

Less is More

Mark 12:40-44

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I. More vs. 40-41

a. Their Exploitation

- i. The story of the widow's offering follows right on the heels of the denunciation of the scribes who "devour the estates of widows" (Mark 12:38–40). The context of the widow's offering suggests, therefore, that it is an example of the very thing that Jesus warned about: the οἰκία, "house," or estate of the poor widow has finally been consumed.
- ii. Devour Widows Houses- vivid figure of speech for exploiting the generosity of people of limited means, especially widows. They unethically appropriated people's property
 1. Rather he condemned a system that permitted widows to be destitute and perhaps even made them destitute by pressuring them to give all they had.
- iii. Points of disagreement between Jesus and the temple establishment. In the law of Moses widows and orphans enjoyed an important measure of economic and legal protection. At Sinai Israel was commanded not to "afflict any widow or orphan" (Exod 22:22).
 1. In this restatement of the covenant God describes himself as one who "executes justice for the fatherless and the widow" (Deut 10:18). Therefore, human judges must deal justly with the marginalized (cf. Deut 24:17; 27:19). Part of this justice meant that widows and orphans were to partake of the tithes (Deut 14:29; 26:12–13) and to enjoy special gleaning privileges (Deut 24:19–21). Partaking of the tithes was to be shared along with the Levites.
 2. Jeremiah's complaints against the temple establishment of his day, in which, among other things, widows and orphans were neglected and denied justice (cf. Jer 7:6,
 3. widows are associated in almost stereotyped fashion with similar disadvantaged and oppressed groups, orphans Is. 1:23; Jer. 5:28; Job 22:9; 24:3
 4. the woman who had lost her spouse and children who had lost their father were in many respects disadvantaged and even

oppressed from the social, economic, legal and religious standpoint. The common feature is that they have all lost their sustainer and protector.

- a. Jesus was Observing
 - iv. Observing - **with sustained attention, *be a spectator***
- b. The Crowd- There were many giving
- c. Rich People
 - v. **to having an abundance of earthly possessions that exceeds normal experience**
 - 1. They too were to be generous in the extreme but without any ostentatiousness.
 - a. being showy, pompous, or vain, or lacking refinement and good taste. It can also refer to the act of attracting attention, admiration, or envy through obviousness or gaudiness.
 - vi. The word translated “abundance” can also mean “surplus,”
 - 1. Unlike the wealthy, whose gifts would not be missed and would not cause for them any hardship or discomfort,
 - vii. Josephus, as well as Roman historians, remarks on the immense wealth of the Jerusalem temple. Many of those donating large sums were wealthy landowners who lived in or near Jerusalem; others were Jewish businessmen and merchants of the Diaspora who had journeyed to Jerusalem for the Passover holiday.
- d. Their Offering
 - viii. Large Sums of Money - various typed of metal copper brass or bronze
- e. Treasury- Treasury- **contribution box** or **receptacle** is attractive. generally attached to a sanctuary (Jos. 6:19, 24; 1 Ki. 7:51; Dn. 1:2)
 - ix. Thirteen receptacles for money offerings, called “trumpets” because they were shaped like funnels and tapered at the top (to prevent theft).
 - x. Freewill offerings’ (six chests being devoted to the last). All contributions were therefore for the work of the temple
 - 1. 2 Kings 12:4

II. Less v. 42

- a. Poor **to being economically disadvantaged, *dependent on others for support.***
 - i. the person wholly without possessions who must acquire the necessities of life through petition
- b. Widow- - the idea of neediness
 - i. How did Jesus know she was a widow? The most probable answer is that he could tell by her dress (cf. Luke 7:11–19, where the grieving mother is readily recognized as a widow).

- c. Her Offering
 - i. Small Copper Coins- The ΛΕΠΤΟΝ (Hebrew *p^erûṭâ*) was the smallest denomination of currency in use, a copper coin less than a centimetre in diameter and worth less than one hundredth of a denarius (which was itself half the value of the half-shekel temple tax)
 - ii. The “two very small copper coins” were two *lepta* (so the Greek text). The *lepton* was the smallest coin in circulation in Palestine and was worth 1/64 of a *denarius*, a day’s wages for a common laborer.
 - iii. It took more than one hundred lepta to equal a denarius, itself worth a day’s wage. It has been said that two lepta could buy one a handful of flour or the equivalent of one meager meal
 - iv. Some of these receptacles were designated for specific purposes; others were used for “freewill offerings.” It could very well be that the widow pitched her coins into the latter. χαλκός, “money,” actually refers to the metal itself (i.e., copper, brass, or bronze)
 - v. while the word translated “want” can also mean “lack” or “deficiency.”
 - 1. the spare change which will never be missed (cf. [περίσσευμα, 8:8](#)); she has given πάντα ὅσα εἶχεν (cf. the example of the disciples, 10:28, and the failure of the rich man to do likewise, 10:21); it is ὅλος ὁ βίος αὐτῆς, and yet she voluntarily gave both coins, rather than just one! While Jesus was not averse to exaggeration to make a point, it is quite possible that in first-century Palestine the donation of two *p^erûṭōt* would have left a poor widow without the means for her next meal
 - 2. the widow’s gift took food right out of her mouth.
 - 3. In other words, the woman had nothing extra. She had no margin from which she could contribute to the temple.

III. Put in More vs.43-44

- a. The Poor Widow
 - i. She did More than ALL the contributors
 - 1. This expression is the exact opposite of ΠΕΡΙΣΣΕΥΟΝΤΟΣ, one meaning *more than enough*, and the other *less than enough; excess and deficiency*
 - 2. Jesus asserts that human needs take precedence over religiosity
 - 3. What matters in God’s sight is not what a person has (and therefore is able to give without pain) but the devotion which causes her to give even at great personal cost
 - 4. It both commends the widow’s self-sacrificing generosity as an example for all God’s people (*pace* Gundry, 730) and (and probably more significantly for its context in Mark) turns upside down the normal human valuation of people.

- a. The gift does not matter to God so much as the giver. And, it is implied, this should also be the basis of his people's valuation.
 5. Jesus indicated that the thing of most importance is not how much is given but the extent to which the gift is a sacrificial one. Or to put it another way, the most significant thing is not how much is given but how much is left for one's personal use after the gift. A major element of Jesus' teaching is that attitude is more important than action. The widow's total giving demonstrates an attitude of absolute trust in God.
 6. Hence, while the real value of their gifts was many times greater than hers, the ideal value of hers was the greatest of them all. Money values are not the standard of gifts in the kingdom of God, but only these ideal values. It is only as the gift measures the moral value of the giver, that it counts with him who looks at the heart.
- ii. She did out of her poverty
 1. Poverty- **the condition of lacking that which is essential, need**
 2. it is quite possible that in first-century Palestine the donation of two *ᾠραι* would have left a poor widow without the means for her next meal (
 - a. The widow of Zarephath, 1 Ki. 17:12
 3. She did it despite exploitation
 - iii. All that She had
 1. A model of discipleship, their own commitment to Jesus would soon be severely tested Mark 14:27–31
 2. No gift, whether of money, time, or talent, is too insignificant to give, but the extent to which the gift is a sacrificial one
 3. The sacrificial gift of the widow points to the sacrificial gift of Jesus. "You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich" (2 Cor 8:9)

Background

12:41–44. A later tradition claims that thirteen receptacles for such gifts stood in the Court of Women, accessible to Israelite women as well as to men. The temple sported ostentatious wealth, and its officials would probably waste this widow’s money; but this powerless woman, ignorant of that likelihood, acts in good faith and is the greatest giver in God’s sight. The widow would not starve, given provisions for the poor in Jewish synagogues (cf. comment on Acts 6:1–4). The widow’s “mite,” or *lepton*, represented the lightest and least valuable coin of the period.¹

Mark’s description of the scene accentuates the poverty and insignificance of the widow and her gift. The scribes are ostentatious and prepossessing, and the crowds are rich and extravagant; but by contrast this “one poor widow” contributes two of the smallest coins in circulation

For Jesus, the value of a gift is not the amount given, but the cost to the giver. That point will be repeated in the story of the woman in 14:3–9 who gives an extravagant gift of perfume: the value of her gift is light years greater than the two lepta of the poor widow here; yet, remarkably, each is equally praised by Jesus for doing what they could. Their generosity and sacrifice, if not their respective amounts, are the same.⁷²² In the temple, others gave what they could spare, but the poor widow spared nothing. Others gave from their surplus, but she gave from her need, “ ‘all she had to live on.’

is perfectly fulfilled in the giving of two simple lepta, which symbolize an undivided heart. This widow’s selfless act is not showcased primarily for its moral value, exposing the gulf between her humble piety and the pretense of the scribes

¹ Craig S. Keener, [*The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*](#) (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), Mk 12:41–44.

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⁷² See Hooker, *The Gospel According to Saint Mark*, 296.

Word Studies

Treasury- **contribution box** or **receptacle** is attractive. ³ ‘Treasury’ and ‘treasure house’ frequently signify a place where treasure is stored, generally attached to a sanctuary (Jos. 6:19, 24; 1 Ki. 7:51; Dn. 1:2) or belonging to a king (2 Ki. 12:18; Est. 3:9). In Ezr. 2:69; Ne. 7:70f., ‘treasury’ is a fund for rebuilding the Temple. In Mk. 12:41; Lk. 21:1 it refers to the thirteen trumpet-shaped offertory boxes placed in the Court of the Women in the Temple; it is apparently used of the vicinity of these boxes in Jn. 8:20.⁴

In the LX⁵X this word is generally used of the storeroom and treasury of the temple (cf. 2 Esdr 20:38; 22:44; 1 Macc 14:49, etc.) and is to be so understood in John 8:20; i.e., of the magnificent treasury built by Herod in the north part of the women’s court (cf. Josephus⁶ *B.J.*⁷. v.200; Josephus⁸ *Ant.*⁹. xix.294). *M. Šeqal.* 6:5 mentions thirteen receptacles for money offerings, called “trumpets” because they were shaped like funnels and tapered at the top (to prevent theft). Seven of them served for raising fixed duties, five for specific appropriations, and one for general, voluntary contributions. It is fairly certain that they stood in the vestibule of the women’s court to which Josephus refers. The events of Mark 12:41 (bis), 43 par¹⁰. Luke 21:1 take place here.

Yet γαζοφυλάκιον does not have to indicate a certain one of the 13 poor boxes, since the phrase βάλλειν χαλκὸν εἰς τὸ γαζοφυλάκιον (Mark 12:41; cf. vv¹¹. 42f.) can describe not only the dropping of money into a poor box but, according to *m*¹². *Šeqal*¹³. 5:6, more generally depositing (*zrq* = βάλλειν) of gifts in the treasury, concretely in the thirteenth poor box for general gifts. Since the scrutiny of all gifts at the poor boxes by the priests was necessary (according to *Lev. Rab*¹⁴. 3 [107a], e.g., a woman had to endure open ridicule by the priests because of a small gift), all those present participated in the presentation of the gift, surely a

³ William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker, and Walter Bauer, [A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature](#) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 186.

⁴ L. C. Allen, [“Treasure, Treasury,”](#) ed. D. R. W. Wood et al., *New Bible Dictionary* (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 1202.

⁵LXX Septuagint

⁶Josephus *Josephus De Bello Judaico*

⁷*B.J.* *Josephus De Bello Judaico*

⁸Josephus *Josephus Antiquitates Judaicae*

⁹*Ant.* *Josephus Antiquitates Judaicae*

¹⁰par. parallel

¹¹vv. verses

¹²*m.* Mishnah

¹³*Šeqal.* *Šeqalim*

¹⁴*Rab. Rabbah*

welcome opportunity for wealthy contributors to commend themselves (cf. Matt 6:2). The real concern of Mark 12:41–44 par¹⁵. becomes clear in light of the background of the situation in front of the treasury in the women's court. Billerbeck¹⁶k II, 37–45; J. W. Doeve, *BH*¹⁷H I, 597; H. Ljungman, *BH*¹⁸H III, 1687; *B*¹⁹L 1534.²⁰

Observed - **to observe someth**²¹. **with sustained attention, be a spectator, look at, observe, perceive, see**²²

Many People- relatively large number of people

Money- various typed of metal copper brass or bronze

Rich people- **to having an abundance of earthly possessions that exceeds normal experience, rich, wealthy**²³

Large Sums –

Widow - the idea of neediness is oft²⁴. associated with this word, and it is oft²⁵. joined w²⁶. orphans (ὀρφανός 1) **Mt 23:13 (14) v.l**²⁷.; **Mk 12:40, 42f**²⁸

¹⁵par. parallel

¹⁶Billerbeck (H. Strack and) P. Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum NT aus Talmud und Midrasch I-IV* (1922-28)

¹⁷*BHH Biblisch-historisches Handwörterbuch I-III* (single pagination; ed. B. Reicke and L. Rost; 1962-66)

¹⁸*BHH Biblisch-historisches Handwörterbuch I-III* (single pagination; ed. B. Reicke and L. Rost; 1962-66)

¹⁹*BL Bibel-Lexikon*, ed. H. Haag (21968)

²⁰Horst Robert Balz and Gerhard Schneider, [*Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*](#) (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1990–), 232.

