

“SELL EVERYTHING YOU HAVE AND GIVE TO  
THE POOR”: THE OLD TESTAMENT PROPHETIC  
THEME OF JUSTICE AS THE CONNECTING MOTIF  
OF LUKE 18:1–19:10

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I. INTRODUCTION

This paper proposes that the theme of “justice,” as described and emphasized repeatedly throughout the Old Testament Prophets, is the central theme and connecting motif for the interrelated pericopes in Luke 18:1–19:10. In developing this conclusion, first three important background issues will be explored: (1) Luke’s intertextual use of the OT in general and the OT Prophets in particular; (2) the emphasis on the theme of justice within the OT prophetic corpus, especially as it is connected to the coming messianic era; and (3) the socio-economic setting in first century Palestine, especially in regard to the rich, the poor, and justice. Informed by these three important background perspectives, the paper will then seek to demonstrate how the theme of justice (as defined by the OT Prophets) runs like a thread throughout the pericopes of Luke 18:1–19:10.

II. LUKE’S RELIANCE ON THE OT PROPHETS

The strong influence of the OT within the message and themes of Luke-Acts is without question. James A. Sanders states, “Luke is the most explicit of the evangelists in insisting that to understand what God was doing in Christ one had to know Scripture.”<sup>1</sup> Luke, however, is not tied to direct citations for his OT connections, and, in fact, much of his OT reference and allusion is not done by direct citation. In this regard, Darrell Bock writes: “The Old Testament is not cited with explanation points like Matthew, but woven into the fabric of the account. This implicit literary style of Old Testament citation may be responsible for much of the ‘subtlety’ since Luke indulges by choice in little explicit editorial

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<sup>1</sup> James A. Sanders, “Isaiah in Luke,” in *Luke and Scripture: The Function of Sacred Tradition in Luke-Acts* (ed. Craig A. Evans and James A. Sanders; Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2001; previously published by Fortress, 1993) 18. See also David W. Pao and Eckhard J. Schnabel, “Luke,” in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007) 251.

comment.”<sup>2</sup> Thus in many passages Luke will allude continuously to OT themes and promises without making any direct citations.

It is also clear that Luke is concerned with connecting Jesus to OT prophecy. In the past, scholars often referred to this as a “proof from prophecy” scheme,<sup>3</sup> but more recently this has been refined along the lines of “proclamation from prophecy and pattern.”<sup>4</sup> Either way, it is important to underscore the centrality of the OT prophetic promises to Luke’s message. Indeed, Mark Strauss identifies the central theme of Luke-Acts in this manner: “God’s end-times salvation predicted through the prophets has arrived through the coming of Jesus the Messiah, the Savior of the world, and this salvation is now going forth to the whole world.”<sup>5</sup> Richard Hays also stresses this, writing, “The most striking thing about Luke’s hermeneutical strategy is his insistent and skillful representation of narrative continuity, linking the story of Jesus seamlessly with the much longer narrative of God’s promises to Israel.”<sup>6</sup>

The close connection between the life, work, and teachings of Jesus and the OT Prophets is stressed early in Luke when in 4:18–19 Jesus opens his public ministry with a citation of Isa 61:1–2 (along with a line from Isa 58:6):

The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me  
to preach good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners  
and recovery of sight for the blind,<sup>7</sup>  
to release the oppressed,<sup>8</sup>  
to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.

Placed here at the beginning of Jesus’ ministry, this connection to Isaiah’s prophecy is “of central importance to the narrative as a whole”<sup>9</sup> and

<sup>2</sup> Darrell L. Bock, *Proclamation from Prophecy and Pattern: Lucan Old Testament Christology* (JSNTSS 12; Sheffield: JSOT, 1987) 269.

<sup>3</sup> See the discussion by Robert Stein, *Luke* (NAC; Nashville: Broadman, 1992) 37–38.

<sup>4</sup> This is one of the main arguments of Bock, *Proclamation from Prophecy*, as the title suggests. Pao and Schnabel, “Luke” 252–53, concur, citing Bock. Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke* (SacPag; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1991) 16, also stresses the importance of this, writing, “Luke also extends and refines proof from prophecy by making it his most important literary device.”

<sup>5</sup> Mark L. Strauss, *Four Portraits, One Jesus: An Introduction to Jesus and the Gospels* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007) 260.

<sup>6</sup> Richard B. Hays, “The Liberation of Israel in Luke-Acts,” in *Reading the Bible Intertextually* (ed. Richard B. Hays, Stefan Alkier, and Leroy A. Huizenga; Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2009) 116.

<sup>7</sup> Luke is following the LXX with the phrase “recovery of sight for the blind.” The MT has “release for the prisoners.” The healing of the blind plays an important role in Luke and in the passage we are considering (Luke 18:1–19:10).

<sup>8</sup> This is the line that is inserted from Isa 58:6. Pao and Schnabel, “Luke” 288–89, note that Isa 58:6 was associated with Isa 61:1 in the Qumran documents (4Q521).

<sup>9</sup> Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997) 207. Green continues, “As Luke has shaped his narrative, then, the ministry of Jesus in Nazareth at the outset of his public ministry is of central importance to the Gospel as a whole, and thus also to Luke-Acts. It defines to a significant extent the nature of Jesus’ ministry, estab-

serves a “programmatically” purpose for much of Jesus’ ministry.<sup>10</sup> The major point to be made here is that in the Gospel of Luke, the ministry of Jesus is firmly rooted in the OT Prophets. Given this clear identification, coupled with the above observations concerning Luke’s normal practice of alluding to the OT in subtle ways, interpreters should not be surprised to see numerous subtle but powerful connections to the OT Prophets throughout Luke.

Also of importance is the observation that even in this text (Luke 4:18–19, citing Isa 61:1–2 and 58:6), the theme of justice hovers just below the surface. All of the actions listed in the Isa 61:1–2 citation are associated throughout the Prophets with justice. Only a few verses later Yahweh states, “For I, the LORD, love justice” (Isa 61:9). The citation from Isa 58:6 is likewise tightly tied into the context of justice. Isaiah 58 is a critique against hypocritical fasting. The entire verse 58:6 reads, “Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice (LXX ἀδικίας) and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke?” Isaiah 58:7 then connects true fasting to caring for the poor, “Is it not to share your food with the hungry . . . ?” In keeping with this early programmatic text, Luke places a heavy emphasis on social reversal and economic justice throughout the book.<sup>11</sup>

### III. THE OT PROPHETS AND THE PROMISE OF JUSTICE

The Hebrew term מִשְׁפָּט (mišpāt) is one of the most central terms of the prophetic literature, occurring 148 times. The importance of this term in the Prophets cannot be overstressed.<sup>12</sup> While the Prophets use מִשְׁפָּט (mišpāt) occasionally to mean “judgment” or “verdict” they use it most frequently to mean “justice.” Carrying the nuance of justice, מִשְׁפָּט (mišpāt) is used by the Prophets in four major contexts.

First, מִשְׁפָּט (mišpāt) is a characteristic of Yahweh, who loves justice and does justice. “For I, the LORD, love justice” (Isa 61:8; cf. Isa 5:16; 30:18; 33:5; Jer 9:24; Hos 2:19; Zeph 3:5). When Yahweh acts in human history, מִשְׁפָּט (mišpāt) is used both for judgment on the rebellious and for deliverance of those who trust him.

