

**HOW DID “RUST” GET INTO MATT 6:19–20
AND “PURSES” GET INTO LUKE 12:33 ?**

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Matthew 6:19

Μὴ θησαυρίζετε ὑμῖν θησαυροὺς ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς,
ὅπου σὴς καὶ βρῶσις ἀφανίζει
καὶ ὅπου κλέπται διορύσσουσιν καὶ κλέπτουσιν·

NAB

Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth,
where moth and decay destroy,
and thieves break in and steal.

KJV

Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth,
where moth and rust doth corrupt,
and where thieves break through and steal

Several commentators, including Mounce (1985: 56), Beare (1987: 182), and Blomberg (1992: 122),¹ are of the opinion that “rust” was first introduced into the English translations of Matt 6:19–20 by William Tyndale (1526), who translated these verses as

Gaddre not treasure together on erth, where rust and mothes corrupte, and wher theves breake through and steale. But gaddre ye treasure togedder in heven, where nether rust nor mothes corrupte, and wher theves nether breake vp, nor yet steale.

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But Tyndale was actually following John Wycliffe (1389) who translated the verses as

Nyle ȝe tresoure to ȝou tresours in erthe, wher rust and mouȝthe distruyeth, and wher theues deluen out and stelen.
But tresoure ȝee to ȝou tresouris in heuene. Wher neither rust ne mouȝthe distruyeth, and wher theues deluen nat out, ne stelen.

It is obvious that Wycliffe and Tyndale were not translating here from the Greek text which has βρῶσις meaning “food.” According to Hatch and Redpath (1954: 231–232), the Greek βρῶσις appears in the Septuagint thirty-three times as the translation of the Hebrew אכל “to eat / food”—which is comparable to the thirty-nine times the synonym βρῶμα “food” was used to translate אכל or one of its derivatives.²

It is equally obvious that Wycliffe and Tyndale were translating here from the Vulgate which, for these verses, reads

*Nolite thesaurizare vobis thesauros in terra
ubi erugo et tinea demolitur
ubi fures effodiunt et furantur.*

Lay not up to yourselves treasures on earth:
where the rust, and moth consume,
and where thieves break through, and steal.

The Latin *erugo/aerugo* definitely means “rust” and it was used correctly to translate the ῥῶς “rust” in James 5:3. Moreover, just as the “rust” in the translations of Wycliffe and Tyndale does not render the Greek βρῶσις “food,” neither does the Vulgate’s *erugo* “rust” translate βρῶσις. The Greek βρῶσις and the Vulgate’s *erugo*—along with the Peshitta’s אכל (°akla°) “eaters/worms” and the Old Syriac’s ܡܗܒܠ (*mḥabel*) “worm”—can be accounted for by postulating a

Hebrew *Vorlage* which read **אֲשֶׁר שָׁם סָס וְאָכַל יֹאכְלוּ**. This Hebrew phrase is unintentionally ambiguous.³ It can mean literally (1) “where maggot and worm eat/devour,” or (2) “where moth and food eat/devour.” In my opinion, Jesus intended his words to mean the former, but when the phrase was translated into Greek, it was given the latter meaning.

Another ambiguous **אָכַל** appears in Mal 3:11, which reads **וְנִעַרְתִּי לָכֶם בְּאֹכֶל וְלֹא־יִשְׁחָת לָכֶם אֶת־פְּרֵי הָאֲדָמָה** and was translated in the NRS as, “I will rebuke the *locust* for you, so that it will not destroy the produce of your soil” (*italics added*). Other translations render the MT **אָכַל** as “devourer, insects, pests.” But the Septuagint reads, *καὶ διαστελῶ ὑμῖν εἰς βρώσιν καὶ οὐ μὴ διαφθείρω ὑμῶν τὸν καρπὸν τῆς γῆς*, “and I will appoint *food* for you, and I will not destroy the fruit of your land.”⁴ The **אָכַל** in the Hebrew *Vorlage* of Matt 6:19–20 suffered the same misunderstanding when it was translated from Hebrew into Greek. The translator of the Greek rendered it as *βρώσις* “food” when it should have been *σκώληξ* “maggot, worm.”⁵

Support for the above reconstructed Hebrew *Vorlage* comes from the Peshitta, which reads as follows in Matt 6:19,

לֹא תִשְׁכַּח לְבַבְךָ שֶׁנִּבְחָה בְּאֶרֶץ
 חֲסִידֵי דְמַלְאָכָא וְדִמְחַבְלֵי
 אֲרָבִים וְדִגְנָבֵי פִלְסִין וְגַאֲבִין⁶

lā° tsîmûn lkûn sîmātā° ba°r°a
°atar dsāsā° wa°klā° mḥablîn
wa°yka° dganābe° pālsîn wgānbîn

Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth
 where the maggot and worm are destroyers.
 and where thieves are breaking in and stealing.

