



Bible Student's Notebook™

The Herald of His Grace

Presenting *every man* perfect in Christ Jesus. Colossians 1:28

Volume X
Issue 245

The Rich Man and Lazarus

Part 2

by – Dan Kraemer

FIVE BROTHERS

Then he said, I pray you therefore, father, that you would send him to my father's house: For I have five brothers.

Another odd and specific detail is stated in that the Rich Man has five brothers. Why five? Is this more useless detail? If not, then what significance does it have?

If the story was literal, we can understand how the Rich man would want someone to come back from the dead and warn his brothers about this punishment in hellfire; but who cares how many brothers he has? What about his wife and children and sisters, parents, friends and servants along with his brothers? Why not mention them? For some reason, Jesus only mentioned his brothers, and the number five. Why?

In accord with the parable, if the Rich Man is a symbol for Judah and Levi, then five is the correct number of brothers each of them had. As you may know, Judah and Levi were sons of Israel, but Israel had twelve sons, not six, so doesn't that shoot down the theory? No. While it is true Israel had twelve sons, he had them by four different women. His first wife was named Leah and she bore him six sons: Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Issachar, Zebulun and Judah. So, of the twelve sons, only these six literally had five full-blooded brothers. This is yet another clue Jesus gave to reveal His real message. The tribes of Judah and Levi are the Rich Man. The Pharisees, who were experts in the Scriptures, would not have missed these stinging clues.

CANAANITE WOMAN

If the fictional Rich Man represents the Jews, then who does Lazarus represent? Lazarus is a poor crippled beggar, living on the ground with dogs, existing off the scraps that come from the table of the Rich Man. This should sound familiar to anyone with a little New Testament knowledge. Again, Lazarus represents the Gentiles. The following gospel story, which tells of a real encounter Jesus had with a Gentile woman, has too many parallels to doubt it.

A Canaanite woman from that vicinity came to Him, crying out, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is suffering terribly from demon-possession." Jesus did not answer a word. So His disciples came to Him and urged Him, "Send her away, for she keeps crying out after us." He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel." The woman came and knelt before Him. "Lord, help me!" she said. He replied, "It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to their dogs." "Yes, Lord," she said, "but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." Then Jesus answered, "Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted." And her daughter was healed from that very hour (Matthew 15:22-28 NIV).

Note how the Gentile woman is similar to Lazarus, and the Jews to the Rich Man.

- 1) Lazarus begs for food and the Gentile woman begs for help.

(see **LAZARUS**, page 2303)

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- the affirmation of God's purpose to save all mankind through the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (1 Timothy 2:3, 4; 4:10; Titus 2:11)
- the "preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began" (Romans 16:25)
- true freedom and liberty apart from law (Galatians 5:1)
- the organic nature of the church, the Body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12)
- the distinct message and ministry of Paul, the apostle to the nations (Romans 11:13)
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LAZARUS (continued from page 2301)

- 2) Lazarus is laid at the Rich Man's gate, and the woman kneels before Jesus.
- 3) The Rich Man is called a son of Abraham, as are the Israelites called his children.
- 4) Both Lazarus and the woman desire to eat the crumbs that fall from the table.
- 5) The Rich Man has an abundant table of food. So too, it seems, has the masters' table (Judah).
- 6) Lazarus never makes any claim of kinship to Abraham, and neither does the woman.
- 7) The Rich Man had little concern for the welfare of Lazarus. Neither did the Apostles for the suffering of this Gentile woman and her daughter.
- 8) Lazarus lay with the dogs. The woman accepts her secondary status as dog-like.

This real event further indicates the Rich Man story is a parable and not about real individuals. Jesus was using the parable as an indictment against Judah and in particular its rulers and priests. He was always frustrated by the Jews lack of faith, yet amazed by the faith of the Gentiles even though He never went out of His way to teach them. Many must have understood the humiliating symbolism Jesus was directing against the Pharisees. It was these sorts of condemnations that drove them to plot His death.

THE NAME LAZARUS

Understanding the meaning of names is very important in understanding the Bible. Unless you discover these, you are missing out on an important dimension of many of its stories. Sometimes the Bible bluntly spells out for the reader what a character's name means, but other times it doesn't. The problem is compounded for English readers because, while all other words are translated, names are not. They may be transliterated into a rough English equivalent, but their meaning is not.

For example the Apostle Simon's name was changed to Peter. What does Peter mean to the average Englishman? Probably nothing; but in reality Jesus changed Peter's name from Simon to the Greek *Pet-*

ros, which means a single stone or rock, such as a building stone. Unless you understand this, you cannot understand that Jesus was calling for Peter to be the first stone laid upon the foundation of a new Church. (If our English Bibles truly translated names we might now know "Saint" Peter as "Saint" Stone. Christ Himself was The Rock, the much larger foundational bedrock beneath the church.)

