

## ALL THINGS IN CHRIST

In all wisdom and prudence making known to us the mystery of His will according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Him the plan for the fullness of the times

**TO HEAD UP THE ALL THINGS IN THE CHRIST,  
the things in the heavens and the things upon the earth, in Him...**

(Ephesians 1:8b-10)

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Article #40

### ***Rich Man & Lazarus – A Parable***

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Probably, the verses most often referenced to make the case for an eternal *hell* of fire, the immortality of the soul, and life *in* death, that is, afterlife (i.e., life immediately after death or *in* death) is the account of the Rich Man and Lazarus, as recorded in Luke 16. According to this doctrine, the rich man being tormented in flame is a picture of the lost in an endless, fiery hell with flames licking at their feet and worms coming out of their ears.

There are at least three, probably more, schools of thought on this story.

One says that it is a literal or true story; therefore, it literally speaks of and supports the whole concept of *hell* as a place of eternal, insufferable torment, which is tantamount to torture from an angry, vengeful god.

The next school says it is a parable but comes to the same conclusion as the literalists. In other words, they make it into a literal story but call it a parable. This is like mixing oil and water because a *parable* is defined as "a short simple story from which a moral lesson may be drawn; an *allegory*, which is a symbolic story."

The third school says it is a parable, but it has nothing to do with an eternal hell. In fact, it has nothing to do with a doctrine on heaven and hell; rather, it was a teachable moment for a specific group of religious elites that were grumbling against and scoffing at Jesus' every word. In other words, it is a symbolic story designed to make a point.

This article supports the third school; however, before explaining the story as a parable; let us consider a few points.

#### **Literal Story?**

There are certain things about the parable that clearly are not literal. First, Abraham's bosom is figurative language referring to blessing and the promises, not to literally being in his bosom. Second, the rich man is in flames of torment. Flames destroy the body, the flesh. There is no way for a human to live in fire; it is impossible. To accept this, one has to come up with some explanation; such as, the rich man is merely a soul with some form, or he has a body that cannot be destroyed, which is why he is in torment. Third, this man could not have been just a spirit, for he had eyes and a tongue, which means he had a body. Fourth, for relief, the rich man desired a

little water on his tongue. How could a little drop on the tongue satisfy one's thirst if he were in a flame of torment? These few points alone refute the notion that the story is literal.

Another argument made to support its literalness is the observation that Jesus never referred to the given name of a person in his parables; therefore, this must not be a parable but a real story. This is rather weak reasoning. Scripture tells us that Jesus spoke only in parables to the multitudes.

All these things Jesus spoke to the crowds in parables, and He did not speak to them without a parable. (Matthew 13:34 NASB)

Why would Jesus reverse course, especially when he spoke to the blind guides of the blind, the Pharisees, and give them a literal story?

### **An Oral Jewish Tradition of Men**

Actually, the story might not have been new to the Jews or to Jesus, for others have offered that it is a repackaged version of a story that was part of an oral Jewish tradition that came out of the time of Babylonian captivity, making it five to six centuries old. The rabbis did not write down their oral law until much later, and the Babylonian Talmud was not completed until 500 AD.

The oral tradition dating back to the Babylonian captivity that was later written down, which most closely relates to this parable, is the Talmud's teaching of a vain and selfish girl who died. Dumah, a mythological angel, carried her to Hades that was divided into two regions, one for the righteous who were in bliss and one for the wicked who were in torment.

By the way, in Babylonian mythology, Dumah is the name of the 14<sup>th</sup> gate of hell, and Ishtar passed through Dumah as she journeyed to the underworld.

The point is that the parable spoken by Jesus was based on a Babylonian myth and, as such, was not presented as a doctrinal statement. It was more on the order of a fable to teach a lesson, a fable that the Jews had made a tradition.

Thus, Jesus, who knew the rabbinic oral traditions and, what he called, the *tradition of men*, used a familiar story to make a point, not to teach a doctrine or to even correct an oral tradition. In other words, he met them on their own turf, so to speak.

This is done quite frequently as a teaching method. For example, if one wants to teach a sports team (e.g., basketball, football, etc.) a lesson outside of their sport, one might use sports analogies or metaphors to get their attention, that is, teach them with something that is familiar.

The fact of the matter is that throughout scripture familiar things are used; just consider the use of many horticultural metaphors. It was not unusual for Jesus to use common things of that day to make his point. One such thing was the metaphor of planting a seed.

