

Resurrection and the Future of Marriage: Interpreting Luke 20:34–36 in its Hebraic Context (Part 1)

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Abstract

When the Sadducees challenged Jesus with their marriage riddle, he replied that “the sons of this age marry and are given in marriage, but those who are considered worthy to attain to that age and to the resurrection from the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage” (Luke 20:34–35). The church has long viewed this as evidence that resurrection marks the start of an eternally celibate existence.

Yet many vital questions surrounding this interpretation have remained largely unexplored. How did the early church fathers view the passage, and what interpretive lens shaped their conclusions? Does the rest of the biblical data say anything about resurrected celibates? Is the concept of *eternal celibacy* an accurate reading of Jesus’ words in their original Hebraic context?

This two-part series will examine the historical record and the Hebrew Scriptures for answers to those questions. It will argue that Jesus’ remarks regarding “marrying and giving in marriage” in fact fell prey to misinterpretation by the Hellenized church fathers, which in turn obscured the biblical portrait of the future of marriage.

In part 1, we will first trace the interpretive history of the passage and identify potential influences behind the popular reading. We will then examine three indications that Jesus actually had a very different meaning in mind. In part 2, we will present an alternative reading that proposes a specific Old Testament text as the background for his famous reply.

The Question

On the final day of his public ministry, Jesus is accosted by a group of Sadducean priests with a challenge rooted in the Mosaic Law. It involves the Levirate

marriage statute that was designed to keep the family's inheritance within the family line:

If brothers dwell together, and one of them dies and has no son, the wife of the dead man shall not be married outside the family to a stranger. Her husband's brother shall go in to her and take her as his wife and perform the duty of a husband's brother to her. And the first son whom she bears shall succeed to the name of his dead brother, that his name may not be blotted out of Israel. (Deut 25:5–6)

These instructions in the Torah form the linchpin of their carefully crafted scenario:

“Teacher, Moses wrote for us that if a man's brother dies, having a wife but no children, the man must take the widow and raise up offspring for his brother. Now there were seven brothers. The first took a wife, and died without children. And the second and the third took her, and likewise all seven left no children and died. Afterward the woman also died. In the resurrection, therefore, whose wife will the woman be? For the seven had her as wife.” (Luke 20:28–33)

The Sadducees presume that the resurrection would cause the woman to be married to all seven brothers at once. This, of course, would violate the Lev 20:21 law against a man being married to his brother's wife while the brother is still alive. The goal of their absurdly exaggerated scenario is transparent: they are trying to prove the resurrection impossible on the grounds that it would violate the Torah.

The Traditional Interpretation

Jesus' response has historically been considered a declaration about the fate of human marriage. The traditional view interprets it something like this: “Ignorant Sadducees, marriage is for this age, not the age to come!” If such is the case, however, it is the first and only time Jesus has mentioned the idea of eternal celibacy for the resurrected.

We might have expected a revelation of this magnitude to take the form of didactic teaching during his ministry, but instead we find only a sharp retort aimed at his enemies shortly before he is arrested. And even this exchange does not elaborate on the concept, as Ben Witherington notes: “Nowhere in the Synoptic accounts of this debate are we told that we become sexless, without gender distinctions like the angels, or that all marital bonds created in this age are dissolved in the next.”¹

Turning to the rest of the NT, we find that celibacy in the present age is

1 Ben Witherington, *Women in the Ministry of Jesus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 35.

permitted in certain cases such as an urgent spiritual mission (Matt 19:12) or impending tribulation (1 Cor 7:29–31).² Yet these exist as exceptions within a worldview that highly esteemed the institution of marriage and so condemned ascetic teachers who were forbidding people from marrying.³

To be sure, a handful of passages are often thought to hint at the idea of celibacy in the *future* age. These include the corporate marriage of Christ and the church in Eph 5 (thought to replace individual human marriages) and the “spiritual” resurrected body in 1 Cor 15 (thought to be an asexual body). But even in such places, the idea of eternal celibacy is neither explicitly stated nor even clearly implied.⁴ Thus we are left without a definitive articulation of this view in the remainder of the New Testament.

The most significant witness to the teachings of Jesus outside of the NT are the writings of the Apostolic Fathers (ca. 70–150 CE). As one might expect, their commentary reflects the same pattern established in the scriptures. Celibacy in the *present* age is permitted in specific cases⁵ that are exceptions to the prevailing

2 Witherington comments on Matt 19:4–12: “That Jesus offers two equally valid callings, either to life-long marriage or to being a eunuch for the kingdom, is in itself evidence that Jesus did not have negative views about human sexuality or sexual relations in marriage. . . . There is no hint here that being a eunuch for the Kingdom was a higher or more holy calling than lifelong marriage.” See *Women in the Ministry of Jesus*, 32. Similarly, although in 1 Cor 7 Paul presents celibacy as advantageous for those who can abide it, he also respects the marital norm established in the Hebrew Bible. See Craig Keener, *1–2 Corinthians* (The New Cambridge Bible Commentary, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 68–69.

3 For passages that explicitly honor marriage see, e.g., Matt 19:3–6; 1 Cor 6:16–18, 7:4; 1 Tim 5:14; Eph 5:28; Col 3:19; Heb 13:4; 1 Pet 3:7. For the condemnation of the ascetic prohibition of marriage see 1 Tim 4:1–3.

