

Present Truth

2 Peter 1:12

July, 1998

Dear Readers,

“Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ.” (Philippians 1:2) I pray that you all are doing well. I wanted to make a clarification concerning the last newsletter because of a question from a reader. On page two, column two, I made the statement, “Nowhere in the Bible is there any indication that we can be forgiven of sins that are yet future.” We can be forgiven of sins that we have not yet committed, but only after we have committed them and repented of them. At this point they will be sins in the past. I am sorry for any trouble this caused.

WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS ABOUT HELL!

The word *hell* is “derived from the Saxon *helan*, to cover; hence the covered or the invisible place.” (Revised Easton’s Bible Dictionary) Hell means to cover, or hide.

In the King James Version of the Old Testament, originally written in Hebrew, there is only one word that was translated “hell.” This Hebrew word is שְׁאוֹל (Sheol), and is used a total of sixty-five times. *Sheol* is translated “hell” thirty-one times, “grave” thirty-one times, and “pit” three times.

The prevailing idea, at the time of the translation of the King James Version, about hell being a place where the wicked are being tormented right now, has influenced the translators’ interpretation of the Hebrew word *Sheol*. With the idea that hell is a place where the wicked are being tormented, the translators could not use the word *hell* to translate *Sheol* in every instance, for to do so would have put some of the most faithful servants of God in a place of torment.

For example, the first time the Hebrew word *Sheol* is used is in Genesis 37:35. “And all his sons and all his daughters rose up to comfort him; but he refused to be comforted; and he said, **For I will go down into the grave** ⁷⁵⁸⁵ [Sheol] **unto my son** mourning. Thus his father wept for him.” (Genesis 37:35) Jacob believed that his son Joseph had been killed by a wild

beast and said that he would go down into *Sheol* unto his son. In this verse the translators used the word *grave* instead of *hell*. If they had used the word *hell*, it would have revealed that Jacob believed Joseph was in hell, and that he expected to go to hell when he died.

Another example of the translators using the word *grave* instead of *hell* is found in Job 14:13. “O that thou wouldst hide me in the **grave** ⁷⁵⁸⁵ [Sheol], that thou wouldst keep me secret, until thy wrath be past, that thou wouldst appoint me a set time, and remember me!” (Job 14:13) Job was experiencing much suffering, which finally caused him to ask God to let him go to *Sheol* where he knew he would have rest. “There the wicked cease from troubling; and there the weary be at rest.” (Job 3:17)

If the translators had used the word *hell* in this case, the readers would soon learn that the *hell* of the Old Testament is not a place of torment, but a state of unconsciousness. Surely Job would not ask God to put him in a place where his suffering would be increased, and would last forever.

Another place where *Sheol* is defined for us is found in Ecclesiastes chapter 9. “For the living know that they shall die: **but the dead know not any thing**, neither have they any more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten. Also their love, and their hatred, and their envy, is now perished; neither have they any more a portion for ever in any thing that is done un-

der the sun.... Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; **for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave** ⁷⁵⁸⁵ [Sheol], **whither thou goest.**" (Ecclesiastes 9:5, 6, 10)

This text sheds wonderful light on the Old Testament *hell*. We learn that there is no knowledge nor wisdom in hell, but those that are there "know not any thing."

Sheol is the only hell of the Old Testament, it is the only hell that God's people were told about for the first 4,000 years of history. Sheol is the only hell that the Jews were familiar with when Christ came. They understood that the wicked would be burned up in a lake of fire (Malachi 4:1), but this was not what they referred to as Sheol.

HELL IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

When we come to the New Testament, which was written in Greek, we find two Greek words that were translated "hell." One of these Greek words is equivalent to the Old Testament Sheol. This is clear by the fact that Peter quoted in Acts 2:27 from a verse in the Old Testament.