The problem was that the Jews, especially the religious elite, had adopted the beliefs of their captors or rulers, starting with the Babylonians and progressing to the Greeks, and they incorporated these into their traditions, much like Christians have done.

Again, Jesus was "getting in their face," so to speak, with their own belief system that had become the tradition of men. He simply used these things to teach them something about their true moral condition, and, in so doing, he, at times, indirectly refuted their beliefs as well.

It was the underlying message of this story that Jesus was conveying, not the beliefs that some Jews had adopted from their captors.

This leads to Jesus' audience, which is a vital key to understanding this parable.

### **Jesus' Audience**

As a reminder, after Solomon's death, the United Kingdom of Israel was split into two houses (kingdoms, nations), Judah and Israel. These two houses were never reunited, and Israel was cast out among the nations and lost their national identity as Israel. However, Judah did return to the land and were under Roman rule when Jesus came on the scene. Although there were undoubtedly descendants from most of the twelve original tribes, those in Judea and Jerusalem during that period were mostly identified with Judah, thus, Jews or Judahites.

Consequently, in what follows, the terms *Judah* and *Judahites (Jews)* are used because Jesus was walking among mostly those of Judah and not of Israel when He spoke this parable. However, it needs to be kept in mind that much of what is said of Judah could also be said of Israel, especially from a historical perspective dating back to 745-721 BC.

### **Pharisees & Scribes**

Now, within Judah, Jesus directed the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus to a very specific group, the Pharisees and the scribes. We could call them the religious elite of Judah who grumbled against and scoffed at Jesus' every step of the way to the cross. They were lovers of money and held to what Jesus called "the tradition of men," which He labeled as hypocritical, leavened teaching.

(5) Then the Pharisees and scribes questioned Him, Why do your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat bread with unwashed hands? (6) And answering, He said to them, Well did Isaiah prophesy concerning you, hypocrites; as it has been written: "This people honors Me with the lips, but their heart is far away from Me; (7) and in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men." Isa. 29:13 (8) For forsaking the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men: immersings of utensils and cups, and many other such like things you do. (9) And He said to them, Well do you to set aside the commandment of God so that you may keep your tradition? ... (12) And you no longer allow him to do anything for his father or mother, (13) making the Word of God of no effect by your tradition which you delivered. And many such like things you do. (Mark 7:5-9, 12-13 LITV)

At which time the myriads of the crowd being gathered together, so as to trample on one another, He began to say to His disciples first, Take heed to yourselves of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. (Luke 12:1 LITV)

(1) Now all the tax collectors and the sinners were coming near Him to listen to Him. (2) Both the Pharisees and the scribes began to grumble, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them." (3) So He told them this parable, saying.... (Luke 15:1-3 NASB)

(14) Now the Pharisees, who were lovers of money, were listening to all these things and were scoffing at Him. (15) And He said to them, "You are those who justify yourselves in the sight of men, but God knows your hearts; for that which is highly esteemed among men is detestable in the sight of God. (Luke 16:14-15 NASB)

Paul, a former Pharisee himself, picked up this same theme and warned the faithful brethren.

See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ. (Colossians 2:8 NASB)

### **Five-Part Parable**

The story of the Rich Man and Lazarus is often presented as if an isolated parable presenting a doctrinal truth about heaven and hell, but it is best viewed in the context of what precedes it. Simply, it is not an island unto itself; it is a figurative story connected to four other stories that precede it, so let us briefly look at them in order.

### **The Lost Sheep (Luke 15:3-7)**

The ninety-nine sheep represent the self-righteous Judahites of that day that saw no need to repent (change their mind). They were secure in the house of Judah and would have nothing to do with Jesus, except to demand his crucifixion. They thought they were safe; but they were the most unsafe and at the greatest risk among the Jews. The self-righteous were the ones in the most danger, for they were left in the wilderness or open pasture while the good shepherd sought for the one lost sheep. Being left alone in a wilderness without the shepherd is sure doom for sheep, for predators, such as wolves, will come and devour them. Thus, it was going to be for the self-righteous, for they would soon face the wrath of the Roman army.

The message of John the Baptist and Jesus was "*Repent, for near is the kingdom of the heavens*" (Matthew 3:2 CLV). The one lost sheep represents the ones that heeded the message to repent. They were the publicans or tax-gatherers and sinners of the house of Judah who responded to Jesus' love and mercy.

