

6. THE RICH MAN AND LAZARUS

Probably, the most often referenced Scripture used to make the case for an eternal *hell* of fire, the immortality of the soul and life *in* death (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 the doctrines of men, the rich man being tormented in flame is a picture of the lost in an endless, fiery hell. In fact, this story is the foundation of most of Christendom's teaching on this matter.

The issue is whether it is a literal story or a figurative story, a parable. Those who hold to the heaven-hell doctrine believe that it is a literal story; however, it cannot be, for there are too many aspects that are figurative for this story to be taken literally.

A few points need to be made to lay a foundation for our understanding of the story of the rich man and Lazarus.

Five-part parable about Israel.

First, it is not merely a parable, but one part of a five-part parable starting at Luke 15.3. It must be viewed in the context of what precedes it; it is not an island unto itself, but a figurative story connected to four other stories that precede it.

Second, Jesus was sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Matthew 15.24). His Father commissioned Him to go to that which was lost, and this is what He did. He did not go to the nations, and He did not leave the land of Israel. The story of the lost sheep speaks of the covenant Israel had with the Lord. The fact that Jesus was sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel indicates that something had gone dreadfully wrong with this covenant.

Third, within the same context, the sinners and unrighteous of this five-part parable are within the house of Israel in that day; they were not of the nations, for they are the sinners and publicans of Israel. The righteous in the house are actually the self-righteous of the elite religious class, the scribes and Pharisees. The entire series starts off with the scribes and Pharisees grumbling against Jesus: "*This man sinners is receiving, and is eating with them*" (Luke 15.2 *cv*). The self-righteous were complaining that the Righteous One was reaching out to the Israelite sinners that the self-righteous abhorred.

Fourth, the salvation that is in view refers to entrance into the Messianic kingdom that was offered to Israel, first by John the baptist, then by Jesus, and finally by Jesus' apostles. The ones that were in jeopardy of being left out of the kingdom were the self-righteous that had shut off the kingdom for themselves and the entire nation of Israel (Matthew 23.13).

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Fifth, the first three stories of the parable focus on the same truth. Simply, God is concerned for the wayward, regardless of how they get that way; either through their own wandering (lost sheep), or through the carelessness of someone else (lost coin), or through their own rebellion (lost son).

The lost sheep of Israel. (Luke 15.3-7). ¹

With this background, let us begin with the first story of the parable, which deals with the one lost sheep. Undoubtedly, this story has been used countless times to preach concerning the lost gentiles, which may have some application to today. However, to understand its meaning, it is vital to understand it in the light of those who heard when Jesus spoke it.

The ninety-nine sheep represent the self-righteous majority of Israel that saw no need to repent. They were secure in the house and would have nothing to do with Jesus, except to demand His crucifixion. They thought they were safe; but of the Jews, they were the most unsafe and at the greatest risk. 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 nations.

The message of John the baptist and Jesus was “*Repent, for near is the kingdom of the heavens*” (Matthew 3.2 cv). 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 Israel, the very ones that Jesus sought. These were the ones who mostly 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 Israelites (scribes and Pharisees) looked down upon these publicans as sinners and viewed them in the same light as the heathens. It was odious for an Israelite to join forces with a foreign country and to even be part of extorting money from other Israelites. 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 Israel, but the next story addresses Israel’s view.

¹ The term *lost* in reference to Israel must be viewed differently from the lost gentiles or nations. They were likened to sheep that had strayed from their shepherd. During the 400 years that no word was spoken to them through the prophets, they had strayed from the Lord, their Shepherd, and they were in a lost condition. Their lost condition, if not remedied, would lead them to being excluded from entering the kingdom of Messiah.

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The lost coin. (Luke 15.8-10)

A woman is described as possessing ten coins, one of which she has lost. She lights a lamp and, sweeping the house clean, searches for the one lost coin. When she does find it, she calls her neighbors together, so that all can join in her joy.

Israel, especially Jerusalem, is often seen as a woman (e.g., Galatians 4.25-26; Revelation 12.1). To the Israelites, particularly the women, coins were a prized possession often used as ornaments, which represented the blessing of God upon Israel. As God's called-out nation, they had known the blessing of God, but had turned from God and gone astray; they were lost. Consequently, the lost coin represents lost Israel. However, the day will come when the lost will be found and they will enter into the joy of the Lord. This will come only when their eyes are opened to see Jesus, and they repent and believe on Him. Only then will there be rejoicing. All the true Israel of God shall be saved one day (Romans 11.26).