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Noteworthy is the **ܐܟܠܐ** (*a°klā°* = **אכלא**) “eater/worm/maggot” (Payne Smith 1903: 15; Jennings 1926: 21) Although it could be a contextually meaningless translation of the Greek βρῶσις “food” or a meaningful translation of the Vulgate’s *erugo* “rust,” it may well retain the noun that was in the original Hebrew saying and point the interpreter in the right direction for reconstructing the phrase.

The Old Syriac of Matt 6:19 differs from the Peshitta. It reads

ܠܐ ܕܘܫܡܚܘܢ ܠܒܗ ܫܡܚܘܢ ܕܐܪܥܐ
 ܐܪܥܐ ܕܢܒܠ ܫܡܫܐ ܕܡܚܒܠܝܢ
 ܘܐܪܥܐ ܕܦܠܥܝܢ ܠܒܗ ܕܠܩܝܒܝܢ
lā° tsîmûn lkûn sîmâtā° ba°r°a
°atar dnkl sāsā° wamḥablîn
w°atar dpālsîn ganābe° wgānbîn

Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth
 where the maggot and destroyer⁷ devour.
 and where thieves are breaking in and stealing.

The verb **ܢܒܠ** (*nekul*) is a defective spelling for the 3ms imperfect **ܢܚܒܠ** (*ne°kûl*) “it will devour” (= **ܝܐܟܠ**). It provides the clue for reconstructing the verb in the *Vorlage* as **ܝܐܟܠܘ** “they will devour.”

The Peshitta of Matt 6:20^b has **ܐܝܟܐ ܕܠܐ ܫܡܫܐ ܕܠܐ ܡܚܒܠܝܢ** (*°aykā° dlā° sāsā° wlā° °aklā° mḥablîn*) “where neither the maggot nor the worm are destroyers”—which matches the words in 6:19^b. But the Old Syriac varies a little, reading **ܐܬܐܪ ܕܠܐ ܫܡܫܐ ܡܚܒܠܝܢ** (*°atar dlā° sāsā° mahbil. wa°klā°*) “where there are not devouring maggots [...] and eaters/worms.”

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The various words attested in the versions of Matt 6:19–20, along with cognates, permit the following equation:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{סָדָּ} &= \sigma\eta\varsigma = \text{سوس} (sāsā') = \text{سوس} (sūs) \\ &= erugo = \text{תול־עֵה} = \text{רָמָה} = \text{רָקָב} \\ &= \text{“moth, maggot, worm, eater, borer} \\ &\quad + \text{decay, rottenness, and rot.”}^8 \end{aligned}$$

All of the words in this equation could well translated the Semitic אכל and/or one of its derivative forms.⁹ The precise identification of the insect or rot involved will be determined by context. If the insect is feeding on clothes it will be the larvae of the *moth*; but if it is feeding on a carcass, it will be a *maggot*. In the case of Matt 6:19–20 the translation will be different if the focus is on the *treasure* or on the ‘*treasurer*’ (the ‘*treasurer*’ found seven times in this study does not mean ‘the controller of funds’ but those ‘controlled by treasures’).

Davies and Allison (1988: 628) noted that James 5:2–3 “may well be based upon the saying preserved in Mt 6. 19–21.” Or it may go the other way around. These words from James 5,

your riches have rotted (σέσηπεν),
and your garments are moth-eaten (σητόβρωτα),
your gold and silver have rusted (κατίωτα),

appear to have influenced the interpretation of Matt 6:19–20 and Luke 12:33, in that the focus of attention has been on the loss *treasures* of garments and gold, rather than being on the *treasurer*’s mortality wherein worms and maggots will have the last word, so to speak.¹⁰

Beare (1987: 181–182) in his following statement reflects the interpretation of most commentators that the focus in Matt 6:19–20 was on the *treasure*,¹¹ not the ‘*treasurer*.’