4 The marital imagery used to describe the church’s relationship with Christ in Eph 5 evokes the marital language used of Israel’s corporate covenant with Yahweh (e.g., Ezek 16:8–14; Isa 54:5–6). As Yahweh’s figurative “wife,” Israel received his covenant blessings, which included the multiplication of her numbers via marriage and childbearing (Deut 1:10–11). Just as her corporate marriage to Yahweh did not preclude literal marriages among the people, so also the church’s corporate marriage to Christ is never said to replace literal marriages. In fact, Paul points to Christ’s covenantal sacrifice as the very model for love between husbands and wives in Eph 5:25–29 with no termination point in view. Regarding the “spiritual” (*pneumatikos*) body in 1 Cor 15:42–49, Craig Keener points out that “-ikos adjectives . . . normally denote mode of existence rather than substance.” See Keener, *1–2 Corinthians*, 133. This is the case earlier in the letter in 1 Cor 2:14–3:3, where the *pneumatikos* man is described as one who lives in obedience to the Spirit of God. The *body* of such a person is later confirmed to be the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 3:16, 6:19), a state which does not prevent it from entering a sexual marriage relationship (1 Cor 7:4). Paul gives no indication that the resurrected *pneumatikos* body in 1 Cor 15:44 will be any different with respect to its capacity for marriage. Keener suggests Paul may have seen a correlation between resurrected humans and the angels, since the *glory* of the resurrected body is compared with the *glory* of the stars in 1 Cor 15:41–42, and stars are viewed as angels elsewhere in Second Temple Judaism (Keener, *1–2 Corinthians*, 131). But it is instructive that Paul also contrasts the *glory* of the resurrected body with the *dishonor* of the mortal body in v. 43, showing that future exaltation (rather than future celibacy) is in view. For more on exaltation as the point of comparison between starlike angels and humans, see David Burnett, “So Shall Your Seed Be: Paul’s Use of Genesis 15:5 in Romans 4:18 in Light of Early Jewish Deification Traditions,” *Journal for the Study of Paul and His Letters* 5(2) (2015): 211–236.

5 E.g., Ign. *Pol.* 5.2; Herm. Mand. 4.4–11.

high regard for marriage.⁶ By contrast, the idea of *future* eternal celibacy for the resurrected is simply never mentioned by any Apostolic Father.

It turns out that the popular view of Jesus' reply does not arrive on the scene until around the mid-second century CE. By this time, Christianity had spread into a Greco-Roman culture saturated in the teachings of the Greek philosopher Plato. Numerous influential church fathers from this era had been trained in Platonic philosophy prior to converting to Christianity, and most continued to express great admiration for it after their conversion.

The Platonist version of the afterlife had no room for bodily resurrection. Instead, the soul was thought to shed the body like a husk and ascend to the heavens to dwell in eternal celibacy among the gods. The mortal body, according to Plato, was little more than a prison that hindered one from seeking spiritual truth. He therefore urged his followers to “avoid, so far as possible, intercourse and communion with the body, except what is absolutely necessary.”⁷

This paradigm naturally engendered disdain for all aspects of human physicality. Tim Connolly explains that “the true philosopher despises bodily pleasures such as food, drink, and sex, so he more than anyone else wants to free himself from his body . . . philosophy itself is, in fact, a kind of ‘training for dying,’ a purification of the philosopher’s soul from its bodily attachment.”⁸

Ascetic celibacy soon began to infiltrate the early church. Joseph Lynch comments that “the ordinary believers and even clergy who did not adopt an ascetic way of life were increasingly regarded as real but second-class Christians. The ascetics gradually became the Christian elite, who did what Jesus had recommended to those who wanted to be ‘perfect.’”⁹

This worldview left an indelible mark upon the theology of the Hellenized church fathers in the second century and beyond. In particular, many of their works reveal a striking connection between their prevailing low view of marriage and the emergence of an eternal celibacy interpretation of Jesus' reply to the Sadducees. A representative sampling from the first four centuries of the church offers some interesting insights in this regard.

We begin with *On the Resurrection* (ca. 150–180 CE), a work traditionally

6 E.g., 1 Clem. 1.3, 6.3; Pol. *Phil.* 4.2; Ign. *Pol.* 5.1.

7 Plato, *Phaedo* 67a. Translation from <https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0170%3Atext%3DPhaedo%3Asection%3D67a>

8 Tim Connolly, “Plato: Phaedo,” *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <https://www.iep.utm.edu/phaedo>.

9 Joseph H. Lynch, *Early Christianity: A Brief History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 195.

attributed to Justin Martyr.¹⁰ Our author holds to a literal resurrection of the flesh and debates an opponent who rejects such a resurrection largely because it would be pointless to resurrect one's sexual organs if the resurrected are celibate (as both men presume Jesus taught).

Justin answers his opponent by pointing to voluntary celibates in the present age, most notably Christ. He asserts that Christ was born of a virgin “for no other reason than that he might destroy the begetting [of children] by lawless desire.”¹¹ Here he refers to children conceived *within* the bond of marriage. In line with the ascetic paradigm, he considers all sexual desire inherently sinful.

The very institution of marriage, he claims, was “made lawless through lust”¹²—that is to say, through sexual desire shared between spouses. He views Christ's single life as a condemnation of the institution itself and is therefore quite comfortable interpreting Jesus to mean that “in the future world, sexual intercourse should be done away with.”¹³

Clement of Alexandria (ca. 150–215 CE) rejected a literal resurrection and argued instead that the New Testament supported the Platonic idea of eternal disembodiment in the heavens.¹⁴ He was a moderate ascetic who supported marriage but discouraged the enjoyment of conjugal relations. Husbands were instructed to suppress any physical desire they might feel for their wives because “the human ideal of continence, I mean that which is set forth by Greek philosophers, teaches that one should fight desire.”¹⁵ This worldview provides the backdrop for his interpretation of Jesus' reply to the Sadducees:

“For in this world,” he says, “they marry, and are given in marriage,” in which alone the female is distinguished from the male; “but in that world it is so no more.” There the rewards of this social and holy life, which is based on conjugal union, are laid up, not for male and female, but for man, **the sexual desire which divides humanity being removed.**¹⁶

Irenaeus of Lyons (ca. 130–202 CE) affirmed a bodily resurrection followed by a millennial reign of the Messiah. Nevertheless, he interpreted Jesus' reply to the

10 While the authorship of this document is dubious, its antiquity is not, and therefore it still provides a window into early church views. We refer to its author as Justin for the sake of convenience. The one authentic text by Justin that mentions Jesus' reply to the Sadducees, *Dialogue with Trypho* 1.81, quotes Jesus without interpretive comment and so is not examined here. Nevertheless, Justin's inclination to extol lifelong celibacy is evident in places such as *First Apology* 1.15.

11 Justin, *On the Resurrection* 1.3 (*The Ante-Nicene Fathers*. Edited by Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson. 1885–1887. 10 vols. Repr. Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1995), 295. Brackets mine.