So, was Lazarus the meaningless name of a random beggar who went to Abraham's bosom, or is there something in the name to confirm that he represents Gentiles?

The Greek name Lazarus is equivalent to the Hebrew name Lazaros. The Jews listening to Jesus knew the name meant *helpless*. How appropriate. The name of the poor, crippled beggar lying at the gate of the Rich Man was Helpless. Do you really think that was a coincidence or did Jesus choose this name to get across a point? Also, was there a historical precedent for being helpless and being in Abraham's bosom?

THE NAME ELIEZER:

God is my help

Although Abraham was a wealthy man, he had no natural heir. At the age of seventy-five God spoke to him and made him a wonderful and unconditional promise.

Now the LORD had said unto Abram, "Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will show thee: And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curses thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed" (Genesis 12:1-3, KJV).

Yet years later Abraham still had no natural heir.

But Abram said, "O Sovereign LORD, what can You give me since I remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus?" And Abram said, "You have given me no children; so a servant in my household will be my heir" (Genesis 15:2-3, NIV).

Even though God had promised Abram as many descendants as there are stars in the heavens and grains of sand on the seashore, he still had not a single one by the age of eighty-six. At this point, if he should die, his estate was willed to his faithful servant Eliezer of Damascus. We know nothing of Eliezer up to this point, but it is reasonable to assume he was the most faithful servant of Abram. This man must have been as close to a beloved son as Abram had. So faithful was Eliezer to Abram that, when Isaac, the natural heir was finally born, not a word of disappointment at the loss of his position is ever mentioned. Not only that, but when it came time to find a wife for Isaac, Abraham entrusts the job to his servant. Although unsaid, it is reasonable to assume that he is the faithful servant who is called on.

Eliezer had lost the right to inherit Abraham's vast wealth, the promise of millions of descendants, land stretching from the Nile to the Euphrates, kings reigning in glorious kingdoms, and the Messiah Himself among those descendants. Instead, he would now receive little or nothing. His descendants would now become nothing more than another group of Gentiles – the ones whom Abraham's descendants through Isaac and Israel would refer to as dogs. No God-given promises are ever given to Eliezer. All his descendants can hope for are the crumbs that fall from the Chosen's table. Yet Eliezer remains faithful. Why?

Perhaps he had the same great faith in God that his master held. Perhaps he, by faith alone, and without spoken promise, believed God had a plan for him and his descendants as well. We might rightly believe this, for the name Eliezer means, "*God is my help.*"

The Bible does not record specifically who his descendants became, but it doesn't really matter: they are Gentiles. They are lumped in with everyone else, as they are not God's special Chosen People. Yet Eliezer knew he was a child of God, and he trusted that God had a plan for all of His children.

So might we, but our problem with God's plan is that we usually don't like His timetable. We like instant results. If we ask for something in prayer and send it off to God before 5 p.m., our modern mentality expects us to take delivery of it before 9 a.m. tomorrow; but God is not Celestial Express. He runs things according to His schedule, not ours. He knows

what is best for everyone in the long run. Abram was chosen to be an example for us to remember. Even though he was a man of great faith, he, too, found it hard to wait until he was one hundred years old before God delivered on His promise to give him and his wife a son. Who wouldn't?

Then what was in store for Eliezer? What was God's plan for him? His name, "*God is my help,*" is a promise, but one that never came to fruition in his lifetime.

His heirs would have to wait another two thousand years before God, through the Apostle Paul, would reveal their special inheritance. This blessing, for the first time, was revealed to be in heaven and not on earth. This was an astonishing revelation. Please recall what I wrote before. The Old Testament says nothing about the righteous, Jew or Gentile, going to heaven. Neither did Jesus. It was not until Paul wrote his letters to the believing Jews and Gentiles that he revealed that our true home is in heaven and not here on this earth. Without a doubt, there will be a Kingdom set up on this earth, but not all believers are a part of it. Our country is in the Celestials, but this is another whole subject of study.

Eliezer's children were also to be sons of Abraham. Not physically as brothers of Israel, but kindred sons of Abraham united in faith, not blood. Although the Israelites did receive a shadow of their Kingdom, isn't it strange Abraham never did? All the vast earthly promises that God made to him were never fulfilled. They await him after his resurrection.

