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Diana Abernethy
Huntingdon College, diana.abernethy@gmail.com

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The Sudden Deluge: *Parasite*, Matthew 24:36-51, and Immanent Apocalyptic Imagery

Abstract

Bong Joon Ho's 2019 film *Parasite* shares significant imagery with the apocalyptic teachings in Matthew 24:36-51. Both feature oblivious carousers before a flood, sleeping homeowners, and domestic workers caught unaware by a returning homeowner. This article argues that this shared imagery gives *Parasite* an apocalyptic edge that intensifies the film's warnings about potential consequences of extreme economic disparities in capitalism. This article develops this argument by (1) highlighting the apocalyptic features of Matthew 24:36-51; (2) describing the convergence of imagery between *Parasite* and Matthew 24:36-51; and (3) exploring how the film's apocalyptic edge illuminates urgent and latent dangers of extreme economic disparities. The shared imagery functions in both similar and different ways in *Parasite* and Matthew 24:36-51. In both, this imagery reveals latent dangers and fosters increased attentiveness to them. While Matthew 24:36-51 envisions an external divine force meting just judgment, *Parasite* centers on an immanent catastrophe that injures indiscriminately. Because characters do not experience rewards or punishments in accordance with their merit, *Parasite* has a tragic dimension absent in Matthew 24:36-51. The competition catalyzed among those with few opportunities for economic advancement harms all involved. The dangers of extreme economic disparities lurk beneath the surface and are prone to erupt at unexpected times. *Parasite* is immanently apocalyptic because dynamics intrinsic to capitalism catalyze its violent ending.

Keywords

Parasite, Gisaengchung, Bong Joon Ho, Gospel of Matthew, Matthew 24, Apocalyptic, capitalism, Korean cinema, Bible and Film

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Author Notes

Diana Abernethy is an Associate Professor of Religion at Huntingdon College in Montgomery, Alabama, and holds a PhD in Hebrew Bible from Duke University.

One hundred years after Korea's film industry began, Bong Joon Ho's 2019 film *Parasite* made cinema history with its international success.¹ It won the 2019 Palme d'Or at Cannes followed by Academy Awards in 2020 for Best Director, Best Original Screenplay, Best International Feature Film, and Best Picture, making it the first film in a language other than English to win the latter. A distinctive feature of *Parasite*'s gripping artistry is Bong's signature experimentation with genre: the film juxtaposes many layers in surprising and thought-provoking combinations.²

One layer echoes biblical apocalyptic imagery. In *Bible and Film: The Basics*, Matthew Rindge cites *Parasite*'s apocalyptic dimensions as an example of a film having a similar function to a biblical genre. Rindge puts *Parasite* in conversation with Revelation 18 and 1 Enoch and emphasizes the film's warnings to the wealthy.³ Expanding on Rindge's insight about the apocalyptic dimensions of *Parasite*, this article identifies a significant convergence of imagery between *Parasite* and Matthew 24:36-51 and explores the convergent and divergent functions of the apocalyptic imagery in each.

To encourage clearer perception of hidden perils, both *Parasite* and Matthew 24:36-51 utilize imagery of oblivious carousers before a flood, sleeping homeowners, and domestic workers caught unaware by a returning homeowner.⁴ While Matthew 24:36-51 envisions the righteous and wayward receiving fitting rewards from a just judge, *Parasite* features an indiscriminately destructive catastrophe triggered by conditions of capitalism. *Parasite*'s apocalyptic layer is immanent because economic disparities—rather than an external judge—catalyze the film's catastrophe. Since the characters in *Parasite* do not experience reward or punishment according to their merits, the film has a tragic dimension absent from Matthew 24:36-51. As *Parasite*'s tragic ending transpires in the absence of external divine judgment or obvious villains, its apocalyptic edge intensifies the warnings it offers about the capitalism it depicts.

Parasite's apocalyptic imagery reminiscent of Matthew 24:36-51 adds depth to the film's exploration of class and social immobility. This article will (1) highlight the apocalyptic features of Matthew 24:36-51; (2) describe the convergence of imagery between *Parasite* and Matthew 24:36-51; and (3) explore how the film's apocalyptic edge illuminates urgent and latent dangers of extreme economic disparities.

Matthew 24:36-51 as Apocalyptic Literature

The apocalyptic features in Matthew 24:36-51 have long been recognized.⁵ Along with the parallel passages in the other Synoptic Gospels (Mark 13 and Luke 21), Matthew 24 is frequently designated the "little apocalypse."⁶ Within Biblical Studies, it has been notoriously complicated to define apocalyptic literature.⁷ The definition proposed by a working group led by John Collins in the 1970s has proven fruitful:

"Apocalypse" is a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial, insofar as it involves another, supernatural world.⁸

While Collins' definition pertains to entire texts that display this genre, a wider range of texts share some of these characteristics. Stephen Cook distinguishes the Synoptics' "little apocalypse" from the genre of apocalypse in Collins' sense, but he contends that the "little apocalypse" "exhibits a vibrant apocalyptic imagination."⁹ While Matthew 24 includes teachings about eschatological salvation and judgment, it lacks the narrative framework with an otherworldly being communicating through symbolic visions. Jesus' role in Matthew 24 is analogous to an otherworldly guide revealing hidden knowledge, but he teaches here with poignant comparisons

rather than symbolic visions. Even though Matthew 24 is not strictly an apocalypse by Collins' definition, it includes significant apocalyptic elements.

Three of the most prominent apocalyptic features in Matthew 24:36-51 are revealing latent aspects of reality, living attentive to a coming judgment, and moral dualism. Jesus' teachings in Matthew 24-25 presuppose that he knows things the disciples do not and that he can aid the disciples by sharing some of this knowledge. Indeed, Jesus' teachings in Matthew 24-25 respond to the disciples' questions in Matthew 24:3: "Tell us, when will this be, and what is the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?"¹⁰ The disciples' questions imply an expectation that Jesus will come again at a decisive moment in the future and that he can teach them how to recognize this future event. In Matthew 24:36-51, Jesus refers to this future event as "the coming of the Son of Man" and indicates that some will receive rewards while others experience punishment.¹¹ Jesus' revelation of knowledge about a future judgment contributes to the apocalyptic character of Matthew 24:36-51. Indeed, when discussing apocalyptic traits in Matthew, Leopold Sabourin emphasizes that the heart of "apocalyptic thought" lies in divine revelations about history, including how a new age of God's reign will follow a future judgment.¹²

While Jesus' teaching in Matthew 24:36-51 focuses on this coming judgment, he does not directly answer the disciples' question about its timing. In Matthew 24:36, Jesus underscores that this is known only by "the Father" and unknown even to himself. Since the timing of this judgment cannot be known, Jesus stresses that its arrival will be unexpected. Each illustration in Matthew 24:36-51 reiterates the unexpected timing of this future judgment and focuses on how to live in anticipation of it. Awareness and preparation are prominent themes in these teachings. Jesus encourages his disciples to be aware of this future judgment and to live so that they will receive reward instead of punishment regardless of when it occurs. When comparing the "little

apocalypse” in the Synoptic Gospels, Cook contends that Matthew 24 highlights “Christian wakefulness” the most.¹³ Thus, Matthew 24:36-51’s focus on living attentive to a coming judgment is a distinctive emphasis among the synoptic versions of the “little apocalypse.” Since adjusting behavior in light of a future judgment is a hallmark of apocalyptic worldviews, this aspect of Matthew 24:36-51 emerges as a prominent apocalyptic feature.

Cook identifies moral dualism as a common element in apocalyptic literature.¹⁴ This moral dualism entails separating people into clear groups based on whether they have access to hidden knowledge and respond accordingly, or do not. Cook notes that even though this moral dualism allows for these groupings, it does not necessarily imply there is no admixture of tendencies within individuals.¹⁵ Moral dualism features prominently in Matthew 24:36-51. This text comprises illustrations that compare those who are prepared for a future judgment with the unprepared: Noah’s family with those unaware of the coming flood, the ones taken with the ones left, attentive homeowners with sleeping homeowners, and the “wise slave” with the “wicked slave.” These exemplify the groupings characteristic of moral dualism in apocalyptic literature.

The imagery in Matthew 24:36-51 contributes to its prominent apocalyptic features: disclosing latent aspects of reality, attentiveness to a future judgment, and moral dualism. The subsequent analysis will reveal that *Parasite* analogously reveals unseen dangers of capitalism and challenges audiences to increase their awareness of economic disparities around them, but the film resists the moral dualism prominent in Matthew 24:36-51.

Convergence of Imagery

Parasite includes a surprising concentration of imagery shared with Matthew 24:36-51. However, this imagery plays a different role in each: *Parasite* does not use this imagery to instruct about a coming external judgment but instead to explore potential consequences of extreme economic

disparities. After a summary of the film, this section describes the convergent imagery in Matthew 24:36-51 and *Parasite*.

