



# Bible Student's Notebook™

## The Herald of His Grace

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

Volume X  
Issue 246

# The Rich Man and Lazarus

## Part 3

by – Dan Kraemer

### TORMENTED IN FLAME:

#### Odunao

*But now he is comforted, and you are **tormented**  
... cool my tongue; for I am **tormented** in this  
flame.*

These two verses show the other two uses of the word “*torment*” in the story. They come from the Greek word *odunao*, and they too must be properly understood.

A torment can be either emotional or physical. Most would immediately assume that the second “*tormented*” in the verse above is physical, because it is associated with a flame, but this is not the case.

The *KJV* translators are once again inconsistent in translating. No doubt they did this to enhance the reading of the version as they thought correct; but, in fact, their inconsistency is a result of interpretation, not translation. Only consistent translation can provide the correct meaning.

For example (as I show in a separate study), three completely different Greek words *Hades*, *Gehenna* and *Tartarus* are all rendered as the same English word “*hell*” in the *KJV*. That is confusing enough, but now there is even added confusion.

Not only have three different Greek words *basanizo*, *kakoucheo* and *odunao*<sup>1</sup> been rendered as the word “*torment*,” but the *KJV* translators sometimes also saw fit to translate one or another of them into the other various words, “*toiling*,” “*vexed*,” “*pained*,” “*tossed*,” “*adversity*” and “*sorrowing*” in different parts of the

New Testament. If one does not read the Greek, or use a concordance to check, reader of the *KJV* is unaware of any of this. He has no idea what word was used originally, and that inconsistent translations, and thus interpretations, are being made for him.

Is this being fair to the reader? Wouldn't you agree that there is a significant difference between being tormented and feeling sorrow? Yet this is exactly the wide range of latitude the translators gave themselves. How they thought the verse should be colored is how they translated it, leaving the reader unaware of their slant. Why not be consistent and let the context determine the force of the word?

So, is the Rich Man suffering fiery *torment*, or emotional *sorrow* in Hades? What is the truest sense of the word? Try to lay aside your prejudices.

Again, the best indicator of meaning is by its use in context. The word *odunao* is used only four times in the Bible, all of them by Luke. It is used once each in the two verses above and once each in the following two verses. So the question is, “Which single English word best translates the single Greek word when applied to all four verses?” Let's see.

When Jesus was only twelve years old, this small-town Boy disappeared into the big city of Jerusalem without telling His parents of His whereabouts or what He was doing. After a few days of frantic search they found Him in the Temple discussing Scripture with the teachers.

*And when they saw Him, they were amazed:  
and His mother said unto Him, “Son, why have*

1. See Strong's #928 *basanizo*, #2558 *kakoucheo* and #3600 *odunao*.

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**LAZARUS** (continued from page 2309)

*You thus dealt with us? behold, your father and I have sought You **sorrowing***” (Luke 2:48, KJV).

The fourth use is when Paul had to say a final goodbye to a group of his friends he had taught for three years. They had an emotional farewell, for they feared they would never see each other again.

**Sorrowing** most of all for the words which he spake, that they should see his face no more. And they accompanied him unto the ship (Acts 20:38).

I think you would agree with the KJV translators that the word “sorrowing” is more appropriate in these two verses than “tormented.” It is perfectly clear that the pain is emotional because of the separation of loved ones.

Therefore, if the word *odunao* in these two verses means sorrowing, and not tormented, then logically it also means sorrowing in the story at hand. The Rich Man is sorrowing in the flame and his suffering is emotional, not physical. Thus the verses are consistently translated,

*But now he is comforted, and you are **sorrowing** ... cool my tongue; for I am **sorrowing** in this flame.*

## FLAME AND FIRE

*Cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.*

How does one “sorrow” emotionally in a flame? Doesn’t the flame in this context change the meaning from sorrowing to torment?

No, because the flame is symbolic. Normally I understand words literally, but as so many things in this parable are symbolic, the flame becomes subject to more scrutiny.

Note the word used is “flame” and not “fire.” The Greek word for flame is *phlox*<sup>2</sup> and it is used only six times in the New Testament. In each case the flame is closely associated with God and is a symbol of affliction not fire. If the word used here was fire instead of flame, I could not make this argument because fire is used in 79 verses in the New Testament of the KJV, and it literally does mean fire most of the time. Yet

2. Strong’s #5395.

flame has a connotation distinct from fire. In the verse below, note that it does not say that the bush was on fire, but that there was a flame of fire in the bush. If this were an isolated example, I would agree that the distinction was weak or meaningless; but in each of the six cases where flame, as opposed to fire, is used, the distinction is consistent and therefore meaningful. It is a special symbol.