²¹**someth. someth.** = something

²²William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker, and Walter Bauer, [*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*](#) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 454.

²³William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker, and Walter Bauer, [*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*](#) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 831.

²⁴oft. **oft.** = often

²⁵oft. **oft.** = often

²⁶w. **w.** = with

²⁷v.l. **v.l.** = varia lectio (variant reading)

²⁸William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker, and Walter Bauer, [*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*](#) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 1084.

In the O²⁹T, too, widows are associated in almost stereotyped fashion with similar disadvantaged and oppressed groups, orphans (→ V, 487, 31 ff.), e.g., Is. 1:23; Jer. 5:28; Job 22:9; 24:3, also Lam. 5:3, aliens (→ V, 9, 19 ff.), e.g., Ex. 22:21 f.; Dt. 10:18; 24:17, the poor, e.g., Is. 10:2; Zech. 7:10; Wis. 2:10, the day-labourer, Mal. 3:5. There is constant complaint at the wrongs done to widows, e.g., Is. 10:2; Ez. 22:7; Job 24:3, cf. 22:9 and esp³⁰. Ps. 94:6, and also at the rights withheld from them, Is. 1:23; Jer. 5:28. Warnings are often issued against injustice to widows, Ex. 22:22; Dt. 24:17; 27:19; Jer. 22:3; Zech. 7:10. There is also a demand that they be helped to their rights, Is. 1:17³¹

In any case in a patriarchal society the woman who had lost her spouse and children who had lost their father were in many respects disadvantaged and even oppressed from the social, economic, legal and religious standpoint. The common feature is that they have all lost their sustainer and protector.³²⁵ Thus from ancient times widows and orphans are often associated and even linked together as a pair → 447, 26 ff.; 448, 27 ff. n. 1³³²). In the writings of antiquity, esp³⁴. in oriental legal and wisdom literature, we constantly find complaint at the lack of protection or help which the widow shares with orphans, the poor, and strangers, and esp³⁵. at the injustice to which she is subjected by the socially more powerful.³⁶

²⁹OT Old Testament.

³⁰esp. especially.

³¹ Gustav Stählin, "Χήρα," ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 445.

³²⁵ Poetically χήρα / *vidua* and ὀρφανός / *orbus* (→ V, 487, 24 ff.) can even be used as synon. Catullus Carmina, 66, 21 (ed. W. Kroll⁵ [1968]) with his *orbum cubile* means the same as Ovid Amores, II, 10, 17 and Statius Silvae, III, 5, 60 (ed. A. Marastoni [1961]) with *cubile viduum*.

³³12 Cf. the fate of the orphaned child, as in Andromache to Hector: μὴ παῖδ' ὀρφανικὸν θήρης χήρην τε γυναῖκα, Hom. II., 6, 432; αὐτοὺς (sc. the fallen heroes) μὲν ἀπεστέρησαν βίου, χήρας δὲ γυναῖκας ἐροίησαν, ὀρφανοὺς δὲ τοὺς αὐτῶν παῖδας ἀπέλιπον, Lys. Or., 2, 71; cf. also Cpt. Cod., 32, 9, 20–22: "They have laid themselves down in their graves ... their wives became widows (χήρα) their sons became orphans (ὀρφανός)," *Ägypt. Urkunden aus d. königlichen Museen zu Berlin: Kpt. Urkunden*, I (1901), p. 53.

³⁴esp. especially.

³⁵esp. especially.

³⁶ Gustav Stählin, "Χήρα," ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 442–443.

Poor- **to being economically disadvantaged**, orig³⁷. 'begging' (s. πένης for a differentiation betw³⁸. the two words; note the juxtaposition in Ps 39:18; 69:6 al³⁹.), **dependent on others for support**, but also simply **poor** (as Mod. Gk⁴⁰. φτωχός) χήρα πτωχή Mk 12:42; ⁴¹

2. In Greek πτωχός (in contrast to → πένης, which designates dearth of possessions) designates the person wholly without possessions who must acquire the necessities of life through petition, hence those "poor as beggars." In the NT, however, one must consider above all the semantic components influenced by the OT and Jewish history of the idea. The following elements are important: According to OT and broader oriental understanding the poor person stands under the special protection of the deity. The poor (Heb⁴². *dal*, 'ebyôn) person is one deprived of his inherited rights (land! cf. the social criticism of the older prophets). Since the land itself stands under Yahweh's legal possession and has been given by him to the whole people, enduring poverty in Israel is not really allowed (covenantal law). Deuteronomy, according to which there should be no poor people in Israel, makes comprehensive provisions for the poor. Esp. in the Psalms the poor ('ānî, 'ebyôn) person, who in crying out in his own defense is simultaneously pleading God's case, becomes the self-identification of the person in prayer; this religious component dominates the concept of the *nāwîm*, the "humble pious ones." The tribulations of the exile resulted in the entire people collectively appearing as the poor (*nîyîm*, *nāwîm*, 'ebyônîm), to whom is given God's saving promise (deutero- and trito-Isaiah). In early Judaism the concept in this eschatological shading served above all opposition groups (the idea of the "remnant") in formulating their own self-understanding as an collective elect (cf. Qumran). The conceptual proximity to "righteous" and "holy" is characteristic (cf. *Psalms of Solomon*).

Small Copper Coin- **small copper coin**, 1/128 of a denarius, something between a penny and a mill, Mk 12:42; Lk 12:59⁴³

Surplus- In their abundance- Rich Young Ruler

Synoptic Gospels and Acts. At Mk. 12:44 and par⁴⁴. and Lk. 12:15 περισσεύειν is used non-eschatologically of transitory earthly possessions. Lk. 15:17 is theologically

³⁷orig. **orig.** = original(ly)

³⁸betw. **betw.** = between

³⁹al. **al.** =alibi (elsewhere), aliter (otherwise), alii (others)

⁴⁰Mod. Gk. **Mod. Gk.** = Modern Greek

⁴¹ William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker, and Walter Bauer, [A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature](#) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 896.

⁴²Heb. Hebrew

⁴³ William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker, and Walter Bauer, [A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature](#) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 592.

⁴⁴par. parallel.

significant, for here the superabundance of the hired servants of the father is a pointer to the God who is rich in grace. Mt. 13:12; 25:29 (cf. Mk. 4:25)⁴⁵

Poverty - the condition of lacking that which is essential, *need, lack, poverty* Mk 12:44.⁴⁶ In Need

Commentary Studies

40 The nominatives οἱ κατεσθίοντες ... καὶ ... προσευχόμενοι do not relate syntactically with the preceding sentence, where the scribes appeared in the genitive, but since no main verb appears before λήμψονται, which has its own subject οὗτοι, they are probably to be taken as a *constructio ad sensum* after the lengthy description of the scribes' ambitions has left the genitive noun and participle on which they depended so far behind.¹⁰⁴⁷⁵ In that case the subjects of these participles are not a new group, or even a subgroup of the scribes, but must still be the scribes in general.

The vulnerability of widows is a recurrent theme in biblical literature,¹⁰⁴⁸⁶ so that to defraud them is particularly despicable. κατεσθίοντες τὰς οἰκίας is a vivid phrase for taking material advantage of them (like our 'eat someone out of house and home'); cf. καταφαγών σου τὸν βίον (Lk. 15:30).¹⁰⁴⁹⁷ How the scribes were alleged to do this can be only a matter of speculation. It could be through excessive legal fees, through mismanaging to their own

⁴⁵ Friedrich Hauck, [“Περισσεύω, Ὑπερπερισεύω, Περισσός, Ὑπερεκπερισσοῦ, Ὑπερεκπερισσῶς, Περισσεῖα, Περίσσευμα,”](#) ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 59.

⁴⁶ William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker, and Walter Bauer, [A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature](#) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 1044.

⁴⁷¹⁰⁵ N. Turner, *Grammar*, 317, includes this in his list of 'excusable solecisms'! The alternative construction, taking the nominative participles as beginning a new sentence with 'a *casus pendens* followed by resumptive οὗτοι' (Cranfield; similarly Gundry, 720, 727; several commentators assume this construction, but not most versions, except REB) results in a very awkward sentence, and one which reads as a *non sequitur* if the subject intended is not the same as in vv. 38–39; this sense would in any case need some indication of change of subject such as ὃέ. If, on the other hand, the subject is the same, the choice of explanation as to the grammatical construction makes no difference to the sense.

⁴⁸¹⁰⁶ See S. Solle, *DNTT*, 3.1073–75.

⁴⁹¹⁰⁷ Similar language is used in *Test. Mos.* 7:6–10 of unnamed officials (perhaps scribes?) who 'eat up the goods of the poor, claiming that they are acting according to justice'. Cf *Ps. Sol.* 4, especially v. 11.

advantage an estate of which they were made trustees,¹⁰⁵⁰⁸ through taking their houses as pledges for unpayable debts, through promoting the temple cult which ‘eats up’ the resources of the pious poor,¹⁰⁵¹⁹ or more generally through exploiting their hospitality and trust.¹¹⁵²⁰ The following clause καὶ προφάσει μακρὰ προσευχόμενοι is closely linked with the ‘eating up’ of their houses, and προφάσει would naturally describe the fraudulent means by which it is achieved. In that case the reference could be to the sort of payment for the prayers of a religious professional which became common in medieval Christianity. It is true that πρόφασις can mean a (valid) reason, as in Jn. 15:22, but its more usual sense is ‘pretext’ and this is its meaning in other NT uses (note Phil. 1:18, where it is contrasted with ἀληθεία). Mann’s translation ‘for appearances’ sake’ is perhaps too gentle. The suggestion that it means something like ‘with such an end in view’, implying an ulterior motive,¹¹⁵³¹ makes little difference to its pejorative force in this context where the ‘end’ is eating up widows’ houses. For insincere prayer cf. Mt. 6:5, though there the emphasis is on the public performance rather than the length of the prayers.

Similarly, while κρίμα sometimes means the act of judging, its normal meaning of ‘condemnation’, ‘punishment’ is demanded by the context here. The reference cannot be to an earthly or human judgment (which would hardly take cognisance of ostentation as a punishable offence), but must be to God’s eschatological judgment, of which Jesus has spoken so vividly in 9:42–48. Such a judgment does not leave room for the gradation of punishments which seems to be envisaged in the comparative ΠΕΡΙΣΣΟΤΕΡΟΝ (though this could be understood simply as ‘very severe’), but probably it is better in context to take the comparative not of varying levels of condemnation or punishment, but rather of the more obvious guilt of these people than of other less blatant sinners. If the nominative participles of v. 40 could be interpreted of a specially wicked group of scribes, the comparative might then contrast them with the general run of scribes whose ostentation (described in vv. 38–39) is a less serious crime, but the syntax scarcely allows this, as we have noted above.⁵⁴

41 As in v. 38, the subject does not need to be expressed (see Textual Note) since there has been a continuous sequence of Jesus’ speaking, without response, since v. 35. γαζοφυλάκιον

⁵⁰¹⁰⁸ So J. D. M. Derrett, *NovT* 14 (1972) 1–9; critical comment by H. Fleddermann, *CBQ* 44 (1982) 61.

⁵¹¹⁰⁹ A. G. Wright (see above, p. 490 n. 101); H. Fleddermann, *CBQ* 44 (1982) 61–66; Myers, 321–22. Fleddermann recognises that μακρὰ προσευχόμενοι is an unnatural way to say ‘promoting the temple cult’.

