

# Lazarus and the Rich Man

— by Elder Jacob O. Meyer —

**O**bjective Bible study is one of the most elusive qualities to achieve. When a person's interest is captured by the Bible, and he desires to know what it teaches, he is probably at his most objective point in life. The only way to become truly objective is to allow the Scriptures to harmonize throughout the Bible and to hold steadfastly to the doctrine which is taught. Any retention of former doctrines, or deliberately ignoring a Scripture that could bear upon the final product of our study, will taint what we are learning. We must never allow ourselves to circumvent a plain and concise Scripture, but such passages must form the bedrock foundation of our doctrines. Scriptures that are vague in any way must harmonize with those that make definite statements.

Research has revealed a high incidence of translators' manipulations as they shaded certain meanings to conform with popular doctrine, when, in fact, the underlying original text harmonized precisely with other plain statements on the subject. As we can plainly see from a study of what happens

after death, the Old Testament teaches that when a person dies, his dead body is placed in the grave and lies there in repose until the resurrection. No such concept as an immortal soul, or eternal burning in hell, is ever taught. It was only in later eras, after the demise of the Apostolic Assembly, that these popular Christian doctrines of our day emerged.

One of the most puzzling passages of the entire Bible, in regard to what happens after death, may be found in Luke 16. If the soul is body, or life (*nephesh*-Hebrew, *psuche*-Greek), then it is not immortal and does not immediately go to heaven at death. But there is a parable that seems to teach the concept of an immortal soul. Or does it?

Let's take a good hard look at this parable and see if answers will be forthcoming. The solution to this parable lies in the original languages—as closely as we can get to them—not in the English translation, which is indeed faulty. Please notice carefully how the definitions of the Greek words will lay bare the true meaning of this parable.

We begin in verse 20, with a description of the beggar Lazarus, covered with sores, lying at the gate of the rich man. The manner in which this account is usually presented in nominal Christianity would lead us to believe that it is necessary for all of us to become beggars and terribly diseased in order to be saved. In actual fact, however, this parable is given so that the members of the Assemblies of Yahweh will come to realize that Yahweh looks on hearts, and that which is highly esteemed to men is abomination to Yahweh, Luke 16:15. It is not wrong to be rich if riches are used righteously, because Abraham was a very rich man, and Yahweh was close to him, Genesis 13:2. It is not desirable to be poor as was Lazarus, but, since he had a physical disability, this was apparently unavoidable.

Please see Proverbs 30:9. The question here, primarily, is related to the way the rich man used his wealth, and Yahshua was trying to show that occasionally the injustices of this human life will only be corrected in the Kingdom, Ecclesiastes 8:11-14. Also see Isaiah 35.

Since Lazarus was a very sick man, unable to work, he had stationed himself outside the gate of the rich man, hoping that some of the surplus food which was probably going to waste in the rich man's household would be given to him so that he would survive. This meager diet from the table of the rich man hardly sufficed for him, and, eventually, he became so diseased that he died, possibly from malnutrition. Now notice what happened to Lazarus. Yahshua says that he was carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom. Before we explain this phrase, let us notice, in addition, that the rich man also died and was buried. Can you see then just how this parable has been misunderstood? It is not in chronological order at this point, because Yahshua the Messiah wished to insert a new thought before he picked up another segment of the story. The beggar Lazarus died and so did the rich man. Each one of these central characters in the account was buried. Both ending their physical life just as do all men; they died and then were buried. Please read Ecclesiastes 3:17-22 and 9:1-6. In death, there is no difference between men, but it reduces each human being to a common level, that of being an inanimate, dead corpse. All personality and remembrance is ended in the grave, Psalm 6:5 and Psalm 49, especially verse 14. He is then no different from a beast.

Subsequent to the death and burial of Lazarus and the rich man comes the resurrection, and we see that the angels come to carry Lazarus to the bosom of Abraham. This agrees with the account of the resurrection

which Yahshua the Messiah Himself gave in Matthew 24:31. Yahshua the Messiah will send His angels to gather the elect from the four winds of the heavens, and the Kingdom of Yahweh will be established on this earth at the first resurrection—in which Lazarus will be included. In the Kingdom of Yahweh will appear Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, ruling under Yahshua the Messiah, Luke 13:28. Apparently, Lazarus will be one of the rulers under Abraham, and, perhaps, his favorite. A note in the **Companion Bible** indicates that *Abraham's bosom* can also be construed as meaning *death*, but a better explanation is the one which takes the events of the parable and places them in chronological order, in harmony with the remainder of the Bible.

