

**The Church of the Servant King**  
**Survey of the Bible Series**  
**The Gospel of Luke**

SB\_LK17\_Instructions, Ten Lepers, and the Second Coming

***Instructions to His Disciples (17:1-10)***

In verse 1, Jesus makes a very interesting comment. The context in Luke (and in the parallel passage in Matthew 18:1-14) is the continuing and unrelenting opposition by the Pharisees against Jesus' ministry. Here in Luke, we have just seen Jesus opposed by the religious leaders of Israel due to Jesus' healing on the Sabbath (13:14; 14:3), His association with tax collectors and sinners (15:1-2) and His teaching against the improper use of material possessions (16:1-13). In addition, Jesus has just provided instruction to His disciples in the form of three parables that emphasized the extent to which the heavenly Father will go to pursue positive volition (15:4-7 – the lost sheep; 15:8-10 – the lost coin) and the attitude which should be possessed by the Jew who repents (15:11-32).

Therefore, the "*stumbling blocks*" to which Jesus referred in this passage is a reference to those actions and words spoken by the unbelieving religious leaders of Israel which would persuade some of Jesus' followers to turn from Him. Jesus had already noted that the Pharisees were not only refusing to enter the kingdom, but they were keeping others from entering the kingdom (Lk 11:52). Jesus' acknowledgement that "*stumbling blocks*" would come is an acknowledgement that negative volition is inevitable throughout human history since God allows free will in His creatures.

Jesus' statement in verse 2 that it would be better if a millstone were hung around his neck and he was thrown into the sea than if he caused one of the "little ones" to stumble is a reference to the severity of the offense of causing a follower to reject Jesus and his gospel, i.e. the gospel of the kingdom. Included among Jesus' followers at this point were both believers and unbelievers. Many had not yet decided and some had decided. Those who had not decided and who were still in unbelief faced the danger of having the word snatched from them by Satan's earthly emissaries, i.e. the Pharisees. The seed of the word had fallen beside the road (Lk 8:5, 12). Those who had decided and believed in Jesus still faced the danger being like the rocky soil so that when the seed of the gospel fell upon their ears, they believed at first with joy, but they had no firm root to withstand the arguments of the opposition. Therefore, they believed for a time, but are drawn away by temptation, i.e. the arguments and pressure of the religious leaders (8:6, 13).

In verses 3-4, we find Jesus' instruction to be somewhat related to that found in Matthew 18:15-22. In the Matthew passage, the emphasis is upon how the "church" should deal with a sinning brother, whereas the emphasis in Luke is perhaps more applicable to one-on-one scenarios. Unlike the Pharisees who had demonstrated a disdain of the sinner to the point of shunning him or her, Jesus teaches the importance of forgiveness of those who have sinned against the believer. The condition is that the sinning brother have an attitude of repentance. What a contrast to the unrepentant Pharisees and religious leaders!

In verses 5-6, the disciples make an interesting request of Jesus. They ask him for more faith. Jesus' response indicates that the quantity of their faith is not the issue. The issue is the quality of their faith. If their faith was only as large as a grain of mustard seed, God could use them to do amazing things. The parallel passage in Matthew 17:19-20 provides a better understanding perhaps of the context for this statement by Jesus. The disciples had been unable to cast a demon out of a boy only to witness Jesus cast out the demon. They wondered at this knowing that they had been given the power over demons to cast them out. Jesus replied that they were unable to cast the demon out because of their unbelief (not the belief or unbelief of the demon possessed boy). Jesus also indicated that if their faith was as the size of a grain of

mustard seed, they would be able to cast out the demon and be used by God to perform even more amazing things.