⁵²¹¹⁰ J. Jeremias, *Jerusalem*, 111–16, provides a fascinating study of the economic circumstances of scribes, and concludes that many were poor and that while some were in paid employment ‘in the main the scribes lived on subsidies’. He concludes that this passage refers to ‘the scribes’ habit of sponging on the hospitality of people of limited means’ (114). For more general information on Jerusalem scribes see J. Jeremias, *Jerusalem*, 233–45.

⁵³¹¹¹ So Derrett, art. cit. (p. 491 n. 108), 7–8.

⁵⁴ R. T. France, [The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary on the Greek Text](#), New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 2002), 491–492.

(‘treasury’) is used in the LXX and Josephus (sometimes in the plural) of the treasure stores in the temple buildings, but its reference here to the collecting chests in the Court of the Women is demanded by the context, which has an ὄχλος, including a woman, ‘throwing in’ donations. (In Jn. 8:20 the same sense seems required, as Jesus and the crowd to whom he was speaking could hardly have been inside the ‘strong room’.) χαλκός is strictly ‘copper’ or ‘bronze’, and the widow’s two coins would be of copper. But the large sums donated by the rich would presumably be in silver or gold coins (as were the half-shekels for the temple tax, which had to be paid in Tyrian silver coins), so that χαλκός is here used in its more general sense of ‘money’. The objects for which the money was given (apart from two chests for the temple tax) are listed in the Mishnah as ‘Bird offerings’, ‘Young birds for whole-offerings’, ‘Wood’, ‘Incense’, ‘Gold for the *kappōret* [perhaps sacred vessels?]’, and ‘Freewill offerings’ (six chests being devoted to the last). All contributions were therefore for the work of the temple; charitable donations for the poor were made separately. For the huge amounts of money contributed see Schüre⁵⁵, 2.270–74.

42 There is a marked contrast between the πολλοὶ πλούσιοι ... πολλά of v. 41 and the μία χίρα πτωχή of this verse.¹¹⁵⁶² There is no reason to think that she was the only such person present, but Jesus singles her out as an object lesson. The λεπτόν (Hebrew *p^erûṭâ*) was the smallest denomination of currency in use, a copper coin less than a centimetre in diameter and worth less than one hundredth of a denarius (which was itself half the value of the half-shekel temple tax).¹¹⁵⁷³ Mark identifies its value by reference to the Roman κοδράντης (a transliteration of *quadrans*, which was the smallest Roman coin, a quarter of an *as*). The use of the Latin term is not necessarily due to a Roman origin for the gospel, since ‘Roman designations of coins were already in the first century A.D. more common in Palestine than the Greek and Hebrew designations still also in use’;¹¹⁵⁸⁴ Matthew also uses the term (5:26).

43–44 Both προσκαλεσάμενος (see the introduction to this section) and the formula ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν (see on 3:28) mark this out as a saying to be noted. It both commends the widow’s self-sacrificing generosity as an example for all God’s people (*pace* Gundry, 730) and (and probably more significantly for its context in Mark) turns upside down the normal human valuation of people. What matters in God’s sight is not what a person has (and therefore is able to give without pain) but the devotion which causes her to give even at great personal cost, even though the amount of the gift may be completely negligible in comparison with the enormous wealth of the temple. The gift does not matter to God so much as the giver. And, it is implied, this should also be the basis of his people’s valuation. By such a criterion the first will often be last, and the last first. The two *p^erûṭōt* are πλεῖον than all the silver and gold put together.

⁵⁵Schürer E. Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ*, rev. and ed. by G. Vermes, F. Millar, M. Goodman, and M. Black. 3 vols., Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1973–87

⁵⁶¹¹² Gundry asserts that ‘The poverty of the widow will naturally be taken as due to a scribal devouring of her estate (v. 40)’. I wonder! Many have not noticed this ‘natural’ reading. Widows are frequently depicted as poor with no such reason adduced.

⁵⁷¹¹³ For the coins of Roman Palestine see, e.g., Schürer, 2.62–66.

⁵⁸¹¹⁴ Schürer, 2.64.

The point is laboured in the wording of v. 44: her ὑστέρησις (destitution) is compared with their περίσσειον, the spare change which will never be missed (cf. περίσσειμα, 8:8); she has given πάντα ὅσα εἶχεν (cf. the example of the disciples, 10:28, and the failure of the rich man to do likewise, 10:21); it is ὄλος ὁ βίος αὐτῆς, and yet she voluntarily gave both coins, rather than just one! While Jesus was not averse to exaggeration to make a point, it is quite possible that in first-century Palestine the donation of two *ρῆνδρῶν* would have left a poor widow without the means for her next meal (cf. the widow of Zarephath, 1 Ki. 17:12).⁵⁹

■ **41–44** This passage is distinguished from the preceding one by a change in the spatial setting. As noted above, vv. 38–40 are closely linked to vv. 35–37 by having the same temporal and spatial location and involving the same characters. Verse 35 locates both passages in “the temple precinct” (ἐν τῷ ἱερῶ). This passage is also within the temple precinct, but the location is given more precisely and movement on the part of Jesus to this specific location is implied: “And he sat down opposite the treasury” (Καὶ καθίσας κατέναντι τοῦ γαζοφυλακίου). There is also a change in characters. In v. 37, Jesus’ audience is characterized as “the mass of the people” (ὁ πολὺς ὄχλος). Here “the crowd” (ὁ ὄχλος) is characterized as those putting money into the treasury, and the focus is on “the many rich people” (πολλοὶ πλούσιοι). “A poor widow” (μία χήρα πτωχή) is a new character, who is introduced as coming on the scene in v. 42. The disciples, whose implicit presence the Markan audience no doubt would assume, are reintroduced in v. 43.

This anecdote is linked to the preceding one (vv. 38–40) by the catchword χήρα (“widow”) It has a parallel in Luke 21:1–4, but Matthew has omitted it.

Bultmann defined the genre of this passage as “biographical apophthegm.”²¹⁶⁰² It is not biographical in the strict sense, since it is an ideal scene that discusses “the proper standard for judging a sacrifice” for the benefit of the church.²¹⁶¹³ In addition to the form of the anecdote and its content, the context (the setting of the scene in the temple) suggests that the story arose in “the Palestinian Church.”²¹⁶²⁴ Tannehill defined the story as a hybrid pronouncement story that combines correction and commendation.²¹⁶³⁵ The correction is not as emphatic as in other hybrids of this type. The narrator expresses the ordinary view of economic values, in commenting that the rich put in much. Jesus corrects this view by saying that the widow, though she put in only two lepta, put in “more than all” (πλεῖον πάντων).

⁵⁹ R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 2002), 492–493.

⁶⁰²¹² Bultmann, *History*, 32–33.

⁶¹²¹³ *Ibid.*, 56–57.

⁶²²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 60.

⁶³²¹⁵ Tannehill, “Varieties,” 1.1 (p. 103).

It has often been pointed out that other cultural traditions contain sayings similar to that of Jesus or stories similar to this one. For example, Xenophon had the following to say about Socrates:

Though his sacrifices were humble, according to his means, he thought himself not a whit inferior to those who made frequent and magnificent sacrifices out of great possessions. The gods (he said) could not well delight more in great offerings than in small—for in that case must the gifts of the wicked often have found more favour in their sight than the gifts of the upright—and man would not find life worth having, if the gifts of the wicked were received with more favour by the gods than the gifts of the upright. No, the greater the piety of the giver, the greater (he thought) was the delight of the gods in the gift. He would quote with approval the line: “According to thy power render sacrifice to the immortal gods”

■ **41** In his description of the temple as renovated by Herod, Josephus says that the inner walls of “the holy place” (τὸ ἅγιον), that is, the inner court, were lined with treasury chambers (γαζοφυλάκια) (*Bel*⁶⁴⁶⁵. 5.5.2 §200).²¹⁶⁶⁸ Elsewhere he says that, at the time the Romans burned the temple, these treasury chambers were filled with large sums of money, great stacks of clothing and other valuables:

They further burnt the treasury-chambers, in which lay vast sums of money, vast piles of raiment, and other valuables; for this, in short, was the general repository of Jewish wealth, to which the rich had consigned the contents of their dismantled houses (ἔκαιον δὲ καὶ τὰ γαζοφυλάκια, ἐν οἷς ἄπειρον μὲν χρημάτων πλήθος ἄπειροι δ’ ἐσθῆτες καὶ ἄλλα κειμήλια, συνελόντι δ’ εἰπεῖν, πᾶς ὁ Ιουδαίων σεσώρευτο πλοῦτος, ἀνεσκευασμένων ἐκεῖ τοὺς οἴκους τῶν εὐπόρων). (*Bel*⁶⁷⁶⁸. 6.5.2 §282)

The treasury chambers then were used in part in relation to the temple’s role as a bank, a role played by many temples in antiquity (2 Macc 3:9–12). The chambers were also used for gifts dedicated to God, for example, the gold chain dedicated by King Agrippa I that had been given to him by the emperor Gaius.²²⁶⁹¹ Some of these gifts may have been money paid for sacrificial offerings. The following passage from Josephus may be related to such gifts:

⁶⁴*Bellum Judaicum, The Jewish War*

⁶⁵. *Bellum Judaicum, The Jewish War*

⁶⁶²¹⁸ Text and trans. from Thackeray, *Josephus*, 3:260–61. For discussion, see Th. A. Busink, *Der Tempel von Jerusalem von Salomo bis Herodes*, vol. 2: *Von Ezechiel bis Middot* (Leiden: Brill, 1980) 1097–1101. Cf. Theissen, *Gospels in Context*, 120 = *Lokalkolorit*, 128.

⁶⁷*Bellum Judaicum, The Jewish War*

⁶⁸. *Bellum Judaicum, The Jewish War*

⁶⁹²²¹ Josephus *Ant.* 19.6.1 §§294–96; cf. Theissen, *Gospels in Context*, 120 = *Lokalkolorit*, 128. On Agrippa I, see David C. Braund, “Agrippa,” *ABD* 1:98–100, esp. 98–99. In *Ant.* 17.10.3 §265, Josephus refers to the grief that the Jews felt when the Romans carried off “the dedicatory offerings” (τὰ ἀναθήματα) when Varus was putting down the Jewish revolt after the death of Herod the Great; text and trans. from Ralph Marcus, in Thackeray, *Josephus*, 8:494–95.

On a later occasion [Pilate] provoked a fresh uproar by expending upon the construction of an aqueduct the sacred treasure known as *Corbonas* (Μετὰ δὲ ταῦτα ταραχὴν ἑτέραν ἐκίνει τὸν ἱερὸν θησαυρόν, καλεῖται δὲ κορβωνᾶς, εἰς καταγωγὴν ὑδάτων ἐξαναλίσκων). (*Bel*⁷⁰⁷¹. 2.9.4 §175)²²⁷²²

In the Second Temple period, the term *qorban* was used for both sacrificial and nonsacrificial offerings, although the former is more common.²²⁷³³ In the parallel passage in his *Antiquities*, Josephus speaks about “the sacred funds” (τὰ ἱερὰ χρήματα) (*An*⁷⁴⁷⁵. 18.3.2 §60).²²⁷⁶⁴ According to a passage in the Mishnah:

There were thirteen Shofar-chests in the Temple, whereon was inscribed: “New Shekel dues,” “Old Shekel dues,” “Bird-offerings,” “Young birds for the Whole-Offering,” “Wood,” “Frankincense,” “Gold for the Mercy-seat” (or “Vessels of Ministry”), and, on six of them, “Freewill-offerings”. (*m. Šeqal.* 6.5)²²⁷⁷⁵

Chapters 3 and 4 of the same tractate mention “the Shekel-chamber.” Perhaps this was one of the chambers that Josephus described as lining the inner walls of the inner court.

Mark, however, describes Jesus as sitting opposite the γαζοφυλάκιον (“treasury”) and watching people coming and going and placing money in it. It seems to be out of the question that such a scene could have taken place in the inner court. Thus, it seems likely that γαζοφυλάκιον in this verse and in the parallel in Luke 21:1^{78*} has the sense of “collection box”

⁷⁰*Bellum Judaicum, The Jewish War*

⁷¹. *Bellum Judaicum, The Jewish War*

²²⁷²² Text and trans. from Thackeray, *Josephus*, 2:390–91.

²²⁷²³ See the commentary on 7:11 above. In Matt 27:6*, however, the term κορβανᾶς seems to be used quite generally to mean “the temple treasury” (BAGD, s.v.).