12 Justin, *On the Resurrection* 1.3 (ANF 1:295).

13 Justin, *On the Resurrection* 1.3 (ANF 1:295).

14 Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* 4.5 (ANF 2:416).

15 Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* 3.7.57 (ANF 2:391).

16 Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor* 1.4 (ANF 2:211). See also 2.10 (ANF 2:263).

Sadducees much like his contemporary Clement, with one notable difference—he explains the apparent cessation of marriage in more pragmatic terms:

All those who have been enrolled for [eternal] life shall rise again Those, on the other hand, who are worthy of punishment, shall go away into it Both classes shall then cease from any longer begetting and being begotten, from marrying and being given in marriage; **so that the number of mankind, corresponding to the foreordination of God, being completed, may fully realize the scheme formed by the Father.**¹⁷

He borrows the idea of a “number of mankind” from the Jewish tradition that a certain number of humans are ordained to be born; to this tradition he adds his own conclusion that when the foreordained number is reached—thereby triggering the resurrection—the resurrected will be made celibate to prevent any further multiplying among them.¹⁸

But Irenaeus is unique among the church fathers in that he attempts to produce Old Testament support for the eternal celibacy interpretation of Jesus’ reply. He rests the full weight of his case upon Isaiah 6:11–12 as found in the Greek Septuagint (LXX):

“For, behold,” says Isaiah, “the day of the Lord cometh past remedy, full of fury and wrath, to lay waste the city of the earth, and to root sinners out of it.” . . . And when these things are done, he says, **“God will remove [us] men far away, and those that are left shall multiply in the earth.” . . . For all these and other words were unquestionably spoken in reference to the resurrection of the just.**¹⁹

Irenaeus presents Isa 6:11–12 as proof that a foreordained number of superior Christians (among whom he includes himself) will be resurrected and removed to a heavenly Jerusalem to live as celibates during the millennium. They will rule over the least worthy believers who remain on earth at Christ’s return in order to do the multiplying mentioned by Isaiah.²⁰

17 Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 2.33 (ANF 1:411). Brackets mine.

18 The Jewish work known as 2 Baruch (ca. 90 CE) describes a tradition in which God responds to Adam’s sin by determining the number of men who would be born and decreeing that the dead would not live again until that number was complete (2 Bar. 23:4–5).

19 Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 5.35 (ANF 1:565). Our insertion of “us” in brackets is based on his earlier citation of the same passage in which he explicitly says “God will remove *us* men far away.” See *Against Heresies* 5.34 (ANF 1:564).

20 It is unclear how his alleged bottom tier of believers who continue to bear children comports with his view that the “number of mankind” is completed at the resurrection. Further, his portrayal of marriage and childbearing as a task relegated to subpar Christians clashes sharply with the OT, which depicts these things as a great reward for God’s people in the future age. His postulated superior class of resurrected celibates, meanwhile, is nowhere to be found in the Hebrew Bible.

But this reading comes at the cost of the passage's historical context. Scholars almost universally recognize it as a prophecy of judgment that describes the people of Judah being removed not to heaven but to exile.²¹ The subsequent multiplying (mentioned only in the LXX) refers to the surviving remnant who fruitfully reproduce (Isa 6:13), thereby ensuring the continuation of the nation. In other words, the removal in Isa 6:11–12 has nothing to do with the resurrection.

Nevertheless, the eternal celibacy view continued its rise to prominence in the third century by way of two notable church fathers. The first of these, Tertullian (ca. 155–220 CE), was a gifted theologian from Africa who composed entire treatises extolling asceticism in general and celibacy in particular. He wrote a letter to his wife in which he urged her to remain a celibate widow after his death, based upon his understanding of Jesus' remarks to the Sadducees:

But to Christians, after their departure from the world, no restoration of marriage is promised in the day of the resurrection, translated as they will be into the condition and sanctity of angels. . . . The question raised by the Sadducees has yielded to the Lord's sentence. . . . **There will at that day be no resumption of voluptuous disgrace between us. No such frivolities, no such impurities, does God promise to His (servants).**²²

Tertullian's characterization of marriage as frivolous, disgraceful, and impure betrays a strong inclination to read the passage through an ascetic lens. His contemporary Origen of Alexandria (ca. 185–253 CE) took a similarly dim view of marriage. Considered one of the most influential theologians of the third century church, Origen was an outspoken Platonist and avowed ascetic who reportedly castrated himself in a zealous commitment to celibacy.²³

The notion of a resurrected physical body clashed with Origen's ascetic paradigm. He thus viewed the resurrection and other OT eschatological prophecies in a purely figurative sense.²⁴ This interpretive matrix is evident in his polemic against some Christians in his day who evidently believed on the basis of the OT

21 See, e.g., John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah Chapters 1–39*, (The New International Commentary on the Old Testament. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 189–191.

22 Tertullian, *To His Wife* 1.1 (ANF 4:39). While he advised against remarriage for the widowed and generally approved of those who chose not to marry in the present life (e.g., *On Exhortation to Chastity* 13.4), he was not opposed to monogamous marriage (e.g., *On Monogamy* 1.1) and so reflected a moderate ascetic position similar to that of Clement.

23 Eusebius, *The Church History of Eusebius* 6.8 (NPNF 2/1:254).

24 E.g., Origen, *Against Celsus* 5.19 (ANF 4:551). He understood the "spiritual" body described by Paul in 1 Cor 15 to mean that the resurrected body would be composed of spirit rather than flesh, so that it would not have the ability to eat, drink, or have sex. On his allegorical approach to interpretation, see *De Principiis* 4.1.16 (ANF 4:365).

