

## ABSTRACT

### Reading the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31) as The Authorial Audience

Joshua Jay Stigall, Ph.D.

Mentor: Mikeal C. Parsons, Ph.D.

Since the late 19th and early 20th centuries, interpretation of the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus has tended to revolve around two primary issues: (1) the structure and unity of the parable; and (2) the search for parallels to the parable. In the first case, Adolf Jülicher's attempt to identify the original form of the parable has led scholars to question the unity of the parable in its canonical form. The result has been a tendency to emphasize the importance of one section of the parable over the other. In the second case, Hugo Gressmann's appeal to the Egyptian tale of Setme Khamuas and his son Si-Osiri has led to a search for the genetic parallel to the parable.

Despite the merits of these approaches, I am interested neither in the "original" parable as spoken by Jesus, nor in the "original" tale that is the genetic source of the parable. Rather, I am interested in understanding how the ancient auditor of Luke's Gospel would have received the message of the parable in its narrative context. Building on the work of Richard Bauckham, I will offer a reading of the parable against the background of the journey to the place of punishment, which is often referred to as a "catabasis" from the Greek word *κατάβασις*. The stories involve gods, heroes, and

mortals, and function as etiological myths, as proof of valor, or as revelatory journey.

Most importantly, these journeys also have a rhetorical function in the narrative of which they are part. Because of the ubiquity of the story of the journey to the place of punishment in ancient literature, ancient authors were able to use the story as an effective means of communication in their overall argument. I will argue that the themes of the parable evoke the imagery of the journey to the place of punishment, which would have created a set of expectations that are used in the Gospel for a particular rhetorical purpose, namely to encourage obedience to the demand of the Law and Prophets to care for the marginalized.

Reading the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31)  
as the Authorial Audience

by

Joshua Jay Stigall, B.A., M.Div.

A Dissertation

Approved by the Department of Religion

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W.H. Bellinger, Jr., Ph.D., Chairperson

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Approved by the Dissertation Committee

---

Mikeal C. Parsons, Ph.D., Chairperson

---

Bruce W. Longenecker, Ph.D.

---

Anne-Marie Schultz, Ph.D.

Accepted by the Graduate School  
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J. Larry Lyon, Ph.D., Dean

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Joshua Jay Stigall  
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To my Wife, Laura, and Our Sons, Tyler and Kaiden  
I Love You More Now Than When This Journey Began

## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction

In his opening comments on the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus, Ronald Hock notes that interpretation on the parable has become “unusually stable, uniform, and, one might almost say, self-satisfied.”<sup>1</sup> Indeed, despite the fact that the parable is well-known and has had a significant impact on both the academy and the church,<sup>2</sup> interpretation of the parable has not advanced far beyond the parameters marked out in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries by scholars like Adolf Jülicher and Hugo Gressmann.<sup>3</sup> Their conclusions regarding the narrative disunity of the parable (Jülicher) and the genetic antecedent of the parable (Gressmann) have dominated the discussion.

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<sup>1</sup> Ronald F. Hock, “Lazarus and Micyllus: Greco-Roman Backgrounds to Luke 16:19-31,” *JBL* 106 (1987): 447.

<sup>2</sup> One example is the impact of the parable on Albert Schweitzer and his decision to become a medical missionary. Schweitzer, disturbed by the lack of humanitarian aid given by Europeans to alleviate the suffering of the natives of the colonies in Africa, writes, “The parable of Dives and Lazarus seemed to me to have been spoken directly of us! We are Dives, for, through the advances of medical science, we now know a great deal about disease and pain, and have innumerable means of fighting them: yet we take as a matter of course the incalculable advantages which this new wealth gives us! Out there in the colonies, however, sits wretched Lazarus, the coloured folk, who suffer from illness and pain just as much as we do, nay, much more, and has absolutely no means of fighting them. And just as Dives sinned against the poor man at his gate because for want of thought he never put himself in his place and let his heart and conscience tell him what he ought to do, so do we sin against the poor man at our gate”; Albert Schweitzer, *On the Edge of the Primeval Forest: Experiences and Observations of a Doctor in Equatorial Africa* (trans. by C.T. Campion; London: A & C Black, 1922), 1-2.

<sup>3</sup> Interpretation of the parable did not, of course, begin with these scholars and there is a tradition of interpretation in the church fathers. This current study, however, will focus on the modern scholarly interpretation of the parable. For a brief overview of the history of interpretation, see Monique Alexandre, “L’interprétation de Luc 16 19-31, chez Grégoire de Nysse,” in *Épektasis; mélanges patristiques offerts au cardinal Jean Daniélou* (ed. Jacques Fontaine and Charles Kannengiesser; Paris: Beauchesne, 1972), 425-441; François Bovon, *Das Evangelium nach Lukas* (EKKNT 3.3; Düsseldorf: Benziger Verlag, 2001), 126-130; and Luc Dubrulle, “Entre archétype et scandale, la mise en place théologique de la catégorie morale due pauvre,” *Transversalités* 111 (2009): 23-33. It is interesting to note, however, that the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus has been neglected in many important studies of the parables, including those of C.H. Dodd, Dan Via, and Eta Linnemann.

The proposals of Jülicher and Gressmann have been so influential that interpretation has tended to revolve around two primary issues: (1) the structure and unity of the parable; and (2) the search for parallels to the parable. This dual focus has led to an interpretive stalemate as scholars have retread the same ground, by posing the same set of questions to the parable.

Not only is the history of interpretation of the parable monolithic, but so also are the general contours of the perceived moral of the parable. The juxtaposition of the rich man dressed in fine garments of purple, who ate lavishly everyday, with the poor, diseased Lazarus who was laid at his gate, longing for the crumbs that fell from the man's table is impossible to ignore. Equally vivid is the reversal of fortune of the two characters that happens upon death. The rich man, who had rejoiced in life was now tormented in flames; Lazarus, whose only companions were dogs that licked his sores, is now comforted in a place of honor in Abraham's bosom. From his vantage point across the chasm that separated the two men, the Patriarch succinctly explains the moral of the parable: "Child, remember that you received your good things during your life, and Lazarus likewise (received) bad things; but now he is comforted and you are in anguish" (Luke 16:25).<sup>4</sup> The fact that the relative positions of the rich man and Lazarus are fixed in the afterlife leads the rich man to ask that his family be warned about his fate. The request, however, is denied in light of the present revelation given in Moses and the Prophets. The parable then, is about the reversal of fortune in the afterlife, echoing the

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<sup>4</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all translations of the Gospel of Luke are from Martin M. Culy, Mikeal C. Parsons, and Joshua Jay Stigall, *Luke: A Handbook on the Greek Text* (Waco, Tex.: Baylor University Press, 2010).

blessings and woes of Luke 6:20-26, with an emphasis on obedience to Moses and the Prophets.

The purpose of this dissertation is not to call into question the moral of the parable as generally understood above. Indeed, I am convinced that the main contours of the parable's meaning summarized in this way is correct. Instead, the purpose of this dissertation is to question the methodology that has dominated the interpretation of the parable for the past hundred years of scholarship. Despite the merits of these approaches, I am interested neither in the "original" parable as spoken by Jesus, nor in the "original" tale that is the genetic source of the parable. Rather, I am interested in understanding how the ancient auditor of Luke's Gospel would have received the message of the parable, and, even more specifically, how the ancient auditor would have received the message of the parable in its narrative context. In this way, the purpose of this dissertation is to understand the rhetorical function of the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus in the Gospel of Luke.<sup>5</sup>

As we will see in Chapter Two on the history of interpretation of the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus, this study is by no means the first to challenge the dominant scholarly approach to the parable. Indeed, in recent years new questions have been posed to the parable that offer promising possibilities for understanding the parable in its first-century context. Some scholars, for example, have read the parable from a sociological standpoint in order to understand the parable in the context of the dominant social scripts of first-century Mediterranean culture. Scholars like Bernard Brandon Scott, William Herzog, and Kenneth Bailey have advanced the conversation about the parable of the

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<sup>5</sup> I am using the term "rhetorical" in a broad sense to refer to the persuasive effect of the parable, not necessarily in the context of formal rhetorical practices.

Rich Man and Lazarus by placing the message of the parable vividly against the backdrop of the exploitation of the poor in the ancient world. Other scholars have sought to understand the parable against a different set of questions about the milieu of the ancient Mediterranean world. Scholars like Ronald Hock, Richard Bauckham, and Outi Lehtipuu have read the parable against the backdrop of ideas that were “in the air” in the first-century Mediterranean world. By focusing on the cultural assumptions that would have affected the way in which the ancient auditors received the message of the parable, these scholars have advanced the conversation beyond the search for a parallel to the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus to a search for how the story of the parable is similar to other ancient literature. To borrow a phrase from Ronald Hock, this approach is an attempt “cast the comparative net” wider than has been done in the past.<sup>6</sup>

Each of the scholars mentioned above has offered helpful insight for understanding the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus. The current study, however, will build off of the work of one of these scholars in particular. One of the fruitful approaches to the study of the parable that has yet to be elaborated upon in detail is the work of Richard Bauckham, who argues that the parable should be read against the background of the journey to the place of punishment.<sup>7</sup> Many of these stories from the ancient world are extant and, as we will see in later chapters, the tale of the descent to the

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<sup>6</sup> Hock, “Lazarus and Micylus,” 455.

<sup>7</sup> Richard Bauckham, “The Rich Man and Lazarus: The Parable and the Parallels,” *NTS* 37 (1991): 225-246. Bauckham’s work will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Two on the history of interpretation of the parable. Throughout this study I will refer to these journeys alternately as “descents to the underworld” or “journeys to the place of punishment.” The reason for this is that, as we will see below, the journey to the place of punishment is not always a descent. For example, Odysseus’ journey to the place of punishment takes him to the end of the world, and Jewish seers often travel “up” to the place of punishment. Similarly, the destination of these journeys is referred to by several names, such as Hades (ᾍδης) or Tartarus.

underworld was ubiquitous in the ancient world. These journeys to the place of punishment, which are often referred to, individually, as a “catabasis” from the Greek word κατάβασις, are found in the literature of the Greeks, Romans, Jews, Christians, and many other ancient people groups. The stories involve gods, heroes, and mortals, and function as etiological myths, as proof of valor, or as revelatory journeys. Most importantly, these journeys also have a rhetorical function in the narrative of which they are part. Because of the ubiquity of the story of the journey to the place of punishment in ancient literature, ancient authors were able to use the story as an effective means of communication in their overall argument. In what follows, I will not argue that the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus is a κατάβασις, per se, but rather, that the parable is “catabatic.” That is, the themes of the parable evoke the imagery of the journey to the place of punishment, which would have created a set of expectations that are used in the Gospel for a particular rhetorical purpose.

#### *Method and Plan for the Present Study*

As noted above, the primary goal of this dissertation is to determine the function of the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus in its narrative context in light of literary themes in ancient literature that would influence the audience’s reception of the parable. In order to accomplish this goal I am interested in two sets of questions. First, why did Luke include this parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus in his story about Jesus? What did he hope to accomplish in his narrative by recounting this parable? Second, how would the audience have received the message of the parable? That is, why would the parable have had an impact on the readers of Luke’s gospel, and what sort of impact would this have been? In this way, I am interested in reading the parable of the Rich

Man and Lazarus in its narrative context, with a particular emphasis on how ancient texts, particularly the journey to the place of punishment, would have shaped the expectations of the audience of the Gospel.

In order to answer these questions, I will depend on two methodological pillars. The first involves reading the parable as the authorial audience of Gospel of Luke. The second involves reading the parable in its narrative context. The discussion below will clarify how this methodological approach will offer a reading of the parable that is consistent with both the aims of Luke's Gospel and faithful to the cultural assumptions of Luke's audience.

### *Reading the Parable as the Authorial Audience*

The first aspect of the methodological approach in this dissertation is reading the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus based on Peter Rabinowitz's understanding of the authorial audience.<sup>8</sup> At the heart of Rabinowitz's approach is the recognition that authors intend to communicate with the audiences to whom they are writing. For him, this intention is discovered by accepting "the author's invitation to read in a particular socially constituted manner that is shared by the author and his or her expected readers."<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Rabinowitz first discussed his understanding of the authorial audience in "Truth in Fiction: A Reexamination of Audiences," *Critical Inquiry* 4 (1977), 121-141. This was followed by a full-length treatment of his ideas in *Before Reading: Narrative Conventions and the Politics of Interpretation* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1998), and "Whirl without End: Audience Oriented Criticism," in *Contemporary Literary Theory* (ed. G. Douglas Atkins; Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1989), 81-100.

<sup>9</sup> Rabinowitz, *Before Reading*, 22. Susan Suleiman makes a similar argument in her discussion of rhetorical audience criticism, which recognizes "the literary text as a form of communication" with "the author and the reader of a text . . . related to each other as the sender and the receiver of a message." This communication is only effective because of the "shared codes of communication between sender and receiver." Reading for meaning, then, is the task of "decoding what has by various means been encoded in the text" including "the values and beliefs that make those meanings possible"; Susan R. Suleiman, "Introduction: Varieties of Audience-Oriented Criticism," in *The Reader in the Text: Essays on Audience*



The assumptions that authors make in writing can be infinite. These assumptions include historical, political, economic, and social assumptions, among other things. Thus, if modern readers wish to make sense of an ancient text, they must seek to understand what the original audience brought to the text when they read it.<sup>10</sup> Rabinowitz's discussion of the audiences in "Truth in Fiction" is especially helpful at this point.

Rabinowitz makes a distinction between four different types of audiences: the "actual audience," the "authorial audience," the "narrative audience," and the "ideal narrative audience."<sup>11</sup> I will focus on the first two. The "actual audience" consists of the "flesh-and-blood" reader who actually reads the text, but of whom the author generally does not have full knowledge.<sup>12</sup> Since authors, however, cannot begin to write without making assumptions about their readers, they "guess" and "design their books rhetorically for some more or less specific *hypothetical* audience," which Rabinowitz calls the "authorial audience."<sup>13</sup> The author's successful communication depends, in part, on the accuracy of these assumptions.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, the author will attempt to keep the gap between the actual audience and the authorial audience as narrow as possible.<sup>15</sup>

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*and Interpretation* (ed. Susan R. Suleiman and Inge Crosman; Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980), 7-8.

<sup>10</sup> Peter J. Rabinowitz, "Whirl without End," 81. This is markedly different from other readings of the parable that focus on the reader's role in interpreting the parable. Robert Hurley, for example, makes little attempt to read the parable in light of the original authorial audience of the parable. Rather, he is interested in how contemporary readers are informed by knowledge of the Hebrew Bible, Classic English literature (e.g., *A Christmas Carol*), contemporary world events, and contemporary notions of Good and Bad found in Westerns. Robert Hurley, "Le Lecteur et Le Riche: Luc 16, 19-31," *ScEs* 51 (1999): 65-80.

<sup>11</sup> Rabinowitz, "Truth in Fiction," 126-136 (cf. Rabinowitz, *Before Reading*, 20-21).

<sup>12</sup> Rabinowitz, *Before Reading*, 20.

<sup>13</sup> Rabinowitz, *Before Reading*, 21 (cf. Rabinowitz, "Truth in Fiction," 126-127).

<sup>14</sup> Rabinowitz provides the following example: "Demby's *Catacombs*, for instance, takes place during the early sixties, and the novel achieves its sense of impending doom only if the reader knows that

The responsibility in communication is not, however, one-sided. Readers have the responsibility to join with the authorial audience in order to receive the author's message.<sup>16</sup> Rabinowitz's example is the knowledge of the Spanish Civil War that is assumed of the authorial audience of Hemingway's *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. If an actual reader lacks this knowledge, he or she will, ideally, acquire it.<sup>17</sup> It is possible, however, for the actual audience simply to pretend to join the authorial audience. This happens through either laziness when the reader foregoes research and pretends to understand the story, or when cultural differences are too vast to overcome. In these cases, the actual reader will not fully "receive the work's intended effect."<sup>18</sup>

Readers of the parables are faced with challenges to joining the authorial audience due to separation from the original audience, both chronologically and culturally. It is, therefore, the responsibility of biblical interpreters to work to bridge the gap between the actual reader (the interpreter) and the authorial audience (the hypothetical audience of the parable). As Rabinowitz notes, while it may be impossible for a modern reader of the parables completely to bridge the gap to the authorial audience to the point of shared beliefs, it is possible to "gain a better understanding of the beliefs of another culture."<sup>19</sup>

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John F. Kennedy will be assassinated when the events of the novel reach 22 November 1963"; Rabinowitz, "Truth in Fiction," 126.

<sup>15</sup> Rabinowitz, "Truth in Fiction," 130. Some authors, however, are forced to widen the gap due to the "subtlety of their intentions." This is not the preferred practice.

<sup>16</sup> Rabinowitz, "Truth in Fiction," 130.

<sup>17</sup> Rabinowitz, "Truth in Fiction," 130-131.

<sup>18</sup> Rabinowitz, "Truth in Fiction," 131.

<sup>19</sup> Rabinowitz, "Truth in Fiction," 131.

The importance of using Rabinowitz's approach is that reading as the authorial audience allows us to focus on influence, rather than dependence. In the history of research of the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus, there has been an ongoing attempt to identify the genetic archetype of the parable, or, at the very least, the closest analog that provides the interpretive key. Reading as the authorial audience, however, allows us to shift the focus from a search for the archetypal story behind the parable to the function of similar stories of the journey to the place of punishment. A broader understanding of the function of these stories allows for a broader understanding of the function of the parable in Luke's Gospel.

### *Reading The Parable in Its Narrative Context*

In his summary of the history of parable research through the first part of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Klyne Snodgrass argues that readings of the parables must take into account their narrative contexts.<sup>20</sup> Snodgrass writes, "[T]he more one cuts the parables from their contexts in the Gospels, the life of Jesus, and the theology of Israel, the more one promotes subjectivity and lack of control in interpretation."<sup>21</sup> While Snodgrass'

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<sup>20</sup> Klyne Snodgrass writes, "They [the parables] need to be heard, heard in the context of Jesus as framed by the evangelists. Granted that respect, once again they will confront and inform as on other genre can, and will reveal that their author deserves not only to be heard, but also followed"; Klyne R. Snodgrass, "Modern Approaches to the Parables," in *The Face of New Testament Studies: A Survey of Recent Research* (edited by Scot McKnight and Grant R. Osborne; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 190. See also Klyne R. Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent: A Comprehensive Guide to the Parables of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 31-35. There are many others who emphasize reading the parables in their narrative context including Warren Carter and John Paul Heil, *Matthew's Parables: Audience-Oriented Perspectives* (CBQMS 30; Washington, D. C.: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1998); Peter Rhea Jones, *Studying the Parables of Jesus* (Macon, Ga.: Smyth & Helwys, 1999); and others who will be discussed in Chapter Two.

<sup>21</sup> Snodgrass, "Modern Approaches," 189-190.

conclusion is not shared by many scholars,<sup>22</sup> he is correct that the assumption by scholars like Jülicher, Bultmann, Jeremias, and others was that by removing the editorial additions made by the Gospel writers, the original parable is able to be interpreted on its own right. With the parable removed from its Gospel context, however, new editorial additions are supplied based on the interpreter's ideological stance or sociological method.<sup>23</sup> Thus, one "interpretive grid" is replaced by another. While taking account of the Gospel context is certainly not a panacea for the types of readings that concern Snodgrass, I agree with him that it is necessary to be guided by the canonical form and context of the parable in interpretation. Thus, I will attempt to read the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus in light of its narrative context.

### *Plan for the Present Study*

In what follows I will offer a reading of the parable that takes into account both the cultural assumptions that would have influenced the audience of Luke's Gospel (audience criticism), and the narrative context in which the parable is placed (narrative criticism). I will begin in Chapter Two by providing an overview of the history of research on the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus. In this chapter I will focus on those readings that illustrate the concern to read that parable in its narrative context, and those approaches that focus on the social world of the parable. In Chapter Three I will discuss the descent to the underworld in Greco-Roman literature. I will begin by showing the ubiquity and importance of the journey to the place of punishment in ancient

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<sup>22</sup> A recent example of a helpful reading of a parable that explicitly moves beyond the Gospel context is Bruce W. Longenecker, "The Story of the Samaritan and the Innkeeper (Luke 10:30-35): A Study in Character Rehabilitation," *BibInt* 17 (2009): 422-447.

<sup>23</sup> Snodgrass, "Modern Approaches," 190.

literature. The journey of heroes like Odysseus and Aeneas, and the journey of mortals to the place of punishment will serve as examples of the function of these stories in the context of the narrative in which they appear. Following this, I will discuss, in Chapter Four, several journeys to the place of punishment in Jewish and Christian literature. In Chapter Five I will offer a reading of the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus in the context of Luke's Gospel by identifying important themes in the parable that tie it to the context of the Gospel as a whole. I will conclude the chapter by showing how reading the parable against the background of the journey to the place of punishment provides insight into understanding the message of the parable.

## CHAPTER TWO

### History of Research

As mentioned at the beginning of the previous chapter, the influence of Adolf Jülicher and Hugo Gressmann looms large in the interpretation of the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus. As a result, the interpretation of the parable has revolved around two primary issues: (1) the structure and unity of the parable; and (2) the search for parallels to the parable. Recently, however, scholars have begun to pose different questions when reading the parable and a third issue has become influential in readings of the parable, namely, the social context of the first-century Mediterranean world. This trend, coupled with the growing practice of reading the parable in its narrative context, offers promise for future interpretations of the parable. In the following summary of the history of research of the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus I will discuss the primary works that fall into these categories.<sup>1</sup> In the first section, I will discuss the influence of Jülicher and Gressmann and those who have followed closely in their footsteps. After this, I will discuss readings that focus on the parable in its narrative context. The third section will deal with readings that take account of the social context of the parable, and will be divided into two parts: (1) a discussion of readings that focus on how understanding of the parable is influenced by cultural conventions that were “in the air” in the first-century Mediterranean world, and, (2) a discussion of readings of the parable that are informed explicitly by the socio-economic conditions in the first-century Mediterranean world.

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<sup>1</sup> The lines between these categories are often blurry. One should expect that certain readings of the parable involve methods used by scholars classified in a different section.

This summary of the history of research will prepare the way for the approach of this current study, reading the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus in the context of the Gospel of Luke against the background of the journey to the underworld.<sup>2</sup>

*The Boundary of the Parable and the Parallel to the Parable*

In this survey of the history of research of the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus the two foundational figures are Adolf Jülicher and Hugo Gressmann. Since this stage of interpretation has been summarized repeatedly in other works, my comments on Jülicher and Gressman will be brief, focusing on the main contours of the discussion.<sup>3</sup> I will spend more time on the readings of the parable that have not been fully summarized by others.

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<sup>2</sup> The summary in this section is a summary of the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus, not a summary of parable research in general. This is important for two reasons. First, many significant figures in the history of parable research did not comment on the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus in their works on the parables and, therefore, will not be discussed in this section (e.g., C.H. Dodd, Dan Via, Eta Linnemann, etc.). Second, when discussing the views of scholars in this section, I will focus on their comments on the parable itself, rather than their overall method of parable interpretation, except where necessary. In many instances, I will assume general knowledge of certain approaches to reading the parables, rather than providing a summary of these approaches. Readers interested in a history of parable research in general are encouraged to consult the many excellent summaries available including Norman Perrin, *Jesus and the Language of the Kingdom: Symbol and Metaphor in New Testament Interpretation* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), 89-193; Warren S. Kissinger, *The Parables of Jesus: A History of Interpretation and Bibliography* (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1979), 1-230; David B. Gowler, *What Are They Saying About the Parables?* (New York: Paulist Press, 2000); Craig L. Blomberg, *Interpreting the Parables* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 13-167; and Klyne Snodgrass Klyne R. Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent: A Comprehensive Guide to the Parables of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 1-59.

<sup>3</sup> For summaries of the interpretive approaches of Jülicher and Gressmann to the parable see especially Stephen I. Wright, *The Voice of Jesus: Studies in the Interpretation of Six Gospel Parables* (Eugene, Ore.: Wipf & Stock, 2002), 113-41; and Outi Lehtipuu, *The Afterlife Imagery in Luke's Story of the Rich Man and Lazarus* (NovTSup 123; Brill, 2007), 11-38.

*Adolf Jülicher: The Boundary of the Parable*

Adolf Jülicher's monumental two volume work *Die Gleichnisreden Jesu*<sup>4</sup> is considered the beginning of modern parable research,<sup>5</sup> and his method of interpreting parables has influenced countless scholars.<sup>6</sup> At the heart of Jülicher's argument is that the parables of Jesus are simple and direct forms of communication. They are certainly not, he argues, allegories. Thus, the parables of Jesus are to be understood as similes,<sup>7</sup> which are literal in nature, as opposed to metaphors which are indirect forms of speech.<sup>8</sup> Jülicher's rejection of allegory, and consequent focus on simile, had two primary methodological consequences that affected his interpretation of parables. First, any allegorical material found in the Gospel parables was considered an addition by the Gospel writers, not a feature of the original parable as told by Jesus. Thus, one could not assume that the parables in the Gospels were authentic sayings of Jesus. One of the tasks of the interpreter, then, is to strip away the interpretive additions of the Gospel writers

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<sup>4</sup> Adolph Jülicher, *Die Gleichnisreden Jesu* (2 vols.; Tübingen: Mohr, 1899).

<sup>5</sup> An example of this influence on the so-called "example stories" can be seen in the chapter headings in Jeffrey T. Tucker, *Example Stories: Perspectives on Four Parables in the Gospel of Luke* (JSNTSup 162; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998): Chapter Two: The Example Stories before *Die Gleichnisreden Jesu*; Chapter Three: The Example Stories according to *Die Gleichnisreden Jesu*; Chapter Four: After *Die Gleichnisreden Jesu*: The Example Stories in Modern Parable Scholarship. In a similar manner, Geraint V. Jones titled his first chapter "Before and After Jülicher"; Geraint V. Jones, *The Art and Truth of the Parables* (London: S.P.C.K., 1964). The structure of Jones' work is also noted by Kissinger, *Parables*, 72.

<sup>6</sup> Jülicher's method of parable interpretation is summarized well by the scholars mentioned in the footnote above.

<sup>7</sup> Jülicher thought these similes appeared in three different forms: Similitude, Parable, and Example Story; Jülicher, *Gleichnisreden*, 1.58-115.

<sup>8</sup> It is well documented that Jülicher appealed to Aristotle's example of the difference between the metaphor "A lion rushed on" and the simile "Achilles rushed on like a lion"; see Jülicher, *Gleichnisreden*, 1.52. The first is an example of *uneigentliche Rede* (figurative, or inauthentic, speech).



and identify the basic form of the parable free from interpretive elements.<sup>9</sup> Second, since the parables are similes, rather than metaphors, the task of the interpreter is to identify the single meaning of the parable. Jesus used parables to communicate clearly, not to obscure the message.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, only one point should be sought in each parable.

Both of these points affect Jülicher's interpretation of the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus. In the first place, Jülicher attempts to isolate the original parable as told by Jesus.<sup>11</sup> In a move that affects many subsequent interpretations of the parable, Jülicher argues that the parable should be divided into two discrete sections: Luke 16:19-26 and Luke 16:27-31.<sup>12</sup> Only the first of these two "loosely connected" sections is original to Jesus; the second section is the addition of a later interpreter.<sup>13</sup> Thus, the second half of the parable must be ignored when interpreting the parable.<sup>14</sup> What point, then, emerges in the first portion of the parable? Jülicher writes, "The parable of the rich man and poor

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<sup>9</sup> As Kissinger notes, Jülicher's approach "should not lead to hopeless scepticism about recovering Jesus in the parables," since the parables have "a genuine nucleus that goes back to Jesus himself"; Kissinger, *Parables*, 74. Indeed, later interpreters like Bultmann, Dodd, and Jeremias, who were influenced by Jülicher, saw the (reconstructed) parables in the Gospels as a window to the historical Jesus.

<sup>10</sup> As Klyne Snodgrass notes, "In Jülicher's understanding there could be no positing of several points of comparison between an image (*Bild*) and the object (*Sache*) portrayed, as happens with allegory. Jesus' parables had only one point of contact (one *tertium comparationis*) between an image and its object"; Snodgrass, "From Allegorizing to Allegorizing: A History of the Interpretation of the Parables of Jesus," in *The Challenge of Jesus' Parables* (McMaster New Testament Studies; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 7.

<sup>11</sup> The search for the original parable as told by the historical Jesus is still ongoing. For example, Hans Klein does not think that the parable is original to Jesus because it lacks concern for the Kingdom of God; Hans Klein, *Das Lukasevangelium* (KEK, Band 1/3; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008), 552.

<sup>12</sup> Jülicher, *Gleichnisreden*, 2.634.

<sup>13</sup> Jülicher, *Gleichnisreden*, 2.638. Jülicher points to the recession of Lazarus to the background of the parable and the emergence of the rich man and his brothers as a piece of evidence that the second half of the parable is a later edition.

<sup>14</sup> Outi Lehtipuu may be correct that part of Jülicher's desire to reduce the parable is that "The longer the parable, the harder it is to reduce to a single point"; Lehtipuu, *Afterlife Imagery*, 20.

Lazarus produced joy in a life of suffering and fear of the enjoyment of life.”<sup>15</sup> With this conclusion, the first stream of interpretation, the quest for the original parable of Jesus, began.<sup>16</sup>

### *Hugo Gressmann: The Genesis of the Parable*

The next major step in the interpretation of the parable was taken by Hugo Gressmann in 1918.<sup>17</sup> While Jülicher focused on the unity of the parable and its original form, Gressmann challenges the critical consensus of his time and focuses on the background of the parable. He argues that Jülicher’s conclusions ignore the literary unity of the text and drive an unnecessary wedge between the sections of the parable.<sup>18</sup> Instead, Gressmann seeks to draw the two parts of the parable together by focusing on the potential background of the parable that would allow it to be read as a narrative unity. In particular, Gressmann identifies an Egyptian folktale about Setme Khamuas and his son Si-Osiri as the most likely background for 16:19-26.<sup>19</sup> Jesus then added his own ending in 16:27-31.

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<sup>15</sup> Jülicher, *Gleichnisreden*, 2.638.

<sup>16</sup> The number of scholars who follow Jülicher’s division is impressive. For a list of these scholars see Hock, “Lazarus and Micyllus,” 449, fn. 5; and Lehtipuu, *Afterlife Imagery*, 17, fn. 33.

<sup>17</sup> Hugo Gressmann, *Vom reichen Mann und armen Lazarus: Eine literargeschichtliche Studie* (Berlin: Königliche Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1918). Prior to Gressmann Adolf von Harnack had suggested other ancient parallels to the parable; Adolf von Harnack, *Texte und Untersuchungen* (13.1; Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1895), 75 (cited by Augustin George “La parabole du riche et de Lazare,” *AsSeign* 57 [1971]: 80). Gressmann, however, was the first to appeal to the Egyptian tale.

<sup>18</sup> Gressmann, *Vom reichen Mann*, 56. Gressmann also cites the conclusions of Julius Wellhausen and Johannes Weiss, who divided the parable into two discrete sections.

<sup>19</sup> F.L. Griffith was the first to publish a translation and transliteration of the story; F.L. Griffith, *Stories of the High Priests of Memphis: The Sethon of Herodotus and the Demotic Tales of Khamuas* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1900), 42-66. Griffith suggests that the written version of the story dates from the second century CE. It is likely, however, that the story circulated widely prior to this date. See Lehtipuu, *Afterlife Imagery*, 12, fn. 11. A more recent translation can be found in Miriam Lichtheim, *Ancient*

In the tale, Si-Osiri was born to Setme, an Egyptian priest, and Meh-wesekht through miraculous means (I.1-5).<sup>20</sup> Prior to the child's birth, Setme had a dream in which he was told that his future son should be named Si-Osiri, followed by this prophecy: "[M]any are the [marvels that he shall do in the land of Egypt (?)]" (I.8). The child grew quickly, surpassing the expected size and intelligence of a child (see I.10-13). One day, while preparing for a feast, Setme saw a funeral procession pass by their home. A rich man, who had died, was being taken to the necropolis with pomp and great wailing, followed, shortly after, by a recently deceased poor man, who was wrapped in a mat and carried to the cemetery with no one in attendance. Seeing the difference in treatment of the dead, Setme said, "By [Ptah, the great god, how much better it shall be in Amenti for great men (?)] for whom [they make glory (?) with] the voice of [wailing] than for poor men whom they take to the desert-necropolis [without glory of funeral]!" (I.19). Si-Osiri heard his father's words and took him on a journey to Amenti.<sup>21</sup>

Once in Amenti Setme was shown both the blessed and the cursed among the dead.<sup>22</sup> Most significantly, Setme saw both a group of "noble spirits," one of whom with

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*Egyptian Literature: A Book of Readings* (vol. 3; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 138-151. I have chosen to follow Griffith's text because it was published when Gressmann made his proposals.

<sup>20</sup> The citations of the tale follow the numbering system in Griffith; *Stories of the High Priests*, 42-66. One night Meh-wesekht, had a dream in which she was told to find a "melon-vine" from which she was to give a gourd to her husband as a fertility medicine (I.1-3). She conceived the following evening. In the main section of the tale the true nature of the child was revealed, when Si-Osiri identified himself as "Hor son of Pa-neshe," who had been sent by Osiris in Amenti to prevent the Egyptians from being humiliated by a scribe from Ethiopia. In this section, Si-Osiri demonstrated his power when he was able to read a scroll that had not, yet, been unrolled, and by causing fire to consume the Ethiopian before disappearing himself (see II.27-VII.6).

<sup>21</sup> There is a lacuna of thirteen lines, which include the first portion of the journey. See Griffith, *Stories of the High Priests*, 45.

<sup>22</sup> Many of the visions of punishment are similar to Greco-Roman stories of the underworld journey that will be discussed in the next chapter.

the “bolt of the door” fixed in his right eye (II.2-3), and “a great man clothed in raiment of byssus, near to the place in which Osiris was, he being of exceeding high position” (II.9). Si-Osiri told him that the noble spirit punished was the rich man, whom he saw being honored in death. The “great man” was the poor man, who had been carried to the cemetery wrapped in a mat (II.12-15). Si-Osiri also gave the reason for the reversal of fortunes in the afterlife. The poor man “was brought to the Tê and his evil deeds were weighed against his good deeds that he did on earth; and it was found that his good deeds were more numerous than his evil deeds, considering (?) the life destiny which Thoth had written for him” (II.11). When the rich man was taken to the Tê, on the other hand, “his evil deeds were weighed against his good deeds, and his evil deeds were found more numerous than his good deeds that he did upon earth” (II.13). As a result, Osiris commanded that the “burial outfit of that rich man . . . should be given to this same poor man, and that he should be taken among the noble spirits as a man of God that follows Sokaris Osiris, his place being near the person of Osiris” (II.11-12).<sup>23</sup>

Gressmann’s identification of the tale of Setme and Si-Osiri as the probable background of the parable has possibly been the most influential interpretation of the parable.<sup>24</sup> On the one hand, the reversal of fortune present in the stories provides a provocative parallel between the story of Setme and Si-Osiris and Luke 16:19-27.<sup>25</sup> More importantly, however, the parallel story answers a question that has vexed

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<sup>23</sup> The purpose of this section seems to be a comfort to Setme that he will be like the poor man in death, glorified as a noble spirit in the presence of Osiris (see II.14-27).

<sup>24</sup> See also Hock, “Lazarus and Micyllus,” 450.

<sup>25</sup> It should be noted that while “Gressmann himself did not assume straight dependency on the Demotic tale but postulated a common origin, many subsequent scholars simply refer to the story . . . as a parallel that adequately illuminates the obscurities of Luke’s story”; Lehtipuu, *Afterlife Imagery*, 17.

interpreters: “Why were the fates of the rich man and Lazarus reversed?” With the tale of Setme and Si-Osiri as the background, the answer is clear: “He who is beneficent on earth, to him one is beneficent in the netherworld. And he who is evil, to him one is evil.”<sup>26</sup> As we will see below, significant challenges have recently be raised against Gressmann’s conclusions, but his mark on the interpretation of the parable is significant.<sup>27</sup>

### *Rudolf Bultmann*

Bultmann’s comments on the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus are brief but important in the history of research. Like Jülicher, Bultmann divides the parable into two distinct sections that have two distinct points. The first section, Luke 16:19-26, offers both a consolation to the poor, who suffer in this life, and a warning to the rich, who fail to care for them.<sup>28</sup> Both the warning and the hope are eschatological and await “the balancing of earthly destinies in the world to come.”<sup>29</sup> The purpose of the second section,

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<sup>26</sup> Lehtipuu, *Afterlife Imagery*, 14.

<sup>27</sup> As we will see below in the discussion of Rudolf Bultmann, not all scholars accepted Gressmann’s methodological proposal, although most have. An example of the tendency to search for the archetype to the parable is seen in George Nickelsburg’s brief treatment of the parable in his studies of wealth and poverty in 1 Enoch and Luke. Nickelsburg argues that Luke’s portrayal of the wealthy and poor in Luke’s Gospel is so similar to 1 Enoch 92-105 that the author of the Third Gospel “knew these chapters”; George W.E. Nickelsburg, “Revisiting the Rich and the Poor in 1 Enoch 92-105 and the Gospel According to Luke,” in *George W. E. Nickelsburg in Perspective: An Ongoing Dialogue of Learning* (vol. 2; ed. Jacob Neusner and Alan J. Avery-Peck; Leiden: Brill, 2003), 547; see also George W.E. Nickelsburg, “Riches, the Rich, and God’s Judgment in 1 Enoch 92-105 and the Gospel According to Luke,” *NTS* 25 (1979), 324-344. The parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus “closely approximates Enochic idiom and imagery” in its depiction of judgment; Nickelsburg, “Revisiting the Rich and Poor,” 565. Another example is the work of J.D.M. Derrett, *Law in the New Testament* (London: Darton, Longman, and Odd, 1970). In a chapter titled “Dives and Lazarus and the Preceding Sayings,” Derrett draws a connection between the name “Lazarus” and “Eliezer,” Abraham’s servant. This connection leads Derrett to read the parable against the background of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis, as a story about “inhospitality”; Derrett, *Law*, 87-89.

<sup>28</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, *The History of the Synoptic Tradition* (rev. ed.; trans. by John Marsh; Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1972), 178.

<sup>29</sup> Bultmann, *History*, 178.

Luke 16:27-31, is to highlight the sufficiency of revelation of the will of God given by Moses and the prophets.<sup>30</sup> Their testimony eliminates the need for “the resurrection of a dead person in order to induce belief.”<sup>31</sup> Bultmann argues that these two discrete sections are at odds with one another and could not originally have belonged together.<sup>32</sup> Bultmann does not think, however, that Luke is responsible for bringing these incompatible sections together. Instead, Luke worked with the material he inherited and provided editorial remarks in Luke 16:14-18 in order to tie the two sections together.<sup>33</sup> This editorial work of Luke provides an overall point to the parable: “It is not right to ask God for a miracle as a confirmation of his will: we have all that is necessary in Moses and the prophets.”<sup>34</sup> Importantly, Bultmann sees here an illustration of Deuteronomy 30:11-14, which situates the parable firmly in the Jewish tradition.<sup>35</sup>

The Jewish nature of the parable caused Bultmann to address the Egyptian parallel suggested by Gressmann. According to Bultmann, Gressman’s proposal is left wanting for two reasons.<sup>36</sup> First, the point of the Egyptian tale is different from that of the parable. In particular, the Egyptian story provides a reason for the reversal in the afterlife, namely the moral behavior of the dead during their lifetime. The second reason

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<sup>30</sup> Bultmann, *History*, 196.

<sup>31</sup> Bultmann, *History*, 196.

<sup>32</sup> Bultmann, *History*, 178.

<sup>33</sup> Bultmann, *History*, 178.

<sup>34</sup> Bultmann, *History*, 203.

<sup>35</sup> Bultmann suggests that the Jewish nature of the parable is not original with Jesus. Rather, the church has taken the material from the Jewish tradition and “put it into Jesus’ mouth”; Bultmann, *History*, 203.

<sup>36</sup> Bultmann, *History*, 204.

is that the parable in Luke lacks “the characteristic form of the problem: the different burial of the rich and poor.”<sup>37</sup> Because of these discrepancies Bultmann argues that a more likely story providing the background for the parable is a Jewish legend found in Rabbinic literature.<sup>38</sup> In this tale a rich and godless woman was sent to Hell where she was tormented. Her husband was not brave enough to journey to the underworld to rescue her, but sent a young boy instead. The boy returned from the underworld with her wedding ring and a message: “Tell my husband to turn over a new leaf, for the power of repentance is great.”<sup>39</sup> The rich man followed his wife’s advice and repented. Although the story as Bultmann has found it dates after the time of Luke, he suggests that it is much older and, in another form, may even have included the name Lazarus.<sup>40</sup>

In Bultmann’s work we can see both of the main streams of interpretation. On the one hand, Bultmann continues the legacy of Jülicher and divides the parable into two sections. On the other hand, Bultmann seeks to determine the archetype of the parable. In both cases, there is no effort to read the parable as a narrative unity, as well as no effort to read the parable in light of the expectations the audience would have had in terms of the themes associated with a descent to the place of punishment.

### *Joachim Jeremias*

Joachim Jeremias continued the stream of interpretation begun by Gressmann and followed by Bultmann, although he argued that the story came from a different source.

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<sup>37</sup> Bultmann, *History*, 204.

<sup>38</sup> Bultmann, *History*, 197.

<sup>39</sup> Bultmann, *History*, 197.

<sup>40</sup> Bultmann, *History*, 197.

According to Jeremias, the parallel to the parable is a “very popular story” of a poor scholar and a rich tax-collector, in which the scholar was comforted in the afterlife, while the tax-collector was denied comfort in the afterlife.<sup>41</sup> The story, which was derived from the Egyptian tale of Setme and Si-Osiri suggested by Gressmann, was brought to Palestine by Alexandrian Jews.<sup>42</sup> While this proposal is clearly different in its details from the proposals of Gressmann and Bultmann, the most important aspect of Jeremias’ interpretation is the significance of the parallel for interpretation. First, Jeremias argues that the reversal of fate in the afterlife is found in the comparison of the parable with the “folk-material that Jesus used.”<sup>43</sup> That is, the supposed parallel to the story takes priority over the narrative context in terms of the interpretation of the parable. The payoff of this approach for Jeremias is similar to that for Gressmann. The parallel story provides the rationale for the judgment of the rich man, and explains “the lack of emphasis on his guilt.”<sup>44</sup> For Jeremias, this guilt is not a result of having riches *per se*, but of impending punishment for “lovelessness and impiety,” and of future reward for “piety and humility.”<sup>45</sup>

The second result of Jeremias’ focus on his proposed parallel to the parable is the part of the story that is most stressed. Following Jülicher, Jeremias divides the parable

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<sup>41</sup> Joachim Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus* (2d ed.; New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1972), 183.

<sup>42</sup> Jeremias, *Parables*, 183.

<sup>43</sup> Jeremias, *Parables*, 185 (cf. 183).

<sup>44</sup> Jeremias, *Parables*, 183.

<sup>45</sup> Jeremias, *Parables*, 185. Jeremias clearly does not think that Jesus is critiquing wealth in and of itself, and asks, “Where has Jesus ever suggested that wealth in itself merits hell, and that poverty in itself is rewarded by paradise?” While he is clear that the rich man’s use of wealth is impious (the rich man is described as an “impious reveller” [183]), he is not as clear about Lazarus’ piety, apart from his lowly status as a beggar.



into two sections, calling it a argues that the parable is a “double-edged parable.”<sup>46</sup> Each of these sections makes a unique purpose. The purpose of the first section is to make clear that in the afterlife there is a reversal of fortune; the purpose of the second section is to provide an opportunity for the rich man to warn his five brothers.<sup>47</sup> The two sections are not, however, of equal value for interpretation. Indeed, Jeremias argues that since the first part of the story is “drawn from well-known folk-material, the emphasis lies on the new ‘epilogue’ which Jesus added to the first part.”<sup>48</sup> That is, since the “folk-material” was well-known, the audience would have been more attentive to the second part of the tale that was appended by Jesus to the common material.<sup>49</sup> In this way, the overall purpose of the parable is to serve as a warning of “impending danger” to those “who resemble the brothers of the rich man.”<sup>50</sup>

In this way, the parable has a negative function, in that it becomes a warning to avoid something, namely, the judgment that is to come.<sup>51</sup> Lacking in Jeremias’ proposal is the positive function of the parable, that is, what are those warned supposed to do in light of the warning? Jeremias clearly states that the the message of the parable does not address a social problem because the emphasis is on the second part of the parable. Thus,

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<sup>46</sup> Jeremias, *Parables*, 186.