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The kind of ‘treasures on earth’ which are envisaged in the basic charge are textiles, which may be destroyed by insects, and such things as gold, silver, and jewels, which may be carried off by robbers. . . . If he accumulates earthly treasures—chests of sumptuous clothing or of gold and jewels—his heart is bound to the earth; if he seeks to accumulate treasures in heaven, his heart is fixed on heavenly things.

The parable of the rich fool in Luke 12:16–21 and the parallel commands in Luke 12:33 provide clues for interpreting Matt 6:19–20. But Luke 12:33 has its own problem which must be addressed first. According to Luke 10:4, Jesus prohibited his disciples from carrying a purse, stating

μη βαστάζετε βαλλάντιον, μη πήραν, μη ὑποδήματα,
καὶ μηδένα κατὰ τὴν ὁδὸν ἀσπάσησθε,
Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals;
and salute no one on the road.

Luke 22:34 indicates that the disciples had carefully obeyed,

Ὅτε ἀπέστειλα ὑμᾶς ἄτερ βαλλαντίου
καὶ πήρας καὶ ὑπόδη μάτων,
μή τινος ὑστερήσατε; οἱ δὲ εἶπαν, Οὐθενός
When I sent you out with no purse or bag or sandals,
did you lack anything? They said, “Nothing.”¹²

Thus, it is surprising to learn in Luke 12:33 that Jesus instructed not just his disciples but his entire “little flock” (τὸ μικρὸν ποίμνιον) to “get yourselves purses that do not wear out” (ποιήσατε ἑαυτοῖς βαλλάντια μὴ παλαιούμενα). This seeming contradiction in Jesus’ instructions apparently emerged when one word in Luke’s Hebrew source was misread. In

the Septuagint βαλλάντια “purse” translated the זָרוּר in Job 14:17 and the כֵּיס in Prov 1:14. If Luke’s Hebrew source read עֲשׂוּ לָכֶם כִּסִּים אֲשֶׁר לֹא יִבְלוּ, it could mean either (1) “make for yourselves *purses* (βαλλάντια) which do not wear out,” or (2) “make for yourselves *clothes* (ἱμάτια) which do not wear out.” The Hebrew כִּסִּים (*scriptio defectiva*) is unintentionally ambiguous. It can be read as כִּסִּים, the plural of כֵּיס “purse,” or as כִּסִּים, the plural of כִּסוּי “clothing, cover” (Jastrow 1903: 633, 652).¹³

In light of the promise in Luke 12:28, “if God so clothes the grass . . . how much more will he clothe you,” the כִּסִּים in Luke’s Hebrew source should have been read as כִּסִּים “clothes” (*scriptio plene* = כִּסוּיִים) rather than as כִּסִּים “purses” (*scriptio plene* = כֵּיסִים).¹⁴ This interpretation brings Jesus’ instruction in line with his earlier prohibition against the use of purses. Once Luke 12:33^b is read as “provide for yourselves *clothes* which do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail,” the metaphor and equation become obvious: *the ageless clothes = heaven’s everlasting treasure*, i.e., everlasting life. This interpretation matches perfectly with the words of Paul in 2 Cor 5:2–4, “We groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, . . . not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life.” Paul would have the Corinthians “provide for themselves ageless clothes,” i.e., God’s gift of heaven’s treasure. The words ring true to the words of Isaiah (61:10), “For he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness.” This interpretation also matches perfectly with the words of Enoch 62:13–16,

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And the righteous and elect shall be saved on that day, And they shall never thenceforward see the face of the sinners and unrighteous. And the Lord of Spirits will abide over them, And with that Son of Man shall they eat And lie down and rise up for ever and ever. And the righteous and elect shall have risen from the earth, And ceased to be of downcast countenance. And they shall have been clothed with garments of glory, 16 And these shall be the garments of life from the Lord of Spirits: And your garments shall not grow old, Nor your glory pass away before the Lord of Spirits.