"Because thou wilt not leave my soul in **hell** ⁸⁶ [Hades], neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption." (Acts 2:27) Peter was quoting from Psalm 16:10. "For thou wilt not leave my soul in **hell** ⁷⁵⁸⁵ [Sheol]; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption." (Psalm 16:10) When Peter quoted this Psalm, he used the Greek word ᾅδης (Hades) to translate the Hebrew word שְׁאוֹל (Sheol).

From this we can see that when Christ died, His soul went to the Old Testament hell. If the translators had given us the word *grave*, then it would have shown that the soul of Christ slept in the tomb with His body. This of course would have been correct, but it would not harmonize with their belief that the soul cannot die. So in this case the translators had to give us the word *hell*. The fact is that the hell of the Old Testament and the Hades hell of the New Testament mean "grave."

"I am He that liveth, **and was dead**; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; **and have the keys of hell** ⁸⁶ [Hades] **and of death.**" (Revelation 1:18) Because Christ was dead; because His soul went to *Sheol* (the grave, or hell), He has the keys of hell, He has the right to unlock the prison of the grave and let the captives free. "To open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the prison, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison house." (Isaiah 42:7)

"And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and **hell** ⁸⁶ [Hades] delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. And death and **hell** ⁸⁶ [Hades] were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death." (Revelation 20:13, 14) Hell, or the grave, delivered up the dead that was in it. Hell was cast into the lake of fire. It is generally supposed that "the lake of fire" is hell, but here we see that hell was cast into the lake of fire to be destroyed.

"The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death." (1 Corinthians 15:26) "I will ransom them from the power of the **grave** ⁷⁵⁸⁵ [Sheol]; I will redeem them from death: O death, I will be thy plagues; O **grave** ⁷⁵⁸⁵ [Sheol], I will be thy destruction: repentance shall be hid from mine eyes." (Hosea 13:14) The Lord says that He will destroy death and hell in "the lake of fire," which is called the "second death."

GEHENNA FIRE

The other Greek word that was translated "hell" in the New Testament is γέεννα (Gehenna).

"Gehenna 'should be carefully distinguished from Hades ([hâidês]) which is never used for the place of punishment, but for the place of departed spirits, without reference to their moral condition' (Vincent)." (Taken from Robertson's *New Testament Word Pictures* on Matthew 5:22)

"The term 'Gehenna' arose from the valley of Hinnom, south of Jerusalem, where the Canaanites burned human sacrifices to Moloch. After the return of the Jews from the Captivity they made it a place of defilement, where the refuse of the city was thrown and burned. The name was applied to the place of future punishment by the Jews. The word is often used in the New Testament (Mt 23:33 5:29 10:28 18:9 Mr 9:43), and always denotes a place of future punishment." (*People's New Testament Notes* on Matthew 5:22)

"The Jews so abhorred the place after these horrible sacrifices had been abolished by king Josiah, that they cast into it not only all manner of refuse, but even the dead bodies of animals and of unburied criminals who had been executed. And since fires were always needed to consume the dead bodies, that the air might not become tainted by the putrefaction, it came to pass that the place was called γέεννα τοῦ πυρός." (*Thayer's Greek Lexicon*).

There was a fire kept burning in the valley continually to destroy whatever was cast into it. If a body was thrown into the valley and did not reach the bot-

tom, where the fire was continually burning, but instead was caught on the jagged rocks surrounding the valley, then the worms would devour the body.

“Hearken unto me, ye that know righteousness, the people in whose heart is my law; fear ye not the reproach of men, neither be ye afraid of their revilings. For the moth shall eat them up like a garment, and the worm shall eat them like wool: but my righteousness shall be for ever, and my salvation from generation to generation.” (Isaiah 51:7, 8) This is what the Bible refers to when it says *“their worm dieth not.”* Gehenna is the place that Christ used to describe the final destruction of the wicked in Mark 9:43, 44.