<sup>47</sup> Jeremias, *Parables*, 186.

<sup>48</sup> Jeremias, *Parables*, 186. That the emphasis falls on the second section of the parable is similar to the other “double-edged” parables Jeremias identifies.

<sup>49</sup> Others have followed Jeremias’ conclusion at this point, including George, “La parabole,” 85.

<sup>50</sup> Jeremias, *Parables*, 186 (cf. 182).

<sup>51</sup> The parable addresses those like the rich man, who “live in selfish luxury, deaf to God’s word, in the belief that death ends all things”; Jeremias, *Parables*, 186.

Lazarus is a foil, “introduced by way of contrast,” and the focus is on the rich man and his brothers, the latter faced with an existential dilemma.<sup>52</sup>

### *Conclusion*

The interpretation of the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus has been dominated, in one way or another, by the proposals of Jülicher and Gressmann, whose approaches have determined the questions most often posed about the parable. On the one hand, scholars have focused on where to divide the parable, generally following Jülicher’s proposal. On the other hand, scholars have attempted to identify the parallel to the parable that will shed light on the meaning of the parable. The works of Bultmann and Jeremias illustrate this method of interpretation, as both sought to identify the discrete parts of the parable, as well as to identify the archetype of the parable that would provide the key to interpretation.

### *The Parable in Its Narrative Context*

Not all interpreters of the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus, however, have been content with reading the parable according to the divisions discussed above. Instead, they have shifted their focus in interpretation to the narrative context of the parable. Scholars taking this approach most often reject the attempt of Jülicher, and those who follow him, to reduce the parable to its “original” form by bracketing out the interpretive layers added to the parable by the early church. Instead, scholars who read the parable in its narrative context consider the Gospel context in which the parable is found to be a guide for interpretation. While the reading of the parable in its narrative context is a

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<sup>52</sup> Jeremias, *Parables*, 186. Jeremias suggests that a better name for the parable would be the Six Brothers, instead of the Rich Man and Lazarus.

practice shared by many commentators, I will only interact with a few representatives of the approach to reading the parable in its narrative context in this section.<sup>53</sup>

*John Donahue*

The first example of reading the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus in its narrative context is the helpful work of John Donahue, who begins by setting the parable in its immediate narrative context.<sup>54</sup> For example, Donahue begins with the characterization of the Pharisees in Luke 16:14-18, who are described negatively as “lovers of money,” who “sneer at Jesus.” Donahue notes that this is a surprising description of the Pharisees in historical terms, since they were usually not members of the upper class, as were the Sadducees.<sup>55</sup> Donahue suggests that a solution to this characterization is found in Luke’s understanding of possessions. Drawing on Luke Timothy Johnson’s conclusions,<sup>56</sup> he suggests that while Luke is concerned with the actual poor, wealth is often a symbol of power and dominance, while poverty is a symbol

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<sup>53</sup> I will discuss focus my comments here on a sampling of scholars that explicitly emphasize reading the parables in their narrative contexts.

<sup>54</sup> Donahue was not the first to focus on reading the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus in its narrative context. John Drury, for example, has the stated goal of understanding the parables “in the contexts of the books in which they occur”; John Drury, *The Parables in the Gospels* (New York: Crossroad, 1985), 1. His approach to the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus, however, is not helpful, and he ends up repeating the approach to the parable begun by Jülicher and Gressmann.

<sup>55</sup> John R. Donahue, *The Gospel in Parable: Metaphor, Narrative, and Theology in the Synoptic Gospels* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 172. Donahue also thinks that this characterization is at odds with Luke’s characterization of the Pharisees in the rest of the his Gospel. He writes, “Though Luke hands on the disputes between Jesus and the Pharisees (e.g., Luke 5:17-39 = Mark 2:1-22), he has nothing comparable to the harsh polemic of Matthew 23. He also portrays Jesus frequently at meals with the Pharisees (7:36; 11:37; 14:1) and depicts them in a favorable light (13:31; d. Acts 5:34; 23:6).”

<sup>56</sup> Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Literary Function of Possessions in Luke-Acts* (SBLDS 39; Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1977); idem, *Sharing Possessions: Mandate and Symbol of Faith* (OBT 9; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981).

of vulnerability.<sup>57</sup> In Luke 15-16 the Pharisees are portrayed “as people of power and influence who grumble because Jesus accepts the outcast.”<sup>58</sup> Jesus’ fellowship with the outcast is then interpreted as an enactment of the law and the prophets and a contrast to the Pharisees’ self-confident attitude, which is an indication of their “miserly . . . possession of virtue.”<sup>59</sup> Donahue’s main contribution at this point is his appeal to the larger narrative context in order to understand the characterization of the Pharisees and its significance for understanding the parable.

Donahue also appeals to the wider Lukan context in order to understand Luke’s view of wealth and possessions, which is at the heart of the meaning of the parable. Luke’s concern for the poor is evidenced in the wider context of the Gospel through Luke’s focus on the way in which the wealthy use their goods. Donahue points to Luke’s unique material in his story about Jesus to make this point.<sup>60</sup> This concern for the use of wealth and the vulnerable is also evident in Luke’s unique parables. For example, the parable of the Rich Fool complements the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus as a

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<sup>57</sup> Donahue, *The Gospel in Parable*, 172-173.

<sup>58</sup> Donahue, *The Gospel in Parable*, 173. See also Hanna Roose, who has recently provided a helpful discussion of the relationship of the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus with the parable of the Prodigal Son in Luke 15; Hannah Roose, “Umkehr und Ausgleich bei Lukas: Die Gleichnisse vom verlorenen Sohn (Lk 15.11–32) und vom reichen Mann und armen Lazarus [Lk 16.19–31] als Schwestergeschichten,” *NTS* 56 (2009): 1-21.

<sup>59</sup> Donahue, *The Gospel in Parable*, 173.

<sup>60</sup> Donahue offers a bullet-point survey of Luke’s unique material showing his concern for the poor and wealthy; Donahue, *The Gospel in Parable*, 175-176. Items include: concern for vulnerable in infancy narrative (1:52-53); the addition to Q material of John’s preaching and the need to share coat and food (3:10); the beginning of Jesus’ public ministry with the declaration of good news to the poor (4:17-19; cf. Isa. 61:1-2); the Lukan saying that Levi left everything to follow Jesus (5:28); the blessing of the “poor” and addition of woes against the rich and powerful (6:20, 24-26); that the parables of the Rich Fool and the Rich Man and Lazarus are unique to Luke; Zacchaeus’ willingness to give up half of his wealth (19:8); Luke’s presentation of Jesus as an “OT prophet who takes the side of the widow (7:11-17; 18:1-8), the stranger in the land (10:29-37; 17:16), and those on the margin of society (14:12-13,21)”; the depiction of the early church sharing everything in common with no one having need among them (Acts 2:41-47; 4:32-37); and the stress on almsgiving Luke and Acts (Luke 11:41; 12:33; 19:8; Acts 10:2,4,31; 24:17).

warning against “the desire for more” and “superfluous possession.”<sup>61</sup> In this parable the rich man is isolated from the community as a result of his abundance and fails both to thank God for the provision and to assist the need.<sup>62</sup> Donahue’s interpretation of the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus, then, is a good example of reading the parable both as a literary unit, as well as in light of the overall context of the Gospel of Luke.<sup>63</sup>

### *Arland Hultgren*

Arland Hultgren’s work is important for this study because he specifically addresses two questions that affect the interpretation of the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus: (1) What is to be interpreted?; and (2) What method is most fruitful and necessary?<sup>64</sup> Hultgren’s answers to these questions are helpful. In the first place, Hultgren argues that the object of interpretation must be the canonical form of the parable. He writes, “To go back behind the books is always speculative. To recreate an original setting within the ministry of Jesus and an original form of a parable is always hypothetical. What we do have is parables within texts at hand, and the analysis of them in their canonical texts is more surefooted than alternatives.”<sup>65</sup> Hultgren is specifically critiquing the approach to parables introduced by Jülicher and continued by Bultmann,

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<sup>61</sup> Donahue, *The Gospel in Parable*, 179.

<sup>62</sup> Donahue, *The Gospel in Parable*, 179.

<sup>63</sup> It should be noted that Donahue’s reading of the parable in its narrative context is not a rejection of previous scholarship on the parable. For one, Donahue writes that the parable’s “atmosphere is strongly folkloric and evocative of Egyptian tales about the reversal of fates after death”; Donahue, *The Gospel in Parable*, 169. He also recognizes that the parable has multiple parts (he identifies three: 16:19-21; 16:22-26; 16:27-31), but chooses to interpret the parable as a literary whole.

<sup>64</sup> Arland J. Hultgren, *The Parables of Jesus: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 12-19. Hultgren also addresses a third issue in parable research, arguing that some parables do, in fact, contain allegorical elements.

<sup>65</sup> Hultgren, *Parables of Jesus*, 16.

Dodd, Jeremias, and others.<sup>66</sup> Hultgren is careful, however, not to dismiss the value of historical-critical study of the parables, and recognizes that the “parables appear in texts that have historical settings within the ancient world.”<sup>67</sup> Thus, the interpreter must translate the message of the parables “from one culture to another.” This translation involves not only linguistic considerations, but also translation “from the worldview of the ancient Gospels to that of moderns.”<sup>68</sup> Thus, interpreters must pay careful attention to the cultural assumptions that underlie the message of the parables in the Gospels.

In answer to the second question, regarding the most fruitful methodology for interpreting the parables, Hultgren argues that the goal of interpretation determines the most appropriate method. His study “is carried on primarily for the sake of interpreting the parables of Jesus within the Christian church.”<sup>69</sup> Thus, his study focuses on the parables “within their contexts, the canonical Gospels.”<sup>70</sup> This approach avoids the danger of removing the parables from their contexts and “making of them what one will in the way of hermeneutical experiments.”<sup>71</sup> In this way, the narrative context of the parables functions as an interpretive control for understanding the parables.

Hultgren’s methodology is a helpful approach to the interpretation of parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus because he takes seriously both the history of interpretation of the parable, but reads it as part of the narrative of Luke’s Gospel. For example, Hultgren

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<sup>66</sup> See Hultgren, *Parables of Jesus*, 14-15.

<sup>67</sup> Hultgren, *Parables of Jesus*, 16.

<sup>68</sup> Hultgren, *Parables of Jesus*, 17.

<sup>69</sup> Hultgren, *Parables of Jesus*, 17.

<sup>70</sup> Hultgren, *Parables of Jesus*, 17.

<sup>71</sup> Hultgren, *Parables of Jesus*, 17.

agrees that the parable should be divided along the lines proposed by Jülicher, but argues that it should be interpreted as a whole, not as two discrete parts.<sup>72</sup> Moreover, Hultgren is careful to set the parable not only in its immediate context, but also in the context of the travel narrative, as well as in light of the themes of wealth and poverty in the Gospel of Luke.<sup>73</sup> Unfortunately, the potential benefits of Hultgren's approach are not seen in his interpretation of the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus, and his discussion does not move far beyond past interpretations.

*David Gowler*

A final example of reading the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus in its narrative context is the recent proposal by David Gowler, whose work anticipates issues to be raised in the next section of this chapter. At the heart of Gowler's work is a twofold recognition. On the one hand, he praises literary approaches to the parables because they "realize that parables further the plot development within each Gospel and that characters in the parables give implicit and explicit commentary on the characters in the larger narrative." On the other hand, he recognizes that literary approaches are not the only way to interpret parables, and, since parables have a great power to communicate meaning, "no single narrative context can restrain or complete the parable's power to communicate."<sup>74</sup> In order to address the complexity of interpreting the parables in their narrative context, Gowler turns to the work of Mikhail Bakhtin, and argues that the

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<sup>72</sup> See Hultgren, *Parables of Jesus*, 112.

<sup>73</sup> See Hultgren, *Parables*, 111, 115.

<sup>74</sup> David B. Gowler, "'At His Gate Lay a Poor Man': A Dialogic Reading of Luke 16:19-31," *PRSt* 32 (2005): 250.

“relationship between gospel contexts and parable is *dialogic*.”<sup>75</sup> The “dialogic” relationship is complex and involves the author and the parable, the author and the creator of the parable, and the narrator of the parable with the characters in the parable and the characters in the larger narrative. The dialogic relationship also applies to the original teller of the parable, in this case Jesus, and his interaction with the “greater dialogue” of which he was a part in his society. Finally, the dialogic relationship extends to the hearers/readers of the parable “as they become participants in that greater dialogue.”<sup>76</sup> As a result, a Bakhtinian (i.e., dialogical) reading of the parable allows the parable to be read in relationship to its narrative context, social context, and ideological context. These different contexts form the outline for Gowler’s argument.

Since Gowler is primarily interested in the dialogical relationship between the parable and the text, he spends the bulk of his argument discussing how the parable fits in its narrative context. He notes the important theme of reversal in the Gospel of Luke, which is presaged in the “proclamation of release” declared in the inaugural statement of Jesus’ ministry (Luke 4:16-30), which contains a “proclamation of release.”<sup>77</sup> The focus of Gowler’s comments in this section, however, are on the theme of conflict in the narrative because it is through conflict that the Pharisees, the addressees of the parable, are characterized. Prior to Luke 16:19-31 the Pharisees are characterized negatively throughout the narrative.<sup>78</sup> In terms of the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus the two

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<sup>75</sup> Gowler, “ ‘At His Gate,’ ” 250 (*italics original*).

<sup>76</sup> Gowler, “ ‘At His Gate,’ ” 250.

<sup>77</sup> Gowler, “ ‘At His Gate,’ ” 252.

<sup>78</sup> Gowler’s comments on the Pharisees are based on his monograph David B. Gowler, *Host, Guest, Enemy, and Friend: Portraits of the Pharisees in Luke and Acts* (Emory Studies in Early Christianity 2; New York: Peter Lang, 1991), and will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Five.



most important controversies are found in Luke 11:37-54 and 14:1-14 when Jesus dines with certain Pharisees.<sup>79</sup> In these settings, the Pharisees are exposed as “fools,” who “are rapacious and filled with avarice,” and who “love to exalt themselves over others.”<sup>80</sup> In this way, the Pharisees are characterized by “the desire for self-glorification” that leads to “a love of possessions and disregard for the poor.”<sup>81</sup> The characterization of the Pharisees in this way is reinforced by the narrator in the introduction to the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus when they are referred to as “lovers of money” (φιλάργυροι; Luke 16:14). The portrayal also forms a dialogical relationship with the parable itself. Both the rich man and Lazarus “serve as illustrative types,” exemplifying several themes present in the Gospel. Themes like reversal and the identity of the true children of Abraham, alluded to by Gowler in the first section of his argument are now discussed in more detail.

As noted above, one of the features of Gowler’s dialogic approach to reading the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus is that the narrative context of the parable is only one of several “contexts” in which one must read the parable. He recognizes that “every text is a socially symbolic act and assumes certain social and cultural norms.”<sup>82</sup> There are two implications of this recognition. On the one hand, it is important to consider the intertextual relationship between the parable and other ancient literature. On the other hand, it is important to explore the dialogical interaction between the parable and the

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<sup>79</sup> Gowler, “ ‘At His Gate,’ ” 253-254.

<sup>80</sup> Gowler, “ ‘At His Gate,’ ” 253. Gowler writes, “Being a fool is equivalent of being a *denier of God*,” an accusation that “labels the Pharisees as moral failures who disregard their social responsibilities” (*italics original*).

<sup>81</sup> Gowler, “ ‘At His Gate,’ ” 254.

<sup>82</sup> Gowler, “ ‘At His Gate,’ ” 258.

cultural context of the parable. Gowler's comments focus primarily on the second issue.<sup>83</sup> Gowler draws particular attention to the description of the rich man's lifestyle, which was characterized by the "conspicuous consumption" associated with the social elite, and to Lazarus, "who belongs to the lowest strata of society," and was, thus, expendable.<sup>84</sup> At this point Gowler's comments are not significantly different from those of scholars to be discussed in the next section and I will defer comment until then.

It should be noted, however, that Gowler highlights the impact of the cultural script of honor and shame, as well as the importance of purity, in ways that the authors to be discussed below do not. In the first place, Gowler notes that honor is "attained and maintained by conformity to prevailing cultural norms."<sup>85</sup> In the parable, the rich man is characterized in this way, when he ignores the beggar at his gate, while indulging his own appetites. In the Gospel, however, Jesus transforms "those cultural norms in a way that insists vertical generalized reciprocity."<sup>86</sup> The rich man's failure to assist Lazarus illustrates a rejection of Jesus' message. In the second place, the parable is "intimately connected to the cultural script of purity rules" that involve "a system of boundaries that human beings develop in order to make sense of their environment."<sup>87</sup> Gowler argues that the rules of purity have been altered by Jesus in the Gospel to include interaction with those how are considered unclean by society. In this light, "the social and economic

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<sup>83</sup> Gowler only briefly discusses the traditional search for the parallel to the parable, but notes his approval of the approach of Ronald Hock and Richard Bauckham, which we will discuss below.

<sup>84</sup> Gowler, " 'At His Gate,' " 255.

<sup>85</sup> Gowler, " 'At His Gate,' " 263.

<sup>86</sup> Gowler, " 'At His Gate,' " 263. Vertical generalized reciprocity involves actions like almsgiving; see Gowler, " 'At His Gate,' " 262.

<sup>87</sup> Gowler, " 'At His Gate,' " 263.

behavior of the rich man . . . not only has made him dishonorable but it has also made him unclean before God.”<sup>88</sup>

Overall, Gowler’s dialogic approach to reading the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus is helpful. One of the greatest strengths is that his value of the narrative context of the parable does not lead to a neglect of the important contexts of the parable, including the interaction of the parable with other ancient texts, as well as dominant cultural scripts in Mediterranean society. A weakness of his work is the little attention that he pays to the intertextual relationships that inform a reading of the parable. Gowler’s work, however, serves as a helpful transition to the approaches to reading the parable that will be discussed below.

### *Conclusion*

The works of Donahue, Hultgren, and Gowler represent dissatisfaction with the common practice of dividing the parable into two discrete sections. Instead, these scholars argue that the parable should be read in its narrative context. While each of the scholars discussed above understand the task differently, each shares the view that the narrative context of the parable serves as a helpful guide for interpretation. The work of David Gowler is helpful in this discussion because, while he is interested in the narrative context of the parable, he is also interested in the wider cultural context of the parable. In the next section, I will discuss approaches to the parable that focus on this aspect of interpreting the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus.

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<sup>88</sup> Gowler, “ ‘At His Gate,’ ” 263.

### *The Social World of the Parable*

A third movement in the interpretation of the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus is the reading of the parable in light of its social milieu.<sup>89</sup> This approach differs from the search for a parallel story to the parable in that it is an attempt to read the parable in the context of first-century Mediterranean culture. Generally, this practice can be divided into two complementary streams. On the one hand, some scholars focus their research on determining the social conventions that were “in the air” in the first century and would have influenced reception of the parable. The works of Ronald Hock, Richard Bauckham, Michael Gilmour, and Outi Lehtipuu are indicative of this approach. On the other hand, some scholars read the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus against the background of the power struggles between the rich and poor in the first-century Mediterranean world. In this approach, illustrated below by the works of Bernard Brandon Scott, William Herzog, and Kenneth Bailey, the focus is on the socio-economic situation in which the parable is set.<sup>90</sup> I have chosen to include both approaches together in this section because they share a fundamental concern for the social world of the parable, and differ primarily in the degree of emphasis that is given to different types of evidence.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> A word of caution is in order before beginning this section. It would be a mistake to suggest that the scholars in the previous sections were unconcerned with the social world of the parable. Some scholars, however, have been much more explicit in their attempt to interpret the parable in light of the cultural scripts that inform a reading of the parable. It is these scholars, who will be discussed in this section.

<sup>90</sup> Since these readings of the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus have not been adequately summarized in the literature on the parable, I will devote significant attention to these three authors.

<sup>91</sup> In general, scholars focused on socio-economic readings of the parable are focused on data gleaned from sociological research of the first century Mediterranean world, while scholars interested in social conventions that were “in the air” focus on the evidence provided by texts that were current in the first century.

Ronald Hock is one of the first scholars to offer a direct critique of the prevailing interpretation of the parable that was controlled by the proposals of Jülicher and Gressmann.<sup>92</sup> He turns his attention first to the Egyptian parallel, arguing that the links “between the two are neither as compelling nor as explanatory” as sometimes suggested. For example, Hock points to the prevailing view that the parallel only sheds light on the first part of the parable as evidence that the parallel only offers “indirect” influence. Moreover, the Egyptian parallel makes use of imagery that is not crucial to interpretation of the parable (e.g., the burial of the two characters).<sup>93</sup> More significantly, however, the Egyptian parallel does not explain what Hock considers to be the most important interpretive crux, namely, “the rationale for the reversal in fortunes of the rich man and Lazarus.”<sup>94</sup> Hock then critiques Jülicher’s division of the parable at Luke 16:26, which he considers to be arbitrary. Indeed, others have divided the parable at different points and the division at Luke 16:26, which takes place in the middle of the conversation of the rich man and Abraham, is awkward.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Hock offers a brief, but helpful, review of the history of research of the parable and rightly notes the dominance of the views of Jülicher and Gressmann; Hock, “Lazarus and Micyllus,” 447-451.

<sup>93</sup> Hock, “Lazarus and Micyllus,” 452. Hock’s argument that the Egyptian parallel has only an “indirect” influence on the parable is similar to Elpidius Pax’s argument to be discussed below.

<sup>94</sup> Hock, “Lazarus and Micyllus,” 452. See also Michael Wolter, *Das Lukasevangelium* (HNT 5; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 557-558. As noted above, however, other scholars consider Gressmann’s proposal to answer this question satisfactorily.

<sup>95</sup> Hock, “Lazarus and Micyllus,” 454. See also the similar assessment by Wolfgang Wiefel, *Das Evangelium nach Lukas* (THKNT 3; Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1988), 298. Hock also cites the work of Franz Schnider and W. Stenger, who have highlighted common themes throughout the parable, thus challenging Jülicher’s claim that the two sections are loosely connected. Schnider and Stenger themselves divide the parable between Luke 16:19-23 and Luke 16:24-31. See Schnider and Stenger, “Die offene Tür und die unüberschreitbare Kluft: strukturanalytische Überlegungen zum Gleichnis vom reichen Mann und armen Lazarus,” *NTS* 25 (1979): 273-283.

On the basis of this critique Hock asks, “In the light of the inability thus far of folkloric and various other Jewish materials to reduce the opacity, how far can we legitimately cast the comparative net?”<sup>96</sup> In answer to this question, Hock suggests that the net can be cast much farther than previously considered in order to include a body of texts that had heretofore been neglected, namely Greco-Roman literature. In particular, Hock draws attention to the similar themes shared in the parable with Lucian of Samosata’s *Gallus* and *Cataplus*, the latter sharing its plot with the parable in Luke. Hock points out what he considers to be parallels in the situations of Micyllus and Lazarus in the *Cataplus*: Micyllus is a poor artisan, Lazarus is a beggar; Micyllus is Megapenthes’ neighbor, Lazarus is laid at the rich man’s gate; Micyllus is tantalized by the food in Megapenthes’ house, Lazarus longs to eat from the rich man’s table; Micyllus dreads winter’s cold and sickness, Lazarus is covered with sores; Micyllus endures the slights and beatings of the powerful, Lazarus is pestered by dogs.

These supposed parallels between the parable and the account of Micyllus lead Hock to draw conclusions from what he understands as the main theme of the *Cataplus*, namely, “the reversal in status of the rich and poor.”<sup>97</sup> In particular, Hock argues that the extended scene of judgment in the *Cataplus* removes the “opacity” in the parable regarding the reason for the reversal of fortune. In this scene Megapenthes and Micyllus appear before Rhadamanthus, the judge of the underworld. Here, Rhadamanthus inspects the two characters for any marks that would indicate wicked deeds. Micyllus is found to be spotless and is sent to the Isles of the Blessed. Megapenthes, on the other hand, is

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<sup>96</sup> Hock, “Lazarus and Micyllus,” 455.

<sup>97</sup> Hock, “Lazarus and Micyllus,” 459.

black and blue with marks indicating a very wicked lifestyle, including both tyrannical (e.g., the extermination of more than 10,000 people, the confiscation of property) and sexual (e.g., ravishing maidens, corrupting boys) crimes (Lucian, *Cat.* 26). On this basis, Hock argues that the parable follows Lucian's Cynic critique of wealth, which removes the opacity of the parable by attributing hedonistic excess to the rich man and piety to Lazarus.<sup>98</sup>

*Richard Bauckham: The Influence of Parallel Accounts*

Building on Hock's proposal Richard Bauckham argued that "the parable of the rich man and Lazarus shows both how misleading extra-biblical parallels to biblical motifs can be when misused . . . [and] how enlightening they can be when correctly used."<sup>99</sup> On the first point, Bauckham critiques the dominant reliance on the Egyptian parallel, which he contends has at least two detrimental effects on interpretation: (1) the assumption that only the first part of the parable is related to the folktale, thus creating two distinct parts of the parable, with the second part superfluous, is "not entirely valid" since the "motif of a revelation of the fate of the dead to the living . . . is integral to the Egyptian story"; and (2) the reliance on the Egyptian parallel leads to "the supposition that a criterion for judgment of the rich man and the poor man . . . must be implicit in the parable."<sup>100</sup> On the second point, Bauckham argues that the parable does, in fact, indicate the reason for the reversal of fortune upon death, namely, God's eschatological justice in

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<sup>98</sup> Hock, "Lazarus and Micylus," 463.

<sup>99</sup> Richard Bauckham, "The Rich Man and Lazarus: The Parable and the Parallels," *NTS* 37 (1991): 225.

<sup>100</sup> Bauckham, "Rich Man and Lazarus," 230-31. See also Hock's concern with the "opacity" surrounding the reversal of fortune in the parable.

reversing the injustice of the present world.<sup>101</sup> Thus, the judgment in the parable is not based on the rich man's unknown moral wickedness that must be uncovered through the use of parallels, but rather it is based on "a popular way of thinking" among the poor that provided future hope of the reversal of their situation.

Bauckham's critique of the abuse of parallels in interpreting the parable does not mean that he is opposed to using them. Indeed, while Bauckham thinks Hock is wrong to assert that Lucian's *Cataplus* and *Gallus* are "more relevant" than the Egyptian story, he is "right to argue that they are *also* relevant."<sup>102</sup> Moreover, Bauckham himself draws attention to the possible parallel found in *Jannes and Jambres*, which he believes provides a parallel account that supports the unity of the parable because it also involves the return of Jannes from torment in Hades to warn Jambres to live a good life.<sup>103</sup>

More important, however, is the way in which Bauckham uses parallel stories in his interpretation of the Rich Man and Lazarus. In his analysis of the supposed parallels in Egyptian and Jewish literature, Bauckham argues that the Gressmann's tale was not the "source of the parable." Rather, the parallel accounts belong to a shared "folkloric motif, around which many stories can be built."<sup>104</sup> Indeed, this story of reversal of fate can be found in the works of other ancient writers other than Lucian.<sup>105</sup> This insight is important because parallel accounts are viewed as just that, accounts that share a particular theme

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<sup>101</sup> Bauckham, "Rich Man and Lazarus," 232.

<sup>102</sup> Bauckham, "Rich Man and Lazarus," 234 (*italics original*).

<sup>103</sup> Bauckham, "Rich Man and Lazarus," 241-242.

<sup>104</sup> Bauckham, "Rich Man and Lazarus," 229.

<sup>105</sup> See also Wolter, *Lukasevangelium*, 562.



that can be used for a variety of rhetorical purposes. It is at this point that the greatest significance of Bauckham's work is evident.

Bauckham's focus on identifying shared motifs in ancient accounts, rather than attempting to identify ancient accounts used as sources, leads him to another group of ancient documents that had been neglected by scholars. In particular, Bauckham draws attention to those ancient stores that tell of the revelation of the fate of the dead following a journey to the place of punishment.<sup>106</sup> Examples of these stories can be found in literature from many different cultures in the ancient world and include both the Egyptian tale proposed by Gressmann and the Rabbinic tale proposed by Bultmann. The primary difference in Bauckham's approach to these stories from that of Gressmann, Bultmann, and others, is that he is looking for motifs in these ancient accounts and is interested in the expectations they create in the resolution of the stories.<sup>107</sup> In my opinion, Bauckham's approach to the parable offers the most fruitful means of exploration into the meaning and rhetorical function of the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus. As such, this present study is, in many ways, an expansion of the insights made by Bauckham.

*Michael Gilmour and Outi Lehtipuu: Further Appeal to Ancient Literary Themes*

Finally, following the advances made by Hock and Bauckham, two other works are important to mention that seek to determine the function of the parable of the Rich

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<sup>106</sup> Bauckham, "Rich Man and Lazarus," 236-244. Bauckham's approach to studying the parable has found important advocates, including François Bovon, *Das Evangelium nach Lukas* (EKKNT 3.3; Düsseldorf: Benziger Verlag, 2001), 113-117.

<sup>107</sup> It should be noted, however, that while Bauckham has offered an important way forward in the interpretation of the parable, he is not entirely immune from the approaches that he critiques. The primary example of this is Bauckham's appeal to the pseudepigraphical work *Jannes and Jambres*, which he argues has particular relevance to the message of the parable. While Bauckham does not argue that *Jannes and Jambres* is the parallel to the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus, his emphasis on this story seems inordinate.

Man and Lazarus in light of ancient literary theme. First, Michael Gilmour suggests that Luke's audience could have associated the scene of the rich man in Hades with Odysseus' trip to Hades in *Odyssey* 11. Gilmour's six possible connections<sup>108</sup> between the two stories is often less than convincing, but they are not the value of his essay. Rather, Gilmour has rightly recognized the importance of parallels between the parable and stories narrating an otherworldly journey to Hades. In particular, Gilmour has shown that themes arising in Homer's *Odyssey* may cast light on the function of the parable.

Outi Lehtipuu is concerned in her monograph to recover an appreciation for the afterlife imagery in the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus. While she recognizes that the "point of the story lies elsewhere than in the revelation of the fate of the afterlife," she argues that "Luke wanted his audience to take the description seriously and made use of beliefs that were culturally acceptable."<sup>109</sup> The remainder of Lehtipuu's work is a study of the understanding of the afterlife in the ancient world, much of which proves helpful for the present study.

### *Bernard Brandon Scott: The Parable as Boundary*

As noted above, not all scholars interested in the cultural milieu of the parable focus on literary evidence from the ancient world. Instead, these scholars draw insights for sociological studies of life in the first century Mediterranean world. Bernard Brandon

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<sup>108</sup> Gilmour suggests the following: (1) The separation of the dead (*Od.* 11.204-205 – from the living; Luke 16:26 – from the righteous); (2) Unsatisfied thirst (*Od.* 11.583-587 – Tantalus; Luke 16:24 – the rich man); (3) Wealth in life not satisfying in life (*Od.* 11.488-491 – Achilles; Luke 16:19-31 – the overarching theme of the parable); (4) Concern for living loved ones (*Od.* 11.541-542 – spirits asking about those dear to them; Luke 16:27-28 – the rich man's brothers); (5) The value of burial (*Od.* 11.51-80 – Elpenor's plea for a proper burial; Luke 16:22 – the contrast between the burial of the rich man and lack of burial for Lazarus); and (6) A wise man in the afterlife (*Odyssey* – Teiresias; Luke 16:19-31 – Abraham); Michael J. Gilmour, "Hints of Homer in Luke 16:19-31?" *Did* 10 (1999): 28-31.

<sup>109</sup> Lehtipuu, *Afterlife Imagery*, 6, 7.

Scott's interpretation of the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus serves as both a bridge between the form-critical work of early scholars and as an example of the sociological criticism of scholars.<sup>110</sup> On the one hand, Scott attempts to identify the original form of the parable. On the other hand, Scott is interested in the social conditions of the first-century Mediterranean world that affect the way the audience receives the parable.<sup>111</sup> Since first-century social dynamics are part of Scott's hermeneutic for reading parables, I will begin with a discussion of this issue before discussing his view of the original form of the parable.

Scott pictures Mediterranean society in the first-century as "divided on two axes." The horizontal axis "reached out from the family to organize the social exchange for the society," while "the vertical axis centered on client-patron relations to organize society's power exchange." Throughout these social interactions, "the artifacts of daily life were often used to symbolize the larger transcendent values of life."<sup>112</sup> These three aspects of social life provide Scott with a system for categorizing the parables of Jesus. Using this scheme, Scott places the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus in the first section titled "Family, Village, City, and Beyond."<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Bernard Brandon Scott, *Hear Then the Parable: A Commentary on the Parables of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989). It should be noted that Scott's work on the parable is not the first to employ a sociological method. Elpidius Pax, for example, argues that the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus is best understood in light of the influence of "clan thinking" (*Clandenken*) on the rich man. In this view, the rich man does not fail to care for Lazarus because he is a transgressor of the law, or simply because Lazarus is poor. Rather, the rich man ignores Lazarus because he is not part of his family. This also explains why the rich man is concerned with his brothers at the conclusion to the parable. See Elpidius Pax, "Der Reiche und der arme Lazarus: Eine Milieustudie," *SBFLA* 25 (1975): 254-268.

<sup>111</sup> Scott writes, "The world of Jesus' parables is the Galilean village. The parables draw their repertoire from peasant experience"; Scott, *Hear Then the Parable*, 79.

<sup>112</sup> Scott, *Hear Then the Parable*, 73.

<sup>113</sup> Scott organizes the parables in the following sections: Family, Village, City, and Beyond; Masters and Servants; Home and Farm.

According to Scott, everyone in the ancient Mediterranean had a social map that “defined the individual’s place in the world.” This map “told people who they were, who they were related to, how to react, and how to behave.”<sup>114</sup> Scott also argues that this social map functions as a “metaphor for the kingdom” and social interaction in this structure “replicates those inside and outside the kingdom.”<sup>115</sup> With this grid in place the parables become “paradoxical” discourse in which Jesus “changes or challenges the implied structural network of associations.”<sup>116</sup> In this way, parables become a means of commentary on the social map of the first-century Mediterranean world.

The central social unit on this map was the family and all social organization moved “out in concentric circles from the family” to the village, city, and beyond.<sup>117</sup> The village, then, stood as a buffer zone between the family and the outside world. In addition to this, Scott understands the village as the central metaphorical representation of the kingdom. In village parables “different aspects of that implied metaphorical system derived from village life” are worked out. The purpose of this reenactment of village life is the subversion of the “the approved way of attaining the end.”<sup>118</sup> The parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus is identified as one of these parables of the village.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> Scott, *Hear Then the Parable*, 79.

<sup>115</sup> Scott, *Hear Then the Parable*, 84.

<sup>116</sup> Scott, *Hear Then the Parable*, 61. Scott uses the example of the parable of the leaven (Matt. 13:33/Luke 13:20-21) in which “a woman taking leaven and hiding it violates the primary associations of male power and moral goodness, driving a hearer into symbolic disjunction.”

<sup>117</sup> Scott, *Hear Then the Parable*, 73.

<sup>118</sup> Scott, *Hear Then the Parable*, 91.

<sup>119</sup> Scott, *Hear Then the Parable*, 85.

The importance of this identification can be seen in Scott's understanding of the three primary social "pressure points" on the first-century Mediterranean village. In the first place the ecosystem places pressure on villagers. The realities of "drought, famine, floods, overgrazing, and so forth" caused a life of subsistent existence. The village social system also generated its own stresses. Households and families were "required to maintain themselves in the face of individual needs and dissatisfactions." Scott has in mind here the migration of the young from the farm to the city as a result of the limited development due to overpopulation and the scarcity of land. This problem was exacerbated in Galilee by the high number of absentee landowners, which "placed great pressure on peasant solidarity."<sup>120</sup>

The presence of absentee landlords was related to the third pressure point on village life, the outside world. Peasants in the village community were at a great disadvantage due to "taxes, wars, harassment from the cities, and in the case of Galilee, foreign conquerors." These outside pressures caused the villagers to be suspicious of, and hostile toward, "city elites and the state."<sup>121</sup> The picture that develops is of an insular community that attempts to relieve these pressures as much as possible and spread the risk that they face as widely as possible.<sup>122</sup> In this context, the relationship between the wealthy elites and the village peasants is strained. This understanding of the social world of first-century Mediterranean villages is key to Scott's interpretation of the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus, as we will see below.

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<sup>120</sup> Scott, *Hear Then the Parable*, 85. For a recent assessment of the economy and society in first century Galilee with regard to the ownership of land, see Sean Freyne, "Jesus of Galilee: Implications and Possibilities," *Early Christianity* 1 (2010): 388-394.

<sup>121</sup> Scott, *Hear Then the Parable*, 86.

<sup>122</sup> See Scott, *Hear Then the Parable*, 86.

Before looking at Scott's interpretation of the parable, however, it is necessary to determine what parable he is interpreting. That is, what portion of the parable does Scott think is authentic and, thus, is the focus of his interpretation? Scott opens the discussion of the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus by quoting Luke 16:19-26. As we will see, he does not consider Luke 16:27-31 as part of the original parable.<sup>123</sup> In order to argue for this conclusion, Scott frames the discussion of the boundaries of the parable with the following three issues: (1) identification of a possible life situation for the parable; (2) a survey of the internal style of the parable; and (3) a look at the parable's narrative development. In this section the influence of Jülicher and other form critics is evident. Scott, however, builds his case primarily on John Dominic Crossan's brief interpretation of the parable.<sup>124</sup>

In terms of a possible life situation for the parable Scott disagrees with Bultmann's conclusion that Luke 16:27-31 came neither from Jesus nor the church and "was a piece of Jewish tradition attracted to the Jesus tradition."<sup>125</sup> He agrees, instead, with Crossan that there is a possible life situation in the early church that would explain the additional ending, namely Jewish unbelief in the message about Jesus and his resurrection.<sup>126</sup> Scott recognizes that this is not definitive evidence that Luke 16:27-31 is not original to the parable, so he turns to the second issue of the parable's style.

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<sup>123</sup> Cf. the difference in Scott's proposal from that of Jeremias discussed above. Jeremias argues that the most important part of the parable is Luke 16:27-31.

<sup>124</sup> John Dominic Crossan, *In Parables: The Challenge of the Historical Jesus* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), 66-68.

<sup>125</sup> Scott, *Hear Then the Parable*, 142.

<sup>126</sup> Scott, *Hear Then the Parable*, 142. See Crossan, *In Parables*, 66-67.

Scott again follows the argument of Crossan, who identifies thematic links between Luke 16:27-31 and Luke 24. Crossan argues that there are “too many links between this discussion of the ‘resurrection’ of the rich man and that concerning Jesus’ own resurrection in Luke 24 to be coincidence.”<sup>127</sup> These links are evidence that the ending of the parable is not original, but rather an addition by the early church. Crossan suggested four links that form the basis for Scott’s argument. First, the recurring theme of disbelief is found in Luke 16:31 is paralleled in Luke 24:11, 25, 41 where the disciples are slow to believe in the resurrection accounts and appearances.<sup>128</sup> Second, Abraham’s exhortation to pay attention to Moses and the prophets (Luke 16:29; cf. 16:31) is echoed in Jesus’ discussion with the disciples on the Emmaus road (Luke 24:27) and in his appearance to the disciples (Luke 24:44).<sup>129</sup> Scott also argues that the emphasis on the fulfillment of scripture in Luke’s account, which is absent from the other resurrection narratives, but prominent in the early kerygma, is another indication of the inauthenticity of Luke 16:27-31.<sup>130</sup> The third thematic link identified by Crossan is the use of the verb ἀνίστημι in Luke 16:31 and Luke 24:46.<sup>131</sup> That these are the only occurrences with the verb coupled with “from the dead” in Luke is seen as “more than coincidental” by

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<sup>127</sup> Crossan, *In Parables*, 67. It should be noted here that Crossan’s identification of the “someone from the dead” who rises (Luke 16:31) with the rich man is dubious in the immediate context of the parable. One problem that can be mentioned now, is that the rich man asks, specifically, that Lazarus “might be sent . . . to my father’s house” (Luke 16:27), a feature that seems to point away from a reference to Jesus’ resurrection. This important element of the parable will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Five.

<sup>128</sup> Scott, *Hear Then the Parable*, 143 (cf. Crossan, *In Parables*, 67). Scott mistakenly cites Luke 24:12 as the first example of disbelief.

<sup>129</sup> Crossan, *In Parables*, 67.

<sup>130</sup> Scott, *Hear Then the Parable*, 143.

<sup>131</sup> Crossan, *In Parables*, 67.

Scott.<sup>132</sup> Finally, Crossan appeals to the use of “they will repent” in Luke 16:30 and the frequency of this same language in “kerygmatic contexts” in Acts.<sup>133</sup>

Scott admits that on first look, “such a lean presentation of the evidence seems less than convincing,”<sup>134</sup> but thinks that Crossan has planted the seeds of an idea that proves the inauthenticity of Luke 16:27-31. Scott then expands on Crossan’s argument in the following ways: (1) highlighting the importance of repentance in Luke; (2) noting further similarities between the final speech in Luke 24:44-47 and Luke 16:27-31; and (3) the use of διαμαρτύρομαι and πειθώ in Luke and Acts. In the first place, Scott picks up Crossan’s reference to the theme of repentance in Acts and shows that Luke has added the importance of repentance to his Gospel. For example, in comparison to Matthew, Luke ends his comment on the sign of Jonah with a reference to repentance (Luke 11:32), includes a saying on the joy of the angels over a sinner who repents in his version of the Lost Sheep (Luke 15:7), and refers to repentance in the saying on forgiving a brother who sins (17:3-4).<sup>135</sup> Secondly, Scott attempts to “refocus Crossan’s argument” about the relationship between Luke 16:27-31 and Luke 24:44-47 by highlighting the shared phrases “Moses and the prophets,” “rise from the dead,” and “repentance.” Moreover, Scott argues that the theme of disbelief is also present in the words “He opened their minds to understand the scripture” (Luke 24:45).<sup>136</sup> Finally, Scott adds to Crossan’s

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<sup>132</sup> Scott, *Hear Then the Parable*, 143. The conclusions drawn here about the use of ἀνίστημι in the Gospel of Luke will be critiqued in Chapter Five.

<sup>133</sup> Crossan, *In Parables*, 67. Crossan cites Acts 2:38; 3:19; 8:22; 17:30; and 26:20.

<sup>134</sup> Scott, *Hear Then the Parable*, 144.

<sup>135</sup> Scott, *Hear Then the Parable*, 144.

<sup>136</sup> Scott, *Hear Then the Parable*, 144.



argument by noting the use of the verb διαμαρτύρομαι in Luke 16:28 and πειθώ in 16:31. The use of these verbs, which is common in Acts,<sup>137</sup> is further evidence of Luke's redaction of the original parable of Jesus, which should end at Luke 16:26.

Scott's final argument regarding the limits of the original parable is the narrative development of the parable. Scott begins with Jeremias' classification of the parable as "one of four 'double-edged' parables in which the emphasis falls on the second edge."<sup>138</sup> Although Scott is not convinced by Jeremias' reading of these parables,<sup>139</sup> the classification "does clarify and enlighten our problem."<sup>140</sup> In particular, since the first part of the parable does not prepare the reader for the second part (i.e, the discussion of the rich man's brothers), the second part is a later addition to the parable.<sup>141</sup> On this basis, Scott concludes that "the present conclusion to the parable was appended to relate the parable to Jewish disbelief in Jesus' messiahship."<sup>142</sup> Therefore, "once Abraham pronounces the chasm, the great dividing line, the story has reached its conclusion" and "has exhausted its possibilities."<sup>143</sup> What is left is an ending that has been reworked by

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<sup>137</sup> Scott notes that διαμαρτύρομαι occurs nine times in Luke and Acts, but only once in the synoptics, and that πειθώ occurs 21 times in Luke and Acts; Scott, *Hear Then the Parable*, 145, fn. 13. He does not, however, mention that πειθώ occurs only four times in Luke.

<sup>138</sup> Scott, *Hear Then the Parable*, 145. See also Jeremias, *Parables*, 186, 37-38. The others are (using Scott's titles): A Man Gave a Banquet (Matt. 22:1-14), A Man Had Two Sons (Luke 15:11-32), and A Householder Went Out Early (Matt. 20:1-16).

<sup>139</sup> Scott, *Hear Then the Parable*, 145. Scott notes that Jeremias regarded the second portion of A Man Gave a Banquet (Matt. 22:1-14) as a Matthean addition, which, for Scott, makes it a problematic example. He also argues that neither A Man Had Two Sons nor A Householder Went Out Early are truly "double-edged." Each of these parables is a coherent whole because the first part sets up the second part.