Synopsis of Parasite

This summary of the film provides context for identifying the convergence of imagery between Matthew 24:36-51 and *Parasite*. *Parasite* traces the collision of three families: the Kims, the Parks, and Geun Se and Moon Gwang, a married couple. Kim Ki Taek, his wife (Chung Sook), and their two children (Ki Woo and Ki Jung) live in a semi-basement apartment in Seoul. At the beginning of the film, they fold pizza boxes for money and have few opportunities for economic advancement. Before Ki Woo's wealthier friend Min studies abroad, he visits Ki Woo and gives him a Scholar's Rock that becomes a thematic thread throughout the film. Ki Woo sees the Scholar's Rock as a connection to a more affluent lifestyle.¹⁶ Min offers to recommend Ki Woo for his former job as a tutor with the wealthy Park family. Though Ki Woo initially thinks he cannot accept Min's recommendation because he is not a university student, Min suggests forging some paperwork, so Ki Woo agrees. With Min's recommendation, Ki Woo begins tutoring Park Da Hye in English. Park Dong Ik, his wife (Yeon Kyo), and their two children (Da Hye and Da Song) live in an architect-designed house in a very affluent neighborhood. With the access created by Min's recommendation, the Kims "infiltrate" the Parks by scheming to get the Parks to hire each of them in some capacity—Ki Jung as an art therapist for Da Song, Ki Taek as a driver, and Chung Sook as a housekeeper.¹⁷ However, the Kims do not reveal that they are all members of the same family. They rejoice in these opportunities for economic advancement, but their bliss is fleeting. When the Parks go on a camping trip for Da Song's birthday, the Kims make themselves at home in the Parks' house until the former housekeeper, Moon Gwang, rings the doorbell. After the Kims let Moon Gwang inside, they discover that Moon Gwang's husband, Geun Se, has been

living in a secret bunker in the basement to hide from loan sharks. This discovery catalyzes the film's central catastrophe as bitter competition erupts between the Kims, Geun Se, and Moon Gwang. As they struggle over the economic opportunities afforded by employment in the Park household, their conflict escalates to the film's bloody climax that causes several casualties and the disintegration of each family. The convergence of imagery with Matthew 24:36-51 appears in the latter half of the film, particularly the portion when the Parks leave to go camping for Da Song's birthday and unexpectedly return early (minutes 53–98), as well as during the film's calamitous climax (minutes 98–116).¹⁸

The Unexpected Deluge

Torrential rain mars the Parks' camping trip. This flood provides not only significant imagery but also catalyzes the plot as it prompts the Parks to return home early. This imagery resembles Matthew 24:38-39's use of Noah's flood as a metaphor for the unexpected timing of the return of the "Son of Man." In this metaphor, many people were living their normal lives when they were caught unaware by the flood.¹⁹

This section of the film begins and ends with a "deluge." When Ki Woo and Ki Taek douse a man urinating in front of their apartment with water, Ki Jung films the encounter and muses, "Wow! It's a deluge" (minute 53).²⁰ Her word choice ominously foreshadows the coming rainstorm: the next time these three characters appear in their apartment, it is rapidly flooding. In the film's last shot of the rainstorm, the camera looks down onto the Kims' street, now completely flooded. For a few seconds, the camera follows a makeshift raft that the Kims use to float to shelter (minute 98).²¹ The raft can be perceived as a crude ark seeking safety from this flood. By lingering on this raft during the final shot of the rainstorm, this image offers emphasis at the end of this sequence and encapsulates the effects of the flood. The makeshift ark both echoes the destruction

of the biblical flood and portrays how the Kims (and many of their neighbors) suffer economic damage as they watch their aspirations wash away with the sewage water flowing through their homes.

Ki Jung's declaration of a deluge occurs immediately before the film cuts to the Parks, who are preparing to depart for their camping trip. This new scene opens with Da Song looking up at a clear sky and reporting the weather to his father over their new walkie-talkies: "Current weather is clear, over. The clouds are moving. But they're not rain clouds, over" (minute 54). The Parks' actual camping trip happens off-screen, so this portion of the film focuses on interactions between the Kims, Moon Gwang, and Geun Se during the Parks' absence. After the Parks drive away, the Kims begin to make themselves at home in the Parks' house. As the Kims lounge in the lush yard at dusk and watch Chung Sook reenact her hammer-throwing prowess, the cloud coverage increases and forebodes rain (minute 56).

In the next scene, the Kims feast in the Parks' living room and admire the view of the backyard as the rainstorm begins. The imagery of this scene converges with Matthew 24:38's description of how blissfully unaware people were of the coming destruction: "For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day Noah entered the ark." Interestingly, eating, drinking, and marriage all feature prominently in this scene. It opens with a close-up shot of a glass of whisky that widens to reveal a vast array of fine foods (minute 56). As the conversation continues, Chung Sook asks Ki Woo about the yellow notebook he has been carrying (minute 57). Ki Woo admits it is Da Hye's diary and confesses that he dreams of marrying Da Hye (minutes 57–62). Thus, eating, drinking, and marriage feature prominently in this scene shortly before Moon Gwang unexpectedly comes to the door. Not only do *Parasite* and Matthew 24:38-39 share imagery of eating, drinking, and marriage, but it functions

similarly in both because it represents life before an unforeseen interruption—Moon Gwang’s arrival in the film and the return of the “Son of Man” in Matthew 24:38-39.

The Surprising Return of the Homeowner

As Moon Gwang’s arrival catalyzes a surprising series of events, imagery in the subsequent scenes converges with the metaphor of a homeowner returning in Matthew 24:45-51. After the Kims let Moon Gwang into the house, they follow her to the basement and discover her husband living there. Chung Sook threatens to expose Geun Se’s presence to the Parks, but the balance of power shifts rapidly when the other Kims fall down the stairs. Moon Gwang realizes they are all members of one family and threatens to send a video of them to the Parks (minutes 64–71). They all return to the living room where Moon Gwang and Geun Se relax, joke, and laugh. Since Geun Se is holding a smartphone poised to send the incriminating video, the Kims sheepishly sit in the corner with their hands up. However, this arrangement proves fleeting. As Moon Gwang and Geun Se lose themselves in appreciation of the home’s design, the Kims attempt to seize the smartphone. An intense physical struggle ensues (minutes 72–75). As the Kims gain the upper hand, the scene is suddenly interrupted—this time, by a phone call revealing the imminent return of the Parks, who have cut their camping trip short because of the rain (minutes 75–76).

Attentive and Inattentive Workers

The scenes before the Parks’ sudden return share imagery with Matthew 24:45-51, which contrasts what a “faithful and wise slave” and a “wicked slave” are doing when the homeowner returns.²² Although the Kims are domestic workers rather than slaves, they are nonetheless analogous to the “slaves” in Matthew 24:45–51.²³ The power imbalance between the Kims and Parks is comparable to that in Matthew 24:45-51; both sets of relationships include significant economic exploitation.

Matthew 24:45-47's description of the actions of the "wise slave" sharply contrasts with the scene prior to the Parks' return:

Who then is the faithful and wise slave, whom his master has put in charge of his household, to give the other slaves their allowance of food at the proper time? Blessed is that slave whom his master will find at work when he arrives. Truly I tell you, he will put that one in charge of all his possessions.

The "wise slave" exercises prudent management over the household, particularly regarding food distribution. The conflict between the Kims and Moon Gwang escalates when Chung Sook specifically refuses to pass food periodically to Geun Se, and she again threatens to call the police (minute 70). Earlier moments have featured food distribution, so Chung Sook's refusal stands out. The film has previously shown close-up shots of lush fruit plates delivered by a smiling Moon Gwang or Chung Sook as part of their duties (minutes 39 and 50). Jieun Kiaer, Emily Lord, and Loli Kim highlight how fruit conveys luxury and status in Korea, including when served as an expensive snack during tutoring sessions.²⁴

Not only does Chung Sook refuse to share food, but the resulting conflict converges with Matthew 24:48-50's description of the "wicked slave":

But if that wicked slave says to himself, "My master is delayed," and he begins to beat his fellow slaves, and eats and drinks with drunkards, the master of that slave will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour that he does not know.

Like the "wicked slave" on the cusp of the homeowner's return, the Kims are engaged in a physical fight with Moon Gwang and Geun Se. They are certainly not "at work" like the "wise slave." Shortly prior to the fight, Moon Gwang also specifically criticizes the Kims' drunkenness and indulgence. As she films the trash from the Kims' feast, Moon Gwang says, "You Neanderthals. Is that all you could think to do, drink yourselves stupid? In this home suffused with Mr. Namgoong's creative spirit? You cretins" (minute 73). Moon Gwang's criticism draws attention

to the Kims' eating, drinking, and drunkenness shortly before the phone call from the Parks.²⁵ Moon Gwang's interpretation of the remnants of the Kims' feast accords with the portrayal of their earlier actions: the film shows a large spread of food and alcohol as well as the Kims actively eating and drinking (minutes 56–62). During the feast scene, Ki Taek says they are "getting drunk in the living room," and the film depicts their indulgence reaching the level of drunkenness, perhaps most clearly when Ki Jung realizes she had been eating dog treats (minutes 61–62). Thus, the film depicts the Kims, Moon Gwang, and Geun Se "beating" one another when the Parks phone to announce their arrival after it previously highlighted the Kims' eating, drinking, and drunkenness. This combination of imagery converges with Matthew 24:45-50's metaphor comparing the unexpected return of a homeowner with the return of the "Son of Man."