“And if thy hand offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go into hell¹⁰⁶⁷ [Gehenna], into the fire that never shall be quenched: Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.” (Mark 9:43, 44)

Gehenna, or “the valley of Hinnom” was used as a place where refuse and dead bodies were destroyed. When Jesus used the word “Gehenna” He meant destruction, as is clear in the following text: *“And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear Him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell¹⁰⁶⁷ [Gehenna].”* (Matthew 10:28)

“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” (John 3:16) Man does not have everlasting life without it being granted to him from God, and his eternal life depends upon eating of the tree of life.

“And the LORD God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil: and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever:” (Genesis 3:22) If Adam had eaten of the tree of life, he would have lived forever in his sinful condition. God, not willing that this should happen, prevented him from eating of that tree.

Thanks be to God who has provided for us a way to eat of the tree of life so that we can live forever. Jesus said that if we believe in Him we *“should not perish, but have everlasting life.”* *“Blessed are they that do His commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city.”* (Revelation 22:14)

We must humble ourselves and repent; turn from our evil ways and live. *“Say unto them, As I live, saith the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the*

wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?” (Ezekiel 33:11)

THE ORIGIN OF MAN

Where did man come from? *“And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.”* (Genesis 2:7) Man came from the dust of the ground.

What happens to us after we die? *“But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope.”* (1 Thessalonians 4:13) After we die, the Bible says that we are asleep.

Where do we sleep after we die? *“And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.”* (Daniel 12:2) *“All go unto one place; all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again.”* (Ecclesiastes 3:20) *“In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.”* (Genesis 3:19) When we die we turn into dust again, and sleep until the Lord awakens us.

“Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit⁷³⁰⁷ [Hebrew: Ruwach] shall return unto God who gave it.” (Ecclesiastes 12:7) When a man dies, there will be a time when he lives again, whether he is raised in the resurrection of the just, or of the unjust. His mind, which contains his life history, will be given to him again at his resurrection. He will come forth from the grave with the same character and manner of thinking that he had before death.

When the dead are raised God will give them back their spirit (mind, or breath) which was in them before. During their sleep in the grave they were not alive anywhere. *“For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.”* (James 2:26)

When God formed man out of the dust of the earth, He breathed into his nostrils the breath (spirit of man) of life. *“All the while my breath is in me, and the spirit⁷³⁰⁷ [Ruwach] of [or from] God is in my nostrils.”* (Job 27:3) The breath of life is that spirit that goes back to God who gave it. Even the wicked—when they die their spirit goes back to God who gave it. *“Who knoweth the spirit⁷³⁰⁷ [Ruwach] of man that goeth upward, and the spirit⁷³⁰⁷ [Ruwach] of the*

beast that goeth downward to the earth?” (Ecclesiastes 3:21)

The spirit of man goes upward to God who gave it. Whether the man was the vilest of criminals, or whether he was the most righteous saint, his spirit goes back to God who gave it. Man will live again, hence it is necessary for God to keep the record of what that man was like. A beast, on the other hand, will not live again, so his spirit goes down to the earth, never to be revived.

WHAT IS THE SOUL OF MAN?

“And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living ²⁴¹⁶ soul ⁵³¹⁵.” (Genesis 2:7) The body (dust) plus the spirit (breath or mind) equals a living soul. When the spirit (breath or mind) returns to God, then the soul is no longer living. The Hebrew word for “soul” is נֶפֶשׁ (Nephesh), which means “living being” (*Thayer’s Greek Lexicon*).

This is why God said that even animals are living souls. *“And to every beast of the earth, and to every fowl of the air, and to every thing that creepeth upon the earth, **wherein there is life** ^{2416; 5315} [literally; “in which is a living soul”], I have given every green herb for meat: and it was so.”* (Genesis 1:30)

The Hebrew word “Nephesh” can also mean “mind, or tablet” (Strong’s), in which is contained a record of every word, thought, and action of a person’s life; his very being or who he is. When a man dies there is still a record kept of him. While he is dead he is not a living being but a dead one.