In verses 7-10, Jesus teaches the principle of servant leadership to His disciples. As disciples, they were to be servant leaders in their walk of faith. They were not to expect commendation for doing that which was expected or commanded of them. In the same way, believers today (men and women) have a responsibility to exercise their faith unto the Lord as a faithful servant regardless of whether or not there is ever any acknowledgment of such service from others. The life of faith (regardless of dispensation) is not a game. It is not an endeavor to build one's own self-esteem through seeking the approbation of others. The true servant of our Lord has full awareness of his spiritual unworthiness and status and does not expect such praise. Yet, such a servant will find especially sweet the words of our Lord when he/she reaches eternity and the Lord says "Well done my good and faithful servant."

### ***Ten Lepers Healed (17:11-19)***

Jesus was on His way to Jerusalem along the border between Samaria and Galilee when He was met (at a distance) by ten lepers who asked Jesus to heal them. This is the second time in Luke's Gospel that lepers were healed.<sup>1</sup> The previous occasion is recorded in Luke 5:12-16. On that occasion, Jesus commanded the healed lepers to tell no one. As we have seen, the reason seems to be that Jesus did not want those healed to indicate the source since the true spiritual condition of the nation had not yet become manifest. Jesus was evaluating the spiritual condition of the nation to see if its spiritual condition was receptive and ready for the kingdom (Matt 5:3-11). However, by the time we arrive at chapter 17 of Luke's Gospel, Jesus has had an opportunity to assess the spiritual condition of the nation and its leaders. He is very aware of the fact that He was being rejected en masse. Therefore, we find no such command to remain silent at this point. As a matter of fact, they are commanded to show themselves to the priest since under the Mosaic Law, the priest could declare a person ceremonially cleansed of such ailments.

Only the foreigner returned to glorify God when he was healed on the way to the priests. Luke's audience would have found this part of the story especially appealing. Luke's point is that Jesus was receiving a greater response from the Gentile community than He was receiving from the Jews.

It is interesting that in verse 14, Luke notes that the lepers were cleansed as they went whereas in verse 19, Jesus' comments to the Samaritan leper who returned to praise God indicate that his healing was related to his faith. Therefore, the question arises as to whether the other lepers who were healed had faith or not? In this passage, the answer really isn't an issue of whether they had any faith since we see in verse 13 that all of them cried out for mercy. Also, Jesus' command in verse 14 required some obedience and manifestation of faith to be followed. The issue in this passage is that one of them (i.e. the despised Samaritan) openly expressed his gratitude and thus demonstrated a humility of spirit that Jesus was desiring to find among the children of promise (i.e. the Jews of Israel).

### ***The Coming of the Kingdom (17:20-37)***

Jesus' more obtuse answer in verses 20-21 (relative to His more direct answer to a similar question in Luke 21:7 and Matthew 24:3) is a result of the fact that it was the Pharisees who posed the question. This is the reason Jesus begins His reply with a statement relating to the internal spiritual dynamics of the kingdom. The phrase translated "within you" is better translated "in your midst" or "among you" especially considering Jesus' audience, i.e. unbelieving

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<sup>1</sup> Leprosy was broadly used to apply to or describe almost any skin ailment. Healing from leprosy was extremely rare. The Scripture records only Miriam (Num 12) and Naaman (2 Kings 5) as having been healed of leprosy.

Pharisees.<sup>2</sup> The kingdom of God was not “in” unbelievers. The kingdom of God was within their reach. All the unbelieving Pharisees had to do was to accept Jesus as the Messiah and the kingdom could have come to Israel through Jesus. Jesus’ audience is the reason that He answered the way He did in verses 20-21. His audience, i.e. the Pharisees, were lacking the humility of spirit that would be receptive to the gospel of the kingdom.

While the phrases “the kingdom of God” and “the kingdom of heaven” refer to the very tangible and visible Messianic kingdom on earth as we have studied, there is also the inner, invisible aspect to the kingdom that Jesus desired to find in Israel and that would be receptive to the presentation of the gospel of the kingdom (e.g. Matt 5-7 cf. Luke 6:20-42; 12:21-31, 57-59; 14:34-35). It is the invisible, spiritual dynamic of the kingdom that has similarities with the spiritual body of believers in this dispensation known as the Church.<sup>3</sup> While Jesus certainly desired to find a humility within Israel that was seeking the kingdom and receptive to His presentation, He is not teaching that the kingdom is an invisible kingdom such as the amillennarian would have us believe.