<sup>140</sup> Scott, *Hear Then The Parable*, 146.

<sup>141</sup> Scott, *Hear Then The Parable*, 146.

<sup>142</sup> Scott, *Hear Then The Parable*, 146.

<sup>143</sup> Scott, *Hear Then the Parable*, 146.

Luke “to fit his apologetic needs, which were highly congruent with both the parable proper (wealth and poverty) and belief in the resurrection.”<sup>144</sup>

The parable that Scott interprets, then, is Luke 16:19-26 and is essentially about the reversal of socio-economic boundaries.<sup>145</sup> Scott divides the parable into two main parts: narration (Luke 16:19-23) and conversation (Luke 16:24-26).<sup>146</sup> In the first part, the rich man and Lazarus are introduced in parallel, which sets up “opposing pictures of the two characters”<sup>147</sup> that prepares for the reversal in the second main part of the parable. Following other commentators, Scott highlights the lavish lifestyle of the rich man, but he goes beyond other interpreters by noting that the rich man’s position makes him a potential patron, “one of those on whom the society at large is dependent.”<sup>148</sup> Thus, the rich man is characterized as someone who was able to aid Lazarus.<sup>149</sup>

The potential aid of the rich man, however, is never realized and the gate of the rich man’s house becomes a barrier between the rich man and Lazarus. Lazarus is laid at the gate of the rich man, longing to eat the scraps from the rich man’s table, but the rich man never crosses the boundary to offer help. Scott rightly warns against reading Lazarus’ plight through the lens of modern “sentimentality and liberalism,”<sup>150</sup> but sees an

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<sup>144</sup> Scott, *Hear Then the Parable*, 146.

<sup>145</sup> Scott writes, “After death, when the rich man and Lazarus have both crossed through the last gate, the boundary that divided them in life divides them in death, but their status is reversed”; Scott, *Hear Then the Parable*, 146.

<sup>146</sup> Scott, *Hear Then the Parable*, 146.

<sup>147</sup> See Scott, *Hear Then the Parable*, 146-147. Scott divides the first part of the parable into three subsections in order to highlight the parallel introductions.

<sup>148</sup> Scott, *Hear Then the Parable*, 149.

<sup>149</sup> See also Wolter, *Lukasevangelium*, 559.

<sup>150</sup> Scott, *Hear Then the Parable*, 151.

“expectation that the rich man will become the poor man’s patron,” despite the fact that the places of the poor and rich are fixed “in a limited-goods society.”<sup>151</sup> In this reading the rich man has abdicated his social responsibility to care for the poor as patron. Upon death, the fate of the rich man and Lazarus is reversed. While there is nothing novel in Scott’s recognition of the reversal of fortune, his focus on the reversal of boundaries is important. Just as the gate at the rich man’s house had separated Lazarus from the care he could have received from the rich man, so now the rich man finds himself on the wrong side of the “great divide” that is “fixed for all time.”<sup>152</sup>

What, then, is the meaning of the parable? According to Scott, the greatest problem in the parable is the failure to cross boundaries: “Had the rich man walked through the gate, his fate in the afterlife would have been much different.”<sup>153</sup> As noted above, Scott is hesitant to infer too much regarding the exact reason for the rich man’s judgment, recognizing that the sin of the rich man is “implied.”<sup>154</sup> He does argue, however, that “in the parable the kingdom almost literally replicates the village, but in reverse.”<sup>155</sup> Thus, the “rich man’s fault is that he does not pass through the gate to help Lazarus.”<sup>156</sup> He has failed to live in solidarity with Lazarus.<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>151</sup> Scott, *Hear Then the Parable*, 151.

<sup>152</sup> Scott, *Hear Then the Parable*, 154.

<sup>153</sup> Scott, *Hear Then the Parable*, 155.

<sup>154</sup> Scott, *Hear Then the Parable*, 155.

<sup>155</sup> Scott, *Hear Then the Parable*, 158.

<sup>156</sup> Scott, *Hear Then the Parable*, 158.

<sup>157</sup> See Scott, *Hear Then the Parable*, 159: “The standard is not moral behavior as individual, isolated acts but the ability to go through the gate, metaphorically, to the other side, solidarity.” See also Scott, *Hear Then the Parable*, 159.

The power of this message is made effective for the reader against the background of the story of Setme and Si-Osiris suggested by Gressmann. According to Scott, the Egyptian tale provides a “mythical structure to which the parable belongs.”<sup>158</sup> He identifies this structure as “the kingdom as the manifestation of God’s righteousness in the face of injustice.”<sup>159</sup> The difference in Luke’s version, however, is the lack of a third person in the tale who “confronts a situation that appears to deny God’s justice.”<sup>160</sup> With the lack of the third person in Luke’s parable, the reader is drawn into the story and “forced to confront both Lazarus and the rich man as images of the hearer.”<sup>161</sup> The story, then is a metaphor for the “menace that Jesus’ announcement of the kingdom of God places on ordinary life. In any given interpersonal or social relationship there is a gate that discloses the ultimate depths of human existence. Those who miss that gate may, like the rich man, find themselves crying in vain for a drop of cooling water.”<sup>162</sup>

*William Herzog: The Parable as Codification*

Like Bernard Brandon Scott, William Herzog reads the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus against the background of socio-economic conditions in first century Mediterranean culture. Unlike Scott, Herzog attempts to read the parable as a narrative unit. I will begin with a summary of Herzog’s overall approach to studying the parables of Jesus before summarizing his reading of the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus.

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<sup>158</sup> Scott, *Hear Then the Parable*, 157.

<sup>159</sup> Scott, *Hear Then the Parable*, 158 (cf. 157).

<sup>160</sup> Scott, *Hear Then the Parable*, 158.

<sup>161</sup> Scott, *Hear Then the Parable*, 158.

<sup>162</sup> Scott, *Hear Then the Parable*, 159.

Herzog opens his work on the parables of Jesus by posing the following questions:

This study of the parables poses a problem that can be expressed in a series of questions: What if the parables of Jesus were neither theological nor moral stories but political and economic ones? What if the concern of the parables was not the reign of God but the reigning systems of oppression that dominated Palestine in the time of Jesus? What if the scenes they presented were not stories about how God works in the world but codifications about how exploitation worked in Palestine? What if Jesus' parables were more like Paulo Freire's 'codifications' than like sermon illustrations? What if the parables are exposing exploitation rather than revealing justification? What would all this mean for a reading of the parables?<sup>163</sup>

With these questions Herzog distances himself from traditional readings of the parables and sets the direction for his study of the parables. In the first place, Herzog is critical of traditional readings of the parables as moral and theological statements about the kingdom of God. In the second place, Herzog argues that the key to interpreting the parables is the social structures that dominated Palestine during the life of Jesus. In this way, parables become codifications of the dominant social script, exposing the unjust treatment of the poor by those in power.

Herzog begins his critique of the history of parable interpretation with the form critical interpretation of the parables exemplified by Bultmann, Dodd, and Jeremias. He argues that, on the one hand, the form critics were right to separate the original parables of Jesus from the theological commentary added by the Gospel writers.<sup>164</sup> The form

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<sup>163</sup> William R. Herzog II, *Parables as Subversive Speech* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994), 7.

<sup>164</sup> The Gospel writers "had selectively invested [the parables] with theological and ethical meanings consistent with their larger themes and concerns"; Herzog, *Parables*, 11. These additions are called " 'theologory,' a kind of allegory in the making but incomplete, inconsistent, and highly selective" and are a problematic feature of the Gospel accounts of the parables; Herzog, *Parables*, 12. In particular, Herzog argues that the narrative context added by the Gospel writers constricts the meaning of the parable. Thus, the field of influence should be widened in order to accurately understand the impact of the parables.

critics, however, did not move past the errors of the Gospel writers, but also invested the parables with moral and theological meaning, in essence repeating the errors of the Gospel writers. The problem of theologizing the parables was exacerbated by the rise of redaction criticism, which focused on reading parables as “a vehicle for the evangelist’s theology and ethics.”<sup>165</sup> Literary-critical approaches associated with Crossan, Funk, Scott, and Via that focused on the “narrativity and metaphoricity” of the parables moved beyond the focus of redaction critics on the theology of the parables to a consideration of a parable’s structure and form. These readings also focused on how parables “generated interiorized apocalypses in which one’s individual perception of reality was subverted, shattered, and reconstituted.”<sup>166</sup> The focus on the existential impact of the parables, however, also fell short.

The root problem of these traditional methods of parable interpretation is the production of “ ‘idealist’ readings of the parables, without much regard for their ‘materialist’ scenes.”<sup>167</sup> That is, in readings that focus on theology, ethics, and the metaphorical value of the parable “the fate of the social world or social scripts glimpsed in the parable was the same: they were ignored or, after cursory examination, neglected.”<sup>168</sup> The result of the failure to take seriously the social context of the parables

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For Herzog, this means reading the parables of Jesus in light of the “reigning systems of oppression” in Palestine at the time of Jesus; Herzog, *Parables*, 12.

<sup>165</sup> Herzog, *Parables*, 12. See also Herzog, *Parables*, 44-46 for a further critique of redaction criticism.

<sup>166</sup> Herzog, *Parables*, 13.

<sup>167</sup> Herzog, *Parables*, 13. “Idealist” readings are those “that center in the ideas generated by the parable”; “materialist” readings are those “that center in the social, political, and economic condition presented in the parable”; Herzog, *Parables*, 269, n. 2.

<sup>168</sup> Herzog, *Parables*, 13. The root cause of the failure of the form critics, in particular, is that they did not take seriously the “social scene” in the parables. Instead, the social scenes were understood as

was the creation of a Jesus in the image of the interpreter.<sup>169</sup> According to Herzog, this type of Jesus who dispensed “spiritual truth and divine wisdom” in the form of parables would hardly have been worthy of a humiliating death at the hands of the Jewish leaders in Palestine. He must have had a more threatening message to the social and political systems of his time.<sup>170</sup> Therefore, the task of the interpreter of the parables is to better reconstruct the historical situation in which Jesus lived.<sup>171</sup>

Herzog begins his reconstruction of the historical situation by identifying his understanding of the nature of the task: “The task of historical inquiry is to test the feasibility of the originating hypothesis rather than to confirm the outcome hidden at the beginning of a project, which covertly controls its subsequent course before emerging as an assured result at its close.”<sup>172</sup> Historical inquiry, then, begins with a hypothesis that is

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“ciphers, whose secret message had to be decoded so that its true meaning could be explicated.” Inevitably, the form critics would interpret the ciphers as the Gospel writers had, in terms of theology and ethics. Thus, despite the fact that the form critics recognized the additions made by the Gospel writers, they repeated the same mistakes because the “semantic field of the parables remained in the realm of theology and ethics”; Herzog, *Parables*, 11-12.

<sup>169</sup> Herzog is explicit about the relationship between his comments and Albert Schweitzer’s critique of the quest for the historical Jesus. Herzog writes, “Jeremias envisions Jesus as a cross between a rabbi and a Christian theologian; Kenneth Bailey believes him to have been a poet and a peasant; John Dominic Crossan, a master of metaphor and poet of the interior apocalypse; Dan Via, a purveyor of existential philosophy through comic and tragic stories; Robert Funk a poetic philosopher who inaugurated a new language tradition that undermined its ossified predecessor. By turns, Jesus is a poet, philosopher, ethicist, theologian, storyteller in the tradition of Franz Kafka or Jorge Luis Borges, ‘Christian’ rabbi, Jewish rabbi, Lutheran theologian, preacher, and Christian minister in disguise”; Herzog, *Parables*, 14-15.

<sup>170</sup> Herzog, *Parables*, 9. Herzog returns to this issue later in his work when he writes, “If he had been the kind of teacher popularly portrayed in the North American church, a master of the inner life, teaching the importance of spirituality and a private relationship with God, he would have been supported by the Romans”; Herzog, *Parables*, 27. Moreover, “Had Jesus’ parables indulged in apocalyptic speculation or threatened the end of the world, he would have been watched but left alone”; Herzog, *Parables*, 27.

<sup>171</sup> It is important to recognize that Herzog does not begin his search for the historical situation naively. He is well aware, for example, that an interpreter’s view of Jesus is integral to an interpreter’s understanding of the parables of Jesus; Herzog, *Parables*, 14. In light of this, Herzog does not claim a unique level of objectivity, but rather is explicit about his operational paradigm.

<sup>172</sup> Herzog, *Parables*, 16.

then tested to see if it holds up to the evidence. One way in which hypotheses are constructed is by the application of new theoretical frameworks that “create new facts or allow us to see new significance in data that we had overlooked because we either did not see it or deemed it insignificant.”<sup>173</sup>

The contemporary analogy that Herzog uses in his hypothesis for understanding the parables of Jesus is Brazilian educator Paulo Freire and his role as “pedagogue of the oppressed.”<sup>174</sup> In particular, Herzog is interested in Freire’s literacy campaigns among the poor. Freire’s methodology of codifying the language of Brazilian peasants, rather than using the language of elite members of society, as he taught them to read is particularly important.<sup>175</sup> As the language codifications of the elite is decoded, problematized, and recodified, the marginalized become active subjects, able to understand their world and what has been done to them.<sup>176</sup> This allows the peasants to

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<sup>173</sup> Herzog, *Parables*, 16 (cf. 48-51). Herzog interacts approvingly with the work of John Gager *Kingdom and Community: The Social world of Early Christianity* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1975), 2-18.

<sup>174</sup> Herzog, *Parables*, 16. Herzog is not unaware of the dangers in appealing to a modern figure as a key to understanding Jesus. He is not attempting to “depict Jesus of Nazareth as a first-century version of Paulo Freire”; Herzog, *Parables*, 16. Rather, Herzog highlights the similarities between Jesus and Freire in order to show how their work is analogous. First, both Jesus and Freire had the same type of students. These students were poor, illiterate peasants, who were oppressed and marginalized in their societies. Second, their social situations were similar, since both lived in “advanced agrarian,” “Mediterranean” societies. These societies were “deformed by colonial exploitation” that shaped the lives of the people. Third, although the religious structures were different in the details, both Jesus and Freire lived in societies in which “leading priestly figures sanction and bless the impoverishment and degradation of peasant life by urban elites with whom they tend to identify and whose economic and political interests coincide with their own.” Thus, Jesus and Freire were aware of “the power of what we call religion to liberate and oppress”; see Herzog, *Parables*, 25-26.

<sup>175</sup> Freire’s method was much different from what was commonly used. As Herzog writes, “Freire organized interdisciplinary teams of participant-observers to live with peasants so that they could piece together their view of the world. This task entailed researching the vocabulary of the villagers and studying their habits of speech. Out of the peasants’ daily discourse, the participant-observers were able to identify ‘generative words’ that gave expression to the speakers’ ‘thematic universe’ ”; Herzog, *Parables*, 19. In this way, the peasants were freed from the “thematic universe” of the ruling class.

<sup>176</sup> Herzog, *Parables*, 19 (cf. 19-23 for Herzog’s summary of Freire’s method).



challenge the oppressive social structures that have caused their marginalization and participate in the making of their own history.

By analogy, Herzog argues that “Jesus used parables to present situations familiar to the rural poor, to encode the systems of oppression that controlled their lives and held them in bondage.”<sup>177</sup> Parables, then, are the means by which Jesus was able “to stimulate social analysis and to expose the contradictions between the actual situation of [the] hearers and the Torah of God's justice.”<sup>178</sup> This was a risky practice because as the oppressed and marginalized became aware of their “political and economic situation, including the humanly designed systems that created it and perpetuated it,” they may choose to revolt.<sup>179</sup> With this understanding of Herzog's approach to parable interpretation, we can now move on to his comments on the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus.

The first interpretive move that Herzog makes is to critique past attempts to divide the parable into two discrete sections that have been brought together by Luke. Instead, he treats the entire parable as a parable of Jesus and reads it in light of the “social structure of an advanced agrarian society.”<sup>180</sup> The parable “brings together figures from

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<sup>177</sup> Herzog, *Parables*, 27.

<sup>178</sup> Herzog, *Parables*, 28.

<sup>179</sup> Herzog, *Parables*, 28. Herzog again states his belief that Jesus' use of parables was integral to the cause of his death: “Employing Freire's work to construct a larger image of Jesus' public activity offers another advantage because it bridges the apparent gap between traditional roles often ascribed to Jesus, such as rabbi or teacher, on the one hand, and his death in Jerusalem at the hands of urban elites and colonial overlords, on the other. How could an educator be executed as a political subversive?”; Herzog, *Parables*, 28.

<sup>180</sup> Herzog, *Parables*, 116-117.

the extremes of that social structure.”<sup>181</sup> On the one side of the social spectrum is the rich man. Like Scott, Herzog focuses on the social position of the rich man. Unlike Scott, Herzog reads the rich man as a wholly negative character.<sup>182</sup> He is a member of “the urban elite, the class that controls wealth, power, and privilege.”<sup>183</sup> This is evident first in his dress, which is often noted by previous interpreters. Herzog, however, interprets the dress in a more nefarious way, as a “display [of] his great wealth as a form of conspicuous consumption.”<sup>184</sup> The identification of the rich man as a member of the social elite is further confirmed by the mention of the rich man’s gate, which is an indication that the rich man lived in a large house or mansion. Herzog writes, “With these deft strokes, Jesus has sketched the life of the urban elite whose ‘houses’ (*oikoi*) control the political and economic life of the preindustrial city and its surrounding countryside.”<sup>185</sup> The negative characterization of the rich man continues in the second part of the parable and will be discussed below.

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<sup>181</sup> Herzog, *Parables*, 117. In this way, the parable is a codification that “brings together figures who were normally kept apart”; Herzog, *Parables*, 120. The purpose is to allow Jesus’ audience to interpret the two extremes in light of each other.

<sup>182</sup> Herzog explicitly rejects Scott’s claim that the rich man could have been Lazarus’ patron for reasons that will be discussed below; Herzog, *Parables*, 120.

<sup>183</sup> Herzog, *Parables*, 117. Herzog’s interpretation of the rich man’s character differs greatly from previous attempts to understand his role in society. Both Oesterley (*The Gospel Parables in Light of Their Jewish Background* [London: SPCK, 1963]) and T.W. Manson (*The Sayings of Jesus* [London: SCM Press, 1949]) focused on the religious affiliation of the rich man: was he a Pharisee (Oesterley) or a Sadducee (Manson)? Herzog thinks this argument misses the mark because it distracts “from the social and economic contrast that animates the story” and replaces “those social concerns with religious questions”; Herzog, *Parables*, 117-118. For Herzog, the “central contrast of the parable focuses on the great class disparity between the rich man and Lazarus”; Herzog, *Parables*, 118.

<sup>184</sup> Herzog, *Parables*, 117.

<sup>185</sup> Herzog, *Parables*, 118. Moreover, Herzog echoes Scott in interpreting the gate as a boundary marker. For Herzog, however, the gate “symbolizes the social barrier between the elites and the expendables”; Herzog, *Parables*, 120.

On the other side of the social spectrum is poor Lazarus. Herzog deals with many of the interpretive issues that have occupied previous scholars, but he reads them through the lens of the dominant social scripts. For example, Herzog argues that the statement that Lazarus “had been placed at [the rich man’s] gate” (ἐβλέβητο),<sup>186</sup> is an indication that Lazarus had been “thrown down” or “cast down . . . by fate or other unspecified forces.”<sup>187</sup> A purpose of the parable, then, “is to disclose some of those forces.”<sup>188</sup> Another example of the importance of the dominant social scripts is seen in Herzog’s interpretation of the scraps of food that Lazarus longed to eat. He views interpretations that appeal to Jewish purity laws as misguided.<sup>189</sup> Rather, he appeals to those that highlight the practice of using scraps of bread as napkins<sup>190</sup> as an indication that the practice is “another form of conspicuous consumption that turned the necessities of life into disposables.”<sup>191</sup>

Nowhere, however, is Herzog’s interpretive framework more evident than in his description of the causes of Lazarus’ poor condition. While the majority of interpreters are hesitant to discuss the wider context of Lazarus’ social status, Herzog’s interpretive

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<sup>186</sup> For a more cautious assessment of the force of ἐβλέβητο see Martin M. Culy, Mikeal C. Parsons, and Joshua Jay Stigall, *Luke: A Handbook on the Greek Text* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2010), 530. Regardless of the particular nuance of the verb, Lazarus is depicted in a negative light. As François Bovon writes, “Lazarus was not the master of his fate,” but was “stranded at the rich man’s gate”; Bovon, *Lukas*, 3.3.119.

<sup>187</sup> Herzog, *Parables*, 118.

<sup>188</sup> Herzog, *Parables*, 118.

<sup>189</sup> Herzog cites Jeremias, *Parables*, 184.

<sup>190</sup> He cites Claude Montefiore (*The Synoptic Gospels* [London: Macmillan, 1909], 2:1003) and Oesterley (*The Gospel Parables*, 1936, 205).

<sup>191</sup> Herzog, *Parables*, 118.

framework provides a potentially new insight.<sup>192</sup> Herzog argues that Lazarus was probably born in the country, either on a peasant farm or in a village. He may have been the second or third son in the family, which would have disqualified him from inheriting land from his father. Once he began to consume more than he could produce, he probably moved away from the farm in search of work as a day laborer. When he was unsuccessful, he may have moved to the city in search of work.<sup>193</sup> Lazarus, however, was no more successful in the city, which was overrun with peasants from the villages looking for work. While the rich preferred this situation because it drove down wages, “day laborers were robbed of any bargaining power.”<sup>194</sup> In this situation, Lazarus became malnourished and, as his body deteriorated and he became susceptible to disease, was no longer able to compete for jobs. Reduced to begging, Lazarus was no longer a candidate for patronage and he knew his end was near.<sup>195</sup>

As the majority of interpreters notice, the second portion of the parable represents a reversal of fortune of the rich man and Lazarus. The two figures find themselves in Hades,<sup>196</sup> separated by a chasm that is interpreted as a “social construction of reality” in which the metaphorical separation of the rich man and Lazarus by means of the gate is

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<sup>192</sup> The following discussion of the social scripts that inform Herzog’s understanding of Lazarus is a summary of Herzog, *Parables*, 119-120.

<sup>193</sup> Herzog conjectures that Lazarus may have even “tried to catch on with an artisan,” but this was to no avail; Herzog, *Parables*, 119.

<sup>194</sup> Herzog, *Parables*, 119.

<sup>195</sup> The speculative nature of this summary is obvious, but it is not unrealistic in the first-century world.

<sup>196</sup> Herzog is insistent that “Hades does *not* equal hell,” which means that this is not a scene of final judgment. Rather, Hades is a “waiting place, where righteous and sinners are gathered after death but separated from each other.” Because Hades is a waiting place, Abraham and the rich man are able to converse using kinship language. See Herzog, *Parables*, 122.

now given a physical representation. Now, however, the means of separation that had “protected the rich man from street people like Lazarus . . . now protects Lazarus from the predatory rich man.”<sup>197</sup> Even in death the rich man, “accustomed to issuing orders and having them obeyed,” demands that Lazarus behave as Abraham’s “errand boy” to meet the needs of the rich man in his torment.<sup>198</sup> Fortunately, the chasm prevents Lazarus from “instinctively obeying the command of the rich man” and Abraham is able to begin his “pedagogy of the oppressor.”<sup>199</sup> The rich man’s fundamental problem is his failure to recognize Lazarus as his kin,<sup>200</sup> which leads to his ignorance of his sin. Rather than “wailing, weeping, and gnashing his teeth like a proper sinner, he tries to weasel his way out by bargaining with Abraham while the flames keep licking his feet.”<sup>201</sup> Abraham refuses to be “bullied” and denies the rich man’s requests.<sup>202</sup>

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<sup>197</sup> Herzog, *Parables*, 122.

<sup>198</sup> Herzog, *Parables*, 123. See, however, Wolter, who argues that the request of rich man is an example of his suffering, not his continued intransigence; Wolter, *Lukasevangelium*, 560. See also the more sympathetic comments of Bovon, *Lukas*, 3.3.110-111, 121-122.

<sup>199</sup> Herzog, *Parables*, 123. Herzog is clear in this section that Abraham’s response to the rich man is a chastisement of the rich man’s oppression. Other interpreters, however, think that the tone of Abraham’s response is less negative. Klein, for example, characterizes Abraham’s response to the rich man as “friendly”; Klein, *Lukasevangelium*, 555.

<sup>200</sup> Herzog, *Parables*, 123. See also Pax, “Milieustudie,” 254-268.

<sup>201</sup> Herzog, *Parables*, 124. Herzog disagrees with Oesterley (*The Gospel Parables*, 1936, 201ff) that the rich man’s pleas represent his recognition of his wrongdoing. Rather, “the plea bargain underscores the rich man’s blindness. He uses kinship terms (father, brothers), but they are confined to members of his house and, by extension, to members of his class. For the rich man, class solidarity and kinship loyalty define the world and his arena of concern”; Herzog, *Parables*, 124. François Bovon, however, argues that the rich man’s repeated attempts are not egocentric; Bovon, *Lukas*, 3.3.111.

<sup>202</sup> Herzog, *Parables*, 124. Herzog’s negative characterization of the rich man continues: he is “bargaining for special treatment” and “blaming God for his predicament.” By asking Abraham to send someone to warn his brothers, the rich man is “proposing an improvement on the divine provision of the Torah,” and, thus, even in his last request he refers to Lazarus as a tool that can be used “to execute his proposal”; see Herzog, *Parables*, 125.

By reading the parable as a unified whole the social distinction between Lazarus and the rich man is highlighted. In this way, the parable functions as a codification of the social problems that faced Jesus' audience. On the one hand, wealth, which is routinely identified as a sign of the blessing of God,<sup>203</sup> is shown to lead to Hades when it is "obtained only by the systemic exploitation of the poor."<sup>204</sup> It is a sign of the twisting of Torah by the urban elites, who "lived at the expense of the poor," focused on purity laws, rather than care for the poor, and used their wealth "in conspicuous consumption."<sup>205</sup> In this reading wealth is a "curse on the land."<sup>206</sup> On the other hand, the idea that poverty is a sign of condemnation that legitimated the mistreatment of the poor is shown to be false based on Lazarus' reception to the bosom of Abraham. The parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus successfully undermines these popular values and through it "the assorted rural poor of Galilee or Judaea who heard the parable could inquire into reasons for their misery that were much closer to home."<sup>207</sup> Thus, the parable recodifies the popular social script, allowing the poor to understand their oppression and make steps towards seeking justice.

Herzog's discussion of the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus is important in the history of research for at least two reasons. First, Herzog's desire to read the parable

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<sup>203</sup> See Herzog, *Parables*, 120.

<sup>204</sup> Herzog, *Parables*, 128.

<sup>205</sup> Herzog, *Parables*, 128.

<sup>206</sup> Herzog, *Parables*, 128.

<sup>207</sup> Herzog, *Parables*, 129. This new view of wealth and poverty also served to undermine the teaching of the scribes for the Torah in general. Herzog raises the question, "If the scribes were wrong about this matter, could they be trusted to interpret the Torah in other matters?" In this way, "the parable discloses a loose thread capable of unraveling a much larger pattern"; Herzog, *Parables*, 130.

as a coherent whole is commendable. As we have seen above, attempts to identify the “original” parable of Jesus are problematic. Second, Herzog’s reading of the parable in light of the dominant social scripts of the first-century Mediterranean world exemplifies a “materialist” reading of the parable. Herzog is to be commended for his recognition of the mistreatment of the poor in the first-century Mediterranean world at the hands of the elite, although at times his conclusions seem overly speculative and harsh.<sup>208</sup>

*Kenneth E. Bailey: The Parable Read through “Middle Eastern Eyes”*

The method of Kenneth Bailey’s interpretation of the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus is similar to the methods employed by Scott and Herzog, in that he is concerned with the impact of socio-economic conditions on interpretation. Unlike other interpreters, however, Bailey is interested in reading the parable through “Middle Eastern eyes” that is not confined to a first century context.<sup>209</sup> According to Bailey, “the Gospels are primarily stories of and about Jesus. Jesus was a Middle Easterner and thus traditional Middle Eastern culture is an important key to unlock the meanings of those stories.”<sup>210</sup> In the case of the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus, Middle Eastern “pearly-gate stories”

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<sup>208</sup> This is particularly evident in Herzog’s characterization of the rich man in Hades. As noted above, Herzog’s characterization of the rich man is wholly negative. In Hades, the rich man appeals to Abraham for mercy by asking that Lazarus be sent to relieve his torment. Herzog reads the imperatives used by the rich man as signs of a man issuing orders. This cannot be supported by the use of the imperative mood alone. Moreover, the rich man’s request is for mercy (ἐλέησόν), which is hardly the request of a man in power. See, for example, the use of the imperative ἐλέησόν in Luke 18:38 where the blind man cries out, “Jesus! Son of David! Take pity on me!” Nonetheless, these supposed demands made by the rich man are interpreted as attempts to “shield his class from the consequences of their luxury”; Herzog, *Parables*, 124.

<sup>209</sup> See the title of his *Jesus through Middle Eastern Eyes: Cultural Studies in the Gospels* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2008).

<sup>210</sup> Kenneth E. Bailey, “The New Testament Job: The Parable of Lazarus and the Rich Man; An Exercise in Middle Eastern New Testament Studies,” *TR* 29 (2008): 17. It is important to recognize that Bailey is attempting to read the Gospels through modern Middle Eastern eyes and relies much on his experience as a missionary in Lebanon.

provide the interpretive key.<sup>211</sup> These pearly-gate stories are “often humorous and have nothing to do with the teller’s understanding of eschatology.”<sup>212</sup> Rather, they are stories that “offer political commentary on the ambiguities of public life in the Middle East.”<sup>213</sup> Read against this background, the parable is primarily a comment on the social relationship between the poor and rich.<sup>214</sup>

Indeed, the focus of the parable on socio-economic concerns can be seen in the immediate context, which includes a warning against improper use of wealth (Luke 16:9-13). Bailey identifies three points relevant to his argument. First, Jesus’ comment that no servant can serve two masters indicates that material possessions “assume the characteristics of a personified force seeking mastery.”<sup>215</sup> Second, if a person succumbs to the efforts of this force, they will not be entrusted with the truth.<sup>216</sup> The primary effect of this is that those who are unfaithful with material possessions “will never understand the gospel.”<sup>217</sup> Bailey argues that the third point builds off of the second. He translates

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<sup>211</sup> Bailey, *Middle Eastern Eyes*, 378. In addition to the chapter in this book and the article in *Theological Review* cited above, Bailey has commented on the parable in “The Clothes Horse and the Beggar,” *Stewardship Magazine* (vol. 2; Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 2001), 4-6. Each of these works are substantively equivalent and I will focus my discussion on *Jesus through Middle Eastern Eyes*, except where necessary.

<sup>212</sup> Bailey, *Middle Eastern Eyes*, 378.

<sup>213</sup> Bailey, *Middle Eastern Eyes*, 378.

<sup>214</sup> This is a similar conclusion to both Scott and Herzog, but for different methodological reasons.

<sup>215</sup> Bailey, *Middle Eastern Eyes*, 379.

<sup>216</sup> Bailey, *Middle Eastern Eyes*, 379. Bailey bases this conclusion on his idiosyncratic translation of Luke 16:11: “If you have not been faithful in unrighteous mammon, who will entrust the truth to you?” Despite the fact that virtually all other translations add either the phrase “true riches” (e.g., NASB, NIV, NRSV) or the phrase “true wealth” (e.g., Culy, Parsons, and Stigall, *Luke*, 516), Bailey translates the substantival adjective τὸ ἀληθινόν as “truth.” The basis for this translation is a perceived word play in Aramaic underlying the Greek.

<sup>217</sup> Bailey, *Middle Eastern Eyes*, 379. The example of unfaithful stewardship give by Bailey is not paying taxes. This example seems out of place in the context of Luke 16.



Luke 16:12, “If you have not been faithful in what is *another’s*, what is *your own* who will give to you?” The conclusion drawn here is that faithlessness with material possessions leads to spiritual dullness.<sup>218</sup> According to Bailey, these three points drawn from the context present the reader with “a story of two people; one served God and the other mammon.”<sup>219</sup> Thus, the message of the parable is both social and spiritual.<sup>220</sup>

The rich man’s mismanagement of his resources is vividly pictured by Bailey. He understands the rich man to be a “self-indulgent” man, “who cares for no one but himself.”<sup>221</sup> Although he owned other clothes, he chose to dress in his most expensive and extravagant purple robes over his luxurious undergarments “to ensure that everyone knew he had money.” Bailey sees this as the overpowering “impulse to drive his ‘gold-plated Cadillac.’”<sup>222</sup> In this sense, he is a “‘clothes horse’ with an inner need to constantly remind everyone of his wealth.”<sup>223</sup> The rich man was not, however, simply extravagant with his wealth but also flippant in his observance of God’s law. Bailey points to the fact that the rich man feasted everyday as evidence that the rich man neither

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<sup>218</sup> Bailey, *Middle Eastern Eyes*, 379-380 (italics original). Bailey writes, “If all possessions belong to God, is there anything that is *really* mine/ours? There is. The small part of God’s truth the we manage to understand and struggle to live out is truly ours, and we will ‘take it with us.’ God looks to see if his people are faithful stewards of material possessions and then decides what he will reveal to them of the ‘deep things of God’ (1 Cor 2:10 NIV).”

<sup>219</sup> Bailey, *Middle Eastern Eyes*, 380.

<sup>220</sup> Bailey explicitly says the “pearly-gate” stories “have nothing to do with the teller’s eschatology,” but he seems to think they can say something about the teller’s soteriology; Bailey, *Middle Eastern Eyes*, 378.

<sup>221</sup> Bailey, *Middle Eastern Eyes*, 382.

<sup>222</sup> Bailey, *Middle Eastern Eyes*, 382.

<sup>223</sup> Bailey, *Middle Eastern Eyes*, 382.

observed the Sabbath, nor allowed his servants to do so.<sup>224</sup> Thus, his “self-indulgent lifestyle” was a weekly, public violation of the Ten Commandments. According to Bailey, “The injustice he inflicted on his staff meant nothing to him.”<sup>225</sup> The rich man not only violated the law, but also mistreated his servants.

According to Bailey, the rich man’s selfish attitude persisted even after death. Bailey writes, “To no one’s amazement the rich man found himself in Hades enduring its torments.”<sup>226</sup> To the reader’s amazement, however, “the rich man recognizes Lazarus and knows his name.”<sup>227</sup> This leads to the expectation that the rich man will apologize to Lazarus for failing to care for him outside the gate and ask for forgiveness. The reader’s expectation is frustrated and the rich man addresses Abraham instead of Lazarus.<sup>228</sup> Playing his “racial card,” the rich man appeals to “*my* father Abraham” for mercy.<sup>229</sup> The rich man has become like the beggars that he despised in life. His arrogance, however, continues despite the fact that he is “frying in hell.”<sup>230</sup> Instead of repenting, the rich man “began demanding services” from Lazarus, and even spoke to Abraham as an inferior.<sup>231</sup>

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<sup>224</sup> Bailey, *Middle Eastern Eyes*, 382.

<sup>225</sup> Bailey, *Middle Eastern Eyes*, 382.

<sup>226</sup> Bailey, *Middle Eastern Eyes*, 387.

<sup>227</sup> Bailey, *Middle Eastern Eyes*, 387.

<sup>228</sup> Bailey sees this as evidence that “the rich man never talks to untouchables!”; Bailey, *Middle Eastern Eyes*, 387.

<sup>229</sup> Bailey, *Middle Eastern Eyes*, 387-388 (italics original). Bailey suggests that the underlying Semitic idiom “my father” underlies the Greek text, which does not include the second person pronoun. The reading “my father” is also present in “all Syriac and Arabic versions”; Bailey, *Middle Eastern Eyes*, 387-388. Bailey sees this appeal to kinship as a sign of the rich man’s racism; Bailey, *Middle Eastern Eyes*, 394.

<sup>230</sup> Bailey, *Middle Eastern Eyes*, 391.

<sup>231</sup> Bailey, *Middle Eastern Eyes*, 393.

Even in death the rich man is blinded by allegiance to his social class, despising all those who are inferior to him.<sup>232</sup>

Lazarus, on the other hand, is the hero of the story.<sup>233</sup> Specifically, Lazarus is a model of both μακροθυμία and ὑπομονή.<sup>234</sup> These types of patience are different from one another and Lazarus exhibits both of them. In life, Lazarus was a model of ὑπομονή because “he had no complaints.”<sup>235</sup> He gratefully accepted the help of the community, who laid him at the gate of the rich man with the hope that the wealthy would care for the poor.<sup>236</sup> The rich man’s failure to care for Lazarus not only distances him from Lazarus, but also the community. In death, Lazarus was an example of μακροθύμια, by putting “his anger far away”<sup>237</sup> and not responding to the rich man’s demeaning requests with the “rage” that would have been expected.<sup>238</sup> Indeed, “Lazarus is quiet,” a “gentle,

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<sup>232</sup> Bailey, *Middle Eastern Eyes*, 392. Bailey does, however, raise the possibility that the rich man was not a wholly negative character by suggesting that he was a victim of “compassion fatigue” from seeing hardship all around him; Bailey, *Middle Eastern Eyes*, 384. In the end, however, this possibility plays no role in Bailey’s conclusions. Instead, the rich man is characterized as someone who “cannot imagine a world where social stratifications do not apply”; Bailey, *Middle Eastern Eyes*, 389.

<sup>233</sup> Bailey, *Middle Eastern Eyes*, 395.

<sup>234</sup> Bailey sees these as examples of “Christian love (*agape*)” in 1 Cor. 13:4-7; Bailey, *Middle Eastern Eyes*, 389.

<sup>235</sup> Bailey, *Middle Eastern Eyes*, 390.

<sup>236</sup> See Bailey, *Middle Eastern Eyes*, 383. Bailey offers an intriguing interpretation at this point. Part of the “community” that cares for Lazarus is the dogs that lick his wounds. Bailey points to both Middle Eastern interpretation of the parable and archaeological evidence that the saliva of dogs has an antibiotic healing effect; see Bailey, *Middle Eastern Eyes*, 385; so also Klein, *Lukasevangelium*, 553. In this way the dogs become caretakers of Lazarus by licking his wounds and offering healing. Most other scholars, however, view Lazarus’ association with the dogs as a negative element of his characterization. See Wiefel, *Lukas*, 299; Wolter, *Lukasevangelium*, 559; and Bovon, *Lukas*, 3.3.120. Pax, however, notes that Lazarus’ association with the dogs is not positive, but that they do provide him a level of relief; Pax, “Milieustudie,” 260-261.

<sup>237</sup> Bailey, *Middle Eastern Eyes*, 390.

<sup>238</sup> Bailey writes, “The listener/reader expects him to explode in rage and say something like: You half-dead dog! I see you recognized my face and can call my name! You saw me outside your gate, but you did nothing to alleviate *my* pain. Your dogs were kind to me. They licked my wounds. But you—you

longsuffering man” with “no reservoir of anger ready to explode, no reflections of retaliation in the waking hours of the night, no score to settle and no vengeance to exact.”<sup>239</sup> As a result of his patience, Lazarus was welcomed into the bosom of Abraham where he receives relief for his “psychic pain.”<sup>240</sup> From this place of comfort Lazarus was able to offer forgiveness to the rich man despite his earthly mistreatment.<sup>241</sup>

Bailey’s imagination is vivid, and it is clear that his perspective on the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus is profoundly influenced by his time spent in the Middle East as a professor. This influence is evident in his description of a beggar named Abd al-Rhaman, with whom he developed a relationship in Lebanon.<sup>242</sup> Al-Rahman “was a quiet, gentle man with a lovely face.” Despite his disability and the ravages of war all around, he had a “quiet calm” that was never broken and radiated an “inner peace.” It is not

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no good scum of the earth—where were you when *I* needed your help? Now you want me to serve you? I can’t believe it! Abraham! Leave this monstrous ego to fry in hell until the flesh falls off of his bones. He fed his dogs! He would not feed me. What he’s now suffering is only half of what he deserves!”; Bailey, *Middle Eastern Eyes*, 389 (italics original).

<sup>239</sup> Bailey, *Middle Eastern Eyes*, 389.

<sup>240</sup> Bailey, *Middle Eastern Eyes*, 391; cf. 384. Bailey finds it significant that Lazarus is not described as healed or well fed in Abraham’s bosom, but, rather, comforted: “While reclining with Abraham he is *comforted*. Someone cares for him and does not leave him in earshot of banquets that produce garbage which he longs to eat but cannot because it is fed to the dogs”; Bailey, *Middle Eastern Eyes*, 391; italics original.

<sup>241</sup> Bailey sees an example of Lazarus’ forgiving and kind attitude in Lazarus’ fictional response to the rich man’s request that someone relieve his pain: “Who, for heaven’s sake, would want to journey from heaven to hell? Obviously, Abraham has a volunteer. There is only one other person on stage. Lazarus is whispering in Abraham’s ear and saying something like, ‘Father Abraham, that’s my old neighbor down there. We have known each other for years. Poor man—he is in such a fix. We have plenty of water here, and if it pleases you, I will be glad to take a glass down to him!’” Bailey, *Middle Eastern Eyes*, 392. Bailey does not attempt to harmonize Lazarus’ willingness to alleviate the rich man’s suffering here with the description of Lazarus’ outburst noted above.

<sup>242</sup> For the story, see Bailey, *Middle Eastern Eyes*, 383. Al-Rahman’s name means “the servant of the Compassionate One.”

difficult to see the connections between this blind beggar and Bailey's characterization of Lazarus as a gentle and loving person despite his poor lot in life.

Bailey's interpretation of the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus is vivid and imaginative. His concern to place the parable in the context of the economic struggles of the poor links his work to that of both Scott and Herzog. Bailey's unique contribution, however, is to read the parable in light of the current struggles of the poor in the Middle East. While Bailey's focus on the plight of the poor and the misuse of wealth by the rich is commendable, the details of his interpretation often rests too heavily on his speculative reconstructions of the text.

### *Conclusion*

The works of Ronald Hock and Richard Bauckham have moved the discussion of the parable beyond a reliance on the Egyptian parallel and have provided a means by which future interpretations can operate. First, while Hock's insistence that the judgment of Megapenthes illuminates the sins of the rich man is too speculative to be convincing, he was able to show that Greco-Roman parallels are as useful in interpretation as the Egyptian and Rabbinic parallels proposed by Gressmann and Bultmann. Second, Bauckham has rightly pointed out that interpretation of the parable is aided by many possible parallels to the story. With this, Bauckham freed the interpretation of the parable from the search for *the* parallel to the story, clearing the way for the use of all parallels that shed light on various aspects of the story. In addition to this, Bauckham has also drawn attention to the importance of the rich man's request for an otherworldly messenger to be sent to his brothers and Abraham's subsequent refusal of an "apocalyptic

revelation of the fate of the dead,”<sup>243</sup> which is unique in this regard among many stories that narrate the fate of particular individuals after death. In so doing, these scholars have introduced an avenue of research that has potential to illuminate aspects of the function of the parable of the rich man and Lazarus.

Bernard Brandon Scott, William Herzog, and Kenneth Bailey have focused their attention on the socio-economic background of the parable. In light of the economic disparities in the first century Mediterranean world, both Herzog and Bailey see the rich man’s failure to care for Lazarus as indicative of the predatory nature of rich land owners. While some conclusions drawn by these scholars seem overly speculative, their work highlights a crucial aspect of the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus, namely the concern for the care of the poor.

### *Summary of the History of Research*

The history of research summarized above illustrates three streams of interpretation. The dominant method of interpretation of the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus since the late 19th century has been the search for the original parable and the genetic parallel of the parable. This tradition, which was begun by Adolf Jülicher and Hugo Gressmann, was continued by the source critical work of Rudolf Bultmann and Joachim Jeremias. Recently, however, scholars have begun to pose a different set of questions that has provided fresh insight into the meaning of the parable. In the first place, scholars like John Donahue, Arland Hultgren, and David Gowler have begun to read the parable in its narrative context. This approach, which is a reaction against the source-critical work of Jülicher, is interested in understanding how the parable fits in the

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<sup>243</sup> Bauckham, “Rich Man and Lazarus,” 244-245.

context of the Gospel of Luke. In the second place, scholars have been dissatisfied with Gressmann's attempt to determine the genetic parallel to the parable. This dissatisfaction has led some scholars to read the parable against the background of the cultural milieu of the first-century Mediterranean world. Other scholars, who are also dissatisfied with Gressmann's approach, have read the parable against the background of the social scripts of wealth and poverty in the first-century Mediterranean world. Each of these new approaches to understanding the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus has advanced the conversation about the parable and offered helpful insight that had been ignored in the past. In the coming chapters, I will continue in the spirit of these new approaches as I seek to read the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus in its narrative context against the background of the journey to the place of punishment in ancient literature.