So, too, it is with Eliezer. He lived his life loyal to his master and died receiving nothing. He lived life in faith having no earthly expectation, but believing eventually that, one day, even if it was after his death, the God of his master Abraham would also help him. He lived in faith that God would be his help, but until that time he and his heirs were helpless. They were not the chosen people, they had nothing physically or spiritually to inherit from God, and they had no direct contact with God – they were just as poor Lazarus: "*helpless.*"

So, when did God finally help the gentiles, the non-Israelis? Let's go back to the parable.

LAZARUS REPRESENTS INDIVIDUALS

If the Rich Man represents the nation of Judah, does Lazarus represent another specific nation or the rest of the world?

No: as opposed to the nameless Rich Man representing Judah, Lazarus is given a personal name. Not only because the meaning is significant but because he was specifically called out individually. He is part of the current special group of God's people who, by His grace, have been called to follow His Son. He represents special individuals. The New Testament calls Christians members of the "church," the original Greek word literally meaning "a called-out group." As such, Christians try to disassociate themselves from the physical selfishness of this world, and live a spiritual, selfless life in Christ.

(The Rich Man never had a personal name. The name "Dives," which tradition has given to him, is not a personal name but comes from the Latin word for "rich" which was used in the popular *Latin Vulgate* translation.)

God is working with individuals now and not any specific nation to spread His Word. Certainly, some nations are more Christian than others, and some more blessed than others, but Jesus made no promises of world dominance to Christians. In contrast, Jesus and His followers were mostly poor and suffered for their faith. The greatest of them were executed. Jesus said a servant (follower) is not greater than his master, meaning we should expect no better treatment from His.

While the Rich Man was alive, Lazarus only got crumbs from his table – a tiny portion of God's revelation – but when the Rich Man was gone, then Lazarus was able to enter into Abraham's bosom. This did not mean that Lazarus usurped Judah's place as God's favored nation. No, he is an individual, not a nation. Abraham wandered the Middle East for 175 years, never establishing a powerful nation. His greatest achievement was his individual faithfulness and obedience to God. Lazarus was sick and hungry while the Rich Man lived, but now he is comforted, resting in Abraham's bosom with a firm expectation that God will deliver His promises. If we have Abraham's faith, then we, too, can identify with Lazarus, and be comforted as well.

WHY WASN'T LAZARUS BURIED?

And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried.

Although both died, the story says the Rich Man was buried but leaves out this detail for Lazarus. Here is another significant little element in the story that is easy to overlook because it subtly records a detail by its absence. If the story was literal, we would expect it say both died and were buried; but I think Jesus is thus prophesying the death and burial of the nation of Judah, and the rise to glory of the disdained Gentiles. No wonder the Pharisees hated Jesus. This wasn't a story about an individual sinner but about all of them and their fall from their esteemed place of favor with God, and replacement by the dogs of the nations.

Note that the capital of Judah, Jerusalem, was literally buried by the Romans within forty years of Jesus telling this story. They knocked down every building stone by stone and scattered them. More on this in section 23, "Death and Burial"; but why is it significant that Lazarus was not buried?

Perhaps we are to see Lazarus as a prophetic type of Gentile Christian believer. Upon becoming a believer, a Christian dies a symbolic death to a worldly lifestyle; but instead of being buried in the ground, he immediately rises to a new way of life. Although still flesh-and-blood, the believer now lives his life with a new mind-set, or spirit of Christ. Paul explains the symbolism and its connection to baptism.

Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? We were therefore buried with Him ... in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead ... we too may live a new life ... united with Him in His resurrection (Romans 6:3-5, NIV).

The concept gets a little difficult to understand. Our bodies still desire the selfish physical acts of personal gain, but our will now desires to do unselfish spiritual acts of love. We characterize our new way of living by saying that we have died to sin and now live in Christ. Yet in reality, only our will is currently spiritual, while we are still struggling within our same old selfish body. ►

After our resurrection, however, even our physical body will change from a flesh and blood physical body to a new and different flesh and spirit body (without blood). We know this from Christ's appearance after He was raised from the dead. He could appear physically, and then disappear, moving about as a spirit. He was alive by the working of the Spirit within Him. Previously, He was able to lose His life by shedding His blood.

If Lazarus was a real person, he would still be dead and buried. Yet the story seems to be making a point of the fact that, although the Rich man was buried, Lazarus was not – he went to Abraham's bosom.

ABRAHAM'S BOSOM

And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom.

Why does it say Lazarus went to Abraham's bosom instead of his immortal soul going to heaven? Because the story is not about anyone going to heaven or hell.