*And when forty years were expired, there appeared to him in the wilderness of mount Sinai an angel of the Lord in a flame of fire in a bush (Acts 7:30).*

Why did God choose to reveal Himself to Moses as a flaming thorn bush that burned but never burned up? Shouldn’t He have chosen something more noble? Something more like thunder and lightning from a mountaintop? Yes, later, but not now. This appearance was more appropriate for the time. Majesty would come later when Israel was free. This flame and the thorns represented Israel’s present affliction in Egypt and God was identifying with them. They had been “burning” as slaves in Egypt for four hundred years, yet they were not consumed.

In the remaining five cases the Lord (or His minister) is again revealed as a flaming fire.

*And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in **flaming** fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ (II Thessalonians 1:7-8, KJV).*

*His eyes were as a **flame** of fire (repeated three times, Revelation 1:14; 2:18; 19:12, KJV).*

*And of the angels he said, “Who makes his angels spirits, and his ministers a **flame** of fire” (Hebrews 1:7, quoted from Psalm 104:4, KJV).*

It is obvious that these flames are not ordinary fire. These flames of fire are a symbol of the Lord’s searching, penetrating judgment, and His wrath and affliction on evil. Yet the affliction is not burning sinners with fire. Nothing here says anything about any human being burned or dying in a fire. It says the Lord is the One Who is in a flaming fire, not the transgressors. It is His eyes that “were as” a flame of fire, and His angels whom He makes a flame of fire. All kinds of horrible punishments may be dealt out to these sinners, but don’t jump to conclusions that simply are not there. ►

Yes, the Lord takes His vengeance, but nothing here says anyone is being eternally burned in a literal fire.

Perhaps we can associate flame's use with the way we presently use the word "burn." "Burn" is sometimes used symbolically and has nothing to do with fire, as in, "the manager's stress left him burned out and exhausted;" or, "the girlfriend was burned by love;" or, "the runaway borrower burned the lender, who is now burning with anger." This symbolic burning is the feeling of an intense emotion. This burning has nothing to do with real fire, but is rather a symbol of affliction. The New Testament uses the word "flame" in a similar way.

## **FIRE**

The Greek word for fire is not found in this story. As such, I should not have to deal with the word, but just so I am not misunderstood, or wrongly accused, let me state this: I do not deny that God will utterly burn up sinners in real fires. For example, fire is used three times in the three consecutive verses below and all of them mean real fire.

John the Baptist was teaching a crowd of repenting Israelites out in the wilderness, but when the Pharisees and Sadducees arrived he said to them,

*Every tree which brings not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire ... He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire ... He will be gathering His grain into His barn, yet the chaff will He be burning up with unextinguished fire (Matthew 3:10-12).*

In each of these three consecutive verses there is a spoken or implied contrast between good and bad, and what the consequence is to both.

In the first, unfit trees are to be cut down and thrown into a literal fire. The trees represent fruitless people, but the fire is real. They will be burned up and all that will be left is ashes. (They are not burning eternally. See my separate study on *Gehenna*.) The good trees are left to bear good fruit.

In the middle verse, one is baptized (meaning immersed) either in the Holy Ghost, or in fire. The good receive the spirit, but the bad receive destruction by fire. Nothing here indicates this is a flame of affliction or a "tongue of fire." The pattern here is salvation or destruction.

The last verse is the same. The good wheat is saved but the useless chaff is burned up in fire.

I will never deny that God uses fire to destroy mortal humans, but He does not use it to torture them endlessly.

## **DROP OF WATER**

Just as Lazarus was "*desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table,*" now it is the Rich Man who asks that Lazarus "*may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue.*"

Just as the crumbs are symbolic, so is the drop of water. If Lazarus was really physically starving, don't you think he would have desired a lot more than the crumbs that fell from the table? Don't you think he would have desired a full meal? Don't you think this is symbolic?

I believe the crumbs really represent little golden nuggets of Divine truth that the Gentiles, who lived in proximity to Jews, desired to pick up. (Note how easily you just accepted my "nugget" symbolism to explain the first symbolism of the crumbs.) God had little or no dealings with the Gentiles at this time, but Judah had a whole table full of divine revelation. Yet they hoarded it and did not share it with any other desiring nation. They had God's truth to themselves and they wanted to keep it that way; but they knew they should share it, for God told Abraham that his descendants were to be the chosen family through whom all the families of the earth were to be blessed. First, God would reveal Himself directly to his family and then, through Israel, would all nations learn of God. This blessing would come especially through His Son, Jesus Christ, born a Jew, Who would die to save all mankind.

