

## DEBTOR'S PRISON AND THE FUTURE OF ISRAEL (LUKE 12:57–59)

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Near the end of Luke 12 Jesus chides the crowds for their hypocrisy (Luke 12:54–56). Then he says,

And why also do you not judge for yourselves what is right? For as you go with your opponent to the ruler, on the way make an effort to be reconciled with him, lest he drag you before the judge, and the judge hand you over to the magistrate, and the magistrate throw you into prison. I say to you, you will certainly not get out of there until you repay even the last cent (Luke 12:57–59).

Early commentators did not so much discuss the parable<sup>1</sup> as cite it, usually in conjunction with arguments that might strike modern readers as fanciful. Tertullian, for example, interprets the “prison” as Hades and takes the passage to teach that the soul in Hades must be purged of all impurities before the resurrection.<sup>2</sup> Origen writes that the “adversary” is a wicked angel who seeks to corrupt humans and bring them to the “ruler,” another wicked angel: but believers have no cause to fear, he avers, for the “judge,” Christ, will eventually intervene to vanquish their enemies.<sup>3</sup> For Augustine, the “adversary” is the word of God that confronts people with the truth of the gospel.<sup>4</sup> On the whole, however, the passage got scant attention from the ancients whose writings have been preserved.

Modern scholars, with rather more consistency than their forebears, have typically held that this parable is directed toward individuals who are

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<sup>1</sup> There is some debate as to whether or not the story should be classified as a “parable.” Among the evangelists Luke uses the term παραβολή most often—and he does not use it here. I will refer to the material as a parable (as do most commentators), though by any other label its point would be the same. Luke 12:57–59 is discussed in many studies on parables, including B. T. D. Smith, *The Parables of the Synoptic Gospels: A Critical Study* (Cambridge: University Press, 1937) 113–114; C. H. Dodd, *The Parables of the Kingdom* (rev. ed.; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1961) 105–108; J. Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus* (2nd ed.; London: SCM, 1972) 42–44; and R. H. Stein, *An Introduction to the Parables of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1981) 25, 113–114. J. A. Fitzmyer questions the appropriateness of the label “parable,” suggesting instead that it is simply a piece of pragmatic advice on the part of Jesus to his followers that they should avoid legal entanglements (*The Gospel According to Luke X–XXIV* [AB 28A; Garden City: Doubleday, 1985] 1002). He criticizes the “tendency of modern commentators to allegorize the would-be parable . . . and interpret Jesus' words in terms of a greater Lucan context” (ibid.). He is almost alone in interpreting the story in this way.

<sup>2</sup> *De Testimonio Animæ* LVIII.

<sup>3</sup> *In Lucam Homiliae* xxxv (see esp. 3–10).

<sup>4</sup> *Sermones ad Populem* cix, 3. For a more detailed history of interpretation, see F. Bovon, *Das Evangelium nach Lukas (9,51–14,35)* (EKKNT 3/2; Benziger: Neukirchener, 1996) 365–368.

urged to make peace with God (or his agent Jesus) before they die and face permanent judgment. For example, Craig Evans writes, “[Jesus] urges them to settle affairs in this world before God settles with them in the next . . . Jesus’ warning, if taken seriously, should jolt people to the realization of their need to turn from their sins and to seek God’s forgiveness. . . .”<sup>5</sup> David Tiede says, “These words . . . assume that the state of the human heart is dire in the prospect of the coming judgement.”<sup>6</sup> As to the permanence of the judgment, Norval Geldenhuys observes, “The full repayment or liquidation of debt is no longer possible for the guilty one. The condemnation then lasts for ever.”<sup>7</sup> Robert Stein agrees, “This [teaching] is a measure of the severity of the judgment and should not be interpreted as teaching that sometimes one can eventually ‘get out’.”<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, there are sound reasons to question the consensus interpretation, reasons based on three factors: the setting of the passage in its context, the phenomenon of debt in Hellenistic law, and the language of the passage itself. In this paper it is argued that (1) the warning of the parable is addressed to Israel; (2) the judgment mentioned is not permanent, but temporary; and (3) the parable as a whole refers to God’s coming judgment on and subsequent reconciliation to Israel.

#### I. THE CONTEXT OF THE PARABLE IN LUKE

The parable of going before the judge is set near the middle of Luke’s imposing central section. The overarching structure of the section remains enigmatic, though not for lack of scholarly attention.<sup>9</sup> In spite of abiding differences among scholars with respect to its structure, certain themes are recognized as more dominant than others. Frank Matera has argued convincingly that one important theme found repeatedly in the narrative is Jesus’ ongoing conflict with Israel.<sup>10</sup> We see this theme in several passages. For

<sup>5</sup> *Luke* (New International Bible Commentary; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1990) 200.

<sup>6</sup> *Luke* (Augsburg Commentary on the New Testament; Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1988) 245. See also D. F. Hauck, *Das Evangelium des Lukas* (THNT 3; Leipzig: A. Deichertsche, 1934) 178; N. Geldenhuys, *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke* (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1950) 368; J. Schmid, *Das Evangelium nach Lukas* (RNT 3; Regensburg: Pustet, 1960) 227; E. E. Ellis, *The Gospel of Luke* (New Century Bible Commentary; rev. ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974) 183–184; W. Wiefel, *Das Evangelium nach Lukas* (THNT 3; Berlin: Evangelische, 1988) 250–251; F. B. Craddock, *Luke* (Louisville: John Knox, 1990) 167; J. Nolland, *Luke 9:21–18:34* (WBC 35b; Dallas: Word, 1993) 713–715; D. L. Bock, *Luke 9:51–24:53* (BECNT; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996) 1200.

<sup>7</sup> *Luke* 369.

<sup>8</sup> *Luke* (New American Commentary 24; Nashville: Broadman, 1992) 368; see also Hauck, who suggests that the poor would “Niemals” get out (*Lukas* 178).

<sup>9</sup> There are many scholarly books and articles dealing with the section. Good bibliographies can be found in J. A. Fitzmyer’s *The Gospel according to Luke I–IX* (AB 28; Garden City: Doubleday, 1981) 830–832 and C. Blomberg’s, “Midrash, Chiasmus, and the Outline of Luke’s Central Section” (in *Gospel Perspectives: Studies in Midrash and Historiography. Volume III* [eds. R. T. France and D. Wenham; Sheffield: JSOT, 1983] 217–261). For additional literature since 1983, see Bock, *Luke 9:51–24:53* 957–964.