As I have mentioned, the Old Testament knows nothing about anyone going to heaven. (Even if some Jews believed in it then or today, they have no Scripture to support the idea. The revelation that Christian believers will go into the heavens was not made known until after Jesus died. The Apostle Paul became the first person to reveal it in his letters.) We know the Pharisees believed in a resurrection, but they correctly looked forward to it in a future life on earth, not in the heavens. (The future is not simple and straightforward, and that is another whole study.)

So what is the significance of the phrase "Abraham's bosom"?

Outside of this story, there is only one other use of this phrase in the Bible. It also happens to be the very first use of the word "bosom."

When Abraham's wife, Sarah, was 76 years old, she had become impatient waiting for God to provide them with their promised child. By now she had given up on herself and was looking for another way to provide her husband with an heir. So she decided to give Abraham her servant girl to sleep with and impregnate.

And Sarai said unto Abram, "Behold now, the LORD has restrained me from bearing: I pray thee, go in unto my maid; it may be that I may obtain children by her." And Abram hearkened to the voice of Sarai (Genesis 16:2, KJV).

Yet as soon as the servant girl got pregnant, she no longer had any respect for Sarah, and Sarah regretted what she had done.

And Sarai said unto Abram, "My wrong be upon thee: I have given my maid into thy bosom" (Genesis 16:5, KJV).

Years later, after Sarah miraculously gave birth to her own son, she insisted Abraham cast out the servant girl Hagar and her son Ishmael. They are the original ancestors of the Arabs, and correctly look to Abraham as their father – but what does that have to do with our parable? There is much in common between Abraham's bosom, Sarah, The Rich man, Hagar and Lazarus.

Abraham is a God-like father figure. He is recognized as the original earthly father of Judaism, Islam and Christianity. Sarah and the Rich man were the legitimate kin of Abraham, and shared all the riches he had. Hagar and Lazarus were outsiders to the father, and were nothing more than a servant and a beggar. However, the ironic twist is that both the servant and the beggar wind up in Abraham's bosom at the expense of the natural heir. Because Sarah was impatient with God, she herself opened the way for Hagar to Abraham, just as Judah opened the door for the Gentiles to God when they rejected His Son.

Symbolic figures like this would not have gone unnoticed by the Pharisees when Jesus was telling the story. They spent their lives studying the Scriptures and this statement was yet another shock to their lofty status, pride and self-righteousness. This was a slap in the face. They felt Abraham was their father and no one else's. Abraham's God was their God and no one else's. They, and only they, were the Chosen People. Jesus was opening up salvation to the repugnant Gentiles, the scrap-eating dogs of the gutter. Doctrines like these were a threat to their perceived monopoly on God. No wonder they plotted Jesus' death.

After Jesus' ascension into heaven, the Apostle Paul again went to the Jews to persuade them that Christ was their Savior, but Jesus was again rejected. Paul was then directed by God to go to the Gentiles and teach them that they, too, could have Abraham as their father – not through the works of the Law as Israel, but through the same simple faith-obedience that Abraham himself had.

To be in Abraham's bosom is to be close to his heart – physically, emotionally and spiritually. It is to be in harmony and unity with him, not to be in heaven. Christians are on a journey in this world just as Abraham was all of his life. By faith we are travelling. We neither expect miracles nor even an easy trip, but we have a firm expectation that God will deliver on His promises in our resurrection. In the meantime we are content with the joys of the spirit.

HELL

And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments.

The word translated "hell" in the above verse is the Greek word *Hades*. It is used only once in the story. (In another study, I have gone to great lengths to show that the basic meaning of this word is an unseen/covered/hidden place where one's body and soul rests peacefully after death. From that study the biblical definition of Hades is made very clear.) It is effectively synonymous with the word grave. It is nothing more and nothing less. How it applies to Judah is symbolized in the fact that the organized nation effectively died and was buried for two thousand years.

What is not so clear is, how do we understand the Rich Man (Judah) being alive after his death and being in torment? First let me deal with his death.

DEATH AND BURIAL

The rich man also died, and was buried.

The city of Jerusalem, the heart and soul of Rich Man Judah, was literally buried in 70 A.D. The Romans were so angered with the Jews rebelling against the occupation of their country that, after their last rebellion was put down, they literally buried the city.

Paul originally tried to spread the Good News of the

Kingdom of God among the Jews, but most continued to reject it. The Jews were still looking for a conquering Messiah who would rid their county of their Roman occupiers. They mounted a futile rebellion against them in 66 A.D., which led to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. The Romans had a "final solution" of their own. Not only did they destroy all Jewish resistance by 73 A.D. when the fortress of Masada fell, but they also utterly destroyed Jerusalem itself. The city was literally flattened. Every building was so completely demolished that not one stone was left standing on another. Even their foundations were dug up and the rocks scattered. The magnificent Temple, the very seat of the presence of God on Earth, suffered the same fate.