CAN A SOUL DIE OR CEASE TO EXIST?

“The soul that sinneth, it shall die. ...” (Ezekiel 18:20) This is not talking about the first death, from which all will return; but the second death, from which none shall return. *“For as ye have drunk upon my holy mountain, so shall all the heathen drink continually, yea, they shall drink, and they shall swallow down, **and they shall be as though they had not been.**”* (Obadiah 16) After the first death the soul, the record, will not be forgotten, but after the second death the soul, the record, will be destroyed and forgotten.

*“Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help. **His breath** ⁷³⁰⁷ [Ruwach] goeth forth, he returneth to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish.”* (Psalm 146:3, 4) The spirit, or breath, of a man goes to God and he returns to the dust of the earth. What does the Bible tell

us happens at this point? In that very day his thoughts perish; he can no longer think. He remains asleep in the dust, unconscious of anything, until the Lord raises him from the dead.

“But,” some may say, “don’t the righteous go straight to heaven when they die?” *“Men and brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day. ... For David is not ascended into the heavens: but he saith himself, The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand.”* (Acts 2:34) David will be in heaven, but he has not yet ascended to heaven. Peter’s argument was “We know that David is not in heaven, because his sepulchre is still with us.” Peter knew that David’s bones were still in the grave.

Christ is risen from the dead. Are His bones still in the tomb where He was buried? No! Anyone who still has bones on this earth could not possibly be in heaven. This is the argument that was made on the day of Pentecost in Acts chapter two. When Christ was raised from the dead, the Bible tells us, many were raised at that time. Are their bones still in the grave? No! For this would be an impossibility.

“And the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose, and came out of the graves after His resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many.” (Matthew 27:52, 53) All those who are in heaven now do not have bones that remain on this earth.

*“So Moses the servant of the LORD died there in the land of Moab, according to the word of the LORD. And He buried him in a valley in the land of Moab, over against Bethpeor: but **no man knoweth of his sepulchre unto this day.**”* (Deuteronomy 34:5, 6) Moses died, and was buried, but no man could find his sepulchre because the Lord raised him from the dead.

*“Yet Michael the archangel, when contending with the devil he disputed about **the body of Moses**, durst not bring against him a railing accusation, but said, The Lord rebuke thee.”* (Jude 9) The fact that Moses was raised from the dead is evident by his appearing with Elijah at the mount of transfiguration. Elijah was taken to heaven on a fiery chariot without seeing death. *“And, behold, there talked with Him [Jesus] two men, which were Moses and Elias.”* (Luke 9:30)

David, who has not yet ascended to heaven, said, *“As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness.”*

(Psalm 17:15) David will be satisfied when he awakes from death, not during the time that he is dead.

“Thy dead men shall live, together with my dead body shall they arise. Awake and sing, ye that dwell in dust: for thy dew is as the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out the dead.” (Isaiah 26:19) The first thing we notice about this verse is that the dead men shall, at some time in the future, live again. These people are not living now, but they shall live at some time in the future. Right now they are those who dwell in the dust. We have already seen that when we die we return to dust, there to remain in unconscious sleep until the Lord raises us from the dead.

ARE THE WICKED IN TORMENT RIGHT NOW?

“The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished.” (2 Peter 2:9) The unjust are being reserved unto the day of judgment to be punished. They are not being punished right now.

“That the wicked is reserved to the day of destruction? they shall be brought forth to the day of wrath.” (Job 21:30) The Lord is reserving the wicked for the day of wrath. They shall be brought forth, or raised from the dead, to the day of wrath.

When will the dead be raised from the grave? *“And have hope toward God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust.”* (Acts 24:15) There will be two resurrections; one of the just, and one of the unjust.

“For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first.” (1 Thessalonians 4:16) The resurrection of the just will take place first. It will happen at the return of our Lord Jesus Christ. This is the first resurrection.