<sup>10</sup> “Jesus’ Journey to Jerusalem (Luke 9.51–19.46): A Conflict with Israel,” *JSNT* 51 (1993) 57–77. For Matera the conflict is based on the crowds’ differing responses to Jesus and the disciples. Through the conflict motif the narrator shows that the crowds are not monolithic in their response to Jesus.

example, at Luke 10:1–16 Jesus anticipates the rejection of his envoys in the cities of Israel. In 11:14–28 Jewish rulers attribute his wonder-working power to Satan, and in 11:29–32 Jesus describes his audience as part of a “wicked generation.” He lists a provocative series of woes against Pharisees and lawyers in 11:37–52. Luke 12 opens with Jesus’ warning that disciples should avoid the Pharisees’ hypocrisy and fear God rather than men (12:1–7). Later passages, such as those dealing with Pharisees and lawyers (14:1–24; 16:14 ff.) also highlight this theme of conflict with the nation.

A related theme, God’s impending judgment of Israel, is also found in the central section. It appears repeatedly in the material leading up to Luke 12:57–59, though it is not confined to the central section. For example, John the Baptist warns that judgment is coming soon and that natural descent from Abraham will not ensure against it (Luke 3:8–9, 17). Elsewhere Jesus warns of the Son of Man coming in judgment (9:26), then speaks harshly to the Jewish towns of Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum for their rejection of him and his envoys (10:13–16). Later Jesus speaks in a parable about the need for servants to be obedient in the light of their master’s absence and sure, but unscheduled, return (12:41–48). The parable is a picture of the need for disciples and others to serve God diligently; it further indicates that disobedient servants (disciples and others) will be judged harshly.<sup>11</sup> In Luke 12:49–53 Jesus comments that his mission brings judgment to the earth (πῦρ ἤλθον βαλεῖν ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν), and division to families.

Immediately following the parable of Luke 12:57–59, Jesus gives a double warning to the crowds to repent lest they suffer a fate similar to the martyred Galileans and the unfortunate people on whom the Tower of Siloam fell (Luke 13:1–5). Following that, the threat of judgment for the nation is likewise present in the parable of the fig tree (13:6–9; see also Hos 9:10; Joel 1:6–7, 12).<sup>12</sup> A later section warns that God might exclude from the kingdom those Jews who had close contact with the Lord yet failed to repent (13:25–28).<sup>13</sup> God’s dealing with Israel, represented in Jesus’ conflict with Israel, is clearly in view both immediately before and immediately after Luke 12:54–59.

If the preceding summary accurately characterizes the context of Luke 12:54–59, how does *this* pericope fit within its larger context? Does it introduce new and different themes, does it expand upon themes already mentioned, or might Luke 12 end, as C. F. Evans suggests, “somewhat lamely with two additional reprimands to the crowds for their inability to exercise the required discernment?”<sup>14</sup> Attention is now turned to the question of the audience of Luke 12:54–59.

<sup>11</sup> Bock, *Luke 9:51–24:53* 1177–1186.

<sup>12</sup> See B. Kinman, “Lucan Eschatology and the Missing Fig Tree,” *JBL* 113 (1994) 669–678; also W. Telford, *The Barren Temple and the Withered Tree: A redaction-critical analysis of the Cursing of the Fig-tree pericope in Mark’s Gospel and its relation to the Cleansing of the Temple Tradition* (JSNTSup 1; Sheffield: JSOT, 1980).

<sup>13</sup> For a detailed study of Luke 13 as a whole, see R. Shirock, “The Growth of the Kingdom in Light of Israel’s Rejection of Jesus: Structure and Theology in Luke 13:1–35,” *NovT* 35 (1993) 15–29.

<sup>14</sup> *Saint Luke* (TPI New Testament Commentaries; London: SCM, 1990) 542.

## II. JESUS' AUDIENCE IN LUKE 12:54-59

To whom does Jesus address his remarks in Luke 12:54-59? In a break with the preceding material which is directed at the disciples (12:1: ἤρξατο λέγειν πρὸς τοὺς μαθητὰς αὐτοῦ; 12:22: Εἶπεν δὲ πρὸς τοὺς μαθητάς), Jesus specifically addresses the crowds in Luke 12:54 ("Ἐλεγεν δὲ καὶ τοῖς ὄχλοις).<sup>15</sup> He notes that they are able to observe meteorological phenomena and make accurate forecasts, but chides them because they have failed to draw the proper conclusions with respect to his ministry and the signs that have accompanied it (12:54-55). He calls them "hypocrites" (ὕποκριται, v. 56), the very same label he gives to the Pharisees (12:1) and the religious leader who opposes him for his work on a Sabbath (13:15). Jesus' comments suggest that the crowds' ignorance of τὸν καιρὸν τοῦτον (12:56) is anything but innocent.<sup>16</sup>

He then prefaces the parable of 12:58-59 by warning *them* (note the plurals ἐαυτῶν and κρίνετε) to take a proper and common sense course of action (v. 57). Observing the use of singular verbs and pronouns in what follows (ὕπάγεις . . . σου . . . δός . . . σε . . . σε . . . σε . . . σοι . . . ἐξέληθης . . . ἀποδῶς, vv. 58-59), many commentators say or imply that the section is addressed to *individuals*.<sup>17</sup> However, the repeated use of singular verbs and pronouns in the parable may be present because of the nature of the parable itself, with its image of coming before a ruler (i.e. typically individuals, not groups, would appear before a ruler dealing with the question of debt). This, rather than an unusual concern for individuals, may account for the change in number from plural, in v. 57, to singular, in the parable. To the extent that individuals might be in view, they are the individuals who comprise the Jewish ὄχλοι that witness Jesus' ministry. *They* (plural ἐαυτῶν and κρίνετε) are the ones warned. As Josef Ernst says, "Man versteht das Gleichnis nicht richtig, wenn man in ihm eine Mahnung zur Versöhnlichkeit sieht, wie das für Mt 5,25-26 tatsächlich zutrifft. . . . Lk richtet mit dem erzählten Beispiel einen nachhaltigen Appell an die Menschen in Israel, die letzte Frist, die ihnen noch bleibt, zu nutzen."<sup>18</sup> A similar point was made by G. B. Caird. He wrote, "Luke recognised that the parables of warning were concerned in the first instance with the historical crisis which the ministry of Jesus provoked in the national life of Israel."<sup>19</sup> Consistent with the stated audience for Jesus'

<sup>15</sup> Some of the preceding material may have been addressed to the crowds (note Jesus' ambiguous "answer" to Peter's question at 12:41-42).