*And I will bless them that bless you [Israel], and curse him that curses you: and in you shall all families of the earth be blessed (Genesis 12:3, KJV).*

Jesus said,

*Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God (Matthew 4:4, KJV).*

In like fashion to the crumbs, the drop of water is symbolic. If the Rich Man were really continuously burning in a lake of fire, would he really ask for only a drop of

water? Of what use would a drop of water on the tip of a finger be to someone spending a million years in a lake of fire? None. Why doesn't he ask to be immersed in water? Why doesn't he ask Abraham to open the floodgates of the heavens to douse the fire? Why? Because the Rich Man is on earth and he is asking for an earthly gesture of comfort from earthly afflictions.

*And whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward (Matthew 10:42, KJV).*

What is the least someone can do for someone else? This verse suggests it is to get them a cup of cold water. Even if the person is not suffering, it is an act of kindness. In the parable, the displaced people of Judah are asking for just the tiniest bit of comfort from the Gentiles.

Or perhaps the water symbolism pertains to Jesus Himself.

*But whosoever drinks of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life (John 4:14, KJV).*

*He that believes on Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water (John 7:38, KJV).*

Is Lazarus to bring the Living Water to the Jews so that they might believe?

The mass conversion of Jews to Christianity, to this point, has not been in God's plan. A fraction of them have accepted Jesus as their Messiah but the remnant of the Jews will never be absorbed into the Gentile nations or their religion. They are still the Chosen People of God. It is their destiny to remain unique and independent. They may request help, but they will never allow themselves to be smothered by the nations nor change their religion. So it has been for thousands of years.

## THE GREAT GULF

*And beside all this, between us and you there is a great **gulf** fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they **pass** to us, that would come from there (Luke 16:26, KJV).*

What is this great gulf that separates the sorrowing Rich Man from the comforted Lazarus?

The word "gulf" is translated as "chasm" by the more literal English versions. That word may, or may not, be a body of water, but if we consider the second use of the word "pass" in the verse, this hints it is. The actual Greek word for "pass" as used in this verse is *diaperao*, meaning to ferry. This indicates that the great gulf is an impassable body of water, over which no boat can cross.

A literal understanding of this story would put the Rich Man in a fire that borders a great gulf of water. On the other side of this great gulf, which is somehow within seeing and speaking range, lays heaven. Do you really think any of this is to be taken literally? It has to be symbolic, but what do the symbols mean?

What could this gulf mean to the Jews of Jesus' time? Remember, the Jewish Scriptures know nothing about anyone ever going to a celestial heaven, nor of anyone burning in hellfire. So how could they possibly understand this in the modern Christian traditional way? They couldn't.

Then what other connection could they make that harmonized with their Scriptures? In what previous situations were the Jews stranded in a sorrowful state, bordering an impassable body of water, and on the other side was their salvation?

Two great events would immediately come to their mind: the crossing of the Red Sea at the beginning of their exodus, and the crossing of the Jordan River at the end of the exodus.

In the first case the Israelites had been tormented in the flame of slavery in Egypt for four hundred years, but were finally released after ten plagues had devastated Egypt. They got as far as the Red Sea before the Pharaoh changed his mind and caught up with them. They were trapped at its shores, but God miraculously intervened and they crossed through the Red Sea and found safety in the wilderness of the Sinai Peninsula.

After wandering in this desert wilderness for forty years, they came to the edge of the Promised Land, but the Jordan River was at its full flood level and presented another impassable boundary to cross. Once again the Israelites were stuck at the banks of a body of water. Wilderness lay on one side, and the Promised Land flowing with milk and honey on the other. ►

Once again, they miraculously crossed when the river suddenly stopped flowing just long enough for them to pass through.

The Israelites were saved by passing through water. This is the original basis for the imagery of baptism. One passes from a certain death situation to salvation through water. The old life is left behind and a new one begins. Remember, baptism is a Jewish tradition. John the Baptist was baptizing Jews before Jesus started His ministry.

So, to the Jews, this gulf was reminiscent of the barriers placed before them to get to the Promised Land. Yet to cross these barriers they needed faith in God to provide the way. They could not do it themselves. When their faith failed they died in the wilderness, and when it prevailed God gave the way.

All these verses mean so little to the Gentile, but to the Pharisees these were blunt condemnations of their lives. They were being told that the impassable gulf was a symbol of their faithlessness, and Jesus is foretelling more bad news to these Jews. Another torment is about to begin from which they do not have the faith to cross over and free themselves.

Their first torment was when they were held captive in Egypt for four hundred years. They were saved by God and released into the wilderness. At that point, God was ready to give them the Promised Land immediately, but they were faithless and afraid to take it.