Second, Yahweh expects his people, and especially their leaders, to live by מִשְׁפָּט (mišpāt). One of the major themes running throughout the

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lishing a critical narrative need for Jesus to perform in ways that grow out of and reflect this missionary program.”

<sup>10</sup> I. Howard Marshall, *Commentary on Luke* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978) 177–78; Pao and Schnabel, “Luke” 287–89.

<sup>11</sup> Scot McKnight, “Justice, Righteousness,” in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (ed. Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight, and I. Howard Marshall; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1992) 415.

<sup>12</sup> The term מִשְׁפָּט (mišpāt) is also of utmost importance in the book of Deuteronomy, on which much of the prophetic message is based.

Prophets is condemnation of Israel's and Judah's leaders (king, nobles, priests, prophets) because of their failure to do justice. For example, in Jer 5:27–28 Yahweh proclaims:

They [the leaders] have become rich and powerful and have grown fat and sleek. Their evil deeds have no limit; they do not plead the case of the fatherless to win it, they do not defend the rights (טִשְׁפָּת) of the poor. Should I not punish them for this?' declares the LORD. (cf. Isa 1:21–23; 5:1–7; 10:1–2; Jer 5:5, 27–28; 21:11–14; 22:1–3, 13–16; Mic 3:1, 7–8)

Third, as the Prophets look to the future and describe the coming glorious restoration, טִשְׁפָּת (*mišpāt*) is one of the highlights of the era. In contrast to Israel's current corrupt and unjust rulers, the coming Davidic King will be characterized by justice and will institute justice in the land. Thus Isaiah proclaims: "In love a throne will be established; in faithfulness a man will sit on it—one from the house of David—one who in judging seeks justice and speeds the cause of righteousness" (Isa 16:5; cf. Isa 9:7; 4; 11:4; 32:1; 42:1–4; Jer 23:5; 33:15; Ezek 34:16).

Fourth, the Prophets continually exhort the people to live by טִשְׁפָּת (*mišpāt*). The exhortation to live by justice is both a call to return to covenant obedience (as described in Deuteronomy) in order to avoid judgment, and a guideline to live by in the intervening time as they wait for the coming Messiah.<sup>13</sup> Thus the prophet Micah declares: "He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly (lit. do טִשְׁפָּת [*mišpāt*]) and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God." (Mic 6:8; cf. Isa 56:1; Ezek 18:21; Hos 12:6; Amos 5:15; Zech 8:16).

Justice in the OT prophetic books is tightly interconnected with several other terms and themes that are significant for understanding Luke 18:1–19:10. First of all, throughout the prophetic literature, justice (טִשְׁפָּת; *mišpāt*) is frequently paralleled with righteousness (דִּקְיָה/דִּקְיָה; *šedeq/šēdāqā*). The two terms are used together over 100 times in the Prophets, often in close parallelism. The meanings of the two terms overlap in the sense that they both seem to refer to a "sphere" of what is right or what is due.<sup>14</sup> In

<sup>13</sup> J. Daniel Hays, *The Message of the Prophets* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010) 65–70.

<sup>14</sup> G. Liedke, "špt," *TLOT* 3.1396. In a very thought-provoking article, Steven M. Voth points out that the KJV, the most influential early English translation, regularly translated *šedeq/šēdāqā* in the OT and *dikaioi/dikaioynē* in the NT as "righteousness," while the RVR, the most influential early Spanish translation, often translated these words as "justice." Voth suggests that the political climate surrounding the KJV perhaps was a determining factor in the translators minimizing the biblical call to "justice." He cites several OT examples, especially in the Prophets, where *šedeq/šēdāqā* is used clearly in a context that is better represented by the English word "justice" than the word "righteousness." He also points out that a better understanding and better translation of the OT usage would impact how the NT is translated as well. Thus he concludes that, in general, our English Bible translations would be more accurate if they spent more time looking carefully at these terms in context, and thus translated these terms more often as "justice" and less often as "righteousness." Steven

the majority of texts where these two terms are used together, justice appears first. These two terms—justice and righteousness—likewise are closely connected in the Gospels.<sup>15</sup> This close connection will surface in the relationship between the first two pericopes in Luke 18:1–19:10.

Justice in the Prophets is also often connected to caring for orphans, widows, foreigners, the oppressed, and the poor. In Isaiah, Yahweh declares, “Woe to those who make unjust laws, to those who issue oppressive decrees, to deprive the poor of their rights and rob my oppressed people of justice, making widows their prey and robbing the fatherless” (Isa 10:1–2). This is a major recurring theme in the prophetic literature (cf. Isa 1:17, 23; 11:4; 32:7; 58:1–8; Jer 5:28; 7:5–6; 21:12; 22:1–3, 13–16; Ezek 22:29; Zech 7:9–10).<sup>16</sup>

Justice and humility are also closely related: “Seek the LORD, all you humble of the land, you who do what he commands (lit., his מִצְוֹת; *mišpāt*). Seek righteousness, seek humility; perhaps you will be sheltered on the day of the LORD’s anger” (Zeph 2:3; cf. Isa 58:1–8; Mic 6:8).

Likewise, in several texts Yahweh declares that he wants true justice rather than hypocritical religious ritual.<sup>17</sup> Amos 5 stresses this theme, and in 5:21–24 Yahweh states,

I hate, I despise your religious feasts; I cannot stand your assemblies.  
Even though you bring me burnt offerings and grain offerings,  
I will not accept them. Though you bring choice fellowship  
offerings, I will have no regard for them. Away with the noise of your  
songs! I will not listen to the music of your harps. But let justice roll  
on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!

As mentioned above, the ritual of hypocritical fasting is singled out in Isa 58:5–7, where Yahweh proclaims,

Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter—when you see the naked, to

M. Voth, “Justice and/or Righteousness: A Contextualized Analysis of *Sedeq* in the KJV (English) and RVR (Spanish),” in *The Challenge of Bible Translation: Communicating God’s Word to the World* (ed. Glen G. Scorgie, Mark L. Strauss, and Steven M. Voth; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003) 321–45.

<sup>15</sup> McKnight, “Justice, Righteousness” 412, writes: “In conveying biblical thought, the two English terms are inseparable in that it is God’s will to which a person conforms, whether that will is expressed in predominantly social or religious categories. In this article justice will be used exclusively for the social implications of God’s will; righteousness will be used for the broader meaning of the concept. However, in many instances a clear distinction cannot and should not be made.”

<sup>16</sup> See the discussions in Hays, *Prophets* 65–70; Donald E. Gowan, “Wealth and Poverty in the Old Testament: The Case of the Widow, the Orphan, and the Sojourner,” *Int* 41/4 (1987) 341–53; Thomas Krapf, “Traditionsgeschichtliches zum deuteronomischen Fremdling-Waise-Witwe-Gebot,” *VT* 34 (1984) 87–91; and Richard D. Patterson, “The Widow, the Orphan, and the Poor in the Old Testament and the Extra-Biblical Literature,” *BSac* 130 (1973) 223–34.

<sup>17</sup> Hays, *Prophets* 66–68.

clothe him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood? (cf. Zech 7:4–10)

Another interesting connection, especially in Isaiah, is the close association between justice and the healing of blindness; that is, injustice and blindness go together while justice and clear sight also go together (Isa 42:1–7; 59:9–11). In Isa 32:1–8, the coming king establishes righteousness and justice (Isa 32:1), opening the eyes of the blind (Isa 32:3–4; figurative of understanding), allowing them to see clearly the hypocrisy of nobles who are really fools and scoundrels because “the hungry he leaves empty” (Isa 32:6) and the poor he destroys with lies, “even when the plea of the needy is just” (Isa 32:7).

