

# LAZARUS AND THE RICH MAN

The parable of Lazarus and the rich man has been the foundation for many of the erroneous beliefs about "hell" within traditional Christianity. Some have viewed it not as a parable, but as a true story Christ told to give details about the punishment of sinners in hell. Yet a thorough, unbiased examination of this story will show that the generally accepted interpretations of this passage of Scripture are fallacious and misleading. In this article, we will go through the parable verse by verse to determine what Christ was truly teaching.

Those who insist that this is not a parable, but a true, literal story Christ told to describe the condition of the lost in hell must overlook several facts to arrive at that conclusion. First, Yeshua the Messiah never accuses the rich man of any sin. He is simply portrayed as a wealthy man who lived the good life. Furthermore, Lazarus is never proclaimed to be a righteous man. He is just one who had the misfortune to be poor and unable to care for himself. If this story is literal, then the logical implication is that all the rich are destined to burn in hell, while all the homeless and destitute will be saved. Does anyone believe this to be the case?

If hell is truly as it is pictured in this story, then the saved will be able to view the lost who are burning there. Could anyone enjoy eternal existence if they were able to see lost friends, family, and acquaintances being incinerated in hell, yet never burning up? Additionally, if hell (as it is traditionally taught) is an abyss of fire and brimstone where sinners are tormented forever, does anyone really believe that one drop of water would relieve the pain and anguish of someone suffering in its flames?

These are just some of the difficulties we encounter when we try to make the account of Lazarus and the rich man literal, instead of realizing that it is a parable. If it is a true story, then **all** of the things Christ said must be factual. If all the points of the story are not literal, then we must view this tale as an analogy Jesus used to teach larger spiritual truths.

Most people think that the Messiah spoke in parables to make the meaning clearer for the uneducated people he was teaching. Reflecting this belief, an appendix to the *NKJV* says that "Jesus' reputation as a great teacher spread far and wide. And no wonder. He taught in parables, simple stories, that made His lessons clear to all who were ready to learn" ("Man for All Times," p. 1870). Yet Christ said his purpose for speaking to the people in parables was exactly the **opposite** of the explanation cited above.

MATTHEW 13:1 On the same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the sea. 2 And great multitudes were gathered together to Him, so that He got into a boat and sat; and the whole multitude stood on the shore. 3 Then He spoke many things to them in parables . . . 10 And the disciples came and said to Him, "Why do You speak to them in parables?" 11 He answered and said to them, "Because **it has been given to you** to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but **to them it has not been given**. 12 For whoever has, to him more will be given, and he will have abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him. 13 **Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand**. 14 And in them the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled, which says: 'Hearing you will hear and shall not understand, and seeing you will see and not perceive; 15 for the hearts of this people have grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, so that I should heal them.'" (*NKJV*)

As this passage and the parallel Scripture in Mark 4 clearly state, Yeshua spoke to the people in parables to **hide** the spiritual meaning of what he was saying. He only intended for his disciples to understand what the parables truly meant. It is no wonder, then, that so many have misunderstood what Christ was teaching with the parable of Lazarus and the rich man.

Let's start by getting some background information on the situation in which Christ told this parable. Luke tells us that all the tax collectors and sinners were coming to Christ to hear what he had to say (Luke 15:1). This made the Pharisees and scribes jealous and they complained, vehemently criticizing Yeshua for receiving sinners and eating with them (Luke 15:2). They were probably envious of Christ's growing fame, afraid that his popularity would diminish their own authority and prestige.

So the Messiah first spoke a three-part parable (the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the prodigal son) to those gathered around him. This parable was designed to show the tax collectors and sinners (as well as the Pharisees) that God was concerned for them and that He would seek out the lost and welcome them into His family when they repented and turned back to Him.

The self-righteous, accusing Pharisees and scribes, who Christ acknowledged as the legitimate religious teachers of the Jews (Matt. 23:1-3), should have been the ones telling these people of God's love for them. They should have been the

ones teaching these sinners, exhorting them to return to God and receive His love and forgiveness. However, because of their faith in their own righteousness and their contempt for these tax collectors and sinners who didn't measure up to their standards, the Pharisees and scribes excluded them and considered them accursed (John 7:49).