Matthew (Matthew 9:9), Levi (Luke 5:27), and Zaccheus (Luke 19:2) were tax-gatherers and each responded to Jesus' call. In those days, the Romans collected taxes from its citizens, and many of the tax-gatherers or publicans, as they were called, were Jews. The elite religious class of the

Jews in Jerusalem (scribes and Pharisees) looked down upon these publicans as sinners and viewed them in the same light as what they would call *heathens*. It was odious for a Jew to join forces with a foreign country and to be even part of extorting money from other Jews. Many Jews not only collected the tribute, but used their position as an opportunity to extort extra money for themselves. This is why John the Baptist warned that they should collect no more than what they had been ordered to (Luke 3:13), and Zaccheus vowed to pay back four times as much to anyone that he had defrauded (Luke 19:8).

This was the Lord's view of the Jews, but the next story addresses the Jew's view.

### **The Lost Coin (Luke 15:8-10)**

A woman is described as possessing ten coins, one of which she had lost. She lit a lamp, swept the house clean, and searched for the one lost coin. When she did find it, she called her neighbors together, so that all could join in her joy.

Coins were a prized possession often used as ornaments, which represented the blessing of the *elohim* called *Yahweh*. As *Yahweh's* called-out people, they had known his blessing, but had turned from him and gone astray; they were lost. Consequently, the lost coin represented those of Judah who had lost their way and repented of their specific sin of turning away.

### **The Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32)**

The next part of the parable is a continuation of the story line being developed by Jesus. Actually, the emphasis of this story is just as much on the elder son that remained in the father's house, just like the ninety-nine sheep that remained in the wilderness.

There are two groups represented in this story: the ones who were far from the father's house, and the ones who were far from the father's heart, even though they remained in the house. The first group included the publicans and sinners who were the outcasts of Judah, separated from *Yahweh* by their sin, because they joined with foreigners. The other group included the same as the ninety-nine sheep, the self-righteous scribes and Pharisees who did not join with foreigners but stayed in the house. However, they were distant in heart from their *elohim* due to their pride, even though they were in his house.

The prodigal joined forces with the citizens of a foreign country. It was so bad for the prodigal that he was willing to eat the food of hogs; hogs were the food of the heathens, a food forbidden to the Jew. The prodigal could not even consider himself worthy of being his father's son.

Jesus was putting His finger on the very pulse of the fallen condition of Judah. They were no different than the nations around them and, in fact, were worse, for at least the nations were true to who they were, but the prodigal was totally unfaithful to his calling. The call to repent was heard by the prodigal, and he returned to his father, declaring that he had sinned. Humbled by his waywardness, he was willing to take the lowest place in his father's house. However, the father would have none of that, rejoiced, put a robe on him, and gave him his best.

On the other hand, the elder son failed to share in the joy of his brother's return. Instead, he grumbled against his brother who had squandered his father's wealth, while he had remained behind and slaved for his father. Hear the resentment in his voice: "Lo! so many years am I slaving for you ... and you never give me a kid that I may make merry with my friends" (Luke 15:29 CLV). The father responded to him: "Child, you are always with me, and all mine is yours. Yet we must be merry and rejoice, seeing that this your brother was dead and revives, and was lost and was found" (Luke 15:31-32 CLV).

This was the heart of the scribes and the Pharisees. Instead of repenting and even rejoicing as they saw sinners and publicans repenting, their hearts were hardened, exposing the depths of their religious pride. After all, in their minds, they had been doing everything right. Had they not been the keepers and teachers of the law, and had they not been performing all the sacrificial rites all those years to placate their elohim? Yes; but where was their heart?

Jesus sought obedience of heart and not sacrifice out of duty. No wonder there was great rejoicing over the one who changed his ways.

### **The Unjust Administrator (Luke 16:1-13)**

The next part of the parable focuses solely on the scribes and Pharisees who were very fond of money. In fact, they were very shrewd when it came to money, and this is what Jesus portrayed with the unjust administrator or steward. The lord in this case is not Jesus, for he could not commend unrighteous behavior. Jesus condemned the love of money. Most translations make Luke 16:9 a statement by Jesus, but this is out of character. How could he commend such behavior? Perhaps, he was not commending it? The Greek does not contain punctuation marks, so verse 9 could just as easily have been a question than a statement. The *Concordant Literal Version* (CLV) makes it a question: "And am I saying to you, Make for yourselves friends with the mammon of injustice, that, whenever it may be defaulting, they should be receiving you into the eonian tabernacles?"