Not surprisingly, Jerusalem (or Zion) is also frequently associated with justice or the lack of justice. In a positive sense God will establish justice in Zion (Isa 33:9). In a negative sense, however, Jerusalem is also tightly connected to the lack of justice and thus will experience judgment (Isa 1:21–23; Jer 5:1–5; 7:1–15; 8:5–7; 22:1–5; Ezek 5:6–8).

In conclusion, justice is a central theme in the OT Prophets. It is closely interconnected with several other subthemes: righteousness; the character of the coming Davidic king and his kingdom; care for orphans, widows, foreigners, and the poor; humility; hypocritical rituals like fasting; the healing of blindness; and judgment on Jerusalem. These are the very themes that surface in Luke 18:1–19:10.

#### IV. POVERTY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE IN FIRST-CENTURY PALESTINE

Often the tendency for Western interpreters is to assume their contemporary affluent socio-economic situation as the default background context for understanding biblical exhortations regarding poverty. That is, in most Western societies there is a large majority group of middle class people with which the readers usually identify. Then at the top there is a small class of very wealthy people (e.g. millionaires and billionaires) and at the bottom there is an equally small class of poor people (e.g. the homeless). The social situation in Palestine of the first century, however, was quite different. Peter Davids explains that at the time of Jesus there was not much of a middle class in Palestine at all. Indeed, there were two major socio-economic groups: a very small wealthy or upper-class urban elite and then a huge mass of very poor subsistence-level peasants. In first-century AD Palestine, the term “poor” probably referred to the vast majority of the population. That is, in all probability, most of the people that Jesus interacts with or speaks to, especially when outside of Jerusalem, were part of the large socio-

economic group living at subsistence level, referred to in the Gospels as “the poor.”<sup>18</sup>

James A. Sanders makes the same point in discussing Jesus’ citation of Isaiah 61 in Luke 4. He notes that the listening audience in that synagogue would have identified themselves with the poor (for they were the poor).<sup>19</sup> Sean Freyne also draws attention to the severe social stratification in Galilee, noting that the Jewish aristocracy, particularly the priestly aristocracy, was precisely the ones who were oppressing the poor peasants.<sup>20</sup>

Bruce W. Longenecker comes to similar conclusions about the socio-economic situation in the first-century world. He argues that this reality is reflected throughout the Gospels and is especially clear in the Gospel of Luke.<sup>21</sup> Longenecker notes, for example, that when John the Baptist asks Jesus if he was the coming one, Jesus answered with a list of actions associated with the eschatological liberation that the Coming One prophesied in Isaiah would bring: the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news preached to them (Luke 7:18–23). Longenecker then points out the irony of the list, observing, “Jesus’ reply depicts a world in which healing blindness, curing disease, restoring hearing and raising the dead were as exceptional as encouraging the poor. The astonishment that would have attended Jesus’ miracles of power is, we are led to think, comparable to the astonishment that would have attended Jesus’ pronouncement of blessing to the

<sup>18</sup> Peter H. Davids, “Rich and Poor,” in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* 702–3. Several recent sociological studies come to similar conclusions, underscoring the extreme social stratification and the crushing debt imposed on the peasant population by the ruling elite in first-century AD Palestine. See, e.g., Douglas E. Oakman, “Jesus and Agrarian Palestine: The Factor of Debt” and “Was Jesus a Peasant? Implications for Reading the Jesus Tradition (Luke 10:30–35),” in Jerome H. Neyrey and Eric C. Stewart, eds., *The Social World of the New Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2008); and David Fiensy, *The Social History of Palestine in the Herodian Period: The Land is Mine* (Studies in the Bible and Early Christianity 20; Lewiston, NY: Mellon, 1991) 75–85. Numerous articles and monographs have been written on the topic of “the poor in Luke,” usually focusing on Luke’s theological and ethical teaching regarding wealth and the poor. See the extensive survey by John R. Donahue, “Two Decades of Research on the Rich and the Poor in Luke-Acts,” in *Justice and the Holy: Essays in Honor of Walter Harrelson* (ed. Douglas A. Knight and Peter J. Paris; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989) 129–44. In spite of the title of this book, however, neither in the works surveyed nor in Donahue’s added comments is the tight OT prophetic connection between the poor and justice mentioned. Likewise, these works do not appear to note the important OT connection between the failure to provide justice for the poor and the consequential judgment from God, especially upon Jerusalem. In contrast, see Bruce W. Longenecker, *Remember the Poor: Paul, Poverty, and the Greco-Roman World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), a recent work which explores the socio-economic situation regarding wealth and poverty in the Greco-Roman world. Longenecker (pp. 115–25) does connect Jesus’s concern with poverty to the eschatological promises of the OT Prophets.

<sup>19</sup> James A. Sanders, “Isaiah in Luke” 22.

<sup>20</sup> Sean Freyne, *Galilee from Alexander the Great to Hadrian, 323 B.C.E. to 135 C.E.: A Study of Second Temple Judaism* (Wilmington, DE and Notre Dame, IN: Michael Glazier and University of Notre Dame, 1980) 194–200.

<sup>21</sup> Longenecker, *Remember the Poor* 115–25.

poor.”<sup>22</sup> That is, the plight of the poor (the majority of the population) was so grim and hopelessly entrenched within the culture that any good news for them was viewed to be on a miraculous par with the resurrection of the dead.<sup>23</sup>

## V. AN ANALYSIS OF LUKE 18:1–19:10

*1. Introduction.* The events in this passage take place within a socio-economic culture in which a very few extremely wealthy rulers, usually connected to the religious institutions, controlled almost all of the wealth while the vast majority of the people lived in poverty. Echoing throughout the book of Luke is the pervasive OT prophetic promise that the coming Messiah would establish justice, in contrast to the unjust rulers of Israel. Justice in the OT prophets is frequently connected to the care and support of widows and the poor. Sounding very much like the OT prophets, Jesus opens this unit with a promise of justice: “Will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? . . . I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly” (Luke 18:7–8). Within the context of this statement, it is highly suggestive to find that the interconnected stories and parables which follow deal precisely with those who would be the major players in the issue of justice at this time in Israel: a crooked judge, a widow, children, a blind beggar, the poor, a rich ruler, Pharisees, and tax collectors. Likewise, one of the interconnecting themes running throughout the passage is money and wealth.

There is no clear consensus regarding the literary “boundaries” or larger unit connections regarding the pericopes in Luke 18:1–19:10. Many commentators connect Luke 18:1–8 (the Widow and the Unjust Judge) with the material before it (starting either with 17:11 or with 17:20), thus placing a unit break between 18:1–8 and 18:9–14,<sup>24</sup> and failing to pursue the connections with the stories that follow. Others include all of Luke 18 in the larger unit of 17:11–19:27.<sup>25</sup> Other options have been proposed as well.<sup>26</sup> While there is a near consensus on the larger unit (the journey to Jerusalem; 9:51–19:27), there is no consensus regarding the smaller units. In light of the way that Luke often interconnects his pericopes (sometimes with subtlety!), it is probably preferable to be cautious

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid. 120.