This began their second torment. God made them wander the desert for a further forty years and subjected them to strict laws of every kind. Eventually every adult, save two, died in the torment of the desert. However, understand that this torment was more emotional than physical. God miraculously provided every necessary physical need, but He never offered them their freedom again. They remained captives of the wilderness.

Finally they got to the Promised Land, but once there they could seldom, if ever, live up to the law-keeping agreement they had made with God to keep His protection and abundance. They fell captive to one conqueror after another. The Philistines, Assyrians, Babylonians and Romans all held the Israelis captive. During this third series of torments their Prophets promised them a Savior. A Messiah would come and free them from their captivity – but when Jesus came and announced that the awaited Kingdom was at hand, they rejected His message, and Him as their Messiah. Once again they lacked the faith to confidently obey.

This soon led to their latest torment. From 70 A.D. to 1948 they were once again wandering the world without a homeland. For almost two thousand years now, the Jews have been unable to cross this great gulf between themselves and Abraham's bosom.

So what exactly is this great gulf?

It is simply faith. I think the Jews are trapped in this torment of captivity and wanderings because God has raised an impassable barrier between them and Himself. They have not been given the faith to see that Jesus Christ is their Messiah. No amount of logic or argument can bridge this gulf. Faith is either given or it is not. Of course, billions of Gentiles have not received this faith either, but the Jews are unique. As a group, God has kept their tight little identity; but one day, as a group, God will enlighten most or all of them to serve His special purpose. They will finally receive peace, security and wealth on this earth. Until that day, though, even with their own homeland they cannot cross into the peace and tranquillity of Abraham's bosom.

This contrasts with true Christians. They walk by faith in God. They place no faith at all in anything else. Although he or she may work for them, Christians have no assurance of physical peace, security or wealth on earth. They are guaranteed only inner peace and tranquillity now. They have no need of a homeland for this whole earth is just a stopping point on their way to their true home in the heavens. Despite any and all tribulations, Christians thank God and put all of their faith in God. They expect nothing for sure in this life, but rest assured that another much better life lies ahead after their death.

Only a leap of faith can cross this gulf.

### **WARNINGS FROM MOSES AND THE PROPHETS**

*Then he said, "I pray you therefore, father, that you would send him to my father's house: For I have five brothers; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment." Abraham said unto him, "They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them." And he said, "No, father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent."*

What is this place of torment about which Abraham indicates Moses and the prophets warned the brothers? As I have repeatedly said, it isn't "hellfire," because Moses and the prophets never warned anybody about anyone

spending a conscious eternity suffering in a lake of fire.

Both Judah and Israel were familiar with Moses' threats of earthly disasters. Both had been invaded, their country destroyed and their people taken away in slavery. To prevent another round of this with the coming Roman exile, the Rich Man asks Abraham to send Lazarus back to his brothers that he may warn them of the impending torment. Yet Abraham counters that they already have had plenty of warnings from the prophets. (Hundreds of verses.) They never listened in the past so why would they listen now? Moreover, why would they listen to a despised Gentile when they won't listen to their most cherished forefathers?

*If ye will **not** do all My commandments ... And I will set My face against you, and ye shall be slain before your enemies: they that hate you shall reign over you; and ye shall flee when none pursueth you ... And I will break the pride of your power (Leviticus 26:14-19, KJV).*

*Our fathers were unfaithful; they did evil in the eyes of the LORD our God and forsook Him ... Therefore, the anger of the LORD has fallen on Judah and Jerusalem; He has made them an object of dread and horror and scorn (II Chronicles 29:6-8, NIV).*

*If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the nations, but if you return to Me and obey My commands, then even if your exiled people are at the farthest horizon, I will gather them from there and bring them to the place I have chosen (Nehemiah 1:8-9, NIV).*

Regardless, the Rich man insists that what his brothers really need is for one to return from the dead to warn them. This would work. Then they would listen.

But Abraham answers,

*If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead (Luke 16:19-31, KJV).*

## **SIGNS**

Would the Rich man's brothers really repent if one went unto them from the dead? The gospel of John answers this question. He records a miracle about another man named Lazarus. Surely it cannot be a coincidence that he is the only other Lazarus in the New Testament, and he really does come back from the dead.

In an event that was written to be taken literally, this Lazarus dies, lies buried in a tomb for four days, and then Jesus brings him back to life. Nevertheless, although the Jews were always asking Jesus for a sign from heaven to prove He was sent by God, nothing He did, even this, ever satisfied them.

This Lazarus arose from the dead and walked among his brothers, but they still refused to believe in the One through Whom it occurred. His many signs only enraged them. Instead of rejoicing and believing in Him after this miracle, the High Priest and Pharisees made plans to kill both Jesus and Lazarus. Nothing would persuade them.