<sup>16</sup> The term ὄχλος appears 63 times in Luke-Acts, 41 times in Luke. Luke seems to like the term, for although Mark uses it 38 times, only in about ten instances does he take over the term from Mark. It most often refers to people who hear Jesus sympathetically yet do not make a commitment to follow him (Luke 5:1; 6:17; 9:11, 18; 14:25; 22:6). It can refer to those who clearly need to repent (Luke 3:7; 11:29).

<sup>17</sup> See n. 6 and the references cited there.

<sup>18</sup> *Das Evangelium nach Lukas* (RNT; Regensburg: Pustet, 1977) 417. Perhaps commentators have unconsciously read the meaning of Matt 5:25-26, which does seem to refer to individuals, into the Lucan account. See the comments of J. M. Creed, *The Gospel According to St. Luke* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1930) 179.

<sup>19</sup> "Expounding the Parables: I. The Defendant (Matthew 5:25f.; Luke 12:58f.)," *ExpT* 77 (1965-66) 38.

remarks (the ὄχλοι, v. 54) and the theme of Jesus' conflict with the nation in the central section, the parable at 12:57–59 should be seen as directed toward the nation. This does not relieve the need for individuals to repent; however, in context stress falls on the need for the *nation* to make a proper response to Jesus. If correct, this reading of the context will have significant implications for interpreting the parable.

### III. THE PARABLE (LUKE 12:57–59)

The language and setting of the parable in Luke suggest that, as elsewhere, he has molded tradition to achieve his own ends. There is nothing in Mark to compare with the Lucan/Matthean material. A similar story is found in Matthew. It is located in the Sermon on the Mount and provides additional illustration of the need for individuals to come before God with a clear conscience (5:25–26). Although there are obvious similarities between the Lucan and Matthean accounts, before the parable is too quickly assigned to Q it must be observed that the overlapping material of Matthew and Luke is short, includes many differences in vocabulary and few verbatim phrases, and is set in different contexts.<sup>20</sup> Even if we were able to posit a common source for the Lucan and Matthean material, it would surely be impossible to be precise as to the parable's original form or setting. It seems likely that Luke has incorporated the three Hellenistic terms employed in the parable (πράκτωρ, ὁδὸς ἐργασίαν, κρίνετε τὸ δίκαιον, see following discussion) into the account himself.<sup>21</sup> Similarly, the connection of the parable (12:57–58) to the preceding material (12:54–56) is made by Luke's use of δὲ καί.<sup>22</sup>

Luke 12:54–59 neatly divides into two parts. Viewed together, they picture Jesus urging the crowds to discern spiritual realities as expertly as they do mundane ones. In the first part, Luke 12:54–56, Jesus chides the ὄχλοι for failing to exercise simple judgment in the spiritual realm. The crowds do not recognize “this time” (τὸν καιρὸν τοῦτον). The “time” refers to the inbreaking of the kingdom in the person and ministry of Jesus. Their lack of recognition is a serious failure, because those who believe in Jesus get forgiveness and praise from God (5:12–14; 7:1–9, 18–23, 36–50; 8:43–48), and those who do

<sup>20</sup> A detailed comparison with the Matthean presentation will not be undertaken. While acknowledging the usefulness of “Q” as a designation for material common to Matthew and Luke (but not Mark), the often heterogeneous nature of the material as to its form, order and function casts doubt on its existence as an independent, unitary and documentary source of material for Matthew and Luke. If one grants that a documentary source underlies some of the Q material (see, for example, the long sections of verbatim agreement in Matt 3:7–10/Luke 3:7–9, Matt 4:1–11/Luke 4:1–13), the present account does not show the kind of agreement between Matthew and Luke that one finds in the other sections; there is reasonable doubt, therefore, that a documentary Q is behind the accounts. With respect to Luke's knowledge of Matthew, see C. M. Tuckett, “On the Relationship between Matthew and Luke,” *NTS* 30 (1984) 130–142.

<sup>21</sup> Perhaps they were taken over from a source more Hellenized than Matthew or a Matthew-like predecessor. There is no way to know for certain.

<sup>22</sup> The δὲ καί combination appears 48 times in Luke-Acts as compared with 57 times in the rest of the NT. Luke uses the combination about nine times as often as Mark, about five times as often as Matthew. We can therefore regard its use here (without parallel in Mark or Matthew) as Lucan.

not are in danger of judgment (11:29–32). In fact, response to Jesus and his messengers determines one's eternal destiny (6:46–49; 9:23–26; 10:1–16; 11:23; 12:8–9; 13:22–27; 16:30–31; 18:22–30). Luke establishes the link between vv. 54–56 and vv. 57–59 by means of the connecting  $\delta\epsilon$  καί. The scene depicted in the second passage (Luke 12:58–59), a debtor threatened with legal action for non-payment, was common in the ancient world, perhaps as common as looking at the skies to forecast the weather. Like the first passage, Luke 12:57–59 also refers to the crowds' need to recognize "this time" and act accordingly. While Jesus admonishes the crowds to judge aright in vv. 54–56, in vv. 57–59 he introduces a note of urgency via the parable of going before a magistrate. From what we know of debt in the ancient world (see below), the very fact that the opponents in the story are on the way to court means the situation had reached a crisis-stage for the debtor. Normally, going before a ruler occurred only after all other avenues of resolution had failed. By means of the parable, Jesus advises his audience to judge the situation for themselves and to act wisely, and quickly.