<sup>23</sup> Regarding this same passage, James Dunn notes that the proclamation of good news to the poor, coming last in the list, serves as the climax of the list, and not the raising of the dead. James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, Christianity in the Making 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003) 517.

<sup>24</sup> Marshall, *Luke* 10; Darrell L. Bock, *Luke 9:51–24:53* (BECNT; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996) v; Green, *Luke* 643.

<sup>25</sup> Stein, *Luke* 33.

<sup>26</sup> Johnson, *Luke* vii, lists the following units: 17:20–37; 18:1–14; 18:15–34; 18:35–19:10.



regarding sub-unit boundaries.<sup>27</sup> That is, as interpreters try to note the structure of Luke it is also possible that he has connections that span across the breaks in their outlines. While acknowledging that Luke 18:1–8 (and even the text that follows) has connections to the preceding material, this paper will seek to point out the numerous connections that exist when 18:1–19:10 is taken together against the OT prophetic background.<sup>28</sup>

2. *The widow and the unjust judge (Luke 18:1–8)*. The preceding passage in Luke 17 deals with the coming of the Kingdom of God, and the context set by this discussion (i.e. the coming Kingdom of God) no doubt carries over into 18:1–19:10. This first episode opens with an explanation—Jesus told this parable to encourage persistence in prayer (18:1). The eschatological nature of the preceding material leads many commentators to conclude that Jesus is exhorting his disciples to pray during the difficult interim time while the consummation of the Kingdom is delayed.<sup>29</sup> Soon, however, the story gives a clear qualification that Jesus is not talking about casual prayer in general, but about prayer from his chosen ones requesting justice. Words related to justice and injustice (from the δίκη word group) appear six times in this episode (18:3 [2x], 5, 6, 7, 8; see the Greek words listed below). Weaver correctly notes that this is a story about justice: “As Luke sees it, justice is the name for God’s action in the world to make right what is wrong. And prayer is the name for the collaboration of humans in that act of God.”<sup>30</sup> As mentioned above, justice is a dominating theme in the OT Prophets and frequently justice is specifically defined as care for widows. Thus the mention of justice within a story about a widow and an unjust judge practically insists that the reader recall the OT prophetic background.

Furthermore, the OT Prophets clearly identify justice as one of the leading characteristics of the Kingdom that the Messiah will inaugurate. So the OT background is not only in regard to widows and justice, but rather points to the fact that the coming Kingdom will bring justice, just as represented by the widow’s story in Luke 18:1–8. In this Kingdom context, Jesus goes on to say in 18:7 that “God will bring about justice for his chosen ones who cry out to him day and night” (recall the persistence

<sup>27</sup> Craig A. Evans, *Luke* (NIBC; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1990) 266, maintains that 18:1–8 connects more properly to the parable that follows rather than to the material that proceeds, but he also notes that it is possible that Luke intends 18:1–8 to be a transition from one section to the next.

<sup>28</sup> Green, *Luke* 643, notes the close ties between 18:9–14 and 18:1–8. Yet he then argues for an inclusio that starts with 17:20 (“when will the kingdom of God come?”) and ends with 18:8 (“when the Son of Man comes”), and thus he concludes that 18:1–8 goes with the preceding unit. However, it would seem that a tighter connection (or inclusio) is between 18:8 (“when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth”) and 19:10 (“For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost”).

<sup>29</sup> Green, *Luke* 637–38; Bock, *Luke 9:51–24:53* 1444.

<sup>30</sup> Dorothy Jean Weaver, “Luke 18:1–8,” *Int* 56.3 (2002) 318–19.

in prayer motif from the introductory verse 18:1). Indeed, Jesus states that God will see that they get justice “quickly” (or perhaps “suddenly”). The Prophets declare over and over that the current leaders and authorities do not practice justice, but that the coming Davidic king, in stark contrast, will inaugurate a time characterized by justice. Jesus connects to this theme and gives this situation a clear messianic twist when he connects the coming of the Son of Man (18:8) to the quick (or sudden) fulfillment of justice. Likewise, he injects the issue of faith, an important qualification.

Thus this first pericope contains several important elements: God, working through the Son of Man, will bring about justice quickly for his chosen ones who pray (cry out) to him persistently . . . and have faith.

3. *The parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector* (Luke 18:9–14). In spite of the suggestion by numerous commentators that there is a major break between Luke 18:8 and 18:9, it can be argued that 18:9–14 is in fact tied to the preceding parable. First of all, note that in the Parable of the Widow and the Unjust Judge (18:1–8) terms from the δίκη word group occur repeatedly (6 times). Then observe that the Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector (18:9–14) opens with the related adjective δίκαιος and closes with the related verb δικαίω in an apparent inclusion word play on that repetition. The striking repetition and word group connection can be seen in the list below:

Parable of the Widow and the Unjust Judge (18:1–8)

|                       |  |
|-----------------------|--|
| ἐκδίκησόν             | (grant me <i>justice</i> ; 18:3)                     |
| ἀπὸ τοῦ ἀντιδίκου μου | (against my <i>adversary</i> ; 18:3)                 |
| ἐκδικήσω              | (I will <i>give her justice</i> ; 18:5)              |
| ὁ κριτῆς τῆς ἀδικίας  | (the <i>unjust</i> judge; 18:6)                      |
| τὴν ἐκδικήσιν         | (and will not God bring about <i>justice</i> ; 18:7) |
| τὴν ἐκδίκησιν         | (he will see that they get <i>justice</i> ; 18:8)    |

Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector (18:9–14)

|               |   |
|---------------|---|
| δίκαιοι       | (who were confident of their own <i>righteousness</i> ; 18:9) |
| δεδικαιωμένος | (this man . . . went home <i>justified</i> ; 18:14)           |

Just as justice and righteousness are closely associated in the OT, so the concept of justice in 18:1–8 is related to the concept of righteousness/justification in 18:8–14. Luke 18:1–8 speaks of justice, vindication, making things right. The connecting sentence in 18:9 could be understood along the lines of “To some who were confident of their own vindication, or their own rightness in the world . . .”

In this connecting, qualifying parable, Jesus moves the persistent prayer theme to the Temple<sup>31</sup> and directs the prayers to God instead of the unjust judge. As Jesus exhorted his disciples to persist in prayer, they would no doubt have thought of the Pharisees, who were often seen praying long prayers in public view. That is, in the popular mind, the Pharisees were the ones who were persistent in prayer. Jesus is thus qualifying the Parable of the Widow by underscoring that the prayer of the pompous, self-righteous Pharisee is not what he is talking about.

The Pharisee in this parable boasts about his fasting and his practice of giving a tenth. Recall that Jesus quotes from Isaiah 58 at the opening of his public ministry in Luke 4. Isaiah 58 is a scathing prophetic critique of hypocritical fasting. Isaiah 58:4 declares, “You cannot fast as you do today and expect your voice to be heard on high.” Likewise, as mentioned above, in the following verses of Isaiah 58 Yahweh explains what he really wants, “Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice. . . . Is it not to share your food with the hungry . . . and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?” (Isa 58:6–7).