Jesus left the temple and was walking away when His disciples came up to Him to call His attention to its buildings. "Do you see all these things?" He asked. "I tell you the truth, not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down" (Matthew 24:1-2, NIV).

This was the literal death of the nation of Judah but, unfortunately, only the start of the torment for its people. God dissolved His marriage union and turned His back on the Jews for two thousand years. The Romans forced them all out of Jerusalem and forbid them to come back. They were left to wander the world, suffer persecution, and have nowhere to call their own. All the wonderful promises God made to Abraham and his descendants were put into suspension.

TORMENT

Tradition has conditioned us to immediately associate torture with torment if it is associated with hell (Hades), but is that the kind of torment that is being spoken of in this passage? Does the word really mean the kind of extreme physical pain that comes from being continuously burned?

Jesus had come specifically to the nation of Judah as their Messiah and Savior, but when they rejected Him, the door to the Kingdom began to close. The Rich Man's torment was actually a prophecy of yet another coming exile for the Jews.

The word torment is used four times in the story. Twice it is a translation from the Greek word ►

basanos, and twice from the word *odunao*. Why did Luke use two different words? He must have meant to convey two different thoughts; but because the *KJV* translates them both as “*torment*” it is failing to convey an important distinction between the words. So, what is the sense and difference of each word?

BASANOS

*And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in **torments** ... lest they also come into this place of **torment**.*

In these two verses, the translation comes from the Greek word *basanos*. Literally, it means a touchstone, which is a type of black stone (basanite) used to test the purity of gold or silver by the color of the streak left on it when rubbed on the metal. Because this rubbing or grinding found the pureness of the metal, a similar physical “grinding” test was applied to people to determine their goodness. This testing became known as an ordeal. (If the accused person survived the ordeal, he was innocent. If he died, he was guilty.)

Although this “testing” was taken to extremes in the Dark Ages, the original meaning of this word did not mean torture, but testing.

Basanos is used only one other time in the Bible. Matthew uses the word in the following sense.

*And they brought unto Him all sick people that were taken with divers diseases and **torments**, and those which were possessed with **devils**, and those which were **lunatick**, and those that had the **palsy**; and He healed them (Matthew 4:24, *KJV*).*

From this context I do not doubt that *basanos* torment includes physical pain, but there is no indication it should be associated with a God-given eternal torture. The associated torments listed here were not supernatural sufferings. They were physical (disease), spiritual (devils), mental (lunatick), and nervous (palsy). They commonly afflicted the people of Jesus’ day. They were the same afflictions from which the God of the Old Testament had promised to protect His people if they obeyed His laws. Jesus’ miraculous ministry to these relatively few sick people was meant to be a sign of what God was willing to do again for the whole nation, if only they would repent – but they would not. Although Judah had

already lost much of God’s protection by this time, it was about to get much worse. The end of the nation was at hand. These Jews would soon be wandering the earth in these and much more torments.

With the coming of Paul and his new message about God dealing directly with individuals through His Son Jesus, the Jews lost their place of prominence. It was now the believing Gentiles through whom God would primarily work. Lazarus, the helpless descendant of Eliezer, was now to be the one comforted by the spiritual blessings of God, and it was the Jews who were soon to be tormented as Lazarus was. Not supernaturally, but with normal earthly sufferings. The focus of this story is not about good and evil, or heaven and hell. It is about Jews and Gentiles, the Chosen and New Testament believers. The Rich Man represents the elite among the Chosen People.

The main focus of Christ’s whole ministry was to the Jews, not the Gentiles, and this story is no exception. Once again, this may come as a surprise to the casual Bible reader, but Jesus came primarily to teach the Jews, not the Gentiles. Although Jesus came to save the whole world, He came to teach the Jews first and to be their Messiah, not ours. Jesus never travelled or taught outside the boundaries of Israel, and while some Gentiles followed Him, He made several blunt statements confirming His primary mission as being to the Jews first. It was not Jesus, but Paul, a Jew and a Pharisee, whose primary mission field was to the Gentiles. (See also section 12, “Rich in Revelation.”)

The beneficiary in the story may be Lazarus the Gentile, but the focus is on and about the Rich Man. In the story, Jesus is reminding the Jews how blessed they are compared to the rest of the world, how unfaithful they have been, and how they will be held accountable for that in the future. Jesus concludes with a prophecy about how they will remain faithless even if one should come back from the dead – although Paul tells us later that their stubbornness is not permanent.

*Blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in. And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, “There shall come out of Zion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob” (Romans 11:25-26, *KJV*).*

(To be continued.)