⁷⁴*Ant Antiquities of the Jews*

⁷⁵. *Antiquities of the Jews*

²²⁷²⁴ Text from Louis H. Feldman, in Thackeray, *Josephus*, 9:46; my trans. Feldman translates τὰ ἱερὰ χρήματα with “the sacred treasury.” He concluded that the funds in question came from the annual contribution of a half-shekel from every Israelite twenty years old and upward (*ibid.*, 46–47 n. b). Cf. *m. Šeqal.* 1.1; see Danby, *Mishnah*, 152 n. 2. Feldman referred to *m. Šeqal.* 3.2.

²²⁷²⁵ Trans. from Danby, *Mishnah*, 159. Danby explains that the purpose of these chests was to receive the Shekel dues and that “shofar” (“trumpet” or “horn”) “possibly refers to the tapering shape of these money-chests” (*ibid.*, 153 n. 10).

^{78*} *The Widow’s Offering*

(*Mk* 12.41–44)

21 He looked up and saw rich people putting their gifts into the treasury;

Lk 21:1 (NRSV)

or “receptacle.”²²⁷⁹⁶ If the story represents conditions in the temple in the time of Jesus or Mark, the box must have been in the outer court.

The narrator states that Jesus was watching people putting χαλκός into the treasury or collection box. This term refers to “a metal of various types, such as copper, brass, or bronze.” It can also refer to “Copper coin, small change.”²²⁸⁰⁷ Since, however, the narrator says that many rich people were putting in πολλά (“a lot”), it seems best to conclude that χαλκός refers here simply to “money.”²²⁸¹⁸

■ **42^{82*}** After many rich people put a lot of money into the treasury or collection box, a poor widow comes along and puts in two lepta. The phrase λεπτὰ δύο is short for λεπτὰ δύο νομίσματα (“two small coins”).²²⁸³⁹ The copper lepton was the smallest Greek coin denomination.²³⁸⁴⁰ The denomination “lepton” occurs in the papyri from Naḥal Ḥever. The documents also mention a Nabatean coin denomination called the *melaina*, which was a silver coin. One such coin was worth more than fifty-eight lepta. A *melaina* was worth less than a denarius.²³⁸⁵¹ The name λεπτόν (νόμισμα) (“small coin”) was used for whatever was the smallest denomination of coins in the Syrian-Nabatean region.²³⁸⁶² Under Herod the Great and after 6 c⁸⁷E, the smallest coin minted in Judea was the *perutah* or *prutah*. Since it was the smallest coin in circulation, it could be called a “lepton.”²³⁸⁸³

⁷⁹²²⁶ BAGD, s.v.; Busink, *Der Tempel von Jerusalem*, 1098. Cf. the description of a collection box in the First Temple in 2 Kgs 12:9–16*. Oddly, John 8:20* depicts Jesus as teaching “in the treasury” (ἐν τῷ γαζοφυλακίῳ). Raymond E. Brown translated this phrase with “at the temple treasury” and concluded that Jesus was simply near the treasury, which he interpreted as a storage chamber abutting the Court of the Women, presumably in the inner court; *The Gospel according to John (i–xii): Introduction, Translation, and Notes* (AB 29; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966) 342.

⁸⁰²²⁷ BAGD, s.v.

⁸¹²²⁸ A usage also documented by BAGD, s.v.

^{82*} ⁴² A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which are worth a penny.

Mk 12:42 (NRSV)

⁸³²²⁹ Cf. BAGD, s.v. λεπτός, ἦ, ὄν.

⁸⁴²³⁰ Alkier, “‘Geld’ im Neuen Testament,” esp. 321.

⁸⁵²³¹ Wolfram Weiser and Hannah M. Cotton, “‘Gebt dem Kaiser, was des Kaisers ist ...’: Die Geldwährungen der Griechen, Juden, Nabatäer und Römer im syrisch-nabatäischen Raum unter besonderer Berücksichtigung des Kurses von Sela /Melaina und Lepton nach der Annexion des Königreiches der Nabatäer durch Rom,” *ZPE* 114 (1996) 237–87, esp. 237–40.

⁸⁶²³² *Ibid.*, 247.

⁸⁷ CE Common Era

⁸⁸²³³ *Ibid.*, 258, 260; the authors refer to Mark 12:42–43* to make this point. See also Alkier, “‘Geld’ im Neuen Testament,” 321 n. 51; 322; Burnett et al., *Roman Provincial Coinage*, 678.

Mark defines two lepta as equivalent to a *quadrans*. The *quadrans* was the smallest denomination of Roman coins.²³⁸⁹⁴ In the first century CE,⁹⁰ the most valuable bronze coin was the *as*; the half-piece of the *as* was the *semis*, and the *quadrans* was the quarter-piece of the *as*.²³⁹¹⁵ The Herodian equivalent of the *quadrans* was the *shamin*, which was worth two *prutot*.²³⁹²⁶ In Syria and Judea, Roman and local coin denominations coexisted, and local coins were understood in terms of Roman denominations.²³⁹³⁷ For this reason, the use of the term *quadrans* (more precisely, the Greek loanword κοδράντης with the same meaning) here may not be taken as evidence that Mark was written in Rome. In fact, mention of the two lepta makes it more likely that Mark was written in one of the eastern provinces.²³⁹⁴⁸

■ **43–44**^{95*} After seeing the widow put her two little coins in the treasury or collection box, Jesus summoned his disciples in order to speak to them. This summons is similar to those in 8:34^{96*} and 10:42^{97*}. In 8:34^{98*}, Jesus summoned the crowd with his disciples in order to teach them about suffering discipleship.²³⁹⁹⁹ In 10:42^{100*}, Jesus summoned the Twelve in order to

⁸⁹²³⁴ Alkier, “ ‘Geld’ im Neuen Testament,” 321. The *quadrans* began to be produced in or shortly after the second cent. BCE, replacing the *sextans* and valued at a quarter of an *as*. The *as* was the most valuable bronze coin in the Roman system (Michael Crawford, “Money and Exchange in the Roman World,” *Journal of Roman Studies* 60 [1970] 40–48, esp. 40).

⁹⁰ CE Common Era

⁹¹²³⁵ Crawford, “Money and Exchange in the Roman World,” 41.

⁹²²³⁶ Alkier, “ ‘Geld’ im Neuen Testament,” 322; cf. Burnett et al., *Roman Provincial Coinage*, 678.

⁹³²³⁷ Burnett et al., *Roman Provincial Coinage*, 590.

⁹⁴²³⁸ Theissen, *Gospels in Context*, 247–249 = *Lokalkolorit*, 259–61.

^{95*} ⁴³ Then he called his disciples and said to them, “Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury.

⁴⁴ For all of them have contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on.”

Mk 12:43–44 (NRSV)

^{96*} ³⁴ He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.

Mk 8:34 (NRSV)

^{97*} ⁴² So Jesus called them and said to them, “You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them.

Mk 10:42 (NRSV)

^{98*} ³⁴ He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.

Mk 8:34 (NRSV)

⁹⁹²³⁹ See the commentary on 8:34 above.

^{100*} ⁴² So Jesus called them and said to them, “You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them.

Mk 10:42 (NRSV)

teach them about a discipleship of service.²⁴¹⁰¹⁰ This similarity suggests that the action of the widow is relevant to the question of discipleship.

Jesus begins his statement or teaching about the widow with the phrase ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν (“Truly I say to you” or “Amen I say to you”). The Markan Jesus used this phrase earlier to introduce his prophetic saying about insulting the Holy Spirit.²⁴¹⁰²¹ It also precedes his declaration that a sign will not be given to this generation (8:12^{103*}) and his prediction that “some of those who are standing here will surely not experience death until they see that the kingdom of God has come with power” (9:1^{104*}). It also introduces the emphatic part of his promise that whoever gives a follower of Jesus a cup of water to drink will surely not lose his reward.²⁴¹⁰⁵² This phrase also introduces the saying that whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a child (would receive it) shall surely not enter into it (10:15^{106*}) and the promise “there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or farms because of me and because of the good news, etc.” (10:29^{107*}). Finally, the same phrase introduces the promise that “whoever says to this mountain, ‘Be lifted up and thrown into the sea,’ etc.” in 11:23^{108*}. All these previous occurrences of the phrase in Mark produce an expectation of an important, emphatic statement here, either a prophetic saying or a saying about discipleship.²⁴¹⁰⁹³

Jesus’ saying has two parts. The first part, “this poor widow put in more than all those who put (money) into the treasury,” is surprising and counterintuitive. The narrator has just said that many rich people put a lot of money into the treasury or collection box and that the widow put in only two coins, the two coins of the least value in Judea at the time. The second part of the saying explains and defends the first part by contrasting the rich, who gave out of their

¹⁰¹²⁴⁰ See “The Literary Context of 10:42–45” and the commentary on 10:42 above. Cf. Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, “The Poor Widow in Mark and Her Poor Rich Readers,” *CBQ* 53 (1991) 589–604; reprinted in eadem, *In the Company of Jesus*, 166–88, esp. 183; reprinted also in Levine, *Feminist Companion*, 111–27 (*In the Company of Jesus* is cited here).

¹⁰²²⁴¹ See the note on the trans. of 3:28 and the commentary on that verse above.

^{103* 12} And he sighed deeply in his spirit and said, “Why does this generation ask for a sign? Truly I tell you, no sign will be given to this generation.”

Mk 8:12 (NRSV)

^{104* 9}

¹ And he said to them, “Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see that the kingdom of God has come with^k power.”

Mk 9:1 (NRSV)

¹⁰⁵²⁴² See the trans. and the commentary on 9:41 above.

^{106* 15} Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.”

Mk 10:15 (NRSV)

^{107* 29} Jesus said, “Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields, for my sake and for the sake of the good news,^f

Mk 10:29 (NRSV)

^{108* 23} Truly I tell you, if you say to this mountain, ‘Be taken up and thrown into the sea,’ and if you do not doubt in your heart, but believe that what you say will come to pass, it will be done for you.

Mk 11:23 (NRSV)

¹⁰⁹²⁴³ Cf. Malbon, “Poor Widow,” 183–84.

abundance, with the widow, who gave out of her need. The statement in the first part of the saying, that the widow put in more than all the rest, corrects the view that the economic value is the primary thing and praises the widow for her generosity.²⁴¹¹⁰⁴

The last portion of the second part of the saying goes even further, remarking that the widow “put in everything she had, her whole livelihood.” The word translated “livelihood” here is βίος, which also has the meaning “life,” in the sense of “life and activity associated with it.”²⁴¹¹¹⁵ In Jesus’ reply to the scribe’s question about the greatest commandment, he quotes Deut 6:5^{112*}, which uses another word for life: “and you shall love the Lord your God with your whole heart and with your whole life (ἐξ ὅλης τῆς ψυχῆς σου) and with your whole mind and with your whole strength.” The word ὅλη (“whole”) also links the two passages.

The implication is that the scribe *knows* what the greatest commandment is, but the widow actually *fulfills* it.²⁴¹¹³⁶ By offering her last two coins to God (whose temple and treasury they ultimately are), she has demonstrated that she loves God “with her whole life.”

A further consideration supports this interpretation. In both Jesus’ and the scribe’s formulations, the greatest commandment includes the command to love God “with your whole strength” (ἐξ ὅλης τῆς ἰσχύος). As noted above, the word ἰσχύς (“strength”) translates the M¹¹⁴T’s דאמ (“power” or “strength”).²⁴¹¹⁵⁷ In the exegesis of Deut 6:5^{116*} in the Dead Sea Scrolls, דאמ (“power” or “strength”) is interpreted as “wealth” or “property.”²⁴¹¹⁷⁸ For members of the audience familiar with this interpretation of Deut 6:5^{118*}, the implication is that the widow has also shown that she loves God “with her whole strength,” that is, with all her property.

¹¹⁰²⁴⁴ See the discussion of Tannehill’s definition of the genre of this anecdote in the commentary on 12:41–44 above.

¹¹¹²⁴⁵ BAGD, s.v.

^{112*} ⁵ You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.
Dt 6:5 (NRSV)

¹¹³²⁴⁶ Note that the scribe, in restating the greatest commandment, omits the phrase “with your whole life.” This detail may not be accidental.

¹¹⁴ MT Masoretic Text of the Hebrew Bible

¹¹⁵²⁴⁷ See the commentary on vv. 29–30 above.