In the feast scene itself, Chung Sook introduces the idea of the Parks' unexpected return. After Ki Taek asks, "We live here now, don't we?", Chung Sook brings that fantasy back to reality when she says, "Cosy? Are you feeling cosy? Sure, but suppose Park walked through that door now. What about your dad? He'd run and hide like a cockroach" (minute 61). Chung Sook's comment juxtaposes their feast with the idea of the homeowner's return and implies that the Parks would not appreciate their actions. Chung Sook's reflection not only adds to the imagery of misguided indulgence before the homeowner's return but also foreshadows how the Kims will hide when the Parks arrive. The film shows the Kims scrambling to prepare in the eight minutes before the Parks arrive and how they hide afterwards (minutes 76-91).

Sleeping Homeowners

While the film has focused on the Kims, Moon Gwang, and Geun Se during the Parks' camping trip, the Parks' arrival invites reflection on how they experience their home after the preceding events. The dramatic irony is poignant as the Parks remain completely unaware of what has

happened, the familial identity of the Kims, and the presence of Geun Se in the basement. The Parks' notable ignorance converges with the imagery in Matthew 24:42-44. While Matthew 24:45-50 focuses on the actions of the workers in the absence of the homeowner, Matthew 24:42-44 instructs homeowners to be awake and attentive:

Keep awake therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. But understand this: if the owner of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.

The metaphors in Matthew 24:42-44 and 24:45-50 share a household setting, but they invite readers to position themselves differently in this space. While Matthew 24:45-50 focuses on the laudable and deficient actions of the workers, Matthew 24:42-44 considers the actions of the homeowner to encourage watchfulness for the return of the "Son of Man." In this metaphor, a thief breaking into a house at night illustrates the unexpected timing of the latter, and a constantly vigilant homeowner represents an appropriately attentive disciple.²⁶

The portrayal of the Parks' return converges with the imagery of Matthew 24:42-44 because the Parks are inattentive homeowners who are unaware of the thieves in their house. Moon Gwang, Geun Se, and the Kims could be analogous to the thieves in Matthew 24:43. With Moon Gwang's assistance, Geun Se has been "stealing" the use of the basement from the Parks. During the Parks' absence, the Kims have been "stealing" food and drink; more broadly, the Kims' employment under different identities and false pretenses could be construed as theft. Since the metaphor in Matthew 24:42-44 focuses on the homeowner's perspective, the Parks' ignorance of all these thefts adds to the force of the convergence in this imagery.

The entire sequence from the Parks' return to the departure of Ki Taek, Ki Woo, and Ki Jung highlights the Parks' ignorance of the thieves in their house. This section cuts between all

three families and includes the Kims' desperate attempts to hide themselves, the remnants of their indulgence, and the presence of Moon Gwang and Geun Se (minutes 78–91). The film features several potent images depicting the Parks' obliviousness, including Zoonie the dog growling at Ki Woo under Da Hye's bed after he returned her diary (minutes 78 and 84–85) and Yeon Kyo recounting to Chung Sook how Da Song had a seizure after seeing a “ghost” (actually Geun Se) on a previous birthday (minutes 80–83).

Perhaps the most poignant depiction of the Parks' unawareness is when they sleep on the couch in the living room while Ki Taek, Ki Woo, and Ki Jung are hiding under the coffee table. Dong Ik and Yeon Kyo decide to sleep in the living room after Da Song insists on sleeping in his tent in the backyard. Before they fall asleep, they discuss Mr. Kim's offensive smell—a significant motif—and share an intimate moment on the couch (minutes 87–91). This scene carries emotional weight because it shows Ki Taek's visceral response to the Parks' hurtful comments and the Kims witnessing such an intimate moment between the Parks.²⁷ In interviews, Bong has described how he felt like he was spying on the lives of strangers when he tutored for a rich family while a university student, and that dynamic may be most evident in this scene.²⁸

The metaphor in Matthew 24:43 indicates that the thieves could not have broken in if the homeowner had stayed awake. In the film, the Parks' sleep provides the opportunity for Ki Taek, Ki Woo, and Ki Jung to escape; although they are exiting instead of entering, their departure allows them to maintain their cover and continue their “theft.” Even when the Parks wake up, they do not perceive the Kims. The Parks wake abruptly when Da Song calls on the walkie-talkie to report an “emergency.” This scene creates incredible tension because Ki Taek is in the process of sliding across the floor to make his escape when Da Song calls. The possibility that Da Song or his parents see Ki Taek is fleeting since the film quickly reveals that Da Song's “emergency” is that he cannot

sleep. The Parks go back to sleep, which allows Ki Taek to complete his getaway (minutes 90–91). Since the Parks fail to perceive the Kims even when they wake at an opportune moment, the film underscores their lack of awareness. Thus, the Parks’ sleep and inattentiveness correspond with imagery of the sleeping homeowner in Matthew 24:42-44.

Violent Consequences

Matthew 24:36-51 concludes with a violent image, and *Parasite* analogously features a violent climax. Though both of these moments portray disturbing violence, the different perpetrators signal the divergent roles of the violence in each. Matthew 24:51 describes the consequences for the “wicked slave” who indulged during the homeowner’s absence: “He will cut him in pieces and put him with the hypocrites, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” Here, the homeowner violently punishes the inattentive worker, and this image in Matthew simultaneously refers to the homeowner in the metaphor and the judgment coming with the return of the “Son of Man.”²⁹ While the portrayal of the Parks converges with the image of the inattentive homeowner in Matthew 24:42-44, they do not correspond to Matthew’s portrayal of the homeowner using violent punishment in Matthew 24:51. In the film, the Parks neither perpetrate violence nor act as instruments of judgment.

Instead, almost all the violence takes place between the Kims, Moon Gwang, and Geun Se. Their interactions quickly lead to violence—namely, the struggle over the smartphone with the incriminating video—and their conflict escalates before culminating in a bloody scene in the backyard. As the Kims attempt to conceal the presence of Moon Gwang and Geun Se, Ki Taek ties up Geun Se in the basement. Before Ki Taek can tie up Moon Gwang, she pushes him away, runs up the stairs, and attempts to tell Yeon Kyo about the Kims. However, Chung Sook foils her efforts when she hears Moon Gwang’s footsteps and kicks her down the stairs (minutes 77–78).

Moon Gwang's head hits the wall hard, and she later dies as a result of this injury (minutes 78 and 97). Although Chung Sook acted out of a deliberate and ruthless desire to hide Moon Gwang from the Parks, it is unclear if she intended to kill Moon Gwang.

Ki Taek, Ki Woo, and Ki Jung escape from the Parks' house and return to their rapidly flooding semi-basement apartment. Next, the film cuts between their apartment and the Parks' basement, where Moon Gwang has become conscious again. Before she dies, she starts to release Geun Se by using her teeth to tear the duct tape binding him. She is unable to finish, and a bound and struggling Geun Se helplessly watches her die (minutes 95–98). This loss devastates Geun Se, and a desire for revenge drives his subsequent actions. However, an opportunity to enact his vengeance does not present itself until Ki Woo reopens the basement.

Ki Woo is worried about how to handle the couple in the basement. When Moon Gwang initially rang the doorbell, he noted, "This isn't in the plan" (minute 64). As he lies awake in the emergency shelter after leaving their flooded apartment, he asks Ki Taek, "What was your plan?" (minute 99). After Ki Taek tells him it is best not to make plans because they often go wrong—"With no plan, nothing can go wrong"—Ki Woo apologizes for their predicament and promises, "I'll take care of everything" (minute 100). Ki Woo feels guilty for starting this whole chain of events by accepting Min's offer.

After their conversation, the film cuts abruptly to the Parks, who are planning an impromptu birthday party for Da Song in their backyard. This party brings Ki Taek, Ki Woo, and Ki Jung back to the Parks' house, where they struggle to play the roles they worked so hard to get and keep. Da Hye asks Ki Woo why he is thinking of something else while kissing her, and he asks her if he fits in here. After she nods in agreement, he says he needs to take care of something below (minutes 105–107). He takes the Scholar's Rock Min gave him and returns to the basement.

On his way down, he drops the rock, which falls to the bottom with a loud crash. In the basement, Ki Woo sees Moon Gwang's body, and as he moves closer to investigate, Geun Se seizes his opportunity for revenge. Geun Se sneaks up behind Ki Woo and places a makeshift snare around his neck. Ki Woo escapes and runs upstairs, but Geun Se catches up with him and throws the rock at Ki Woo's head, causing him to bleed profusely and pass out (minutes 109–112).

The film does not explain why Ki Woo feels compelled to return to the basement.³⁰ His character has an optimism his family members do not share. He has been drawn to Min's Scholar's Rock and Min's world throughout the film, and perhaps Da Hye's declaration that he has a place in this world gives him the confidence to try to make that a reality.³¹ Budding with hope, Ki Woo may take Ki Taek's advice and enter the basement without a plan. However, the climax of the film illustrates how flawed Ki Taek's advice is. Although Ki Taek proceeds without a plan, things go very wrong: his family is torn apart, and he becomes a murderer.