How should the parable be interpreted here? As noted in the introduction, I tentatively suggest that taking together the context of the account (where Jesus' conflict with Israel looms large) and the audience of the parable (the nation as a whole) we should understand the parable to teach that the nation ought to take the wise course of action by repenting and giving allegiance to Jesus while the opportunity for repentance exists. Like the debtor and his opponent on the way to the judge, the nation has a limited time to be reconciled to God via his agent Jesus. Specifically, this opportunity lasts only so long as Jesus is on the way to Jerusalem. For Luke, the day of reckoning from which there is no turning back is the day of Jesus' entry to Jerusalem (Luke 19:28–48; esp. vv. 41–44).<sup>23</sup> If we were to hazard a guess as to what sort of punishment might be referred to by the  $\phi\upsilon\lambda\alpha\kappa\acute{\eta}$  of the parable, consideration would have to be given to the coming destruction, captivity and Diaspora that Jesus mentions in Luke 19:41–44 and 21:20–24.<sup>24</sup> But, to return to the parable, even if judgment and its attendant horrors do come, they will be temporary rather than permanent.<sup>25</sup> Before defending this inter-

<sup>23</sup> See B. Kinman, *Jesus' Entry into Jerusalem: In the Context of Lukan Theology and the Politics of His Day* (AGJU 28; Leiden: Brill, 1995).

<sup>24</sup> This would be similar to the LXX of Isa 42:7, where the place of captivity, Babylon, is referred to as οἴκου φυλακῆς.

<sup>25</sup> Can the figures of debtor (the implied audience), opponent (ἀντιδίκος) and judge (κριτής) be further identified? As to the first and the last of these, we note that the image in the parable of impending crisis for the debtor at the hands of the judge fits well with the general context of the parable in Luke where the nation is clearly under the threat of God's judgment. Thus Israel is represented as the debtor and God as the judge. As to the identity of the opponent, while it would be unwise to press the details of the parable too far, it would perhaps not be far fetched to understand the opponent as Jesus. Why? For Luke Israel's conflict with God is epitomized by its conflict with Jesus. This conflict builds in Luke's central section while Jesus is on the way to Jerusalem. It might be more than coincidence that the exhortation to make friends with the opponent "on the way" (ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ, v. 58) to the judge echoes the language of Jesus' journey to Jerusalem where he is said to be "on the way" (ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ, 13:22; cf. 9:51; 18:31). This understanding has the virtue of being defensible within the context of Luke as compared with the other interpretations, especially ancient ones, that are not (see nn. 2–4).

pretation of Luke 12:57–59, we would be well-advised to study more closely those backgrounds and issues most germane to it, namely the background of debt, the language of the parable itself, and the theme of Israel's restoration. How would an understanding of debt in Hellenistic law further our understanding of the passage? Does the account suggest permanent destruction for the nation? And does this correspond to what Luke tells us elsewhere about God's dealings with Israel?

1. *The phenomenon of debt in Hellenistic law.* One reason scholars suggest that a permanent destruction of some sort is in view here is the understanding that those thrown into prison (φυλακή) were not released until all outstanding debts were satisfied. And since, it is thought, the person in prison manifestly does not have the means to pay (else he would not be in prison in the first place), his imprisonment is perpetual. Is this a right understanding of debt in the ancient world?

A question that any interpretation of the parable must address is that of the precise legal situation envisaged by the language of the account.<sup>26</sup> While some scholars think a Roman background lies behind the parable,<sup>27</sup> it is probably Hellenistic. First, the term πράκτωρ is distinctly Hellenistic.<sup>28</sup> In Roman jurisdiction (i.e. that which applied to Roman citizens) there was no such official, but they were ubiquitous in the Greek world as the municipal official who saw to the collection of debts.<sup>29</sup> Second, the phrase δὸς ἐργασίαν

<sup>26</sup> This necessarily brings into the open the question of Luke's original audience: does he write for Jews or Gentiles, and what sort of Jews and Gentiles is he writing for? For the purposes of this inquiry, it is accepted that Luke's audience consisted of Gentile Christians, Jewish Christians and God-fearing Gentiles (it is virtually impossible to determine what the precise "mix" of the various groups would have been). It seems inevitable that there might also have been some curious pagans among the early readership. For more on the question of Luke's audience, see Fitzmyer, *Luke I–IX* 57–62; G. E. Sterling, *Historiography and Self-Definition: Josephus, Luke-Acts and Apologetic Historiography* (NovTSup 64; Leiden: Brill, 1992) 374–379; and Kinman, *Jesus' Entry into Jerusalem* 6–10. More recently D. Ravens has laid out a persuasive case for a significant Jewish readership for Luke (*Luke and the Restoration of Israel* [JSNTSup 119; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995] 11–16). For the argument that the Gospels circulated more widely than is usually recognized, see *The Gospels for All Christians: Rethinking the Gospel Audiences* (ed. R. Bauckham; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998).

<sup>27</sup> Stein writes, "*Praktor* was a technical term for the officer in the Roman judicial system who was in charge of the debtor's prison" (*Luke* 367; see also E. Schweizer, *The Good News According to Luke* [Atlanta: John Knox, 1984] 217).

<sup>28</sup> Marshall alludes to this (*Luke* 551).

<sup>29</sup> Bock says "*Πράκτωρ* does not imply a Hellenistic setting, since such prisons were widespread" (*Luke 9:51–24:53* 1199). It is true that the prisons were widespread, but πράκτορες apply to particular officers in a Hellenistic rather than Roman or Jewish legal system. They were of course found outside Greece on account of the extensive influence of Hellenism. As to the question of the relationship between Roman and Hellenistic law, H. J. Wolff notes, "the integration of the Hellenistic countries into the Roman Empire took place, at least at first, without any notable effect on their tradition of private law, which continued to flourish beyond the fall of the Hellenistic state system as such" (in *The Jewish People in the First Century: Historical Geography, Political History, Social, Cultural and Religious Life and Institutions. Volume 1* [eds. S. Safrai and M. Stern; Assen: van Gorcum & Co., 1974] 535). He later observes, "The basic ideas underlying the [Hellenistic legal] system were the same everywhere, though details varied" (ibid. 545–546).

has Hellenistic precedents. Although it is widely referred to in commentaries as a “latinism,”<sup>30</sup> Adolf Deissmann long ago observed that as early as the second century BC the phrase was “in living use among the people, who no longer felt that it was a ‘Latinism.’”<sup>31</sup> In other words, we should not regard the presence of the phrase in Luke as Roman in origin but, much more likely, as Hellenistic. A third phrase with a Hellenistic background is κρίνεται τὸ δίκαιον. It is often translated “judge what is right” (KJV, NKJV, NASB, NIV, NJB, REB, RSV). The standard lexicons, together with works that treat papyri and epigraphic evidence, point to the Hellenistic legal background of the phrase.<sup>32</sup> These three pieces of evidence suggest that a Hellenistic rather than Roman background is in view.