## CHAPTER THREE

### The Journey to the Place of Punishment in Greco-Roman Literature

In Chapter Two, I identified three streams in the interpretation of the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus: the search for the original form of parable, the search for the archetype of the parable, and readings of the parable in light of its social world.

Following the lead of Richard Bauckham,<sup>1</sup> I will discuss the journey to the place of punishment<sup>2</sup> in Greco-Roman, Jewish, and Christian literature and its significance for interpreting the parable. As we will see, the journey to the place of punishment appeared in many documents in the ancient world and was a well-known tale. However, instead of an attempt to discern the archetypal story behind the parable (stream two in the history of interpretation), my focus in this chapter and the next is on the function of the stories as they appear in ancient literature. The purpose of this survey, then, is to identify the background that would have influenced the reception of the parable by the audience of Luke's Gospel.

In the following discussion of journeys to the place of punishment, I will begin in this chapter with a review of such journeys found in Greco-Roman literature. I will provide an overview of each descent, a summary of the description of the place of

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Bauckham, "The Rich Man and Lazarus: The Parable and the Parallels," *NTS* 37 (1991): 225-246.

<sup>2</sup> Throughout this chapter I will often use the phrase "place of punishment" instead of the typically used "underworld" or "Hades" because the place of punishment is not always located under the earth. As we will see, the place of punishment is often reached by a journey "up," rather than "down." Moreover, the place of punishment is not always explicitly referred to as "Hades," although the scene is often assumed to be Hades. At times, however, "underworld" is a more suitable term for the location of the journey (e.g., Aeneas' descent to the underworld with the Sibyl).



punishment, and, finally, a discussion of the function of the journey in the document. This section on Greco-Roman descents will be followed in the next chapter by a summary of journeys to the place of punishment in Jewish and Christian literature. My goal in these chapters is to show that these journeys to the place of punishment in Greco-Roman and Jewish literature raise two interrelated questions. In the first place, Greco-Roman journeys to the place of punishment raise the question of whether one who has journeyed to the place of punishment is able to return to the land of the living with a message. In the second place, the journey to the place of punishment in Jewish and Christian literature raises questions about the possibility of postmortem repentance for the wicked dead and/or the efficacy of intercessory prayer on behalf of the wicked dead. The answers to these two questions have important implications for how the authorial audience would have understood the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus in its narrative context in the Gospel of Luke.

One of the most well-known descents to the underworld is Aeneas' journey to meet his father Anchises in the Elysian Fields.<sup>3</sup> Prior to his descent, Aeneas must convince the Sibyl to guide him on his quest, and, in so doing, he appeals to the descent to the underworld of such illustrious figures as Orpheus, Pollux, Theseus, and Heracles. The reference to these descents to the underworld indicates the presence of other similar journeys that provide justification for Aeneas' request. Upon further exploration of the evidence, the journeys referred to by Aeneas only scratch the surface of the stories of those who descended into the realm of the dead and returned successfully to the land of

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<sup>3</sup> As many scholars have noted, Aeneas' descent was particularly influential on Dante when writing the *Divine Comedy*. Aeneas' journey will be discussed in more detail below.

the living.<sup>4</sup> In what follows, I hope to show both how familiar the descent to the underworld would have been to a first-century auditor, as well as the function of these stories in the literature of the ancient Mediterranean world.

In order to demonstrate the importance of the journey to the underworld in Greco-Roman world I will categorize these journeys in a similar manner to that of Raymond Clark in his important work on this topic. In his study of the history of catabatic literature, Raymond Clark divides the tradition into two streams.<sup>5</sup> The first stream involves the descent of a god or goddess and is typically associated with fertility stories. The second stream identified by Clark involves the descent of mortals, most often heroes, and is typically linked with the search for oracular advice. The roots of these traditions are both found in Ancient Near Eastern literature and, for the most part, the Greco-Roman literature follows the same division. What Clark does not note, however, is that the Greco-Roman tradition of descent to the underworld is predominantly associated with the second stream that he identifies. Indeed, as will become clearer below, the descent of the gods to the underworld is relatively rare in Greco-Roman literature.

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<sup>4</sup> For example, Aeneas does not mention Odysseus' journey to the underworld, which, as we will see, was the basis for Virgil's depiction of Aeneas' journey. Another list of those who returned from the underworld is provided by Hyginus, the first century BCE author of the *Fabulae* (*Fab.* 251). The list includes Ceres, Liber, Heracles, Asclepius, Castor and Pollux, Protesilaus, Alcestis, Theseus, Hippolytus, Orpheus, Adonis, Glaucus, Ulysses, Aeneas, and Mercurius. It is important to note that many stories of descent to the underworld that existed in the ancient world have either come to us in a fragmentary form, or are now lost. Many of the returns to the land of the living mentioned by Hyginus fall in the latter category. In what follows, the focus is on those stories that still exist in full form. The exception to this rule will be the discussion of the descent of Dionysus to rescue his mother, Semele, from Hades.

<sup>5</sup> See Raymond J. Clark, *Catabasis: Vergil and the Wisdom-Tradition* (Amsterdam: B.R. Grüner, 1979), 15-36. The descent to the underworld is often referred to as a *catabasis* from the Greek κατάβασις.

### *Journeys to the Place of Punishment by Gods*

There are three primary descents of gods in Greco-Roman mythology: the abduction of Persephone by Hades, the descent of Dionysus to rescue his mother Semele, and the descent of Heracles to capture Cerberus.<sup>6</sup> Each of these descents were well-known in the ancient world. The descents of Persphone and Demeter were especially important in the Mystery Religions. Heracles' descent to capture Cerberus was one of the most conspicuous achievements during his twelve labors. Each of these descents will be discussed below.

#### *The Abduction of Persephone*

In his discussion of the “fertility-tradition” myths in the ancient Near East, Clark points to the descents by the Sumerian goddess Inanna and the Akkadian goddess Ishtar as paradigmatic examples.<sup>7</sup> In both of these cases the descent to the underworld by the goddess became an etiological story that explained the changing of the seasons. Perhaps the clearest analog in Greco-Roman mythology is Persephone's descent to the underworld when she was abducted by Hades. In this case, however, the descent of the goddess, and the subsequent emotional distress of her mother Demeter, became not only an etiological myth for the changing of the seasons, but also the foundational myth for the Eleusinian mysteries.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> It is somewhat difficult to place Heracles on the scale between god and hero. As Carl Galnisky notes, Heracles was worshipped as a god by some; G. Karl Galinsky, *The Herakles Theme: The Adaptations of the Hero in Literature from Homer to the Twentieth Century* (Totowa, N.J.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1972), 5; see also Pindar *Nem.* 3.22, who calls Heracles a “hero and god.” As we will see below, Heracles had the lineage to claim divinity in the Greco-Roman world.

<sup>7</sup> See Clark, *Catabasis*, 15-22.

<sup>8</sup> For a helpful discussion of the Eleusinian Mysteries, and the role of the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* as an etiological myth for both founding of the Mysteries and as an etiological myth for the

The story of Persephone's abduction is found in several documents,<sup>9</sup> but the general contours of the story can be found in the earliest narration of the myth in the Homeric *Hymn to Demeter*.<sup>10</sup> Persephone was playing with the daughters of Oceanus when she saw a narcissus flower. It was very beautiful and she bent down to pick it from the ground. As she did, the ground parted beneath her and Hades rose from the underworld on his chariot. He snatched the girl and drove away. Persephone called out for help, but at first was unheard by all except Hecate and Helios. (Zeus was distracted in his temple as people offered him sacrifices.) She continued to cry for help while she was in the upper world and finally caught the attention of her mother, Demeter.

When Demeter heard the cries of Persephone she was very distraught and tore the covering for her hair, and her cloak. She sped across the earth for nine days in search of her daughter, but was unable to find her. On the tenth day she met Hecate, who told her that she too had heard the cries of Persephone, but did not see what happened. After talking with Hecate, Demeter hurried to Helios, hoping that his vantage point would allow for an eyewitness account. Helios said that he had seen Persephone taken by Hades to the underworld with the permission of Zeus. He finished by saying that the situation was not bad since Hades is the brother of Zeus and holds sway over a third of the earth.

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changing seasons, see Helene P. Foley, ed. *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter: Translation, Commentary, and Interpretive Essays* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994), 65-75, 97-103.

<sup>9</sup> In addition to the Homeric *Hymn to Demeter* to be discussed, see Hesiod *Theog.* 912-914; Hyginus *Fab.* 146; Diodorus Siculus *Library*, 5.2.3-5.5.3; Ovid *Metam.* 5.346-571; Apollodorus *Biblio.* 1.5.1-3.

<sup>10</sup> The Homeric *Hymn to Demeter*, written sometime in the seventh or sixth century BCE, is considered the earliest literary record of the Eleusinian Mysteries; see Robert Parker, "The 'Hymn to Demeter' and the 'Homeric Hymns,'" *GR* 38 (1991): 1; and Francis R. Walton, "Athens, Eleusis, and the Homeric Hymn to Demeter," *HTR* 45 (1952): 105-114.

The grief of Demeter was renewed at these words and she ostracized herself from the company of the gods. Disguising herself as an old woman, Demeter sat by a well outside of Eleusis. The daughters of Celeus, king of the city, came out to draw water from the well. While there the women invited the old woman to their home. Demeter agreed and became the nurse for Demophoön, the son of Celeus.<sup>11</sup>

During her time spent in the household of Celeus, Demeter was in deep grief and remained aloof from the gods, living in her temple. In her grief she caused a terrible famine to come upon the land that was so severe it threatened to destroy humanity and the attendant sacrifices to the gods. The situation did not escape the attention of Zeus and he sent Isis to encourage Demeter to return to Olympus. Demeter refused the request and Zeus eventually dispatched all of the gods to offer gifts to her. She was not persuaded by any of her peers and vowed not to return to Olympus or allow plants to grow until she saw Persephone again. Zeus understood the situation and sent Hermes to Hades. Here the messenger encouraged Hades to let Persephone return, so that sacrifices to the gods would not cease. Hades agreed and encouraged Persephone to return to her mother. Before she left, however, he secretly fed her a pomegranate seed.

With the permission of Hades, Hermes and Persephone returned to the upper world in Hades' chariot. Demeter and Persephone were overjoyed when they saw each other. Demeter was afraid, however, that Persephone had eaten food in the underworld. Persephone told her about the pomegranate seed, but Demeter was not upset. As a result

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<sup>11</sup> During the night Demeter would anoint Demophoön with ambrosia and place him in the fire in order to make him immortal. One night his mother, Metaneira, saw her son in the fire and reacted with horror. The goddess was offended by Metaneira's reaction and revealed her true self to the household. She then demanded that the citizens build her a temple, and she promised to teach them her rites (*Homeric Hymn to Demeter* 231-302). Thus is told the founding of the Eleusinian Mysteries.

of eating the pomegranate seed, however, Persephone was sentenced to spend one-third of the year in the underworld.<sup>12</sup>

As noted above, this brief story of the abduction of Persephone became the etiological myth of both the changing of the seasons, as well as, and perhaps more importantly, the etiological myth for the Eleusinian Mysteries. The role of Persephone's descent and return from the underworld in this ancient cult is particularly important for our present discussion for two primary reasons. First, given the prominence of the yearly public celebration of initiates, the story of Persphone's descent was well known in the ancient world.<sup>13</sup> Second, as we will see below, the Eleusinian Mysteries were associated with the descent to the underworld by Heracles in his attempt to subdue Cerberus.

### *Dionysus and Semele*

Another descent to the underworld by a god in Greco-Roman tradition is the descent to Hades by Dionysus. The god, son of Zeus and the mortal Semele,<sup>14</sup> descended to the underworld in order to rescue his mother, who had been killed prior to his birth. Hera, who was jealous when she learned of her husband's infidelity, disguised herself as

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<sup>12</sup> Persephone's three month stay in Hades, and Demeter's subsequent mourning, was seen as the reason for the lack of harvest during the winter months.

<sup>13</sup> The Eleusinian Mysteries were practiced for approximately 1,000 years, ending in the fourth century CE; Walton, "Homeric Hymn to Demeter," 105, fn. 1. Each year, thousands of people were exposed to the secret rites in a celebration outside of Athens. For an overview of these rituals see Walter Burkert, *Greek Religion* (trans. by John Raffan; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985), 285-290.

<sup>14</sup> Most ancient witnesses do not tell us how Semele conceived her son; see Hesiod, *Theog.* 940-942; Ovid, *Metam.* 3.260-261; Apollodorus, *Bibl.* 3.4.3. Hyginus (*Fab.* 167), however, states that Liber Pater, with whom the Romans identified Dionysus, was the son of Jove and Proserpina. After he was torn apart by the Titans, Jove took his heart, cut it in pieces, and put it in a drink for Semele, causing her to conceive.

Semele's elderly nurse, Beroe.<sup>15</sup> In this role, she encouraged Semele to seek proof that it truly was Zeus who had impregnated her. At the urging of Hera, Semele asked Zeus to show her his full splendor. Zeus had sworn "by the divinity of the seething Styx, whose godhead is the fear of all gods" to grant Semele anything she wished (Ovid, *Metam.* 3.290-291), and so he reluctantly granted her request. When Zeus arrived at her home, Semele was consumed by his glory.<sup>16</sup> Zeus then took the six-month old fetus and implanted it in his thigh. When the baby came to term, Hermes took Dionysus to his Aunt Ino, who raised the child.<sup>17</sup>

When Dionysus was older he decided to descend to the underworld in search for his mother. Although Dionysus' descent was well-known in the ancient world, there is no complete narrative account of his journey to rescue Semele, and the story must be pieced together from various sources.<sup>18</sup> Dionysus did not know the location of the path to

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<sup>15</sup> The story of Hera's jealousy is told by several authors. The following account will most closely follow Ovid, *Metam.* 3.259-315 (see also Apollodorus, *Bibl.* 3.4.3-3.5.3).

<sup>16</sup> Pausanias (*Descr.* 3.24.3) records a unique story told in Brasiaie, in southern Grece, that instead of being consumed, Semele gave birth to Dionysus. When her father, Cadmus, discovered the child, he placed both Semele and Dionysus in a chest, which washed ashore in Brasiaie.

<sup>17</sup> Hera's jealousy did not die with her rival, and the rivalry between Dionysus and Hera continued after his birth. One example of the rivalry can be seen in stories of the madness of Ino and her husband Athamas, who had been charged with Dionysus' upbringing, and their murder of their children. The story is told frequently (cf. Pausanias, *Descr.* 1.44.7-8; Hyginus *Fab.* 2, 4; Apollodorus, *Biblio.* 1.2.1-2, 3.4.3), but only Ovid (*Metam.* 4.416-542) associates the events with a descent to the underworld by Hera. In another fit of jealousy at the popularity of Dionysus, Hera descended to the underworld to enlist the help of Tisiphone, one of the dreaded Furies. The path to the underworld is told in vivid detail and Hera saw such sites as the river Styx, the palace of Dis, Cerberus, Ixion, and Sisyphus. Tisiphone agreed to help Hera and visited Athamas and Ino in their palace. After throwing snakes from her hair, Tisiphone poured a poisonous mixture of "froth of Cerberus' jaws, the venom of Hydra, strange hallucinations and forgetfulness, crime and tears, mad love of slaughter, all mixed together with fresh blood, brewed in a brazen cauldron and stirred with a green hemlock-stalk" over the duo (Ovid, *Metam.* 4.501-505). With this she set fire to the palace and returned to the underworld. As a result of their madness, Athamas murdered his older son, Learchus, and Ino jumped into the sea with her younger son, Melicertes. Unless otherwise noted, all quotations of Ovid's *Metamorphosis* are from Ovid, *Metamorphosis* (trans. Frank Justus Miller; 2 vols.; LCL; Cambridge, Mass.: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

<sup>18</sup> The earliest evidence of Dionysus' descent to rescue his mother is on a vase from the sixth century BCE. See Clark, *Catabasis*, 100.

the underworld, so he enlisted the help of Palymnus, who led him to the Alcyonian Lake in Lerna.<sup>19</sup> The locals thought the lake was bottomless, and, although it appeared calm, anyone who attempted to swim across the lake was “dragged down, sucked into the depths, and swept away” (Pausanias, *Descr.* 2.37.6).<sup>20</sup> Dionysus’ descent, however, was a success and he arrived in Hades to rescue his mother. According to a scholiast on Aristophanes’ *Frogs* 330, Hades agreed to allow Semele to return, but Dionysus was required to offer one of his most beloved possessions to remain in the underworld. He decided to leave the myrtle in Hades, which is “why the initiated in his rites wreathed their brows with myrtle leaves.”<sup>21</sup> With his mother in his possession, Dionysus ascended from the underworld at Troezen.<sup>22</sup> Upon their return his mother was made into a god and

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<sup>19</sup> The name of Dionysus’ guide is not consistent in the ancient accounts. Hyginus (*Astronomica*, 2.5) gives the name Hyplipnus, and says that he agreed to show Dionysus the entrance to the underworld in exchange for sexual favors. Clement of Alexandria (*Protr.* 2.30) gives the name Prosymnus, and says that when Dionysus returned from his journey, he found his guide dead. In order to fulfill his vow, Dionysus is said to have fashioned a phallus from the branch of a fig tree, “and then made a show of fulfilling his promise to the dead man.” Unless otherwise noted, all quotations of Clement of Alexandria are from *Clement of Alexandria* (trans. G.W. Butterworth; LCL; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003).

<sup>20</sup> According to Pausanias, Nero had unsuccessfully attempted to gauge the depth of the lake by lowering ropes, weighted with lead, several stades long into the water. He was unable reach bottom even though he omitted “nothing that might help his experiment” (Pausanias, *Descr.* 2.37.5). Pausanias’ description at this point implies that Dionysus descended to the underworld *through* the water. If this is the case, it echoes a tradition found in Homer of Dionysus’ descent through water to receive protection when Lycurgus attempted to kill him (see Homer, *Il.* 6.130-134). Unless otherwise noted, all quotations of Pausanias are from Pausanias, *Description of Greece* (trans. W.H.S. Jones and H.A. Omerod; LCL; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1918).

<sup>21</sup> Sir James George Frazer, *Apollodorus: The Library* (vol. 1; LCL 121; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1921), 332-333, fn. 2.

<sup>22</sup> See Pausanias (*Descr.* 2.31.2), although he doubts that Semele ever died. Plutarch (*Sera* 565E-566A) describes the pathway that Dionysus took on his return. He says it had the “appearance of a Bacchic grotto . . . gaily diversified with tender leafage and all the hues of flowers.” Lovely scents rose from the area, that was called “Lethe,” and the area was “full of bacchic revelry and laughter and the various strains of merry-making.” Unless otherwise noted, all quotations of Plutarch are from Plutarch, *Moralia* (vol. 7; trans. Phillip H. De Lacy and Benedict Einarson; LCL; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000).



they ascended to heaven.<sup>23</sup> The descent and return of Dionysus became a well-known event in the ancient world and was often celebrated by bacchic initiates.<sup>24</sup>

Despite the fact there is no complete narrative account of the descent of Dionysus to the underworld to rescue Semele, there is an account of a different descent by Dionysus in Aristophanes' *Frogs*. In the play, which was produced in 405 BCE and which won first prize at the Lenaeon festival in Athens, Dionysus descended to the underworld with his servant, Xanthias, in order to bring back the recently deceased poet Euripides. Dionysus, dressed up as Heracles, met with the hero and asked him how to descend to the underworld.<sup>25</sup> Heracles had famously descended to Hades as the last of his twelve labors to abduct Cerberus, the three-headed dog that guarded the underworld,<sup>26</sup> and although he found Dionysus' journey humorous, he offered the god directions.<sup>27</sup> Once in the underworld, Dionysus was ferried across the lake by Charon, but Xanthias was told to run

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<sup>23</sup> See Hesiod, *Theog.* 940-942; Apollodorus, *Library* 3.5.3; Diodorus Siculus, *Library* 4.25.4. Clark tentatively suggests that there was a parallel tradition in Lerna that Dionysus was unable to rescue his mother from the underworld. In this reading, Dionysus' journey is similar to both the revelatory journey of Odysseus, and the failed attempt to rescue a loved one by Orpheus. Clark admits, however, that the argument that Semele was not brought back is an argument from silence based on the evidence he discusses; Clark, *Catabasis*, 104-08.

<sup>24</sup> Pausanias (*Descr.* 2.37.5) was unwilling to discuss the "nocturnal rites performed every year in honor of Dionysus." For more on the celebration of Dionysus' descent and return see Clark, *Catabasis*, 100.

<sup>25</sup> Dionysus is interested in more than just directions to the entrance. He is looking for complete itinerary: "Well, the reason I've come wearing this outfit in imitation of you is so you'll tell me about those friends of yours who put you up when you went after Cerberus, in case I need them. Tell me about them, about the harbors, bakeries, whorehouses, rest areas, directions, springs, roads, cities, places to stay, the landladies with the fewest bedbugs" (*Ran.* 108-114). Unless otherwise noted, all quotations of Aristophanes are from Jeffrey Henderson, *Aristophanes: Frogs, Assemblywomen, Wealth* (Loeb Classical Library 180; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002).

<sup>26</sup> The descent of Heracles to the underworld will be discussed further below. Aristophanes also makes reference to Demeter in the *Frogs*, which shows the influence of the abduction of Persephone in the ancient world (see Aristophanes, *Ran.* 383-393).

<sup>27</sup> Heracles is particularly amused by Dionysus' garb and says, "I just can't get rid of this laughter. It's the sight of that lionskin atop a yellow gown. What's the idea? Why has a war club joined up with lady's boots?" (Aristophanes, *Ran.* 45-48).

around the lake because he was a slave. The pair eventually arrived at the gate of Hades' residence and Dionysus pretended to be Heracles, so that Aeacus, the gatekeeper, would let him inside.<sup>28</sup> When Aeacus saw Dionysus dressed as Heracles he threatened the impostor and Dionysus lost heart. Xanthias upbraided his master for his cowardice and taking the Heracles disguise, gained access to Hades' palace.<sup>29</sup> Once in the palace Pluto recruited Dionysus to judge a contest between Aeschylus and Euripides for the Chair of Tragedy in the underworld. Dionysus chose Aeschylus and was allowed to take him back to the land of the living.

While Aristophanes' primary goals in the *Frogs* may have been to make people laugh and to win the Lenaean festival, his work was overtly political.<sup>30</sup> The political situation in Athens was notoriously complex at the time and Aristophanes was not shy about poking fun at politicians, or raising political issues.<sup>31</sup> Indeed, Aristophanes refers to several prominent, and controversial, political figures throughout the *Frogs*.<sup>32</sup> Alcibiades, the self-exiled statesman and general, is a prominent subject of the questioning of Euripides and Aeschylus (*Ran.* 1422-1432). And, as the play closes, Pluto

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<sup>28</sup> Immediately before Dionysus and Xanthias arrive at the doorway of Pluto's residence, the chorus appears as Eleusinian initiates singing and dancing in the underworld (*Ran.* 448-455). This is one of several appearances of Eleusinian initiates in the *Frogs*.

<sup>29</sup> The scene of Dionysus' timidity is very humorous as the god wilts in fear. To make matters worse for Dionysus, Xanthias is welcomed in as Heracles by a maid and has a fine dinner and entertainment from dancing girls.

<sup>30</sup> See W.B. Stanford, *Aristophanes Frogs* (London: Bristol Classic Press, 1993), xv-xvi.

<sup>31</sup> For an overview of the political situation in Athens and Aristophanes' critique see the introduction to *Frogs* in Henderson, *Aristophanes*, 3-9. See also Stanford, *Frogs*, xiv-xvii; James Redfield, "Comedy, Tragedy, and Politics in Aristophanes' 'Frogs,'" *Chicago Review* 15 (1962): 107-21; and, for a more cautious note on Aristophanes' politics, A.W. Gomme, "Aristophanes and Politics," *The Classical Review* 52 (1938): 97-109.

<sup>32</sup> Aristophanes refers explicitly to Theramenes (*Ran.* 541, 967-968), Cleophon (*Ran.* 678, 1504), and Alcibiades (*Ran.* 1422).

bids farewell to Aeschylus, charging him to “save our city with your fine counsels” and to tell Cleophon and several other prominent leaders to “hurry on down to me without delay” (*Ran.* 1500-1514).<sup>33</sup>

Most importantly for our purposes, however, is that Aristophanes used the descent to the underworld as the framework for his comedy. As Radcliffe Edmonds III notes, the *Frogs* is the longest κατάβασις “extant from the classical period and earlier.”<sup>34</sup> Thus, despite the fragmentary nature of the evidence that we have, the theme of the κατάβασις must have been well-known to the audience of the *Frogs* for it to be successful. Indeed, the descent to the underworld depicted in the *Frogs* draws on two prominent, and interrelated, streams in the tradition: the importance of the Eleusinian mysteries in the descent to the underworld, and the descent of Heracles to the underworld, which provides the model for Dionysus’ descent. The Eleusinian mysteries have been discussed above in regard to the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*; I will now discuss the descent of Heracles to the underworld.

### *Heracles and Cerberus*

Heracles, son of Zeus and the mortal Alcmene,<sup>35</sup> is arguably the most popular hero in Classical mythology. The tradition surrounding Heracles is very complex and it

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<sup>33</sup> Pluto gives Aeschylus several instruments of suicide to give to Cleophon and the others. Henderson (*Frogs*, 230-231, fn. 150) thinks these are “probably a sword, a noose, and a mortar of hemlock.”

<sup>34</sup> Radcliffe G. Edmonds III, *Myths of the Underworld Journey* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 112.

<sup>35</sup> Zeus assumed the form of Alcmene’s husband, Amphytrion, and seduced her while the king was away at battle. During the night, which lasted three times its normal duration, Heracles was conceived. Hera was enraged when she learned of Zeus’ infidelity. Alcmene was aware of Hera’s jealousy and exposed Heracles, so that he would die. Athena and Hera happened upon the baby in a field and, unaware of the child’s identity, Hera attempted to nurse the child. Heracles suckled so vigorously, however, that Hera was unable to endure the pain and Athena took the child back to Alcmene (see Diodorus Siculus, *Library* 4.9.6). When the child was older, Hera sent two poisonous snakes to the child’s bed. Heracles,

is difficult to develop a consistent, composite picture of him. The complexity of Heracles' personality allowed his myth to be adapted to many different contexts, by many different people.<sup>36</sup> Famous for his brute strength and valor, Heracles was originally seen as a divine helper for the trials of life.<sup>37</sup> His legend, however, grew beyond that of a mere strongman capable of superhuman feats, and he eventually became an example of virtue.<sup>38</sup> An example of the changing characterization of the hero can be seen in the difference between the earliest reference to him by Homer and the later development found in writings of the Stoics. On the one hand, Homer portrays Heracles as a godless lawbreaker because of his attack on Hera and Hades (*Il.* 5.392-397).<sup>39</sup> On the other hand,

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however, strangled the serpents, saving himself and his mortal twin brother, Iphicles (Apollodorus, *Bibl.* 2.4.8; cf. Diodorus Siculus, *Library* 4.9.6). Diodorus Siculus (*Library* 4.10.1) says that as a result of this feat the child's name was changed from "Alcaeus" to "Heracles," which means "Hera's glory," because the boy gained glory with the aid of Hera. Thus, while most children are given names by their parents, Heracles alone was given a name because of his valor.

<sup>36</sup> Galinsky writes, "The Herakles of the folktale had belonged to all of Greece, and the mythical Herakles was the one true Panhellenic hero. He was not merely the property of the Dorians, into whose genealogy he was fitted rather indirectly, but his cult and shrines were distributed all over Greece. . . . As a mythological and cultic hero, Herakles replaced, in many towns, local heroes whose exploits promptly were absorbed into his mythological baggage train"; Galinsky, *Herakles*, 2-5. The legends surrounding Heracles are made more complex by his character as both a hero and a god. With rare exceptions, Heracles is considered a human being first, then a god. See also note 6.

<sup>37</sup> This role can be seen in the myths surrounding the birth of Heracles. Hesiod, for example, says that Zeus' motivation for impregnating Alcmena was the desire for a child who would defend both gods and humans (Hesiod, *Shield* 27-29). See also Diodorus Siculus who says that Zeus did not lay with Alcmena out of love, but solely with the desire to procreate (Diodorus Siculus, *Library* 4.9.3).

<sup>38</sup> A helpful discussion of the development of the Heracles myth can be found in Galinsky, *Herakles*; see also Clark, *Catabasis*, 80-92. According to Galinsky, the difference in the characterization of Heracles often falls on the lines of his depiction in art as the strongman, and a "kindlier" portrayal in literature, although, of course, not all literary portrayals of Heracles are positive; Galinsky, *Herakles*, 1. The turning point of Heracles' characterization is often thought to be his initiation into the Eleusinian Mysteries; see Apollodorus, *Bibl.* 2.5.12; see also Clark, *Catabasis*, 92.

<sup>39</sup> The attack of Hades at Pylos by Heracles is considered the earliest reference to an underworld journey by the hero. Eduard Norden thinks that this reference, among others, is part of a lost Descent of Heracles, which he calls the Ἡρακλέους κατάβασις; Eduard Norden, *P. Vergilius Maro Aeneis Buch VI* (4 ed.; Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1957), 5. It is also important that this reference in the *Iliad* is not the only reference to Heracles' attacks upon a god. Euripides (*Alc.* 837-860) records Heracles' plan to subdue Death when he rescued Alcestis from death. Hesiod (*Shield*, 359-367) refers to another of Heracles' battles with a god, this time the war god Ares.

the Stoics adapted the Heracles myth to portray the hero as an ideal king (see Seneca, *De constant.* 2.1-3; *De beneficiis* 1.13). Despite the milder portrayal of Heracles in later literature, however, earlier conceptions of Heracles still dominated the popular imagination.<sup>40</sup>

Of all of Heracles' deeds, the most well-known are the so-called "Twelve Labors." According to tradition, Heracles was indentured to Eurystheus, who ordered the hero to perform twelve feats of valor. Completion of these tasks would result in immortality.<sup>41</sup> In Apollodorus' account, the ultimate feat performed by Heracles was the abduction of Cerberus from Hades. Before Heracles began the journey to capture the three-headed monster, he wanted to be initiated into the Eleusinian mystery religion. After initial hesitation, Eumolpus cleansed Heracles from the slaughter of the centaurs during his pursuit of the Erymanthian boar and initiated him.<sup>42</sup> After this Heracles descended into Hades through Taenarum. Once in Hades all of the souls who saw him fled except for Meleager and Medusa. Heracles raised his sword at Medusa, but was told by Hermes that she was a shade. Moving on he came to the gates of Hades where Theseus and Pirithous were bound because of Pirithous' attempt to woo Persephone.<sup>43</sup> Heracles freed

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<sup>40</sup> See Clark, *Catabasis*, 92.

<sup>41</sup> See Diodorus Siculus, *Library*. 4.10.7 (cf. Apollodorus, *Bibl.* 2.4.12). Also present in the tradition at this point is Heracles' madness, which resulted in the murder of his children. In one stream of the tradition, Heracles' despair at being told he must perform the labors at the behest of Eurystheus drove him mad (Diodorus Siculus, *Library* 4.11.1). In another stream, Hera drove Heracles mad prior to his knowledge of his labors (Apollodorus, *Bibl.* 2.4.12). In the latter tradition, the labors function as a penance for his crime of murder.

<sup>42</sup> Diodorus Siculus (*Library*, 4.14.3) says that Demeter founded the Lesser Mysteries for the purpose of cleansing Heracles from the guilt caused by his slaying of the Centaurs, during his search for the Erymanthian Boar.

<sup>43</sup> Apollodorus (*Epitome* 1.23-24) tells us that Theseus and Pirithous made a pact to marry daughters of Zeus. After Pirithous helped Theseus abduct Helen from Sparta when she was twelve years old, the pair journeyed to Hades in an attempt to kidnap Persephone. Once in Hades, the god of the

Theseus, but when he attempted to raise Pirithous there was an earthquake and Heracles let go.<sup>44</sup> Heracles also rolled away the stone that Demeter had placed upon Ascalaphus because of his testimony against Persephone when she ate the pomegranate.<sup>45</sup> Heracles then sacrificed one of Hades' cows to the souls in the underworld. Menoetes, who tended the cows of Hades, challenged Heracles to a wrestling match. Heracles seized him and broke his ribs, only letting him go at the request of Persephone. Hades then permitted Heracles to take Cerberus, as long as Hades could subdue the beast with his bare hands. Heracles, dressed in the pelt of the Nemean lion, overcame Cerberus, and carried him out through Troezen.<sup>46</sup> After taking him to Eurystheus, Heracles carried the dog back to Hades.

### Conclusion

The abduction of Persephone by Hades, the descent of Dionysus to rescue Semele, and the descent of Heracles to capture Cerberus were all important stories of the journey to the underworld by gods and goddesses in the ancient world. The accounts survive not only in literature, but also in art and religious ritual.<sup>47</sup> Each story has a different purpose,

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underworld tricked the two into sitting in the Chair of Forgetfulness (ἐν τῷ τῆς Λήθης . . . καθεσθῆναι θρόνῳ) on which they were tied with serpents. See also Homer, *Od.* 11.631; Euripides, *Heracles Furens*, 619; Apollonius Rhodius, *Argon.* i.101ff.; Diodorus Siculus, *Biblio.* 4.26.1; Virgil, *Aen.* 6.392ff; Hyginus, *Fab.* 79. For a rationalistic account of Theseus' and Pirithous' exploits see Plutarch, *Thes.* 31.4.

<sup>44</sup> See also Diodorus Siculus (*Library.* 4.26.1) where Heracles successfully rescues both Theseus and Pirithous.

<sup>45</sup> In the account Demeter turns Ascalaphus into an owl.

<sup>46</sup> See also the ascent of Dionysus with Semele discussed above.

<sup>47</sup> The abduction of Persephone appears on a vase from the sixth century BCE. Both the descent of Dionysus and the descent of Heracles appear on vases from the sixth century BCE. Heracles' labors are also depicted on a frieze on the Temple of Zeus at Olympia. For more on Persephone, Dionysus, and Heracles in art see the dated, but useful, work by Maxime Collignon, *Manual of Mythology in Relation to Greek Art* (trans. by Jane E. Harrison; London: H. Grevel & Co., 1890), as well as more recent works by Jaimee

ranging from etiological myth for the changing of the seasons, to founding myth of a religious ritual, to critique of political policy in ancient Athens. They were all, however, well known in the ancient world, and authors were able to refer to elements of the story with the assumption that their audience was familiar with the stories. The descent to the underworld in ancient literature was not, however, limited to journeys of deities. In the next section, I will discuss two journeys to the underworld by famous heroes in the ancient world and the function of these journeys in the larger narrative in which they are told.

### *Journeys to the Place of Punishment by Heroes*

#### *Odysseus and the End of the World*

The descent of Odysseus to the underworld is probably the earliest example of a journey to Hades.<sup>48</sup> After setbacks on Aeolia (*Od.* 10.1-75) and in the company of the Laestrygonians (*Od.* 10.76-134) Odysseus and his companions arrived at the island of Aea where they met Circe. The goddess turned Odysseus' companions into swine, but Odysseus successfully freed them and they remained in Circe's house for a year. At the end of the year, Odysseus asked Circe to fulfill her promise to send them home to Ithaca (*Od.* 10.483-486). Instead of granting the request immediately, Circe told Odysseus that he must complete another journey with his companions before returning home. This

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Pugliese Uhlenbrock, ed., *Herakles: Passages of the Hero through 1000 Years of Classical Art* (New York: Aristide D. Caratzas, 1986), Thomas H. Carpenter, *Art and Myth in Ancient Greece: A Handbook* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1991), and Susan Woodford, *Images of Myths in Classical Antiquity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

<sup>48</sup> Mark P.O. Morford and Robert J. Lenardon, *Classical Mythology* (8 ed.; New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 349. See also Odysseus Tsagarakis, *Studies in Odyssey II* (*Hermes: Zeitschrift für Klassische Philologie* 82; Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2000), 100.

journey was to Hades in order to “seek prophecy from the ghost of Theban Teiresias (*Od.* 10.490-492).<sup>49</sup> Circe gave Odysseus instructions for summoning the ghosts of the dead by means of a necromantic ritual. Odysseus obeyed Circe’s command, despite his companions fear of journeying to Hades.

Odysseus and his companions were sped on their way with the aid of a North wind sent from Circe and came to “deep-flowing Oceanus” at the end of the earth (*Od.* 11.13-14).<sup>50</sup> After securing the ship, Odysseus performed the rites he learned from Circe: He dug a pit eighteen inches square and filled it with milk, honey, wine, and water. After sprinkling the mixture with white barley meal he “earnestly entreated the strengthless heads of the dead,” vowing that he would sacrifice a heifer for the dead and a ram for Teiresias when he returned to his home in Ithaca (*Od.* 11.29-33).<sup>51</sup> With this Odysseus sacrificed sheep and poured their blood into pit he had dug.<sup>52</sup>

Odysseus’ libation and prayer drew the attention of those in the underworld and the dead began to rise.<sup>53</sup> He saw many different types of dead, “brides, and unwed

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<sup>49</sup> Circe also told Odysseus that Teiresias was the only being in Hades that still had a sound mind. The rest, “flit about as shadows” (*Od.* 10:4493-495; cf. Plutarch, *Quaest. conviv.* 740e). Odysseus’ journey is commonly referred to as the *Nekyia*.

<sup>50</sup> It is here that the Periphlegethon and Cocytus rivers, which appear in later depictions of Hades, flow into Acheron (*Od.* 10. 513-514). Pausanias notes that these rivers are located in Thesprotia, in western Greece. He also says that the Cocytus is “a most unlovely stream,” and suggests that Homer visited the area, which is why he used these rivers in his work (*Descr.* 1.17.5).

<sup>51</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all quotations of Homer are from Homer, *Odyssey* (trans. A.T. Murray; revised by George E. Dimock; LCL; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002).

<sup>52</sup> On the cultic background of the necromantic ritual performed by Odysseus see Tsagarakis, *Odyssey II*, 37-44.

<sup>53</sup> Odysseus’ journey is an example of the directional difficulty in locating the place of punishment. Odysseus travelled to the end of the world, dug a pit for his libations, and sat down to guard it. At one point during this ritual he “descended” to the underworld (see also Tsagarakis, *Odyssey II*, 33). That Odysseus made an actual descent to Hades is confirmed later in the *Odyssey* by Circe, who said to Odysseus and his companions upon their return, “Stubborn men, who have gone down (ὑπὲλθετε) alive to the house of Hades to meet death twice, while other men die only once” (*Od.* 12.21-22), as well as



youths, and toil-worn old men, and frisking girls with hearts still new to sorrow, and . . . men slain in battle, wearing their blood-stained armor” (*Od.* 11.38-41). Afraid of the gathering throng, Odysseus ordered his men to burn the sacrificial sheep and pray to Hades and Persephone, while he guarded the libation pit with his sword drawn.<sup>54</sup>

Eventually, the ghost of Teiresias rose to meet Odysseus.<sup>55</sup> After drinking the libation of blood, Teiresias prophesied about Odysseus’ journey home: The journey would be difficult and filled with hardship, but Odysseus would eventually return to Ithaca (*Od.* 11.100-137).<sup>56</sup> Teiresias’ prophecy fulfilled the main purpose of Odysseus’ journey to Hades; Odysseus had received a prophecy about his attempted return home.

Odysseus’ experience in Hades was not, however, finished after his meeting with Teiresias. He had more visions and conversations with the dead, including with his

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Odysseus’ reference to Penelope about “the day when I went down (κατέβην) into the house of Hades” (*Od.* 23.252). The difficulty of Odysseus’ location in relation to the dead in Hades was recognized in early comments on the scene. Aristarchus, for example, asks in a scholia, “πῶς εἶδε τούτους ἢ τοὺς λοιποὺς ἔσω τῶν Ἄιδου πυλῶν ὄντας καὶ τῶν ποταμῶν;” (“How did he see these people or the others which were inside the gates of Hades and the river?”). For a discussion of the scholia, see Kweku A. Garbrah, “The Scholia on *Odyssey* Λ 566-640,” *Eranos* 76 (1978): 4. For a discussion of the combination of themes from a *catabasis* and *nekyomanteia* in the *Nekyia*, see Clark, *Catabasis*, 74-78, and Tsagarakis, *Odyssey II*, 94-100 (cf. 13-17). Regardless of his position relative to Hades, Odysseus saw the torments of several well known figures in Hades (see discussion below; see also Morford and Lenardon, *Classical Mythology*, 354-355).

<sup>54</sup> Odysseus had been commanded by Circe to guard the blood of these sacrifices from the dead until Teiresias drank from the sacrificial offering (*Od.* 10.516-540).

<sup>55</sup> Prior to meeting Teiresias, Odysseus had a discussion with Elpenor, one of his companions who had died in Circe’s palace. As the men were preparing to leave the island of Aeaea, Elpenor had fallen from a window, breaking his neck. In his discussion with Odysseus, Elpenor was concerned that he had not received a proper burial. He begged Odysseus to stop at Aeaea on his return to Ithaca and bury him. Odysseus promised to honor the request (*Od.* 11.57-80; cf. 12.8-15). Tsagarakis notes that, unlike the other spirits, both Elpenor and Teiresias are able to speak with Odysseus prior to drinking the libation; Tsagarakis, *Odyssey II*, 33.

<sup>56</sup> Teiresias, however, specifically warned Odysseus about the danger of landing on the island of Thrinacia, where the cattle of Helios graze (*Od.* 11.104-109). If Odysseus or his companions slaughtered any of the cattle they would put their lives at risk. This warning is repeated by Circe (*Od.* 12.127-141). When Odysseus and his companions arrived on Thrinacia, Odysseus, himself, warned his companions, but they ignored him. As a result, Zeus struck the ship with a lightning bolt, killing everyone on board except Odysseus (*Od.* 12.260-453).

mother, Anticleia, who gave him a positive report about the faithfulness of Penelope and news about his father (*Od.* 11.180-203), and also with many illustrious women who had died (*Od.* 11.225-384).<sup>57</sup> Eventually, Persephone dispersed the crowd and Odysseus spoke with Agamemnon, who was murdered by his wife, Clytemnestra, and her lover, Aegisthus (*Od.* 11.385-464).<sup>58</sup> Achilles also came forward to speak to Odysseus, asking for news about his son, Neoptolemus. Achilles told Odysseus that he would rather be a living servant than a dead lord in Hades (*Od.* 11.473-540). Many others also spoke with Odysseus, except for Ajax, whom Odysseus had bested in a contest for the weapons of Achilles (*Od.* 11.541-567). Finally, Odysseus had a vision of figures who, in later depictions of the underworld, became associated with Hades (e.g., Minos and Heracles), as well as examples of punishment in Hades (i.e., Tityos, Tantalus, and Sisyphus; *Od.* 11.568-626).

Odysseus' vision of the place of punishment is paradigmatic for later representations.<sup>59</sup> The location of the dead is identified as "Hades" (Ἅιδης),<sup>60</sup> a place located at the end of the earth near "deep-flowing Oceanus, which bounds the earth, where is the land and city of the Cimmerians, wrapped in mist and cloud" (*Od.* 11.13-15).

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<sup>57</sup> Some have questioned the integrity usefulness of this section in the *Odyssey*. For bibliography, see Alfred Heubeck and Arie Hoekstra, *A Commentary on Homer's Odyssey* (2; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 90ff. Page writes, "These heroines have nothing whatever to do with Odysseus"; Sir Denys Lionel Page, *The Homeric Odyssey* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955), 36. Others have noted the similarity of this section to Hesiod's catalogues; see especially Rudolf Pfeiffer, "Hesiodisches Und Homerisches, Zu Neuen Und Alten Papyri," *Phil* 92 (1937): 1-18.

<sup>58</sup> See discussion below of the importance of this event in *Odyssey* 1.35-43.

<sup>59</sup> This does not, of course, imply that Homer was not influenced by others. Tsagarakis suggests that "a *Catabasis of Heracles* was known to the poet," but that it also "cannot be said with certainty whether, and to what extent, the poet was influenced by earlier accounts of a 'review of Hades'"; Tsagarakis, *Odyssey II*, 100. See note 39 above on Norden's hypothesis of a Ἡρακλέους κατάβασις.