The CLV has some strange wording so consider the following from other translations. The following has been modified based on the CLV rendering.

(9) "And I am saying to you, make friends for yourselves by means of the wealth of unrighteousness, so that when it fails, they will receive you into the eternal [eonian] dwellings? (10) "He who is faithful in a very little thing is faithful also in much; and he who is unrighteous in a very little thing is unrighteous also in much. (11) "Therefore, if you have not been faithful in the use of unrighteous wealth, who will entrust the true riches to you? (12) "And if you have not been faithful in the use of that which is another's, who will give you that which is your own? (13) "No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth." (Luke 16:9-13)

Notice the difference in meaning when Jesus' words are posed as a question: "Am I saying to you?" In other words, Jesus was warning them not to make friends with the mammon of injustice. Why? Because you cannot serve two masters; you will love one and hate the other! The Pharisees had, in fact, fallen into this trap. They loved the god of mammon and hated the elohim of Israel.

Luke confirmed the heart of the Pharisees in the next verse.

Now the Pharisees, who were lovers of money, were listening to all these things and were scoffing at Him. (Luke 16:14 NASB)

Rather than taking Jesus' words to heart and repenting, these elite were more intent on justifying themselves before men. They wanted the place of honor among men, which Jesus said was an abomination (Luke 16:15). The Pharisees were right before men but not right before their elohim. The latter is what pleases God.

Jesus then proceeded to bring the kingdom into view, a critical point for the last part of this five-part parable.

(16) "The Law and the Prophets were proclaimed until John; since that time the gospel of the kingdom of God has been preached, and everyone is forcing his way into it. (17) "But it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one stroke of a letter of the Law to fail. (18) "Everyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery, and he who marries one who is divorced from a husband commits adultery. (Luke 16:16-18 NASB)

Until John the Baptist appeared on the scene, Judah had no recorded word from a prophet for at least four centuries. All that preceded John was appropriate for the time, but with John a new proclamation went forth that their long-awaited Messiah was among them, and that it was time to receive him, and a time for them to repent and return to Yahweh. The kingdom had drawn near even in their midst. Instead, when they realized that the One in their midst had great power and authority, they sought to seize the kingdom by carnal means; that is, they tried to take it by force. They would have made him king, which would have led to an all-out revolt and war with Rome. Besides, the kingdom was of another realm (John 18:36).

Then notice that, as if to inject something out of context, Jesus brought divorce into the picture. But it was not out of context, for Jesus was driving home the point that Yahweh's chosen people had been divorced from him due to their adultery and uncleanness. The nation of Judah was dead in the day in which Messiah stood in their midst, and this is the real message of the story of the Rich Man and Lazarus. Jesus pointed to a national death.

This leads to the last part of the five-part parable.

### **The Rich Man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31)**

It is important to keep in mind that Jesus was not attempting to lay out a theological, dogmatic statement about salvation, as so many try to read into this story. He was attempting to impress on the Pharisees, in particular, and Judah, in general, the severity of their stubbornness and blindness to their true adulterous condition in light of the kingdom and their divorced from Yahweh.

(19) "Now there was a rich man, and he habitually dressed in purple and fine linen, joyously living in splendor every day. (20) "And a poor man named Lazarus was laid at his gate, covered with sores, (21) and longing to be fed with the crumbs which were falling from the rich man's table; besides, even the dogs were coming and licking his sores. (22) "Now the poor man died and was carried away by the angels to Abraham's bosom; and the rich man also died and was buried. (23) "In Hades he lifted up his eyes, being in torment, and \*saw Abraham far away and Lazarus in his bosom. (24) "And he cried out and said, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus so that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool off my tongue, for I am in agony in this flame.' (25) "But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that during your life you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus bad things; but now he is being comforted here, and you are in agony. (26) 'And besides all this, between us and you there is a great chasm fixed, so that those who wish to come over from here to you will not be able, and that none may cross over from there to us.' (27) "And he said, 'Then I beg you, father, that you send him to my father's house—(28) for I have five brothers—in order that he may warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.' (29) "But Abraham \*said, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.' (30) "But he said, 'No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent!' (31) "But he said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead.'" (Luke 16:19-31 NASB)

### The Rich Man

The garment of purple and fine linen means that the rich man represents sons of Israel's called to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

'Now then, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine; and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words that you shall speak to the sons of Israel." (Exodus 19:5-6 NASB)

*Linen* refers to the priestly function and *purple* refers to the kingly function. Through the rich man, Jesus was stating that the ones called to be a kingdom of priests were dead to their calling when Jesus appeared among them—the reason for them being in the fire of persecution. As Jesus walked among his blood brethren, they were under the rule of Rome.