In verse 22, Jesus turns to His disciples and His instruction focuses upon the more visible aspects of the kingdom. Jesus’ statement that “the **days** will come when you will desire to see **one of the days** of the Son of Man...” is a reference to the last days of Israel in anticipation of the establishment of the Messianic kingdom on earth at Jesus’ Second Advent. It is another reference to the day of the Lord that is sometimes used to refer to the same event, i.e. the judgment associated with the Second Advent (Joel 2:31; Amos 5:18-20; Obadiah 15; Malachi 4:5).<sup>4</sup> The phrase “one of the days of the Son of Man” is most likely a reference to the fact that Jesus’ Second Advent, while quick, begins the process of the establishment of the Messianic kingdom on earth.<sup>5</sup> As a matter of fact, this is not the only occasion in which both the singular and the plural of “day” are used to refer to this event or period of time. (See Luke 17:24, 30 cf. 17:26, 28 in addition to Amos 8:11, 13.)

Verse 23 is a reference to the false prophets and false Christs who will evidently be in abundance during the last days of Israel. Compare Jesus’ statements in verse 23 to similar statements in Matthew 24:23-24.

In verses 26 – 30, Jesus teaches the principle that in the days before the judgment associated with His Second Coming and the establishment of the Messianic kingdom, people will still engage in normal activities of life. To the spiritually blind, these activities are distractions from

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<sup>2</sup> See Frank E. Gaebel, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976-1992) and John A. Martin, “Luke” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, John Walvoord and Roy Zuck, editors (Wheaton, Illinois: Victor Books, 1983), 249.

<sup>3</sup> In the greater context of the whole of human history, the Church is an intercalation not foreseen by the prophets to Israel. The Church is the recipient of spiritual blessings such as the permanent indwelling of the Holy Spirit that will also be true of the believer who enters and dwells in the Messianic Kingdom on earth. The resurrected believers of the Church Age will rule and reign with Christ during the Messianic Kingdom on earth along with the resurrected believers of prior dispensations. However, the tangible, visible and earthly promises given to Israel that relate to the Messianic kingdom on earth are hers alone. The Church is in no way a recipient of these aspects of the kingdom.

<sup>4</sup> Sometimes the phrase the “day of the Lord” doesn’t refer to the Second Advent. See Isaiah 2:12; Ezekiel 13:5; and 30:3 as examples.

<sup>5</sup> As we have seen in previous studies, the different number of days associated with the last three and one-half years of the Tribulation in various Scriptures provides for a period of as many as 75 days. Compare Daniel 12:7, 11-12 to Revelation 11:2-3 where we see references to 1,335 days, 1,290 days and 1,260 days describing they length of the last half of the Tribulation.

the spiritual realities. Such was the case with the generation of Noah (verses 26-27) and in the generation of Lot (28-29). The spiritual man of the last days should not be attached to material things that blind one from the spiritual realities as was the case with Lot's wife (v. 32). Jesus emphasizes the point by saying that when the days of the Son of Man have come, one should abandon material possessions (i.e. their "life") in the interest of the spiritual (i.e. the kingdom). Ironically, those who invest their lives in the advancement of the spiritual kingdom and forsake the things of this world will one day inherit the very real and tangible Messianic kingdom on earth (v. 33). Those "taken" are taken to judgment (cf. Matt 24:36-44).

The Pharisees had asked Jesus "when" (v. 20) and the disciples asked Jesus "where" (v. 37). Jesus' response to the disciples indicates the severity of the judgment associated with His Second Coming. Eagles refer to vultures that gather over the dead to consume the flesh. When the judgment of the Second Advent comes, it will be final and terrible. No one will need to look for the place of judgment; the presence of the birds will reveal where the carcasses are located (see Matt 24:28 and Rev 19:17-21).