<sup>60</sup> There are multiple spellings for Hades in Homer, including Ἅιδης and Αἴδαιο.

The sun is blocked in this area and Hades itself is described as a “murky darkness” (ζόφον ἠερόεντα; see *Od.* 11.57, 155). While it is not clear if Odysseus traveled down into Hades itself,<sup>61</sup> it was possible to summon the dead from Hades by means of the proper necromantic ritual. When the dead arrived they caused fear among the living (*Od.* 11.43), but were held at bay with a sword (*Od.* 11.48-50; cf. 11.95-96), although they were “strengthless” and incorporeal.<sup>62</sup> The dead were also sentient and capable of emotion and feeling pain.<sup>63</sup> On the one hand, the dead were able to feel joy, anger, and grief.<sup>64</sup> On the other hand, some of the dead experienced pain as a result of their misdeeds. Most notable among these are Tityos, whose liver was continually eaten by

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<sup>61</sup> At one point, we learn that Odysseus has “gone down” (κατελθέμεν) into Hades (*Od.* 11.475). At a later point, however, it does not seem that Odysseus has left the beach. The last hero with whom Odysseus has contact is Heracles. After Heracles’ lament over his suffering, he “went away again into the house of Hades,” but Odysseus stood where he was, hoping to see other illustrious warriors in Hades (*Od.* 11.627-628). This may imply that Odysseus, himself, has not descended into Hades. This may explain why there is no mention of a guide to Hades, a prominent feature of later descents. Only Heracles mentions that he was guided by Hermes and Athene on his journey to capture Cerberus (*Od.* 11.625-626; cf. *Il.* 8.367-369 for another reference to the descent of Heracles). See also note 53 above on the nature of Odysseus’ journey as a descent.

<sup>62</sup> Odysseus “earnestly entreated the strengthless heads of the dead” (νεκῶν ἀμενηνὰ κάρηνα; 11.29; see also *Od.* 11.49). When he attempted to embrace his mother, he was unable to grasp her. She was like a shadow (σκιῇ) or a dream (ὄνειρος; *Od.* 11.204-209). He was troubled that he was unable to hold her and share “chill lamenting” (*Od.* 11.212). Anticleia answered: “[I]t is not that Persephone, daughter of Zeus, is deceiving you, but this is the appointed way with mortals, when one dies. For the sinews no longer hold the flesh and the bones together, but the strong force of blazing fire destroys these, as soon as the spirit (δαμνῆ) leaves the white bones, and the ghost (ψυχῇ), like a dream, flutters off and is gone” (*Od.* 11.216-223). “Blazing fire” is probably a reference to cremation (see Tsagarakis, *Odyssey II*, 111). It is also true, however, that not all the dead are incorporeal. As we have seen above, they are not only able to be held at bay with a sword, but they also are able to drink blood to regain their wits. Moreover, it appears that those punished in Hades have a corporeal existence (e.g., Tityos’ liver is eaten, dust rises from the stone as Sisyphus pushes it, etc.). Tsagarakis argues that this inconsistency regarding the form of the dead is a result of a conflation of burial practices; Tsagarakis, *Odyssey II*, 105-119. That is, some of the dead were cremated, which destroyed their bones, while others were interred, which allowed them to continue a corporeal existence.

<sup>63</sup> For the majority of the dead, this was only possible after drinking the libation of blood.

<sup>64</sup> Examples include Achilles’ joy when hearing of his son’s preeminence (*Od.* 11.538-540), Telamon’s continued anger toward Odysseus because of Odysseus’ victory over him in the contest for Achilles weapons (*Od.* 11.541-552), and Heracles’ lament to Odysseus (*Od.* 11.601-626; see also Achilles’ lament that he would rather be a living servant than a dead lord of Hades; *Od.* 11.489-492).

birds (*Od.* 11.576-581) and Tantalus (*Od.* 11.582-592), who was “in bitter torment” (κρατέρ’ ἄλγε’), standing in a lake.<sup>65</sup> These two figures, along with Sisyphus (*Od.* 11.593-600), became stock characters in many accounts of the underworld.

With this description of Hades, we can now turn to the question of the function of the journey in the *Odyssey*. The explicit purpose of Odysseus’ journey to Hades was to gain information. Circe told Odysseus that he must first visit Hades in order “to seek prophecy from the ghost of Theban Teiresias” (*Od.* 10.492). This prophecy would reveal to Odysseus his “way” (ὁδόν), the “measures of the path” (μέτρα κελεύθου), his “return” (νόστον), and how he would go “over the fish-filled deep” (ἐπὶ πόντον ἐλεύσεαι χυθούεντα; *Od.* 10.538-540). In short, it appeared that Teiresias would reveal to Odysseus the way that he must take in order to return home. Odysseus, himself, hoped that Teiresias would tell him “some plan” (τινα βουλὴν) “whereby I might reach rugged Ithaca” (*Od.* 11.479). The prophet did not, however, lay out a clear route home for Odysseus and his companions.<sup>66</sup> Rather, Teiresias warned Odysseus that his return (νόστος) would be difficult because Poseidon’s wrath had been kindled when Odysseus blinded Polyphemus, the Cyclops.<sup>67</sup> Despite the rage of the god, Teiresias offered Odysseus hope that he would return home. The seer said, “[Y]ou and your comrades may reach home, though suffering hardships, if you will curb your own spirit and that of your comrades . . .” (*Od.* 11.104-107). Specifically, Teiresias warned Odysseus against

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<sup>65</sup> Tantalus was “wild with thirst, but had no way to drink.” His attempts to eat were also frustrated as the branches of the trees were blown by the wind into the “shadowy clouds” (νέφεα σκιόεντα).

<sup>66</sup> Circe later gave Odysseus information that is more of this nature (see *Od.* 12.37-141).

<sup>67</sup> Teiresias’ prophecy is found in *Od.* 11.100-137. The story of Odysseus and the Cyclops is found in *Od.* 9.224-566. Some scholars have seen the wrath of Poseidon as the link between the *Nekyia* and the rest of the *Odyssey*. See, for example, Marchinus van der Valk, *Beiträge zur Nekyia* (Kampen: J.H. Kok, 1935). See, however, the discussion of the theme of the *Nekyia* below.

harming the cattle of Helios on the island of Thrinakia: “If you leave [the cattle of Helios] unharmed and are careful of your homeward way, you still may reach Ithaca, though suffering hardships. But if you harm them, then I foresee ruin for your ship and your comrades, and even if you shall yourself escape, late shall you come home and in distress, after losing all your comrades . . .” (*Od.* 11.110-114). Teiresias’ prophecy, then, does not provide Odysseus with directions for his return, but a warning that must be heeded to ensure a successful return. Essentially, the journey to Hades and the consultation with Teiresias set up the ultimate test for a safe homecoming.<sup>68</sup>

Despite the denigration of the *Nekyia* by some who either question its integrity,<sup>69</sup> or call it “a fools errand,”<sup>70</sup> a careful reading shows the importance of the warning to avoid Helios’ cattle on Thrinakia in the overall narrative.<sup>71</sup> Indeed, of all the important events in the *Odyssey*, the misdeeds of Odysseus’ companions on Thrinakia occupy the bulk of the proemium to the poem:<sup>72</sup>

Tell me, Muse, of the man of many devices, driven far astray after he had sacked the sacred citadel of Troy. Many were the men whose cities he saw and whose minds he learned, and many the woes he suffered in his heart upon the sea, seeking to win his own life and the return of his comrades, for all his desire, for through their own blind folly they perished—fools, who devoured the cattle of Helios Hyperion; whereupon he took from them the day of their returning. (*Od.* 1.1-9)

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<sup>68</sup> Bernard Fenik, writes, “Left to their own devices, and without interference from above, the men would have sailed away from Thrinakia, without so much as looking at the cattle”; Bernard Fenik, *Studies in the Odyssey* (Hermes: Zeitschrift für Klassische Philologie 30; Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1974), 222. The fact that they received the warning makes the test a true test.

<sup>69</sup> Page, *Homeric Odyssey*, 32.

<sup>70</sup> W.J. Woodhouse, *The Composition of Homer’s Odyssey* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1930), 145.

<sup>71</sup> The vagueness of Teiresias’ prophecy is seen by the scholars cited above as a detriment to the event. Tsagarakis shows, however, that prophecy in the *Odyssey*, and elsewhere, is vague by nature; Tsagarakis, *Odyssey II*, 50-56.

<sup>72</sup> Rainer Friedrich, “Thrinakia and Zeus’ Ways to Men in the Odyssey,” *GRBS* 28 (1987): 375.

From the beginning, the reader of the *Odyssey* is prepared for the “blind folly” (ἄτασθαλῖαι) that would ruin Odysseus’ companions. Zeus, himself, picks up on this idea in his speech to the gods in *Odyssey* 1.32-43: “It’s astonishing how ready mortals are to blame the gods. It is from us, they say, that evils come, but they even by themselves, through their own blind folly (σφῆσιν ἄτασθαλίῃσιν), have sorrows beyond that which is ordained” (*Od.* 1.32-34). Here, the god “expresses the novel notion of man’s own responsibility for suffering he incurs ‘beyond his allotted portion’ (ὕπερ μόνον) as a result of his ‘reckless folly’ (ἄτασθαλῖαι).”<sup>73</sup> The example Zeus uses as an illustration is Aegisthus, who took the wife of Agamemnon and then killed him, despite the fact that Hermes warned him against the action (*Od.* 1.35-39). Rudolf Pfeiffer makes a connection between the events on Thrinakia, the misdeeds of Aegisthus, and the suitors of Penelope.<sup>74</sup> Thus, the theme of ἄτασθαλῖαι in the face of divine warning extends throughout the *Odyssey*.

In this way, the *Nekyia* is an essential scene in the *Odyssey*.<sup>75</sup> Odysseus was warned not to molest the cattle of Helios or he would suffer the wrath of the god. In the end, of course, Odysseus’ companions failed to heed the warning and were punished appropriately.<sup>76</sup> Odysseus, on the other hand, while not without fault,<sup>77</sup> is a model of

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<sup>73</sup> Friedrich, “Zeus’ Ways to Men,” 375.

<sup>74</sup> Rudolf Pfeiffer, *Asugewählte Schriften: aufsätze und Vorträge zur griechischen Dichtung und zum Humanismus* (München: C.H. Becksche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1960), 16-19. See also Raymond Clark, who draws attention to Odysseus’ meeting with Agamemnon in the *Nekyia* and the dead hero’s admonition to bring his ship “in secret, and not openly” when he returns; Clark, *Catabasis*, 48-51; see *Od.* 11.455-456.

<sup>75</sup> Tsagarakis writes that Teiresias’ warning “links our *Nekyia* to the *Odyssey*”; Tsagarakis, *Odyssey II*, 57.

<sup>76</sup> See Tsagarakis, *Odyssey II*, 59. The account of the consequences of eating the cattle of Helios is told in *Od.* 12.397-446. After six days of feasting on the cattle, Odysseus and his men set sail. When they reached the open sea, a great storm arose around them. The wind was so strong that it broke the ship’s

dependence upon the gods. Not only did he convey Teiresias' warning to his companions (*Od.* 12.320-323), but sought the counsel of the gods when supplies began to run low during their extended stay, instead of joining his companions as they butchered the cattle (*Od.* 12.327-351).<sup>78</sup> The scene, then, functions as a turning point in the narrative, where the characters are warned by the gods to avoid certain actions. Their obedience to the warning will determine their fate.<sup>79</sup>

In summary, Odysseus' journey functions as a twofold revelation. For the reader, the journey functions as a revelation of Hades. As noted above, Odysseus visited a place at the end of the world that is dark and gloomy, occupied by the dead, who were able to be revived by a proper libation. Some of the dead were punished in Hades, but others seemed to live a shadowy existence that mirrored their previous life on earth. Odysseus, however, did not make the journey to learn about Hades, but rather to receive instruction from Teiresias about his journey home. While Odysseus did not receive step-by-step directions, he did receive a message about the dangers remaining on his journey. First, Teiresias made clear the demands of the gods upon Odysseus and his companions. In this way, the demand for obedience to the revelation of the gods is placed squarely on Odysseus and his men. Odysseus is the only one to pass the test because he chose to heed the warning and depend upon the gods for deliverance from the temptation to abuse the cattle of Helios. Second, Odysseus learned about the suitors of Penelope. He was

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mast. At the same time lightning struck the boat, shattering it to pieces. All of Odysseus' companions were sucked out to sea, leaving him as the lone survivor.

<sup>77</sup> See his obstinate refusal to leave the cave of the Cyclops, Polyphemus, which led to Poseidon's wrath (*Od.* 9.224-566).

<sup>78</sup> See also Odysseus' dependence upon Athene for escape from Polyphemus (*Od.* 9.317).

<sup>79</sup> On this function of the *Nekyia* see also Heubeck and Hoekstra, *Odyssey*, 10-11.

told by Teiresias that he would eventually return home and conquer his opponents. Later in the *Nekyia* he was warned by Agamemnon to approach the suitors in disguise. As we have seen this advice is later repeated by Athene and Odysseus successfully drove the men from his home.

### *Aeneas' Descent to the Underworld*

The descent of Aeneas to the underworld is one of the fullest ancient accounts of a journey to the dead, and is perhaps the most influential.<sup>80</sup> It is not, however, a wholly unique creation, and there are many similarities between the descent of Aeneas and Homer's report of the journey of Odysseus to Hades, as well as several other underworld journeys that pre-existed Virgil's account.<sup>81</sup> Raymond Clark, for example, writes, "Since no actual Αἰνείου κατάβασις existed before Vergil, Aeneas' journey through the netherworld is the product of Vergil's creation fashioned by extensive adaptation of earlier descents made by other catabatic heroes."<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> The influence of Aeneas' descent is most famously seen in Dante's *Divine Comedy*.

<sup>81</sup> See Clark, *Catabasis*, 15, 147-183. Deryck Williams notes the comments about the influence of Homer on Virgil by early writers like Donatus and Macrobius, and writes, "the *Aeneid* is indeed a full-scale *aemulatio* of Homer, and in it Virgil uses again for his own purposes many aspects of the structure of the Homeric poems, their conventions (such as the similes, or the double action in Olympus and on earth), their episodes (like the catalogue, the visit to the underworld, the funeral games, the single combat), their characters (Aeneas and Turnus have strong relationship with Hector and Achilles, Pallas is like Patroclus, Palinurus like Elpenor), their very phraseology. It has often been remarked that the first half of the *Aeneid* is Virgil's *Odyssey*, describing the wanderings of the hero, and the second half his *Iliad*, describing the battles; it is astonishing to find from a close investigation how very similar in structure and episode the first book of the *Aeneid* is to *Odyssey* 5-8; or how densely the last scenes of *Aeneid* 12 echo the events of *Iliad* 22"; Deryck Williams, "The Aeneid," in *The Cambridge History of Classical Literature* (eds. E.J. Kenney, and W.V. Clausen; 2; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 339-40. For a more detailed account of the influence of Homer on the *Aeneid* see Georg Nicolaus Knauer, *Die Aeneis und Homer: Studien zur poetischen Technik Vergils, mit Listen der Homerzitate in der Aeneis* (Hypomnemata: Untersuchungen zur Antike und zu ihrem Nachleben 7; 2d ed.; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1979).

<sup>82</sup> Raymond J. Clark, "How Vergil Expanded the Underworld in Aeneid 6," *PCPhS* 47 (2001): 104. Clark's interest in this article is to show how Virgil transferred the role of Aeacus in fragment of the tragedy *Pirithous*, written by either Euripides or Critias, to Charon. The similarities between Aeneas' descent and the journey of Odysseus are well documented and will be noted below. For discussion of the



The account begins when Aeneas and his companions arrived on the Italian coast. When he arrived, he sought the Sibyl of Cumae, prophetess of Apollo, in order to ask her to show him the way to the underworld so that he might meet with his father, Anchises. Calling upon the examples of Orpheus, Pollux, Theseus, and Heracles, he sought to convince the Sibyl of his worth. The Sibyl agreed to be his guide, telling Aeneas, “Easy is the descent to Avernus<sup>83</sup> . . . but to recall one’s steps and pass out to the upper air, this is the task, this the toil!” (*Aen.* 6.126-129).<sup>84</sup> With this warning, the Sibyl told Aeneas that three tasks must be completed in order to enter the underworld. First, Aeneas must find the golden bough, hidden in the nearby forest, to bring as an offering to Proserpine (i.e., Persephone).<sup>85</sup> Second, he must bury his companion Misenus, who had died an untimely death while Aeneas was searching for the Sibyl. Finally, Aeneas must offer the proper peace offering of black cattle prior to descending (*Aen.* 6.133-155).

Aeneas returned to the ships in order to make preparations for the burial of Misenus (*Aen.* 6.154-182, 212-235),<sup>86</sup> before beginning his search for the golden bough.

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artistic nature of the changes made by Virgil to his sources see Frederick E. Brenk, “Most Beautiful Horror: Baroque Touches in Vergil’s Underworld,” *The Classical World* 73 (1979): 1-7.

<sup>83</sup> Virgil thought the Greeks called the place of this descent “Avernus” because it meant “no birds” (*Aen.* 6.242). This is possibly a reference to the smell that arose from the place, killing the birds (cf. *Aen.* 6.201).

<sup>84</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all quotations of Virgil are from Virgil, *Eclogues, Georgics, Aeneid I-VI* (trans. H. Rushton Fairclough; rev. G. P. Goold; LCL; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999). Ironically, the story of Aeneas’ journey to the underworld describes the descent in great detail, but devotes only eight lines to the ascent from the underworld (*Aen.* 6.893-901). It is possible, of course, that the Sibyl is making a statement regarding the journey of mortals to the underworld. The context, however, focuses on the gods and heroes.

<sup>85</sup> The literature on the significance of the golden bough is extensive. For a brief discussion and helpful bibliography see Clark, *Catabasis*, 185-204, and Raymond Cormier, “Who Bears the Golden Bough Before Charon?,” in *Studies in Latin Literature and Roman History* XII (ed. Carl Deroux; Collection Latomus 287; Bruxelles: Éditions Latomus, 2005), 175-177.

<sup>86</sup> The scene is similar to the burial of Elpenor (*Od.* 12.8-15), who had died unbeknownst to Odysseus. While the burial of Elpenor and Misenus are similar, it is important to note that they function

He received guidance in his quest from a pair of doves that led him to the bough deep in the forest (*Aen.* 6.183-211). With Misenus buried and the golden bough in hand, Aeneas prepared to offer the appropriate sacrifice<sup>87</sup> in front of the entrance to the underworld.<sup>88</sup> After the sacrifices were made and the sun was about rise, the ground began to shake and a sound of howling dogs filled the air. The Sibyl commanded the attendants to flee from the forest and commanded Aeneas: “rush on the road and unsheathe your sword! Now, Aeneas, is the hour for courage, now for a dauntless heart!” (*Aen.* 6.260-261). With this Aeneas entered the cave and began his descent to the underworld.

Aeneas and the Sibyl descended through the gloom of the cave, and at the entrance to the underworld encountered an assortment of figures.<sup>89</sup> Grief and Care made their bed there (*Aen.* 6.274). Disease, Age, Fear, Hunger, and Want were “shapes terrible to view” (*Aen.* 6.275-276). Death, Disease, Sleep, War, and Strife were also there along with the iron cells of the Furies (*Aen.* 6.276-281). In the midst of all, stood an elm, home of false dreams (*Aen.* 6.282-284). At the gate were also gathered several beasts: Centaurs, Scyllas, Briareus, Lerna, Gorgons and Harpies, and Geryon (*Aen.* 6.286-289).

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differently in the two accounts. In the *Odyssey*, Odysseus makes a promise to Elpenor after talking with him during his journey to Hades. In the *Aeneid*, Aeneas must bury Misenus prior to making his journey. See also below the comment on Aeneas’ meeting with Palinurus in the underworld.

<sup>87</sup> The account of Aeneas’ sacrifice (*Aen.* 6.243-254) is very similar to the account of Odysseus’ sacrifice before meeting with the dead (*Od.* 11.23-34).

<sup>88</sup> The entrance is described as a cave, “yawning wide and vast, of jagged rock, and sheltered by a dark lake and woodland gloom” from which arose a noxious odor (*Aen.* 6.237-239).

<sup>89</sup> Alan Bernstein notes that Virgil constructs the descent of Aeneas through a series of contrasts; Alan E. Bernstein, *The Formation of Hell: Death and Retribution in the Ancient and Early Christian Worlds* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1993), 62. Here, Aeneas and the Sibyl descend into the gloom of the underworld just as day begins to dawn in the world of the living.

At the site of these creatures, Aeneas raised his sword, but was reminded by the Sibyl that they were bodiless and his sword will have no affect on them (*Aen.* 6.290-294).<sup>90</sup>

Moving on from the portico of Hades, the pair reached the tributary of the river Acheron and Cocytus where they met Charon, ferryman of the dead.<sup>91</sup> Around him a great throng of the dead gathered, asking that they might be the first ferried across the river to the other side.<sup>92</sup> Charon refused to take all of the dead at once, allowing only those whom he selected to enter his boat. Aeneas learned from the Sibyl that Charon only allowed those who had received a proper burial to embark on the journey across the “Stygian marsh.” The rest, who were unburied, roamed the shores for a hundred years before being allowed to cross over (*Aen.* 6.317-330).<sup>93</sup> When Aeneas approached Charon

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<sup>90</sup> Clark notes that this command comes earlier in Virgil’s account of Aeneas’ descent than it does in other similar scenes in other descents (e.g., Apollodorus *Bibl.* 2.5.12; Bacchylides *Odes* 5.71-84). The effect is that “Vergil heightens emotions at the very beginning of the Underworld journey as Aeneas reacts from sheer fright at the terror inspired by the monstrous shapes living there”; Clark, “Expanded Underworld,” 114-15.

<sup>91</sup> Clark cites this scene as an example of Virgil’s reworking of prior journeys to the underworld. Here Virgil “has artfully transferred the scene of the challenge of Heracles by Aeacus [in Euripides’ *Pirithous*] from deep inside the Underworld at Pluto’s gate beyond the infernal lake to an earlier location . . .”; Clark, “Expanded Underworld,” 111. See also Raymond J. Clark, “P. Oxy. 2078, Vat.Gr. 2228, and Vergil’s Charon,” *CQ* 50 (2000): 192-196.

<sup>92</sup> Compare *Od.* 11.36-50 and the throngs of the dead who gathered around the libation pit Odysseus had dug. Odysseus did not allow the throng to taste of the sacrificial blood without his permission. Charon does not allow the dead to enter the boat without his permission. According to Clark, Virgil has moved the “ghost-scene” up in the narrative compared to Heracles’ experience in Bacchylides’ *Odes* 5 and Orpheus’ experience in *Georgics*. The effect of this change “is to delay Aeneas’ crossing over the Styx, which in consequence appears, impressionistically at least if not geographically, to be pushed deeper into the Underworld, since Aeneas is troubled both by the sudden pathos at the sight of the ghosts and by the shock of Charon’s subsequent challenge before he can fully approach and cross the infernal waters”; Clark, “Expanded Underworld,” 112-13.

<sup>93</sup> It is here that Aeneas met Palinurus, his helmsman, who had fallen overboard. Palinurus had been washed ashore, but was killed by “the barbarous folk” that lived there. Since his body was unburied, he was forced to wander the shores of the underworld river. Palinurus begged Aeneas to either bury him or convince the Sibyl to take him across the river when they both crossed. The Sibyl denied his request, but comforted Palinurus with the news that people in a neighboring area would indeed bury his body and erect a tomb in his honor (*Aen.* 6.337-383). This scene is similar to that of Odysseus and Elpenor (*Od.* 11.51-83), except that Odysseus is the one who eventually buried Elpenor. Moreover, there is no indication in the *Odyssey* that Elpenor’s status in the underworld is in limbo until he is properly buried. The motivation for

and his boat the ferryman rebuked him, telling Aeneas that living souls were not allowed to cross. He was particularly concerned that Aeneas was on a mission like Heracles, Theseus, or Pirithous, all of whom attempted to take something from the underworld by force. The Sibyl assured Charon that Aeneas was not on a mission to abduct Cerberus or Proserpine, but was in search of his father. After the golden bough was shown to Charon, he consented to take the pair across the river.<sup>94</sup>

Upon reaching the far side of the river the Sibyl fed Cerberus a drugged piece of bread, allowing them to move past the three-headed beast. With this, Aeneas and the Sibyl came in contact with those who had died prematurely, consisting of five groups: infants, those who were falsely accused of crimes and condemned to die, those who had committed suicide, those who died of love, and dead soldiers (*Aen.* 6.426-534).<sup>95</sup> Aeneas engaged in discussion with many of the figures in this area before the Sibyl warned him that it was time to move along on their journey.

At this point, Aeneas reached a fork in the road: To the right, the path led to Elysium; to the left, the path led to Tartarus (*Aen.* 6.539-543). Aeneas looked to the left and saw a triple-walled castle surrounded by a river of fire.<sup>96</sup> The castle was further

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burial in the *Odyssey* is that Elpenor may “become a cause of the gods’ wrath” against Odysseus, if left unburied (*Od.* 11.73-74).

<sup>94</sup> Cormier discusses the ambiguity in the Latin text about who showed the bough to Charon; Cormier, “Golden Bough,” 173-183.

<sup>95</sup> For a discussion of this scene, see Bernstein, *Formation of Hell*, 64-67. This portion of the *Aeneid* is very similar to Odysseus’ vision of Hades in several ways: (1) In both stories, the hero interacts with the dead; (2) Like Achilles, who would rather be a servant in the land of the living than a ruler among the dead (*Od.* 11.473-540), the suicides would gladly “bear both want and harsh distress” from the living instead of their experience in the underworld (*Aen.* 6.434-437); (3) Minos served as the arbiter of the dead in both the *Odyssey* (*Od.* 11.568-571) and the *Aeneid* (*Aen.* 6.432-433).

<sup>96</sup> The river, Phlegethon, is the same river seen by Odysseus in the underworld, which there is called πυριφλεγέθων (cf. *Od.* 10.513).

fortified with a gate so large, and pillars so strong, that “not even the sons of heaven” could break it down during a war (*Aen.* 6.553-554). Tisiphone sat atop a “soaring” iron tower, keeping watch over the gate night and day, “girt with bloody pall” (*Aen.* 6.554-555). From within the castle Aeneas “heard groans, the sound of the savage lash, the clank of iron and the dragging of chains” (*Aen.* 6.557-558).

Aeneas was distressed by the noises that came from the castle and asked the Sibyl to explain what was happening. The Sibyl, taught by Hecate, explained the torments in Tartarus to Aeneas: Rhadmanthus “holds . . . his iron sway,” acting like a judge of those who have “put off atonement for sin until death’s late hour” (*Aen.* 6.566-569). The guilty party was then passed on to Tisiphone, who “leaps on the guilty to scourge them . . . brandishing her grim snakes,” and the other Furies (*Aen.* 6. 570-572). After this description, the gates of Tartarus opened revealing the Hydra, with her fifty heads, and Tartarus itself “stretching into the gloom twice as far as is the upward view of the sky toward heavenly Olympus” (*Aen.* 6.575-579).<sup>97</sup> Within Tartarus were those who were famously punished for their misdeeds: the Titans, the sons of Aloeus, Salmoneus, Tityos, the Lapiths, Ixion, Pirithous, and Tantalus.<sup>98</sup> Before these figures was a “banquet in royal splendour” that the punished were not allowed to touch (*Aen.* 6.580-607). Also in Tartarus were mortals who were patricides, those who “entangled a client in wrong,” who

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<sup>97</sup> The depth of the underworld is often described vividly by ancient authors. Apollodorus, for example, says that the underworld is as far from earth as earth is from heaven (Apollodorus, *Biblio.* 1.1.2-4). Hesiod measures the distance between the regions by saying that a bronze anvil takes 10 days to fall from heaven to earth, and 10 days to fall from earth to the underworld (Hesiod, *Theog.* 722-725).

<sup>98</sup> The punishments are described in terms of well-known underworld punishments (e.g., rolling a huge stone; hanging outstretched on the spokes of a wheel, etc.). See *Od.* 11.576-600 for a similar description of the punishment of Tityos and Tantalus.

hoarded wealth, who did not care for their relatives,<sup>99</sup> those who were slain for adultery, and the treasonous (*Aen.* 6.608-615, 621-627).

After learning of these punishments, the vision of Tartarus was completed and Aeneas and the Sibyl continued on their journey and arrived at the Elysian fields.<sup>100</sup> After washing his body with water and placing the Golden Bough on the threshold of the door, he and the Sibyl “came to a land of joy, the pleasant lawns and happy seats of the Blissful Groves” (*Aen.* 6.637-639). The land was pleasant smelling and was lit by its own sun and stars. Aeneas saw many people wrestling, listening to music, dancing, and enjoying themselves.<sup>101</sup> Shortly, Aeneas and the Sibyl met Musaeus, who guided them to Anchises, the father of Aeneas. Aeneas attempted to embrace his father three times, but was unable to grasp him because Anchises was bodiless (*Aen.* 6.699-702).<sup>102</sup> Despite his incorporeal nature, Anchises was able to reveal the future of Rome to Aeneas. For the remainder of Aeneas’ time in the underworld, Anchises revealed to him the future glory of Rome. When Anchises’ account was complete, Aeneas and the Sibyl left quickly through the ivory gate.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Virgil notes that this was the largest group of people in Tartarus (*Aen.* 6.611).

<sup>100</sup> Since the focus of this chapter is on the vision of the place of punishment, the comments on the Elysian Fields in this section will be brief.

<sup>101</sup> The music is played by Orpheus, another person whose descent to the underworld was well-documented (*Aen.* 6.645-647).

<sup>102</sup> Cf. Odysseus’ unsuccessful attempt to embrace his mother three times.

<sup>103</sup> There are two exits from the underworld (*Aen.* 6.893-898). One exit leads through the horn gate, which “offers a ready exit for true shades.” The other leads through a gate of ivory, “but delusive dreams issue upward through it from the world below.” For recent discussion of the significance of Aeneas’ exit through the ivory gate, see Ross S. Kilpatrick, “The Stuff of Doors and Dreams (Vergil, *Aeneid* 6.893-898)” *Vergilius* 41 (1995): 63-70; and Lee Michael Fratantuono, “A Brief Reflection on the Gates of Sleep,” *Latomus* 66 (2007): 628-635.

With this summary of Aeneas' journey to the underworld, we can move on to a discussion of the function of the journey in the *Aeneid*. Scholars recognize that the *Aeneid* was, first and foremost, a political document celebrating national pride. Deryck Williams, for example, writes

Virgil's *Aeneid* was conceived and shaped as a national and patriotic epic for the Romans of his day. Certainly the Romans hailed it as such, and it rapidly became both a set text in education and the natural successor to the *Annales* of Ennius as the great poetic exposition of Roman ideals and achievements. . . . Virgil's primary intention was to sing of his country's glories past and present, and of the greatness yet to come.<sup>104</sup>

One of the more conspicuous means of achieving this goal is found in Aeneas' descent to the underworld in Book 6. The goal of the journey is made explicit prior to the journey when Anchises' called to his son from the world of the dead in *Aeneid* 5: "Hither, with much blood of black sheep, the pure Sibyl will lead you; and then you will learn of all your race, and what city is given to you" (*Aen.* 5:736-737). When Aeneas eventually reached the Elysian Fields and met Anchises, he was given a vision of the future of his people. The vision is so evocative that it overshadows the description of Tartarus that immediately precedes it.<sup>105</sup> Since the focus of this chapter is on the journey to the place of punishment, I will focus on the function of this section in what follows.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Williams, "Aeneid," 333.

<sup>105</sup> On the neglect of the Tartarus scene, see James E. G. Zetzel, "Romane Memento: Justice and Judgment in Aeneid 6," *Transactions of the American Philological Association* (1974-) 119 (1989): 264-65.

<sup>106</sup> For a discussion of the function of Anchises' speech to Aeneas see Norden, *Aeneis Buch VI*, 295-349; Clark, *Catabasis*, 166-83; Wendell Clausen, *Virgil's Aeneid: Decorum, Allusion, and Ideology* (Munich: K.G. Sauer, 2002); and David O. Ross, *Virgil's Aeneid: A Reader's Guide* (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2007), 109-13.

As noted above, the punishments meted out in the description of Tartarus are divided into two types.<sup>107</sup> The first, description is of the punishment of individuals, who tend to be mythological figures (*Aen.* 6.580-607, 616-620).<sup>108</sup> The second is a description the punishment of types of people (*Aen.* 6.608-615, 621-627). As noted above these “types” of wrongdoers include patricides, those who “entangled a client in wrong,” those who hoarded wealth, those who did not care for their relatives, those who were slain for adultery, and the treasonous. R.G. Austin notes each of these types of punishment involves “the violation of the laws of *pietas*.”<sup>109</sup> In light of the political nature of the *Aeneid* this violation is significant. As Williams notes, Virgil presented the reign of Augustus not only as a negative achievement (i.e., “the removal of violence and bloodshed” through war), but also as “the positive prospect of a return to what was seen as Rome’s true self, a return to the *mos maiorum*, the way of life of their ancestors.” This way of life had been romanticized by those like Livy, and “idealized into an idyllic vision of the simple virtues, virtues of *fides*, *pietas*, *religio*, *disciplina*, *constantia*, *grauitas*.”<sup>110</sup> In this way, the scene of punishment in Tartarus has a parallel function to that of the scene in the Elysian Fields. While the parade of heroes is meant to engender national hope in the person of the ruler, the scene in Tartarus is meant to provoke fidelity to the virtues that had made Rome great.

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<sup>107</sup> See also Zetzel, “Justice and Judgment,” 265-266.

<sup>108</sup> R.G. Austin notes that Virgil does not always attribute the traditional punishment to the traditional wrongdoer; R.G. Austin, *P. Vergili Maronis, Aeneidos Liber Sextus: With a Commentary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 191-92. For example, Ixion and Pirithous are punished in a way that is normally reserved for Tantalus (see *Aen.* 6.600).

<sup>109</sup> Austin, *P. Vergili*, 193.

<sup>110</sup> Williams, “Aeneid,” 338.



## *Conclusion*

Both Odysseus and Aeneas journeyed to the place of punishment in order to receive a revelation. On one level, the journeys function as a revelation of the place of punishment for the readers of the documents. On another level, however, the descents have a specific function in their respective narratives. For Odysseus, the descent to the underworld results in a message about the dangers remaining on his journey. Teiresias makes clear the demands of the gods upon Odysseus and his companions. In this way, the demand for obedience to the revelation of the gods is placed squarely on Odysseus and his men. For Aeneas, the vision he received during his descent to the underworld functions as a proleptic vision of both the greatness of the Roman empire and the ethical demands placed upon its citizens. The consequences of failing to meet these demands are most clearly seen in the vision of Tartarus. In this way, the Tartarus scene functions as a warning for violating the ethical demands of the community. In the next section of this chapter, I will discuss the role of the journey to the place of punishment by mortals and the function of these journeys in philosophical texts.

### *Journeys to the Place of Punishment by Mortals*

The story of a journey to the place of punishment was not limited to gods and heroes in the ancient world. In several cases, the story is told of a mortal who witnessed the postmortem punishment of others during a journey to the place of punishment. Both Plato and Plutarch include such journeys at key sections in their philosophic and moral writings. As we will see, the primary issue in these texts is the relationship between the story of the journey to the place of punishment (in these texts referred to as a *μῦθος*) and the overall argument of the work (in these texts often referred to as the *λόγος*). As such,

the κατάβασις has a distinct rhetorical function in the overall argument of these works. I will begin with a discussion of Plato's "Myth of Er," found in *Republic*, 10.614A-621D. Following this, I will provide an overview of Plutarch's *De Sera numinis vindicta* and *De Genio Socratis*.

*Plato, Republic 10.614A-621D: The "Myth of Er"*

Plato's "Myth of Er" is told in the context of an argument about theodicy.<sup>111</sup>

Here, it is suggested that while the wicked and the just appear to have the same lot in the beginning, the just will be vindicated and the wicked will receive their due in the present life (*Resp.* 613B-D). Moreover, death will serve as further vindication of the just and punishment of the wicked (*Resp.* 614A). As proof of this argument (λόγος), the tale (μῦθος)<sup>112</sup> of Er, the Pamphylian warrior, is recounted.

The myth of Er begins with his death on the battlefield. After ten days, he and the other slain were gathered, and two days later he was placed on a funeral pyre, where he revived and recounted the story of his journey. Upon death, Er found himself

in a mysterious region where there were two openings side by side in the earth, and above and over against them in the heaven two others, and . . . judges were sitting between these, and after every judgment they bade the righteous journey to the right and upwards through the heaven . . . and the unjust to take the road to the left and downward. (*Resp.* 614C)<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> It is important to note at this point that the tale told by Plato begins with a reference to *Odyssey* 9-12 and the tale told by Odysseus to Alcinous regarding his journey to Hades: "It is not, let me tell you . . . the tale to Alcinous told that I shall unfold, but the tale of a bold warrior, Er, the son of Armenius, by race a Pamphylian" (*Od.* 614B). In this way, the "Myth of Er" is explicitly linked with the κατάβασις tradition begun with Odysseus' journey.

<sup>112</sup> Plato introduces the story as an ἀπόλογος, but ends the story by calling it a μῦθος (*Resp.* 621B).

<sup>113</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all quotations of Plato are from Plato, *Republic*, (trans. Paul Shorey, LCL; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006). It is important here to note that the text is not clear where this judgment takes place. In Plato's *Gorgias*, however, the judgment occurs at the hands of Rhadamanthus and Aecus "at the dividing of the road, whence are the two ways leading, one to the Isles of the Blest, and the other to Tartarus" (Plato, *Gorg.* 524A). In later tradition, this scene is described as taking

He also saw souls returning to the place of judgment from the other holes that were in the sky and the earth.<sup>114</sup> These souls were those who had completed their 1,000 years in either torment or bliss, and they met in a meadow to share stories of their experiences (*Resp.* 615A). On the eighth day, they embarked on a four day journey until they reached the “spindle of Necessity” (*Resp.* 616B-C).<sup>115</sup>

When they arrived, they were “straightaway bidden to go before Lachesis,” one of the three Fates, who are the daughters of necessity.<sup>116</sup> Once here, a prophet cast lots amongst the crowd to determine who would choose a new life first.<sup>117</sup> These lives were laid out before the crowd, each able to see what would happen during the life that was to be chosen. Those who had come from heaven often chose their lives without due care because they were “unexercised in suffering,” while those who had ascended from below, having suffered and having seen others suffer, were careful to choose a life that would not easily lead to wickedness (*Resp.* 619D).

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place in Hades (see Lucian’s *Cataplus*). Thus, later tradition, coupled with the reference to Odysseus’ journey to Hades at the beginning of the tale, sufficiently connect the “Myth of Er” with the *κατάβασις* tradition.

<sup>114</sup> Those coming up from under the earth were “full of squalor and dust,” while those coming down from the sky were “clean and pure” (*Resp.* 615A). Thus, while Er did not have an eyewitness account of the punishment of the wicked, he did see evidence of poor treatment of certain souls. Moreover, as we will see below, the new life chosen by each soul depended on whether or not the soul was punished during the 1,000 years.

<sup>115</sup> Note that Er revived after twelve days, the same amount of time that elapsed from his first vision of the place of judgment and congregation of the souls to their journey to the spindle Necessity.

<sup>116</sup> The two other Fates are Clotho and Atropos.

<sup>117</sup> Each soul had the choice to enter a human or an animal body (*Resp.* 620A-C).

When every soul had made its choice<sup>118</sup>

[Lachesis] sent with each, as the guardian of his life and the fulfiller of his choice, the genius (δαίμονα) that he had chosen, and this divinity led the soul first to Clotho . . . to ratify the destiny of his lot and choice; and after contact with her the genius again led the soul to the spinning of Atropos to make the web of its destiny irreversible, and then without a backward look it passed beneath the throne of Necessity. And after . . . that . . . they all journeyed to the Plain of Oblivion . . . and there they camped . . . by the River of Forgetfulness (Λήθης). . . . They were all required to drink a measure of the water . . . and each one as he drank forgot all things. And after they had fallen asleep . . . there was a sound of thunder and a quaking of the earth, and they were suddenly wafted thence, one this way, one that, upward to their birth like shooting stars. (*Resp.* 620D-621B)

With this, Er awoke on the funeral pyre.

With the framework of the Myth of Er as a background, we can turn to a discussion of its function in Plato's argument. Hans Dieter Betz suggests that "with Socrates' interpretative and paraenetical statements the nature and function of mythos have become clear."<sup>119</sup> In particular, the rational argument (λόγος) and the story (μῦθος) complement each other since the μῦθος is able to do "what *logos* cannot do: *mythos* can speak in human words about things that go beyond the human world and language. While *logos* must be understood rationally *mythos* is to be believed."<sup>120</sup> Indeed, this proposal agrees with the statement at the end of the Myth of Er: "It will save us if we believe it, and we shall safely cross the River of Lethe, and keep our soul unspotted from the world" (*Resp.* 621C). Thus, the μῦθος has the ability to confront people in a way that

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<sup>118</sup> Notable choices include: Ajax becoming a lion; Agammemnon an eagle; Epeius an arts and crafts woman; Thersites an Ape; and Odysseus' choice to become a common citizen (*Resp.* 620B-C).

<sup>119</sup> Hans Dieter Betz, "The Problem of Apocalyptic Genre in Greek and Hellenistic Literature," in *Apocalypticism in the Mediterranean World and the Near East* (ed. David Hellholm; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1983), 587.

<sup>120</sup> Betz, "Problem," 588.

λόγος cannot.<sup>121</sup> In this way, the μῦθος completes the purpose of the λόγος, as through it the audience is vicariously “confronted with that ‘greatest danger for men,’ the choice between a good and a wicked life.”<sup>122</sup> As we turn to two of Plutarch’s works, we will see a similar pattern emerge.

*Plutarch, De Sera numinis vindicta 563B-568A*

At the end of his treatise *De Sera numinis vindicta* Plutarch told a story about a wicked man named Aridaeus. After a lethal fall Aridaeus was led by an unnamed kinsmen, who called Aridaeus “Thespesius,” on an otherworldly journey. During this tour the fate of the dead and the geography of the otherworld was revealed to him. First, Thespesius was given a vision of the fate of the dead that forms a bookend around his journey through the otherworld. These visions focus on the punishment of the wicked.

In the first episode, Thespesius saw the souls of the departed which were

enveloped all around with light and translucent within, although not all to the same degree . . . some were like the full moon at her clearest, shining evenly with a single smooth and unbroken hue; others were shot through with scales, as it were, or faint bruises; others quite mottled and odd in appearance, covered with black tattoo-marks, like speckled vipers; and still others bore the faded traces of what looked like scratches. (*Sera* 564D-E)

Thespesius was told that the marks on the souls were “the scars and welts left by the different passions,” which were purged in three different ways:

. . . those who are punished at once in the body and through it are dealt with by swift Poinê in a comparatively gentle manner that passes over many of the faults requiring purgation; those whose viciousness is harder to heal are delivered up to Dikê by their daemon after death; while those past all healing . . . are pursued by the third and fiercest of the ministers of

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<sup>121</sup> In Plato’s *Gorgias* (522E) he hints that this confrontation can lead to fear.

<sup>122</sup> Betz, “Problem,” 588.

Adrasteia, Erynys . . . who makes away with them, each after a different fashion, but all piteously and cruelly, imprisoning them in the Nameless and Unseen. (*Sera* 564E-F)<sup>123</sup>

In the second episode, these torments became personal as Thespesius saw his friends, relatives, comrades, and father undergoing “fearful torments and ignominious and excruciating chastisements” (*Sera* 566F). When Thespesius was confronted by a woman shortly after witnessing these punishments (*Sera* 568A), the message to him was clear: he, too, would be subjected to the same sufferings, unless he changed his ways.

In between the visions of punishment, Thespesius was taken on a journey of the otherworld, which involved two different sites. First, he was led over an “immense distance . . . buoyed up by the beams of the light as by wings” until he reached a great chasm (χάσμα μέγα) where his strength left him. He saw that he was not alone in his sudden impotence, as other souls “drew themselves up like birds and alighted and walked around the circuit of the chasm, not venturing to pass directly across” (*Sera* 565E-F). He was told that the place, which was marked by “bacchic revelry,” was called “Lethe,” and was the route that Dionysus had taken during his rescue of his mother Semele from Hades. After this, Thespesius was taken to a crater “with streams pouring into it,” which was as far Orpheus had advanced in his search for his wife Eurydice (*Sera* 566C).<sup>124</sup>

At this point, there are two observations that need to be made, the first incidental, the second important to the comparison between this story and the parable of the rich man and Lazarus. First, Thespesius’ journey presents an interesting merger of ideas

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<sup>123</sup> The punishment inflicted by Dikê is described in further detail: “In this state she first shows him to his good parents and ancestors—if such there are—as one execrable and unworthy of them, while if they are wicked, he sees them punished and is seen by them; he then undergoes prolonged chastisement, each of his passions being removed with pains and torments that in magnitude and intensity as far transcend those that pass through the flesh as the reality would be more vivid than the dream” (*Sera* 565B).