Jesus was speaking of Israel's condition in his day and was looking forward to the fire of persecution that Israel would continue to have. In 70 AD, Jerusalem and Herod's Temple were totally destroyed, many Jews were killed, and others were scattered to the nations. This was a fulfillment of Hebrews 8:13: When he said, "A new covenant," he has made the first obsolete. But whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to disappear.

Take note that the rich man cried out to Abraham, and Abraham acknowledged him as "child." This is similar to the father of the prodigal son as he spoke to his son who remained in his house: "Child, you are always with me, and all mine is yours." So, there is a familial relationship in the use the word *child*.

Ask yourself this question: As a father would you condemn your "child" to a place of torture called *hell*, without trying to save or restore him? Is this truly a story that portrays the Creator and Source of all things whose essence is love?

The rich man represented ones who were related to Abraham, in this case by blood. Jesus injected this word so that there would be no question that the rich man referred to the Jews that had been called to share in the inheritance of Abraham but were disqualifying themselves.

As blood descendants of the Hebrew Abraham, they thought he was all they needed. However, they were looking to the wrong one to deliver them. In their pride, they thought all they needed was Abraham, and their elohim would look the other way when it came to their sin. After all, were they not the apple of his eye, his chosen people simply based on their genes (i.e., bloodline)?

(54) Jesus answered, "If I glorify Myself, My glory is nothing; it is My Father who glorifies Me, of whom you say, 'He is our God'; (55) and you have not come to know Him, but I know Him; and if I say that I do not know Him, I will be a liar like you, but I do know Him and keep His word. (56) "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad." (57) So the Jews said to Him, "You are not yet fifty years old, and have You seen Abraham?" (58) Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I am." (59) Therefore they picked up stones to throw at Him, but Jesus hid Himself and went out of the temple. (John 8:54-59 NASB)

The Jews could not fathom that Jesus was greater than Abraham. Consequently, Jesus was telling the Jews that Abraham and their bloodline could not and would not deliver them, for there is only one who can and will do that. The day would come that they would seek for whatever relief they could, but it would not come unless they repented and confessed that Jesus is Messiah and Lord.

Instead, Abraham reminded the rich man that he had been blessed with good things in life, which refers to Israel's once blessed status as an out-called people. In essence, the nation had its chance but had been set aside due to apostasy and unbelief.

### **In Hades**

Translations that use the word *hell* instead of the word *Hades* do a disservice to the reader, for they are injecting interpretative bias. Out of a review of thirty-five translations, it was discovered that ten use the word *hell* (BBE, CEV, Bishops, Geneva, GW, KJV, LITV MKJV, Murdock, Webster).

The word *Hades* simply means the place of the unseen or the dead, or the state of being dead. It is not so much about a place as it is a state of unconsciousness. This is the Hebrew meaning of *Hades*, which in Hebrew is called *Sheol*.

So, the most basic meaning of the rich man in Hades is that he was in the place of the unseen. On a national level, it signified Judah that was rejecting the very One who came to deliver them

into the long-awaited Kingdom. The religious leaders were blind guides. They were in a place of death as long as they stood in opposition to Messiah.

As stated earlier, Jesus was speaking to the Jews on their turf. They had been living under Babylonian and then Greek rule before the Romans came along. Greek mythology had a place called *Hades* that was divided into two parts: *Erebus* was the first part and the place of the souls of the dead. Keep in mind that they believed in the immortality of the soul. *Tartarus* was the second part and the place where the Titans were imprisoned. This is not found in any teaching contained in Hebrew scripture. It came from the Egyptians and was adopted by the Jews who incorporated it into what Jesus called the tradition of men. This does not make it a reality, and just because Jesus used a tradition of men to make a point, does not make it a Church doctrine.