As is clear from the papyri, loans, mortgages and the like were common transactions in the ancient world.<sup>33</sup> A loan document typically included the names of creditor and debtor (sometimes a physical description of the debtor was included), the principal amount of the loan, the rate of interest, the schedule for repayment along with penalties in case of delinquency or default.<sup>34</sup>

Not all loans involved money nor would they all have been written (i.e. there were oral contracts<sup>35</sup>), but those written were normally recorded in a municipal record office for inspection by interested parties.<sup>36</sup>

Failure to repay a loan could result in drastic penalties. These penalties fell into three categories, each more severe than the one preceding: first, the accrual of punitive interest;<sup>37</sup> second, the right of execution<sup>38</sup> against the possessions of the debtor;<sup>39</sup> and third, the right of execution against the person of the debtor.

<sup>30</sup> E.g., Plummer, *Luke* 336; Hauck, *Lukas* 178; Marshall, *Luke* 551; Wiefel, *Lukas* 250; Bovon, *Lukas* 363.

<sup>31</sup> *Light from the Ancient East: The New Testament Illustrated by Recently Discovered Texts of the Graeco-Roman World* (4th ed., 1927 ed. reprinted, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995) 116.

<sup>32</sup> BAGD, “δίκαιος” 196; MM, “δίκαιος” 162; LSJ, “δίκαιος” 429, B(2). See also Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East* 117.

<sup>33</sup> Since the government was deeply involved in the economy (e.g. in addition to its characteristic interest in issues related to taxation and the minting of coins, local governments owned and leased land, had a virtual monopoly on some enterprises, etc.), it oftentimes became creditor to individuals (see *P. Teb.* 5, ll. 36 ff.; ca. 118 BC). However, the language of the Lucan parable suggests that a private loan is in view, and thus we shall concentrate on this kind of transaction.

<sup>34</sup> See, for example, *B. G. U.* 1273 (221–220 BC); *P. Amh.* 50 (106 BC); *P. Oxy.* 269 (AD 57); *P. Oxy.* 270 (AD 94); *P. Oxy.* 499 (AD 121); *P. Oxy.* 507 (AD 169); *P. S. I.* 961 (AD 176).

<sup>35</sup> For the terminology involved, see R. Taubenschlag, *The Law of Greco-Roman Egypt in the Light of the Papyri 332 BC–640 AD* (2nd ed.; Warsaw: Panstwoe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1955) 292–303.

<sup>36</sup> The records were apparently not always well kept (e.g. see *P. Oxy.* 237 [AD 89]).

<sup>37</sup> E.g., *P. Oxy.* 499 (AD 121); *P. Oxy.* 507 (AD 169).

<sup>38</sup> The technical term is πράξις.

<sup>39</sup> Where a creditor might make an execution against the debtor’s possessions (ὑπάρχοντα), the creditor would take his claim to a magistrate who would rule on its validity then enlist the πράκτορ; the government could seize the debtor’s possessions and auction them in order to pay off the debt (Taubenschlag, *The Law of Greco-Roman Egypt* 525–531). This right was not automatically exercised; debtors might have a brief period to convey their belongings to the πράκτορ (ibid. 530–531). There was, in addition, an appeals procedure by which the debtor could dispute the proceedings (ibid. 533–534). It was therefore possible to drag out the process for some time.

In the penalty of last resort—a claim against the person of the debtor—the creditor would be forced to take his claim of non-payment to a municipal official, a magistrate, for adjudication.<sup>40</sup> In the language of Luke's parable, this magistrate is the ἄρχων (v. 58a; apparently equivalent to the κριτής of v. 58b). The magistrate would then find in favor of the creditor and direct the bailiff, the πράκτωρ, to locate, seize and imprison the debtor.<sup>41</sup> Once arrested, the debtor could end up in a municipal or private jail.<sup>42</sup> On the basis of legislation that forbade it in certain instances, it may be surmised that the practice (and hence, even the threat) of execution against the person of the debtor was a particularly effective way to collect outstanding debt.<sup>43</sup> But if this be true then it is at once obvious that it cannot automatically be assumed that the one seized did not have the means to repay. In fact, M. Rostovtzeff observes that a debtor's assets might be seized and kept or auctioned *during* his imprisonment.<sup>44</sup> It is possible that in at least some instances failure to repay a loan was not because the debtor lacked the means, but rather the will, to repay.<sup>45</sup>

The language of the parable in Luke is somewhat vague (e.g. the particular sort of loan or indemnity in view is not specified). Nevertheless, it is clear from the account and, moreover, from what was widely known about being a debtor under a Hellenistic legal system, that a rather unpleasant experience is envisaged for him. While people in cities influenced by Hellenism had rather ingenious if sometimes indelicate ways of seeing to it that debts were repaid, they did *not* provide for a perpetual imprisonment of the debtor. It would be wrong to conclude that a *permanent* imprisonment is what Jesus has in mind here—this is the thrust of our investigation into the Hellenistic background. But does this comport with the language of the parable itself?

2. *The language of the parable.* Jesus' words about the certainty and length of punishment are clear and emphatic: "you will certainly not get out (οὐ μὴ ἐξέλθῃς) until you have paid (ἕως . . . ἀποδῶς) even (καί) the last cent (λεπτός)" (12:57). The use of οὐ μὴ stresses the impossibility of getting out;<sup>46</sup>

<sup>40</sup> Ibid. 533.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid. 534–537. We have some record of these decisions (e.g. *P. Tor.* 13 [136 BC]).

<sup>42</sup> Personal enslavement for debt was not practiced in the NT era (Taubenschlag, *The Law of Greco-Roman Egypt* 529–530).

<sup>43</sup> *P. Teb.* 5, ll. 221–230.

<sup>44</sup> M. Rostovtzeff, *The Social and Economic History of the Hellenistic World* (3 vols.; Oxford: Clarendon, 1967) 1548 (the continuation of n. 173).

<sup>45</sup> But what happened when the debtor did not have assets? Did he remain imprisoned forever? If the debtor did not have significant assets, he might languish in jail for some time. There was evidently a fair amount of official corruption related to the use of coercion by municipal officials to collect city debts alongside debts owed to them privately (Rostovtzeff, *The Social and Economic History of the Hellenistic World* 894). However, whether public or private, imprisonment in the ancient world meant expense for the jailer—and unlike contemporary societies, the ancients were not in the habit of providing perpetual room and board for those in custody. As a result, jail was made unpleasant so that friends and relatives might be encouraged to put up money or assets in order to secure the debtor's release. This last comment might not be relevant to the Lucan parable where the language of the episode suggests that the debtor himself must repay (ἀποδῶς).