^{116*} ⁵ You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.
Dt 6:5 (NRSV)

¹¹⁷²⁴⁸ CD 9:10b–12; 1QS 1:11–15; 3:2–3; Catherine M. Murphy, *Wealth in the Dead Sea Scrolls and in the Qumran Community* (STDJ 40; Leiden: Brill, 2002) 48–49, 118–25. See also the literature cited by Foster, “Why Did Matthew Get the *Shema* Wrong?” 329. He is right that the evidence does not necessarily reflect the liturgical use of the *Shema*, but it does support the conclusion that these passages involve an interpretation of Deut 6:5*.

^{118*} ⁵ You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.
Dt 6:5 (NRSV)

The behavior of the widow is also contrasted with that of the scribes who are denounced in vv. 38–40^{119*}. She gives all, whereas they take all, they “devour the houses of widows.”²⁴¹²⁰⁹ Seim has a good discussion of the way the parallel in Luke develops the theme of the ideal or demand “of giving up possessions and realising [i.e., making use of] property for the benefit of the community” in Luke and the first part of Acts.²⁵¹²¹⁰¹²²

41–44 The scene now shifts to the temple treasury, where Jesus observes the crowd.⁶¹²³⁵ The crowd has played a slightly more positive role in Jerusalem than it did in Galilee, where it often prevented people from approaching Jesus. In Jerusalem the crowd has delighted in Jesus’ teaching (11:18; 12:37), and its sympathy for Jesus has forced the Sanhedrin to temper the expression of its antagonism (11:32; 12:12). Even in the temple “the crowd [was] putting their money into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts.”

In addition to worship, one of the most important functions of the **temple** in Jerusalem was as a depository for and the administration of vast amounts of wealth. In this respect the Jewish temple was no different from other temples in the ancient world. Unlike the other tribes of Israel, the tribe of Levi possessed no land. In place of land, the Levites were responsible for superintending the temple, which accrued great quantities of wealth in the form of dues, taxes, and donations of valuable objects and money (2 Kgs 12:4). The vessels used for sacrificial worship were required by the Torah to be made of gold or silver. In addition, there were stocks of priceless curtains and priestly garments, and virtual warehouses of flour, oil, grain, wine, incense, and other valuable products. The temple could and also did function as a repository of the wealth of individuals who deposited money there in the belief that a sacred place was a safe place. Given the financial resources and treasures of the temple, it is not surprising that the

^{119*} *Jesus Denounces the Scribes*

(Mt 23.1–7; Lk 20.45–47)

³⁸ As he taught, he said, “Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes, and to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces,

³⁹ and to have the best seats in the synagogues and places of honor at banquets!

⁴⁰ They devour widows’ houses and for the sake of appearance say long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation.”

Mk 12:38–40 (NRSV)

¹²⁰²⁴⁹ With Malbon, “Poor Widow,” 175–76; and Seim, *Double Message*, 95–96 (regarding the Lukan parallel), and contra Addison G. Wright, “The Widow’s Mites: Praise or Lament?—A Matter of Context,” *CBQ* 44 (1982) 256–65, esp. 261–62.

¹²¹²⁵⁰ Seim, *Double Message*, 77–78. Cf. 2 Cor 8:1–4*.

¹²² Adela Yarbro Collins and Harold W. Attridge, [*Mark: A Commentary on the Gospel of Mark*](#), *Hermeneia—A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2007), 586–590.

¹²³⁶⁵ Among a plethora of minor textual variations related to Jesus sitting opposite the temple treasury, two manuscripts (W Θ) have him “*standing* opposite the temple treasury,” evidently to heighten the reverence of his position, in accordance with the Jewish custom of standing for prayer. The textual evidence for his sitting is far superior.

officer in charge of its administration, the *gazophylax*, was, according to Josephus, second in importance only to the chief priest.⁶¹²⁴⁶

The “temple treasury” of 12:41 was located in the Court of the Women, the first enclosure of the sanctuary in which Jewish women and children were allowed to worship (Josephus, *Ant*¹²⁵. 19.294). The Mishnah (*m. Sheq*¹²⁶. 6:5) reports that there were thirteen Shofar-chests in the temple, each dedicated to a special offering.⁶¹²⁷⁷ These trumpetlike receptacles were, as their name suggests, shaped like a Shofar or ram’s horn, and positioned with the tapered end upward in order to prevent theft. Into one of these receptacles (perhaps one of the latter designated for freewill offerings) “a poor widow” deposits “two lepta” (v. 42), the smallest coinage in circulation.⁶¹²⁸⁸ The NI¹²⁹V glosses over the fact that Mark converts the sum into the equivalent of a Roman coin, a *quadrans*, for the benefit of his Roman readers. Jesus could have known the amount of the woman’s offering in various ways. In cases where a contribution was rendered for priestly service, the attending priest examined the currency for genuineness, inquired of the purpose of the gift, and verified that the contribution corresponded to the prescribed sacrifice. The priest then directed the worshiper to deposit the amount in the appropriate receptacle. All this was spoken aloud and would have been audible to bystanders. If, however, the gift were a simple freewill offering, perhaps the appearance of the woman betrayed her poverty, or, more likely, the sound of the coin in the treasure chest tolled the size of her gift.⁶¹³⁰⁹

Mark’s description of the scene accentuates the poverty and insignificance of the widow and her gift. The scribes are ostentatious and prepossessing, and the crowds are rich and extravagant; but by contrast this “one poor widow” contributes two of the smallest coins in circulation.⁷¹³¹⁰ In purely financial terms, the value of her offering is negligible—and unworthy of compare to the sums of the wealthy donors. But in the divine exchange rate things look differently. That which made no difference in the books of the temple is immortalized in the

¹²⁴⁶⁶ On the temple treasury, see Schürer, *History of the Jewish People*, 2.279–87.

¹²⁵ *Ant.* Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*

¹²⁶ *m. Sheq. Sheqalim*, Mishnah

¹²⁷⁶⁷ New Shekel dues, Old Shekel dues, Bird-offerings, Young birds for the whole offering, Wood, Frankincense, Gold for the Mercy-seat, and the remaining six were for Freewill-offerings (*m. Sheq.* 6:5). On the particular purposes of each offering, see Str-B 2.38–40.

¹²⁸⁶⁸ A denarius was the standard wage for a day’s labor (Matt 20:8–10); a lepton was $1/64$ th of a denarius.

¹²⁹ NIV New International Version

¹³⁰⁶⁹ For a discussion of temple offerings, see Str-B 2.37–46. Some commentators suggest that the widow’s offering was originally a parable of Jesus, following *Lev. Rab.* 3:5: “A woman once brought a handful of flour for an offering. The priest rejected the offering and said, ‘Look what this woman brings! How can such an offering qualify as a sacrifice or provide a priest enough to live on?’ Then the priest was warned in a dream, ‘Do not despise her, for she is like a person who has sacrificed her whole life’ ” (cited in Str-B 2.46). The likeness notwithstanding, there is no further evidence that the widow’s offering was originally a parable.

¹³¹⁷⁰ On the contrast between the scribes and the widow, see G. Smith, “A Closer Look at the Widow’s Offering: Mark 12:41–44,” *JETS* 40 (1997): 30–31.

Book of Life. Jesus prefaces his pronouncement on the widow's gift with solemn authority: He "summoned" (Gk. *proskaleesthai*) the disciples, saying " 'I tell you the truth' " (Gk. *Amēn legō hymin*, v. 43), this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others, for they gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on.' "⁷¹³²¹ How powerfully ironic is the word "more" in Mark's description. Everything about this woman has been described in terms of *less*, particularly in comparison to the scribes and wealthy crowd. And yet, the contrast between her genuine piety and faith and the pretense of the wealthy is beyond compare.

For Jesus, the value of a gift is not the amount given, but the cost to the giver. That point will be repeated in the story of the woman in 14:3–9 who gives an extravagant gift of perfume: the value of her gift is light years greater than the two lepta of the poor widow here; yet, remarkably, each is equally praised by Jesus for doing what they could. Their generosity and sacrifice, if not their respective amounts, are the same.⁷¹³³² In the temple, others gave what they could spare, but the poor widow spared nothing. Others gave from their surplus, but she gave from her need, " 'all she had to live on.' "

The nameless widow concludes Mark's account of Jesus' public ministry. The sacrifice of " 'all she had' " is the keystone in Mark's arch of faith. The initial call of Jesus to the fishermen beside the sea to leave all and " 'Come, follow me' " (1:17) is perfectly fulfilled in the giving of two simple lepta, which symbolize an undivided heart. This widow's selfless act is not showcased primarily for its moral value, exposing the gulf between her humble piety and the pretense of the scribes, or to unmask tests and traps of the Sanhedrin, although it does that.⁷¹³⁴³ Rather, as v. 43 reveals ("Summoning *his disciples*"), the chief purpose of the widow is as a model of discipleship. No gift, whether of money, time, or talent, is too insignificant to give, if it is given to God. And what is truly given to God, regardless how small and insignificant, is transformed into a pearl of great price. What may look like a great gift, conversely, may in reality be little in comparison with what one *could* give. The widow's giving " 'all she had' " is a true fulfillment of the call to discipleship to follow Jesus by losing one's life (8:35). The final Greek words of the chapter might be paraphrased, "she lay down her whole life." That is what Jesus will do on Golgotha.¹³⁵

¹³²⁷¹ Compare the saying of Rabbi Jonathan, "He that fulfills the Law in poverty shall in the end fulfill it in wealth; and he that neglects the Law in wealth shall in the end neglect it in poverty" (*m. Avot* 4:9).

¹³³⁷² See Hooker, *The Gospel According to Saint Mark*, 296.

¹³⁴⁷³ Examples can be found in both Judaism (see n. 71[†] above) and Hellenism praising the piety of the poor over that of the rich. Euripides writes: "Often I see that poor people are more wise than the rich, and with their own hands offer small gifts to the gods and [one sees in them] more piety than those who bring oxen to sacrifice" (*Danae Fragment* 329; cited in *HCNT*, 178). For further examples, see E. Klostermann, *Das Markusevangelium*, 130).

¹³⁵ James R. Edwards, [The Gospel according to Mark](#), *The Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: Eerdmans; Apollos, 2002), 379–382.

This pronouncement story is linked to the preceding by the common word “widow” in vv. 40, 42, the common location in the temple, and the contrast between the greed of the scribes and the generosity of the widow. The last of these is another example of Mark’s contrast between the leaders who rejected Jesus and the common people who accepted him.

Most commentators praise the beauty of the story and acknowledge that it is in accord with all that is known about Jesus’ character. Some, however, doubt its historicity because of the improbability that Jesus could know how much the woman gave, that it was all her livelihood, that she was a widow, and because similar stories exist in Jewish and pagan literature. As for Jesus’ inability to know, certainly he was subject to most of the limitations of all human beings, but this consideration does not rule out the possibility that on certain occasions he was given unusual insight. The real question is not whether he had some supernatural knowledge but whether he was in fact Son of God as Mark claimed. A keenly observant person, which Jesus certainly was to have spoken the parables he did, could with a large amount of confidence have determined the particulars.

12:41 The “treasury” appears to have been located in the court of women and appears to have consisted of thirteen trumpet-shaped receptacles for both the temple tax and money given voluntarily for various purposes.²¹³⁶³

12:42 The “two very small copper coins” were two *lepta* (so the Greek text). The *lepton* was the smallest coin in circulation in Palestine and was worth 1/64 of a *denarius*, a day’s wages for a common laborer. It was not in circulation in the western part of the Roman Empire, where Mark apparently wrote. Therefore he explained that two *lepta* had the same value as a *kodrantēs*, the Greek transliteration of the Latin *quadrans*, which was a coin familiar to his readers/hearers. (The statement “which is a *quadrans*” is obscured by the NI¹³⁷V’s “worth only a fraction of a penny.” A similar obfuscation appears in most translations because most modern readers have no knowledge of ancient coins or their values.)

12:43–44 Jesus indicated that the thing of most importance is not how much is given but the extent to which the gift is a sacrificial one. Or to put it another way, the most significant thing is not how much is given but how much is left for one’s personal use after the gift. A major element of Jesus’ teaching is that attitude is more important than action. The widow’s total giving demonstrates an attitude of absolute trust in God.

Quite different is the interpretation that claims the widow was guilty of imprudence and that Jesus could not have commended her. Rather he condemned a system that permitted widows to be destitute and perhaps even made them destitute by pressuring them to give all they had. The same kind of extravagance, however, is commended in 14:6. There was so much poverty in ancient Palestine that the authorities could do little about it. The commendation of the widow does not imply that every disciple should give away everything.