Within the Gospel of Luke, Jesus has already expressed quite clearly his opinion of the Pharisees. In Luke 11 he delivers a series of blistering critiques. Jesus exhorts the Pharisees to give to the poor (11:41) and then declares, “Woe to you, Pharisees, because you give God a tenth of your mint, rue, and all other kinds of garden herbs, *but you neglect justice (κρίσις) and the love of God*” (11:42).<sup>32</sup> Jesus then criticizes them for their arrogance and lack of humility (11:43) and lumps them together with their forefathers who *killed the Prophets* (11:47–51). Obviously, Jesus’ polemic against the Pharisees in Luke 11 echoes into Luke 18.

The tax collector, rejected by the Pharisee (note Isa 58:6 and true fasting—“not to turn away from your own flesh and blood”) stands at a distance (μακρόθεν), beats his breast (in repentance and humility?) and cries out for mercy. This theme of being close/far is likewise a prophetic theme and will echo through the next several pericopes.<sup>33</sup>

Although the arrogant Pharisee thinks he is righteous (δίκαιος), it is the tax collector who goes home justified (δίκαιω) before God. Jesus

<sup>31</sup> The Prophets in general, and Jeremiah in particular, are very negative towards the Temple because of the hypocritical cultic worship of the priests and people.

<sup>32</sup> The LXX frequently uses κρίσις to translate Hebrew מִשְׁפָּט (*mišpaṭ*).

<sup>33</sup> There is a possible word play between μακρόθεν (far) in 18:13 and μακροθυμεί (having patience?) in 18:7. Scholars are puzzled over the use of μακροθυμεί in 18:7. Bauer, Arndt, and Gingrich, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* 489, state that in 18:7 this term is “difficult to interpret.” Marshall, *Luke* 674–75, provides a discussion of possible options, none of which is entirely compelling. If a word play exists then the first instance (μακροθυμεί) might carry a figurative nuance of “put off, keep at a distance.” Several translations (NIV, NLT) reflect something similar to “Will he keep putting them off?” This theme will echo across this unit: the tax collector stands far off (but is then justified); the little children are brought near; the rich ruler comes to Jesus but will not commit to following him; Jesus orders that the blind beggar be brought to him; and Jesus goes right into the house of Zacchaeus.

then adds a new element into his exhortation to pray for justice persistently: humility is also a requirement. As mentioned above, one of the problems with the leaders of Israel and Judah during the time of the Prophets was their arrogance and their lack of humility. Thus as the Prophets condemned the leaders for their lack of justice, the lack of humility was one of the connected indictments. Ironically, throughout Isaiah one of the ways in which God judges the proud and obstinate is to “bring them low” (ταπεινῶ). In fact, the LXX in Isaiah uses the term ταπεινῶ over twenty times in judgment contexts.<sup>34</sup> Thus in Luke 18:14 when Jesus states that “Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled” (ὅτι πᾶς ὁ ὑψῶν ἑαυτὸν ταπεινωθήσεται) he is probably alluding to the numerous texts in Isaiah that use this same terminology for judgment (cf. Isa 2:11–12, 17; 3:8; 3:17; 3:25; 5:15; 10:33; 13:11; 25:11–12; 58:3, 5).<sup>35</sup> In the Prophets, the “bringing down” (LXX ταπεινῶ) of the arrogant leaders of Israel and Jerusalem is part of Yahweh’s justice on the Day of Yahweh. Isaiah 5:15–16 states this clearly: “Both low and high will be humbled, and the eyes of the arrogant brought low. But the LORD Almighty will be exalted by his justice, and the holy God will show himself holy by his righteousness.” In Luke 18:14, Jesus is not only proclaiming justification of the humble tax collector, he is also proclaiming judgment on the Pharisee. Both actions are part of the prophetic notion of justice. The behavior of the leaders in Luke 18:1–19:10 (Pharisee, rich ruler) connects them to the leaders who are condemned on the pages of the Prophets.

As Jesus promised in 18:7–8, in this parable God hears the persistent humble and repentant cry of the tax collector and then vindicates/justifies him quickly. Thus Jesus has qualified his exhortation on persistent prayer. His disciples are to pray persistently to God for justice, but they are also to be characterized by faith and true humility.

Having given two related parables of Jesus, Luke now connects them to several events regarding real people—events that illustrate the major themes of these parables in real life.

4. *Jesus And The Children (Luke 18:15–17)*. This short passage connects along two lines. First of all, it relates to the theme of “being far off/being close” to God. The disciples try to keep these young ones at a distance from Jesus, but Jesus orders that they be brought close.<sup>36</sup> The

<sup>34</sup> See the discussion in Walter Grundmann, “ταπεινός,” *TDNT* VIII.8.

<sup>35</sup> Isaiah 58 and its discussion of true fasting connect at numerous points with Luke 18:1–19:10. Note that in the LXX ταπεινῶ occurs three times in that chapter (58:3, 5, 10).

<sup>36</sup> Moessner argues that the theme of “journeying guest” (coming, house, receiving) runs throughout the “travel to Jerusalem” narrative section of Luke (9:51–19:27). David P. Moessner, *Lord of the Banquet: The Literary and Theological Significance of the Lukan Travel Narrative* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989) 167. Most of these references, however, seem to fit better when viewed against the OT theme of God’s presence and his people being either brought near (in blessing) or sent away (in judgment). Ezekiel 8–10 describes the departure of Yah-

second aspect of this passage is that children illustrate humility quite well. Thus this pericope is linked to the preceding one by the theme of humility.<sup>37</sup> The kingdom of God must be received like a child, in humility. Some have suggested that when the disciples rebuke the children and prohibit them from coming close to Jesus they expose their own exaggerated sense of importance and the fact that they did not quite comprehend what Jesus meant by humility.<sup>38</sup> Others note the contrast between the children and the rich ruler in the next section.<sup>39</sup>

5. *The Rich Ruler (Luke 18:18–30)*. Against the backdrop of justice in the Kingdom, Luke now presents several contrasting individuals (a rich ruler, a blind beggar, a tax collector). In 18:18, the first individual is identified as a ruler (ἄρχων). In the NT, when referring to Jewish leaders, ἄρχων is a fairly generic term, used for a wide range of Jewish leadership positions: synagogue authorities, lay members of the Sanhedrin, members of the highest Jewish authorities in general, or even the high priest.<sup>40</sup> Although Luke often uses this term for rulers of the 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. More likely, Bock notes, this man is a magistrate or an official of the high priest.<sup>41</sup> Coming in the context of the “justice” theme, the term ἄρχων is significant, for whether this man relates to the Sanhedrin, the synagogue, or the courts, he would be one of the people responsible for bringing about justice in the community, suggesting a connection back to the widow and judge parable. The connection back to “everyone who exalts himself will be humbled” (18:14) is likely as well.

Although most Bibles and many scholars label this story “The Rich Ruler,” the detail about his wealth is only revealed later in the story. Luke introduces him only as “a ruler” (ἄρχων).<sup>42</sup> Luke is the only one of the Synoptic Gospels that uses this term for this individual, again suggesting that the term is important to Luke’s overall purpose.<sup>43</sup>

weh from the Temple in Jerusalem and all indications are that God’s Presence does not return to the Temple until Jesus walks in through the gates. The OT theme of God’s Presence (being near or far as a sign of blessing) finds an echo in Jesus and how people either draw near to him or move away from him. This theme will continue across this unit: the tax collector stands off at a distance (18:13); Jesus calls the little children to himself (18:16); the rich ruler refuses to follow Jesus (18:22–23); the disciples have left all to be with Jesus (18:28); the healed beggar follows Jesus (18:43); and Jesus fellowships with Zacchaeus in his house as a guest (18:5–6).