Although our main story is a parable, this real event confirms much of the parable's predictions.

1. A man named Lazarus literally did come back from the grave.
2. Regardless, they would not repent or heed the spirit of the prophets and Moses' Law.
3. Jesus Himself died, came back from the grave, and still they would not believe.
4. In 70 A.D. Jerusalem fell and the Jews went into a 2000-year exile.

The Old Testament has numerous examples of God giving miraculous signs, only to be soon forgotten. God may have parted the Red Sea for the Israelites to pass through, but within days they were grumbling and asking, "What has God done for us lately?" Although they kept asking for signs right up to the moment of His death on the cross, no sign would change their hardened hearts. Jesus said,

*A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a miraculous sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth (Matthew 12:39-40, NIV)*

Jesus Himself rose from the dead after three days in the tomb, yet even this did not convince the nation to accept her Messiah – *though One rose from the dead.*

## **FOREVER**

Another commonly accepted misconception of this story is that the Rich Man is tormented forever, but the fact is that the duration of his sorrows is not stated anywhere in the story. An eternal punishment is ►

a fabrication and a baseless assumption forced onto this story. If Jesus was warning everyone of endless misery, don't you think He would have made that fact prominent? Do you really think that millions of years of excruciating torture is what God thinks is equitable for a short lifetime of neglect and selfishness? Moreover, if Lazarus, who does absolutely nothing in the story, is given millions of years of untold pleasure for a short lifetime of misery, what is God's purpose and wisdom in the endless torture of the Rich Man: to teach him a lesson? If literal, should we all pray to be poor, sick, hungry and helpless like Lazarus? Regardless, this debate belongs in another study, but the lack of a time element is worth noting.

### Summary

Isn't the parable of "The Rich Man and Lazarus" wonderful? Did you have any idea how much meaning and symbolism was within it? This paper details many different reasons for not believing that this is just the story of one poor man forever burning in "hellfire." It is so much more.

I pray this explanation helps remove a major stumbling block toward belief in a God Who is not eternally vengeful, but toward One Whose perfect justice will one day lead all men back to Himself, toward the One Whose saving power is all conquering, Whose forgiveness and mercy is unlimited, and Whose love is overwhelming and ultimately irresistible.

As judgmental as Jesus was of the Rich Man, God has not given up on Judah, nor has He given up on any sinner even though he dies sinful and unrepentant. They are not burning eternally in "hellfire." They are awaiting judgement, correction and, finally, reconciliation. The Good Shepherd will save every last, lost sheep.

For it is written, "As I live," saith the Lord, "**every** knee shall bow to Me, and **every** tongue shall confess to God." So then **every** one of us shall give account of himself to God (Romans 14:11, a quote from Isaiah 45:23, KJV)

*For therefore we both labour and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, Who is the Saviour of **all** men, **specially** of those that believe* (I Timothy 4:10, KJV).

*I ask then: Did God reject his people? By no means! I am an Israelite myself, a descendant of Abraham, from the tribe of Benjamin. God did not reject His people, whom He foreknew ...*

*What Israel sought so earnestly it did not obtain, but the elect did. The others were hardened, as it is written: "God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes so that they could not see and ears so that they could not hear, to this very day." ... Again I ask: Did they stumble so as to fall beyond recovery? Not at all! Rather, because of their transgression, salvation has come to the Gentiles to make Israel envious ... in the hope that I may somehow arouse my own people to envy and save some of them. I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. **And so all** Israel will be saved, as it is written: "The deliverer will come from Zion; He will turn godlessness away from Jacob" (Romans 11:1-26, NIV).*

Amen.

### Bibliography

Although I am the author of this essay, many of the thoughts in it have been compiled from many sources, and I have added some of my own. It is part of a longer study in progress dealing with every aspect of hell and "hellfire," rightly or wrongly, derived from the Bible, e.g. Hell, Hades, Gehenna, Lake of Fire, Outer Darkness, the Second Death, Tartarus, the Abyss, the lost, etc. It is not written or edited professionally, but I want to make it available now, lest I wait forever to make it perfect. I pray it is scripturally correct and helpful to many. If there are errors, may they come to light and be corrected. If you can expand on it, please let me know, I'm sure I have not exhausted all of this parable's hidden treasures.

Please share it widely and freely.

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Separate essays on *The Rich Man and Lazarus*, written by:

J.F. Witherell, 1843  
Alan Burns, 1916  
Bryan T. Huie, 1998  
L. Ray Smith, 2000  
J. Patching, (no date)