¹³⁶²³ “There were thirteen Shofar-chests in the Temple, whereon was inscribed: ‘New Shekel dues,’ ‘Old Shekel dues,’ ‘Bird-offerings,’ ‘Young birds for the Whole offering,’ ‘Wood,’ ‘Frankincense,’ ‘Gold for the Mercy-seat,’ and, on six of them, ‘Freewill-offerings’ ” (*m. Šeqal.* 6.5, trans. Danby).

¹³⁷NIV *New International Version*

The expression “calling his disciples to him” indicates that the teaching was intended for them and for all subsequent disciples. They too were to be generous in the extreme but without any ostentatiousness. In various ways they were to give their all as the widow did. But there is an additional lesson in the account. The sacrificial gift of the widow points to the sacrificial gift of Jesus. She gave her entire livelihood; he gave his very life. As Paul put it, “You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich” (2 Cor 8:9). Therefore the account functions as a transition to the passion narrative in chaps. 14–15. With this beautiful story Mark ended his account of Jesus’ public ministry.¹³⁸

b. Jesus’ commendation of a widow’s commitment to God (12:41–44) (Luke 21:1–4).

12:41–42. From the court of the Gentiles (cf. 11:15) where He conducted His public teaching, **Jesus** entered the court of the women. Against the wall of this court were 13 trumpet-shaped collection receptacles for receiving worshipers’ freewill **offerings** and contributions (Mishnah *Shekalim* 6. 5).

From a vantage point **opposite** (*katenanti*; cf. comments on 11:2) one of these receptacles Jesus was observing how (*pōs*, “in what way”) the Passover **crowd** was **putting their money into the temple treasury** (lit., “the receptacle”).

In contrast with **many** wealthy **people** who gave **large amounts** (lit., “many coins” of all kinds—gold, silver, copper, and bronze), one unnamed **poor widow** gave **two lepta** (Gr.). A *lepton* was the smallest bronze Jewish coin in circulation in Palestine. Two *lepta* were worth 1/64 of a Roman denarius, a day’s wage for a laborer (cf. 6:37). For his Roman readers Mark stated their value in terms of Roman coinage, namely, **a fraction of a penny**.

12:43–44. With solemn introductory words (**I tell you the truth**; cf. 3:28) **Jesus said** that she had given **more ... than all the others**. The reason was (*gar*, “for, because”) the others **gave out of their material wealth** at little cost to them, **but** the widow **out of her poverty gave everything**. Proportionally she had given the most—**all she had to live on**. In giving to God sacrificially she completely entrusted herself to Him to provide her needs.

She could have kept back one coin for herself. A Rabbinic rule stating that an offering of less than two *lepta* was not acceptable related to charitable gifts and does not apply here. Jesus used her example to teach His disciples the value God places on wholehearted commitment. Their own commitment to Jesus would soon be severely tested (cf. 14:27–31). This incident also illustrates Jesus’ total self-giving in death.¹³⁹

¹³⁸ James A. Brooks, *Mark*, vol. 23, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1991), 202–204.

¹³⁹ John D. Grassmick, “*Mark*,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 165–166.

Form/Structure/Setting

Form critics have designated the story of the widow's offering a pronouncement story or biographical apophthegm (Bultmann, *History*, 32–33; Dibelius, *Tradition*, 261; Taylor, *Formation*, 72). Dibelius speculates that Jesus' pronouncement might originally have been part of a parable about a poor widow. But there is no need to imagine any other form or setting than the one presented in Mark. Bultmann comments that Mark 12:41–44 parallels a story in Buddhist tradition so closely that "it is difficult to avoid concluding that there was some dependence on it" (*History*, 33). But as Bultmann himself acknowledges, stories contrasting the gifts of the rich and poor are common in the Middle East of late antiquity. Bultmann's idea of dependence on a Buddhist story is farfetched and unnecessary. Lührmann's (212) suggestion that underlying the story of the widow's offering is competition between church and synagogue regarding which community cared most for widows is purely speculative and reads nuances into the story that are not present. Haenchen (432–33) doubts the historicity of the story on the grounds that Jesus would not have been able to see the respective amounts of the gifts. Like Dibelius (whom Haenchen does not cite), he thinks that "a parable of Jesus has been transformed into a historical event" (433). But the observation of gifts by treasury attendants and onlookers is noted in rabbinic tradition and is probably implied in Jesus' criticisms of those who "sound [a] trumpet before them" when they give alms (Matt 6:2).

The story of the widow's offering follows right on the heels of the denunciation of the scribes who "devour the estates of widows" (Mark 12:38–40). The context of the widow's offering suggests, therefore, that it is an example of the very thing that Jesus warned about: the οἰκία, "house," or estate of the poor widow has finally been consumed. But Gundry (728) sees a contrast between the "true godliness of a widow" and the "pretended righteousness of the scribes." The point, if we expand on Gundry's approach, lies in the contrast between the scribes, on the one hand, whose religiosity is selfish and avaricious, and the poor widow, on the other hand, whose religiosity is generous, even to the point of self-denial and hardship. That there is implicit such a contrast cannot be denied. But the reference to widows in 12:38–40 has to do with the scribes' exploitation of these defenseless persons. Is the point then really to provide a contrast between the self-righteous scribe and the devoted widow? Or is the point to provide a tragic example of how the scribes have indeed consumed the poor? This question will be pursued further in the *Comment*.

Comment

The touching story of the widow's offering has often been cited in literature, sermons, and Bible lessons as providing an exemplary model of sacrificial giving. Many commentators have taken the passage in this sense, as most recently has Gundry. But the interpretation offered by A. G. Wright (*CB*¹⁴⁰Q 44 [1982] 256–65), which Gundry (730–31) questions but Fitzmyer (*Luke* 2:1320–21) accepts, to the effect that Jesus' word was not one of praise but one of lament, is in my opinion correct. Fitzmyer joins Wright in criticizing the traditional interpretation for assuming facts not in evidence. Fitzmyer reminds us that in Mark Jesus asserts that human needs take precedence over religiosity (as seen in 3:1–5 [healing on Sabbath], 7:10–13 [the qorban tradition, by which elderly parents may be denied support from their adult children], and 12:28–34 [where loving God and neighbor is worth more than burnt offerings]). He concludes: "Given such a reaction of Jesus in other parts of the Marcan Gospel, would the Marcan Jesus become enthusiastic about and praise the widow's contribution, when it involves 'all that she had to live on'? The Corban-saying seems to set limits to the interpretation of Jesus' words in this episode" (*Luke* 2:1321). With the Markan context in mind, Wright (*CB*¹⁴¹Q 44 [1982] 262) says: "Her religious thinking has accomplished the very thing that the scribes were accused of doing.... She has been taught and encouraged by religious leaders to donate as she does, and Jesus condemns the value system that motivates her action."

There is also a potentially significant parallel to our story in a later rabbinic tradition. In some ways it might offer support for Wright's line of interpretation. Jesus' comment that the widow has cast into the treasury box "her whole life [βίον]" finds an interesting parallel in an anonymous midrash: "Once a woman brought a handful of fine flour, and the priest despised her, saying: 'See what she offers! What is there in this to eat? What is there in this to offer up?' It was shown to him in a dream: 'Do not despise her! It is regarded as if she had sacrificed her own life [הַנַּפְשׁוֹת *napsot*]' " (*Lev. Rab.* 3.5 [on Lev 1:17]). What is of interest here is not the exegetical point that this midrash is trying to make (that in offering a sacrifice one offers one's "life") but rather that the midrash presupposes that priests on occasion viewed small gifts with contempt. (The "handful of fine flour" in the midrash approximates the value of the two lepta brought to the temple in Mark's story.) Such an attitude is consistent with the thinking of the ruling priests with whom Jesus contended and against whom many of his contemporaries complained (for a summary of the evidence of ancient criticism directed against the temple establishment, see *Comment* on 11:15–19). If the rabbinic story ultimately derives from an ancient tradition, then Jesus may have deliberately and ironically alluded to it. In giving her last two lepta, the woman has indeed given her life! Given the Markan context, both the immediate context and the larger context of his Gospel as a whole, and given the rabbinic parallel just considered, it seems appropriate to accept Wright's interpretation.

41 καὶ καθίσας κατέναντι τοῦ γαζοφυλακίου ἐθεώρει πῶς ὁ ὄχλος βάλλει χαλκὸν εἰς τὸ γαζοφυλάκιον, "And taking a seat opposite the treasury, he was watching how the crowd casts money into the offering box." The temple's γαζοφυλάκιον, "treasury," and various chambers are mentioned in several early texts (Neh 12:44; Josephus, *J.W.* 5.5.2 §200; 6.5.2 §282; 1 Macc 14:49; 2 Macc 3:6, 24, 28, 40). According to the Mishnah there were thirteen trumpet-shaped receptacles into which people could cast money (*m. Šeq.* 6:5). Some of these receptacles were

¹⁴⁰*CBQ Catholic Biblical Quarterly*

¹⁴¹*CBQ Catholic Biblical Quarterly*

designated for specific purposes; others were used for “freewill offerings.” It could very well be that the widow pitched her coins into the latter. χαλκός, “money,” actually refers to the metal itself (i.e., copper, brass, or bronze; cf. Josephus, *Ant.* 8.3.4 §76, in reference to workers “in gold, silver, and bronze”). It would be much like slang a century ago in referring to a “copper.”

καὶ πολλοὶ πλούσιοι ἔβαλλον πολλά, “and many wealthy people were casting in large sums.” Josephus, as well as Roman historians, remarks on the immense wealth of the Jerusalem temple. Many of those donating large sums were wealthy landowners who lived in or near Jerusalem; others were Jewish businessmen and merchants of the Diaspora who had journeyed to Jerusalem for the Passover holiday.

42 καὶ ἐλθοῦσα μία χήρα πτωχή, “and approaching, a poor widow.” Might the reference to the widow remind Mark’s astute readers of Jeremiah’s complaints against the temple establishment of his day, in which, among other things, widows and orphans were neglected and denied justice (cf. Jer 7:6, as well as *Comment* on Mark 11:15–19)? The reference will, of course, cause the reader to recall the previous pericope where Jesus accuses the scribes of devouring the houses of widows.

ἔβαλεν λεπτὰ δύο, ὃ ἐστὶν κοδράντης, “cast in two small coins, which make a penny.” Mark’s two “small coins” are λεπτά (s¹⁴²g. λεπτόν, a loanword from the Latin *lepton*). The evangelist says that the two lepta equaled a κοδράντης (also a loanword from the Latin *quadrans*), which is probably correct. It took more than one hundred lepta to equal a denarius, itself worth a day’s wage. It has been said that two lepta could buy one a handful of flour or the equivalent of one meager meal (regarding this point, see *Comment* above).

43 καὶ προσκαλεσάμενος τοὺς μαθητὰς αὐτοῦ εἶπεν αὐτοῖς, “and summoning his disciples, he said to them.” Often in Mark Jesus summons his disciples (3:13; 6:7; 8:1; 10:42), sometimes for the express purpose of teaching (cf. 3:23; 7:14; 8:34). On Jesus as teacher in Mark, see *Comment* on 12:35.

ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν ὅτι ἡ χήρα αὕτη ἡ πτωχή πλεῖον πάντων ἔβαλεν τῶν βαλλόντων εἰς τὸ γαζοφυλάκιον, “Truly I tell you that this poor widow has cast in more money than all who cast money into the offering box.” Prefacing his statement with ἀμὴν, “truly,” heightens the importance of the pronouncement. On Jesus’ use of ἀμὴν, see *Comment* on 9:1. The reference to ἡ χήρα αὕτη ἡ πτωχή, “this widow, the poor one,” in which the adjective is delayed, emphasizes her poverty. How did Jesus know she was a widow? The most probable answer is that he could tell by her dress (cf. Luke 7:11–19, where the grieving mother is readily recognized as a widow).