Afterward, speaking primarily to his disciples but with the Pharisees (and probably the crowd) still listening in, Christ related the parable of the unjust steward (Luke 16:1-13). The Pharisees, who were "lovers of money" (Luke 16:14), realized that the Messiah was alluding to them with this parable and took offense. They scoffed at Jesus. The final part of Christ's response to the derision of the Pharisees and scribes was the parable of Lazarus and the rich man.

We'll now examine this parable in detail to grasp exactly what the Messiah was teaching about the Kingdom of God.

LUKE 16:19 "There was a certain rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and fared sumptuously every day." (*NKJV*)

We begin by scrutinizing the description Christ gives us of the rich man. First, he tells us that this man is clothed in purple and fine linen. This type of clothing would not have been out of the ordinary for one of considerable wealth during this time period. However, this raiment also has symbolic meaning. *The Eerdmans Bible Dictionary* says: "The wearing of purple was associated particularly with royalty . . ." ("Purple," p. 863). In addition, the *New Bible Dictionary* tells us: "The use of linen in OT times was prescribed for priests (Ex. 28:39). The coat, turban and girdle must be of fine linen." ("Linen," p. 702).

So we see that the garments worn by this rich man were symbolic of royalty and the priesthood. With that in mind, let's see what God told Moses just before giving the Israelites the Law on Mount Sinai.

EXODUS 19:6 And ye shall be to me a **royal priesthood** and a **holy nation**: these words shalt thou speak to the children of Israel. (*Brenton's LXX*)

The clothing of the rich man identifies him symbolically with the people of Israel, who God chose to be a special people. They were called to be a witness to the nations surrounding them, confirming the blessings available to those who would obey God and keep His laws. Unfortunately, only infrequently did

they live up to the high calling given to them by the Eternal. Eventually He had to send them into captivity for their refusal to honor their part of the covenant ratified at Mount Sinai. At the time of Christ, only the remnant of the house of Judah which had returned from the Babylonian captivity continued to have a covenant relationship with God. The rich man in this parable represents the Jews of Jesus' day, exemplified by the religious teachers, the Pharisees and scribes.

Verse 19 also tells us that the rich man "fared sumptuously every day." Figuratively, this represents the magnificent spiritual feast available only to the Jews, who were the sole remaining part of God's called people Israel. In the first century A.D., they were the only people on earth who had the true religion. Indeed, Paul recounts the glorious station of the house of Judah in Romans 9:3-5.

ROMANS 9:3 For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen by race. 4 They are Israelites, and to them belong the sonship, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises; 5 to them belong the patriarchs, and of their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ. God who is over all be blessed for ever. Amen. (*RSV*)

The Jews were truly rich, feasting on God's spiritual blessings. Yet these very gifts caused them to stumble because they prompted them to self-righteousness. They gloried in the gifts, without glorifying the Eternal God who gave them. Instead of being a "royal priesthood" that was a blessing to all nations, they instead loathed and despised the surrounding Gentile peoples. Certainly, as Paul wrote, "their table become a snare and a trap, a stumbling block and a retribution for them" (Rom. 11:9).

LUKE 16:20 "But there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, full of sores, who was laid at his gate, 21 desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table. Moreover the dogs came and licked his sores." (*NKJV*)

In contrast to the rich man, we now see Lazarus. The first thing to note is that he is depicted as a beggar. This is an apt description of the Gentiles who "laid at the gate" of Judah. Paul describes the predicament of the Gentiles before they received Christ in Ephesians 2:12.

EPHESIANS 2:12 Remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the

covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.  
(*RSV*)

This Scripture is also a fitting representation of the position of the Gentile nations before the Messiah's sacrifice for the world's sins. They were certainly "excluded from the commonwealth of Israel," "strangers to the covenants of promise," and "without hope and without God in the world." The Gentiles were beggars, located outside Judah and longing to be fed spiritual crumbs from the table of the divinely blessed Jews.

Additionally, we are told that dogs came and consoled Lazarus in his misery, licking his sores. The Jews considered the surrounding Gentiles to be unclean "dogs." Even Christ himself used this unflattering comparison when he conversed with the Greek Syrophenician woman while in the region of Tyre (Mark 7:24-30).