“And they [the just] lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years. But the rest of the dead [the unjust] lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection.” (Revelation 20:4, 5) The first resurrection, which is the resurrection of the just, takes place at the return of Christ. The second resurrection, which is the resurrection of the unjust, takes place after the thousand years.

During the thousand years the righteous will live and reign with Christ in heaven while the earth is desolate with no inhabitants; for the wicked are dead on the earth. *“Behold, the LORD maketh the earth empty, and maketh it waste, and turneth it upside down, and scattereth abroad the inhabitants thereof. ... The*

land shall be utterly emptied, and utterly spoiled: for the LORD hath spoken this word.” (Isaiah 24:1, 3)

SATAN'S LIE

Satan has said from the very beginning, *“ye shall not surely die.”* Satan taught that man could disobey God and still live forever without dying. This statement is in direct contradiction to the word of God who said, *“thou shalt surely die.”* God said that if man would disobey Him he would surely die.

From that day on Satan has continued to teach men that they will not surely die. According to Satan all men who have ever died are not really dead. Therefore, according to Satan, man can communicate with the dead. This cleverly opens the way for Satan himself, or one of his angels, to impersonate a deceased loved one. We see an example of this in the first book of Samuel. This is the only instance recorded in the Bible where someone supposedly communicated with the dead.

SAUL'S VISIT WITH THE WITCH OF ENDOR

“And when Saul saw the host of the Philistines, he was afraid, and his heart greatly trembled. And when Saul enquired of the LORD, the LORD answered him not, neither by dreams, nor by Urim, nor by prophets.” (1 Samuel 28:5, 6) Saul, the king of Israel, had walked contrary to the word of the Lord for so long that the Lord would not communicate with him by any means.

“Then said Saul unto his servants, Seek me a woman that hath a familiar spirit, that I may go to her, and enquire of her. And his servants said to him, Behold, there is a woman that hath a familiar spirit at Endor. And Saul disguised himself, and put on other raiment, and he went, and two men with him, and they came to the woman by night: and he said, I pray thee, divine unto me by the familiar spirit, and bring me him up, whom I shall name unto thee.” (1 Samuel 28:7, 8)

Since the Lord would not communicate with Saul, he decided to use a forbidden means to try to communicate with a deceased prophet named Samuel. *“A man also or woman that hath a familiar spirit, or that is a wizard, shall surely be put to death: they shall stone them with stones: their blood shall be upon them.”* (Leviticus 20:27) God had strictly forbidden any such communication with familiar spirits.

“Then said the woman, Whom shall I bring up unto thee? And he said, Bring me up Samuel.” (1 Samuel 28:11, 12) Samuel was a righteous prophet

of God, yet Saul asked the witch of Endor to bring Samuel up. Many Christians suppose that when a righteous man dies he goes up to heaven immediately. If this were true, then Samuel would have to come down from heaven, rather than up from the earth. Was this really Samuel that appeared to the witch of Endor? What saith the Scriptures. As before noted, the dead “*know not anything*,” and are unconscious. Therefore, according to the Bible, there is no way that Samuel could have appeared, and spoken to Saul.

If Samuel was in heaven, as most preachers teach, then would God send him down to earth, in cooperation with a woman who was doing something that God condemned? Samuel was asleep in the dust, not to regain consciousness until the Lord raised him from the dead. The spirit that was brought up with the likeness of Samuel was none other than Satan or one of his angels.

“*So Saul died for his transgression which he committed against the LORD, even against the word of the LORD, which he kept not, and also for asking counsel of one that had a familiar spirit, to enquire of it; And enquired not of the LORD: therefore he slew him, and turned the kingdom unto David the son of Jesse.*” (1 Chronicles 10:13, 14)

Clearly you can see the danger of opening yourself up to communication with the deceased.