44 πάντες γὰρ ἐκ τοῦ περισσεύοντος αὐτοῖς ἔβαλον, αὕτη δὲ ἐκ τῆς ὑστερήσεως αὐτῆς πάντα ὅσα εἶχεν ἔβαλεν ὅλον τὸν βίον αὐτῆς, “For all of them have cast in money from their abundance, but she from her want has cast in all that she has—her whole life.” The contrast between the wealthy people’s περισσεύοντος, “abundance,” and the poor widow’s ὑστερήσεως, “want,” is noteworthy. The word translated “abundance” can also mean “surplus,” while the word translated “want” can also mean “lack” or “deficiency.” In other words, the woman had nothing extra. She had no margin from which she could contribute to the temple. Unlike the wealthy, whose gifts would not be missed and would not cause for them any hardship or discomfort, the widow’s gift took food right out of her mouth.

¹⁴²sg singular

How did Jesus know that the two lepta that she gave to the temple represented the last of the widow's resources? It is probable that her attire, which in itself indicated her status as a widow, made it sadly apparent that she was impoverished. It is not necessary to insist that Jesus was clairvoyant in this instance. Given her status as a widow and given her apparent poverty, as seen by her clothing and the smallness of her gift, Jesus may have only assumed that the two coins were all that she had left. Jesus' words could also be viewed as hyperbolic.

Explanation

The story of the widow's offering may provide us with an important clue for understanding the points of disagreement between Jesus and the temple establishment. In the law of Moses widows and orphans enjoyed an important measure of economic and legal protection. At Sinai Israel was commanded not to "afflict any widow or orphan" (Exod 22:22). Legislation in defense of widows and orphans was expanded and intensified in Deuteronomy. In this restatement of the covenant God describes himself as one who "executes justice for the fatherless and the widow" (Deut 10:18). Therefore, human judges must deal justly with the marginalized (cf. Deut 24:17; 27:19). Part of this justice meant that widows and orphans were to partake of the tithes (Deut 14:29; 26:12–13) and to enjoy special gleaning privileges (Deut 24:19–21). Partaking of the tithes was to be shared along with the Levites.

Were widows and orphans in Jesus' time receiving the full protection and privileges commanded in the law of Moses? The Damascus Document has what could be a very important passage in which the sons of the covenant are to "separate themselves from the sons of the Pit, and to keep themselves from the unclean riches of wickedness (acquired) through vow or anathema and by robbing the wealth of the Sanctuary, (and not) 'to rob the poor of his people that widows may be their spoil and that they might murder the fatherless' [Isa 10:2]" (C¹⁴³D 6:14–17 = 4Q266 [= 4QD^a] 3 iii 7–9). These angry criticisms appear to be leveled against the Jerusalem priesthood. The quotation from Isa 10 is significant, for vv 1–4 of this text make up an oracle of judgment against Israel's leaders who pass decrees that oppress widows and orphans. Note too that the reference to "vow or anathema" is closely related to the qorban tradition, of which Jesus was critical (see above). Elsewhere fragments of the Damascus Document from cave 4 speak of widows who prostitute themselves after they are widowed (cf. 4Q270 [= 4QD^e] 5 19 = 4Q271 [= 4QD^f] 1 i 12). Perhaps from this we should infer that some widows turned to prostitution out of economic desperation. The parable of the Dishonest Judge (Luke 18:1–8a) may presuppose a callous indifference to widows' cries for justice. That the ruling priests might have neglected their legal and ethical obligations to protect and provide for widows seems probable in view of their shabby treatment of fellow Levites and lower-ranking priests (for whom the Mosaic laws, as observed above, provided assistance similar to that provided orphans and widows). According to Josephus, some ruling priests sent thugs to rob the lower-ranking priests of their fair share of the tithes and to beat those who resisted (*Ant.* 20.8.8 §181; 20.9.2 §§206–7). The rabbis remember and pass on related stories (*t. Menah.* 13.18–22; *b. Pesah.* 57a). If the ruling priests treated their lower-ranking colleagues so poorly and disregarded the spirit, if not the letter, of the law as it applied to them, why would they have

¹⁴³CD Cairo (Genizah text of the) Damascus (Document)

paid any attention to widows? One should recall too how the rebels in 66 c.e. burned the house of the High Priest Ananias and then set fire to the public archives in order to destroy the records of debt (Josephus, *J.W.* 2.17.6 §§426–27).

Jesus apparently has taken up the cause of the marginalized, and widows were among the most marginalized in his society. Evidently he has leveled a prophetic complaint against the religious establishment for failing to live up to its Mosaic obligations. He has warned of the scribes whose religion devours the poor and enriches themselves. He has pointed to the poor widow who cast her last tiny coins into the temple's coffers as an example of one such person who has been consumed. We have here an important remnant of Jesus' criticisms against the temple establishment and what motivated them. In the next passage (Mark 13:1–2) Jesus will prophesy the dreadful result, to which this oppressive policy will inevitably lead.¹⁴⁴

JESUS' COMMENDATION OF THE WIDOW'S OFFERING

41–44. *The day closes with a scene in the treasury of the temple. Jesus is watching the multitude casting their offerings into the trumpet-shaped mouths of this receptacle, and among them many rich men casting in much. But there is one poor widow, who casts in two small coins, worth about a third of a cent, and Jesus commends her as having given more than all the rest. They, he says, gave out of their excess; she, out of her lack, gave all her living.*

41. Καὶ καθίσας κατέναντι τοῦ γαζοφαλκίου—*And having taken a seat over against the treasury.*

¹⁴⁴ Craig A. Evans, [Mark 8:27–16:20](#), vol. 34B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2001), 281–285.

Omit ὁ Ἰησοῦς, Tisch¹⁴⁵. Treg¹⁴⁶. WH¹⁴⁷. RV¹⁴⁸. ¹⁴⁹ⲭ ¹⁵⁰B¹⁵¹L ¹⁵²Δ two *mss.* Lat. Vet¹⁵³. Memph¹⁵⁴..

γαζοφυλακίου—*treasury*.¹⁵⁵¹ The treasury meant is probably that in the outer court of the temple, having thirteen openings shaped like trumpets, for the reception of temple offerings and of gifts for the poor. χαλκὸν—literally, *brass*, but, like the Latin *œs*, a general word for all money. ἔβαλλον—*were casting*, denoting the repeated act.

42. μία χήρα—*one widow*; contrasted with the many rich. δύο λεπτά, ὃ ἐστὶ κοδράντης—the λεπτόν was the eighth part of an as, the value of which was one and two-thirds cents, so that two λεπτά were about two-fifths of a cent. κοδράντης is the Latin word *quadrans*, meaning a quarter of an as. But the real value appears only from the fact that the denarius, or ten asses, was a day's wages.

43. εἶπεν αὐτοῖς, Ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν, ὅτι ἡ χήρα αὕτη ἡ πτωχὴ πλεῖον πάντων ἔβαλεν τῶν βαλλόντων εἰς τὸ γαζοφυλάκιον—*said to them, Verily I say to you, that this poor widow cast in more than all who are casting into the treasury.*

¹⁴⁵Tisch. Tischendorf.

¹⁴⁶Treg. Tregelles.

¹⁴⁷WH. Westcott and Hort.

¹⁴⁸RV. Revised Version.

¹⁴⁹ⲭ *Codex Sinaiticus*.

¹⁵⁰B *Codex Vaticanus*.

¹⁵¹L *Codex Regius*.

¹⁵²Δ *Codex Sangallensis*

¹⁵³Lat. Vet. *Vetus Latina*.

¹⁵⁴Memph. Memphitic.

¹⁵⁵¹ A Scriptural word, of which the first part is a Persian word for treasure.

εἶπεν, instead of λέγει, Tisch¹⁵⁶. Treg¹⁵⁷. WH¹⁵⁸. RV¹⁵⁹. 160^Ⲱ 161^A 162^B 163^D 164^Κ 165^L 166^U 167^Δ 168^Π,
two mss. Lat. Vet¹⁶⁹. Egyptt¹⁷⁰. Syrr¹⁷¹. ἔβαλεν, instead of βέβληκε, Treg¹⁷². WH¹⁷³. RV¹⁷⁴. 175^{Ⲱ^c}

¹⁵⁶Tisch. Tischendorf.

¹⁵⁷Treg. Tregelles.

¹⁵⁸WH. Westcott and Hort.

¹⁵⁹RV. Revised Version.

¹⁶⁰Ⲱ *Codex Sinaiticus*.

¹⁶¹A *Codex Alexandrinus*.

¹⁶²B *Codex Vaticanus*.

¹⁶³D *Codex Bezae*.

¹⁶⁴Κ *Codex Cyprius*.

¹⁶⁵L *Codex Regius*.

¹⁶⁶U *Codex Nanianus*.

¹⁶⁷Δ *Codex Sangallensis*

¹⁶⁸Π *Codex Petropolitianus*

¹⁶⁹Lat. Vet. *Vetus Latina*.

¹⁷⁰Egyptt. Egyptian Versions.

¹⁷¹Syrr. Syriac Versions.

¹⁷²Treg. Tregelles.

¹⁷³WH. Westcott and Hort.

¹⁷⁴RV. Revised Version.

¹⁷⁵Ⲱ *Codex Sinaiticus*.

(¹⁷⁶κ* ἔβαλλεν) ¹⁷⁷A ¹⁷⁸B ¹⁷⁹D ¹⁸⁰L ¹⁸¹Δ ³ ¹⁸²3 βαλλόντων, instead of βαλόντων, Tisch¹⁸³. Treg¹⁸⁴.
WH¹⁸⁵. RV¹⁸⁶. ¹⁸⁷κ ¹⁸⁸A ¹⁸⁹B ¹⁹⁰D ¹⁹¹L ¹⁹²Χ ¹⁹³Γ ¹⁹⁴Δ ¹⁹⁵Π.

... πλεῖον πάντων ἔβαλεν τῶν βαλλόντων—*cast in more than all who are casting*. This is a case where the use of the comp., instead of the superl., is misleading, as the superl. means *most of them all*, whereas the comp. strictly means *more than all together*.

44. ὑστερήσεως—This expression is the exact opposite of περισσεύοντος, one meaning *more than enough*, and the other *less than enough; excess and deficiency*. RV¹⁹⁶. *superfluity and want*. ὅλον τὸν βίον—*all her living, her resources*. The idea of περισσευέοντος is that they did not trench on their resources, but gave a part only of what they had over and above that, while the poor widow gave all her resources. Hence, while the real value of their gifts was many times greater than hers, the ideal value of hers was the greatest of them all. Money values are not the standard of gifts in the kingdom of God, but only these ideal values. It is only as the gift measures the moral value of the giver, that it counts with him who looks at the heart.

It is noticeable that Mk. closes his account of this stormy scene in the Temple with this idyl. The connection is not the verbal and superficial relation to the *widows* of v. 40, but the contrast between the outward meagreness and inward richness of the widow's service, and the outward ostentation and inward barrenness of the Pharisees' religion.¹⁹⁷

¹⁷⁶κ *Codex Sinaiticus*.

¹⁷⁷A *Codex Alexandrinus*.

¹⁷⁸B *Codex Vaticanus*.

¹⁷⁹D *Codex Bezae*.

¹⁸⁰L *Codex Regius*.

¹⁸¹Δ *Codex Sangallensis*

¹⁸²33 *Codex Regius*.

¹⁸³Tisch. Tischendorf.

¹⁸⁴Treg. Tregelles.

¹⁸⁵WH. Westcott and Hort.

¹⁸⁶RV. Revised Version.

¹⁸⁷κ *Codex Sinaiticus*.

¹⁸⁸A *Codex Alexandrinus*.

¹⁸⁹B *Codex Vaticanus*.

¹⁹⁰D *Codex Bezae*.

¹⁹¹L *Codex Regius*.

¹⁹²Χ *Codex Wolfi A*.

¹⁹³Γ *Codex Tischendorfianus*

¹⁹⁴Δ *Codex Sangallensis*

¹⁹⁵Π *Codex Petropolitanus*

¹⁹⁶RV. Revised Version.

¹⁹⁷ Ezra Palmer Gould, [*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to St. Mark*](#), International Critical Commentary (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1922), 238–239.

5. The Widow's Gift (12:41–44)

⁴¹ Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts. ⁴² But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a fraction of a penny.

⁴³ Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. ⁴⁴ They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on."

This pronouncement story is linked to the preceding by the common word "widow" in vv. 40, 42, the common location in the temple, and the contrast between the greed of the scribes and the generosity of the widow. The last of these is another example of Mark's contrast between the leaders who rejected Jesus and the common people who accepted him.