Scriptures that marriage and childbearing would indeed continue for the resurrected.²⁵ Such a belief, in his opinion, could only be motivated by lustful desire:

Certain persons . . . adopting a superficial view of the letter of the law, and yielding rather in some measure to the indulgence of their own desires and lusts . . . are of opinion that the fulfilment of the promises of the future are to be looked for in bodily pleasure and luxury. . . . And consequently they say, that after the resurrection there will be marriages, and the begetting of children.²⁶

The eternal celibacy paradigm marched onward into the fourth century through the teaching of prominent ascetic theologians Augustine and Jerome. As an affirmed Platonist,²⁷ Augustine held that “continence is preferred to wedded life, and pious virginity to marriage.”²⁸ Jerome, meanwhile, admitted that his view of marriage was influenced by Plato’s *Phaedrus*²⁹ and ultimately disavowed the institution as nothing short of a “defilement.”³⁰

It is therefore unsurprising that Augustine thought resurrected females “shall then indeed be superior to carnal intercourse and child-bearing,”³¹ or that Jerome used Jesus’ reply to promote celibacy in the present age: “After the resurrection there will be no wedlock. But if death be the end of marriage, why do we not voluntarily embrace the inevitable?”³²

In this brief survey, we have seen that the eternal celibacy interpretation of Jesus’ words cannot be found in the remainder of the NT or in the writings of the Apostolic Fathers. Nevertheless, many influential Christians in later centuries interpreted Jesus in precisely this way. But their predominantly negative view of marriage and corresponding inclination to exalt celibacy reveals an interpretive bias that likely hindered them from considering the scene in its original Hebraic context.

Indications of a Different Meaning

The traditional reading of Luke 20:34–36 overlooks several indications that Jesus had something other than eternal celibacy in mind. We will examine three key examples in detail below.

25 Ironically, Origen admitted that these Christians sought to establish their views “on the authority of the prophets by those promises which are written regarding Jerusalem,” but dismissed their interpretation as too “Jewish.” See *De Principiis* 2.11 (ANF 4:297).

26 Origen, *De Principiis* 2.11 (ANF 4:297).

27 E.g., Augustine, *Letters* 1.1 (NPNF 1/1:219).

28 Augustine, *Of Holy Virginity* 1.1 (NPNF 1/1:417).

29 Jerome, *Against Jovinianus* 1.49 (NPNF 2/6:386).

30 Jerome, *Against Jovinianus* 1.26 (NPNF 2/6:366).

31 Augustine, *City of God* 22.17 (NPNF 1/2:496).

32 Jerome, *Against Jovinianus* 1.13 (NPNF 2/6:357).

1. Jesus Appealed to the Old Testament Scriptures and the Scribes Affirmed his Reply.

Jesus began his reply to the Sadducees by rebuking them for failing to understand the Scriptures (Mark 12:24; Matt 22:29). He later concluded by citing Exod 3:6, which reads: “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.”

He likely pointed to this verse from the Torah—rather than something more obvious like Dan 12:2—because the Sadducees held the five books of Moses in exceptionally high regard. Even so, this particular text was an unusual choice. While the rabbis had a list of passages used to prove the resurrection, there is no indication they ever called upon Exod 3:6.³³

One significant effect of choosing this verse is that it placed the Abrahamic Covenant front and center in the debate. As Darrell Bock explains, Exod 3:6 conveys the idea that “God is the God of promise and covenant.”³⁴ Jesus therefore used it to remind the Sadducees that “the patriarchs are not dead—and neither are God’s promises to them. For the promises to the patriarchs to come to pass and for God to still be their God, resurrection must be a reality.”³⁵

The interesting thing about these patriarchal promises is that they prominently feature marital fruitfulness.³⁶ We encounter them in the Torah shortly after the story in which God unites Adam and Eve together in marriage. He charges the first couple to rule over the earth and populate it with their offspring (Gen 1:26–28),³⁷ but they eat the forbidden fruit before they reproduce, bringing sin and death into the picture. Jonathan Huddleston argues that the subsequent promises given to the patriarchs serve as a beacon of hope:

Genesis’ story of loss and of promise does not just describe the origins of the present imperfect world; it also **evokes an eschatological hope for future Edenic fruitfulness**. . . . For Genesis’ audiences, **all of this language of [future] multiplication and fruitfulness evokes . . . a creation blessing expressing the creator’s will for all life upon the earth**.³⁸

33 Martin McNamara, *Targum and Testament Revisited: Aramaic Paraphrases of the Hebrew Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 204. He notes that the rabbis of the third and fourth centuries typically cited Deut 33:6, Exod 15:1, Ps 84:4, and Gen 3:19.

34 Darrell L. Bock, *Luke 9:51–24:53*, (Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1996), 1625.

35 Bock, *Luke 9:51–24:53*, 1625.

36 E.g., Gen 15:5; 17:5–6; 26:24; 28:13–14.

37 Once the earth had been filled, presumably childbearing would have ceased naturally but marriages would have remained intact.

38 Jonathan Huddleston, *Eschatology in Genesis* (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 149, 151. Brackets mine.

Huddleston has put his finger on a central theme of Old Testament eschatology: that God’s original Edenic intentions for humankind will finally be realized in the eschaton. Thus the Abrahamic promise of fruitful marriages is not reserved for the present age alone but is also anticipated throughout the Hebrew Bible to be a central blessing of the *future* age.³⁹

Ezekiel 37 is perhaps the quintessential example. Here we find an eschatological blessing of fruitful marriages bestowed upon people who are expressly said to have been raised from the dead. Composed of two closely related visions known as the Dry Bones (vv. 1–14) and the Two Sticks (vv. 15–28), Ezekiel 37 describes the bodily resurrection of “the whole house of Israel” (v. 11), which is then placed in the Promised Land and blessed with fruitful marriages:

And you shall know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves, and raise you from your graves, O my people. And I will put my Spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land. Then you shall know that I am the LORD. . . . **They shall dwell in the land that I gave to my servant Jacob, where your fathers lived. They and their children and their children’s children shall dwell there forever.** I will make a covenant of peace with them. It shall be an everlasting covenant with them. **And I will set them in their land and multiply them,** and will set my sanctuary in their midst forevermore. (Ezek 37:13–14, 25–26)

Many scholars regard the corporate resurrection in Ezek 37:1–14 as nothing more than a vivid metaphor for the restoration of the nation (in which case the subsequent marriages would not necessarily be those of resurrected people). While this is possible, it is also worth considering several lines of evidence that indicate an actual resurrection is indeed in view.