### **A Great Chasm**

Next, we are told that a great chasm was fixed between the two dead men, which referred to a deep ravine or valley with cliffs on each side. The gulf was so great that no one could cross over.

It has been suggested that this great chasm refers to the Great Rift Valley in which the Jordan River flows, which is the greatest and longest visible chasm on earth. The Jordan River is best known for its dividing of the original land promised to Abraham from the land of the nations. When Joshua and the tribes entered the water of the Jordan, they entered into the Promised Land (Joshua 3), as a type of spiritual salvation. Historically, the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah were in the same rift valley, and they were turned into ashes by fire (2 Peter 2:6).

Thus, the great chasm represents the gulf between those who will enter the coming Kingdom of Christ, and those who will not enter. Some from ancient Judah will enter the land of milk and honey, and some will be left out in the darkness of the nations. They must come in the same *Way* that we all do! It is not by ancestral blood or genes but by justification by faith.

But the true Jew is one inwardly, and true circumcision is heart-circumcision—not literal, but spiritual; and such people receive praise not from men, but from God. (Romans 2:29 WNT)

Abraham and Lazarus were in sight and hearing of the rich man in torment. Considering the modern-day Christian view of heaven and hell in light of this parable, ask yourself: What joy would it bring to saved ones to be able to observe and hear loved ones in torment? Some take this to mean that Abraham is in heaven and the rich man is in hell. This makes matters even worse, for all in heaven would continue to see the torment of hell every day for all eternity. This is nonsense.

Sadly, this very picture was preached by a very well-known preacher, only he added that those in heaven will look down on those in hell with glee. Does this sound like the heart of the Creator and Source of all, the *God is love*?

Further, how could there be communication between two places that are separated by a great distance, supposedly, one above the earth and one in the earth?

## Five Brothers

Jesus continued the conversation by bringing in five brothers of the rich man. This again gives a clue as to the identity of the rich man. Of the twelve tribes of Israel, Judah had five brothers born of Leah (Genesis 30:20). The tribe of Judah usurped both the kingdom and priesthood, which made them the representative of all the promises given to Abraham. However, Jesus was stating that the ones who should receive it were in no position to receive it and, in fact, would be disqualified from the kingdom.

The five brothers had Moses and the prophets, which again made their lineage clear. They were not listening to Moses and the prophets then, and there was no reason that they would listen to them even if someone was raised from the dead to warn them.

Clearly, Jesus was making a reference to his impending death and resurrection. The ones that he was indicting were about to demand his death. However, even if he were to rise from the dead, they would not listen. The fact of the matter is that after Jesus' resurrection, many of the Jews remained in unbelief, did not repent, and nationally they remained in their place of death as rotten figs (Jeremiah 24).

## Lazarus

Now, Lazarus was a poor man, a beggar. To the Pharisees, this was the worst kind of person and sinner. There is no mention of what this beggar did to deserve to be in Abraham's bosom. He was one of Abraham's children, just as the rich man was, but there is no mention of anything noteworthy that he ever did. He was simply a sinner that received evil things and was ignored by the elite religious class of Jews that should have had compassion on him.

This poses the question: Who does Lazarus represent, gentiles (the nations) or Jews? As we seek an answer keep in mind that the parable deals with the entrance into the kingdom. Lazarus as a figure most likely represents ones who would enter the kingdom. Jesus himself brought the kingdom into view in connection with the Pharisees who were scoffing at him, as he declared: "The Law and the Prophets were proclaimed until John; since that time the gospel of the kingdom of God has been preached, and everyone is forcing his way into it" (Luke 16:16 NASB).

## Two Views of Lazarus' Identity

There are two views worth considering. Each view sees Lazarus as representative of saved ones; but the question is from where do they come. Do they come from the nations (gentiles) or from Israel (Jews)?

First, the name *Lazarus* in Hebrew is *Eleazar*, which means "God has helped." The *Complete Jewish Bible* uses the name *Eleazar* in this story rather than the name *Lazarus*. Some people believe that Jesus was referring to Eleazar of Damascus, the gentile and chief steward of Abraham who lost the right of Abraham's inheritance to Isaac, the son of promise (Genesis 15:2-3). It was Eleazar who was commanded to find a wife for Isaac (Genesis 24:2-4). Due to his faithfulness to Abraham, Eleazar lost an inheritance from Abraham. Thus, Lazarus as the gentile Eleazar, the

chief steward for Abraham, could represent the believers from among the nations (gentiles) that will receive the inheritance lost by the Jews that rejected Messiah.