In the Parable of the Rich Fool in Luke 12 the focus of attention was not on the *treasure* but on the *treasurer*. The *treasure* was simply a lot of καρπός, “crops,” stored in easily accessible barns; but the *treasurer* was a πλούσιος, “a rich man.” As depicted by Jesus, though not stated directly, the foolish farmer lived according to the maxim espoused in Prov 13:8, כֶּפֶר נַפְשׁ־אִישׁ עֶשְׂרוֹ, “The ransom of a man’s life is his wealth!” Prosperity was the LORD’s gift to the righteous as promised in the Torah: “The LORD will command the blessing upon you in your barns . . . The LORD will make you abound in prosperity . . . in the fruit of your ground” (Deut 28:9, 11). The foolish farmer was religious man in traditional ways, so “the more the merrier!” But before the bugs would make their way into the foolish farmer’s barns, the maggots and worms would feast on his body: “Fool! This night your soul is required of you!” The rich man had laid up treasures on earth, but maggots and worms were his final acquisition and the grave his final destination.”¹⁵

But there was no security for the foolish farmer even in his grave—not for him nor for any treasure buried with him. Grave robbers were real and abundant,¹⁶ and in their own way they too were just laying up treasures on earth for themselves,

not knowing that their souls would be required of them. More worms and maggots—not *rust* and *larvae*—would feast on newly fallen fools. Such is the fate of those who lay up for themselves treasures on earth were *maggots* and *worms* consume ‘*treasurers*’—not just *treasures*.

Once the סוּאִכְל “maggots and body-worms” in the *Vorlage* of Matt 6:19–20 became σῆς καὶ βρωσις “moths and food”—which eventuated in English to the “moth and rust”—a disconnect was made, precluding the Parable of the Rich Fool from becoming a commentary on the command to “Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth . . . but lay up for yourselves treasure in heaven,” i.e., “Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness (Matt 6:33) . . . and you will have treasure in heaven (Luke 18:22), for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also (Luke 12:34, Matt 6:21).”

The question raised above in the title, “How did “rust” get into Matt 6:19–20 and “purses” get into Luke 12: 33?” has now been answered. When Jesus spoke his words in Hebrew or Aramaic they rang with clarity and were deemed by others to be worthy of being recorded. But, thanks to a spelling system which used only consonants, ambiguities became rampant once sayings were written down. Homographs were no problem for those who had actually heard Jesus speak. But where there was no oral recollection, varied interpretations of the written consonant clusters soon emerged, like the כְּסִים, noted above, which could mean either “purses” or “clothes.” Compounding the problem was the semantic range of some Semitic stems like אָכַל, which could mean either “food” or “feces,” as well as “eater”—which in turn could mean “rust” or “worms” or “maggots.”

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Once the “maggot” is restored in Matt 6:19–20 and the thieves mentioned there are recognized as “grave-robbers,” it becomes obvious that “laying up treasure in heaven,” and “providing one’s self with the ageless clothes of heaven’s eternal treasure” (Luke 12:33) address the reality of human mortality, as well as the promise of immortality. This is the reality about which Paul wrote in 1 Cor 15:53–54,

For this perishable nature must put on the imperishable, and this mortal nature must put on immortality. When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: ‘Death is swallowed up in victory.’

It is not just earth’s *treasures* which are perishable, earth’s ‘*treasurers*’—those who lay up treasures—are equally destined for death and decay. Thus, Jesus commanded his little flock to “be rich toward God” (Luke 12:21) and secure the ageless clothes of heaven’s everlasting treasure (Luke 12:33).

NOTES

1. Beare stated in his commentary,

There is no word corresponding to ‘worm’. In Matthew, the Greek word is βρῶσις, which means literally ‘eating’. The more familiar rendering ‘rust’ goes back to Tyndale, and is used in all classic English versions except the Geneva Bible (1562), which replaces it with ‘canker’.

Bloomberg noticed, similarly, that the “rust” really meant “eating.” Davies and Allison (1988: 629) referred to Tyndale but did not identify him as the first to introduce “rust” into this verse.

2. Lidell and Scott (1940:332) gave the following definitions for βρωσις: (1) meat, (2) pasture, (3) eating, (4) taste, flavor, (5) decay, and (6) corrosion, rust in Matt 6:19. Its synonym, βρώμα, can mean (1) food, meat, that which is eaten, (2) tooth cavity, (3) moth eating, (4) filth [i.e., the food in the intestines, like the Aramaic אִוְכְלָא “excrement,” cited by Jastrow 1903: 25]. Definition (6) above for βρωσις cannot be sustained. Arndt and Gingrich (1957: 147) called attention to the Epistle of Jeremiah 1:10 (= RSV 6:12) which reads in part, “[gods] which cannot save themselves from rust and corrosion (ἀπὸ τοῦ καὶ βρωμάτων).” They noted that a few manuscripts of the epistle have βρωσις instead of βρώματα being used along with the ῥός “rust.” These variant readings led them to conclude rightly that this combination of ῥός and βρωσις argues against the identification of βρωσις in Matt 6:19–20 with ῥός. (For ῥός “rust” see Liddell and Scott : 832.)