A key observation, as Daniel Block points out, is that the reference to Israelites being resurrected and returned to the land (vv. 11–14) is not part of the vision itself. Rather, it is the *interpretation* of the vision.⁴⁰ This suggests that the metaphorical pile of dry bones represents Israelites from the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities who perished among the nations and so were cut off from any hope of returning home (cf. Lev 26:38)—a fate Ezekiel and most of his generation would

39 E.g., Ps 69:35–36; Isa 54:3; 59:21; 60:21–22; 61:9; 65:23; Jer 23:3–4; 30:19–20; 31:27; 33:10–11; Zech 8:3–5.

40 Daniel I. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 25–48* (The New International Commentary on the Old Testament. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 379.

experience.⁴¹ Moreover, the stated interpretation in vv. 11–14 implies that Israel’s national restoration is closely linked to the physical resurrection of her exiles.⁴²

The Qumran community evidently understood Ezek 37:1–14 along these lines. In *4QPseudo-Ezekiel* (ca. 150 BCE–70 CE), the author reworks Ezekiel’s Dry Bones vision into his own rendition of the scene. Benjamin Wold notes four modifications to the vision which have led multiple DSS scholars to conclude that *4QPseudo-Ezekiel* describes the personal resurrection of righteous Israelites. Wold agrees that this text portrays “a resurrection of individuals and recompense for the righteous in the eschaton.”⁴³

Equally striking is the series of paintings known as the “Ezekiel Panel” found on the walls of a 3rd century CE Jewish synagogue in Syria. This panel, containing scenes from Ezekiel 37, seems to portray both the bodily resurrection and national restoration of Israel. Viewers are presented with a depiction of individual human body parts such as heads, arms, and legs scattered across the ground, in the process of reassembling. Standing in their midst are two distinct groups of apparently resurrected people that Rachel Wischnitzer-Bernstein concludes are the ten tribes of Israel and the two tribes of Judah (along with the tribe of Levi).⁴⁴

Perhaps most intriguing of all is the possibility that Jesus affirmed a similar view. In John 5:21–29, he predicts that his voice will bring forth the dead from their tombs to receive either eternal life or judgment. This dichotomy recalls the Dan 12:2 resurrection unto everlasting life or contempt. But, as Stefanos Mihalios points out, Jesus’ words also have close ties to Ezek 37:1–14: “Ezekiel 37 is the only place in the OT in which the hearing of the divine voice leads to a

41 The related Two Sticks vision (Ezek 37:15–28) strongly implies that the Israelites in view in Ezek 37:1–14 are those from the two divided kingdoms who were sent into exile. The identification of the dry bones as “the whole house of Israel” in Ezek 37:11 is also noteworthy. In Ezek 11:15–20, this phrase explicitly refers to Ezekiel’s own generation, which is promised participation in the final restoration of Israel (cp. Ezek 36:10, 17, 21, 22–32).

42 Block points out that the notion of restoration through resurrection was anticipated by the earlier prophets in places like Hos 6:1–3 and Isa 26:19 (though as with Ezek 37:1–14, scholars debate whether such references to resurrection should be taken literally). See Daniel I. Block, *By the River Chebar: Historical, Literary, and Theological Studies in the Book of Ezekiel* (Eugene: Cascade, 2013), 196–198. Significantly, a similar framework may also be implied in Dan 12:1–2. The context for the resurrection mentioned in v. 2 is the eschatological deliverance of Israel, as stated in v. 1: “at that time your people shall be delivered (*mālaṭ*).” The verb *mālaṭ* is used in Isa 49:25 to describe the eschatological return home of exilic Israel, and in Joel 2:32 to describe the eschatological restoration of Judah. Thus Dan 12:1–2 appears to envision a link between national restoration (implied in v. 1) and physical resurrection (described in v. 2).

43 Benjamin Wold, “Agency and Raising the Dead in *4QPseudo-Ezekiel* and 4Q521 2 ii,” *Academia.edu*, https://academia.edu/306575/Agency_and_Raising_the_Dead_in_4QPseudo-Ezekiel_and_4Q521_2_ii.

44 Rachel Wischnitzer-Bernstein. 1941. “The Conception of the Resurrection in the Ezekiel Panel of the Dura Synagogue.” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 60, no. 1:43–55.

resurrection.⁴⁵ Mihalios goes on to document no less than five lexical parallels between Ezek 37:4–12 and John 5:21–29.⁴⁶

It seems evident that many ancient Jews—possibly including Jesus himself—understood the Ezekiel 37 resurrection quite literally. In fact, James Edwards observes that it is because of this passage that “the rabbis [of Jesus’ day] argued for the continuation of earthly circumstances and conditions in the resurrected state, including marriage and sexual intercourse in it.”⁴⁷

But whatever one makes of Ezekiel 37, this much is certain: the OT describes resurrection *into* the future age and fruitful marriages *during* the future age, without any hint that the former excludes one from the latter. This fact shaped how Jews of the Second Temple period and beyond viewed the future age. Based on his exhaustive survey of marriage and sexuality in the Jewish pseudepigraphal literature (ca. 300 BCE–300 CE), William Loader concludes:

The most common and widespread Jewish expectation was that the [eschatological] future . . . will be a time of abundance, including abundant offspring . . . **the assumption is that life will resemble its current forms, including, therefore, sexual relations and procreation, often in association with [Old Testament] promises that barrenness will cease and progeny be abundant.**⁴⁸

Consequently, the idea of an eternally celibate state was virtually unknown to Jews at the time of Christ.⁴⁹ This is why the Sadducees, who denied the resurrection, still assumed marriage for the resurrected in their challenge. And while the scribes sought to “catch him in what he said” (Luke 20:19–20), it is telling that

45 Stefanos Mihalios, *The Danielic Eschatological Hour in the Johannine Literature* (Library of New Testament Studies. London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2002), 110.

46 Mihalios, *The Danielic Eschatological Hour in the Johannine Literature*, 110–111. For additional proposals of other New Testament allusions to Ezek 37:1–14 that suggest a literal view see J. Grassi, “Ezekiel xxxvii. 1–14 and the New Testament,” *NTS* 11(2) (1965): 162–164. See also Shelly Matthews, “Elijah, Ezekiel, and Romulus: Luke’s Flesh and Bones (Luke 24:39) in Light of Ancient Narratives of Ascent, Resurrection, and Apotheosis,” *Academia.edu*, https://www.academia.edu/28728390/Elijah_Ezekiel_and_Romulus_Luke_s_Flesh_and_Bones_Luke_24_39_in_Light_of_Ancient_Narratives_of_Ascent_Resurrection_and_Apotheosis.