Also important to the story is the meaning of the name Lazarus. This Greek name is a form of the Hebrew *Eleazer*, and it literally means "he whom God helps." The use of this particular name is very significant to the message of the parable, for the Gentiles would indeed become "those whom God helped" through the sacrifice of His son, Yeshua.

LUKE 16:22 "So it was that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom. The rich man also died and was buried."  
(*NKJV*)

The next events recorded in this parable are the deaths of Lazarus and then the rich man. Since the parable has been figurative up until this point, there is no reason to assume it becomes literal now.

First, to prove that this language is symbolic and not meant to be taken literally, let's examine exactly what we are told by Christ. He says that **first**, Lazarus dies and is taken to the bosom of Abraham. Notice, there is no mention of his burial here. Then **later** the rich man dies, and he is buried (in Hades, according to verse 23). So the time sequence given indicates that upon his death, Lazarus was taken immediately to Abraham's bosom, while afterward the rich man was buried in Hades after his death.

If this story is literal, then we have a contradiction in the Bible. Here, Lazarus is shown to have immediately received the promise of eternal life. Yet the author of Hebrews clearly tells us that Abraham, as well as all the other Old Testament saints, have not yet received the promises given to them by God.

HEBREWS 11:13 All these [Abraham, Noah, Abel, etc.] died in faith, **without receiving the promises**, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. . . . 39 And all these [including Abraham], having gained approval through their faith, **did not receive what was promised**, 40 because God had provided something better for us, **so that apart from us they would not be made perfect.** (*NASB*)

The great men and women of faith listed in Hebrews 11 have **not yet** been made perfect and given eternal life. They, along with all the saints of God from every age, are currently sleeping in their graves (Job 3:11-19; Psa. 6:5; 115:17; Ecc. 9:5, 10; I Cor. 15:20; Isa. 57:1-2; Dan. 12:2; Acts 2:29, 34; 13:36). These saints are awaiting the first resurrection, which will take place when Yeshua the Messiah returns at the sounding of the seventh trumpet (Matt. 24:30-31; I Cor. 15:51-52; I The. 4:16; Rev. 11:15-18).

Clearly, there is no way to reconcile the numerous Scriptures listed above with a literal understanding of the story of Lazarus and the rich man. What, then, does the death of these two men represent?

The deaths of both the rich man (who represented the Jews) and Lazarus (who represented the Gentile nations) are symbolic in this parable. Here, their demise depicts an elemental change in the status and position of the two groups.

To confirm this, let's look at the meaning of Lazarus being "carried to Abraham's bosom." The figurative meaning of being in one's bosom is to be in a position of closeness, to be highly regarded. This symbolism is indicated by the ancient practice of having guests at a feast recline on the chest of their neighbors. The place of highest honor would therefore belong to the one seated next to the host, calling to mind the example of John at the Last Supper (John 13:23). Paul explains this imagery in Galatians 3:6-9 by telling us how the Gentiles could be in this place of highest honor.

GALATIANS 3:6 . . . Abraham "believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." 7 Therefore know that **only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham.** 8 And the Scripture, foreseeing that **God would justify the Gentiles by faith**, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying, "In you all the nations shall be blessed." 9 So then those who are of faith are blessed with believing Abraham. (*NKJV*)

As the passage above (as well as the fourth and ninth chapters of Romans) shows, Gentile believers become "sons of Abraham" through faith in Christ. This faith allows Gentiles to no longer be "strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God" (Eph. 2:19). For centuries the Jews had received the benefits of being God's chosen people by virtue of being Abraham's physical descendants. But after the sacrifice of Christ, this place of honor and blessing would be given to the people represented by Lazarus. This is the meaning of being "carried to the bosom of Abraham" in this parable.

In contrast to Lazarus, the rich man was **buried** in Hades. An understanding of the original meaning of the Greek word *hades* is necessary to grasp the message of the parable. Regarding the possible etymology of this word, the *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* states that *hades* ". . . comes from *idein* (to see) with the negative prefix, *a-*, and so would mean the invisible . . . In the LXX *hades* occurs more than 100 times, in the majority of instances to translate Heb. *she'ol*, the underworld which receives all the dead. It is the land of darkness . . ." (vol. 2, p. 206).