“*And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light.*” (2 Corinthians 11:14) Satan can impersonate with unerring accuracy any person that he wishes. If we are deceived into believing that the dead are not really dead, but alive somewhere, we are opening ourselves up to accept the teachings and doctrines of devils.

“*Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils;*” (1 Timothy 4:1) “*For they are the spirits of devils, working miracles, which go forth unto the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty.*” (Revelation 16:14) If we are going to stand the great trials that are soon to come upon the earth, we are required to search the Scriptures diligently to find truth from God Himself.

THE THIEF ON THE CROSS

What about the thief on the cross? Didn't Jesus say that he would be with Him in paradise that same day? Let's look at what Christ said to him. “*And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou co-*

mest into thy kingdom. And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise.” (Luke 23:42, 43) The thief asked Jesus to remember him when He comes into His kingdom. “*I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom;*” (2 Timothy 4:1)

The thief was asking the Lord to remember him when He judges the quick and the dead. Jesus replied, “*Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise.*” (Luke 23:43) Notice where the translators chose to put the comma in the previous sentence. When this was written, originally in Greek, there was no use of punctuation. Read this verse again with the comma placed after the word “today.” “*Verily I say unto thee today (at this moment), shalt thou be with me in paradise.*” Jesus was saying, “This day I am telling you that you will, at some point in the future, be with me in paradise.”

It is also interesting to note that it would have been impossible for Christ to be saying that the thief would be with Christ in paradise on that very day, because Christ Himself was not in paradise that day. This fact is clearly brought out in the following verse: “*Jesus saith unto her, Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father: but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God.*” (John 20:17)

The day that Christ was raised from the dead, Mary saw Him and was ready to fasten herself to him, thus restraining Him. Christ told her not to restrain Him because He had not yet ascended to His Father. Christ had not seen His Father face to face for over thirty years. He was eager to go and see Him. The fact that, on the third day, Christ had not yet ascended to His Father is clear evidence that He had not been to paradise on the day that He conversed with the thief on the cross.

THE RICH MAN AND LAZARUS

What about the parable of the rich man and Lazarus? Some doubt that this is really a parable. They argue that it is not a parable because it starts out in a narrative form. They say that because it starts out, “*There was a certain rich man, ...*” Christ was talking about an actual incident that took place. But this is not the only parable that starts out in this manner. For example, the parable of the prodigal son, which starts out like this; “*A certain man had two sons: ...*” Another example, “*Hear another parable: There was a*

certain householder, which planted a vineyard, ...” (Matthew 21:33)

*“And with many such parables spake He the word unto them, as they were able to hear it. **But without a parable spake He not unto them:** and when they were alone, He expounded all things to His disciples.”* (Mark 4:33, 34) It is evident that almost everything that Christ taught, He used a parable to teach it.

The prevailing idea, at Christ’s time, was that a rich man was surely blessed by God, and his riches were clear evidence that he was going to be in the kingdom of God. On the other hand, the Jews believed that if a man was poor he was cursed of God, and the fact that he was poor was evidence that he would not make it to the kingdom of God.

This false idea was what Christ was combating with His parable about the rich man and Lazarus. The fact that the Jews had this idea, and also the disciples of Christ had this idea, is brought out in these next verses. *“Then said Jesus unto his disciples, Verily I say unto you, **That a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven.** And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God. When his disciples heard it, they were exceedingly amazed, saying, **Who then can be saved?**”* (Matthew 19:23-25)

The response of the disciples is clear evidence that they believed that the rich men would certainly enter the kingdom. For, as they thought, if a rich man can hardly enter the kingdom, then we may as well not even try, because a rich man has a much better chance of making it than a poor man like me. It was precisely to reveal the error of this idea that Christ told the parable of the rich man and Lazarus.