3. Compare the text in Shem Tob’s *Hebrew Gospel of Matthew*, where the ambiguities in 6:19 were modified by having רָקַב “decay” (but not רָקַבָא ‘rust’) rather than סָס, and תּוֹלְעָה “grub” rather than אָכַל. The full verse reads

עוד אמר להם אל תרבו
לצבור אוצרות בארץ
כדי שיאכלנו רקב ותולעה
או יחפרו הגנבים ויגנבום.

Again he said to them:

Do not keep on heaping up treasures on earth
so that decay and grub devour it
or thieves dig through and steal.

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The ambiguities in 6:20 were fixed by having רִים “worm” rather than סָס, and again חוֹלְעָה “grub” rather than אָכַל. The full verse reads

עשו לכם אוצרות בשמים
במקום שרימה ותולעה לא יאכלם
ובמקום שהגנבים לא יחפרו ויגנבו
Make for yourselves treasures in heaven
where the worm and the grub do not devour them
and where thieves do not dig through and steal.
(Howard 1995: 24–25.)

4. Davies and Allison (1988: 629) are incorrect in their statement that, “In Mal 3.11 LXX A, the word [βρωσις] means ‘grasshopper’.” Hebrew אָכַל could be used for a grasshopper, as well as for food; but βρωσις did not mean “rust,” nor did it mean “grasshopper.”

5. Davies and Allison (1988: 631) conjectured a bit about the Semitic original of this saying since Matthew’s διορύσσω “to break in” appears in Luke 12:33 as ἐγγίζω “to draw near.”

If Luke is in fact original, it is more likely that assonance characterized the Semitic original, for ‘draw near’ could be *qērēb*, ‘moth’ could be *rūqbā*, ‘destroy’ could be *rēqāb*, and ‘worm’ could be *raqqābā*. [Does one interpretation of *rqb* = ‘worm’ or ‘rust’ stand behind Jas 5.2–3, another behind the synoptics?]

The answer to their closing question is a “No!” The attested misinterpretation of אָכַל in Mal 3:11 tilts the scales in favor of reconstructing the *Vorlage* with אָכַל rather than רָקַב— for there is no attested confusion between the Hebrew רָקַב

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“decay” and the Aramaic ܠܘܫܢܐ “wood-worm” or ܠܘܫܢܐ “rust.” For the combination of “moth” and “worm,” note the addition in the Septuagint to Prov 25:20, ὡσπερ σής ἱματίῳ καὶ σκώληξ ξύλω οὕτως λύπη ἀνδρὸς βλάπτει καρδίαν, “as a moth in a garment, and a worm in wood, so the grief of a man hurts the heart.”

6. Lamsa (1957: 956), following the Vulgate, paraphrased the Peshitta’s reading Matt 6:19–20 as follows:

Do not lay up for yourselves treasures buried in the ground, a place where rust and moth destroy and where thieves break through and steal. But lay up for yourselves a treasure in heaven, where neither rust nor moth destroys, and where thieves do not break through and steal.

7. The root meaning of ܠܘܫܢܐ (*hbal*) is “to twist, to writhe,” suggesting that the “destroyer” in this context—where the maggot is mentioned—is a twisting, slithering worm.

8. See the various lexicons, *sub voce*. The Greek σής “moth” is no doubt a loanword from Semitic. In the Septuagint σής “moth” occurs in Isa 50:9, 51:8; Job 4:19, 27:18; and Prov 14:30. These bugs gave those who translated the Hebrew into Greek a hard time. Although the ܠܘܫܢܐ in Isa 50:9 was rightly translated by σής “moth,” the ܠܘܫܢܐ in Isa 51:8 became χρόνος “time,” as though the *Vorlage* had ܠܘܫܢܐ instead of ܠܘܫܢܐ. But the ܠܘܫܢܐ in this verse was rightly rendered as σής. In Hosea 5:12 the ܠܘܫܢܐ “moth” was translated as παραγή “trouble,” and the ܠܘܫܢܐ “decay, wood-worm, or rust” became κέντρον “goad.”