47 James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark* (The Pillar New Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 368 (fn 42). Brackets mine. See, e.g., b. Sanh. 92b, though in this text the Ezekiel 37 resurrection was not regarded as eschatological. The resurrected are said to have married, borne children, and later died again.

48 William Loader. 2014. “Sexuality and Eschatology: In Search of a Celibate Utopia in Pseudepigraphic Literature.” *Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha* 24.1:45, 53. Brackets mine.

49 Loader finds only two pseudepigraphal texts suggesting an eternally celibate future, *Sibylline Oracles 1–2* and *Apocalypse of Moses*. He points out that both works espouse negative views of sex within marriage in the present life, which runs counter to Biblical Judaism (*Sexuality and Eschatology*, 50). He thus considers “the belief that eternal life makes procreation and so marriage and sexual relations redundant” to be the *least* likely Jewish background for the scene with the Sadducees (*Sexuality and Eschatology*, 64).

they did not question Jesus' response, despite being aware of the many OT promises that marriage would persist into the future age.

Moreover, the eternal celibacy view asks us to believe that while Jesus grounded his argument for the resurrection in a text that evoked the patriarchal promises, he also introduced a new doctrine about the future of marriage which was in direct conflict with those same promises—and his enemies accepted this without a trace of protest.⁵⁰ Such a scenario defies credibility.

The fact that the scripturally astute scribes admitted that Jesus had “spoken well” (Luke 20:39) implies they believed his entire reply was supported by the OT Scriptures. This makes it highly unlikely that Jesus was announcing the future cessation of marriage.

2. *Jesus was Contrasting Righteous Sons and Wicked Sons Living in the Present Age.*

The phrase “the sons of this age” (*hoi huioi tou aionos toutou*) is an unusual expression that appears only twice in the Bible. Significantly, both instances are found in Luke's gospel. The first usage appears in the parable of the shrewd manager (Luke 16:1–8), where Jesus identifies the manager as “unjust” (*adikias*) and associates him with “the sons of this age” (16:8).⁵¹

50 Faced with the absence of OT support for the eternal celibacy view, commentators often attempt to locate the background for Jesus' reply in a few extra-Biblical Jewish traditions. Three are commonly cited: b. Ber. 17a, 1 En. 15:6–7, and 2 Bar. 51:10. Berakhot 17a, found in the Babylonian Talmud, creatively interprets Exod 24:11: “In the future world there is no eating nor drinking nor propagation nor business nor jealousy nor hatred nor competition, but the righteous sit with their crowns on their heads feasting on the brightness of the divine presence, as it says, ‘And they beheld God, and did eat and drink.’” However, this imposes a strikingly Platonic view of the future onto a verse that has nothing to do with marriage in the future age. As such, it seems an unlikely background for Jesus' reply to the Sadducees.

In 1 En. 15:6b–7 (ca. 200 BCE–100 CE), Enoch rebukes the angelic Watchers who fell from heaven to beget children: “But you were formerly spiritual, living the eternal life, and immortal for all generations of the world. And therefore I have not appointed wives for you; for as for the spiritual ones of the heaven, in heaven is their dwelling.” Yet in this passage Enoch addresses the angels and so says nothing about the marital status of resurrected humans. Interpreters who cite it typically neglect 1 En. 10:17, which anticipates that righteous humans (unlike the angels) *will* marry: “And then shall all the righteous escape, and shall live till they beget thousands of children, and all the days of their youth and their old age shall they complete in peace.”

In 2 Bar. 51:10 (ca. 100–200 CE), we are told: “For in the heights of that world shall they dwell, and they shall be made like unto the angels, and be made equal to the stars, and they shall be changed into every form they desire, from beauty into loveliness, and from light into the splendor of glory.” But the marital status of resurrected humanity is not mentioned here. Any such notion is simply read into the text. Furthermore, 2 Bar. 70:7 explicitly affirms Isaiah's prophecy of marriage and childbearing in the future age: “And women shall no longer then have pain when they bear, nor shall they suffer torment when they yield the fruit of the womb.”

51 There has been much scholarly debate surrounding the fact that the wicked steward is commended for his shrewdness. Some have tried to paint the steward as a good man, but the fact remains that Jesus explicitly labeled him immoral (*adikias*). This word is elsewhere rendered *unrighteousness*, *injustice*, *iniquity*, *evildoers*, and *wickedness* in the NASB. The only other time it appears in Luke, we find it on the lips of Jesus: “Depart from me, all you workers of *adikias*” (Luke 13:27).

These sons are connected with a generation that was previously characterized as “faithless” (9:41) and “evil” (11:29), thereby reinforcing their morally bankrupt character.⁵² They are then contrasted with the righteous “sons of light,” who coexist alongside them.⁵³ Thus the first time we encounter the phrase “the sons of this age” in Luke’s gospel, it refers to the wicked in the context of a moral contrast that is set in the present age.

The Hebraic origin of this phrase further confirms its negative connotation. As I. Howard Marshall notes, “[using] *hoi huioi* [i.e., ‘the sons’] with a genitive is a common Semitic phrase to denote people belonging to a particular class.”⁵⁴ E. W. Bullinger agrees that “the word ‘son,’ when qualified by another noun, denotes the *nature* and *character* of the person or persons so named.”⁵⁵

For example, “the sons of disobedience” in Eph 2:2 is a designation for the wicked, while “the sons of light” in Luke 16:8 refers to the righteous. The expression “the sons of this age” similarly implies that these “sons” embody the character of “this age.” What then is the character of the present age in Jewish thought? It turns out that the literature of the Second Temple period widely regards it to be an *evil* age.⁵⁶

The Dead Sea Scrolls *Damascus Document* and *War Scroll* are two such texts that both refer frequently to the present “age of wickedness” in which “the sons of darkness” and “the sons of light” coexisted. This pattern continues into the New Testament, where Jesus identified the “end of the age” as a time when “the sons of the evil one” are judged after “the sons of the kingdom” are delivered (Matt 13:37–43).