The prodigal son. (Luke 15.11-32)

The next part of the parable is a continuation of the story line being developed by Jesus in reference to Israel. The prodigal is another story that has been used countless times to reach the lost, yet this is not the primary application. In fact, 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 of Israelites 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 Israel and who had sided with the foreigners. At the outset of the birth of Israel, the Israelites were warned about mingling with the nations, which they often ignored, resulting in severe chastisement from the Lord. The other group included the same as the ninety-nine sheep, the self-righteous scribes and Pharisees. They kept a distance from the nations; but, because of pride they were also distant in heart from the Lord.

The prodigal joined forces with the citizens of the 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 Israel. 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 heeded 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.

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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 cv). 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 cv).

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?

But Jesus sought obedience of heart and not sacrifice out of duty. No wonder there was great rejoicing over the sinners of Israel who repented. They will be included with the ones arriving from the east and the west in that glorious day. There will be only deep regret for the unrepentant and grumblers (see Matthew 8.11-12).

The unjust administrator. (Luke 16.1-13)

The next part of the parable takes up the scribes and Pharisees only, 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 the Lord Jesus, for He could not commend unrighteous behavior. In fact, Jesus condemned the love of money. Most translations make Luke 16.9 a statement by Jesus, but this is out of character of our righteous Lord. How could He commend such behavior? The answer is that He did not. Instead, He asked a question, as rendered in the Concordant Version.

"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?* He who is faithful in the least is faithful in much also, and he who is unjust in the least is unjust in much also. If, then, you did not come to be faithful in the unjust mammon, who will be entrusting to you the true? And, if you did not come to be faithful in that which is an outsider's, who will be giving you that which is yours? No domestic can be slaving for two lords, for either he will be hating one and loving the other, or he will be upholding one and despising the other. You can not slave for God and mammon." (Luke 16.9-13 cv)

Notice the difference in meaning when Jesus' words are posed as a question. 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 God of Israel.

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Luke confirmed the heart of the Pharisees in the next verse: *Now the Pharisees also, inherently fond of money, heard all these things, and they scouted Him* (Luke 16.14 cv). 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 in the sight of God (Luke 16.15). The Pharisees were right before men but not right before God. 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.

“The law and the prophets are unto John; thenceforth, **the evangel of the kingdom of God** is being brought, and everyone is violently forcing into it, and the violent are snatching it. Yet it is easier for heaven and earth to pass by than for one serif of the law to fall. Everyone dismissing his wife and marrying another is committing adultery. And everyone marrying her who has been dismissed from a husband, is committing adultery.” (Luke 16.16-18 cv)

Until John the baptist appeared on the scene, the nation of Israel had not heard the voice of 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 Messiah, God incarnate, was among them, and that it was time to receive Him, and a time for them to repent and return to their God. The kingdom had drawn near; it had not taken root on earth yet, but it was coming if they would receive its Messenger with humble hearts. 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. It was not His time for such a move, for the kingdom was not to come in that day and will not come through the force of man; it will come by the will of God alone.

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 Israel, the nation of twelve tribes that had been under a covenant likened to the wife of Jehovah, had divorced herself from her God, which resulted in her being left desolate. Israel had become an adulteress with the nations, for she sought comfort and relief from the nations, rather than looking to her Husband. She had committed adultery and was unclean (see Jeremiah 31.4, 21, 32). She was a harlot.

In God's eyes, His called-out nation Israel 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. The kingdom being manifested on earth and in the nations was withdrawn to a much later day. Even those who repented and believed would suffer until Messiah returns. Death had come upon all of them because the kingdom had gone into abeyance, at least outwardly among

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the nations. However, when Messiah comes a second time, some will come into the joy of the kingdom and others will not.

The rich man and Lazarus. (Luke 16.19-31)

It is important to keep in mind that Jesus was not attempting to lay out an entire theological statement about salvation, as so many try to read into this story. He was attempting to impress on the Pharisees in particular, and the nation in general, the severity of their stubbornness and blindness to their true adulterous condition in light of His future kingdom. **They were apostate and DEAD!** Even those who believed were dead to the kingdom in that day, because the coming of the kingdom of the heavens to rule over the earth was not to come for a long time, which is all in the will of God. National rejection of the offer of the kingdom affected even those who accepted the offer in that day. The ecclesia of God has suffered to this day as well, as she has wandered in the wilderness.