We continue now to verse 23. Here we find that the rich man lifts up his eyes in hell. The word which has been translated *hell* by the **King James** translators is *hades* in the Greek. It means the *common grave*. The old Saxon word *hell* is derived from, or means, *hole*. It does not at all raise the slightest connotation that it would be *gehenna*, which is the lake of fire, or destruction, which awaits sinners. The rich man was buried, and, at the second resurrection, he awakened, and he was still in the grave.

The next phrase is the one which is truly thought to present difficulties, since it alludes to the torment that is supposed to accompany the mythological description of *gehenna*. However, several definitions are offered by the lexicons which will give us a much clearer understanding, and we will find that they will harmonize completely with the teachings of the entire Bible on life after death. The **Strong's Concordance Greek Lexicon** offers this definition for the Greek word *basanos*: *to go to the bottom, to touch stone, figuratively torment*. Immediately we receive a much clearer picture of the events of the parable. In *hades*, or the

grave, the rich man lifted up his eyes, being in the bottom of the grave (he had awaited the resurrection). However, I feel that the **Young's Concordance**, in this instance, holds a much superior definition. Robert Young translates this word *basanos* as a *test, trial, inquisition, figuratively torment*. So you see, the rich man was raised in the second resurrection; as he was lifted from the grave, he was taken to the great white throne judgment trial, Revelation 20:11-15.

This will be a trial at which evidence will be given. Some people assume that they will be given the opportunity to argue the merits of their own case before the Great Judge, Yahshua the Messiah. In reality, the books will be opened and all of the evidence will be taken exclusively from the books which have been recorded by the angels of Yahweh, those who have observed the daily conduct of each person with special scrutiny during his entire life span. These books will give accurate evidence of the person's basic character, deep down in his heart, at secret times in his life, and this knowledge of what a person is like indicates that Almighty Yahweh looks on the heart, 1 Samuel 16:7. There will be little desire for a wicked individual to speak when he confronts the stern Judge, the powerful Being who holds his destiny in his hands. In effect, this trial will be taking the form of an inquisition, especially when an incident such as the rich man's case comes up for litigation, and his life compares with the second category of Matthew 25:31-46. This separation of the two classes—the sheep from the goats—will be a time of remorse and sorrow for those who know that they will be denied life everlasting. Matthew 25:46.

The rich man fell into this excluded category and became so frightened at the thought of death for everlasting ages, eternal destruction in the lake of fire which he already saw burning in the distance, that he

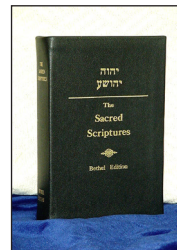
had a nervous reaction such as is described of criminals about to be executed for a crime. He sees the flame burning and knows that he will soon be joining the wicked people who have been separated from the righteous. This torment is more than he can bear, and so he requests just a drop or two of water to revive his senses. The term *tormented* in verse 24 is not the same as *basanos* above. The word is *odunaomai* and means *to be pained*. The rich man was pained in his heart and mind because he knew that he would be missing the blissful everlasting life in the Kingdom. This trial apparently will be held outside the capital city of the earth, Jerusalem, since we read at various places that the wicked cannot enter the city. Please read Matthew 22:13, and Revelation 21:8, 22:15. The angels will sever the righteous from the wicked as Yahshua renders judgment, and will burn the wicked people in the lake of fire which is the gulf fixed between the righteous and the wicked. Please see Matthew 13:41, 42, 49, 50. The rich man knew exactly what was to happen to him. He had not been faithful in the stewardship of his life. He had been warned by the prophets of Yahweh that judgment awaited the sinner and one who had no compassion for his fellow man. At this precise moment, he became concerned for his brothers still behind (or so he thought, since in death there is no comprehension of the passage of time, and he still thought that they were alive). He petitioned Abraham to send back some prophets to preach to his brothers, but this plea was denied by Abraham who informed the rich man that our Heavenly Father had already sent many righteous men to call the world to repentance. The parable ends with a pointed allusion by the Messiah to His own impending death and resurrection.

Just what are we to learn from this parable, which could presently benefit our own life on this earth? The lesson our Savior

wishes us to learn is one of values. We should fix our goal at attaining everlasting life and not allow earthly riches to divert us. If we are faithful and learn the lessons of a repentant life, and we do not gain our wealth unjustly, nor use it for our own personal satisfaction, we have learned the lesson of life. The Pharisees of Yahshua's day had not learned this lesson; consequently, Yahshua the Messiah was attempting to teach them through this parable. Please see Luke 16:14. Our goal in life should be to enter the Kingdom of Yahweh, even if this goal could impose upon us some discomforts as we learn the true values of everlasting life. ■

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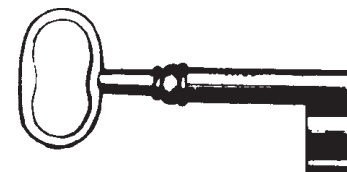
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## ***Keys to Knowledge***

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