<sup>37</sup> John Nolland, *Luke 9:21–18:34* (WBC 35B; Dallas: Word, 1993) 880.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.* 881.

<sup>39</sup> Johnson, *Luke* 280.

<sup>40</sup> Hans Bietenhard, “ἄρχῆ,” *NIDNTT* 168.

<sup>41</sup> Bock, *Luke* 9:51–24:53 1476.

<sup>42</sup> As noted above, however, in first-century AD Palestine the rulers and the wealthy were very often one and the same.

<sup>43</sup> Johnson, *Luke* 280.

The connotations of ἄρχων echoing from the OT Prophets are significant. Throughout the prophetic literature, the LXX regularly uses this term for the leaders who do not practice justice and who oppose the Prophets, thus falling under God's judgment (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 [37:14–15 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). Isaiah 1:23, for example, reads: “Your *rulers* are rebellious, companions of thieves, loving bribes, seeking after rewards; not pleading for orphans, and not heeding the cause of widows.” Likewise, Isa 3:14–15 declares: “The LORD takes his place in court; he rises to judge the people. The LORD enters into judgment against the elders and *rulers* of his people: ‘It is you who have ruined my vineyard; the plunder from the poor is in your houses.’” In the OT Prophets, it is also precisely these rulers who are the arrogant and self-exalted ones who will be brought down (LXX ταπεινώω) in judgment by God because of their unjust actions (especially against orphans, widows, and the poor).

Note also the irony in that this ruler (ἄρχων) approaches Jesus (the true ἄρχων prophesied by the Prophets), and yet calls him “good teacher.” Contrast this with the blind beggar of 18:35–42, who, although blind, addresses Jesus clearly (and correctly) as “Son of David.” This ruler is also contrasted with the children of the preceding story: They are peasant children; he is wealthy and powerful. They embody the call for humility; he states confidently that he has kept all of the commandments since his youth. The Kingdom of God belongs to them, while in spite of the ruler's wealth Jesus tells him that he lacks one more thing, and implies that he will not enter the Kingdom of God.<sup>44</sup>

Furthermore, keep in mind that the large introductory theme back in 18:1 was persistent prayer, and the driving question in 18:7 is, “Will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones who cry out to him day and night?” Against this setting, the ruler's request (or prayer) is ironic and in contrast: “Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” It is not directed to God, but to the “good teacher,” and it is not a cry for justice but a request for information that would lead to eternal life.

The prophetic context of justice, as elucidated by the widow and unjust judge parable, provides a strong background for understanding Jesus' words to the ruler. Recall Jesus' concluding statement in the Parable of the Widow and the Unjust Judge. As the Kingdom breaks in, God will see that his chosen ones (those with faith, humility, and prayer) get justice quickly. When this ruler in Luke 18:21 piously claims to have kept the law, Jesus sounds very much like Isaiah and cuts through the hypocrisy of cultic ritual and asks about justice, specifically in regard to the poor. As

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

the Kingdom breaks in, Jesus, the Davidic King who will bring about justice, confronts one of Israel's rulers and tells him that if he wants to be part of the Kingdom then he must also be part of the inauguration of justice . . . starting with restitution to the poor. Furthermore, keep in mind that the entire audience for this exchange (i.e. the rest of the community) was probably part of the "poor" section of the society. That is, when Jesus says that the ruler should sell all he has and give it to the poor, it is "the poor" that are standing around them and listening.

Jesus' demands on the ruler are far-reaching, with implications for his entire audience. But notice that this demand addresses the *system* of inequality where a few wealthy rulers/religious leaders are at the top while the entire rest of the community suffers and struggles in poverty at the bottom. The inauguration of justice, Jesus is announcing, involves changing the system in this community, alleviating the poverty that is all around the wealthy ruler.

6. *The Trip To Jerusalem (Luke 18:31–34)*. The larger unit of Luke 9:51–19:27 is connected together by the journey to Jerusalem,<sup>45</sup> and the scattered texts that remind the readers of this journey keep stressing the fact that critically important events will occur when Jesus arrives there. Thus in 18:31 Jesus refers to the fulfillment of "everything that is written about the Son of Man in the Prophets." What does the Lord mean by this statement? In the OT Prophets, especially in Jeremiah and also in Isaiah, the injustices practiced in Jerusalem are often underscored and cited as

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<sup>45</sup> There is an ongoing discussion among Lukan scholars regarding the degree to which Luke is following a pattern from the book of Deuteronomy in the "travel to Jerusalem" narrative (9:51–19:27). C. F. Evans, "The Central Section of St. Luke's Gospel," in *Studies in the Gospels: Festschrift to R. H. Lightfoot* (ed. D. E. Nineham; Oxford: Blackwell, 1955) 37–53, proposes that Luke 9:51–19:27 follows a similar pattern as Deuteronomy 1–26. Moessner, *Lord of the Banquet* 290–325, comes to a similar conclusion, broadening the discussion to include the book of Acts. Critiquing this view is Craig L. Blomberg, "Midrash, Chiasmus, and the Outline of Luke's Central Section," in R. T. France and D. Wenham, eds., *Studies in Midrash and Historiography* (Gospel Perspectives 3; Sheffield: JSOT, 1983) 228–33. Responding to many of Blomberg's criticisms, but still calling for a refining of the thesis is Craig A. Evans, "Luke 16:1–18 and the Deuteronomy Hypothesis," in *Luke and Scripture: The Function of Sacred Tradition in Luke-Acts* 121–39. See Marvin Pate's discussion of this and his list of which scholars have affirmed this view and which have rejected it. C. Marvin Pate, *Communities of the Last Days* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2000) 149–51; n. 47, 264–65; and *The Reverse of the Curse* (WUNT 2/114; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000) 399–402. It should be noted that in general the OT Prophets are inextricably interconnected to the book of Deuteronomy and they base much of their message on Deuteronomy. The language of Jeremiah, for example, is so close to the language of Deuteronomy that many non-evangelical critical scholars conclude that the same group of writers produced both documents. At any rate, when the NT is making general allusions to the OT, in many cases it is extremely difficult to determine whether the allusion is to Deuteronomy or the prophetic use of Deuteronomy. The theology coming from Jesus and the Gospels certainly connects in a clear line of continuity to the Prophets and their understanding of Deuteronomy. Often missing from the dialogue concerning the Deuteronomy Hypothesis in Luke is recognition that just about all of the deuteronomic elements under discussion are prophetic elements as well. And it is the Prophets who explicitly tie many of these elements to the coming messianic king and the kingdom that he will establish.

motivating factors in the coming judgment on the city (Jer 22:1–5; Isa 1:21–28).<sup>46</sup> Indeed, in the book of Jeremiah the condemnation and judgment on Jerusalem is a prevalent theme running throughout the book. It is likely that the negative statements regarding Jerusalem spoken by Jesus and arranged by Luke have strong allusions to Jeremiah.<sup>47</sup> Likewise in the Prophets it is the ruling class that is primarily responsible for failing to heed the prophetic word and for opposing and oppressing the Prophets.<sup>48</sup> Following close upon the heels of the story about the ruler who refused to bring about justice and then follow Jesus, the mention of Jerusalem is ominous.<sup>49</sup>

This pericope also connects to the previous one in that Peter notes that *they* have left all to follow Jesus (18:28). Likewise, in this pericope Jesus reminds the disciples that humiliation and death lie at the end of the road they follow. The statement in 18:34 that Jesus' meaning was hidden from them anticipates and connects nicely to the following story about the blind beggar. Furthermore, when Jesus says that everything written about him in the Prophets will be fulfilled (18:31), in addition to the Isaianic "suffering servant" texts, does Jesus also have prophetic passages such as Isaiah 32:1–3 in mind? "See, a king will reign in righteousness and rulers will rule with justice. . . . Then the eyes of those who see will no longer be closed, and the ears of those who hear will listen."