The apostle Paul likewise portrayed this period as “the present *evil* age” (Gal 1:4) to which believers should not be conformed (Rom 12:2).⁵⁷ In addition, “the age (*aiona*) of this world” is associated with “the sons of disobedience” in Eph 2:2, prompting S. M. Baugh to write that “the ‘age of this world’ clearly has a

52 Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke* (The New International Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 720. Luke Timothy Johnson notes that “Luke uses [the term ‘generation’] increasingly of those opposed to the prophet’s message (Luke 9:41; 11:29, 30, 31, 32, 50, 51; 16:8; 17:25; Acts 2:40).” See *The Gospel of Luke*, (Sacra Pagina. Collegeville: The Liturgical, 1991), 123.

53 Crispin Fletcher-Louis identifies the two groups in this passage as “the righteous and unrighteous” who “coexist” in the present age. See *Luke-Acts: Angels, Christology and Soteriology* (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997), 82.

54 I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 620. Brackets mine.

55 E. W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible*, (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1898), 503. Emphasis mine.

56 See Richard Bauckham, “The Delay of the Parousia,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 31 (1980), 8.

57 The term “this age” is used in a neutral sense on occasion, e.g., Matt 12:32. But it predominantly carries a negative connotation that is usually explicit but also occasionally implicit (e.g., the foolish “wisdom of this age” and the doomed “rulers of this age” in 1 Cor 2:6).

negative reference . . . the sons of this age (Luke 16:8; cf. Luke 20:34) . . . are accordingly called here the sons of disobedience.”⁵⁸

The seemingly innocuous term “this age” was in reality fraught with negative connotation in first century Jewish thought. This further indicates that the phrase “the sons of this age” is not neutral but instead denotes the *wicked*. With this in mind, we now turn to Luke’s final use of the phrase in Luke 20:34.

As in Luke 16:8, Jesus again contrasts “the sons of this age” with a righteous group of sons using the present tense. But here the “sons of this age” *are marrying* (*gamousin*), while the “sons of God” *are not marrying* (*oute gamousin*). The ones who are not marrying are not said to be living in the future age; instead they are considered worthy to *attain* to the future age.

As Crispin Fletcher-Louis and others have noted, the present tense verbs indicate that both groups of sons are living in the present age, with the sons worthy of resurrection being identified by their marital restraint. Fletcher-Louis sums it up well: “[the activities in] the present tense in [Luke] 20:35b–6 should be attributed to the present life.”⁵⁹

But this was no call to a life of celibacy. As we have seen, “the sons of this age” identifies the group of sons who marry as *wicked* sons, signaling that a particular sort of marriage is in view. Jesus was by implication referring to *forbidden* marriages.⁶⁰

3. Jesus Later Applied the Phrase “Marrying and Giving in Marriage” to Illicit Marriages.

The expression “marrying and giving in marriage” (*gamousin kai ekgamiskontai*) is another rare phrase found in only two New Testament scenes. Jesus used it in his reply to the Sadducees, and then again in the Olivet Discourse just a few hours

58 Steven M. Baugh, *Ephesians* (Evangelical Exegetical Commentary. Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2016), 149. Pauline authorship of Ephesians has been disputed by many scholars, but our point here is simply that this text represents another NT example of the negative view of the present age.

59 Crispin Fletcher-Louis, *Luke-Acts: Angels, Christology and Soteriology*, 82. Brackets mine. For a similar view see also David Aune, “Luke 20:34–36: A ‘Gnosticised’ Logion of Jesus?” *Geschichte-Tradition-Reflexion: Festschrift für Martin Hengel zum 70. Geburtstag*, ed. H. Cancik, H. Lichtenberger and P. Schafer. 3 vols. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1996), 121. Such scholars generally take the view that Luke 20:34–36 is a call to celibacy in the present age.

60 Jesus had previously denounced forbidden marriages in Luke 16:18: “Everyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery, and he who marries a woman divorced from her husband commits adultery.”

later.⁶¹ In the latter case, he was describing the marrying and giving in marriage that would occur shortly before his return:

For as were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. **For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage,** until the day when Noah entered the ark, and they were unaware until the flood came and swept them all away, **so will be the coming of the Son of Man.** (Matt 24:37–39)

This passage is commonly thought to contain two pairs of morally neutral activities. But Bock rightly challenges the popular view: “the verbs may seem neutral, but anyone familiar with the flood story would know that they connote moral corruption.”⁶² In fact, upon closer inspection of these two pairs of activities, we will find evidence that Jesus was warning his disciples not to participate in them.

Eating and drinking. It is often overlooked that Jesus elaborated on this activity later in his discourse (Matt 24:42–51; Luke 21:34–36). There we discover he had in mind a certain form of eating and drinking that would render his disciples unprepared for his return and ultimately consign them to the fate of the wicked, as shown in the table below:

Warning About the Son's Return	Elaboration on the Warning
<p>For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, and they were unaware until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. (Matt 24:38–39)</p>	<p>Therefore, stay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming But if that wicked servant says to himself, “My master is delayed,” and begins to beat his fellow servants and eats and drinks with drunkards, the master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he does not know and will cut him in pieces. (Matt 24:42, 48–51)</p> <p>But watch yourself lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness . . . and that day come upon you suddenly like a trap But stay awake at all times. (Luke 21:34, 36)</p>

61 Matthew and Mark place it in the Olivet Discourse. In Luke, Jesus uses a similar phrase to describe the same eschatological scenario, but delivers it prior to entering Jerusalem (Luke 17:27). There is no scholarly consensus on why Luke places this scene prior to the Olivet Discourse in Jerusalem. Bock suggests that Luke had an additional source (besides Mark and Matthew) which had an eschatological discourse occurring outside of Jerusalem. In Bock's theory, Luke decided to use this source and omit the duplicate material found in the Olivet Discourse. See *Luke 9:51–24:53*, 1422–1423.