Ki Woo's return to the basement provides Geun Se with an opportunity for revenge. Geun Se is seeking Chung Sook (since Moon Gwang said Chung Sook pushed her down the stairs), but he attacks every member of the Kim family he sees on the way, first Ki Woo and then Ki Jung. After Geun Se stabs Ki Jung in the middle of Da Song's garden party, the film cascades through its bloody climax. Chaos ensues and Da Song passes out at the sight of Geun Se. As Ki Taek rushes to aid Ki Jung, Geun Se turns on Chung Sook, who manages to evade his blows and mortally wound him with a grill skewer. The Parks ignore Ki Jung's and Geun Se's injuries as they prepare to rush Da Song to the hospital. Overcome with rage by the Parks' oversight, Ki Taek picks up the knife Geun Se used to stab Ki Jung and stabs Dong Ik in the same manner. As everyone flees the scene, Ki Taek hides in the basement (minutes 111–116). Thus, the film culminates with three grisly murders—those of Ki Jung, Geun Se, and Dong Ik—and this imagery converges with the

violent punishment in Matthew 24:51. While the homeowner perpetrates the violence in Matthew 24:51, Geun Se and the Kims attack each other. Their harm does not come from the homeowner but from their own conflict. The one exception is when their conflict spills over into Ki Taek's murder of Dong Ik. Therefore, while Matthew 24:36-51 and *Parasite* each have a violent ending, the violence comes from different sources.³²

While *Parasite* does not offer metaphors to illustrate the need for preparation in the face of coming divine judgment, it does include imagery from the metaphors in Matthew 24:36-51 as part of its own examination of extreme economic disparities. Like the people before the biblical flood, the Kims feast and dream while unaware of how quickly their circumstances could change. When the Parks return, the Kims are not only indulging but also fighting with Moon Gwang and Geun Se over who will continue to benefit from these jobs. The Parks are sleeping and unaware homeowners who do not perceive the thieves in their house. The struggles between the Kims, Moon Gwang, and Geun Se culminate in violence. Thus, some of *Parasite*'s imagery converges with that of Matthew 24:36-51. Though each work weaves this imagery into its wider themes and interests, the shared imagery invites reflection on the apocalyptic layer in *Parasite*.

***Parasite*'s Apocalyptic Edge**

Since Matthew 24:36-51 includes prominent apocalyptic elements, the convergence of imagery between it and *Parasite* highlights apocalyptic dimensions in the film. Though both feature revelers unaware of a coming flood, slumbering homeowners, and domestic workers caught unaware by a homeowner's return, this imagery has similar and different roles in each. As in Matthew 24:36-51, this imagery in *Parasite* exposes dangers often unseen and stimulates greater attentiveness to them.

However, the role of the apocalyptic imagery in *Parasite* differs from that in Matthew 24:36-51 in two notable ways: *Parasite* lacks a just judge meting consequences according to merit, and the film resists the moral dualism prominent in Matthew 24:36-51. *Parasite* does not feature a figure analogous to the “Son of Man” in Matthew 24:36-51 and instead showcases how extreme economic disparities can create precarious circumstances liable to implode and harm people irrespective of merit. Because the film lacks both an external judge and clear villains, *Parasite* draws attention to potential perils in forms of capitalism that create extreme economic disparities. Since *Parasite* shares neither Matthew 24:36-51’s moral dualism nor an external divine force enacting just judgment, this imagery in the film carries a tragic dimension foreign to Matthew 24:36-51. Even as the imagery in Matthew 24:36-51 and *Parasite* converges, the function of their apocalyptic dimensions diverges.

Latent Dangers of Extreme Economic Disparities

In the absence of external judgment and stereotypical villains, extreme economic disparities furnish the conditions that cascade to the film’s violent climax.³³ Bong’s reflections on the film, critics’ praise, and scholars’ analysis frequently highlight *Parasite*’s central interest in economic disparities.³⁴ While Bong made *Parasite* as a distinctly Korean film, he has reflected on why it has resonated with audiences across the globe, and he identifies the shared experiences of capitalism as one powerful point of connection: “Regardless of borders, we all live in this one giant nation of capitalism.”³⁵ Bong’s astute and focused exploration of economic disparities provides the milieu in which *Parasite* forewarns latent dangers of capitalism.³⁶

Parasite exemplifies Bong’s sharp perception of the complex dynamics within South Korea’s economic disparities as it traces characters navigating limited opportunities for social mobility.³⁷ While each of the Kims is capable and savvy, they have few opportunities to increase

their economic stability. The film prompts reflection on the vastly different opportunities available to the Kims and Parks, and it juxtaposes the Kims with Moon Gwang and Geun Se. While Moon Gwang has a job coveted by the Kims, Geun Se's economic situation is even more dire than that of the Kims. Potent visual contrasts emerge between the Parks' house with many windows, Geun Se's living quarters in the Parks' windowless basement, and the Kims' semi-basement apartment with a window at ground level. The film opens with the Kims in this apartment, which becomes a powerful symbol of how they see themselves between economic strata and actively strive to move up, both topographically and economically.³⁸ Bong describes how he used staircases as a prominent motif in *Parasite* to represent economic disparities across a vertical spread.³⁹

Even though the Parks are much better off than the Kims, Geun Se, and Moon Gwang, Bong explores the differences between the situations of the latter two families. Inkoo Kang praises Bong's subtle and probing portrayal of "gradations of privilege within those clear-cut strata."⁴⁰ The Kims perceive Moon Gwang and Geun Se as competition; the similarities in their situations do not prompt sympathy or cooperation. When the Kims first discover Geun Se's basement abode, Moon Gwang and the Kims both cite their similar situations as a strategy to secure aid from the other, but their attempts quickly turn into open conflict (minutes 67-72). Since employment with the Parks is one of the few paths to economic improvement, these two families fight each other for that opportunity.⁴¹

The desperation of this struggle leads to violence, which gives the film a poignantly tragic dimension. The extreme economic disparities between the Parks and the other two families spark conflicts that harm each family deeply. In an interview with Inkoo Kang, Bong describes this tragic layer: "It's a story about the powerless fighting each other, and that is the saddest thing."⁴² In an interview at the Toronto International Film Festival, Bong describes how he "wanted to end the

film on this sad, tragic note” and how one of the heartbreaking consequences is the separation of the Kim family; the letter Ki Taek passes to Ki Woo in Morse code creates an “eerie” feeling of distance in our age of digital communication.⁴³ As extreme economic disparities trigger harmful conflicts, the film’s conclusion has a tragic weight because a lack of economic opportunities has limited the options before the Kims, Geun Se, and Moon Gwang.

No Just Judge

In Matthew 24:36-51, external divine intervention—“the coming of the Son of Man”—will prompt the anticipated judgment, but in *Parasite*, the catastrophe stems from the extreme economic disparities represented in the film. *Parasite* does not include a figure analogous to the “Son of Man,” though several scenes feature possible but oblique references to Jesus. In the absence of an external judge, the film emphasizes how extreme economic disparities are capable of catalyzing indiscriminate harm.

The only mention of “Jesus” in the film is more of an exclamation than a reference to the Jesus of the New Testament. When the Kims are feasting in the Parks’ living room, Ki Woo exclaims “Jesus, Dad” after being shocked by Ki Taek moving to punch Chung Sook and then laughing (minute 62). Ki Taek is not a savior figure in the film because he becomes a murderer and contributes to his family’s disintegration.

Several possible allusions to Jesus appear in almost parodic contexts. For example, after the Kims have all been hired by the Parks, they are eating in their apartment when Ki Taek says, “Let’s offer a prayer of gratitude to the great Mr. Park. And to Min!” (minute 53). Even though the Kims have secured this much-needed employment, Ki Taek’s “prayer” sounds parodic because the film shows how fleeting these benefits prove.

Parasite later features a potential parody of the “what would Jesus do?” trend. While fleeing the Parks’ house in the rain, Ki Jung desperately asks Ki Taek what their plan is, and Ki Woo says, “I’ve been wondering... What would Min do in this situation?” When the exasperated Ki Jung retorts, “Min wouldn’t be in this situation!”, she poignantly reminds the audience of the Kims’ limited economic options (minutes 93–94). Compared with the Kims, Min’s economic situation offers many more opportunities—including study abroad—so he would likely not find himself drawn into a bloody conflict over domestic work positions. While Ki Taek, Dong Ik, and Min feature in parodic allusions to Jesus, none of them represent a divine figure enacting apocalyptic judgment.