There were many of the Jews in Christ’s time who fit the description of the rich man in this parable. Not only were many of them rich in earthly goods, but they had been given the oracles of God. It was their duty to impart the light that had been given them to others who were dying all around without hope of eternal life. Instead of looking upon the Gentiles with compassion, with a desire to share the wonderful riches that God had given them, they looked upon the Gentiles as one would look upon a poor man diseased with leprosy.

The rich man in this parable represented the Jewish nation. This is brought out by the repeated use of the term “Father Abraham”. *“And he cried and said, **Father Abraham,** ...”* (Luke 16:24) The Jews *“answered Him, **We be Abraham’s seed,** and were*

*never in bondage to any man: how sayest thou, **Ye shall be made free?**”* (John 8:33)

When the poor diseased man—who represented the Gentiles—died, he is said to have been brought, by the angels, into Abraham’s bosom. *“Now there was **leaning on Jesus’ bosom** one of His disciples, whom Jesus loved.”* (John 13:23) This represented a close relationship with Abraham. The Jews thought that since they were descendants of Abraham they would be heirs of the kingdom of heaven.

Christ revealed that a man, though he be of the lineage of Abraham, if he did not bear the character traits of Abraham, was not counted as heir according to the promise. *“They answered and said unto him, **Abraham is our father.** Jesus saith unto them, **If ye were Abraham’s children, ye would do the works of Abraham.** But now ye seek to kill me, a man that hath told you the truth, which I have heard of God: this did not Abraham.”* (John 8:39, 40)

Christ taught, through His parable, that the Gentile—though not of the lineage of Abraham yet having the character traits of Abraham—is considered Abraham’s seed. The Jews so highly regarded their relation to Abraham that they set him up as God. When the rich man was in distress, he called to Abraham to have mercy on him. *“And he cried and said, **Father Abraham, have mercy on me, ...”*** (Luke 16:24) The Bible teaches, however, that there is salvation in none other than Christ. *“Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.”* (Acts 4:12)

*“Then he said, I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him to my father’s house: For I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment. Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them. And he said, Nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent. And he said unto him, **If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.**”* (Luke 16:27-31)

Lazarus, the brother of Mary and Martha, had been raised from the dead to testify that Christ was the Messiah, yet the Jewish nation would not accept this. The rich man, along with his brethren, had every opportunity to know the truth and to be saved through the testimony of the sacred Scriptures. If they had rejected the Scriptures as the way of salvation, then they would not be persuaded even if one was raised from the dead.

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I do not know anyone who would say that this parable describes, in every detail, the actual conditions after death. For one thing, the Bible never gives us any hint that Abraham is in heaven right now. Nowhere do the Scriptures teach that Abraham has already been raised from the dead, but rather is as David, whose sepulchre is with us to this day. *“Men and brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day. ... For David is not ascended into the heavens: but he saith himself, The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand,”* (Acts 2:29, 34)

If we really want to know what the Bible teaches on a particular subject, we must gather all the references that deal with that subject and weigh the evidence. *“For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little:”* (Isaiah 28:10) We must be as the noble Bereans, who searched the Scriptures daily to see if those things are so. *“These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the*

scriptures daily, whether those things were so.” (Acts 17:11)

Please take the time to examine all the scriptures that deal with this subject. Do not be misled to accept one section of Scripture that appears to support an idea which the rest of the Bible clearly disproves, without taking the time to weigh all the evidence. A judge can only make a just decision after examining all the evidence on both sides of the issue. Please do not settle this issue without hearing all the Scripture testimony concerning it. *“He that answereth a matter before he heareth it, it is folly and shame unto him.”* (Proverbs 18:13)

Lynnford Beachy

Present Truth is published monthly by Doug Goslin, 13264 Jobs Road, Newark, Ohio 43055, Phone: (614) 763-2242, E-mail: believe@infinet.com. It is sent free upon request.

Editor: Lynnford Beachy, HC 64 Box 128-B, Welch, WV 24801, Phone: (304) 732-9204, E-mail: berean@smyrna.org.

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13264 Jobs Road
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