62 Bock, *Luke 9:51–24:53*, 1432.

The charge to “stay awake” is an eschatological metaphor with both spiritual and physical connotations. The disciples were to be *spiritually* sober, which involved *physically* refraining from the kind of eating and drinking that leads to debauchery. We find precedent in the OT, which strongly condemns eating and drinking in the context of idolatrous rituals (e.g., Exod 32:5–6) or overindulgence (e.g., Deut 21:20). The latter is often associated with other sins like violence and the neglect of the poor, as was the case with Israel’s wicked leaders in Isaiah 5:

Woe to those who rise early in the morning, that they may run after strong drink, who tarry late into the evening as wine inflames them! They have lyre and harp, tambourine and flute and wine at their feasts, but they do not regard the deeds of the LORD, or see the work of his hands. (Isa 5:11–12)

The *Assumption of Moses*, a Jewish work dated by R. H. Charles and others to around the first century CE, reveals the similar expectation of immoral eating and drinking in an eschatological context:

And, in the time of these, **destructive and impious men shall rule . . . [they will be] filled with lawlessness and iniquity from sunrise to sunset: saying: “We shall have feastings and luxury, eating and drinking, and we shall esteem ourselves as princes.”** And there shall come upon them a second visitation and wrath, such as has not befallen them from the beginning until that time.⁶³

These texts illustrate the sort of eating and drinking Jesus had in view. He identified it as the behavior of the wicked at the time of the flood and later associated it with drunkenness, confirming it to be immoral in nature. This implies that the next pair of verbs he mentioned will also denote immoral behavior.

Marrying and giving in marriage. Jesus set this “marrying and giving in marriage” within a very specific context: the days of Noah before the flood. It is clearly an allusion to Genesis 6, which mentions the marriages that took place precisely because they were forbidden:

When man began to multiply on the face of the land and daughters were born to them, **the sons of God saw that the daughters of man were attractive. And they took as their wives any they chose.** Then the LORD said, “My Spirit shall not abide in man forever, for he is flesh: his days shall be 120 years.” (Gen 6:1–3)

The connection between illicit marriages and the flood judgment was firmly

63 R. H. Charles, “The Assumption of Moses” (vol. 1 of *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament*; Berkeley: Apocryphile Press, 2004), 419–420. Brackets mine.

embedded in Israel's national consciousness. Ellen Robbins observes that sexual immorality as the primary cause of the flood "remains the dominant motif in later interpretation."⁶⁴ One example is the tradition found in the book of *Jubilees* (ca. 150 BC):

Noah . . . exhorted his sons to . . . guard their souls from fornication and uncleanness and all iniquity. For owing to these three things came the flood upon the earth, namely, owing to the fornication wherein the Watchers against the law of their ordinances went a whoring after the daughters of men, and took themselves wives of all which they chose: and they made the beginning of uncleanness.⁶⁵

Both the OT and most other Second Temple Jewish texts regard illicit marriages as a primary cause of the flood. Jesus' disciples therefore would have instantly recognized his reference to "marrying and giving in marriage" in the days of Noah as a warning against becoming entangled in sexual immorality.

This is corroborated by the fact that Jesus chose to connect the act of "marrying and giving in marriage" with the act of "eating and drinking" in particular. Luke Timothy Johnson remarks that "for ancient moral logic generally, incontinence with respect to food is integrally linked to incontinence with respect to sex."⁶⁶ And indeed, sexual immorality and drunkenness appear together in several NT passages that allude to the Olivet Discourse.

Peter compared his generation with the "days of Noah" (1 Pet 3:20–21) and cautioned believers to avoid "doing what the Gentiles want to do, living in *sensuality, passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties* and lawless idolatry" (1 Pet 4:3). And Paul told the Roman church that "the hour has come for you to wake from sleep" (Rom 13:11), meaning that they should "walk properly as in the daytime, not in *orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality*" (Rom 13:12–13).

It seems apparent that the activities Jesus mentioned in the Olivet Discourse are a list of sinful behaviors which will be prevalent in the days leading up to his return (cf. Matt 24:12). This means that just a few short hours after he first used

64 Ellen Robbins, "The Pleiades, Flood, and Jewish New Year," in *Ki Baruch Hu: Ancient Near Eastern, Biblical, and Judaic Studies in Honor of Baruch A. Levine*. Ed. R. Chazan, W. Hallo, and L. Schiffman, (Winona Lake 1999), 341. The question of whether the "sons of God" are human or angelic has long been debated among interpreters. However, the salient point is the universally recognized immoral nature of these antediluvian marriages.

65 R. H. Charles, "The Book of Jubilees," (*The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1913), 24. Other examples include Judith 16:7; Tobit 4:12; 3 Maccabees 2:4; 1 Baruch 3:26; Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs 5:5–6; 1 Enoch 6–16; CD Geniza A Col. 2 lines 14–21.

66 Luke Timothy Johnson, *Hebrews*, (The New Testament Library. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2006), 325.

the phrase “marrying and giving in marriage” in his confrontation with the Sadducees, he used the same phrase a second time to describe the *sexual immorality* that would occur at the end of the age.⁶⁷

Conclusion

The foregoing evidence raises serious concerns about the traditional eternal celibacy interpretation of Jesus’ reply to the Sadducees. We have found that this view did not arise until the second century, and that the church fathers who developed it had a distinct anti-marriage bias. More importantly, we also noted several indications that Jesus actually had a very different meaning in mind. Our next article will make the case that in fact he based his reply upon a specific Old Testament text uniquely suited to the situation at hand.

67 No less immoral is the list of activities in Luke 17:28–29, where the people of Sodom were “eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building” just before the city’s demise. This passage predicts the judgment of Jerusalem, whose sins are often compared to those of Sodom in the OT. Thus Bock points to Isa 1:9–10—where Israel’s leaders are derisively called “rulers of Sodom”—as a likely background text (*Luke 9:51–24:53*, p. 1433). In Isa 3:9 we are similarly told Israel’s wicked leaders “proclaim their sin like Sodom” by committing a series of transgressions with unjustly gained wealth: they greedily purchase numerous fields, plant vineyards, acquire large houses, and participate in drunken feasting (Isa 5:8–12). In other words, they are “eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building.” This supports Bock’s conclusion that the verbs in Luke 17:26–27 are used in the *negative* sense, implicitly referring to the *excess and abuse* of the activities listed (*Luke 9:51–24:53*, p. 1433). See also William Loader, *Sexuality and the Jesus Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 141.