

Luke 10:1-24: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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[0 : 00] Luke chapter 10 verses 1 to 24 After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others, and sent them on ahead of him, two by two, into every town and place where he himself was about to go.

And he said to them, The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few. Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest, to send out labourers into his harvest. Go your way. Behold, I am sending you out as lambs in the midst of wolves.

Carry no money bag, no knapsack, no sandals, and greet no one on the road. Whatever house you enter, first say, Peace be to this house. And if a son of peace is there, your peace will rest upon him.

But if not, it will return to you. And remain in the same house, eating and drinking what they provide, for the labourer deserves his wages. Do not go from house to house.

Whenever you enter a town and they receive you, eat what is set before you. Heal the sick in it, and say to them, The kingdom of God has come near to you. But whenever you enter a town and they do not receive you, go into its streets and say, Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet we wipe off against you.

[1 : 14] Nevertheless, know this, that the kingdom of God has come near. I tell you, it will be more bearable on that day for Sodom than for that town. Woe to you, Chorazin!

Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes. But it will be more bearable in the judgment for Tyre and Sidon than for you.

And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? You shall be brought down to Hades. The one who hears you hears me, and the one who rejects you rejects me, and the one who rejects me rejects him who sent me.

The seventy-two returned with joy, saying, Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name. And he said to them, I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven.

Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall hurt you. Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.

[2 : 25] In that same hour he rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and said, I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding, and revealed them to little children.

Yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, or who the Father is except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

Then turning to the disciples, he said privately, Blessed are the eyes that see what you see, for I tell you that many prophets and kings desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it.

In Luke chapter 10, Jesus sends out the 72, much as the 12 were sent out at the beginning of chapter 9. Here, however, they function as a sort of an advance party.

They go before him into all of the towns that he is going to visit on his way towards Jerusalem. Jesus is very slowly advancing towards Jerusalem, and like an army gradually moving down through the land, he sends disciples in twos ahead of him.

[3 : 32] In some texts, the number of disciples is 70. In other texts, such as the ESV which we are using, there are 72. What are we to make of the numbers? First of all, if it is 70, we can think of the 70 nations of the world in Genesis chapter 10, representing all of humanity.

70 people go down with Jacob into Egypt in Genesis chapter 46, verses 26 to 27. Jesus, the new Jacob, has 12 disciples as Jacob had 12 sons, and 70 more in the wider body of his family. There were 70 elders of Israel who received Moses' spirit in Numbers chapter 11. It could also relate to the number of people in the great Sanhedrin. The choosing and empowering of the 70 represents Christ's formation of a new Israel and a new polity.

But then, there seem to be two more, which presents some problems for those connections, if it is indeed correct. So what to make of this? First, you might argue that some of the connections with 70 would still pertain, but much more loosely.

Yet it is curious to notice that on a couple of occasions where there is this connection with the number 70, you also have the number 72 connected in some traditions. So first of all, there are two extra people in Numbers 11.

[4 : 46] There are the 70 elders, but there are these two, Eldad and Medad, who are in the camp, who are separate from them. A number of people using slightly different criteria have counted the number of the nations in Genesis chapter 10 slightly differently, making 72 by some reckonings.

Also, 70 nations plus Edom and Israel make 72. By some traditions, 70 scholars produce the Septuagint. By other traditions, it was 72.

So a curious uncertainty about whether a number is 70 or 72 is common to a number of important instances. Perhaps there is something more to be explored here.

Of course, 72 is 6 times 12. They could be seen as an expansion of the 12, but they could also be seen as, with the 12, forming a group of 84. Now, Luke has already used the number 84 in reference to the Age of Anna.

And 84 is 7 times 12. There is a sort of fullness represented here. Note also that the number of disciples prior to the Day of Pentecost is 120, again an expansion upon the number 12.

[5 : 53] The reference here to the harvest might look back to the seed sowing mentioned a few chapters earlier. Maybe we should see the 12 sent out earlier, in chapter 9 verses 1 to 6, as sowers, and the 70 functioning more as reapers.