According to this view, Jesus brought the gentile Lazarus into the picture because the Pharisees and others of Judah would be disqualified from the kingdom, and the nations would end up being blessed in their stead. Since Abraham is the father of nations, it makes sense that Lazarus would be in his presence. This would have been like a knife cutting into the hearts of these self-righteous men.

Further, Jesus wanted the Jews to see that the ones they called *dogs*, and whom they looked down upon, would be part of the kingdom, whereas they would be excluded. This was the worst kind of condemnation Jesus could heap on them to show them they were the dandelion, the sons of the wicked one (Matthew 13:38), or the sons of stubbornness (Ephesians 2:2).

Second, Lazarus was in Abraham's bosom. Abraham and his faith before circumcision has great meaning to believers from among the nations; nevertheless, Abraham's bosom has limited meaning to believers, for they are *in* Christ and fall asleep *in* Christ. It is true that Abraham is the father of faith, and all who are of faith are blessed with Abraham, the believer (Galatians 3:9). Paul even wrote that if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise (Galatians 3:29). However, this refers to justification by faith, which comes through Christ, not Abraham. Believers are of the seed of Abraham based on the same faith Abraham had before he received the sign of circumcision. Faith now tells us that we are *in* Christ, not in Abraham, in life or in death.

To the ones listening to Jesus, the mention of Abraham would have roused their pride that thought they had a given right to be the chosen nation because of their blood connection to Abraham. This really has not changed much among the Jews, even in our day. Their thinking was (and is) in opposition to Jesus' own words in that day.

But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. (John 1:12-13 NASB)

Given this thought, it is just as likely that Lazarus represents the publicans and sinners of Judah in Jesus' day, the very same ones that are in view throughout this five-part parable. It is quite plausible that Jesus would have maintained the continuity of his message to the Pharisees rather than injecting a new group of people. The lost sheep, the prodigal, and the lost coin all represent the sinners and publicans in some measure. Further, it should be noted that even the dogs were licking Lazarus' sores. Lazarus himself was not considered a dog; he was actually receiving from the dogs. To the Jew, the dogs were the nations.

According to this thinking, Lazarus does not represent the nations; he represents the Jewish sinners who repented and who recognize the true nature of the kingdom. Jesus spoke to the people of Judah as two groups: the sinners that repented and the self-righteous that saw no need to repent. The kingdom that was near would not be manifested then, and all of Judah was going

into a national death. The story has no bearing on the physical death of individuals; this was a national death.

"Now I am saying to you that many from the east and the west shall be arriving and reclining with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of the heavens, yet the sons of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness. There shall be lamentation and gnashing of teeth." ... Then shall the just be shining out as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Who has ears to hear, let him hear! (Matthew 8:11-12; 13:43 CLV)

As an offshoot of this view, there is one other well-known Lazarus in scripture and that is the brother of Mary and Martha, whom Jesus loved.

(11) This He said, and after that He said to them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I go, so that I may awaken him out of sleep." (12) The disciples then said to Him, "Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will recover." (13) Now Jesus had spoken of his death, but they thought that He was speaking of literal sleep. (14) So Jesus then said to them plainly, "Lazarus is dead, (15) and I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, so that you may believe; but let us go to him." (John 11:11-15 NASB)

Jesus defined Lazarus' death as a sleep. The man was dead to the physical world.

Now, take note of what the Jews wanted to do to Lazarus after he was raised from the dead.

(9) The large crowd of the Jews then learned that He was there; and they came, not for Jesus' sake only, but that they might also see Lazarus, whom He raised from the dead. (10) But the chief priests planned to put Lazarus to death also; (11) because on account of him many of the Jews were going away and were believing in Jesus. (John 12:9-11 NASB)

In other words, Jesus could have been referring to his friend Lazarus. Later, the Jews would try to kill him just as they succeeded in doing to Jesus. They would see signs of resurrection before his death and then in His resurrection from among the dead, but they still would not believe on Christ.

Regardless of which figure one chooses, the message is clear; they didn't listen.

"But he said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead.'

### **A Parable!**

In conclusion, this story is *not* about the lost in hell and the saved in heaven. It is a parable that primarily refers to the unbelief of apostate Judah in Jesus' day.