<sup>124</sup> The descent of Orpheus in search of his wife Eurydice will be discussed below.

associated with ascent and descent stories since he sees sites associated with descents to the underworld (Dionysus' chasm and Orpheus' crater), despite the fact that he has traveled to the heavens (*Sera* 563E-F). Second, the geographic similarity between Thespesius' journey and the description in Luke 16:23-26 (the great chasm, and the presence of water), and the focus on punishment,<sup>125</sup> provides conceptual links between the two stories.

What, then, is the function of Thespesius' story? The answer is twofold. First, in the context of the treatise, the μῦθος of Thespesius functions as proof of Plutarch's argument (λόγος) that the delay of divine vengeance does not mean that it never occurs. Indeed, in Plutarch's *Sera*, this function is stated explicitly before the myth is told. Following Plutarch's apparent reluctance to tell the μῦθος of Thespesius, Olympichus says, "We do not applaud . . . lest you imagine we are letting you off from your myth (μῦθον), on the ground that your argument (λόγος) suffices to prove your case. No; we shall pass judgement only when we have heard that further recital" (*Sera* 563B). In this way, the pattern is the same as that seen in Plato's "Myth of Er": The λόγος is confirmed by the μῦθος.

Second, Hans Dieter Betz has suggested that Thespesius' tale functions as a "conversion story."<sup>126</sup> At the beginning of the tale, we are told that upon regaining consciousness Thespesius "instituted a change in his life that could hardly be believed . . . so that all who met him longed to hear the reason for the difference" (*Sera* 563D-F).

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<sup>125</sup> It is interesting to note that while Thespesius sees his kinsmen suffering, he does not feel inclined to intercede for them (*Sera* 566F-567A). In the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus, however, the rich man desires someone to warn his kinsmen about his fate (Luke 16:27-28).

<sup>126</sup> Betz, "Problem," 594.

In conclusion, Plutarch's *De Sera numinis vindicta* illustrates the same principles that were at work in Plato's "Myth of Er." First, the μῦθος follows the λόγος providing evidence for the argument. Second, the one returning from the dead becomes an authoritative voice on the nature of the afterlife and bears a message that has life-changing potential.

*Plutarch, De genio Socratis 589F-592E*

Plutarch's *De genio Socratis* is a treatise on the nature of Socrates' δαιμόνιον, which is described by Socrates in Plato's *Apology* as "a sort of voice that comes to me, and when it comes it always holds me back from what I am thinking of doing, but never urges me forward" (*Gen. Socr.* 31C-D). The first twenty chapters of the treatise compose a rational discussion of the issue (λόγος), while the twenty-first and twenty-second chapters comprise the story (μῦθος) of Timarchus, who, desiring to know the nature of the δαιμόνιον, descended into the "crypt of Trophonius" (*Gen. Socr.* 590A).<sup>127</sup> Upon entering, he was surrounded by darkness and, after saying a prayer, lay on the ground where he was struck on the head, opening a crack through which his soul was released (*Gen. Socr.* 590B). With his new found liberation, Timarchus saw the Milky Way fed by "rivers of fire," as well as a "great abyss (χάσμα μέγα) . . . filled with a mass of darkness" from which roars, groans, and lamentations arose (*Gen. Socr.* 590F). At this point, he was met by an unnamed guide, whose purview was limited to Hades, the portion marked off by the river Styx (*Gen. Socr.* 591A). The guide then proceeded to tell Timarchus

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<sup>127</sup> Apollonius of Tyana also entered the cavern "in the interest of philosophy," asking Trophonius what he considered "the most complete and purest philosophy" (Philostratus, *Vit. Apoll.* 19). Seven days later, he returned with a book containing the "tenets of Pythagoras." See Pausanias (*Descr.* 9.39.5-14) for a detailed description of the ritual Timarchus would have participated in at the oracle of Trophonius. The oracle of Trophonius also figures prominently in the descent recorded in Lucian's *Mennipus*.



about the nature of the soul and its relation to its δαίμονιον (*Gen. Socr.* 591D-592E).

Timarchus' head was then "violently compressed" and he made his way out of the cavern (*Gen. Socr.* 592E), whereupon he told others about the "many wonders he had seen and heard" (*Gen. Socr.* 590B).

Several of the conclusions drawn from Thespesius' journey apply to that of Timarchus. First, again, the λόγος in chapters 1-20 is followed by the apocalyptic μῦθος of chapters 21-22, as further proof of the logical argument previously presented.

Following the pattern in *De Sera numinis vindicta*, Simmias is reluctant to tell the story:

"The story I had about Timarchus of Chaeroneia, as it more resembles a myth (μύθοις) or fiction (πλάσμασιν) than an argument (λόγοις), I had better perhaps leave untold" (589F).

Theocritus, however, encourages him by saying, "myths (τὸ μυθῶδες), too, despite the loose manner in which they do so, have a way of reaching the truth" (589F). The myth, then, is an appropriate means of supporting an argument. Second, the geographic similarity between Timarchus' journey and that of Luke 16:23-26 is apparent (e.g., the great chasm). Third, Timarchus returns with an authoritative report on the nature of Socrates' δαίμονιον on the basis of the vision he received.

### *Conclusion*

Plato's "Myth of Er," Plutarch's *De Sera numinis vindicta*, and *De Genio Socratis* each function as a revelatory myth that provides information regarding the fate of the dead, particularly their punishment. In addition to this, each story adds further proof for the logical argument advanced prior to their telling. As such the story of the journey to the place of punishment has a specific rhetorical function in these documents. Since these stories are explicitly related in various ways to the κατάβασις tradition, a

development can be traced from the journey to the place of punishment as etiological myth, to the journey for oracular advice, to the journey as rhetorical proof of a logical argument. It would be too simple, of course, to claim that the journey to the place of punishment was univocal in the narration of the return to the land of the living by the one who descends. In the final section of this chapter, I will discuss stories of the descent to the underworld that deny the opportunity for return.

### *Journeys to the Place of Punishment that Do Not Include a Return*

Up to this point we have seen that the journey to the place of punishment was a well-known motif in Greco-Roman literature. Descents by gods and goddesses were commonplace and authors could assume that their audience would be familiar with the story. This framework was used to narrate the search for oracular information by heroes like Odysseus and Aeneas, and was used by Plato and Plutarch as a rhetorical tool to prove an argument. In the final section of this chapter I will discuss the descent of Orpheus in search of his wife Eurydice, as well as several writings of Lucian of Samosata. Each of these works narrate the unsuccessful return from the place of punishment.

### *Orpheus and Eurydice*

The account of the descent of Orpheus to the underworld in order to rescue his wife Eurydice from Hades was a well known story in the ancient world and has several variations. The general contours of the story can be seen Apollodorus' account:<sup>128</sup> Eurydice, the wife of Orpheus, was bitten by a snake and died. Following her death

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<sup>128</sup> Apollodorus, *Biblio.* 1.3.2. Apollodorus also says that Orpheus was the one who "invented the mysteries of Dionysus."

Orpheus went to Hades in order to persuade Pluto to allow Eurydice to return to the upper world. Hades agreed on the condition that Orpheus not look back at his wife until they were in his home. Orpheus, however, disobeyed, the command and Eurydice returned to the underworld.

The story is expanded significantly in Virgil's account of the journey in the *Georgics*, a didactic poem on farming. Book Four is concerned with beekeeping and it is here that we learn of Aristaeus,<sup>129</sup> a bee farmer, who had lost all of his bees due to hunger and sickness (*Georg.* 4.315-444). He cried out to his mother, Cyrene, a water nymph, for assistance and was told to seek the seer Proteus.<sup>130</sup> Cyrene led her son to the cave that held Proteus and hid him from the seer's sight. When Proteus came into his cave, Aristaeus attacked him and put him in fetters. Despite Proteus' ability to change shape, Aristaeus successfully subdued him and was told that he had incurred the wrath of Orpheus because he was a beekeeper: "She, in headlong flight, along the river, *if only she might escape you*, saw not, doomed maiden, amid the deep grass the monstrous serpent at her feet that guarded the banks" (*Georg.* 4.455-460, emphasis added). Eurydice, distracted by the bee chasing her was unaware of the danger lurking in front of her. The fact had not escaped Orpheus' knowledge and the god held Aristaeus responsible. With this background in place, Proteus recounted the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice.

Orpheus was very distraught and attempted to console himself with music. This did not work, so he "passed through the jaws of Taenarum, the lofty portals of Dis, the grove that is murky with black terror" to the king of the dead who is not persuaded by

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<sup>129</sup> Aristaeus is credited with pioneering the art of beekeeping (Nonnus, *Dionysiaca* V.214ff.).

<sup>130</sup> Clark discusses this as a descent by Aristaeus to find Proteus. According to Clark, this descent to the watery cave of Proteus is unknown before Vergil's telling of the tale; Clark, *Catabasis*, 96.

human prayers (*Georg.* 4.467-468). As he descended, the shades were drawn out of the “lowest realms of Erebus” by the song of Orpheus. The dead were “as many as the myriads of birds that shelter among the leaves,” and were encircled by the “black ooze and unsightly reeds of Cocytus” and held fast by the Styx (*Georg.* 4.478-480). Orpheus’ song was so enchanting that “the very house of Death and deepest abysses of Hell were spellbound, and the Furies with livid snakes entwined in their hair; Cerberus stood agape and his triple jaws forgot to bark; the wind subsided, and Ixion’s wheel came to a stop” (*Georg.* 4.479-484).

The music of Orpheus also apparently won him the chance to regain Eurydice, since there was no bartering with Pluto or Proserpine that is recorded in other accounts. The command not to look back does apply, however, since Proserpine imposed the rule that Eurydice must follow behind Orpheus. As they couple ascended and was “on the very verge of light” Orpheus was seized with passion and looked back at Eurydice and “in an instant all his toil was spilt like water” (*Georg.* 4.491-492). Again, while Virgil does not tell us about the meeting between Orpheus and the god and goddess of the underworld, we find that Orpheus had broken the pact made with Pluto. Thunder roared three times and Eurydice said, “What madness, Orpheus, what dreadful madness has brought disaster alike upon you and me, poor soul? See, again the cruel Fates call me back, and sleep seals my swimming eyes. And now farewell! I am borne away, covered in night’s vast pall, and stretching towards you strengthless hands, regained, alas! no more” (*Georg.* 4.494-498). With this she was taken away from him like “smoke mingling with thin air.” Despite his efforts, Charon would not allow Orpheus to cross the Styx again. Orpheus was left with no other choice and he was unable again to persuade

Pluto with his tears and none of the gods would listen to his cries for help. Eurydice was already on the boat across the Styx. In his grief Orpheus sat for seven months along Strymon's stream playing his music and weeping. During this time he drew tigers and oaks to himself, mourning like a nightingale. He eventually left this place and roamed the frozen north along the icy Tanais before being torn limb from limb by the "Ciconian women . . . in the midst of their sacred rites and their midnight bacchic orgies" (*Georg.* 4.520-521). Even though his head was severed, he was able one last time to call out for Eurydice.

After explaining to Aristaeus the cause of his problems, Proteus dove in to the ocean. Cyrene told her son that the wrath of Orpheus was brought on by the nymphs who accompanied Eurydice on the day she died, and in order to make appeasement, he must Aristaeus must sacrifice four choice bulls and four choice heifers. These are to be sacrificed on four separate altars on the ninth day as funeral dues along with "Lethe's poppies" and a black ewe. He should also visit the grove in which Eurydice was killed and offer a calf. This will appease the wrath of Orpheus, Eurydice, and the nymphs. Aristaeus knows the sacrifice is acceptable when he sees bees flying up from the sides of the bull (*Georg.* 4.529-558).

Another extended account of the story of Orpheus' descent is found in Ovid *Metamorphosis* 10:1-77 within a group of love stories. Specifically, the context is concerned with the extent to which people will go for love. The first story in this series is that of Byblis, who fell in love with her twin brother (*Metam.* 9.454-665). Byblis wrestled with her illicit desires, but eventually gave in to them and wrote a letter to her brother Caunus. Caunus was appalled by his sister's desire and fled his home. Byblis

followed, but was unable to find Caunus. The second story is that of Iphis (*Metam.* 9.666-797). Before Iphis was born her father told her mother to kill the baby if it was not born a boy because girls are “more trouble than boys.” Iphis’s mother, Telethusa, had a dream vision in which the goddess Io/Isis told her to save the child no matter what its gender. When Telethusa delivered a baby girl, she hid the gender from the father. Iphis was raised as a boy and is eventually betrothed to Ianthe. The wedding was postponed several times as Telethusa and Iphis attempt to find a way to hide the true gender of the child. While praying in the temple of Isis, the altar was moved, the door posts shook, and light shot forth. As the two walked away from the altar, rejoicing at the good omen, Iphis was changed from female to male.

Following the successful marriage of Iphis and Ianthe Hymen traveled to the marriage of Orpheus and Eurydice. Despite the god’s presence, however, the marriage had a inauspicious beginning: there were no “hallowed words, nor joyous faces, nor lucky omen. The torch also which he held kept sputtering and filled the eyes with smoke, nor would it catch fire for any brandishing.” The inauspicious beginning to the marriage was confirmed when Eurydice was bitten by a snake and killed while strolling in the garden.

After mourning his bride in the upper world Orpheus decided to journey to the underworld in order to reclaim his bride. His path of choice was the gate of Taenarus. Passing through the shades who had been buried, he came to Persephone and Pluto. In an attempt to secure the release of Eurydice, Orpheus sang a song to the two rulers of the underworld in which he clearly stated that his purpose in traveling to the underworld was not mere curiosity (“to see dark Tartarus”), nor the attempt for a heroic feat (binding

Cerberus). Rather, he was motivated by love, a motivation that he is sure the two gods will understand, “if the story of that old-time ravishment is not false.” With this Orpheus connects his journey *down* for love with Pluto’s journey *up* for love, as well as the journey of Heracles to subdue Cerberus. He does not deny that Eurydice will one day return to Tartarus, as all the living must eventually submit to the rule of Pluto, but he hopes that the gods will undo the fates and allow Eurydice to return to the upper world until she lives out her years.

Orpheus’ appeal had a dramatic affect on those who heard: the spirits wept; the torments of notorious figures ceased (i.e., Tantalus, Ixion, Tityus, the Belides, Sisyphus); even the wicked Furies were overcome with tears. Persephone was unable to deny the request and sent for Eurydice, who was still limping from her wound. She was allowed to return to the upper world as long as Orpheus did not look back until they had exited the underworld through the valley of Avernus.<sup>131</sup>

Orpheus and Eurydice began the upward journey through silent, dark places. As they approached the exit from Tartarus, Orpheus was afraid that Eurydice would lack the strength to finish the journey and he turned to look at her. As soon as he turned back, a second tragedy occurred and Eurydice began to slip back into the depths. Orpheus reached to pull his bride back towards the upper world, but grasped only air. As Eurydice fell into the dark, she cried, “Fairwell,” to her husband, never to see him again.

Orpheus was again filled with grief that is discussed in terms of several figures who turned to stone. He tried to cross the Styx again to rescue Eurydice a second time, but was restrained by Charon. He sat on the bank of the river for seven days in rags,

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<sup>131</sup> Note the condition to the return from the underworld and the connection with Persephone, who was allowed to return to the upper world only if she had not eaten food while in Tartarus.

eating nothing. When he finally returned to the upper world he shunned all love of women. Ovid tells us that after Orpheus died at the hands of crazed, female followers of Bacchus, he went back to the underworld where he was reunited with Eurydice and he can look upon her without fear of losing her again (*Metam.* 11.61-66).

The descent to the underworld by Orpheus is very similar in both Virgil and Ovid. In the *Georgics*, the story of Orpheus and Eurydice functions as an explanation for a problem faced by Aristaeus. The reason Aristaeus was facing trouble with his bees was that Orpheus was upset with him because a bee led to the death of his wife. In Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Orpheus descended for the sake of love. In each case, however, Orpheus' journey to the underworld was a mixed success. On the one hand, Orpheus' musical ability allowed him to descend to the underworld and secure his wife's release. On the other hand, Eurydice was not able to reach the upperworld because of Orpheus' disobedience to Persephone's command.

It should also be noted, however, that some scholars argue that there is a parallel tradition in which Orpheus successfully rescued Eurydice.<sup>132</sup> The evidence, is based, in part, on Diodorus Siculus *Library* 4.25.4, who says that Orpheus acted similarly to Dionysus in his journey to the underworld. Earlier than Diodorus, the fourth century BCE poet Hermesianax wrote that Orpheus descended to the underworld in order "to regain the gentle breath of life for his wife" (*Leontin* 3.14).<sup>133</sup> While this is not a clear

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<sup>132</sup> See, for example, Clark, *Catabasis*, 108. For a discussion of texts that suggest a successful return of Eurydice, see W.H. Roscher, *Lexikon der griechischen und römischen Mythologie* (vol. 3; Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1965), 1157-1165.

<sup>133</sup> The translation is from J.L. Lightfoot, *Hellenistic Collection: Philotas, Alexander of Aetolia, Hermesianax, Euphorion, Parthenius* (LCL; Harvard: Cambridge University Press, 2009). Hermesianax also calls Orpheus' wife Agriope, providing evidence that the name of Orpheus' wife was not fixed in the tradition until later. Other authors who hint at a possible successful return are Pseudo-Heraclitus, *De incredibilis* 21; and Isocrates, *Busiris* 11.7-8.



declaration of a successful return journey by Orpheus and Eurydice, it certainly hints that this was the case. Peter Donke, moreover, provides evidence of a successful return from the underworld by both Orpheus and Eurydice persisting into the seventeenth century.<sup>134</sup> So, while the dominant tradition regarding Orpheus and Eurydice involves an unsuccessful rescue, there was a parallel story, albeit in the minority, that told of Eurydice's return to the land of the living.

### *Lucian of Samosata*

The works of Lucian are an example of the two streams in the tradition of descent to the underworld. On the one hand, Lucian mocks the possibility of the return of the dead from the underworld. On the other hand, Lucian makes use of the possibility of descent and return to support his arguments. Regardless of his use of the theme of the descent to the underworld, Lucian's interest in Hades and discussion of the underworld permeates his works, both positively and negatively.

Positively, Lucian sees the underworld as a place of equalization. The clearest examples of this view are seen in this *Dialogues of the Dead*.<sup>135</sup> The dialogues begin with a discussion between Diogenes and Pollux in Hades. Diogenes asked Pollux to go to the living, find the cynic Menippus, and tell him that while he may enjoy laughing at philosophers on earth, he will really enjoy mocking the dead rich and powerful in Hades because all will be equal. This leads to a series of announcements that Pollux is to pass on to various groups. To philosophers: Cease meaningless talk and riddle-making. To

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<sup>134</sup> Peter Dronke, "The Return of Eurydice," *Classical et mediaevalia* 23 (1962): 198-215.

<sup>135</sup> All quotations of Lucian are from *Lucian* (trans. A. M. Harmon, et al.; 8 vols.; LCL; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1913-1967).

the rich: Hoarding wealth is foolish in light of the small cost of entering Hades (an obol for Charon). To the beautiful: Your good looks will be meaningless in the gloom of Hades. To the poor (πένης): Do not lament your poverty; all will be made equal in Hades. These themes are repeated throughout the *Dialogues* as the wealthy and powerful are mocked for trusting in their wealth that is now gone (e.g., Midas, Sardanapalus, and Croesus), the beautiful are stripped of their good looks now that they are skeletons (e.g., Nireus, Tersites, Helen), the hypocrisy of philosophers is evident in their resistance of death (e.g., Socrates), and those who despised earthly pleasures are the only ones happy in the underworld (e.g., Diogenes, Menippus).

Lucian's positive attitude in the *Dialogues of the Dead* that Hades is a place of equalization forms the basis of his most trenchant critique of those who believe the myths about Hades and how it affects their attitudes toward the dead. This critique is found in his treatise *On Funerals*, which deals with common practices of mourning the dead, and deserves to be discussed in detail. Lucian begins by saying that mourners have no knowledge about actual fate of dead. Rather, they behave in a certain way based on stories about the fate of the dead found in myths by the likes of Homer and Hesiod.

The first thing he refers to is the custom of placing of an obol in the mouth of the deceased as payment for passage across Acheron. Lucian questions the usefulness of this practice because there is no consideration of the type of currency that is accepted in Hades, whether it is Athenian, Macedonian, or Aeginetan. Moreover, mourners do not stop to consider whether money is of any actual value in the underworld. Indeed, it may be better not to provide the dead with money so that Charon will refuse them passage and send them back to earth. Lucian finds it equally ludicrous that the body of the dead is

bathed in preparation for burial. He suggests that the Acheron is large enough to accommodate those in need of bathing. Clothing the dead and perfuming their bodies is equally foolish in light of the decay that has already set in to the dead body and is rapidly decomposing the flesh.<sup>136</sup> The practice of mourning also seems misguided to Lucian. After the body is perfumed and dressed, women begin their loud lamentation and wailing, shedding tears and abusing their bodies and clothing in their grief. This shows the state of the dead to be better than that of the living. The family of the deceased is no more composed than the crowd of mourners. Fathers mourn their sons who die young because they will never marry, have children, serve in the military, work their fields, fall in love, or have parties with their friends. Lucian suggests that such loud lamentation is done not for the benefit of the deceased or the mourner, but for the crowd.

To illustrate the foolishness of the mourning, Lucian creates a hypothetical response by the son “to stop his father’s silliness” (*Luct.* 16). The son calls his father an “unfortunate man,” who does not recognize that in his death, the son is better off than his father. The young man will never grow old, with a bald head, bent back, and weak knees. The toil, love, and parties that the young man will not experience are actually for the young man’s benefit. Instead, the father should recognize that his son will never experience hunger, thirst, cold, disease, abuse by a tyrant, the vexation of love, or be scorned for his old age. To be consistent with the common view of life after death, Lucian suggests that mourners celebrate that the departed are in a better state.

Lucian’s negative view of Hades is also evident in his questioning of the very existence of Hades. The *Lover of Lies* is an example of this questioning and deals with

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<sup>136</sup> Lucian also mocks other practices associated with funerals like the offering of sacrifices, tombstones, embalming, and the funeral feast (*Luct.* 21-24).

supernatural phenomena and those who are duped by the stories. Lucian is particularly interested in the mythmakers and poets who tell stories about the creation of mankind, stories of the gods, and other foundational myths.<sup>137</sup> These stories are so ingrained in the consciousness of the people that anyone who questions their veracity is considered “a sacrilegious fool” (*Philops.* 3). Lucian’s discussion of these myths takes place in the form of a dialogue between Philocles and Tychiades. The latter has just returned from the house of a respectable old man, Eucrates, who has defended the myths. Both Philocles and Tychiades are amazed at the arguments of Eucrates and Philocles asks for a report of the conversation. While several myths are dealt with in the dialogue, I will focus on Eucrates’, and his guests’, defense of visions of Hades.

Tychiades had gone to the house of Eucrates because he had heard that he was sick. When he arrived he learned that Eucrates was suffering from rheumatism in his feet and was attended by the physician Antigonus. Also present were three philosophers representing three philosophical schools: Cleodemus the Peripatetic, Deinomachus the Stoic, and Ion the Platonist. After arguing about various healing cures, miraculous signs, and supernatural events that Tychiades considered “old wives tales,” Eucrates told his guests about his vision of Hades. One day during the grape harvest Eucrates had gone for a walk in the woods while his servants were working. When he entered the nearby forest he heard the sound of barking dogs. A short time later an earthquake shook the ground and he saw Hecate, with snakes for hair, coming towards him.<sup>138</sup> She was carrying a

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<sup>137</sup> These mythmakers and poets are also considered lovers of lies for telling stories about “the castration of Uranus, and the fetters of Prometheus, and the revolt of the Giants, and the whole sorry show in Hades, and how Zeus turned into a bull or a swan on account of a love-affair, and how some woman changed into a bird or a bear . . .” (*Philops.* 2).

<sup>138</sup> Hecate was reportedly 110 feet tall.

torch and a 30 foot long sword. She was accompanied by shaggy, black dogs that were as large as elephants. Hecate stomped on the ground and opened a chasm “as deep as Tartarus,” into which she jumped.

Eucrates gathered his courage, walked to the edge of the chasm, and looked down into Hades.<sup>139</sup> From his vantage spot he saw the river of fire, Lake Acheron, Cerberus, and dead souls lying in the asphodel fields.<sup>140</sup> Some of these he recognized, including his father, who was still wearing his grave clothes, and Socrates.<sup>141</sup> No sooner had he seen into Hades than the chasm closed up. In the meantime, several servants of Eucrates were searching for him. When they came upon him they heard the barking of dogs and saw “a gleam of fire” shining through the closing chasm.

Tychiades was immediately skeptical and scoffed at the account, but Cleodemus, Deinomachus, and Ion were captivated by the story. In fact, Cleodemus added support to Eucrates’ story by telling of his vision while sick with a fever. One night, while the fever was particularly bad, a young man wearing a white cloak appeared at Cleodemus’ bedside. Taking his hand, the young man led Cleodemus on a journey through Hades.<sup>142</sup> The pair arrived in a court where Charon, Aecus, the Fates, and the Furies stood around a throne, while Pluto read the names of those who were about to die. When he saw Cleodemus and his guide, Pluto was angry and commanded that Cleodemus return to the

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<sup>139</sup> He held on to a tree, so that he “might not get a dizzy turn and fall into it headlong” (*Philops.* 24).

<sup>140</sup> Cleodemus takes this vision as proof of Plato’s teaching about souls in the face of opposition from the Epicurians.

<sup>141</sup> It is interesting that Eucrates definitely saw his father (τὸν γοῦν πατέρα εἶδον ἀκριβῶς), but was only able to guess that he saw Socrates because he had a pot-belly and was bald (Τὸν Σωκράτιον ἔγωγε . . . οὐδὲ τοῦτον σαφῶς, ἀλλὰ εἰκάζων ὅτι φαλακρὸς καὶ προγάστωρ ἦν).

<sup>142</sup> Cleodemus was certain he was in Hades when he saw Tantalus, Ixion, and Sisyphus.

land of the living because it was not yet his time to die. Instead, the guide was to bring Cleodemus' neighbor Demylus. When Cleodemus returned to the upperworld he was cured and told everyone about Demylus' impending death. Demylus, who had been ill, died shortly thereafter.

*The Lover of Lies* continues with discussions of the existence of spirits of the dead, the possibility of exorcism, and the veracity of oracles. When the last issue is raised, Tychiades has enough and excuses himself from the conversation. The work concludes with an admonition to use truth and sound reasoning as an antidote to the spread of these superstitions.

The three works above illustrate Lucian's thoughts on Hades. On the one hand, Hades is a mythical construct of the poets and mythmakers that deceives fools (*The Lover of Lies*) and causes people to act like fools (*On Funerals*). On the other hand, if Hades exists, it is not necessarily a place to be avoided, unless, of course, a person clings to worldly goods. Indeed, Hades is a place that is truly "democratic" (*Dial. mort.* 8) because everyone is equal in power, wealth, and beauty, and no one hungers or thirsts. As such, it is a place to be embraced, rather than shunned. With this background in place, I will discuss two particular stories of Lucian that take place in the underworld as descents to the underworld. As we will see, Lucian's attitude towards life, death, and Hades are repeated.

The first story, *The Downward Journey*, begins with Charon and Clotho awaiting the arrival of Hermes with the souls of the most recently deceased that are to be transported to Hades. Hermes was late and the two characters speculated that he was either wasting time in the upper world because it is much more pleasant than the

underworld (Charon) or that he was on an errand for Zeus (Clotho). In time, a weary Hermes arrived with the souls, one of which was in fetters, another that was laughing. The soul in fetters, a tyrant later identified as Megapenthes, had resisted his fate, offering bribes to be allowed to return. Despite Hermes' lecture about the impossibility of a return to the upper world, the tyrant had fled. He was captured by Hermes with the help of Micyllus, another of the souls in Hermes group, just before escaping through a cave at Taenarus.<sup>143</sup>

Having heard the tale, Charon urged Hermes to begin loading the ship with the souls.<sup>144</sup> True to his character, Megapenthes resisted boarding Charon's ship. He attempted to bribe Clotho, just as he had attempted to bribe Hermes. He began by asking for time to finish construction on his home. When this was denied he asked for just one day to tell his wife where his treasure was buried. Clotho responded that he need not worry about his wealth because it will be found and given to his cousin, who would also inherit Megapenthes' concubines and property. Megapenthes was furious at this news because he hated his cousin and offered a bribe of 1,000 talents of gold plus two bowls made of 100 talents of gold apiece so that he could return. When the bribe was again refused, Megapenthes appealed to his patronage of the city suggesting that the city wall and docks would remain incomplete without his help. Again, his request was refused. Megapenthes, however, was undeterred and again requested to be allowed to return to the upper world long enough to subdue his enemies in battle and construct a mausoleum for

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<sup>143</sup> Taenarus was a headland in Laconia and commonly thought to be an entrance to the underworld.

<sup>144</sup> Lucian provides an extensive list of the dead: 300 babies; 398 elderly, who are likened to "raisins" (ἄσταφίδες); a group of wounded (84 in battle, seven suicides for love, two killed in a battle for a throne, a man killed by his wife and his lover); 16 killed by pirates; and an unnumbered group of criminals, those lost at sea, and the sick.

himself depicting his military exploits. Megapenthes then offered Clotho another sum of money plus his “beloved”<sup>145</sup> in exchange for return to the land of the living. After being rebuffed again by Clotho, Megapenthes asked for information about what would happen to his household after his death. Clotho gave him very bad news: His servant, who had an ongoing affair with his wife, would now publicly have her; his daughter would become a concubine of the next tyrant; the statues and busts that had been erected in Megapenthes’ honor would be torn down; his so-called friends would mock his death;<sup>146</sup> and he would be unable to avenge mistreatment by a slave, who had been having an affair with his mistress, while he lay dying on his bed. With this, Megapenthes is forced on to Charon’s ship and tied to the mast so he would not attempt another escape.

At this point Micyllus, a poor cobbler, who assisted Hermes in recapturing Megapenthes, is introduced more fully. In stark contrast to Megapenthes, Micyllus was eager to board the boat, wondering if he must board last because he was poor in life. When Clotho commented on this difference in attitude, Micyllus attributed his delight to the great leveling that takes place at death. During his life he had faced trouble and hardship as a poor cobbler living next door to Megapenthes. In the underworld all things were equal, which in some ways meant that Micyllus had been exalted. His only regret was that while living he had envied Megapenthes’ fortune and did not recognize that all his wealth would be stripped at death.

With this explanation for his happiness, Micyllus attempted to board the boat, but was initially refused passage by Charon, who said the boat was overfull. This was no

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<sup>145</sup> The masculine τὸν ἀγαπητόν suggests that Megapenthes is offering a male lover.

<sup>146</sup> Clotho is clear that Megapenthes’ friends had only seemed loyal to him. They had all desired his wealth alone. In fact, he was poisoned by one of the people he considered a friend.



matter to Micyllus, who was willing to swim across. After all, he was not worried about drowning since he was already dead. He was eventually allowed to embark and took a seat on Megapenthes' shoulders. During the journey across the river the wealthy dead continued to lament their misfortune, while Cyniscus and Micyllus enjoyed the journey.

Once on the other side, the group was met by Tisiphone, one of the Furies, who brought the group to Rhadamanthus for judgment. Cyniscus eagerly stepped forward to be judged because of his desire to prosecute Megapenthes.<sup>147</sup> Hermes called for witnesses against Cyniscus, but none stepped forward. Rhadamanthus then commanded Cyniscus to remove his clothing in order to check for marks that would indicate wicked deeds. He was surprised to find only three or four marks that seemed to have been erased. When Cyniscus told him that his philosophical life had led to the erasure of wicked deeds from his soul, Rhadamanthus told him that he would be able to go to the Isles of the Blessed. Following this, Micyllus stepped forward and was found to have no marks on him at all.<sup>148</sup> With this the prosecutors against Megapenthes was set.

Megapenthes was thrust before Cyniscus, who functioned as the lead prosecutor. The philosopher began by saying that the marks on Megapenthes would be sufficient to show his wickedness, but before viewing these gave a list of sins committed by Megapenthes, the tyrant. Charges of mass murder, confiscation of property, savagery, pride, torture, kidnapping, and sexual abuse of young boys and girls were enumerated. Megapenthes was asked to respond to the charges and admitted to the murders, but denied the sexual misdeeds. In order to prove that Megapenthes was not innocent of

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<sup>147</sup> This fits with his early characterization in the work by Clotho, who says that Cyniscus had been on earth as an observer and physician (ιατρὸν) of sins.

<sup>148</sup> There is no reason given for Micyllus' cleanness.

these crimes, Cyniscus called to witnesses, the bed and the lamp of Megapenthes. Both objects provided damning testimony against Megapenthes. Rhadamanthus then judged Megapenthes and stripped off his purple robe revealing black and blue marks across his back. Rhadamanthus suggested that Megapenthes either be thrown into the river of fire or handed over to Cerberus. Cyniscus, however, had a better idea: Megapenthes should be denied a drink from the River Lethe, thus being condemned to remembering his misdeeds in the underworld. Rhadamanthus agreed and sentenced Megapenthes to be bound in fetters and be given a place near Tantalus.

Lucian's *Downward Journey* is important because not only does it deny the return of the dead to the land of the living, but also because of the focus on wealth.

Megapenthes is intent on returning to the land of the living in order to make proper arrangements for his vast wealth. Micyllus, on the other hand, is eager to journey to the land of the dead because death has leveled the playing field. The similarities between Lucian's argument and the function of the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus are analogous,<sup>149</sup> if not exact. Lucian does not, however, always deny the return from the underworld of the one who descends as is evident in the next document to be discussed.

In the *Menippus* Lucian tells of the philosopher's descent to the underworld and return to tell his friend about the fate of the dead and the true means of a happy life. The story begins with Menippus' return home after a long absence from the city. His friend greeted him and asked about Menippus' strange attire: a felt cap, lyre, and a lion's skin. Menippus informed his friend that he had just returned from the underworld. The friend

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<sup>149</sup> It is for this reason that Lucian's *Downward Journey* informs Ronald Hock's reading of the parable; see Ronald F. Hock, "Lazarus and Micyllus: Greco-Roman Backgrounds to Luke 16:19-31," *JBL* 106 (1987): 457.

was amazed and asked if Menippus had died and returned to life. On the contrary, Menippus made the trip while living so that he could obtain council from Teiresias (cf. *Od.* 11.164). Menippus is coy about the advice he sought, but asked his friend how people had been behaving on the earth during his absence. His friend replied that all was just about the same: stealing, lying, extorting, and cheating. Menippus denounced the foolishness of these people because he knew of an ordinance that had just passed in the underworld concerning the wealthy. His friend was intrigued, but Menippus initially refused to divulge his secret knowledge. After minor insistence from the friend, Menippus decided to tell his story.

Menippus began his story by telling his friend about the crisis he faced when he realized the stories about the gods he accepted as a youth were contradicted by laws he became aware of as an adult. The stories of abduction, assault, banishment and the like were all against the law. This led to a search for the “solid path in life” with the help of philosophers. This inquiry proved to be “struggling out of the smoke . . . right in to the fire!” (*Men.* 4). The philosophers, it seemed, were just as confused about the issue. Menippus was surprised to find that while one philosopher recommended the pursuit of pleasure as the means to happiness, another advocated an ascetic lifestyle. This disagreement was also evident in the philosophers’ instructions on the use of wealth and the nature of the universe. To make things worse all of the philosophers had plausible arguments. Worst of all, however, was the hypocrisy Menippus observed in the behavior of the philosophers. Those who despised money, were attached to it strongly, arguing over pay for teaching and interest accrued on loans. Those who spoke against the need

for public approval said such things for fame. Moreover, although almost all encouraged Menippus to avoid pleasure, they devoted themselves to such pleasure.

In order to resolve his dilemma, Menippus decided to seek the council of Magi in Babylon. These disciples of Zoroaster knew charms and ceremonies that would allow a person to descend to Hades. Once in Hades, Menippus planned to meet with Teiresias in order to learn “the life that a man of sense would choose.” In Babylon Menippus convinced a wise man named Mithrobarzanes to guide him to the underworld. Mithrobarzanes led Menippus through a series of rituals in order to prepare him for entry to Hades.<sup>150</sup> When Menippus was fully consecrated, Mithrobarzanes put on a magician’s robe and Menippus put on his cap, lyre, and lion’s skin. The purpose of this dress was so that Menippus would resemble three famous figures who had successfully descended to Hades, Odysseus, Orpheus, and Heracles. If asked, Menippus was to say that he truly was one of these heroes in order that he might fool the guards of Hades and successfully descend to the underworld.<sup>151</sup>

At daybreak Mithrobarzanes and Menippus began their journey down the Euphrates on their boat loaded with supplies for the rituals. When they arrived at a marshy lake and disembarked, they performed a necromantic ritual similar to that of Odysseus. The ground began to shake as a chasm formed before them. The sky grew gloomy and Menippus could hear the barking of Cerberus. He also saw that palace of Pluto, the lake of fire, and the Acheron. The two travelers passed by Rhadamanthus and

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<sup>150</sup> For 29 days Menippus would bathe in the Euphrates at sunrise for 29 days, while Mithrobarzanes recited arcane incantations, after which he would spit in Menippus’ face three times. The two ate a diet of nuts, milk, and water, and slept outdoors. After this preliminary preparation, Mithrobarzanes took Menippus to the Tigris, purified and consecrated him and then led him home, walking backwards.

<sup>151</sup> Note the similar method of Dionysus in Aristophanes’ *Frogs* discussed above .

Cerberus and boarded Charon's ferry.<sup>152</sup> Once on the other side Mithrobarzanes and Menippus made their way to the court of Minos. Two groups of people were lined up to be judged. On one side were adulterers, pimps,<sup>153</sup> tax-collectors, and flatterers; on the other side were the wealthy. Each person in the group was prosecuted by his own shadow. Those whose wealth had led to great pride were judged most harshly because they forgot that they were mere mortals. This fate delighted Menippus and he would remind those whom he knew that their life had been grand, but now they were reduced to nothing.

Following this scene of judgment, Mithrobarzanes led Menippus to the place of punishment. All the wicked were tormented in this place: kings, slaves, poor, and rich. Menippus heard the sounds of scourging and the wails of those roasting in fire and he saw racks and pillories all around. He also saw the infamous dead being punished: Ixion, Sisyphus, Tantalus, and Tityus. The punishment was especially brutal for the rich, who never received a break. The poor, on the other hand, took regular breaks and received only half the punishments of the rich. Mithrobarzanes and Menippus moved on to the Acherusian Plain where they saw demigods and others living together in nations and clans. Apart from the Egyptians, who were preserved because of embalming, it was difficult to recognize the dead here because everyone looked the same when reduced to skeletons.<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> Menippus' disguise allowed them to make it this far in the journey: he subdued Cerberus with the lyre and fooled Charon with the lion's skin so they could board the ferry.

<sup>153</sup> Gk: πορνοβοσκοί.

<sup>154</sup> This caused Menippus to digress on a comparison of life to a pageant. Fate assigns a costume to a skeleton and allows them to play their part on earth. Sometimes the costume is replaced mid-pageant and the fortune of the person is reversed. At death, the costumes must be returned to Fate. This leads to a comical description of many famous dead kings working menial jobs in order to make ends meet in the

At this point, Menippus' friends interrupted his description of the fates of dead kings and philosophers in order to ask again about the ordinance that was passed in the underworld concerning the wealthy. Menippus told his friend that while in the underworld a public meeting was called. After various business decisions were decided a motion was brought against the wealthy: "Whereas many lawless deeds are done in life by the rich, who plunder and oppress and in every way humiliate the poor, be it resolved by the senate and people, that when they die their bodies be punished like those of the other malefactors, but their souls be sent back up into life and enter into donkeys until they shall have passed two hundred and fifty thousand years in the said condition, transmigrating from donkey to donkey, bearing burdens, and being driven by the poor; and that thereafter it be permitted them to die." The motion was passed by a majority. After this Menippus had a brief discussion with Teiresias, in which he asked the seer about the best way to live life. Initially, Teiresias declined to answer, saying that Rhadamanthus had forbidden to tell others. Menippus persisted and Teiresias relented, pulling him aside. In a low voice, he told Menippus that the common life is the best. To be happy, Menippus must stop speculating about the origins of the universe and heavenly bodies. Instead, he ought to make good use of the present and to take nothing seriously. With this new knowledge, Menippus and Mithrobarzanes returned to earth through the sanctuary of Trophonius.

The use of wealth plays an important role in Lucian's *Mennipus*, just as it does in the *Downward Journey*. Just as in the *Downward Journey*, the wealthy tyrants in *Mennipus* face a special punishment as a result of their evil deeds. The difference, of

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underworld. For example, Philip, king of Macedon, was working as a cobbler; Xerxes, Darius, and Polycrates were begging. Menippus also saw many philosophers in the underworld.

course, is that the vision of the judgment, as well as the vision of the underworld seen by Mennipus, is passed on to the living via the one who journeyed to the underworld. Moreover, Mennipus' comments make it clear that Lucian is drawing upon the rich tradition of descent to the underworld that was discussed at the beginning of this chapter.

### *Summary of Greco-Roman Journeys to the Place of Punishment*

The descent to the underworld was a well-known theme in Greco-Roman literature. The theme was well-known from stories that provided etiological myths for the founding of religious movements, as well as for explanations for natural phenomena. Ancient authors used this theme as a means for their characters to obtain oracular advice from dead sages and other illustrious figures who had died. The template was used by other authors as a means of proof, when rational arguments alone were insufficient. As we have seen the tradition also included tales of gods, heroes, and mortals, both rich and poor, taking the journey to the underworld. Moreover, the use of this motif was not univocal, but consisted of both the expectation and rejection of the possibility of a return of the one who journeyed to the place of punishment. Overwhelmingly, however, the expectation in these stories was that the traveller would return with a message from the otherworld. At times this message consisted of directions for a journey. At other times, however, the message functioned as a conversion story that was meant to impact the behavior of the audience that heard the tale. In the next chapter, we will see that the journey to the place of punishment was not limited to Greco-Roman literature. Indeed, the tradition of the journey to the place of punishment has an established tradition in Jewish and Christian literature.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Jewish and Christian Journeys to the Place of Punishment

Stories of the journey to the place of punishment were not limited to Greco-Roman literature in the ancient world. Indeed, there is a rich tradition of these visits in Jewish and Christian literature. The purpose of these visits, however, is markedly different from the focus in Greco-Roman literature. Whereas the journey to the place of punishment in literature produced by the Greeks and Romans was primarily interested in receiving information (for directions on a journey, for the future of a people, or for the condition of the dead in the afterworld), Jewish and Christian journeys to the place of punishment were interested in the possibility of postmortem repentance of the dead and/or efficacious prayers for the dead. These issues, in turn, raised questions about God's justice and mercy. As may be expected, two streams of thought developed in these documents: (1) the possibility of postmortem repentance, or the extension of mercy by God to the wicked dead; and (2) the rejection of the possibility of postmortem repentance, or the granting of mercy to the wicked dead.<sup>1</sup> In this chapter I will discuss the Jewish and Christian journeys to the underworld that exemplify this tradition. The

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Bauckham's study of justice and mercy in Jewish and Christian apocalyptic literature is helpful at this point; Richard Bauckham, "The Conflict of Justice and Mercy: Attitudes to the Damned in Apocalyptic Literature," in *The Fate of the Dead* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 132-48. In this essay Bauckham traces the theological concern of divine justice and mercy posed by the description of torment in apocalyptic literature. Based on the intercessions of the seers who take journeys to the place of punishment, Bauckham has identified the two streams mentioned here and catalogued extensive lists of the seers appeal for mercy, and the divine rejection of the request; see Bauckham, "Justice and Mercy," 139-40.



works of both Martha Himmelfarb<sup>2</sup> and Richard Bauckham<sup>3</sup> are helpful for identifying the literature to discuss in this chapter, although I will not discuss a number of documents that they include in their works,<sup>4</sup> and I will add several documents not discussed by either scholar.