Because *Parasite* lacks a “Son of Man” figure, its conclusion diverges significantly from the judgment in Matthew 24:36–51. While Matthew 24:36–51 anticipates that the “Son of Man” will offer rewards and enact punishment according to merit, no characters in *Parasite* enjoy positive consequences. Some have perished, and the survivors struggle to go on after the disintegration of their families. In some ways, the end of the film connotes a return to the status quo, but in others, all the characters are worse off than at the start. *Parasite* opens and closes with shots of Ki Woo sitting under the window of the Kims’s semi-basement apartment, visually representing a return to the status quo. In these two moments, he faces a similarly limited set of economic opportunities. However, Ki Woo’s situation at the end of the film is worse because he now also lacks the company of Ki Taek and Ki Jung.⁴⁴

The absence of a “Son of Man” figure in *Parasite* enhances its portrayal of the dangers of capitalism. While the judgment anticipated in Matthew 24:36–51 has a divine cause, the catastrophe in *Parasite* lacks an external trigger. The film exposes the instability of the extreme economic disparities created by capitalism. While the form of capitalism in *Parasite* offers

opportunities to some, dangers lurk beneath its surface—poignantly represented by the Parks’ basement—and are poised to implode unexpectedly. The extreme economic disparities in this form of capitalism can spark conflicts among those with few options and may harm everyone involved. As in Matthew 24:36-51, the catastrophe in *Parasite* arises suddenly from latent dangers, but when the film’s capitalism explodes, it metes out only punishment—no one, regardless of merit, reaps reward.

Resisting Moral Dualism: ‘All Characters in the Gray Zone’

In *Parasite*, merit does not determine characters’ fates, and the film more broadly resists the moral dualism of Matthew 24:36-51. *Parasite* develops each character with human flaws and understandable motivations. These nuanced and sympathetic portrayals make it difficult to separate the characters into innocents and villains. Because the film blurs who is in the right and in the wrong, characters’ merits do not determine how they fare in the film’s catastrophe. Thus, the portrayal of the dangers of capitalism is enhanced as clearly malicious agents are unnecessary to ignite capitalism’s explosive potential. As the catastrophe harms characters irrespective of their deserts, the film’s tragic dimension augments. Part of the danger of capitalism lies in its capacity to injure participants irrespective of merit.

Parasite’s ending is so heartbreaking in part because the film lacks any clear villains. Bong avoids painting any character as entirely good or bad. In an interview with Kristen Yoonsoo Kim, Bong says, “All characters in *Parasite* are in the gray zone... They’re all nice to some degree and bad to some degree. And I think that’s closer to reality.”⁴⁵ As Bong explores the consequences of economic disparities, he creates characters who are simultaneously human, flawed, and sympathetic. For example, even though the Parks are extremely wealthy, they do not fit the conventional stereotypes of greedy and malicious villains. Instead, the film presents them as

complexly human and reveals more about them as it progresses. Nam Lee describes how the film subtly portrays the Parks as “nouveau riche”: an innovation award allowed Mr. Park to rise from the middle class to the wealthy class. While Mr. Kim fell from the middle class through failed franchises, Mr. Park benefited from being “a decade younger, good with English, and tech savvy.” For Lee, the Kims and the Parks represent different paths of the middle class in contemporary South Korea.⁴⁶ Thus, the Parks do not play the role of stereotypical rich and cruel villains.

Reflecting on the meaning of *Parasite* in an interview for the Santa Barbara International Film Festival Cinema Society, Bong says the absence of clear villains invites audiences to question the film’s violence and traumatic ending.⁴⁷ These questions prompt reflection on how capitalism can fuel violence. Competition in the face of few avenues for economic advancement propels the Kims, Moon Gwang, and Geun Se into a tragic conflict.

The film’s one example of violence beyond that conflict takes place when Ki Taek murders Dong Ik, and the film subtly develops how Dong Ik becomes an object of Ki Taek’s rage.⁴⁸ While *Parasite* carefully presents Ki Taek as a sympathetic character trying to make the best of his circumstances, it also portrays a divide between the Kims and the Parks. Dong Ik says he does not want his domestic staff to “cross the line,” and this “line” has a visceral dimension connected to smell (minute 88).⁴⁹ The film highlights this motif when Da Song smells Ki Taek and Chung Sook and says they both smell like Ki Jung (minutes 51–52).⁵⁰ The focus on the Kims’ smell intensifies when the Kims are hiding under the coffee table and overhear Dong Ik telling Yeon Kyo how offensive Ki Taek’s smell is (minutes 87–88). In the film’s bloody climax, smell again draws attention to this economic divide. When the Parks are trying to rush Da Song to the hospital, Ki Taek freezes over Ki Jung’s bleeding body, so Dong Ik screams for Ki Taek to throw him the car keys. In the fray, the keys land under Geun Se; when Dong Ik reaches for them, he is physically

repulsed by Geun Se's smell. Witnessing this revulsion spurs Ki Taek to attack Dong Ik (minutes 113–115). Dong Ik's reaction to Geun Se's smell shows Ki Taek that Dong Ik sees both Ki Taek and Geun Se on the other side of the "line." Dong Ik's reaction also accentuates his different responses to the various victims in this scene—while he desperately tries to rush Da Song to the hospital, he ignores the injured Ki Jung and Geun Se. As Ki Taek realizes that Dong Ik's reaction to his smell exposes a deeper failure to recognize the humanity of those on the other side of the "line," rage overtakes Ki Taek. His murder of Dong Ik is a crime of passion as intense emotions grip him, and he quickly feels deep remorse.⁵¹ Stunned by his own actions, Ki Taek closes his eyes in a feeble attempt to flee mentally, and his regret drives him to hide in the basement (minutes 115–116 and 120–124). The film shows him weeping with remorse for this uncharacteristic violence (minute 122).

In interviews, Bong describes Ki Taek's return to the basement as "self-punishment."⁵² Ki Taek's murder of Dong Ik intensifies the film's tragic dimension. Not only does *Parasite* include the tragedy of "the powerless fighting each other," but it also shows how the economic disparities between the Kims and Parks spark rage that takes Dong Ik's life and makes Ki Taek a murderer.⁵³ In an interview with DP/30, Bong reflects on how his writing process focuses on the choices individual characters make in different situations. In *Parasite*, economic disparities play a central role in creating the situations that drive the characters to their woeful fates.⁵⁴

Because *Parasite* invites audiences to empathize with all the main characters, it lacks the kind of moral dualism prominent in Matthew 24:36-51. Both *Parasite* and Matthew 24:36-51 invite readers to consider the perspective of both the homeowners and the domestic workers, but they use different rhetorical strategies to achieve this effect. Matthew 24:36-51 includes imagery that places the reader in different perspectives. Matthew 24:42-44 invites readers into the

perspective of homeowners who are called to stay awake to avoid the thief in the night, but Matthew 24:45-51 encourages readers to emulate the worker who is diligent during the homeowner's absence. *Parasite* invites audiences into the perspectives of the homeowners and workers by depicting all its main characters as nuanced, flawed, and sympathetic and by providing enough context to make characters' motivations legible. Bong and scholars have reflected on how the film's title refers to both the Kims and Parks because the classes they represent are dependent on each other.⁵⁵ *Parasite*'s lack of moral dualism and caricatured villains enhances its warnings about capitalism because malicious agents are not necessary to ignite the harms that can arise from extreme economic disparities.

Attentiveness

Even though the anticipated judgment in Matthew 24:36-51 and the catastrophe in *Parasite* have different causes and results, attentiveness is a significant motif in both. Matthew 24:36-51 uses a series of contrasts to encourage attentiveness so that disciples will be ready for a future judgment regardless of its timing. The imagery in *Parasite* converges with the inattentive in these contrasts, but the imagery has a similar rhetorical function in both. The characters in *Parasite* echo Matthew 24:36-51's oblivious antediluvians, sleeping homeowners, and "wicked slave." In Matthew 24:36-51, these figures serve as counterexamples to engender the disciples' diligence. While these images do not represent groups to be avoided in the film, *Parasite* uses these characters to spur audiences to reflect on the economic disparities that catalyze its catastrophe. While the characters are unaware of the latent dangers of the capitalism around them, the film invites audiences to perceive the capitalism in their context more clearly and to contemplate how they will respond. Thus, both Matthew 24:36-51 and *Parasite* use this imagery to stimulate particular kinds of awareness.