There is a much greater emphasis upon judgment associated with the ministry of the 70, which might relate to this. They gather the wheat, but bring down judgment upon the chaff.

They are sent out in a very similar way to the 12. They are sent out with instructions that suggest both the urgency of their mission, and also their dependence upon the people that they are being sent to, to provide for them.

The sending of the 12 and the 70 might also recall the spying out of the promised land under Moses and Joshua. There are hints there that they are sent out in pairs too. 12 spies were sent to spy out the promised land, representing the whole of Israel.

And now the sending out of the 12, followed by 72, suggests another representation of Israel as they spy out the land. But these spies bring back a good report.

[6 : 56] A connection is drawn between the reception of the 70 disciples and the final judgment. We can maybe think about Matthew chapter 25 verses 31 to 46, and the sheep and the goats.

The division there occurs on the basis of their reception of the brothers of Christ. The brothers are the disciples, the emissaries that are sent out representing their Lord. It isn't merely about a general attitude towards people in need.

This isn't what that passage is about. The passage is rather about the reception of the prophet. However, the disciples are sent without great provisions. They depend upon the hospitality of the places to which they go.

And the test that is being provided to these places is a test of hospitality. The way that these places will or will not receive the prophet is very similar to the way that they will or will not receive the poor. Such inspections of cities remind us perhaps of the story of Sodom in chapter 19 of Genesis. Also of the story of the two spies going to Jericho in the story of Rahab in the book of Joshua.

[7 : 59] The way that the towns received Jesus' 72 brethren would weigh in their final fate. You can think about the way Sodom is described in Ezekiel chapter 16 verses 48 to 50.

As I live, declares the Lord God, your sister Sodom and her daughters have not done as you and your daughters have done. Behold, this was the guilt of your sister Sodom. She and her daughters had pride, excessive food and prosperous ease, but did not aid the poor and needy.

They were haughty and did an abomination before me. So I removed them when I saw it. In the story of Sodom there is a great juxtaposition between chapters 18 and 19. The hospitality of

Abraham to the angels and the Lord unawares in chapter 18.

And the way that that is juxtaposed with the story of Lot's hospitality to the angels and the inhospitality of the people of Sodom. A failure to receive the messengers of the Lord is connected with a failure to receive the poor and the needy more generally.

So it should come as no surprise to us that the 72 are sent as people who are dependent upon the hospitality of the cities and the towns that they are visiting. Jesus challenges the cities that he has performed most of his works in to that point.

[9 : 13] On account of God's great work within their midst and their rejection of it, they are preparing themselves for a far greater judgment. Capernaum, for instance, sought to be lifted up to heaven, but it will be brought down to Sheol.

Jesus' statement here is playing off the background of Isaiah chapter 14 verses 12 to 15. Once again in verses 17 to 20, the theme of heavenly conflict comes to the foreground.

The disciples are engaged in a battle with demonic forces, which are being driven back by their work. Jesus' vision probably refers to something that has not yet occurred. It's an anticipation of what will occur through his death, resurrection, ascension, and the ministry of the church following Pentecost.

We might consider Revelation chapter 12 in light of this. The greater defeat of Satan would result from events that are being put in motion with the spying out of the land here. The emphasis upon conflict with Satan and his demons makes clear that Israel is his occupied territory.

The primary enemy is not Rome. It's Satan. This all sets things up for Jesus' prayer to his father. Verse 21 is a profoundly Trinitarian verse.

[10 : 48] The son rejoices in the Holy Spirit and addresses the father. The father, as the lord of heaven and earth, is the one who reveals and hides. He hides truth from the proud who imagine themselves to be wise, and who reveals things to the weakest and the humblest.

All authority has already been given to Christ. He is the one who passes on all that the father has given him, and apart from him there is no access to it. A question to consider.

The eschatological and spiritual horizons of reality are very prominent in this passage. Behind the ministry of the 72, Jesus shows the horizon of this great battle with Satan himself, and shows the horizon of the last day looming over these cities.

How might we better recognize the interrelation between the horizons that are most immediate to us, and the horizons of the age to come, and the horizon of conflict with spiritual forces?

How many