Most likely, *hades* originally meant "unseen." Later, it came to refer to the hidden state of those buried in the earth. Symbolically, this parable shows that a point would come when the house of Judah would become "unseen" by God, out of favor because of their unbelief. There would come a time when the Jews as a whole would no longer be God's favored nation. Their hard hearts would lead them to reject their Messiah (John 1:11).

LUKE 16:23 "And being in **torments in Hades**, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom." (*NKJV*)

What did Christ mean by saying here that the rich man was in "torments in Hades"? The key to discovering the symbolic meaning of this verse is the Greek noun *basanois*, translated "torments" above.

According to Friberg's *Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament*, *basanois*, which is a form of the noun *basanos*, means "strictly, a touchstone for testing the genuineness of metals by rubbing against it . . ."

The etymology of *basanos* found in Kittel's *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* is very helpful in correctly understanding this verse:

In non-biblical Gk. [*basanos*] is a commercial expression, or is used in relation to government. It then acquires the meaning of the checking of

calculations, which develops naturally out of the basic sense of [*basanos, basanizein*] . . . **In the spiritual sphere it has the figur[ative] sense, which is closely related to the original concrete meaning, of a means of testing . . .**

The word then undergoes a change in meaning. The original sense fades into the background. [*Basanos*] now comes to denote "torture" or "the rack," espec[ially] used with slaves . . . [*Basanos*] occurs in the sense of "torment" . . .

The change in meaning is best explained if we begin with the object of treatment. If we put men instead of metal or a coin, the stone of testing become[s] torture or the rack. The metal which has survived the testing stone is subjected to harsher treatment. Man is in the same position when severely tested by torture. In the testing of metal an essential role was played by the thought of testing and proving genuineness. The rack is a means of showing the true state of affairs. **In its proper sense it is a means of testing and proving, though also of punishment.** Finally, even this special meaning was weakened and only the general element of torture remained (vol. I, pp. 561, 562, emphasis mine).

In this verse, *basanois* simply conveys a sense of testing and proving through punishment. When this understanding is combined with a proper discernment of the symbolism of Hades, we can begin to see the point Yeshua is making. As a whole, the house of Judah would to be cut off and replaced during this current age by those Gentiles who in faith would accept the sacrifice of the Messiah.

If the Pharisees and scribes understood this prophetic parable, it must have astonished and infuriated those who listened as Christ spoke. The implication that the house of Judah and the Gentile nations were to change places, with the Jews becoming alienated from God while the Gentiles were to become the "seed of Abraham," would have been almost impossible for them to believe.

LUKE 16:24 "Then he cried and said, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.'" (*NKJV*)

First, notice that the rich man identifies Abraham as his father, just as the Pharisees did (John 8:39). The rich man (Judah) is now shown to be undergoing reproof, testing, and punishment in "this flame" (singular, **not** "these flames"). It is quite obvious that the flame is not literal, because a wet fingertip on the tongue would do nothing to quench the pain inflicted by real flames.

The word rendered "torment" here is a form of the Greek verb *odunao*, which literally means "grief," "pain," or "suffering." Predominantly, it conveys the sense of mental anguish, **not** physical pain. Forms of this word are found only four times in the Scriptures, all in the writings of Luke. It appears twice in this parable, in verses 24 and 25. In Luke 2:48, it is used to describe the anxious distress that Mary and Joseph felt after they discovered the 12-year old Jesus missing on the trip home from Jerusalem after the Passover feast. In Acts 20:38, it depicts the sorrow the elders of the Ephesian Church felt at Paul's farewell announcement that they would never see him again.

The rich man cries out from the symbolic darkness of Hades for comfort because of the suffering caused by the flame. The explanation of the symbolism of the flame will require a little background information.

In Deuteronomy 11 and 28, Moses delineates God's part in His covenant with Israel. Moses told them that if they obeyed the Eternal, they would be the most blessed nation on earth. Conversely, if they disobeyed, God promised to curse and eventually destroy them because of their sins.

As the history of Israel in the Tanakh shows, only rarely did they obey God. Although the Eternal was patient and forgave them many times when they repented and turned back to Him, eventually He was forced to curse Israel as He had vowed to do.