<sup>46</sup> D. B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996) 468.

the *καί* in the phrase is ascensive,<sup>47</sup> hence emphatic, and the mention of a *λεπτός*, the smallest of coins, highlights how exacting the creditor will be.<sup>48</sup> But do his words mean there is no getting out for the debtor?

The grammatical construction involving *ἕως* as a conjunction followed by a subjunctive mood verb occurs 15 times in Luke, 21 times in Luke-Acts.<sup>49</sup> The grammatical construction invariably leaves open the possibility that the situation described in the protasis will be reversed or ended when the condition (or conditions) mentioned in the apodosis is (or are) fulfilled. For example, in Luke 9:27 Jesus assures that some of those present with him at the Transfiguration “will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God” (οὐ μὴ γεύσονται θανάτου ἕως ἂν ἴδωσιν τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ θεοῦ). These remarks are addressed to a crowd that includes the disciples. Some of these, specifically Peter, James and John, then follow Jesus onto the mountain where the Transfiguration occurs (9:28–36). Whether one regards the Transfiguration, crucifixion or exaltation of Jesus as the fulfillment of the saying about the kingdom of God displayed,<sup>50</sup> some of those standing there do witness its manifestation in the course of Luke-Acts. Once the ‘seeing’ of the kingdom of God occurs, that is, once the condition specified in the apodosis is met, it becomes possible that some of those witnessing it will “taste death.” In fact, in Acts 12:2, we read of the death of James. Similarly, in Acts 23:12 certain men take an oath “neither to eat nor drink until they kill Paul” (μήτε φαγεῖν μήτε πεινῆ ἕως οὗ ἀποκτείνωσιν τὸν Παῦλον). The situation mentioned in the protasis, their fast, was to end once the condition referred to in the apodosis, the murder of Paul, was accomplished. The same thing happens in virtually every instance of the construction, and even if there is some disagreement as to precisely how the event described in a given apodosis might take place, the implication remains that once the condition mentioned in the apodosis is fulfilled, a reversal of sorts can take place with respect to the protasis.

To return to the parable: it is not that its language forbids release for the debtor, only that a certain condition must be met for release to occur, viz., the complete repayment of the debt. At the very least the language of the account allows for the possibility that the ‘debt’ will be repaid at some point in the future.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>47</sup> See BDF §442 (12).

<sup>48</sup> See Grundmann, *Lukas* 273–274 and Bock, *Luke* 9:51–24:53 1200.

<sup>49</sup> Luke 2:15; 9:27; 12:50, 59; 13:8, 35; 15:4, 8; 17:8; 20:43; 21:32; 22:16, 18, 34; 24:49; Acts 2:35; 17:15; 23:12, 14, 21; 25:21. Of its occurrences in Luke, a handful appears in the parallel Markan material and two others may reasonably be assigned to Q. In the triple tradition we find Luke 9:27 = Mark 9:1/Matt 16:28; Luke 20:43 = Mark 12:36/Matt 22:44; Luke 21:32 = Mark 13:30/Matt 24:34 (Matthew and Luke use *ἕως*, Mark has *μέχρις*); Luke 22:18 par. Mark 14:25/Matt 26:29; Luke 22:34 par. Mark 14:30/Matt 26:34 (Mark and Matthew use *πρίν*; Luke has *ἕως*). Elsewhere, Luke 12:59 = Matt 5:26; Luke 13:35 = Matt 23:39. In other words, about half of its occurrences in Luke can be traced to Markan or Q material; the other half comes from other sources.

<sup>50</sup> For a survey of views, see Plummer, *St. Luke* 249–250; C. A. Evans, *Luke* 149; Stein, *Luke* 280.

<sup>51</sup> The possibility of eventual release is mentioned by Tertullian (*De Testimonio Animæ* LVIII), though his understanding of the parable differs vastly from the one proposed here.

3. *Paying the last cent.* I have argued that the context of Luke 12:57–59 directs the reader to interpret the parable as speaking especially to the nation. Further, the language of the parable and the background of debt suggest, or, at the very least, leave open the possibility, that God's judgment on the nation will be temporary, not permanent.

According to the parable the debt must be fully paid; otherwise, the debtor does not get out of prison. But while the debt in the parable is undoubtedly financial in nature, we are not told precisely *what* might be involved in "paying the last cent" (12:59) for the nation. How should it be understood?

Even though commentators have generally failed to appreciate that Jesus is here addressing Israel, they are right to interpret the "last cent" as the debt one owes to God.<sup>52</sup> But it is possible to be more specific. In the context of Jesus' preaching in Luke we should see settling with the opponent and paying the last cent as a reference to repentance. Why? The parable involves the ideas of obligation and punishment. In Luke these concepts emerge particularly in connection with Israel's obligation to be reconciled to God via repentance in order that punishment might be avoided. Repentance is first mentioned in connection with the ministry of John the Baptist where the crowds at large are urged to do it (Luke 3:3, 8). It is prominent in the preaching of Jesus near the outset of his ministry and after his resurrection (Luke 5:32; 24:47).<sup>53</sup> Interestingly, it is what Jesus calls for in Luke 13:1–5 when he warns of coming judgment on his Jewish hearers (a story immediately preceded by the parable of 12:57–59). It is also what Peter demands when he anticipates national restoration (Acts 3:19–21). Indeed, Peter says without it there will be no restoration. Repentance is what is required in Luke to avoid judgment (Luke 3:8; 13:1–9; 16:30). It is part of the apostolic preaching (Acts 2:38; 5:31; 8:22) and is what God requires of Jew and Gentile (Acts 11:18; 17:30; 20:21; 26:20). In context, therefore, I suggest that "the last cent" for which payment is demanded in the parable corresponds to God's call for repentance on the part of Israel.

If Hellenistic law did not foresee a perpetual imprisonment for the debtor, and if the Lucan parable allows a future "getting out" for Israel, would the parable's implication of a future for Israel be consistent with what Luke has to say on the theme elsewhere? Attention is now turned to the future of Israel in Luke-Acts.