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9. The following Arabic cognates of Hebrew אכל provide evidence that the Hebrew root could also have been used for “rust” and “corrosion,” as understood by the Saint Jerome.

- אכל (*akala*) “to eat, eat away, corrode, to rust,”
- آكلة (*akilat*) “corrosion, rust,”
- أكال (*ukâl*) “corrosion, ”
- أكال (*ukâl*) “corroded, cankered, decayed,”
- متآكل (*muta^oakkil*) “corroded, rusty, rust-eaten,”
- متآكل (*muta^oakil*) “corroded, rusty, rust-eaten.”

See Lane 1865: 71–72; Wehr 1979: 27; Hava 1915: 11.

10. The following texts provide compelling commentary for this interpretation.

Job 25:6

אֶךְ כִּי־אֲנוֹשׁ רִמָּה וּבֶן־אָדָם תּוֹלְעָה
“How much less man, who is a maggot,
and the son of man, who is a worm!”

Isaiah 51:12

מִי־אַתָּה וַתִּירָאִי מֵאֲנוֹשׁ
יָמוּת וּמִבֶּן־אָדָם חָצִיר יִנְתֵּן:
who are you that you are afraid of man who dies,
of the son of man who is made like grass.

Sirach 17:30

οὐ γὰρ δύναται πάντα εἶναι ἐν ἀνθρώποις
ὅτι οὐκ ἀθάνατος υἱὸς ἀνθρώπου
For not everything is within human capability,
since human beings are not immortal.

11. Allen (1912: 61) cited the *Testament Levi* 13:6, “Do righteousness, my sons, upon earth, that you may have treasure in heaven.” By way of commentary Albright and Mann (1971: 79) cited from *Baba Bathra* 11a and *Tosefta Peah* iv, 18 two sayings of King Monobaz of Adiabene who had embraced Judaism: “My fathers stored in a place where the hand can reach, but I have stored in a place where the hand cannot reach,” and “My fathers gathered for this world, but I have gathered for the future world.” (Simon and Slotki, 1935: 52–53). Davies and Allison (1988: 631) provide a few more lines in their quotation of King Monobaz and call attention to Tobit 4:8–9, Psalms of Solomon. 9:5, 2 Baruch 24:1; Sirach 29:10–13; Gospel of Thomas 76; and a number of other texts. Keener (1999: 228–231) also provides a very helpful survey, with full bibliography, on the attitudes toward wealth and possessions in the Graeco-Roman and Jewish literature.

12. According to Matt 10:9 and Mark 6:8, purses were allowed but money was not to be put in them. But in John 13:29 and Luke 22:36 some disciples carried purses in which there was money.

13. It could also be כּוּסִים, the plural of כּוּס “cup” or כּוּס “thorn.”

14. Hebrew כּוּס “bag, purse,” is the cognate of Arabic كِيس (*kîs*) “purse,” which is perhaps a loanword from the Persian كِيفَة. Hebrew כּוּסָה “to clothe, to cover” is the cognate of the Arabic كَسَا (*kasa/kasw*) “to clothe, to dress” and كِسَاءٌ (*kisāʾ*) “garment, clothes, dress” (Castell 1669: 1718, 1767; Lane

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1885: 2640; 1893: 3000; Hava 1915: 655; Wehr 1979: 969–970; BDB 476, 491–492).

15. The words of James 5:3, καὶ ὁ ἰὸς . . . φάγεται τὰς σάρκας ὑμῶν ὡς πῦρ “and the rust . . . shall eat your flesh like fire” could well apply here to the grave worms.

16. Brown (1970: 984) noted that “Tomb robbery was a troublesome crime at this time [early 1st century A.D.], as witnessed in an imperial edict against it.” This edict was issued by Claudius and was found in an inscription discovered at Nazereth. Barrett (1989:15) provides bibliography and the following translation.

Ordinance of Caesar. It is my pleasure that graves and tombs remain undisturbed in perpetuity for those who have made them for the cult of their ancestors or children or members of their house .If however any man lay information that another has either demolished them, or has in any other way extracted the buried, or has maliciously transferred them to other places in order to wrong them, or has displaced the sealing or other stones, against such a one I order that a trial be instituted, as in respect of the gods, so in regard to the cult of mortals. For it shall be much more obligatory to honour the buried. Let it be absolutely forbidden for anyone to disturb them. In case of contravention I desire that the offender be sentenced to capital punishment on charge of violation of sepulture.

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