Greek mythology.

In researching this story, I discovered something interesting. I have not personally verified this, so I must leave it to the reader to decide. However, according to some sources, this parable was not something that originated with Jesus. Something similar was found in a document called *Gemara Babylonicum*. Supposedly, it was a pagan parable that the Jews had adopted. We must keep in mind that from Malachi to Christ, there was no voice of a prophet in Israel; there was only silence. During that time, the Pharisees and others most likely adopted pagan mythology, particularly in relation to death and the unseen. The pagans believed in an after-life under the earth with compartments for the good and the evil, and some of the Jews began to hold such views as well.

If this thought is accepted, then Jesus merely took a pagan parable that the Pharisees understood and used it to portray the death of Israel. He was in no way sanctioning such a belief; He merely used something that the Israelites understood and turned it on them. One with an open mind to the truth will search in vain for a literal story from which to produce a doctrine on eternal salvation and hell.

The question will arise as to why Jesus used such a story to drive home His point. It was not unusual for Him to use common things of that day that the people understood. For example, He referred to the god of mammon or the god of riches and to Beelzebub, the Philistine god of flies or filth (see Matthew 10.25; 12.24), as if they were personified. To believe that Jesus was teaching on these false gods in such a way as to support or sanction their existence, or to create some new doctrine, is most untenable.

It was the underlining message of this story that Jesus was conveying, not the pagan beliefs that some Israelites had adopted. If anything, the fact that they had adopted such paganism was a further indictment of their condition. It should have brought great shame on them, for the Son of God stood in their midst.

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Figurative, not literal.

The next issue that needs to be addressed is whether this story is literal or figurative. At this point, it is almost too obvious for this even to be a question, since much of it is figurative and based on pagan beliefs. However, we need to be clear on this point, for many take it to be a literal story.

First, Abraham's bosom is not literal, for no one could literally be in his bosom. It was figurative language referring to blessing and the promises.

Second, Abraham and Lazarus were in sight and hearing of the rich man in torment. 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. Further, how could there be communication between two places that are separated by a great distance (one above the earth and one in the earth)?

Third, 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. To believe such a thing, one would have to make it up, for there is no place in Scripture that we are told this. It has to be interpreted into this story. Further, we cannot state that this man was merely 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?

Do you begin to see the path that one is led down if this story is viewed as literal? Yet, this is exactly what many pastors and preachers do, and they make no attempt to explain the problems that such a view creates. It is presented as if this is the truth, and we must accept it. No! We must reject it!

Jesus was making a point directed toward the Jews, and He did it using figurative language, as He did in the preceding stories of this five-part parable.

Now, let us look at the two men in the story.

The rich man.

"Now a certain man was rich and he dressed in **purple and cambric**, daily making merry splendidly. Now the rich man also died, and was entombed. And in the unseen, lifting up his eyes, existing in torments, he is seeing Abraham from afar, and Lazarus in his bosom. And he, shouting, said, 'Father Abraham, be merciful to me, and send Lazarus that he should be

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dipping the tip of his finger in water and cooling my tongue, for I am pained in this flame.’ “Now Abraham said, ‘Child, be reminded that you got your good things in your life, and Lazarus likewise evil things. Yet now here he is being consoled, yet you are in pain.’” (Luke 16.19, 22b-25 cv)

The garment of purple and cambric means that the rich man represents Israel’s calling as 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)

Cambric 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. It was not a physical death but a spiritual death, and this was 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 was totally destroyed, many Jews were killed, and others were scattered to the nations. During World War II, the Jews found themselves in the fire of persecution under the tyranny of Adolph Hitler. Two-thirds of the Jews were exterminated in a five-year period. A secular nation of Israel was born in 1948 and has seen war after war and attack after attack. Do not be tricked into thinking that this nation that is called Israel is the chosen nation of God. They have rejected Jesus as Messiah and continue to reject Him. They have even taken the name *Israel*, which means “who (or prince) prevails with God” or “God rules.” The so-called Israel we see today is contrary to the meaning of the name. Very soon, they will find themselves in the fight of their life as they come into their final judgment. This is the torment of flame in which the rich man was engulfed and in which the unbelieving Jew has been engulfed, and will continue to be engulfed, because of apostasy and unbelief.

The rich man cried out to Abraham, who acknowledged their relationship by calling him “child.” Jesus injected this word so that there would be no question that the rich man referred to the Jews that potentially would share the inheritance of Abraham. We must see this conversation as figurative. Jesus was relating it to make a point with a figure that the Pharisees would understand. If Abraham is figurative, so are the rich man and Lazarus.

