and even life. But the leaders are terrified that the people are so supportive of Jesus that they will have to be overcome before a plan to kill Jesus can be fulfilled.*

### **Luke 20:20-26**

*So they watched Him, and sent spies who pretended to be righteous, in order that they might catch Him in some statement, so that they could deliver Him to the rule and the authority of the governor. (21) They questioned Him, saying, "Teacher, we know that You speak and teach correctly, and You are not partial to any, but teach the way of God in truth. (22) "Is it lawful for us to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?" (23) But He detected their trickery and said to them, (24) "Show Me a denarius. Whose likeness and inscription does it have?" They said, "Caesar's." (25) And He said to them, "Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." (26) And they were unable to catch Him in a saying in the presence of the people; and being amazed at His answer, they became silent.*

The "they" are all of the religious rulers who are sympathetic to their cause and against the teaching of Jesus. They watched Him closely and sent double agents to be with Him. These people would ask religious questions that they thought could get Him in trouble with the Roman

rulers so that they could remove Jesus from being the problem with their authority. The spies called Him “teacher” and flattered Him with words as did Satan in his temptations but Jesus was not susceptible to such flattery. Luke reports one of the questions they posed to Jesus regarding paying taxes. This is actually a legitimate question regarding paying tribute to Caesar without dishonoring God. The taxes totally almost 30-40 percent of a person’s income so this was a real burden to the people that went to support the imperial court in Rome and kept everyone in mind of the absolute rule of Rome. Regarding the legality of the tax, it could be seen as a violation of the first commandment. If Jesus stated that He opposed the tax, even in a nonviolent manner, He could be judged a rebel and sentenced to death. But if He upheld paying the tax that position would negate any messianic claim because everyone expected the Messiah to remove Israel from subjection to Rome.

Jesus was not fooled by their trickery and outmaneuvered them by asking them a question that was also a trap. The denarius is an advertisement for idolatry with the effigy of the emperor and a superscription on one side that read “Emperor Tiberias Son of the divine Augustus”. On the other side some coins had a female figure facing right and seated on a throne with the writing “Chief Priest”. Thus the coin advertises Tiberius as a divine being as the son of the divine Augustus. The woman is a priestess or the wife of Augustus. To look at the coin means that they had one in the temple and that was a clear violation of the second commandment.

The verb translated “render” can be better translated as “give back” as Jesus simply points out that they already acknowledge the authority of Caesar by having the coin in their possession. The spies did not ask about God but the second part of the answer of Jesus is the key to the entire passage. The passage is then not about what belongs to Caesar but what belongs to God. Will they play by Caesar’s rules or by God’s rule? Will they be like the tenants in the previous parable who refused to give to the owner of the vineyard the fruit owed him? Jesus indeed put them into a predicament! Luke only reports the interplay regarding this one question but the spies gave up on this approach to trap Jesus as He was too clever and they only revealed their ineptitude. But they did not give up and will later accuse Jesus of forbidding paying taxes to Caesar: *And they began to accuse Him, saying, "We found this man misleading our nation and forbidding to pay taxes to Caesar, and saying that He Himself is Christ, a King."* (Luke 23:2) They did not hesitate to lie to bring Jesus into disfavor with Rome.

### **Luke 20:27-36**

*Now there came to Him some of the Sadducees (who say that there is no resurrection), (28) and they questioned Him, saying, "Teacher, Moses wrote for us that IF A MAN'S BROTHER DIES, having a wife, AND HE IS CHILDLESS, HIS BROTHER SHOULD MARRY THE WIFE AND RAISE UP CHILDREN TO HIS BROTHER. (29) "Now there were seven brothers; and the first took a wife and died childless; (30) and the second (31) and the third married her; and in the same way all seven died, leaving no children. (32) "Finally the woman died also. (33) "In the resurrection therefore, which one's wife will she be? For all seven had married her."*

This is the first and only appearance in Luke of the Sadducees although Luke does mention them in his second epistle (Acts 4:1; 5:17; 23:6-88). They did not believe in a resurrection or any life

after death that may reflect their lack of support of traditions outside of the Pentateuch. Their question of Jesus is meant to make a belief in the resurrection look ridiculous but it allows Jesus to support the resurrection. They are quoting Moses' support of Levirate marriage (husband's brother) that would allow a man's name to be carried forth after death in the life of any male progeny sired by his brother and the surviving wife:

*Deut 25:5-6 "When brothers live together and one of them dies and has no son, the wife of the deceased shall not be married outside the family to a strange man. Her husband's brother shall go in to her and take her to himself as wife and perform the duty of a husband's brother to her. (6) "It shall be that the firstborn whom she bears shall assume the name of his dead brother, so that his name will not be blotted out from Israel.*

Their argument based upon the Mosaic custom was meant to make the resurrection look foolish. Each of the brothers died with no children to carry on his name and finally the widow died. They seem hardly able to conceal their sniggers as they ask Jesus what they think is their penetrating question.