First the house of Israel, the ten tribes that composed the northern kingdom with Samaria as their capital, was carried into captivity by Assyria (c. 722 B.C.). Hosea, who prophesied during the end of the northern kingdom, said this about God's chosen people who were called to be a royal priesthood and a holy nation.

HOSEA 4:6 My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I also will reject you from being priest for Me; because you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children. (*NKJV*)

Then, about 135 years later, the southern kingdom of Judah was subdued and finally conquered by Babylon (c. 587 B.C.). God had delivered His people to their enemies, as He had promised.

The people of Judah were given another chance. After the Persians defeated the Babylonians, the Jews were allowed to return to Judea (c. 538 B.C.) and eventually they rebuilt the Temple. Chastened and aware that their sins had

brought about the captivity, many sought to obey God's laws upon their return to the land.

But by the time of Christ, once again unbelief had become a major problem. Many of the religious teachers of the day had substituted human traditions for the laws God had given Israel (Matt. 15:1-9; Mark 7:1-13). Because of their lack of faith, they didn't really believe the very Scriptures they professed to follow (John 5:39, 45-47). In the end, they rejected the anointed one God sent to them and had the Romans crucify him.

Now back to the question at hand. What does the flame in the parable represent?

When one looks at the history of the Jewish people from the time of Christ until today, one theme remains constant -- persecution. With the quashing of the Jewish revolts against Rome (66-70 A.D. and 132-135 A.D.), the saga of the Jewish people in the Diaspora has been one of persistent and harsh persecution from virtually all quarters. The Inquisition of the 15th century and the Holocaust of the 20th century are two of the more well-known anti-semitic episodes, but many more are recorded on the bloody pages of history. For their unbelief and rejection of truth and knowledge, the Jews have been cursed by God with the "flame" of suffering and grief down through the centuries. Unfortunately, most of that mistreatment has come at the hands of those who called themselves "Christians."

The Jews pictured by the rich man in this parable are in their present state because of their unbelief, which ultimately manifested itself in the rejection of the Messiah, Yeshua. Unfortunately, this parable shows that the punishment and testing they would undergo would not **immediately** lead them to Christ. Instead of calling on the Messiah, the rich man calls on his ancestor Abraham to help ease his suffering.

LUKE 16:25 "But Abraham said, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted and you are tormented. (*NKJV*)

Abraham clearly identifies the rich man as his descendant by calling him "son." He tells him that things have changed. When the Jews were God's chosen people, they enjoyed the spiritual blessings associated with that status. But now, Abraham says, Lazarus is enjoying those blessings while the rich man is grieving and in sorrow. "Tormented" here is another form of *odunao*, the same Greek verb found above in verse 24.

LUKE 16:26 "And besides all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, so that those who want to pass from here to you cannot, nor can those from there pass to us." (*NKJV*)

What is the "great gulf" which stands between the rich man and Lazarus? Paul aptly explains it to us in the eleventh chapter of Romans. He tells us that because of the Jews' unbelief, "God has given them a spirit of stupor, eyes that they should not see and ears that they should not hear, to this very day" (Rom. 11:8). Paul goes on to say that "a partial hardening would happen to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles had come in" (Rom. 11:25). In II Corinthians 3:14-15, Paul tells us that the Israelites' "minds were blinded. For until this day the same veil remains unlifted in the reading of the Old Testament, because the veil is taken away in Christ. But even to this day, when Moses is read, a veil lies on their heart."

The "great gulf" mentioned by Abraham is nothing less than God's blinding in this age of the Jews as a whole to the truth about their Messiah! It's not that the Jewish nation won't acknowledge Christ; they **cannot** recognize his true identity because of God's actions! Yet because of the Eternal's great mercy, this state of affairs will not last forever (Rom. 11:26).

LUKE 16:27 "Then he said, 'I beg you therefore, father, that you would send him to my father's house, 28 for I have five brothers, that he may testify to them, lest they also come to this place of torment.'" (*NKJV*)

Yielding himself to his destiny, the rich man asks one more thing of his forefather Abraham. He pleads with him to send someone to warn his brothers, so that they may escape "this place of **torment**" (*basanou*), the testing and punishment that he was undergoing.