### *The Underworld in Jewish and Christian Literature*

#### *The Underworld in the Hebrew Bible*

Before discussing the journey to the place of punishment in Jewish and Christian literature, it is important to discuss briefly the nature of the realm that was visited.<sup>5</sup> In the

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<sup>2</sup> Martha Himmelfarb, *Tours of Hell: An Apocalyptic Form in Jewish and Christian Literature* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 1983). Himmelfarb traces the development of Jewish and Christian tours of hell beginning with the Book of the Watchers in *1 Enoch*, through the *Apocalypse of Peter* and *Apocalypse of Zephaniah*, and into later writings like *Apocalypse of Paul*. Prior to Himmelfarb's work the only major work on a Christian journey to the place of punishment was Albrecht Dieterich, *Nekyia: Beiträge zur Erklärung der neuentdeckten Petrusapokalypse* (Leipzig: Druck und Verlag von B. G. Teubner, 1893). Dieterich suggests that "Orphic" or "Orphic-Pythagorean" texts formed the background for the *Apocalypse of Peter* and its vision of punishment. Himmelfarb critiques Dieterich's view by pointing out the circularity in the definitions of "Orphism" and what texts constitute "Orphic/Orphic-Pythagorean" literature; Himmelfarb, *Tours*, 41-45. See also the early review of Dieterich's work by Carl Schmidt, who argues that Dieterich ignored other possible background literature, including Jewish texts; Carl Schmidt, "Review of Albrecht Dieterich, *Nekyia*," *TLZ* 19 (1894): 560-66.

<sup>3</sup> Bauckham, "Justice and Mercy," 132-48.

<sup>4</sup> I will focus on documents that date with relative certainty to the second century CE or earlier. As a result, I will not offer a substantive discussion of several documents that also narrate a descent to the place of punishment and raise the question of the possibility of postmortem repentance. In particular, I will not discuss *Vision of Ezra* and the *Greek Apocalypse of Ezra*. Another reason for this is that these documents are literarily related, which, together with their late date, mitigates against detailed discussion. Michael Edward Stone suggests that "the later works associated with [Ezra] in Christian tradition all derived in the final analysis from 4 Ezra"; Michael Edward Stone, *A Commentary on the Book of Fourth Ezra* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 1990), 37; cf. 43-46. See also Michael E. Stone, "Greek Apocalypse of Ezra," in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (ed. James H. Charlesworth; vol. 1; New York: Doubleday, 1983), 563-564, 569. For a list of parallels between the *Apocalypse of Ezra* and 4 *Ezra* in particular see Bruno Violet, *Die Esra-Apokalypse* (Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten drei Jahrhunderts; Leipzig: J. C. Hinrich, 1910), I-lx.

<sup>5</sup> One of the most helpful discussions of the development of the idea of the place of punishment in Jewish and Christian thought is Alan E. Bernstein, *The Formation of Hell: Death and Retribution in the Ancient and Early Christian Worlds* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1993).

Hebrew Bible the abode of the dead is most frequently referred to as *šē'ôl*.<sup>6</sup> The etymology of *šē'ôl* is unclear, but may be related to the verb *šā'al* (to ask) and, thus, refer to a necromantic ritual.<sup>7</sup> Despite the lack of certainty regarding the origin and meaning of the word, it is possible to construct a general heuristic picture of *šē'ôl*.

*Šē'ôl* is a dark and dusty realm (Job 17:13, 16) that is located under the earth. This description fits with the ancient understanding that the heavens were the dwelling of God, the earth the land of the living, and that dead were located under the earth.<sup>8</sup> Thus, the dead are said to go down to *šē'ôl* (e.g., Num 16:30, 33; Job 7:9; Prov 5:5; Isa 57:9; Ezek 31:15-17, 32:21 cf. Prov 15:24)<sup>9</sup> through its gates (Isaiah 38:10)<sup>10</sup> to a place of decay (Ps 16:10) where there is no hope (Job 17:13-16). *Šē'ôl* has a voracious appetite and because it is located below the earth, it is pictured as swallowing those who go down

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<sup>6</sup> Daniel Block's recent essay is helpful on this issue; Daniel I. Block, "The Old Testament on Hell," in *Hell Under Fire* (eds. Christopher W. Morgan, and Robert A. Petersen; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2004), 43-65. As he notes, the place of the dead is also referred to as *qeber*, *bôr*, *šahat*, *'ābaddōn*, and, at times, *'ereš*, and *māwet/môt*; see Block, "Hell," 44-46 for discussion and references; see also Nicholas J. Tromp, *Primitive Conceptions of Death and the Nether World in the Old Testament* (BibOr 21; Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1969), 21-79; Philip S. Johnston, *Shades of Sheol: Death and Afterlife in the Old Testament* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 83-85; Theodore J. Lewis, "Dead, Abode of," *ABD* 2:101; Simcha Paull Raphael, *Jewish Views of the Afterlife* (Second Edition; Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2009), 53-54.

<sup>7</sup> For a discussion of the etymology of *šē'ôl* see Lewis, "Dead," *ABD* 2:101-102; see also Block, "Hell," 45-46.

<sup>8</sup> See Block, "Hell," 50-51.

<sup>9</sup> The depth of *šē'ôl* is also contrasted with the heights of the heavens (Ps 139:8; Isa 7:11; Amos 9:2; cf. Deut 32:22).

<sup>10</sup> See also Pss 9:13 (MT 9:14); 107:18 (MT 106:18) where the dead enter the "gates of death" (*ša'ārê māwet*). Similarly in Job 38:17 the LORD asks Job if the "gates of death" (*ša'ārê māwet*) have been revealed to him, or if he has seen the "gates of deep darkness" (*ša'ārê šalmāwet*)

(Prov 1:12, 27:20, 30:16; Hab 2:5). All people descend to *šē'ōl*, not just the wicked,<sup>11</sup> and, in general, once a person goes down, there is no hope of return (Job 17:13-16). But since the LORD rules over *šē'ōl* (1 Sam 2:6; cf. Job 26:6; Prov 15:11), it is possible that he will rescue people, a view most often expressed in the Psalms (Pss 16:10, 30:3 [MT 30:4], 49:14-15 [MT 49:15-16], 86:13; cf. Hos 13:14).<sup>12</sup> Those who dwell in *šē'ōl* are sometimes called *rēpā'im*, most often translated “shades,” in parallel contexts with *mētīm* (“the dead”; Ps 88:10 [MT 88:11]; Prov 2:18; Isa 26:14, 19) or alone as dwellers of the underworld (Job 26:5; Prov 9:18; Isa 14:9).

Despite the picture of *šē'ōl* that develops in the Hebrew Bible there is scholarly disagreement about what *šē'ōl* is. On the one hand, some scholars argue that *šē'ōl* refers to “the grave” and, thus, is a synonym for “death.” In this view *šē'ōl* does not refer to the abode of the dead. R. Laird Harris, one of the staunchest proponents of this view, points to several places where *šē'ōl* is discussed in parallel with *māwet* (death).<sup>13</sup> For example, 2 Samuel 22:6 reads, “the cords of Sheol entangled me, the snares of death (*māwet*) confronted me” (cf. Ps 18:5 [MT 18:6]; Ps 116:3).<sup>14</sup> In a similar manner, Isaiah critiques

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<sup>11</sup> Jacob, for example, says that he will go down to *šē'ōl* when mourning Joseph (Gen 37:35; cf. Gen 42:38, 44:29, 31). *Šē'ōl* is also, however, a place where the wicked descend (Pss 9:17 [MT 9:18], 55:15; cf. Isa 5:14, 14:3-21).

<sup>12</sup> For a discussion of these Psalms, see David C. Mitchell, “‘God Will Redeem My Soul From Sheol’: The Psalms of the Sons of Korah,” *JSOT* 30 (2006): 365-384. There are, of course, other exceptions to this general rule. The first is the practice of necromancy, which allows the living to contact the dead (see 2 Sam 28:1-19). A second exception is the raising of the dead, as seen in Elijah’s raising of the son of the widow of Zarephath (1 Kings 17:17-24), and Elisha’s healing of a young boy who had died (2 Kings 4:17-37).

<sup>13</sup> R. Laird Harris’ fuller treatments on the topic are R. Laird Harris, “The Meaning of the Word Sheol as Shown By Parallels in Poetic Texts,” *Bulletin of the Evangelical Theological Society* 4 (1961): 129-35, and R. Laird Harris, “Why Hebrew *šē'ōl* Was Translated ‘Grave,’ ” in *The NIV: The Making of a Contemporary Translation* (ed. Kenneth L. Barker; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Academie Books, 1986), 59-71.

<sup>14</sup> All quotations of the Hebrew Bible and the Apocrypha are from the NRSV.

the leaders of Jerusalem who said, “We have made a covenant with death (*māwet*), and with Sheol we have an agreement; when the overwhelming scourge passes through it will not come to us” (Isa 28:15). Laird argues that the relationship between *šē’ōl* and the grave in these parallels is further supported by the use of *šē’ōl* in Numbers 16:33 when Korah, those with him, and all their belongings “went down into Sheol.” According to Harris, the “tents and things surely did not go to the place of departed spirits! The obvious meaning is that he and his goods were all buried alive in the earth.”<sup>15</sup>

While Numbers 16:33 may, indeed, refer to the literal burial of Korah and those with him, not all scholars are willing to draw as sharp a distinction between the “place of departed spirits” and the grave as Harris does. Johannes Pederson, for example, writes, “The ideas of the grave and Sheol cannot be separated. Every one who dies goes to Sheol, just as he, if everything happens in the normal way, is put into the grave. . . . The dead are at the same time in the grave and Sheol, not in two different places.”<sup>16</sup> Indeed, the majority of scholars argue that *šē’ōl* refers both to the grave/death and the place where the dead dwell, depending on the context in which the word appears.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> The full quote of Laird is, “But not only did Korah and his fellows go to Sheol, his houses and goods also went down. His tents and things surely did not go to the place of departed spirits! The obvious meaning is that he and his goods were all buried alive in the earth. It is not stated in the text that Sheol was an underground cavity and that a hole was opened in the earth whereby Korah and his friends went down. This is not stated and should not be inferred”; Harris, “Sheol,” 130.

<sup>16</sup> Johannes Pedersen, *Israel: It's Life and Culture* (London: Oxford University Press, 1926), 461.

<sup>17</sup> The view is held by the majority of scholars, see, for example, W.O.E. Oesterley, *Immortality and the Unseen World: A Study in Old Testament Religion* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1921), 86-92; S.G.F. Brandon, *The Judgment of the Dead: An Historical and Comparative Study of the Idea of Post-Mortem Judgment in the Major Religions* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1967), 58; Tromp, *Death*, 129-40; Lewis, “Dead,” *ABD* 2:101-105; Block, “Hell,” 44-65; Raphael, *Afterlife*, 151-60.

Perhaps the most regularly cited passage is Isaiah 14:3-21.<sup>18</sup> Here *šē'ôl* refers to both the grave and the underworld, as the Israelites sing a taunt over the king of Babylon who has been brought low by the LORD, giving rest to both people and creation (Isa 14:4-8). When the king is cast down, *šē'ôl* “is stirred up” and the *reṣpā'im*, who in this case are other former leaders of nations that have died, rise from their thrones and greet the descending king (Isa 14:9). Here, the *reṣpā'im* are depicted as sentient beings who understand that a fellow king has been reduced to a shade, just as they had been:

You too have become as weak as we!  
You have become like us! (Isa 14:10)

*Šē'ôl* is clearly the place where the dead dwell. The imagery, however, also refers to grave:

Your pomp is brought down to Sheol,  
and the sound of your harps;  
maggots are the bed beneath you,  
and worms are your covering. (Isa 14:10)

Thus, others can marvel at the sight of the king's humiliation when he is “brought down to Sheol, to the depths of the Pit” (Isa 14:15). The people who see him say:

Is this the man who made the earth tremble,  
who shook kingdoms,  
who made the world like a desert  
and overthrew its cities,

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<sup>18</sup> In addition to the standard commentaries recent treatments of Isaiah 14:3-21 that take account of the descent motif include: Markus Zehnder, “Jesaja 14:1,f.: widersprüchliche Erwartungen zur Stellung der Nicht-Israeliten in der Zukunft?” in *Prophetie und Psalmen: Festschrift für Klaus Seybold zum 65. Geburtstag* (ed. Beat Huwyler, et al.; Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2001), 3-29; John C. Poirier, “An Illuminating Parallel to Isaiah XIV 12,” *VT* 49 (1999): 371-389; Klaas Spronk, “Down with Hêlêl: The Assumed Mythological Background of Isa 14:12,” in “*Und Mose schrieb dieses Lied auf*”: *Studien zum Alten Testament und zum alten Orient: Festschrift für Oswald Loretz zur Vollendung seines 70. Lebensjahres mit Beiträgen von Freunden, Schülern und Kollegen* (ed. Oswald Loretz, et al.; Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 1998), 717-726; Joseph Jensen, “Helel ben Shahaar (Isaiah 14:12-15) in Bible and Tradition,” in *Writing and Reading the Scroll of Isaiah: Studies of an Interpretive Tradition* (VTSup 70; ed. Craig C. Broyles and Craig A. Evans; Leiden: Brill, 1997), 339-356.

who would not let his prisoners go home? (Isa 14:16-17)

The picture that develops is twofold. On the one hand, from the perspective of the living, the king of Babylon lies dead, which is a wonder. On the other hand, the king is greeted by those who dwell in the underworld, and welcomed to his new home. The close relationship between *šē'ōl* and the grave in Isaiah 14 is indicative of the use throughout the Hebrew Bible.

### *The Underworld in the Apocrypha*

A similar picture is also present in the Apocrypha, where, in virtually all cases, *šē'ōl* is translated as ᾗδης.<sup>19</sup> Just as there is a close relationship between *šē'ōl* and the grave/death in the Hebrew Bible, so also there is a close relationship between death (θάνατος) and ᾗδης. At times θάνατος and ᾗδης are parallel to one another. For example, Wis 16:13 says, “For you have the power over life and death; you lead mortals down to the gates of Hades (κατάγεις εἰς πύλας ᾗδου) and back again” (cf. Sir 51:5). At other times, ᾗδης is used idiomatically to refer to death. For example, in the face of martyrdom, young grooms saw “death immediately before them” (τὸν ᾗδην ὁρῶντες κείμενον; 3 Macc 4:8).<sup>20</sup> ᾗδης is not, however, a mere synonym for θάνατος. At times

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<sup>19</sup> Block’s claim that the only exception to this rule is Proverbs 23:14 where *šē'ōl* is translated as “death” (θάνατος) is not accurate; Block, “Hell,” 44, n. 1. *Šē'ōl* is also translated as θάνατος at 2 Samuel 22:6. Moreover, the idea that *šē'ōl* is deep below the earth is rendered with βάθος (Isa 7:11) or the phrase ἐν βάθει βόθρου (Ezek 32:21). ᾗδης is also the word that commonly refers to the underworld in the Pseudepigrapha. Important passages that reflect this tradition will be discussed below.

<sup>20</sup> The translation of ᾗδης as “death” is, of course, a decision made by the committee, not a meaning necessarily inherent in the word ᾗδης. The decision, however, seems to be correct and is repeated in several passages (see 3 Macc 5:42, 51, 6:31; Sir 9:12).

ᾗδης refers to a realm where the dead dwell (see Bar 2:17).<sup>21</sup> This place was located below the earth (Tob 13:2), and those that dwelled there had no luxury (Sir 14:6) and were unable to praise God (Sir 17:27). Just as in the Hebrew Bible, the general expectation is that those who descended to ᾗδης would not return to the land of the living (see Wis 2:1). But, since God rules over ᾗδης, there was the possibility of a return (Wis 16:13). Thus the picture of ᾗδης in apocryphal literature is similar to the picture the develops in the Hebrew Bible.

### *The Underworld in the New Testament*

The conception of the underworld in the New Testament, however, is much different from that of the Hebrew Bible and Apocrypha. In particular, the underworld in the New Testament is associated with the punishment of the wicked in a way that does not appear in earlier Jewish literature. The words used to refer to the underworld as a place of punishment are more varied than the Hebrew Bible or Apocrypha. Like the Septuagint, the underworld is often referred to as ᾗδης in the New Testament. ᾗδης is referred to as a gated area (Matt 16:18) below the earth (Matt 11:23; Luke 10:15), over which God has authority (Rev 1:18).<sup>22</sup> Additionally, ᾗδης is used as a synonym for death

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<sup>21</sup> It is also important to recognize that, just as in the Hebrew Bible, the righteous, as well as the wicked, descend to ᾗδης. One of the more striking examples is the faithful scribe, Eleazar. The old man was being forced by his persecutors “to open his mouth to eat swine’s flesh” (2 Macc 6:18). When he refused, he was taken aside and encouraged to bring his own meat and pretend to eat the pork. Eleazar refused and “making a high resolve, worthy of his years and the dignity of his old age and the gray hairs that he had reached with distinction and his excellent life even from childhood, and moreover according to the holy God-given law, he declared himself quickly, telling them to send him to Hades” (2 Macc 6:23).

<sup>22</sup> God’s rule over Hades is clearly mediated by Christ, who holds “the keys of death and Hades” (Rev 1:18).

(Acts 2:27, 31),<sup>23</sup> or closely associated with death when personified (Rev 6:8). Unlike the Hebrew Bible and Apocrypha, however, ἄδης is explicitly a place of punishment. In the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus, the rich man is in torment in ἄδης, surrounded by flames (Luke 16:23-24). This punishment in ἄδης, however, is not the final punishment. Both death and ἄδης give up their dead prior to the final judgment before being thrown into the lake of fire, themselves (Rev 20:12-14).

The idea of a fiery place of torment for the wicked is also found in the reference to γέεννα in the Synoptic Gospels and James. The background for the term found in the Hebrew Bible is well documented,<sup>24</sup> and refers to the “Valley of Hinnom” (*gê-hinnōm*) outside of Jerusalem. Notorious as a place for the worship of Molech and Baal, the site became synonymous with wickedness and was denounced by the prophet Jeremiah.<sup>25</sup> In the New Testament γέεννα is a place of unquenchable fire that is to be avoided at all costs. It is better, according to Jesus, to be maimed in life than for the whole body “to be cast into the Gehenna of fire” (Matt 18:9; cf. 5:29; Mark 9:43-47).<sup>26</sup> James’ warning that the tongue will be set on fire by γέεννα echoes this warning (James 3:6; cf. Matt 5:22). As a result of the dangers of torment in γέεννα, Jesus encourages those listening to him to “fear the one who is able to destroy both spirit and body in Gehenna” (Matt 10:28; cf.

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<sup>23</sup> Acts 2:27 is a quotation of Psalm 16:10 (LXX 15:10) and Acts 2:31 repeats the thought.

<sup>24</sup> See, for example, Duane F. Watson, “Gehenna,” *ABD* 2.927; Chaim Milikowsky, “Which Gehenna? Retribution and Eschatology in the Synoptic Gospels and in Early Jewish Texts,” (*NTS* 34): 238-39; and Bernstein, *Formation of Hell*, 167-172.

<sup>25</sup> See Jeremiah 7:31-32; 19:2-9; 32:35.

<sup>26</sup> In a parallel passage, Mark calls the fire of γέεννα an “unquenchable fire” (Mark 9:43).



Luke 12:5).<sup>27</sup> The presence of fire in the place of punishment finds expression in the Synoptic Gospels even when neither ἄδης nor γέεννα are present. This is evident in Matthew's Gospel where Jesus warns that the wicked will be cast into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matt 13:42). Elsewhere in the Gospel, this place is mentioned without reference to fire, but to darkness (Matt 8:12; 13:42; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30; cf. Luke 13:28). Mark speaks of a similar place with unquenchable and undying worms (Mark 9:48).

A final term used to refer to the underworld as a place of punishment in the New Testament is ἄβυσσος. The term occurs primarily in Revelation and is associated with judgment.<sup>28</sup> In Revelation 9:1 John saw a pit opened from which smoke rose and locusts poured (Rev 9:1). The Hebrew name of the king of ἄβυσσος was Abaddon, another word used rarely for the underworld in the Hebrew Bible.<sup>29</sup> Later in Revelation a beast rose from ἄβυσσος to make war on the servants of God (Rev 11:7).<sup>30</sup> In the end, ἄβυσσος is the place where Satan will be bound before being judged (Rev 20:1-3).

While the New Testament conception of the underworld as a place of punishment is much different from the depiction of the underworld in the Hebrew Bible and Apocrypha, all of these texts share the expectation that people do not travel to the

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<sup>27</sup> Chaim Milikowsky draws attention to the difference between the Matthean and Lukan version of this saying and suggests that Matthew's reference to the destruction of the body and spirit refers to a judgment after body and spirit have been reunited at the resurrection, while Luke's reference to only the body indicates a belief that the wicked are judged immediately after death; Milikowsky, "Gehenna," 242-244.

<sup>28</sup> Demons in Luke also refer to ἄβυσσος when they beg Jesus not to cast them there (Luke 8:31).

<sup>29</sup> See footnote 6 above.

<sup>30</sup> This beast rising from ἄβυσσος has the power to amaze the inhabitants of the earth (Rev 17:8).

underworld and return of their own volition.<sup>31</sup> One potential exception to this belief in the New Testament is Christ's so-called "Harrowing of Hell." The idea is based primarily on 1 Peter 3:18-22; 4:6, and has sparked much debate.<sup>32</sup> In the history of interpretation the early church was quick to pick up on the idea of Christ preaching the Gospel to the dead during the time between his death and resurrection.<sup>33</sup> Two main streams of interpretation developed in the writings of the Church Fathers.<sup>34</sup> The first view is more universal, arguing that Christ preached the gospel to all people in the underworld. Clement of Alexandria writes, "If, then, He preached the gospel to those in the flesh that they might not be condemned unjustly, how is it conceivable that He did not for the same cause preach the gospel to those who had departed this life before His advent?"<sup>35</sup> The second view is more restricted, suggesting that Christ preached only to

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<sup>31</sup> As we will see below, the journey to the underworld was well known in the Pseudepigrapha.

<sup>32</sup> For a history of interpretation see Bo Ivar Reicke, *The Disobedient Spirits and Christian Baptism: A Study of 1 Pet. III.19 and Its Context* (ASNU 13; Copenhagen: Ejnar Munksgaard, 1946); Norbert Brox, *Der erste Petrusbrief* (EKKNT 21; Zurich: Benzinger/Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1986), 182-89; William J. Dalton, *Christ's Proclamation to the Spirits: A Study of 1 Peter 3:18-4:6* (AnBib 23; Rome: Pontifical Bible Institute, 1989); D.N. Campbell and Fika J. van Rensburg, "A History of the Interpretation of 1 Peter 3:18-22," *Acta patristica et byzantia* 19 (2008): 73-96; and Jeffrey A. Trumbower, *Rescue for the Dead: The Posthumous Salvation of Non-Christians in Early Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 91-108. For a discussion of the Harrowing of Hell in Byzantine and medieval art, see Heidi J. Hornik and Mikeal C. Parsons, "The Harrowing of Hell," *BibRev* 19 (2003): 18-26, 50.

<sup>33</sup> Martin Connell writes, "There is virtually no gap in the preaching and the literature about the descent after the First Letter of Peter. Even with so little scriptural testimony, Christ's descent is omnipresent in the Fathers of the next few centuries"; Martin F. Connell, "Descensus Christi Ad Infernos: Christ's Descent to the Dead," *TS* 62 (2001): 265. It is important that there is a distinction in many of the Church Fathers between ᾗδης and γέεννα at this point. Origen, for example, saw ᾗδης as the place where the dead descended *prior* to Christ's own descent. Γέεννα was a place of fiery torment reserved for the wicked; see Trumbower, *Rescue*, 101.

<sup>34</sup> See Peter Burfeind, "The Harrowing of Hell: Filling in the Blanks," *Logia* 18 (2009): 8-9. For a fuller discussion of early witnesses see Jared Wicks, "Christ's Saving Descent to the Dead: Early Witnesses From Ignatius of Antioch to Origen," *Pro Ecclesia* 17 (2008): 281-309; and Trumbower, *Rescue*, 102-105.

<sup>35</sup> Clement of Alexandria, *The Stromata* 6.6 (ANF 2:491). The author of the *Shepherd of Hermas* assigns this task also to forty apostles and teachers after their own death (*Shep. Herm. Sim.* 9.16; see Trumbower, *Rescue*, 93.)

the righteous people mentioned in the Hebrew Bible. Irenaeus, for example, writes, “It was for this reason, too, that the Lord descended into the regions beneath the earth, preaching His advent there also, and [declaring] the remission of sins received by those who believe in Him.” These people are identified as “the righteous men, the prophets, and the patriarchs.”<sup>36</sup> The majority of modern scholars, however, do not agree with either of these interpretations, but think that those to whom Christ preached were “Christians who heard the gospel preached on earth, but died before the writing of the epistle, that is, before the parousia.”<sup>37</sup>

The descent of Christ to preach in the underworld finds its most dramatic representation, however, in the *Gospel of Nicodemus*. Dating from third to sixth centuries CE,<sup>38</sup> the *Gospel of Nicodemus* contains an account of Christ’s descent as told by Simeon, the old man who prophesied about Jesus in Luke 2:25-35, and his two sons, who were three of those raised from the dead at Christ’s crucifixion (*Gos. Nic.* 17.1; cf. Matt 27:52-53). After swearing an oath and asking Jesus to aid them in telling the story, the three men recounted what happened while they were in Hades “with all who have died since the beginning of the world” (*Gos. Nic.* 28.1).<sup>39</sup> Suddenly, at midnight, a great

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<sup>36</sup> Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 4.27 (ANF 1:499).

<sup>37</sup> Dalton, *Christ’s Proclamation*, 51. For a critique of Dalton’s view see David G. Horrell, “Who Are ‘the Dead’ and When Was the Gospel Preached to Them?: The Interpretation of 1 Peter 4.6,” *NTS* 48 (2003): 70-89.

<sup>38</sup> See Joseph Kroll, *Gott und Hölle: Der Mythos vom Descensuskampfe* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1963), 83-85. Malcolm Lowe gives a date between the second and fifth centuries; Malcolm Lowe, “A Fresh Approach to the Gospels of James, Pseudo-Thomas, Peter, and Nicodemus,” *NovT* 23 (1981): 86.

<sup>39</sup> All quotations of the *Gospel of Nicodemus* are from Felix Sheidweiler, “The Gospel of Nicodemus, Acts of Pilate, and Christ’s Descent Into Hell,” (in *New Testament Apocrypha*; vol. 1; ed. Wilhelm Schneemelcher; Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 521-526.

light shone in Hades, bringing joy to Abraham and causing Isaiah to refer to his prophecy in Isaiah 9:1-2 that Zebulun and Naphtali would see a great light (*Gos. Nic.* 18.1). John the Baptist, Adam, Seth, the prophets, and the patriarchs were also there. The events did not, however, please Satan, who warned a personified Hades about Jesus and his deeds on earth. Hades was familiar with a living person who had “snatched up . . . forcibly” Lazarus from the grave (*Gos. Nic.* 20.1-3). Hades then told Satan to fortify the gates of Hades, when “a loud voice like thunder” shouted the words of Psa 24:7, “Lift up your heads, O gates! and be lifted up, O ancient doors! that the King of glory may come in!” The crowd in Hades, however, echoed the liturgical refrain, “Who is the King of glory? The LORD, strong and mighty, the LORD, mighty in battle” (Psa 24:8), and the gates were shattered (*Gos. Nic.* 21.1-3). Jesus then subdued Satan and handed him over to an angel before clearing Hades of all its inhabitants (*Gos. Nic.* 22.2-23.1).<sup>40</sup>

### *The Underworld in the Pseudepigrapha*

As we will see in more detail below, the story of the journey to the underworld is much more common in the Pseudepigrapha in both Jewish and Christian works, as well as is the concern for post-mortem repentance and prayers for the dead. Before looking at these issues, however, a few brief comments about the underworld in general in the Pseudepigrapha are in order. Overall, the Pseudepigrapha represents a blend of Jewish and Christian teaching about the underworld, and it is difficult to determine where one

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<sup>40</sup> Hades chided Satan, “O Beelzebub, heir of fire and torment, enemy of the saints, through what necessity did you contrive that the King of glory should be crucified, so that he should come here and strip us naked? Turn and see that not one dead man is left in me, but that all which you gained through the tree of knowledge you have lost through the tree of the cross” (*Gos. Nic.* 23.1).

begins and the other ends. The *Sibylline Oracles* are exemplary of this difficulty<sup>41</sup> and will serve as an example of the view of the underworld in the Pseudepigrapha.<sup>42</sup> Overall, the words that we have looked at above appear in the Pseudepigrapha in reference to the underworld, but with some important differences. On the one hand, ᾗδης is described as the realm of all the dead, both righteous and wicked. In a discussion of the first generation of creation, the author writes that ᾗδης received the dead, just as Adam had been received. Thus, “all men who are born on earth are said to go to the House of Hades” (*Sib. Or.* 1.80-85; cf. 1.300-306; 3.458; 11.138; 12.77, 146; 14.184). Since all people descend to Hades at death, it is fitting that Jesus descended to ᾗδης after his death, in order to announce “hope for all the holy ones” in ᾗδης (*Sib. Or.* 8.310-312; cf. 1.372-382). On the other hand, however, ᾗδης is connected with judgment more explicitly than it is in the New Testament. Rome, for example, will be brought down by “gigantic hands” to ᾗδης with “naphtha and asphalt and brimstone and much fire” (*Sib. Or.* 8.100-102). From ᾗδης will rise “a mournful great bellowing and gnashing of teeth” (*Sib. Or.* 8.105).<sup>43</sup> The description of punishment echoes the situation of the dead in γέννα in the New Testament. Indeed, γέννα is referred to explicitly in a manner consistent with the New Testament. For example, the second generation of creation (which includes the Watchers) was punished at death and “went under the dread house of Tartarus guarded by

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<sup>41</sup> As John Collins notes, the twelve books of the *Sibylline Oracles* were written by many different authors, both Jewish and Christian, and it is difficult to determine the Jewish and Christian elements of the text. This is made all the more complicated by the fact that the *Oracles* were written over a period of 750 years; J. J. Collins, “Sibylline Oracles,” in *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (ed. James H. Charlesworth; vol. 1; New York: Doubleday, 1983), 322. All quotations of the *Sibylline Oracles* are from Collins’ translation.

<sup>42</sup> Other important discussions of the underworld in the Pseudepigrapha will be discussed in detail below.

<sup>43</sup> Other scenes of judgment in the *Sibylline Oracles* involving ᾗδης are 5.162-178; 8.217-250.

unbreakable bonds, to make retribution, to Gehenna of terrible raging fire” (*Sib. Or.* 1.101-103).

A connection between ᾗδης as the dwelling of the dead and the judgment of γέννα is made explicit at *Sib. Or.* 2.214-312. Here the angels Michael, Gabriel, Raphael, and Uriel “lead all the souls of men from the murky dark to judgment, to the tribunal of the great immortal God.” The dead are prepared for judgment at the resurrection by receiving “flesh and sinews and veins and skin about the flesh, and the former hairs.” Uriel leads the people out by breaking “the gigantic bolts, of unyielding and unbreakable steel, of the gates of Hades.” The evil will face terrible judgment when they are surrounded by a “fiery circle,” lashed “with whips of flame,” and bound with “fiery chains.” In the darkness of γέννα, the wicked “will be thrown under many infernal beasts” and cry out for death, which will “evade them.” Interestingly, however, there is a way to escape this punishment once it has started by means of the prayers of the righteous. Immediately following the judgment scene in *Sib. Or.* 2.214-312, the righteous are brought by angels “through the blazing river” and brought “to light and life without care” (*Sib. Or.* 2.315-316). Once there, “Whenever they ask the imperishable God to save men from the raging fire and deathless gnashing he will grant it, and he will do this” (*Sib. Or.* 2.331-333). They will be transferred “to another eternal life with the immortals in the Elysian plain where he has the long waves of the deep perennial Acherusian lake” (*Sib. Or.* 2.336-338).

### *Conclusion*

With this brief overview of the underworld in Jewish and Christian literature the following heuristic picture forms. In the Hebrew Bible, *šē’ōl* is the realm of all the dead,

both the righteous and the wicked. It is a dark, dusty realm from which escape is possible, but not the general rule. Many times, *šē'ōl* was used as a synonym for death, but it often referred to the underworld dwelling of the dead in certain contexts. The idea was picked up in intertestamental literature with the word *ᾗδης* often in close relationship with *θάνατος*. In the New Testament, however, the underworld as a place of punishment became more explicit by references to *γέεννα*, a place of unquenchable fire and pain. Importantly, *ᾗδης* was also a place of punishment, if not final judgment, in the New Testament as seen in the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus. The theme of the underworld as a place of torment is also present in the Pseudepigrapha, as seen in the *Sibylline Oracles*, where *ᾗδης* is the realm of the dead, some of whom are brought to judgment in *γέεννα*. Importantly, both the New Testament and the *Sibylline Oracles* tell the story of Jesus preaching good news to the dead in *ᾗδης*. The *Sibylline Oracles* goes one step further and offers hope for the wicked dead to be relieved of their torments by means of the prayers of the righteous. This picture of the underworld developed here will serve as the background for the discussion below. In what follows, I will focus on stories about the journey to the place of punishment and the possibility of postmortem repentance and the efficacy of prayers for the dead.

### *Jewish and Christian Journeys to the Place of Punishment*

As noted above, there are two streams of tradition regarding the possibility of mercy for the wicked dead. On the one hand, Jewish and Christian journeys to the place of punishment explicitly deny any possibility of postmortem repentance or the efficacy of prayers for the dead. On the other hand, there are several Jewish and Christian journeys to the place of punishment that allow for mercy for the dead. In the following section I

will provide an overview of these texts, beginning with those that deny mercy for the dead.

### *The Denial of Mercy for the Wicked Dead*

*The Denial of Mercy in The Book of Watchers* (1 Enoch 1-36). I will begin this section with the so-called Book of Watchers (1 Enoch 1-36) and the Parables of Enoch (1 Enoch 37-71). *First Enoch* is a composite document of at least five different sections: The Book of Watchers (1-36); The Book of Similitudes (37-71); The Book of Astronomical Writings (72-82); The Book of Dream Visions (83-90); and The Book of the Epistle of Enoch (91-107). Of these five component sections, the Book of Watchers is considered among the earliest. This section is itself a composite document, which further complicates the dating. The oldest fragment of the Watchers (4QEn<sup>a</sup>) is dated to the first half of the second century CE. This, coupled with evidence from 1 Enoch 85-95 that 1 Enoch 1-36 was known prior to the death of Judas Maccabeus in 160 BCE indicates that the book came together by the late-second century BCE and probably much earlier than that.<sup>44</sup> As such, these sections of 1 Enoch are two of the earliest sources for Jewish stories of a journey to the place of punishment.

*First Enoch* begins with an opening declaration that God will judge the wicked and that the righteous will be blessed (1 Enoch 1). In the immediate context, the judgment comes as a result of the deeds of fallen angels. Shemihazah and his cohorts

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<sup>44</sup> See George W.E. Nickelsburg, *1 Enoch: A Commentary on the Book of 1 Enoch Chapters 1-36; 81-108* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 1169-71; and George W.E. Nickelsburg, *Jewish Literature between the Bible and the Mishnah* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 2005), 46, 83-86. See also J.T. Milik, *The Books of Enoch: Aramaic Fragments of Qumran Cave 4* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), 6.



saw the beautiful daughters that were born to humans and made a pact to go down to earth and take wives for themselves (*1 Enoch* 6). The results were unnatural and disastrous as the angels taught their wives an assortment of magical arts and produced great giants as children (*1 Enoch* 7:1-2). The giants began to wreak havoc on the earth, devouring all the produce and eventually turning against humans to eat them (*1 Enoch* 7:3-5). In the meantime, the wicked angels taught the people the art of war and other forbidden arts like astrology, incantations, and divination (*1 Enoch* 8:1-3). As a result of their oppression, both the land (*1 Enoch* 7:6) and the people (*1 Enoch* 8:4) cried out to God for deliverance. The angels Michael, Sariel, Raphael, and Gabriel brought the report to God (*1 Enoch* 9), who pronounced judgment on the wicked and blessing on the righteous (*1 Enoch* 10).

It is in this context that Enoch was taken on an otherworldly journey in which he saw the place of punishment. Enoch had been hidden “before these things” happened in the place of the Watchers and was called to inform the fallen angels about their judgment (*1 Enoch* 12). Enoch’s message to the fallen Watchers is clear: “You will have no peace. A great sentence has gone forth against you, to bind you. You will have no relief or petition, because of the unrighteous deeds that you revealed, and because of all the godless deeds and the unrighteousness and the sin that you revealed to humans” (*1 Enoch* 13:1-2).<sup>45</sup> The angels were greatly troubled and terrified by the message and begged Enoch to “write a memorandum of petition for them, that they might have forgiveness, and that I [Enoch] recite the memorandum of petition for them in the presence of the

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<sup>45</sup> All quotations of *1 Enoch* are from George W.E. Nickelsburg and James C. VanderKam, *1 Enoch: A New Translation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004).

Lord of heaven (*1 Enoch* 13:4). Enoch complied with the request, wrote the prayers down, and read them alongside the “waters of Dan” until he fell asleep (*1 Enoch* 13:7). While he was sleeping he had a “vision of wrath” that he recounted to the Watchers as they were weeping. This vision, his journey to the place of punishment, was meant to communicate to the Watchers that their prayers would not be heard and that irrevocable judgment had been passed (*1 Enoch* 14).

In his vision, Enoch was taken to heaven on the winds until he arrived at a large wall made of hailstones and surrounded by flames of fire. Enoch was afraid at the sight, but entered through the flames into the house, which was also made of hailstones. The floor of the house was made of snow and Enoch, when looking up, was able to see the stars through the ceiling. Fire surrounded the empty house, which was both hot like fire and cold like ice. Enoch fell to the floor in fear and had another vision of a second house, larger than the first, built with fire, the floor of which was fire. The throne of the Great Glory, which had the appearance of ice under which flames streamed, was in the house. The Great Glory was seated on the throne, wearing a brilliantly shining robe, “whiter than much snow.” Although none of the attendants, including the cherubim, could approach the throne or look upon the one seated upon it, Enoch was summoned near the throne and comforted by the Great Glory. The seer was told not to be afraid, but to tell the Watchers, “You should petition in behalf of humans, and not humans in behalf of you” (*1 Enoch* 15:2). The Watchers have abandoned their natural place in heaven as holy, spiritual beings and have been defiled by their union with “the daughters of men.” This is, indeed, the fundamental problem: that which was spiritual by nature has been corrupted with the flesh. The children that were born of these unions will be called evil

spirits and will “rise up against the sons of men and the women of the people” (*1 Enoch* 15:9, 12). This antagonistic relationship will continue “until the consummation of the great judgment” (*1 Enoch* 16:1). The final message Enoch was to give the Watchers was this: “You were in heaven, and no mystery was revealed to you; but a stolen mystery you learned . . . . You will have no peace” (*1 Enoch* 16:3-4).

With this, Enoch was taken on another otherworldly journey. He was first lifted to a place where beings of flaming fire, who could morph into the appearance of humans, dwelt. He was then shown the ends of the earth where the waters of life and the river of fire flowed. Enoch then arrived at “the great river and the great darkness” before departing for the place “where no human walks” (*1 Enoch* 17:6). After this Enoch saw the “treasuries of all the winds,” the “cornerstone of the earth,” “the firmament of heaven,” and the path of the angels “at the ends of the earth” (*1 Enoch* 18:1-5).

It is at this ultimate end of the earth that Enoch saw seven mountains that looked like precious stones. Beyond these mountains at “the edge of the great earth” Enoch saw a deep chasm with immeasurably tall and wide streams of fire on its pillars (*1 Enoch* 18:10). Enoch was told by the angel Uriel that in this chasm were the “angels who mingled with the women” (*1 Enoch* 19:1). Their spirits<sup>46</sup> were still bringing “destruction on men” by “leading them astray to sacrifice to demons as to gods.” At the great judgment they will be “judged with finality” (*1 Enoch* 19:1). At this point Enoch saw a place beyond the chasm that had neither the firmament of heaven above, nor the earth

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<sup>46</sup> Nickelsburg equates the “spirits” of these angels with their offspring (cf. *1 Enoch* 15:8-12); Nickelsburg, *1 Enoch*, 287.

beneath. It was a desolate land,<sup>47</sup> and he was told that this was the prison for “the stars and the hosts of heaven,” that is, the fallen angels (*I Enoch* 19:14). With this, Enoch’s first vision of the punishment of the Watchers was completed.

After Enoch was introduced to the angels who watch over the punishment of the wicked,<sup>48</sup> he saw further visions of the torment of wicked angels and the fate of the dead.<sup>49</sup> In this section Enoch first saw an empty, chaotic, and terrible place. Seven stars were bound together in the place and were burning with fire.<sup>50</sup> He was told that these “stars” were angels who will be punished for 10,000 years in accordance with their sins (*I Enoch* 21:6). Enoch then saw more angels tormented in an immeasurably large sea of fire. This place is the prison house of the angels.

Enoch was also shown four hollows in a mountain where the souls of humans were kept for the day of judgment (*I Enoch* 22).<sup>51</sup> The purpose of these hollows was the separation of the dead based on their deeds. The area housing the righteous had a “bright fountain of water” and the righteous were, presumably, comforted.<sup>52</sup> The sinners, however, were divided into three subgroups. The first contained sinners who were not

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<sup>47</sup> The lack of water and birds highlights the desolate nature of the area. See also Nickelsburg, *I Enoch*, 288.

<sup>48</sup> These angels are identified as Uriel, Raphael, Reuel, Michael, Sariel, Gabriel, and Remiel. The Greek text says that Uriel is “one of the holy angels, who is over the world and Tartarus” (ὁ εἷς τῶν ἁγίων ἀγγέλων ὁ ἐπὶ τοῦ κόσμου καὶ τοῦ ταρτάρου; *I Enoch* 20:2).

<sup>49</sup> While Enoch’s tour of the world is expanded from the vision in *I Enoch* 17-19, I will focus discussion on the places of torment and dead souls.

<sup>50</sup> Enoch says the stars were “like great mountains” (*I Enoch* 21:3). This imagery of seven mountains is repeated throughout Enoch’s journey (*I Enoch* 16:6; 24:2; 32:1).

<sup>51</sup> This description of caves in the side of a mountain and may be a vision of a massive necropolis (Nickelsburg, *I Enoch*, 304).

<sup>52</sup> See Nickelsburg, *I Enoch*, 306.

judged during their lifetime. These await a resurrection after which they will be tormented and seemed to experience “scourges and tortures” while they waited (*1 Enoch* 22:10).<sup>53</sup> The second and third groups, however, were not punished while in their holding area.<sup>54</sup>

The visions Enoch had on his otherworldly journey have several defining characteristics, particularly the presence of fire, whether in flames or streams, and the torment of the wicked. While the vision focuses on the punishment of fallen angels, who have transgressed their natural role as spiritual beings to defile themselves with flesh, there are also visions of the gathering of human souls for the day of judgment. The fate of these souls, like the fate of the Watchers, appears to be set. There is no indication that their situation will change. In this way, the fate of wicked humans is united with the fate of the wicked angels. The story of the Watchers, then, functions as a dramatic representation of the response to those who would ask for postmortem forgiveness.<sup>55</sup>

Another important aspect of these visions is the literary context in which they appear. Enoch’s visions are in direct response to the request of the Watchers that intercession be made on their behalf in light of their judgment. As Enoch was praying for the Watchers, he had his vision, which involved the otherworldly journey to the places of

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<sup>53</sup> See Nickelsburg (*1 Enoch*, 306). For further discussion see Marie-Theres Wacker, *Weltordnung und Gericht: Studien zu 1 Henoch 22*; Würzburg: Echter, 1982), 281-288.

<sup>54</sup> Enoch’s vision ends with a tour of a valley of judgment made of hard rock where trees were unable to grow (*1 Enoch* 26:5). In this place, those who were “cursed forever,” who had uttered “improper” words against the Lord, and spoken “hard things against his glory” were held for judgment (*1 Enoch* 27:1-2). As Milikowski notes, this is most likely a reference to γέεννα, although the word is not used; Milikowski, “Gehenna,” 239.