### **Luke 20:34-36**

*Jesus said to them, "The sons of this age marry and are given in marriage, (35) but those who are considered worthy to attain to that age and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry nor are given in marriage; (36) for they cannot even die anymore, because they are like angels, and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection.*

The first portion of the answer by Jesus argues two things with the first being that they premise of life after death is just a continuation of life on this mortal plane because the two spheres of existence are not compatible. Those who are resurrected are more comparable to the angels who have not need to propagate, will not marry or be given in marriage, cannot die, and are sons of God. The second aspect of the reply by Jesus pertains to whether all will attain the resurrection. The implication is that not all are worthy and reminds us of the questions asked by the disciples:

- Luke 13:23-24 *And someone said to Him, "Lord, are there just a few who are being saved?" And He said to them, (24) "Strive to enter through the narrow door; for many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able.*
- Luke 18:26-27 *They who heard it said, "Then who can be saved?" (27) But He said, "The things that are impossible with people are possible with God."*

### **Luke 20:37-40**

*"But that the dead are raised, even Moses showed, in the passage about the burning bush, where he calls the Lord THE GOD OF ABRAHAM, AND THE GOD OF ISAAC, AND THE GOD OF JACOB. (38) "Now He is not the God of the dead but of the living; for all live to Him." (39) Some of the scribes answered and said, "Teacher, You have spoken well." (40) For they did not have courage to question Him any longer about anything.*

Before the Bible was divided into chapters and verses, people referred to specific verses by titles such as "the bush passage" to which Jesus refers:

Exo 3:14-16 *God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM"; and He said, "Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.'" (15) God, furthermore, said to Moses, "Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, 'The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.' This is My name forever, and this is My memorial-name to all generations. (16) "Go and gather the elders of Israel together and say to them, 'The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, has appeared to me, saying, "I am indeed concerned about you and what has been done to you in Egypt.*

If people no longer existed they cannot have a god but saying that the LORD is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob who had died means that they still live in the afterlife. God is then the God of the living even if they have ceased to live in this mortal realm. Paul affirms that Christians are “children of God”:

- Rom 8:14-16 *For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. (15) For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, "Abba! Father!" (16) The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God,*
- Gal 3:26 *For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.*
- Gal 4:5-6 *so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. (6) Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!"*

The teachers of the law (scribes) voiced their approval of the argument of Jesus as they are always happy to see the Sadducees lose an argument. They did not have the courage to ask Him any more questions as they had lost every argument.

#### **Luke 20:41-44**

*Then He said to them, "How is it that they say the Christ is David's son? (42) "For David himself says in the book of Psalms, 'THE LORD SAID TO MY LORD, "SIT AT MY RIGHT HAND, (43) UNTIL I MAKE YOUR ENEMIES A FOOTSTOOL FOR YOUR FEET.'" (44) "Therefore David calls Him 'Lord,' and how is He his son?"*

Jesus ended this discussion with a question of His own. The Christ is the title Messiah and Jesus asks how the Messiah can be called David's son. The question is passed upon a Psalm in which David refers to his descendent as Lord: **A Psalm of David.** *The LORD says to my Lord: "Sit at My right hand Until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet."* (Psa 110:1) People viewed the Messiah as a person who would defeat all of the enemies of Israel and bring about another great kingdom of David. They viewed the Messiah as similar to David but Jesus wants them to understand that the Messiah is not someone of such a petty sense. So how can the Messiah be both Lord of David and his son? The word LORD translates the Hebrew Yahweh, the sacred name of God. Such a relationship can only be true if He is more than just a human descendent. Paul answered this question in:

*Rom 1:3-4 concerning His Son, who was born of a descendant of David according to the flesh, (4) who was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead, according to the Spirit of holiness, Jesus Christ our Lord,*

Jesus is David's Lord because He is the eternal God and He is David's son because He became man as born supernaturally of the daughter of David's lineage, Mary. Therefore Jesus is both the son of David and the Lord of David. He is heir to the throne of David (Luke 1:32 "*He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David*) but He will not reign from Jerusalem but from heaven as the Son of the Most High.

**Luke 20:45-47**

*And while all the people were listening, He said to the disciples, (46) "Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes, and love respectful greetings in the market places, and chief seats in the synagogues and places of honor at banquets, (47) who devour widows' houses, and for appearance's sake offer long prayers. These will receive greater condemnation."*

The crowd had been listening to all of these discussions but now Jesus turned to the disciples to warn them of the scribes. Luke has previously recorded His strong disapproval of them in 11:37-52 and here Luke only repeats some of this condemnation. They are extreme hypocrites who practice lawlessness in their lives and still rise to give long prayers in the synagogue. They love the praise of the people but do not know that they will receive eternal damnation from God for the people that they really are. Certainly there are many such people today who preach to many people a false gospel that only lifts them up but does not reveal their hearts. Just as Jesus warns the disciples, so we should be warned of such teachers and preachers in the churches today. Paul warned of such people in:

- 2Cor 11:4 *For if one comes and preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted, you bear this beautifully.*
- 2Cor 11:13-15 *For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. (14) No wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. (15) Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness, whose end will be according to their deeds.*

All such people should be warned by these words of Jesus that they will receive a greater condemnation for their hypocrisy as they pretended to worship God but by their actions betrayed such a pretense.