7. *The Blind Beggar (Luke 18:30–43)*. This episode occurs near Jericho, a city that carries strong connotations from the OT, especially since it is Ἰησοῦς (i.e. the LXX Greek form of Joshua) who approaches the city. As

<sup>46</sup> Moessner, *Lord of the Banquet* 117, also notes the connection between the three Jerusalem passages from the "travel to Jerusalem" narrative and the frequent proclamation of judgment on Jerusalem in the book of Jeremiah. Jindřich Mánek discusses numerous ways in which Luke expresses a negative view of Jerusalem. Mánek, however, does this in an attempt to connect Jerusalem to Egypt in the exodus tradition, which is not overly convincing. His data on Luke's negative view of Jerusalem is strong, but his connection with Egypt is weak. A much stronger case can be made for Luke's view of Jerusalem being in close congruence with that of the Prophets, especially Jeremiah. Jindřich Mánek, "The New Exodus in Luke," *NovT* 2 (1957) 14.

<sup>47</sup> David L. Tiede, *Prophecy and History in Luke-Acts* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980) 81–83.

<sup>48</sup> Sanders, "Sins, Debts, and Jubilee Release" 90, writes, "Like the prophets of old, whose role Luke insists Jesus assumed in this day with his people, Jesus went about challenging powerful sinners, the leaders with social and institutional responsibility. . . . The prophets got into trouble enough with the authorities of their day; but Jesus' added role of herald of the release of all debts to God, pronouncer of the forgiveness of sins and the introduction of a new order, had to be a serious threat to those who had given their lives to being responsible to the established order, even when Jesus included the promises of hope that the new order would bring."

<sup>49</sup> Likewise, as mentioned above, from an OT perspective, it is important to recall that the Presence of Yahweh left the Temple in Ezekiel 8–10, with no indications in the Scripture that he ever returned. The trip by Jesus to Jerusalem suggests a return of God's presence to Zion and the Temple, a highly significant event. Of course, on his arrival Jesus will find a corrupt, hypocritical system similar to that which the Prophets condemned. Indeed, Jesus' quote from Jer 7:11 ("den of robbers") comes from a passage in Jeremiah proclaiming judgment on Jerusalem ("I will thrust you from my presence"; Jer 7:15).



Jesus journeys to Jerusalem he heals a blind man in Jericho.<sup>50</sup> A serious OT reader would suspect some symbolism as Jesus revisits the city where the conquest of Israel began.<sup>51</sup>

As with the other pericopes in this unit, this passage not only picks up prophetic themes from the OT, but it also interconnects closely with the surrounding episodes. The blind beggar is in stark contrast to the ruler in the previous story. Indeed, both the blind beggar and Zacchaeus (the following story) provide strong contrasts with the ruler. The beggar is told that Jesus of Nazareth is passing by. This is the first instance of using Nazareth to identify Jesus since Luke 4, when he began his public ministry with his proclamation from Isa 61:1–2: “to preach good news to the poor . . . and recovery of sight for the blind.” Although the Isaiah 61 citation at the beginning of Jesus’ ministry continues to echo throughout Luke even without direct allusion, the mention of Nazareth probably seals the connection.

Likewise, in contrast to the ruler who addresses Jesus as “teacher,” the blind beggar clearly identifies Jesus as the “Son of David,” even though the beggar cannot see him. As Jesus heads for Jerusalem, the title “Son of David” is quite appropriate from the context of the OT Prophets. Also, recall that in the Prophets the removal of blindness is often an accompanying sign of the eschatological establishment of justice.

More startling, perhaps, is Luke’s stress on the persistence of the beggar’s cry: “He called out, ‘Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!’ Those who led the way rebuked him and told him to be quiet, but he shouted all the more, ‘Son of David, have mercy on me’” (18:38–39). Note the similarity between his cry, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me” (Ἰησοῦ υἱὲ Δαυίδ, ἐλέησόν με), and the cry of the tax collector in 18:13, “God, have mercy on me” (Ὁ θεός, ἰλάσθητί μοι). The persistence of the beggar (humble by the virtue of his position) as he cries out repeatedly to Jesus in faith ties this passage in dramatic fashion to the opening pericope of the widow and the unjust judge and also to the

<sup>50</sup> Several observations lend support that the mention of Jericho has special significance. First of all, Moessner points out that apart from Jerusalem, Jericho is the only city specifically mentioned in the entire “travel to Jerusalem” narrative of Luke 9:51–19:27. A second observation by Moessner, *Lord of the Banquet* 14–16, 30–33, is that it is challenging to make geographical or chronological sense out of the travel indicators in 9:51–19:27, suggesting that Luke has arranged his material primarily according to another agenda other than strict geography/chronology.

<sup>51</sup> Not only are there probable allusions in this text to the conquering of Jericho by Joshua, but there may also be allusions to 1 Sam 5:6–7. In that text, David marches toward Jerusalem to try to capture it from the Jebusites. The Jebusites taunt David by saying, “You will not get in here; even the blind and the lame can ward you off.” Nevertheless, the text explains, David did indeed capture Zion, the city of David. In Luke 18:35–43, we find a story of Jesus on his way to Jerusalem, called “Son of David” by a blind beggar whom Jesus consequently heals. While not conclusive, the parallels are certainly suggestive. Other instances of Luke making very close allusions to texts in 1–2 Samuel are cited by Sanders, “Isaiah in Luke” 17.

parable of the Pharisee and tax collector. The theme of near/far appears as well for Jesus orders this man to be brought near to him (18:40–41). In addition, Jesus is acting very much as ruler or judge in that he gives orders (ἐκέλευσεν) to bring the man to him, a term used primarily in the NT for the actions of high ranking human authorities such as kings, high priests, Roman officials, etc. The man requests that Jesus heal his blindness, and Jesus states, “Your faith has healed you,” connecting to 18:8, “when the Son of Man comes will he find faith on the earth?” Furthermore, he is healed immediately, as 18:8 states, “he will see that they get justice and quickly.”<sup>52</sup> In further contrast to the ruler, the healed blind man then follows Jesus (i.e. staying near).