As blood descendants of the Hebrew Abraham, they will cry out to him for deliverance, but he cannot and will not answer them, for there is only One who will deliver them. They seek for whatever relief they can, but it will not come unless they repent and confess that Jesus is Messiah and Lord. Instead, Abraham reminded the rich man that he had been blessed with good things in life, which

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refers to Israel's once blessed status as God's out-called people. In essence, the nation had its chance but has been set aside due to apostasy and unbelief.

A great chasm.

'And in all this, between us and you a great chasm has been established, so that those wanting to cross hence to you may not be able, nor yet those thence may be ferrying to us.' (Luke 16.26 cv)

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 river Jordan 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). It was their 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 Messianic kingdom, and those who will not enter. Some from the ancient commonwealth of Israel 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!

Five brothers.

"Yet he said, 'I am asking you then, father, that you should be sending him into my father's house, for **I have five brothers**, so that he may be certifying to them, lest they also may be coming into this place of torment.' Yet Abraham is saying to him, 'They have Moses and the prophets. Let them hear them!' Yet he said, 'No, father Abraham, but if someone should be going to them from the dead, they will be repenting.' Yet he said to him, 'If Moses and the prophets they are not hearing, neither will they be persuaded if someone should be rising from among the dead.'" (Luke 16.27-31 cv)

Jesus continued the conversation by bringing in five brothers of the rich man. This again gives a clue as to whom the rich man represents. Of the twelve tribes of Israel, Judah had five brothers (Genesis 30.20) born of Leah. 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. Israel of our day is of the same stock, since they usurped the name of Israel for their nation.

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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 though He would rise from the dead, they would not listen. The fact of the matter is that after Jesus' resurrection, most of the Jews remained in unbelief, did not repent, and nationally they remained in their place of death.

Lazarus.

Now there was a certain poor man named Lazarus, who had been cast at his portal, having ulcers, and yearning to be satisfied from the scraps which are falling from the rich man's table. But the curs also, coming, licked his ulcers. **Now the poor man came to die and he is carried away by the messengers into Abraham's bosom.** (Luke 16.20-22 cv)

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 Israelites (Jews)? As we seek an answer, we need to keep in mind that the parable deals with the entrance into the kingdom. Lazarus as a figure most likely represents ones who will enter the kingdom of Messiah in the next eon. 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 are unto John; thenceforth, the evangel of the kingdom of God is being brought, and everyone is violently forcing into it, and the violent are snatching it"* (Luke 16.16 cv).

Keep in mind that the scribes and the Pharisees that hounded Jesus every step of the way will be excluded from the kingdom, having lost their birthright as sons of the kingdom.

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 whence 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

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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.

Jesus brought the gentile Lazarus into the picture because the Pharisees and others of Israel would be disqualified from the future 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 millennial kingdom, whereas they would be excluded. This was the worst kind of condemnation Jesus could heap on them to show them they were the dornel, the sons of the wicked one (Matthew 13.38), or the sons of stubbornness (Ephesians 2.2 cv).

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 our justification by faith, which comes through Christ, not Abraham. We are of the Seed of Abraham based on the same faith Abraham had before he received the sign of circumcision. Our 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 God-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 Israel 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.

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Consequently, Lazarus would not represent the nations; but rather, would represent the Jewish sinners who repented and who will enter into the joy of the future kingdom as part of the true Israel. They will enter into eonian life. The rich man would represent the self-righteous Jews in unbelief that will not enter the joy of the future kingdom.

Jesus was speaking to the entire nation of Israel that He divided into 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 the entire nation of Israel was going into a national death. The story has no bearing on the physical death of individuals; this was a national death.

The apostates and adulterers, which are the majority of the Jews, will find themselves in the fire of persecution. The sinners that repented, which is a remnant, will share in the joy of the coming kingdom of the heavens, but they cannot come into this joy until Messiah comes again. In the meantime, they are in a place of death as well. Their comfort was in knowing that they will share in the promises of their father Abraham. All are dead, awaiting the renascence of the coming new world order. In that day, Jesus' words will be fulfilled.

“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 cv)

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 apostate Israel being disqualified from entering the kingdom of Messiah in the oncoming eon, except for a remnant that, by faith in Jesus and His blood, will be counted worthy to enter in.

This is all in accord with the purpose of the eons.