Most commentators praise the beauty of the story and acknowledge that it is in accord with all that is known about Jesus' character. Some, however, doubt its historicity because of the improbability that Jesus could know how much the woman gave, that it was all her livelihood, that she was a widow, and because similar stories exist in Jewish and pagan literature. As for Jesus' inability to know, certainly he was subject to most of the limitations of all human beings, but this consideration does not rule out the possibility that on certain occasions he was given unusual insight. The real question is not whether he had some supernatural knowledge but whether he was in fact Son of God as Mark claimed. A keenly observant person, which Jesus certainly was to have spoken the parables he did, could with a large amount of confidence have determined the particulars.

12:41 The “treasury” appears to have been located in the court of women and appears to have consisted of thirteen trumpet-shaped receptacles for both the temple tax and money given voluntarily for various purposes.²¹⁹⁸³

12:42 The “two very small copper coins” were two *lepta* (so the Greek text). The *lepton* was the smallest coin in circulation in Palestine and was worth 1/64 of a *denarius*, a day’s wages for a common laborer. It was not in circulation in the western part of the Roman Empire, where Mark apparently wrote. Therefore he explained that two *lepta* had the same value as a *kodrantēs*, the Greek transliteration of the Latin *quadrans*, which was a coin familiar to his readers/hearers. (The statement “which is a *quadrans*” is obscured by the NIV’s “worth only a fraction of a penny.” A similar obfuscation appears in most translations because most modern readers have no knowledge of ancient coins or their values.)

12:43–44 Jesus indicated that the thing of most importance is not how much is given but the extent to which the gift is a sacrificial one. Or to put it another way, the most significant thing is not how much is given but how much is left for one’s personal use after the gift. A major element of Jesus’ teaching is that attitude is more important than action. The widow’s total giving demonstrates an attitude of absolute trust in God.

Quite different is the interpretation that claims the widow was guilty of imprudence and that Jesus could not have commended her. Rather he condemned a system that permitted widows to be destitute and perhaps even made them destitute by pressuring them to give all they had. The same kind of extravagance, however, is commended in 14:6. There was so much poverty in ancient Palestine that the authorities could do little about it. The commendation of the widow does not imply that every disciple should give away everything.

The expression “calling his disciples to him” indicates that the teaching was intended for them and for all subsequent disciples. They too were to be generous in the extreme but without any ostentatiousness. In various ways they were to give their all as the widow did. But there is an additional lesson in the account. The sacrificial gift of the widow points to the sacrificial gift of Jesus. She gave her entire livelihood; he gave his very life. As Paul put it, “You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich” (2 Cor 8:9). Therefore the account functions as a transition to the passion narrative in chaps. 14–15. With this beautiful story Mark ended his account of Jesus’ public ministry.²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁸²³ “There were thirteen Shofar-chests in the Temple, whereon was inscribed: ‘New Shekel dues,’ ‘Old Shekel dues,’ ‘Bird-offerings,’ ‘Young birds for the Whole offering,’ ‘Wood,’ ‘Frankincense,’ ‘Gold for the Mercy-seat,’ and, on six of them, ‘Freewill-offerings’ ” (*m. Šeqal.* 6.5, trans. Danby).

¹⁹⁹ NIV *New International Version*

²⁰⁰ James A. Brooks, *Mark*, vol. 23, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1991), 202–204.

40 The nominatives οἱ κατεσθίοντες ... καὶ ... προσευχόμενοι do not relate syntactically with the preceding sentence, where the scribes appeared in the genitive, but since no main verb appears before λήμψονται, which has its own subject οὗτοι, they are probably to be taken as a *constructio ad sensum* after the lengthy description of the scribes' ambitions has left the genitive noun and participle on which they depended so far behind.¹⁰²⁰¹⁵ In that case the subjects of these participles are not a new group, or even a subgroup of the scribes, but must still be the scribes in general.

The vulnerability of widows is a recurrent theme in biblical literature,¹⁰²⁰²⁶ so that to defraud them is particularly despicable. κατεσθίοντες τὰς οἰκίας is a vivid phrase for taking material advantage of them (like our 'eat someone out of house and home'); cf. καταφαγών σου τὸν βίον (Lk. 15:30).¹⁰²⁰³⁷ How the scribes were alleged to do this can be only a matter of speculation. It could be through excessive legal fees, through mismanaging to their own advantage an estate of which they were made trustees,¹⁰²⁰⁴⁸ through taking their houses as pledges for unpayable debts, through promoting the temple cult which 'eats up' the resources of the pious poor,¹⁰²⁰⁵⁹ or more generally through exploiting their hospitality and trust.¹¹²⁰⁶⁰ The following clause καὶ προφάσει μακρὰ προσευχόμενοι is closely linked with the 'eating up' of their houses, and προφάσει would naturally describe the fraudulent means by which it is achieved. In that case the reference could be to the sort of payment for the prayers of a

²⁰¹¹⁰⁵ N. Turner, *Grammar*, 317, includes this in his list of 'excusable solecisms'! The alternative construction, taking the nominative participles as beginning a new sentence with 'a *casus pendens* followed by resumptive οὗτοι' (Cranfield; similarly Gundry, 720, 727; several commentators assume this construction, but not most versions, except REB) results in a very awkward sentence, and one which reads as a *non sequitur* if the subject intended is not the same as in vv. 38–39; this sense would in any case need some indication of change of subject such as δέ. If, on the other hand, the subject is the same, the choice of explanation as to the grammatical construction makes no difference to the sense.

²⁰²¹⁰⁶ See S. Solle, *DNTT*, 3.1073–75.

²⁰³¹⁰⁷ Similar language is used in *Test. Mos.* 7:6–10 of unnamed officials (perhaps scribes?) who 'eat up the goods of the poor, claiming that they are acting according to justice'. Cf *Ps. Sol.* 4, especially v. 11.

²⁰⁴¹⁰⁸ So J. D. M. Derrett, *NovT* 14 (1972) 1–9; critical comment by H. Fleddermann, *CBQ* 44 (1982) 61.

²⁰⁵¹⁰⁹ A. G. Wright (see above, p. 490 n. 101); H. Fleddermann, *CBQ* 44 (1982) 61–66; Myers, 321–22. Fleddermann recognises that μακρὰ προσευχόμενοι is an unnatural way to say 'promoting the temple cult'.

²⁰⁶¹¹⁰ J. Jeremias, *Jerusalem*, 111–16, provides a fascinating study of the economic circumstances of scribes, and concludes that many were poor and that while some were in paid employment 'in the main the scribes lived on subsidies'. He concludes that this passage refers to 'the scribes' habit of sponging on the hospitality of people of limited means' (114). For more general information on Jerusalem scribes see J. Jeremias, *Jerusalem*, 233–45.

religious professional which became common in medieval Christianity. It is true that πρόφασις can mean a (valid) reason, as in Jn. 15:22, but its more usual sense is ‘pretext’ and this is its meaning in other NT uses (note Phil. 1:18, where it is contrasted with ἀληθεία). Mann’s translation ‘for appearances’ sake’ is perhaps too gentle. The suggestion that it means something like ‘with such an end in view’, implying an ulterior motive,¹¹²⁰⁷¹ makes little difference to its pejorative force in this context where the ‘end’ is eating up widows’ houses. For insincere prayer cf. Mt. 6:5, though there the emphasis is on the public performance rather than the length of the prayers.

Similarly, while κρίμα sometimes means the act of judging, its normal meaning of ‘condemnation’, ‘punishment’ is demanded by the context here. The reference cannot be to an earthly or human judgment (which would hardly take cognisance of ostentation as a punishable offence), but must be to God’s eschatological judgment, of which Jesus has spoken so vividly in 9:42–48. Such a judgment does not leave room for the gradation of punishments which seems to be envisaged in the comparative περισσότερον (though this could be understood simply as ‘very severe’), but probably it is better in context to take the comparative not of varying levels of condemnation or punishment, but rather of the more obvious guilt of these people than of other less blatant sinners. If the nominative participles of v. 40 could be interpreted of a specially wicked group of scribes, the comparative might then contrast them with the general run of scribes whose ostentation (described in vv. 38–39) is a less serious crime, but the syntax scarcely allows this, as we have noted above.

41 As in v. 38, the subject does not need to be expressed (see Textual Note) since there has been a continuous sequence of Jesus’ speaking, without response, since v. 35. γαζοφυλάκιον (‘treasury’) is used in the LXX and Josephus (sometimes in the plural) of the treasure stores in the temple buildings, but its reference here to the collecting chests in the Court of the Women is demanded by the context, which has an ὄχλος, including a woman, ‘throwing in’ donations. (In Jn. 8:20 the same sense seems required, as Jesus and the crowd to whom he was speaking could hardly have been inside the ‘strong room’.) χαλκός is strictly ‘copper’ or ‘bronze’, and the widow’s two coins would be of copper. But the large sums donated by the rich would presumably be in silver or gold coins (as were the half-shekels for the temple tax, which had to be paid in Tyrian silver coins), so that χαλκός is here used in its more general sense of ‘money’. The objects for which the money was given (apart from two chests for the temple tax) are listed in the Mishnah as ‘Bird offerings’, ‘Young birds for whole-offerings’, ‘Wood’, ‘Incense’, ‘Gold for the *kappōret* [perhaps sacred vessels?]', and ‘Freewill offerings’ (six chests being devoted to the last). All contributions were therefore for the work of the temple; charitable donations for the poor were made separately. For the huge amounts of money contributed see Schüre^{208r}, 2.270–74.

²⁰⁷¹¹¹ So Derrett, art. cit. (p. 491 n. 108), 7–8.

²⁰⁸Schürer E. Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ*, rev. and ed. by G. Vermes, F. Millar, M. Goodman, and M. Black. 3 vols., Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1973–87

42 There is a marked contrast between the πολλοὶ πλούσιοι ... πολλά of v. 41 and the μία χήρα πτωχή of this verse.¹¹²⁰⁹² There is no reason to think that she was the only such person present, but Jesus singles her out as an object lesson. The λεπτόν (Hebrew *p^erûṭâ*) was the smallest denomination of currency in use, a copper coin less than a centimetre in diameter and worth less than one hundredth of a denarius (which was itself half the value of the half-shekel temple tax).¹¹²¹⁰³ Mark identifies its value by reference to the Roman κοδράντης (a transliteration of *quadrans*, which was the smallest Roman coin, a quarter of an *as*). The use of the Latin term is not necessarily due to a Roman origin for the gospel, since ‘Roman designations of coins were already in the first century A.D. more common in Palestine than the Greek and Hebrew designations still also in use’;¹¹²¹¹⁴ Matthew also uses the term (5:26).

43–44 Both προσκαλεσάμενος (see the introduction to this section) and the formula ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν (see on 3:28) mark this out as a saying to be noted. It both commends the widow’s self-sacrificing generosity as an example for all God’s people (*pace* Gundry, 730) and (and probably more significantly for its context in Mark) turns upside down the normal human valuation of people. What matters in God’s sight is not what a person has (and therefore is able to give without pain) but the devotion which causes her to give even at great personal cost, even though the amount of the gift may be completely negligible in comparison with the enormous wealth of the temple. The gift does not matter to God so much as the giver. And, it is implied, this should also be the basis of his people’s valuation. By such a criterion the first will often be last, and the last first. The two *p^erûṭōt* are πλεῖον than all the silver and gold put together.

The point is laboured in the wording of v. 44: her ὑστέρησις (destitution) is compared with their περίσσειον, the spare change which will never be missed (cf. περίσσειμα, 8:8); she has given πάντα ὅσα εἶχεν (cf. the example of the disciples, 10:28, and the failure of the rich man to do likewise, 10:21); it is ὅλος ὁ βίος αὐτῆς, and yet she voluntarily gave both coins, rather than just one! While Jesus was not averse to exaggeration to make a point, it is quite possible that in first-century Palestine the donation of two *p^erûṭōt* would have left a poor widow without the means for her next meal (cf. the widow of Zarephath, 1 Ki. 17:12).²¹²

²⁰⁹¹¹² Gundry asserts that ‘The poverty of the widow will naturally be taken as due to a scribal devouring of her estate (v. 40)’. I wonder! Many have not noticed this ‘natural’ reading. Widows are frequently depicted as poor with no such reason adduced.

²¹⁰¹¹³ For the coins of Roman Palestine see, e.g., Schürer, 2.62–66.

²¹¹¹¹⁴ Schürer, 2.64.

²¹² R. T. France, [*The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary on the Greek Text*](#), New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 2002), 491–493.