Conclusion: Immanently Apocalyptic Layer of *Parasite*'s Genre

Bong's films famously interweave elements of multiple genres, so the apocalyptic imagery reminiscent of Matthew 24:36-51 adds another layer to *Parasite*'s composite genre. While Matthew 24:36-51 and *Parasite* share many apocalyptic elements, this imagery has different contexts and functions in each work. In order to call forth attentiveness to dangers often unnoticed, both deploy imagery of unwitting revelers before a flood, sleeping homeowners, and domestic workers surprised by the return of a homeowner. However, *Parasite* lacks analogues to Matthew 24:36-51's divine figure meting out righteous judgment and moral dualism. *Parasite*'s use of apocalyptic motifs has an immanent quality because the film's catastrophe erupts from dynamics internal to capitalism rather than from an external judge. Thus, the convergence of imagery between Matthew 24:36-51 and *Parasite* highlights the film's apocalyptic edge, and this layer of its genre explores the latent dangers in the extreme economic disparities created by capitalism.⁵⁶

Parasite is immanently apocalyptic. The film is apocalyptic in its uncompromising examination of how extreme economic disparities can reveal latent dangers of capitalism. It is immanently apocalyptic both in Frank Kermode's sense and in another sense. Kermode describes apocalyptic literature as immanent to underscore how conceptions of a future end shape one's understanding of and actions in the present.⁵⁷ The apocalyptic imagery in the film operates in this way as it uses an imaginative space to show audiences a possible result of extreme economic disparities and prompt them to reexamine their context. *Parasite* is also immanently apocalyptic in another sense: its catastrophe arises immanently. Dangers lurking beneath the surface emerge to produce the tragic ending; neither external divine judgment nor obvious villains cause it. In *Parasite*'s capitalism, violent competition erupts when those with limited opportunities glimpse a possibility for economic advancement. Predatory lending and a failed business have driven Geun

Se to hide in the Parks' basement, and when he and Moon Gwang encounter the Kims, they battle for the chance of employment since few other opportunities are open to them. This conflict results in loss of life and the disintegration of all the families involved. The immanently apocalyptic layer of *Parasite*'s genre emerges as dynamics intrinsic to its capitalism fuel the film's tragic ending and apocalyptic imagery intensifies its cautionary tale about economic disparities.

¹ Bong says he made this film for his own reasons—not for this anniversary in particular—but he is glad *Parasite* has contributed to the 100th anniversary of Korean cinema (Bong Joon Ho and Choi Woo Shik, “‘Parasite’ Director Bong Joon-ho Breaks Down the Opening Scene,” *Vanity Fair* on *YouTube*, November 12, 2019, accessed December 18, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bP-eqx2X9AY>); see also Bong Joon Ho, with Sharon Choi translating, in “‘Parasite’ Q&A with Director Bong Joon-ho,” Interview for Santa Barbara International Film Festival Cinema Society on *YouTube*, October 8, 2019, accessed June 7, 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8mWlhV9_w and Jieun Kiaer, Emily Lord, and Loli Kim, *The K-Wave On-Screen: In Words and Objects* (New York: Routledge, 2023), 37.

² Bong describes his own interest in using genre in innovative ways, and he appreciated David Ehrlich's description of him as “a genre unto himself” (Bong Joon Ho, with Sharon Choi translating, in “Bong Joon Ho on *Parasite* and His Eclectic Career | NYFF57,” Interview for Film at Lincoln Center on *YouTube*, October 13, 2019, accessed April 5, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tNtSMuPuBww>; David Ehrlich, “‘Parasite’ Review: Bong Joon Ho Delivers a Brilliant and Devastating Electric Shock of Economic Anxiety,” *IndieWire*, May 21, 2019, accessed December 18, 2022, <https://www.indiewire.com/2019/05/parasite-review-bong-joon-ho-1202143634/>; Calum Russell, “Bong Joon-Ho Discusses How His Films Defy Genre,” *Far Out*, January 13, 2022, accessed May 22, 2023, <https://faroutmagazine.co.uk/bong-joon-ho-discusses-how-his-films-defy-genre/>). Scholars and critics also praise Bong's experimentation with genre (Alireza Farahbakhsh and Ramtin Ebrahimi, “The Social Implications of Metaphor in Bong Joon-ho's *Parasite*,” *CINEJ Cinema Journal* 9, no. 1 [2021]: 114; Inkoo Kang, “Bong Joon-ho Is Weaponizing the Blockbuster,” *Slate*, October 24, 2019, accessed December 18, 2022, <https://slate.com/culture/2019/10/bong-joon-ho-profile-parasite-movie-spielberg-oscars.html>; Inkoo Kang, “Critic's Notebook: The Liberating Power of the ‘Parasite’ Oscar Win,” *The Hollywood Reporter*, February 10, 2020, accessed May 22, 2023, <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/general-news/critics-notebook-liberating-power-parasite-oscar-win-2-1278595/>; Kelly Kasulis, “*Parasite*: The South Korean Film Wowing the World,” *Al Jazeera* (Website), February 9, 2020, accessed January 7, 2023, <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2020/2/9/parasite-the-south-korean-film-wowing-the-world>; Nam Lee, *The Films of Bong Joon Ho* [New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2020], 149; and David Sims, “How Bong Joon Ho Invented the Weird World of *Parasite*,” *The Atlantic*, October 15, 2019, accessed December 16, 2022, <https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2019/10/bong-joon-ho-parasite-interview/600007/>).

³ Matthew Rindge, *Bible and Film: The Basics* (New York: Routledge, 2021), 2 and 157-158. For more examples of reception history of biblical apocalypses in film, see Tina Pippin, “This is the End: Apocalyptic Moments in Cinema,” in *The Bible in Motion: A Handbook of the Bible and Its Reception in Film*, ed. Rhonda Burnette-Bletsch (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016), 405-415.

⁴ While Bong does not mention Christianity, the Bible, or Matthew 24 as influences for *Parasite*, it is possible that they were unconscious influences. When reflecting on his creative process, Bong emphasizes the role of unconscious inspiration (Bong Joon Ho, with Sharon Choi translating, in “Bong Joon-ho *Parasite* Q&A with Rian Johnson & Sharon Choi,” Interview for [TheMovieReport.com](https://www.themovie.com) on *YouTube*, January 18, 2020, accessed June 7, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4baPaNXMQs>; Bong Joon Ho in “Bong Joon-Ho Reveals Where He

Got the Idea for ‘Parasite,’” Interview for IMDb at Toronto International Film Festival on *YouTube*, September 8, 2019, accessed December 16, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XEK6d3WhxgA>; Bong Joon Ho, with Sharon Choi translating, in “DP/30: Parasite, Bong Joon Ho,” Interview for DP/30: The Oral History of Hollywood on *YouTube*, October 6, 2019, accessed June 7, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9iO3MrZcS9c>; Bong Joon-ho, with Sharon Choi translating, in “Parasite: Bong Joon-ho & Song Kang-ho—Collider FYC Screening Series, presented by Arclight Cinemas,” Interview with Scott Mantz for Collider for Your Consideration Screening Series on *YouTube*, January 18, 2020, accessed June 22, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5mZPz7qNpUQ>; and Mark Russell, “Unlike His Peers, the Director Bong Joon-Ho Likes Ideas and Metaphors,” *The New York Times*, May 28, 2006, accessed May 22, 2023, <https://www.nytimes.com/2006/05/28/movies/28russ.html>). Bong describes how the idea for *Parasite* was percolating in his mind for several years before the idea for the third family in the basement came to him suddenly during a car ride (Bong, “Bong Joon Ho on Parasite and His Eclectic Career | NYFF57” and Bong Joon Ho, with Sharon Choi translating, in “Bong Joon Ho and Song Kang Ho on the Phenomenon of Parasite,” Interview for Film at Lincoln Center on *YouTube*, January 2, 2020, accessed June 7, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1dcwt8IsMNU>). Bong then wrote the screenplay over a few months: “Then it all came to me, and I wrote like it was a hurricane” (Sims, “How Bong Joon Ho Invented the Weird World of *Parasite*”). Since Bong’s parents emphasized Catholic virtues in his upbringing, it is theoretically possible that themes and images from Christianity and the Bible could have contributed unconscious inspiration for *Parasite*, but in the absence of Bong noting Matthew 24 as an influence, more concrete connections remain elusive (Do Jae Jin, “I Didn’t Want to Avoid Even 1cm of the Bitter Social Reality,” *Catholic Peace Newspaper*, February 19, 2020, accessed December 16, 2022 and through translation by Hyekyung Lee, <http://app.catholic.or.kr/web/news/?flag=8&seq=160490> and Bong Joon Ho, with Sharon Choi translating, in “SBIFF 2020—Bong Joon Ho Intro, Early Years & ‘Barking Dogs Never Bite,’” Interview with Scott Feinberg at Santa Barbara International Film Festival on *YouTube*, January 24, 2020, accessed June 22, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ty8fvT1Kwsl>). I would like to offer special thanks to my research assistant Hyekyung Lee for consulting Korean language media coverage of *Parasite* for this project.

⁵ Leopold Sabourin suggests that Matthew is the most apocalyptic canonical Gospel (“Apocalyptic Traits in Matthew’s Gospel,” *Religious Studies Bulletin* 3, no. 1 [1983]: 19). For more on the significance of apocalyptic dimensions in Matthew, see also Lamar O. Cope, “‘To the Close of the Age’: The Role of Apocalyptic Thought in the Gospel of Matthew,” in *Apocalyptic and the New Testament: Essays in Honor of J. Louis Martyn*, ed. Joel Marcus and Marion L. Soards, Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series 24 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1989), 113-24.

⁶ Stephen L. Cook, *The Apocalyptic Literature*, Interpreting Biblical Texts (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2003), 183.

⁷ Cook, *The Apocalyptic Literature*, 22.

⁸ John J. Collins, “Towards the Morphology of a Genre: Introduction,” *Semeia* 14 (1979): 9.

⁹ Cook, *The Apocalyptic Literature*, 183.

¹⁰ All biblical quotations are from the NRSV unless otherwise indicated.