The fact that the rich man has **five** brothers is a vital clue to his true symbolic identity. Judah, the progenitor of the Jews, was the son of Jacob through Leah (Gen. 29:35). He had five full-blooded brothers: Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Issachar, and Zebulun (Gen. 35:23).

While the significance of this seemingly pointless detail has been neglected by scholars throughout the centuries, you can be certain that it did not escape the notice of the Pharisees and scribes to which Christ was speaking. They thoroughly knew their history and were extremely proud of their heritage. Yeshua wanted those self-righteous Pharisees to know exactly who He was referring to with this parable. This detail cements the identity of the rich man as the house of Judah, the Jews!

LUKE 16:29 "Abraham said to him, 'They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.'" (*NKJV*)

Once again Abraham refuses the rich man's request, telling him that the brothers already have a witness in the writings of Moses and the prophets that will allow them to escape his fate. Moses, as well as the prophets, are shown several times in the New Testament to support Yeshua's identity as the Messiah (Luke 24:27, 44; John 1:45; 5:46; Acts 3:22-24; 7:37; 26:22-23; 28:23). Abraham tells the rich man that his brothers would have to recognize the prophesied Messiah because of the things written about him in the Tanakh. This echoes what Yeshua told the Jews in John 5:45-47.

JOHN 5:45 "Do not think that I shall accuse you to the Father; there is one who accuses you -- Moses, in whom you trust. 46 For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote about Me. 47 But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words?" (*NKJV*)

As the Scriptures show, the Jewish leaders of Christ's day generally failed to recognize the very one Moses wrote about (Deu. 18:15, 18).

LUKE 16:30 "And he said, 'No, father Abraham; but if one goes to them from the dead, they will repent.' 31 "But he said to him, 'If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead.'" (*NKJV*)

Christ uses the last two verses of this parable as an amazing prophecy of his pending resurrection from the dead. The rich man says that although his brothers may not accept the scriptural evidence for the identity of the Messiah, they will accept the evidence of one who is raised from the dead.

But Abraham answers and plainly tells him that anyone who rejects God's Word about the Messiah will also refuse to acknowledge the evidence of a miraculous resurrection. This last verse is a sad prophecy about the Jews and about all the Israelites who have not, despite God's resurrection of His son from the power of the grave, recognized Christ as the Messiah.

Christ ends this parable abruptly, with no real resolution presented. The picture presented is a bleak one, yet there is hope for the Jews and for all Israel. In Romans 11, Paul laid out that hope in such a manner that scarcely few today have really believed it.

In Romans 11:1 Paul rhetorically asks if God has cast away His people, Israel. He answers his own question emphatically by saying "Certainly not!" He tells us that God has not cast away His people whom He foreknew. Paul writes that there is currently a remnant of Israel, analogous to the seven thousand reserved to God in Elijah's time (I Kings 19:18), that God has elected by grace. The rest God hardened, that the Gentiles might also be included in salvation through grace. He gives the resolution of the situation in verse 26.

ROMANS 11:25 For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. 26 And so **all Israel will be saved**, as it is written: "The Deliverer will come out of Zion, and He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob; 27 for this is My covenant with them, when I take away their sins." 28 Concerning the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but concerning the election they are beloved for the sake of the fathers. 29 For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. 30 For as you were once disobedient to God, yet have now obtained mercy through their disobedience, 31 even so these also have now been disobedient, that through the mercy shown you they also may obtain mercy. 32 For God has committed them all to disobedience, that He might have mercy on all. 33 Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out! (*NKJV*)

The same God that blinded Israel unto disobedience will have mercy on all that have been rebellious due to that blindness. To quote Paul once again, "Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!" Praised be the Eternal Creator of all things!

## CONCLUSION

The parable of Lazarus and the rich man, long used by mainstream ministers to teach the reality of "hell," really has nothing to say about punishment or reward in the afterlife. Christ used this story, which fit the common misconception about life after death in his day, to show the fate that awaited the Jewish nation because of the unbelief and faithlessness which led them to reject him as the Messiah. They still suffer from that fate to this very day. Yet the time is soon coming when God will pour on the Jews the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Christ whom they pierced, and they will mourn for Him

as one mourns for his only son, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn (Zec. 12:10).

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