8. *Zacchaeus The Tax Collector (Luke 19:1–10)*. The parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector in 18:9–14 was about a hypothetical tax collector, but in the Zacchaeus story the reader encounters a real, live tax collector. Not only is Zacchaeus a tax collector, connecting him to the second of the opening parables, but he is a chief (or ruling) tax collector (ἀρχιτελώνης) and a wealthy man. Thus he is also in parallel with the rich ruler of 18:18–30. In that episode, Jesus had said that it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom. The puzzled disciples asked, “Who then can be saved?” Zacchaeus answers that question, demonstrating that the rich can indeed be saved with dramatic results (“what is impossible with men is possible with God”; 18:27).<sup>53</sup>

Like the blind beggar, Zacchaeus is unable to see Jesus.<sup>54</sup> Yet he shows great persistence and humility as he runs ahead and climbs a tree, something quite unusual and humiliating for a grown adult to do (keep in mind that Zacchaeus is wearing a robe, not blue jeans). Once again, the restoration of this man to Jesus (and into the Kingdom) is immediate, and part of the justice that the King brings. Jesus says, “Come down immediately (σπεύσας),” and he comes down “immediately” (σπεύσας). Zacchaeus’s reaction to Jesus (the invitation to dinner) is one of gladness, in contrast to the ruler of 18:18–30, who reacts to the Lord’s call with

<sup>52</sup> There is perhaps another connection to Isaiah 58 regarding the “quick” or “immediate” action of justice. In 58:8 the text reads, “Then your light will break forth like the dawn and your healing will quickly appear.”

<sup>53</sup> Alan P. Stanley, “The Rich Young Ruler and Salvation,” *BSac* 163 (2006) 59–60. In this article, Stanley notes many of the connections between Zacchaeus and the rich ruler, but he does not push the context over the “inviolable” boundary at 18:8 or 18:14 to see the justice theme as the connection.

<sup>54</sup> There are perhaps two parallel sequences in the last four pericopes of this unit. The episode concerning the wealthy self-righteous ruler (18:18–30) is followed by the reference to Jerusalem and “everything that is written in the Prophets” (18:31–34). The healing of the blind beggar (18:35–43), by contrast, is followed by the salvation of Zacchaeus (19:1–10). Thus the ruler’s rejection of the call to justice and to following Jesus is followed by a passage alluding to judgment on Jerusalem while the removal of the beggar’s blindness is followed by the salvation and inclusion of an outcast.

sadness (18:23). Likewise, the theme of near/far continues as Jesus goes to dine with Zacchaeus at his house.

The most surprising thing, however, is Zacchaeus's response to Jesus at his house. Recall that the Pharisee of the parable in 18:11–12 looked down on the tax collector and boasted that he gave a tenth. Jesus was not impressed. Jesus then told the ruler in 18:22 that he must give all of his wealth to the poor and follow him, but the ruler refused. In startling contrast, Zacchaeus, the real tax collector and new follower of Jesus, announces that he will give half of his possessions to the poor and use the other half to pay back anyone he has cheated (18:8). In the context of the OT Prophets, this is not an act of self-piety, but an act of justice. Zacchaeus is concerned with helping the poor (an aspect of justice) and also with making restitution to those he has cheated (correcting the injustice of the past). He “sees” the reality of Jesus' call into the Kingdom, and he recognizes that joining into the Kingdom means establishing justice, especially toward the poor.

Also, recall that Isa 58:3–7 critiques hypocritical fasting and provides background for the hypocritical Pharisee in Luke 18:9–12. True fasting, Isa 58:6–7 states, includes caring for the poor and also not rejecting “your own flesh and blood.” In the parable of Luke 18:9–12, the Pharisee is not caring for the poor and is rejecting the tax collector. In Zacchaeus's story, the real tax collector gives a sacrificial amount to the poor (true fasting, according to Isaiah 58), and then Jesus declares him a true son of Abraham (i.e. included and brought into the family, rather than rejected). Jesus brings about true prophetic justice as salvation comes to the house of Zacchaeus.

Finally, the concluding words of Jesus, “For the Son of Man came to seek and save what was lost,” connects back to the opening Parable of the Widow and the Unjust Judge, where Jesus stated “When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?,” thus forming a strong *inclusio* around this unit.

## VI. CONCLUSION

It appears that the parables and stories in Luke 18:1–19:10 have numerous connections and interrelated themes. The two hypothetical parables at the beginning are closely connected and the stories that follow provide illustration and depth from encounters with real live people. From an OT perspective, the connections and allusions to the OT Prophets are evident everywhere throughout this unit. Justice, righteousness, widows, the poor, humility, rulers who don't obey, hostile Jerusalem, healing the blind, the coming Kingdom—these themes of Luke 18:1–19:10 are also the repeated themes found throughout the pages of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the Twelve.

By stressing Jesus' citation of Isaiah 61 and 58 at the beginning of Jesus' public ministry (Luke 4), Luke sets the pattern for understanding Jesus against the backdrop of the Prophets. In 18:1–19:10, the opening Parable of the Widow and the Unjust Judge highlights the prophetic theme of justice, and the following Parable of the Pharisee and Tax Collector stresses the accompanying parallel theme of righteousness. As Jesus, the fulfillment of the OT prophetic promise, moves towards Jerusalem, he inaugurates justice as part of the “already” aspect of the Kingdom. As he calls people into the Kingdom, he insists that they come in humble faith, but also that they join him in working to establish justice (which is a critical prophetic part of the Kingdom)—especially in regard to the traditional OT vision of helping widows, the poor, and outcasts. As in the time of the Prophets, the current rulers refuse the call to justice, and thus do not enter into the Kingdom (and thus will face judgment). In contrast, two outcasts—a blind beggar and a tax collector—respond to Jesus and the call to believe in him. Thus as they are saved and are brought close to him, they join him in establishing the justice that the Prophets proclaimed as part of the coming Kingdom.<sup>55</sup>

These conclusions have far-reaching implications for the church today. Certainly, it is important for Christians to recognize the stress and emphasis that the Scriptures place on justice, both in the OT Prophets and in the Gospels, and to acknowledge that the call to follow Jesus includes a call to work for justice.<sup>56</sup> Furthermore, the imperative of Jesus to “sell everything you have and give to the poor” should be interpreted within the original context as a call to confront flagrant socio-economic injustice with serious action that brings about justice in the community. For us today, this is probably more about working to improve unjust

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<sup>55</sup> Such an understanding helps to clear up tensions in 18:1–8 that Stephen Curkpatrick has raised. In “A Parable Frame-up and Its Audacious Reframing,” *NTS* 49 (2003) 22–38; and in “Dissonance in Luke 18:1–8” *JBL* 121 (2002) 107–21, Curkpatrick argues that in Luke's final framing of this parable he loses the parable's emphasis on justice; indeed, Luke frames it “to less than adequate” effect. In “Dissonance in Luke 18:1–8” 121, Curkpatrick writes, “The issue of justice is displaced by the faithfulness of the elect until eschatological vindication. The interpretive frame has eclipsed the central issue in the parable, in which the powerless overcomes the powerful, and potential justice prevails over injustice. . . . In continuity with Luke's themes of just, inclusive community as an expression of the present reign of God, the widow is central to the parable (vv. 2–5), and a locale of justice. However, Luke has not allowed the parable to speak in this way and frames its impetus with less than optimum effect, given other possibilities that might exist.” Of course, Curkpatrick bases his understanding of Luke's reframing on connecting Luke 18:1–8 with what precedes it rather than with what follows it. Connecting 18:1–8 with the following passages and with the call to justice regarding the poor relieves much of the tension that so bothers Curkpatrick, and places the emphasis back on justice (as well as on the Kingdom), which he thinks was the original intention of the parable.

<sup>56</sup> For two recent books that grapple with how the church should engage with the issue of justice, see Timothy Keller, *Generous Justice: How God's Grace Makes Us Just* (New York: Dutton, 2010); and Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Hearing the Call: Liturgy, Justice, Church, and World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011).

systemic problems that create suffering and oppression than it is about tithing (although using our personal resources may be part of the needed solution).