4. *A future for Israel in Luke-Acts.* With the possible exception of Paul's discourse in Romans 9–11, Luke has more to say about a future for Israel than any NT writer.<sup>54</sup> While it is not within the purview of this study to

<sup>52</sup> E.g., Bock, *Luke 9:51–24:53* 1200; C. A. Evans, *Luke* 200.

<sup>53</sup> See also 10:13; 11:32; 15:7,10; 16:30.

<sup>54</sup> Scholars have increasingly recognized the extent to which Luke seems to emphasize a future for Israel. In addition to Ravens's study, *Luke and the Restoration of Israel*, this theme is explored by J. Jervell, *Luke and the People of God: A New Look at Luke-Acts* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1972); A. W. Wainwright, "Luke and the Restoration of the Kingdom to Israel," *ExpT* 89 (1977–78) 76–79; R. C. Tannehill, "Israel in Luke-Acts: A Tragic Story," *JBL* 104 (1985) 69–85; J. T. Carroll, *Response to the End of History: Eschatology and Situation in Luke-Acts* (SBLDS 92; Atlanta:

explore what the term Ἰσραήλ means in every one of its occurrences in Luke-Acts, we may generalize that it typically contains both an ethnic and religious dimension, with the ethnic one ever-present. It is never applied to Gentiles, even Gentile Christians.<sup>55</sup>

In spite of the judgment of a few moderns who argue that Luke was anti-Jewish,<sup>56</sup> several lines of evidence point in precisely the opposite direction. The following passages indicate that, at least from Luke's perspective, God will make good his promises to Israel (albeit not, perhaps, in the way anticipated by the prophets of old). In fact, the importance of Israel is magnified by Luke in that what Paul calls the blessed hope of all Christians—the second coming of Jesus (2 Tim 2:13–14)—depends on the repentance of Israel (see the discussion of Acts 3:19–21 below). Two passages from Acts will be examined in order to show that the parable of 12:57–59, with its tacit conclusion that there remains a future for Israel, is consistent with what Luke says and implies elsewhere with respect to Israel.

a. *Acts 1:6*. The resurrected Jesus taught the disciples for 40 days about “the kingdom of God” (Acts 1:3); afterwards, he spoke of the coming baptism with the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:5). It is not difficult to imagine how these themes would have excited the disciples. After all, OT passages such as Joel 2:28–3:1

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Scholars, 1988) 146–147; E. Franklin, *Luke: Interpreter of Paul, Critic of Matthew* (JSNTSup 92; Sheffield: JSOT, 1994) and V. Fusco, “Luke-Acts and the Future of Israel,” *NovT* (1996) 1–17.

Why would Luke write so much about Israel? Most recently Ravens has made the argument that Luke-Acts was written toward the end of the first century to assure Jewish Christians that they had made the right choice and to show Gentile believers “that they are now, by God's grace, members of Israel with the same inheritance as the Jews” (*Luke and the Restoration of Israel* 250). Ravens pits Luke against both Paul and Matthew, arguing that each needs correcting because each, in its own way, advocates (or can be seen to advocate) a radical break with Judaism. This is not the venue to undertake a prolonged critique of Ravens's argument. It is lucid and plausible, but certain questions persist. For example, it is granted that there is much in Matthew that looks like a break with Judaism, if by Judaism we refer not to the faith of the OT but to its (allegedly illegitimate) practice by the Jews who rejected Jesus (surely Matthew's fulfillment language stresses an essential continuity between Jesus and the OT). But if this is true, is Luke any less “anti-Judaism” than Matthew? While he may have presented the Pharisees in a more favorable, or perhaps, fuller, light than Matthew, there remain “bad” Pharisees (Luke 5:17–21, 30; 6:6–11; 7:36–50; 11:37–44, 53–54; 12:1; 16:14) and at the end of the day *all* Jews are called upon to repent with respect to Jesus (Acts 2:38; 3:17–19; 4:12)—that is, to embrace a Christocentric faith. Is this in itself not also capable of being regarded as in fundamental opposition to Judaism? In addition, with regard to Paul, it is arguably the case that the greatest parallel to and support for Paul's teaching about Israel in Romans 11 is found in Luke-Acts. Far from correcting Paul, Luke seems to emulate him (on this, see Franklin's *Luke: Interpreter of Paul, Critic of Matthew*).

<sup>55</sup> In support of this, see the recent monograph by G. Harvey, *The True Israel: Uses of the Names Jew, Hebrew and Israel in Ancient Jewish and Early Christian Literature* (AGJU 35; Leiden: Brill, 1996). Peter Richardson made the same case years ago, observing that the name Israel was not specifically applied to the church until Justin did so in about AD 160 (*Israel in the Apostolic Church*; SNTSMS 10; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969). I would, however, strongly disagree with his dating of Luke-Acts and his conclusion that Luke-Acts contain no basis for an expectation of Israel's future salvation (ibid. 201). In addition to the studies cited in the previous note, see also E. Franklin, *Christ the Lord: A Study in the Purpose and Theology of Luke-Acts* (London: SPCK, 1975) 77–115 and J. Green, *The Theology of the Gospel of Luke* (New Testament Theology; Cambridge: University Press, 1995) 68–75.

<sup>56</sup> E.g., J. T. Sanders, *The Jews in Luke-Acts* (London: SCM, 1987).

and Ezek 39:25–29 link the outpouring of the Spirit to the restoration of the fortunes of the nation. Quite understandably, then, in Acts 1:6 Jesus is asked by these disciples, “are you establishing the kingdom to Israel at this time?” (ἐν τῷ χρόνῳ τούτῳ ἀποκαθιστάνεις τὴν βασιλείαν τῷ Ἰσραήλ). Rather than give a direct reply to their question, Jesus urges them not to be preoccupied with this issue (which is solely within the purview of the Father’s providence, οὐχ ὑμῶν ἐστὶν γινῶναι χρόνους ἢ καιροὺς οὓς ὁ πατὴρ ἔθετο ἐν τῇ ἰδίᾳ ἐξουσίᾳ, v. 7), but to carry out the world-wide evangelistic mission once the Spirit comes (v. 8).