¹¹ For more on the “Son of Man” figure in Daniel and the New Testament, see Michael Shepherd, “Daniel 7:13 and the New Testament Son of Man,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 68, no. 1 (Spring 2006): 99-111.

¹² Sabourin, “Apocalyptic Traits in Matthew’s Gospel,” 19-20.

¹³ Cook, *The Apocalyptic Literature*, 189. This project focuses on Matthew 24, rather than Mark 13 or Luke 21, because Matthew 24:36-51 exhibits the most extensive convergence of imagery with *Parasite*. For more detailed comparisons of Matthew 24 with Mark 13 and Luke 21, see Schuyler Brown, “The Matthean Apocalypse,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 2, no. 4 (July 1979): 2-27; Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 21-28*, Hermeneia, trans. James E. Crouch (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2005), 211-12 and 216-18; and John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co, 2005), 990-1000.

¹⁴ Cook, *The Apocalyptic Literature*, 23.

¹⁵ Cook, *The Apocalyptic Literature*, 23-24.

¹⁶ Bong confesses the decision to include a Scholar's Rock was intentionally "strange." Scholar's Rocks evoke status, though they are becoming less popular. They are an old tradition going back to the Joseon dynasty when Confucian scholars would display them on their writing desks (Patrick Brzeski, "Bong Joon Ho Reveals the Significance of 'Parasite's' Scholar Stone," *The Hollywood Reporter*, January 7, 2020, accessed May 22, 2024, <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/general-news/bong-joon-ho-reveals-significance-parasites-scholar-stone-1265811/> and Kiaer, Lord, and Kim, *The K-Wave On-Screen*, 55-56).

¹⁷ Bong describes how infiltration was an early and central concept in his development of *Parasite*. Drawing on his own brief experience tutoring for a wealthy family while he was a university student, he envisioned infiltration as the way the two families in the film would come into such close proximity (Bong, "Bong Joon Ho on Parasite and His Eclectic Career | NYFF57," Bong Joon Ho in "I'm Bong Joon Ho, Director of Parasite. AMA," *Reddit Ask Me Anything*, November 4, 2019, accessed December 18, 2022, https://www.reddit.com/r/movies/comments/drqrii/im_bong_joon_ho_director_of_parasite_ama/; Bong, "'Parasite' Director Bong Joon-ho Breaks Down the Opening Scene," Bong Joon Ho, with Sharon Choi translating, in "SBIFF 2020—Bong Joon Ho Discusses Parasite," Interview with Scott Feinberg at Santa Barbara International Film Festival on *YouTube*, January 24, 2020, accessed December 16, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w9czNUm4UJk>; Yohana Desta, "Bong Joon-Ho Looked to Hitchcock When Making *Parasite*: 'He Always Gives Me Very Strange Inspiration,'" *Vanity Fair* (Website), October 11, 2019, accessed December 16, 2022, <https://www.vanityfair.com/hollywood/2019/10/bong-joon-ho-parasite-interview>; Sims, "How Bong Joon Ho Invented the Weird World of *Parasite*," and Jen Yamato, "Why Everyone is Talking about Bong Joon Ho's 'Parasite': A Thriller Rooted in Class Conflict," *Los Angeles Times*, October 11, 2019, accessed December 16, 2022, <https://www.latimes.com/entertainment-arts/movies/story/2019-10-11/parasite-bong-joon-ho-song-kang-ho>).

¹⁸ This article focuses on the imagery *Parasite* shares with Matthew 24:36-51 because of the notable concentration of shared imagery and the significance of this imagery in a particularly apocalyptic section of Matthew. There are additional instances of potentially Christian imagery in the film that could merit further exploration. For example, Da Hye's description of peaches as "forbidden fruit" (minute 40) could be an allusion to Genesis 2-3, and the scenes in which Ki Taek expresses gratitude around the table in their semi-basement apartment (minutes 5-6 and 52-53) have a composition reminiscent of Leonardo da Vinci's "The Last Supper."

¹⁹ Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew*, New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992), 336; Craig S. Keener, *Matthew*, IVP New Testament Commentary (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 591; Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 993; and Mark Wilson, "Noah, the Ark, and the Flood in Early Christian Literature," *Scriptura* 113 (2014): 1-12.

²⁰ All quotations from *Parasite* are from the English subtitles. Yoon Jeong Oh notes that some viewers connected the flood in *Parasite* with the "biblical flood" in internet discussions ("The Transcultural Logic of Capital: The House and Stairs in *Parasite*," in *The Soft Power of the Korean Wave: Parasite, BTS and Drama*, ed. Youna Kim [London: Routledge, 2021], 75).

²¹ Though the family on the raft is viewed from a distance, Milo Sweedler identifies them as the Kims ("Class Polarization, Gendered Violence, and Climate Insecurity in Neoliberal Korea: Burning and Parasite," *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* [Feb 27, 2023]: 14, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10509208.2023.2183737>).

²² This imagery is often interpreted as describing one character in different scenarios (Blomberg, *Matthew*, 367-8; W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, Volume III: Commentary on Matthew XIX-XVIII, International Critical Commentary on the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1988], 386; and Luz, *Matthew 21-28*, 223-4).

²³ For a more detailed discussion of the form of slavery reflected in Matthew 24, see Jennifer Glancy, “Slaves and Slavery in the Matthean Parables,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 119, no. 1 (2000): 67-90.

²⁴ Kiaer, Lord, and Kim, *The K-Wave On-Screen*, 53-54.

²⁵ Davies and Allison connect the eating before the flood in Matthew 24:38 with the “wicked slave” eating in Matthew 24:49 (*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, 389).

²⁶ On the prominence of the metaphor of a thief at night for the unexpected timing of the return of the “Son of Man” in the New Testament, see Blomberg, *Matthew*, 367 and Keener, *Matthew*, 592.

²⁷ Bong Joon Ho, with Sharon Choi translating, in “Meet the 2020 DGA Nominees for Theatrical Feature Film,” Directors Guild of America on *YouTube*, February 6, 2020, accessed December 19, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oZf5L8nF3xc>.

²⁸ Bong, “Bong Joon Ho on Parasite and His Eclectic Career | NYFF57” and Bong, “DP/30: Parasite, Bong Joon Ho.”

²⁹ While the meaning of this phrase is debated, Luz and Nolland interpret it as referring to violent punishment inflicted by a homeowner (Luz, *Matthew 21-28*, 224-5 and Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 999-1000).

³⁰ Sweedler suggests that Ki Woo intends to kill Geun Se with the Scholar’s Rock (“Class Polarization,” 18).

³¹ Bong discusses how the Scholar’s Rock is a physical object—it becomes the weapon that injures Ki Woo—and how it represents Ki Woo’s desire for a more affluent life. Interestingly, Ki Woo—a character in the film rather than a critic—labels it “metaphorical” (Bong, “SBIFF 2020—Bong Joon Ho Discusses Parasite” and Bong, “‘Parasite’ Director Bong Joon-ho Breaks Down the Opening Scene”). Farahbakhsh and Ebrahimi argue that the Scholar’s Rock functions as “a symbol for empty promises of social mobility in a capitalist society” (“The Social Implications of Metaphor,” 106-107).

³² The violent ending of *Parasite* also shares some similarity with the imagery in Matthew 24:40-41, but this is the weakest point of the convergence. These verses use the image of two people engaging in everyday labor when one will suddenly experience judgment and the other reward at an unexpected time: “Then two will be in the field; one will be taken and one will be left. Two women will be grinding meal together; one will be taken and one will be left.” Interpreters debate whether the ones taken or the ones left behind are those who experience judgment. For arguments that the ones taken experience judgment, see Blomberg, *Matthew*, 366 and Benjamin Merkle, “Who Will Be Left Behind?: Rethinking the Meaning of Matthew 24:40-41 and Luke 17:34-35,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 72, no. 1 (Spring 2010): 169-79. For arguments that the ones left behind are the ones who experience judgment, see Daniel J. Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew*, Sacra Pagina (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1991), 342-343. While at least one member of each family in *Parasite* is killed, these losses are tragic and not connected to differential experiences of punishment and reward.

³³ Bong describes how his focus on economic disparities in *Parasite* grew out of his work with this theme in *Snowpiercer*. In *Parasite*, Bong explored this theme in a mundane setting rather than a sci-fi film (Bong, “SBIFF 2020—Bong Joon Ho Discusses Parasite” and Bong, “Bong Joon Ho on Parasite and His Eclectic Career | NYFF57”). It is interesting to wonder if the apocalyptic elements in *Snowpiercer* also shaped Bong’s imagination for *Parasite*.

³⁴ For example, see Bong, “SBIFF 2020—Bong Joon Ho Discusses Parasite;” Bong, “‘Parasite’ Director Bong Joon-ho Breaks Down the Opening Scene;” Bong Joon Ho in “Bong Joon Ho and Tom Quinn Talk ‘Parasite,’ ‘Mad Max’ & Marvel,” *Variety* on *YouTube*, November 19, 2019, accessed January 7, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CG-cM3b9cmk>; Kang, “Bong Joon-ho Is Weaponizing the Blockbuster;” Kasulis, “*Parasite*: The South Korean Film Wowing the World;” Kristen Yoonsoo Kim, “‘All Characters in ‘Parasite’ Are in the Gray Zone.’ Bong Joon-ho on the War of the Classes in His New Masterpiece,” *The Ringer*, October 11, 2019, accessed January 7, 2023, <https://www.theringer.com/movies/2019/10/11/20909610/bong-joon-ho-interview-parasite>; and Choe Sang-Hun, “Bong Joon Ho’s Path From Seoul to Oscar Dominance,” *The New York*

Times, February 13, 2020, accessed January 7, 2023, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/02/13/world/asia/bong-joon-ho-south-korea.html>.

³⁵ Bong, “‘Parasite’ Q&A with Director Bong Joon-ho.” See also Bong, “DP/30: Parasite, Bong Joon Ho” and Bong Joon Ho, with Sharon Choi translating, in “Best Picture ‘Parasite’ | Q&A with Director Bong Joon-ho and Actor Song Kang-ho | MoMA FILM,” Interview for the Museum of Modern Art Contenders Series on *YouTube*, February 7, 2020, accessed June 22, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FjbmyOGve9M>.

³⁶ Lee also emphasizes how *Parasite* functions as a warning of potential consequences of capitalism, and she highlights “moral corruption and anomie” as prominent among them (*The Films of Bong Joon Ho*, 150-151).

³⁷ For more detailed discussion of how *Parasite* reflects and explores the particular form of capitalism in contemporary South Korea, see Brian X. Chen, “‘Parasite’ and South Korea’s Income Gap: Call It Dirt Spoon Cinema,” *The New York Times*, October 30, 2019, accessed January 9, 2023, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/10/18/movies/parasite-movie-south-korea.html>; Farahbakhsh and Ebrahimi, “The Social Implications of Metaphor,” 88, 92, 96, 102, and 112-113; Joseph Jonghyun Jeon, “Lines Left to Cross: Deglobalization and the Domestic Western in Bong Joon-ho’s *Parasite*,” *Critical Inquiry* 49, no. 4 (2023): 557-580; Kyung Hyun Kim, *Hegemonic Mimicry: Korean Popular Culture of the Twenty-First Century* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2021), 164-94; and Lee, *The Films of Bong Joon Ho*, 139-151.

³⁸ Kiaer, Lord, and Kim, *The K-Wave On-Screen*, 38-47; Sims, “How Bong Joon Ho Invented the Weird World of *Parasite*,” and Sweedler, “Class Polarization,” 12-13.

³⁹ Bong, “Meet the 2020 DGA Nominees for Theatrical Feature Film” and Kim Gu Cheol, “Symbols and Metaphors in *Parasite* by Director Bong Joon Ho,” *Munhwa Ilbo*, June 12, 2019, accessed December 19, 2022 and through translation by Hyekyung Lee, <http://www.munhwa.com/news/view.html?no=2019061201032412053001>. For more on the prominence of staircases and verticality, see Bong, “Best Picture ‘Parasite’ | Q&A with Director Bong Joon-ho and Actor Song Kang-ho | MoMA FILM;” Bong, “Bong Joon Ho and Song Kang Ho on the Phenomenon of *Parasite*,” Jeon, “Lines Left to Cross,” 564; Kiaer, Lord, and Kim, *The K-Wave On-Screen*, 48-49; Lee, *The Films of Bong Joon Ho*, 147; and Oh, “The Transcultural Logic of Capital,” 69-73.

⁴⁰ Kang, “Bong Joon-ho Is Weaponizing the Blockbuster.”

⁴¹ Sweedler interprets this conflict as “a grisly allegory of intra-class rivalry in neoliberal Korea” (“Class Polarization,” 20). See also Farahbakhsh and Ebrahimi, “The Social Implications of Metaphor,” 103 and 111 and Lee, *The Films of Bong Joon Ho*, 140 and 145-147. Analogously, Luz and Nolland interpret the “wicked slave” beating his fellows in Matthew 24:49 as a conflict between those with limited power (Luz, *Matthew 21-28*, 224 and Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 996-9).

⁴² Kang, “Bong Joon-ho Is Weaponizing the Blockbuster.” See also Bong Joon Ho, with Sharon Choi translating, in “Bong Joon Ho on the Meaning of *Parasite*’s Title & the Journey of Awards Season,” Interview for Film at Lincoln Center on *YouTube*, February 3, 2020, accessed June 7, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xy6QlEnMnh0>. Jeon sees the film’s tragic dimension as part of a larger reflection on how fewer and fewer have “space” to prosper in the current form of global capitalism (“Lines Left to Cross,” 557-558, 568, and 580).

⁴³ Bong Joon Ho, with Sharon Choi translating, in “Parasite Cast and Crew Q&A | TIFF 2019,” Interview at Toronto International Film Festival on *YouTube*, September 7, 2019, accessed May 31, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rnofTL3XIsA>.

⁴⁴ Sweedler, “Class Polarization,” 21. Bong discusses the contrast between the Kim family spending time together at the beginning of the film and their separation at the end. Bong says, “The biggest punishment that this family faces is the fact that they are all scattered in the end; they are no longer together” (Bong, “Parasite Cast and Crew Q&A | TIFF 2019”).

⁴⁵ Kim, ““All Characters in “Parasite” Are in the Gray Zone.”” See also Bong, “Parasite: Bong Joon-ho & Song Kang-ho—Collider FYC Screening Series” and Bong, “Best Picture ‘Parasite’ | Q&A with Director Bong Joon-ho and Actor Song Kang-ho | MoMA FILM.”

⁴⁶ Lee, *The Films of Bong Joon Ho*, 142-143 and 146.

⁴⁷ Bong, ““Parasite’ Q&A with Director Bong Joon-ho” and Bong, “DP/30: Parasite, Bong Joon Ho.”

⁴⁸ Bong, “Parasite Cast and Crew Q&A | TIFF 2019.”

⁴⁹ Bong, ““Parasite’ Q&A with Director Bong Joon-ho;” Kim, *Hegemonic Mimicry*, 182 and 189; and Sweedler, “Class Polarization,” 16-17.

⁵⁰ Bong says this scene was initially written by his co-writer. He was so moved by the scene that it significantly contributed to his development of the latter half of the film, including the third family in the basement (Bong, “Bong Joon-ho Parasite Q&A with Rian Johnson & Sharon Choi”).

⁵¹ Farahbakhsh and Ebrahimi also argue that Ki Taek acts in “a moment of rage.” They interpret Ki Taek as “gradually becoming more class-conscious” through closer proximity to members of a wealthier class. As Ki Taek realizes that the Parks see members of the lower classes as replaceable, he comes to despise them (Farahbakhsh and Ebrahimi, “The Social Implications of Metaphor,” 88, 97-98, and 109-111). Similarly, Lee perceives that Ki Taek “finally identifies” with Geun Se. A cumulation of humiliations spurs Ki Taek to attack Dong Ik (Lee, *The Films of Bong Joon Ho*, 143-145). In contrast, Kim does not identify an understandable motivation for Ki Taek’s murder of Dong Ik, and Sweedler contends that Ki Taek’s murder is motivated by Dong Ik’s disdain for his smell but is “out of proportion.” Both interpret Ki Taek’s murder as the film’s symbolic response to capitalism more broadly (Kim, *Hegemonic Mimicry*, 189-191 and Sweedler, “Class Polarization,” 19-20).

⁵² Bong, “Bong Joon Ho on the Meaning of Parasite’s Title & the Journey of Awards Season” and Bong, “Parasite Cast and Crew Q&A | TIFF 2019.”

⁵³ Kang, “Bong Joon-ho Is Weaponizing the Blockbuster.”

⁵⁴ Bong, “DP/30: Parasite, Bong Joon Ho.”

⁵⁵ Adele Ankers-Range, “Parasite: Bong Joon-ho Reveals the Meaning Behind the Title of the Oscar-Nominated Film,” *IGN*, January 31, 2020, accessed May 30, 2024, <https://www.ign.com/articles/parasite-bong-joon-ho-reveals-the-meaning-behind-the-title-of-the-oscar-nominated-film>; Farahbakhsh and Ebrahimi, “The Social Implications of Metaphor,” 97-101 and 113; and Jeon, “Lines Left to Cross,” 563.

⁵⁶ For other examples of reading New Testament apocalyptic literature in conversation with contemporary contexts, see Andrew Shepherd’s discussion of Matthew 24 and visions of the future in relation to climate change (“Apocalyptic Visions and Anthems of Hope: Climate Change Communication and Future Possibilities,” *International Journal of Public Theology* 15, no. 4 [2021]: 463-83) and Pablo Richard’s discussion of Revelation as a source of hope in contemporary liberation movements (trans. Carmen M. Rodriguez and José Rodriguez, “Reading the *Apocalypse*: Resistance, Hope, and Liberation in Central America,” in *From Every People and Nation: The Book of Revelation in Intercultural Perspective*, ed. David Rhoads [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005], 146-64).

⁵⁷ Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction with a New Epilogue* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 3-31.

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