The verb ἀποκαθίστημι, translated “restore” in Acts 1:6, occurs 46 times in the LXX (including instances of ἀποκαταίστημι). Apparently following A. Oepke, J. T. Carroll asserts that in the OT the word had become “a technical term . . . for the political restoration of Israel by God.”<sup>57</sup> This would appear to overstate the case. Of its 46 occurrences, only seven passages—all from the prophets—refer to the political restoration of Israel (Hos 11:11; Jer 15:19; 16:15; 23:8; 24:6; 27:19; Ezek 17:23). On rare occasions it has this meaning in Josephus (e.g. *Ant.* 11.1.1 §2). The verb ἀποκαθίστημι is found eight times in the NT. In its only other appearance in Luke-Acts, the word refers to the healing of the man with the withered hand (Luke 6:10, the hand is “restored”).<sup>58</sup> Even though I am skeptical that the term was a technical one denoting the political restoration of Israel, that would appear to be its meaning in the context of Acts 1:6. This makes sense in context where, as noted earlier, Jesus’ teaching about the kingdom and his promise of the Spirit would quite naturally have brought a vision of national restoration and splendor to the minds of the disciples. Clearly there is precedent in the prophetic books for thinking the term refers to national restoration. On any other view one is hard-pressed to explain Jesus’ failure to correct the disciples’ misunderstanding and the recurrence of the theme at Acts 3:19–21 (see below). Scholars are quick to recognize the overtly nationalistic flavor of the disciples’ question in Acts 1:6,<sup>59</sup> and we should regard Jesus’ answer as implicit confirmation of the premise of their question. As Robert Tannehill observes, “Jesus’ answer to the question about restoring the reign to Israel denies that Jesus’ followers can know the time and probably corrects their supposition that the restoration may come immediately, but it does not deny the legitimacy of their concern with the restoration of the national life of the Jewish people.”<sup>60</sup>

<sup>57</sup> *Response to the End of History* 146. The term also refers to a political restoration in Diodorus Siculus 16,10,3 and Polybius 4,23,1 (see further A. Oepke, “ἀποκαθίστημι,” *TDNT* 1.388–389).

<sup>58</sup> Elsewhere in the NT the verb refers to the effects of a miraculous healing at Matt 12:13, Mark 3:5 (these parallel Luke 6:10) and Mark 8:25. In two places in the Synoptic tradition it is used in reference to the anticipated ministry of the prophet Elijah: he will come and restore (ἀποκαθίστημι) all things (Mark 9:12; Matt 17:11).

<sup>59</sup> See (in addition to Carroll, *Response to the End of History* and Oepke, *TDNT* 1) J. C. O’Neill, *The Theology of Acts in its Historical Setting* (London: SPCK, 1961) 82; E. Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1971) 143; Franklin, *Christ the Lord* 102; F. F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983) 38.

<sup>60</sup> *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation. Volume 2: The Acts of the Apostles* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990) 15.

b. *Acts 3:19–21*. In Acts 3 Peter and John, emboldened by the Holy Spirit and, perhaps, by the success of the apostolic preaching at Pentecost, return to the temple. There, after the healing of the lame man, a crowd gathers, and Peter begins to preach. Tannehill has noted that by this stage in the narrative, Peter functions as a “reliable character,” and, thus, his pronouncements carry special weight for understanding the author’s point of view.<sup>61</sup> Toward the end of his sermon, Peter pleads with the Jews to repent “that seasons of refreshing may come from before the Lord and He might send Jesus—the one appointed as Christ for you, whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration (χρόνων ἀποκαταστάσεως) of all things which God spoke of through the mouths of his holy prophets from of old.” If the Jews heed Peter’s exhortation to repent, two things will follow: seasons of refreshing and the return of Jesus, the Christ. According to Peter, Jesus is in heaven at present by divine necessity (δεῖ οὐρανὸν μὲν δεῖξασθαι), but he will be sent (again) once the Jews repent.<sup>62</sup> Hence the restoration of Israel and the return of Jesus are linked to the repentance of the Jews.<sup>63</sup>

These comments evoke memories of Acts 1:6 in that the theme of Israel’s restoration is revisited (this time by the Spirit-empowered Peter). The noun ἀποκατάστασις in 3:21 is related to the verb ἀποκαθίστημι, which Luke has already employed in Acts 1:6. As we have seen, the language there envisages national blessings for Israel. But in Acts 3 more information is offered. If the Jews repent, times of refreshing will come as will Jesus, the one appointed Christ. Whereas in Acts 1:6–8 the time of restoration is not revealed, in Acts 3:19–21 we *are* told when it will come—after the Jews repent.<sup>64</sup> While the promise of restoration to Israel in Acts 3 is conditional upon the nation’s repentance (μετανοήσατε, v. 19), it is nonetheless clearly made.

Other passages might be enlisted to provide a more comprehensive picture of Israel’s future in Luke-Acts; however, the two surveyed suffice to show that the possibility of a future for the nation hinted at in the parable in Luke 12:57–59 is consistent with what Luke has to say elsewhere about the topic.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

It has been argued that to see Luke’s parable of the debtor as referring to individuals ignores the context of the passage, and to see it as implying permanent judgment for the nation runs contrary to the background of Hellenistic debt and the language of the parable itself.

<sup>61</sup> “Israel in Luke-Acts: A Tragic Story” 70, 75–77.

<sup>62</sup> On the relationship of “seasons of refreshing” (v. 20) to “times of restoration” (v. 21), compare H. A. W. Meyer (*Critical and Exegetical handbook to the Acts of the Apostles* [4th ed., New York: Funk and Wagnells, 1883] 81–84) and C. K. Barrett (*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles* [ICC; Edinburgh: Clark, 1994] 205–207) to Oepke (*TDNT* 1.390) and Haenchen (*The Acts of the Apostles* 208).

<sup>63</sup> Meyer, *The Acts of the Apostles* 81–82; Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles* 208.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

In Luke 12:57–59 Jesus speaks, as elsewhere, of the crisis facing the nation—a crisis of its own making, a crisis initiated by its lack of faith in him, a crisis which, if unresolved, presents grave consequences to it. The parable of going before the ruler anticipates both a harsh judgment and an eventual restoration for Israel. This interpretation fits the parable's context, where these themes are present, and the larger context of Luke-Acts with its distinctive stress on the restoration of Israel. Although, with respect to Israel, Luke does not flatly state that “the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable” (as does Paul in Rom 11:29), he nevertheless goes to great lengths to point his readers toward that understanding. Israel is destined not only for a “prison,” but also for restoration.