<sup>55</sup> The angels, of course, had not died in a human sense when they made their request for mercy. Nonetheless, the judgment of the Great Glory was binding on the Watchers in a way that is analogous to the binding judgment of the wicked humans separated mountain hollows.

punishment. In such a context, the vision serves as an emphatic negation of the Watcher's request for mercy. While the focus is on the possibility of repentance leading to forgiveness by angelic beings, there is also a comment on wicked humans who die. In both the hollow places that house the dead of and the valley of the accursed, the wicked are kept for the day of judgment without possibility of repentance. Indeed, the souls in the place of the "beautiful corners" already begin to experience their punishment prior to the final judgment.

*The Denial of Mercy in The Parables of Enoch (1 Enoch 37-71).* The three parables of Enoch consist of three visions that are primarily concerned with the punishment of wicked humans.<sup>56</sup> The distinction between the righteous and the sinners is stark in the first parable, which begins, "When the congregation of the righteous shall appear, sinners shall be judged for their sins, they shall be driven from the face of the earth" (*1 Enoch* 38:1). These sinners, who "denied the name of the Lord of Spirits," will not have a dwelling, but will be judged and "driven from the presence of the righteous and the elect." Moreover, it "would have been better for them not to have been born" and they will be unable "to behold the faces of the holy ones" (*1 Enoch* 38:2-4). Despite the declaration that the sinners will not have a dwelling, their dwelling is described, albeit tersely and in ominous tones, when Enoch saw a vision of "how the actions of the people are weighed in the balance." When sinners were found lacking, they were "expelled from there [the weigh station]" and "dragged off" forcibly, unable to "stand still because of the plague which proceeds forth from the Lord of the Spirits" (*1 Enoch* 41:1-2).

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<sup>56</sup> The three parables comprise the following chapters: Parable 1 – *1 Enoch* 38-44; Parable 2 – *1 Enoch* 45-57; Parable 3 – *1 Enoch* 58-69.

In contrast, the blessing of the righteous is clear. The Lord of the Spirits will shine light upon them and will give them charge of the “kings and rulers” of the earth (*I Enoch* 38:2, 4-5). Enoch was also given a vision of the dwelling place of the righteous, which was with the holy ones “underneath the wings of the Lord of the Spirits” (*I Enoch* 39:7). Importantly, the righteous not only sang praise to the Lord (*I Enoch* 39:7), but also “interceded and petitioned and prayed on behalf of the children of the people.” As a result of these prayers “righteousness flowed before them like water, and mercy like dew upon the earth” (*I Enoch* 39:5). That this mercy is not extended to the wicked either during life or after death is clear in *I Enoch* 38:5-6: “Kings and rulers shall perish, they shall be delivered in to the hands of the righteous and holy ones, and from thenceforth no one shall induce the Lord of the Spirits to show them mercy” (*I Enoch* 38:5-6). The moment where mercy is denied came after “the light of the Lord of the Spirits has shined upon the face of the holy, the righteous, and the elect,” which seems to be a time of ultimate judgment (*I Enoch* 38:4). Regardless of when the event happens, the first parable is clear that the opportunity for mercy will not be extended to the unrighteous dead. As noted above, after death, the wicked will be weighed and punished accordingly.

The second parable of Enoch continues the theme of the first parable and deals with the final blessing of the righteous and the final punishment of the wicked. Two categories of wicked are discussed: (1) wicked people, and (2) the members of the “armies of Azaz’el” (*I Enoch* 54:5; cf. *I Enoch* 55:4). In the first place, judgment is pronounced on the “kings of the earth and the mighty landowners” (*I Enoch* 48:8). On

account of their deeds,<sup>57</sup> these people will be humiliated in the presence of the elect:

“They shall burn before the face of the holy ones and sink before their sight, and no place will be found for them” (*1 Enoch* 48:9).<sup>58</sup> Because they have “denied the Lord of the Spirits and his Messiah” no one will take their hands to raise them up (*1 Enoch* 48:10). In a complementary vision, Enoch saw a “deep valley with a wide mouth” in which sinners will be “destroyed from before the face of the Lord of the Spirits—they shall perish eternally” (*1 Enoch* 53:2), a denial of the possibility of postmortem repentance after judgment has taken place.

In the second place, the followers of Azazel were punished for their rebellion. Following his vision of the punishment of the kings and landowners, Enoch saw another valley “deep and burning with fire” (*1 Enoch* 54:1). Kings and potentates were brought to this valley and thrown inside. As Enoch looked, he saw that “iron fetters of immense weight” were being fashioned (*1 Enoch* 54:3). He learned that these chains were being made for Azazel and his followers so that they might be “cast . . . into the abyss of complete condemnation” (*1 Enoch* 54:5). The angels Michael, Raphael, Gabriel, and Phanuel will seize these wicked angels and “cast them into the furnace (of fire)” and cover their faces with “rocky stones” (*1 Enoch* 54:6; cf. 55:3-4; 67:4-7).

The punishment of sinners is also the theme of the third parable (*1 Enoch* 58-69). Enoch was shown a vision of this punishment that seized him with “great trembling and

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<sup>57</sup> The deeds of the kings and landowners is unspecified, but the context indicates that they involve the oppression of the poor and the righteous (cf. *1 Enoch* 48:7). As we will see in the next chapter, the theme of the oppression of the marginalized is pervasive in the Gospel of Luke and the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus.

<sup>58</sup> The descent of the wicked is echoed in *1 Enoch* 56:8 as “Sheol will swallow up the sinners in the presence of the elect ones.”



fear” that caused his “loins and kidneys” to lose control (*1 Enoch* 60:3). As part of this vision, Enoch saw the “Lord of the Spirits” judging “the kings, the governors, the high officials, and the landlords” (*1 Enoch* 62:1). With the word of his mouth these “oppressors shall be eliminated” and “pain shall come upon them as on a woman in travail with birth pangs” (*1 Enoch* 62:2, 4). When this happens “they shall be terrified and dejected” and will attempt to “bless, glorify, [and] extol him who rules over everything” in hopes of receiving mercy (*1 Enoch* 62:6-9). The cause of this prayer is the realization that they should have glorified and blessed “the Lord of kings—him who rules over all kings” (*1 Enoch* 63:4-9). This prayer for mercy, however, will be rejected and the sinners will be made “frantic” by the Lord and they will rush away from his presence into the hands of the “angels for punishment” (*1 Enoch* 62:10-12). As in the second parable, the righteous will witness the punishment of the sinners and they will rejoice over those who are punished for oppressing them (*1 Enoch* 62:12).

Three themes develop in the visions recorded in *1 Enoch* that are particularly pertinent to the current study. First, the visions of the place of punishment provide a dramatic picture of the fate of those who rebel against the Lord of Spirits, both angels and humans. The focus in the Book of Watchers is on the fate of the angels who transgressed the natural order and procreated with human women, teaching humans forbidden arts. The similar fate of wicked human sinners, which was hinted at in the Book of Watchers, is made explicit in the three parables found in *1 Enoch*. In these parables, both wicked humans and rebellious angels are punished by the Lord of Spirits. The second theme that arises is the cause of judgment: the oppression of the marginalized. In the Book of Watchers this theme is evident as the giant offspring of the angels and human women

oppress humans by consuming food and, eventually, humans themselves. In the parables of *1 Enoch* the focus is on wealthy rulers and the elite who oppress the poor and the righteous. Finally, the theme of the denial of mercy is clear throughout the Book of the Watchers and the Parables of Enoch. Once judgment has been decreed, there is no possibility of postmortem repentance.

*The Denial of Mercy in 2 Enoch.* Another early text that includes a journey to the place of punishment is *2 Enoch*. Originally written in Greek, the work only survives in Slavonic in both a long and a short recension, of which the oldest manuscript is from the fourteenth century.<sup>59</sup> Scholars have suggested, however, that the document, which has clear points of contact with *1 Enoch*, was composed in the first century CE in Egypt.<sup>60</sup>

The genre of *2 Enoch* is a combination testament and apocalyptic journey.<sup>61</sup> During the last year of his life Enoch was taken on a journey through the heavens in which he received a revelation about the cosmos and the future.<sup>62</sup> Enoch was met by “two huge men,” whose faces “were like the shining sun,” and was told to prepare his household for his absence while he was taken through the heavens (*2 Enoch* 1:4, 8-10).<sup>63</sup> After exhorting his family to remain true to God, Enoch was taken on his journey. The

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<sup>59</sup> F.I. Andersen, “2 (Slavonic Apocalypse of) Enoch,” in *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (ed. James H. Charlesworth; vol. 1; New York: Doubleday, 1983), 91-94. All quotations of *2 Enoch* are from Andersen’s translation.

<sup>60</sup> See Andersen, “2 Enoch,” 94-97; and Nickelsburg, *Jewish Literature*, 225.

<sup>61</sup> Nickelsburg, *Jewish Literature*, 221.

<sup>62</sup> In my summary, I will focus on the scenes of punishment that Enoch saw.

<sup>63</sup> Unless otherwise noted, the material quoted in *2 Enoch* is shared by both the long and short recensions.

first vision of punishment took place when Enoch was in the second heaven (*2 Enoch* 7). Here he saw angels who were condemned because they rebelled against the LORD. The longer recension adds details to the scene, describing the second heaven as “a darkness greater than earthly darkness.” The condemned angels were weeping while hanging up under guard, “waiting for the measureless judgment.” In both the long and short recensions, Enoch was moved with pity for the angels, and the condemned said to him, “Man of God, please pray for us to the LORD.” Enoch questioned his right to pray for angels and wondered who will pray for him on his journey.

Moving on from the second heaven, Enoch arrived in the third heaven in which he saw Paradise (*2 Enoch* 8). He saw many flowering trees full of ripe fruit, including the tree of life, “under which the LORD takes a rest when the LORD takes a walk in Paradise.”<sup>64</sup> In this same heaven, however, Enoch was taken to the north and shown “a very frightful place” (*2 Enoch* 10). The region was dark, but a “black fire” blazed “perpetually” and it was full of various tortures and torments. Although a river of fire ran across the land, the place was freezing. Angels carried out the torment on human victims, and Enoch cried out in horror. He was told that the place was reserved for those who acted wickedly through, among other things, involvement in witchcraft, defrauding the poor, “bringing about the death of the hungry by starvation,” and stealing clothing from the poor who were left naked as a result.<sup>65</sup> For these deeds, the place of punishment “has been prepared as an eternal reward.”

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<sup>64</sup> The translation is from the short recension, but the idea is present in the long recension, as well.

<sup>65</sup> As would be expected the list is broadened in the long recension, but both recensions include the mistreatment of the poor as a cause of punishment.

Passing through the fourth heaven, Enoch came to the fifth heaven and saw another group of angels, who were similar to the Watchers in 1 Enoch (2 Enoch 18). These angels were silent and dejected, not singing a liturgy, as other angels had done in the fourth heaven. In the longer recension Enoch was told that these beings were like those that were tormented in the second heaven and the seer told them that he had prayed for their “brothers.” Despite this prayer, “the LORD has sentenced them under the earth until heaven and earth are ended forever.”<sup>66</sup> Enoch encouraged these angels to “perform the liturgy” so as not to “enrage your LORD (God) to the limit.” Enoch then passed through the remaining heavens, until he reached the tenth heaven in which he received a revelation of the cosmos, seasons, and creation from the LORD.

When Enoch returned from his journey, he recounted his vision to his sons. Interestingly, the vision of torment of angels and humans played a small role in his retelling of the vision. What he did say, however, did not bode well for the wicked dead who had asked for mercy. Enoch told his sons that he saw the “place of condemnation” where the “prisoners were in pain, looking forward to *endless punishment*” (2 Enoch 40:13; emphasis added).<sup>67</sup> The guards of the dead were described in more detail as having the form of a serpent with large teeth and fiery eyes (2 Enoch 42:1-2). Importantly, Enoch referred to the punished as members of his “tribe” (2 Enoch 42:2). In the narration of the vision, those punished were identified as angels (see 2 Enoch 7). The conflation here seems to be similar to what we see above in 1 Enoch where the distinction

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<sup>66</sup> The translation is from the long recension, but the idea is also present in the short recension.

<sup>67</sup> The short recension refers to the place of condemnation, but does include the undending nature of the punishment.

between the punished angels and punished humans collapsed.<sup>68</sup> Enoch lamented the “small extent they have sinned in this life, but in eternal life they will suffer forever” (2 *Enoch* 42:3).<sup>69</sup>

2 *Enoch*, then, follows the teaching of 1 *Enoch* in regard to the possibility of postmortem repentance. Enoch sees a vivid picture of the punishment of the wicked in the afterlife and is moved with pity. Although those who are punished ask Enoch to pray for him, their punishment does not cease, and Enoch’s prayers are ineffective.

*The Denial of Mercy in 4 Ezra.* Bauckham’s primary example of the refusal of divine mercy for those in torment is found in 4 *Ezra*. Armand Kaminka argues that 4 *Ezra*, which comprises chapters 3-14 of 2 *Esdras*, should be dated to the sixth century BCE, which is also the purported setting of the document.<sup>70</sup> The majority of scholars, however, date 4 *Ezra* sometime toward the end of the first century and beginning of the second century CE.<sup>71</sup> Of particular importance in the message of the document for our purposes is 4 *Ezra* 7:26, which Michael Stone says is the beginning of a section that “gives a fairly detailed exposition of the eschatological events in a chronological series.”<sup>72</sup> Here, Ezra is told that the Messiah will be revealed and will reign on earth for

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<sup>68</sup> 2 *Enoch* is clear that the seer is in the second heaven at this point (cf. 2 *Enoch* 7), since he immediately proceeds to the third heaven after describing the guards.

<sup>69</sup> This lament is found only in the longer recension.

<sup>70</sup> Armand Kaminka, *Beiträge zur Erklärung der Esra-apokalypse und zur Rekonstruktion ihres herbräischen Urtextes* (Schriften der Gesellschaft zur Förderung der Wissenschaft des Judentums 38; Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1934), 47-59.

<sup>71</sup> See Stone, *Fourth Ezra*, 9; Bruce W. Longenecker, 2 *Esdras* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 13-14; David A. DeSilva, *Introducing the Apocrypha: Message, Context, and Significance* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2002), 330-32; and Nickelsburg, *Jewish Literature*, 270-277.

<sup>72</sup> Stone, *Fourth Ezra*, 204.

400 years before he is killed and the world is “turned back to primordial silence” (4 *Ezra* 7:30).<sup>73</sup> At this time “the Most High shall be revealed upon the seat of judgment” to judge those who have been raised from the dead following the end of the world (4 *Ezra* 7:32-33). The judgment is final and stern as “compassion shall pass away, and patience shall be withdrawn” when the “pit of torment” and the “place of rest” are revealed (4 *Ezra* 7:33-36).<sup>74</sup>

Ezra, distressed by the sight of many being taken off into torment, asked whether those to be punished were kept in rest until the renewal of creation, or tormented immediately (4 *Ezra* 7:75). The reply is chilling:

Now, concerning death, the teaching is: When the decisive decree has gone forth from the Most High that a man shall die, as the spirit leaves the body to return again to him who gave it, first of all it adores the glory of the Most High. And if it is one of those who have shown scorn and have not kept the way of the Most High, and who have despised his Law, and who have hated those who fear God—such spirits shall not enter habitations, but shall immediately wander about in torments, ever grieving and sad, in seven ways. (4 *Ezra* 7:78-80)

The second of these seven ways of wandering is a denial that those tormented are able to now “make a good repentance” (4 *Ezra* 7:82). Significantly, the context in which this quote appears seems to indicate pre-Day of Judgment torment of those who have died.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> All quotations of 4 *Ezra* are from Bruce M. Metzger, “The Fourth Book of Ezra,” in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (ed. James H. Charlesworth; vol. 1; New York: Doubleday, 1983).

<sup>74</sup> Stone’s comment on 4 *Ezra* 7:33 is curious. He writes, “The absence of intercession does not serve to emphasize the unremitting fate of the sinners. Their fate is not discussed in any of the relevant passages, nor is any sense of vengeance to be found. The withdrawal of intercession is a function of the full revelation of truth that will characterize the final judgment” (4 *Ezra*, 220). First, as we will see below the fate of the sinners (i.e., those in torment) is taken up in some detail in 4 *Ezra* 7:75-101. Second, while the withdrawal of intercession does function as a “seal of truth” (4 *Ezra* 7:104), it also serves as a sign of the finality of the judgment (see 4 *Ezra* 7:105).

<sup>75</sup> See Stone, 4 *Ezra*, 239.

If this is the case, *4 Ezra* denies the possibility of repentance on the part of the dead prior to the finality of the Day of Judgment.

Although Bauckham does not note the refusal of post-mortem repentance prior to the Day of Judgment, he does highlight the denial of efficacious intercession for the dead in *4 Ezra*.<sup>76</sup> Following Ezra's vision of the torment of the unrighteous dead, he was given a revelation concerning the blessedness of the righteous who die. Just as the unrighteous immediately faced a sevenfold series of grief and sorrow, the righteous experienced a sevenfold series of rest (*4 Ezra* 7:90-98).<sup>77</sup> Again, the second element of the series is important for our present concerns and sets the stage for Ezra's question regarding intercession. Here, one of the ways in which the righteous experience rest is that "they see the perplexity in which the souls of the ungodly wander, and the punishment that awaits them" (*4 Ezra* 7:93). Thus, the righteous dead were clearly aware of the fate of the unrighteous and their torments. In this context Ezra, who has been told he is one of the righteous (*4 Ezra* 7:76-77), asked whether "on the day of judgment the righteous will be able to intercede for the ungodly or to entreat the Most High for them" (*4 Ezra* 7:102). His primary concern was prayer for those who are "most dear" to the righteous. The reply to Ezra's question is clear:

The day of judgment is decisive and displays to all the seal of truth. Just as now a father does not send his son, or a son his father, or a master his servant, or a friend his dearest friend, to be ill or sleep or eat or be healed in his stead, so *no one shall ever pray for another on that day*, neither shall anyone lay a burden on another; for then everyone shall bear his own righteousness or unrighteousness. (*4 Ezra* 7:104-105; emphasis added).

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<sup>76</sup> See Bauckham, "Justice and Mercy," 138-140.

<sup>77</sup> The only difference seems to be a seven day "waiting period" in which the righteous receive revelations of their blessedness (*4 Ezra* 7:101; see also Stone, *4 Ezra*, 249).

In *4 Ezra*, then, the answer to the question of post-mortem repentance and prayers for the dead is clear: Postmortem repentance is not available to, and intercessory prayer is not efficacious for, the unrighteous prior to, on, or after the Day of Judgment. In this way, *4 Ezra* stands in the same stream of tradition as *1 Enoch*. Death represents the end of all opportunity for repentance of sins. After this moment, there is no longer hope of receiving mercy. The tradition of journeys to the place of punishment is not univocal, however, as will be seen in the *Apocalypse of Zephaniah* to be discussed below.

### *The Possibility of Mercy for the Wicked Dead*

*The Possibility of Mercy in the Apocalypse of Zephaniah.* The *Apocalypse of Zephaniah* is a short apocalyptic text that exists in at least two fragments (Sahidic and Akhmimic) and is possibly alluded to be Clement in *Strom.* 5.11.77.<sup>78</sup> If the quotation by Clement is indeed a reference to the *Apocalypse of Zephaniah*, the latest date of the document would be the end of the second century CE. With this possibility in mind, O.S. Wintermute tentatively suggests a possible date sometime between the first century BCE and the end of the second century CE.<sup>79</sup> Just as in *1 Enoch*, *2 Enoch*, and *4 Ezra*, the *Apocalypse of Zephaniah* provides the seer with visions of the torments of the unrighteous dead. In addition, Zephaniah was moved with compassion at the sight of the

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<sup>78</sup> For a detailed discussion of the textual tradition (esp. the Sahidic and Akhmimic fragments) see U. Bouriant, "Les papyrus d'Akhmim," *Mémoires publiées par les membres de la mission archéologique française au Caire* 1 (1885): 260-279; L. Stern, "Die koptische Apocalypse des Sophonias, mit einem Anhang über den untersahidischen Dialect," *Zeitschrift für ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde* 24 (1886): 115-129; Georg Steindorff, *Die Apokalypse des Elias, Eine Unbekannte Apokalypse und Bruchstücke der Sophonias-Apokalypse*. Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs, 1899, (esp. 14-16); and Bernd Jörg Diebner, "Zephania's Apokalypsen," *JSHRZ* 5.9: 1143-1243.

<sup>79</sup> W.S. Wintermute, "Apocalypse of Zephaniah," in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (ed. James H. Charlesworth; vol. 1; New York: Doubleday, 1983), 500-501.



torment. The first example of this is seen in *Apoc. Zeph. 2*. Here the seer was taken on his first visionary journey in which he saw people involved in various daily activities that concluded with a scene of the punishment of souls. The sight prompted Zephaniah to cry out, “[O Go]d, if you remain with the [sa]ints, you (certainly) have compassion on behalf of the world [and] the souls which are in this punishment” (*Apoc. Zeph. 2:9*).

The most significant section of the *Apocalypse of Zephaniah* for our present concerns, however, is found in *Apoc. Zeph. 10-11*. In this scene, the great angel blew the second of three trumpets, which caused a rift to open in Heaven. Zephaniah saw a great fiery sea, which he had seen earlier in Hades (cf. *Apoc. Zeph. 6:1-3*), full of sinking souls. Similarly to the *Apocalypse of Peter*, which will be discussed below, Zephaniah observed the torment of these souls in a manner consistent with their sins on earth.<sup>80</sup> Zephaniah was again concerned for the fate of these souls and his dialogue with the great angel asked, “ ‘[D]o they not have repentance here?’ [The great angel] said, ‘Yes.’ I said, ‘How long?’ He said to me, ‘Until the day when the Lord will judge’ ” (*Apoc. Zeph. 10:10-11*). Here, we have evidence of the possibility of post-mortem repentance prior to the Day of Judgment. It is not clear, however, how this will happen, or if the possibility of such repentance is great.

Not only does the *Apocalypse of Zephaniah* witness the possibility of post-mortem repentance, but it also encourages intercessory prayer for the dead. Immediately following the scene of the dead in torment in a lake of fire, Zephaniah received a vision of a multitude that was gathered to pray for those in torment. This group called out, “We

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<sup>80</sup> For example, those who were apparently involved in slave trading are bound hand and foot (10:5); money lenders who charged too much interest are covered with fiery mats (10:6-7); catechumens who failed to be “perfected” by the word of God are blind (10:9).

pray to you [i.e., the Lord Almighty] on account of those who are in all these torments so that you might have mercy on all of them” (*Apoc. Zeph.* 11:2). Zephaniah was curious about the identity of members in this group and is told that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are among those who pray for the dead. Interestingly, the prayer offered on behalf of the unrighteous is a daily ritual that seems to be initiated by God. The angel told Zephaniah, “[A]t a certain hour daily they come forth with the great angel. He sounds a trumpet up to heaven and another sound upon the earth. All the righteous hear the sound. They come running, praying to the Lord Almighty daily on behalf of those who are in all these torments” (*Apoc. Zeph.* 11:5-6). Thus, divinely initiated, daily prayer for the unrighteous dead is encouraged in the *Apocalypse of Zephaniah*. It is important to recognize, however, that the opportunity for repentance is limited to the period prior to the Day of Judgment. The implication of this is that, like *4 Ezra*, the fate of the dead is sealed on the Day of Judgment.

*The Possibility of Mercy in the Testament of Abraham.* The *Testament of Abraham*, like *2 Enoch*, exists in a long and short recension. While the relationship between the two recensions is complex, many scholars view the longer recension as the original version.<sup>81</sup> And, although the final form of the longer recension betrays later redaction, it still probably has its roots in the late first century CE.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> See Dale C. Allison, *Testament of Abraham* (Commentaries on Early Jewish Leaders; New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2003), 12-27; see also Nickelsburg, *Jewish Literature*, 322, 327. For further discussion see Francis Schmidt, “The Two Recensions of the Testament of Abraham: In Which Way Did the Transformation Take Place?,” in *Studies on the Testament of Abraham* (ed. George W.E. Nickelsburg; Sblscs 6; Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1976), 65-83.

<sup>82</sup> Allison, *Testament of Abraham*, 34-40.

Like the *Apocalypse of Zephaniah*, the *Testament of Abraham* shares features with *1 Enoch* and *4 Ezra*. Most notably, Abraham was distressed by the thought of the wicked in torment and was concerned that there might be an opportunity for postmortem repentance. Like the *Apocalypse of Zephaniah*, the *Testament of Abraham* also holds out hope for such repentance, as well as efficacious intercession for the dead. The situation in the *Testament of Abraham* is, however, somewhat more complex, due to the multiple judgments revealed to Abraham.

Abraham's vision of judgment began when the angel Michael took him to the first gate of heaven where Abraham was shown two ways with gates leading to them; one gate was wide and spacious, the other gate was narrow and strait (*T. Ab.* 11:1).<sup>83</sup> Adam sat in front of the gates, weeping when souls entered the broad gate, but rejoicing when souls entered through the narrow gate (*T. Ab.* 11:4-10). As Michael was explaining the scene to Abraham, two angels "with fiery aspect and merciless intention and relentless look" drove souls through the wide gate with fiery lashes (*T. Ab.* 12:1).<sup>84</sup> After the souls entered the wide gate, Michael and Abraham followed. Once through the gate Abraham saw a large crystal throne upon which a "wondrous man" was seated. This man, who was joined by several angels, judged souls by weighing their good and evil deeds. At this point, a soul that had been singled out earlier in front of the gates was found to have an

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<sup>83</sup> Allison says this image is "clearly influenced by Matt 7:13-14"; Allison, *Testament of Abraham*, 242, cf. 239-241. It is also possible that the Gospel of Mathew and the *Testament of Abraham* share a common source; see Mathias Delcor, *Le Testament d'Abraham: Introduction, traduction du texte grec et commentaire de la recension grecque longue, suivi de la traduction des Testaments d'Abraham, d'Isaac et de Jacob d'après les versions orientales* (Studia in Veteris Testamenti pseudepigraphica 2; Leiden: Brill, 1973), 134.

<sup>84</sup> All quotations of *Testament of Abraham* are from E. P. Sanders, "Testament of Abraham," in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (ed. James H. Charlesworth; vol. 1; New York: Doubleday, 1983).

equal number of sins and good deeds. As a result, the soul was placed in the middle of the two gates and neither tormented nor saved (*T. Ab.* 12:16-18).

Abraham was perplexed by the scene and he asked for an explanation. Michael told him that the man seated on the crystal throne was Abel, whose responsibility was to “judge the entire creation, examining both the righteous and the sinners” (*T. Ab.* 13:3). This judgment was evidently preliminary because, according to Michael, it was to be followed by a second judgment by the twelve tribes of Israel at the “second Parousia.”<sup>85</sup> Finally, however, there was a third judgment, this one under the direction of God himself. At this judgment the decision was final and “there is none who can release” (*T. Ab.* 13:8). Thus, there are three judgments: the examination by Abel, the judgment of the twelve tribes at the parousia, and the final judgment by God, which is irreversible.<sup>86</sup>

At this point the soul that was singled out earlier again entered the spotlight to play a key role in understanding the view of postmortem repentance and intercessory prayer for the dead in the *Testament of Abraham*. Following Michael’s explanation of the three judgments, Abraham again inquired about the fate of the soul “in the middle” (*T. Ab.* 14:1). He learned that since the soul was found to have an equal number of good and bad deeds it needed to await the third judgment before it would be moved to either the place of torment or the place of blessedness (*T. Ab.* 14:2). When Abraham learned that the soul only needed one more righteous deed in order to be saved, he suggested that he and Michael “offer a prayer on behalf of this soul and see if God will heed us” (*T. Ab.*

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<sup>85</sup> Allison notes that the reference a second parousia is a surprising element of the text because, although a parousia is mentioned at *T. Ab.* 13:4, “it is not presented as the first of two or more advents”; Allison, *Testament of Abraham*, 285.

<sup>86</sup> Michael suggests that the three judgments are so that “every matter shall be established by three witnesses” (13:8).

14:5).<sup>87</sup> Michael agreed and when they rose from prayer the soul was gone because it “was saved by [Abraham’s] prayer, and . . . a light-bearing angel took and carried it up to Paradise” (*T. Ab.* 14:6).<sup>88</sup> When Abraham learned of the successful prayer, he suggested intercession on behalf of souls whom he had cursed prior to his arrival at the place of judgment (cf. *T. Ab.* 10:1-11).<sup>89</sup> Again, the prayer is successful and those whom Abraham cursed are “called back . . . and . . . led . . . into life” (*T. Ab.* 14:14).<sup>90</sup>

The *Testament of Abraham*, then, like the *Apocalypse of Zephaniah*, offers the hope of efficacious intercession on behalf of the dead. In both documents it appears that this intercession is only efficacious, however, prior to the Day of Judgment. Thus, while there is hope for relief for the wicked dead, there is a limited window of opportunity in which the prayer must be performed. In addition to this, there is another important similarity between the *Testament of Abraham* and the *Apocalypse of Zephaniah*, the figure of Abraham. In both documents, Abraham is involved in the intercession for the wicked dead. The implications of this will be discussed in the next chapter.

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<sup>87</sup> Allison notes that at this point Abraham “becomes ‘in character’ ” in his role as intercessor for the wicked; Allison, *Testament of Abraham*, 299-300.

<sup>88</sup> It is significant that the rescue of the soul is attributed to Abraham’s prayer, without reference to Michael (see also Allison, *Testament of Abraham*, 301).

<sup>89</sup> In this section, Abraham zealously is evident as he calls upon wild beasts to devour robbers, the earth to swallow up fornicators, fire to fall from the sky on thieves. In the end, God commands Michael to stop the chariot and turn away before Abraham curses the entire earth. The significance of the different order of events in the two recensions is noted by Jared Ludlow; Jared Ludlow, *Abraham Meets Death: Narrative Humor in the Testament of Abraham* (JSPSup 41; London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 131. In the shorter recension Abraham curses the wicked *after* seeing the judgment, which mitigates his change of heart here in the longer recension.

<sup>90</sup> Sanders does not note the variant reading “eternal life” in this verse; Sanders, “Testament of Abraham,” 891. Allison, however, includes “eternal life” in his translation; Allison, *Testament of Abraham*, 294-295. If Allison is correct in his subsequent suggestion that the restored sinners are parallel to the “soul in the middle” that was taken to Paradise, it is clear that Abraham’s intercessory prayer was effective for relief for the unrighteous dead; Allison, *Testament of Abraham*, 305.

*The Possibility of Mercy in the Apocalypse of Peter.* As we have seen, there is sufficient evidence to show that there was a tradition of efficacious intercession on behalf of the dead. The conflicting viewpoints are clearly illustrated in the *Apocalypse of Peter*, which Bauckham uses as his primary example for an affirmative response to intercessory prayer for the dead.<sup>91</sup> The *Apocalypse of Peter* is an early text that was probably composed in the middle of the second century CE,<sup>92</sup> and the revelation of postmortem torment is similar to the other visions of the punished discussed above at several points. First, like *4 Ezra* the scene of the prayer and repentance is the Day of Judgment. Peter was given a vision by Jesus in which “on the day of the decision of the judgment of God, all the children of men from the east unto the west shall be gathered before my Father . . . and he will command hell to open its bars of steel and to give up all that is in it” (*Apoc. Pet.* 4).<sup>93</sup> The purpose of this resurrection was to set the stage for the punishment of the wicked, which is narrated in detail in *Apoc. Pet.* 4-13. Second, like the other seers mentioned above, Peter was moved to compassion for those in torment following this vision of their punishment. The vision of punishment given to Peter, however, was a much more detailed description of what awaits the unrighteous than found in the other

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<sup>91</sup> See Bauckham, “Justice and Mercy,” 144.

<sup>92</sup> Detlef Müller dates the work at approximately 135 CE; Detlef Müller, “Apocalypse of Peter,” in *New Testament Apocrypha* (vol. 2; ed. Wilhelm Schneemelcher; trans. R. McL. Wilson; Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 2003), 622. See also Himmelfarb, *Tours*, 8-9; and Richard Bauckham, “The Apocalypse of Peter: A Jewish Christian Apocalypse from the Time of Bar Kokhba,” in *The Fate of the Dead* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 176.

<sup>93</sup> Quotations of the *Apocalypse of Peter* are from Müller (“Apocalypse of Peter”), unless otherwise noted.

documents.<sup>94</sup> Another important difference in the *Apocalypse of Peter* is that Peter was not the only one moved to tears at the sight of those punished, but was joined by Jesus, the righteous, and the angels who see the torment. As we will see below, the fact that the righteous share Peter's sorrow and compassion for the unrighteous is important for the resolution of the problem. Despite this shared sorrow for the wicked, however, Peter's initial display of compassion was rebuffed. Like Ezra, Peter lamented the birth of those in torment (*Apoc. Pet.* 3; cf. *4 Ezra* 7:62-69), and like Enoch and Ezra, Peter was essentially told that those in torment deserved their fate. The conclusion to the revelation, however, is radically different from the vision in *1 Enoch* and *4 Ezra*.

The most significant difference in the *Apocalypse of Peter* from *1 Enoch* and *4 Ezra* is the final successful intercession for the unrighteous dead. In *Apoc. Pet.* 13, following the detailed description of punishment for the wicked, the angels of God brought "the elect and righteous . . . clothed with garments of eternal life" for one final view of the torment of the wicked. At this point, the wicked dead cried out for mercy, saying, "Have mercy upon us, for now we know the judgment of God, which he declared to us beforehand, and we did not believe." Not unexpectedly, the initial request was emphatically denied by the angel Tatirokos, who said, "Now do ye repent when there is no more time for repentance, and nothing of life remains?" The wicked, apparently resigned to their fate, responded, "Righteous is the judgment of God: for we have heard and perceived that his judgment is good, since we are punished according to our deeds."

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<sup>94</sup> Many of the punishments narrated in *Apoc. Pet.* 4-13 are gruesome and correspond to the sin committed (e.g., blasphemers are hung by their tongues, fornicators are hung by their genitals, aborted children punish their mothers with lightning).

At this point, there is a significant difference in the resolution to the story between the Ethiopic version and the resolution in the Greek version of *Apoc. Pet.* 14.<sup>95</sup> Both versions represent different streams of the tradition regarding post-mortem repentance and prayers for the dead. In the Ethiopic text, the apparent resignation of the wicked to their just punishment is truly a concession and they disappear from the narrative. The focus shifts back to the righteous and their blessedness. In the Greek text, however, the previous display of compassion by Jesus, the angels, and the righteous for the wicked (see *Apoc. Pet.* 3) returns and the fortunes of the wicked are reversed. Jesus says, “Then will I give unto my called and my chosen whomsoever they shall ask me for, out of the torment, and will give them [presumably the redeemed from the wicked dead] a fair baptism in salvation from the Acherusian lake which men so call in the Elysian field, even a portion of righteousness with my holy ones.” In the context, both post-mortem repentance (*Apoc. Pet.* 13: “Have mercy upon us, for now we know the judgment of God”) and intercessory prayer for the dead (Grk. *Apoc. Pet.* 14: “Then will I give unto my called and my chosen whomsoever they shall ask me for”) are effectual.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> The only complete manuscript of the *Apocalypse of Peter* is found in an Ethiopic manuscript dating from the seventh or eighth century C.E. Fragments of the apocalypse are also available in Greek and Akhmimic. The Greek fragment of *Apoc. Pet.* 14 is of most import for the present study. In what follows, I will follow the conclusion of M.R. James that the Greek fragment represents the correct reading; M.R. James, “The Rainer Fragment of the Apocalypse of Peter,” *JTS* 32 (1931), 270-279. All quotations from the Greek fragment are from James’ translation.

<sup>96</sup> Significantly, the sentiment found in the Greek fragment of *Apoc. Pet.* 14 is echoed in other apocalyptic works discussed above. In particular, as we saw earlier, *Sib. Or.* 2:330-334 says, “To these pious ones imperishable God, the universal ruler, will also give another thing. Whenever they ask the imperishable God to save men from the raging fire and deathless gnashing he will grant it, and he will do this. For he will pick them out again from the undying fire and set them elsewhere and send them on account of his own people to another eternal life with the immortals in the Elysian plain where he has the long waves of the deep perennial Acherusian lake.” Bauckham suggests that *Sib. Or.* 2:330-334 is directly dependent on *Apoc. Pet.* 14; Bauckham, “Conflict of Justice and Mercy,” 144. See also James, who cites the cryptic passage found in *Apoc. Elijah* 5:27-29, and the *Ep. Apos.* 40; James, “Rainer Fragment,” 272-273. The points of contact between the two passages are evident. Both mention the Acherusian lake and



*The Possibility of Mercy in the Apocalypse of Paul.* The final document to discuss in this section is the *Apocalypse of Paul*, which has many similarities with the *Apocalypse of Peter*.<sup>97</sup> Determining the precise date of the *Apocalypse of Paul* is difficult. There is evidence that Origen was aware of the document, which confirms the purported third century CE context of the document.<sup>98</sup> Some versions of the apocalypse, however, contain the so-called “Tarsus introduction,” which tells of the discovery of the document under a house in Tarsus in 388 CE.<sup>99</sup> Despite the introduction, most scholars think the text must have existed in some form at the beginning of the third century CE.<sup>100</sup>

The *Apocalypse of Paul* is based on Paul’s journey into heaven mentioned in 2 Corinthians 12:1-5. What is hinted in the New Testament is given full expression in the apocalypse. Following the introduction regarding the discovery of the document, the “word of the Lord” came to Paul, raising a complaint against humanity for their

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the Elysian field, and both highlight the effective intercession for the wicked dead by the righteous. The main difference is that there is no mention of post-mortem repentance in *Sib. Or.* 2:330-334, but the prayer of the righteous is effectual.

<sup>97</sup> See Himmelfarb who notes the similarities between the *Apocalypse of Peter*, the *Apocalypse of Paul*, and the Ezra literature; Himmelfarb, *Tours*, 127-73.

<sup>98</sup> For the following review of the issues surrounding the dating of the *Apocalypse of Paul* see Himmelfarb, *Tours*, 16-19.

<sup>99</sup> See Anthony Hilhorst, “The *Apocalypse of Paul*: Previous History and Afterlife,” in *The Visio Pauli and the Gnostic Apocalypse of Paul* (eds. Jan N. Bremmer, and István Czachesz; Studies on Early Christian Apocrypha 9; Leuven: Peeters, 2007), 4. Pierluigi Piovanelli argues that the story of the finding of the document functions to give the document credibility since it was written almost 350 years after the death of Paul; Pierluigi Piovanelli, “The Miraculous Discovery of the Hidden Manuscript, Or the Paratextual Function of the Prologue to the *Apocalypse of Paul*,” in *The Visio Pauli and the Gnostic Apocalypse of Paul* (eds. Jan N. Bremmer, and István Czachesz; Studies on Early Christian Apocrypha 9; Leuven: Peeters, 2007), 30.

<sup>100</sup> See R. Casey, “The *Apocalypse of Paul*,” *JTS* 34 (1933): 28; Himmelfarb, *Tours*, 18-19; and Hilhorst, “History,” 5. Some have even suggested a date in the first or second century; see Theodore Silverstein, and Anthony Hilhorst, *Apocalypse of Paul: A New Critical Edition of Three Long Latin Versions* (Genève: P. Cramer, 1997), 9.

wickedness (*Apoc. Paul 3*).<sup>101</sup> The complaint was also raised against humanity by creation, as the sun, moon, stars, and sea cried out against the wickedness that they observed (*Apoc. Paul 4-6*). Angels also brought a complaint to the Lord and gave an account of the suffering of the righteous because of the great wickedness on the earth (*Apoc. Paul 7-10*). The focus of the narrative then shifts to the dead as Paul was “caught . . . up in the Holy Spirit and carried . . . up to the third part of Heaven” where he was shown “the souls of sinners and the kind of place to which they are brought when they are dead” (*Apoc. Paul 11*).

There Paul was shown two types of angelic beings. The first were pitiless angels, “who had no compassion; their faces were full of wrath and their teeth projected from their mouths; their eyes flashed like the morning star in the east, and from the hairs of their head and out of their mouth went forth sparks of fire” (*Apoc. Paul 11*). He was told that these angels were “appointed for the souls of the wicked in their hour of need” (*Apoc. Paul 11*). On the other hand, Paul saw angels full of compassion who were angels of the righteous (*Apoc. Paul 12*). When Paul saw these beings he asked to see what happened to people when they died. First, he saw a righteous man, who was surrounded by the holy and wicked angels. The wicked angels were not able to find any place in him, and the righteous soul was welcomed to heaven with great rejoicing (*Apoc. Paul 13-14*).

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<sup>101</sup> All translations of the *Apocalypse of Paul* are from Hugo Deunsing, and Aurelio de Santos Otero, “Apocalypse of Paul,” in *New Testament Apocrypha: Writings Related to the Apostles; Apocalypses and Related Subjects* (ed. Wilhelm Schneemelker; 2; Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 2003), 716-743.

Next, Paul saw a wicked man, who had died, and he, too, was surrounded by holy and wicked angels. This time, the wicked angels took charge of the soul. The wicked angels admonished the soul saying, “O unfortunate soul, look at your flesh, which you have left. For on the day of resurrection you will have to return into your flesh to receive what is fitting to your sins and ungodliness” (*Apoc. Paul 15*). Next, the soul was met by its “familiar angel,” whose job it was to report the soul’s deeds to God. The soul was further admonished by this angel, who said, “God is merciful and a righteous judge . . . . But you have wasted the time for repentance” (*Apoc. Paul 16*). When the soul arrived in heaven, it was taken before God, so “that it may know there is a God whom it has despised” (*Apoc. Paul 16*). The angels present are appalled at the wicked soul who had brought a “foul stench” with it into heaven. Its angel, however, pleaded with God to have mercy on the soul. God judged the wicked soul and commanded that the soul be “handed over to the angel Tartarachus . . . and let him send him into outer darkness where there is wailing and gnashing of teeth” to await the final judgment (*Apoc. Paul 16*).

Later on his journey, after visiting the place of the righteous, Paul received a vision of the place of punishment that he had heard about when the wicked man was judged. The land was dark and filled with sorrow and distress, through which ran a river of fire. Paul saw a great multitude of men and women in the river of fire “immersed up to their knees, and other men up to their navel, others up to the lips, and others up to the hair” (*Apoc. Paul 31*). These people were in limbo, not counted among the righteous or the wicked, but “spent the period of their life on earth in passing some days in prayers but other days in prayers but other days in sins and fornications right up to their death” (*Apoc. Paul 31*). The depth at which the souls were submerged was based on the sins

that they committed. For example, fornicators were submersed up to their navel, while slanderers were submerged to their lips.

Paul was then led to the north where he saw those who “did not hope in the Lord that they be able to have him for a helper” (*Apoc. Paul 32*). These were in a lake of fire 3,000 cubits deep, over which a river of fire poured. The souls cried out for mercy, but were not heard. Paul was greatly distressed by the sight and turned his head away from the scene (*Apoc. Paul 33*). When he looked back he saw a man being strangled by another old man. The “guardians of Tartarus” also “pierced the intestines” of the man being strangled with a three-pronged iron tool (*Apoc. Paul 34*). The punishing angels were merciless and Paul saw an old bishop, who had “no compassion on the widows and orphans,” dragged into the lake of fire and immersed up to his knees. The angels proceeded to throw stones at the man and “wounded his face like a storm and they did not allow him to say: Have mercy on me” (*Apoc. Paul 35*). Paul saw another man, a deacon who “ate up the offerings and committed fornication,” in the river with his hands “stretched out and bloody, and worms came out of his mouth and from his nostrils and he was groaning and weeping and crying, and he said: Have mercy on me, for I suffer more than the rest who are in this punishment” (*Apoc. Paul 36*).

Paul saw many more scenes of gruesome punishments of the dead (see *Apoc. Paul 37-42*). The punishment caused him great sorrow and he began to weep, together with the angel who was serving as his guide. When those in punishment saw Paul and the angel weeping, they began to cry out for mercy (*Apoc. Paul 43*). Their cries brought the archangel Michael, and a host of other angels. Those in punishment began to cry out all the more fervently for mercy and relief from their torments. Michael, and the angels with

him, joined with Paul, his guide, and the tormented in prayer for mercy. Their prayers were effective and the Son of God descended to the place of punishment (*Apoc. Paul 44*).

He first rebuked those in torment, saying,

My blood was poured out for your sakes and even so you did not repent. For your sakes I bore the crown of thorns on my head; for you I was slapped on the cheeks, and even so you did not repent. Hanging on the cross begged for water, and they gave me vinegar mingled with gall; with a spear they laid open my side. (*Apoc. Paul 44*).

Despite all of this, Jesus said to those asking for mercy,

For the sake of Michael . . . and the angels who are with him, and for the sake of Paul, my dearly beloved, whom I would not sadden, and for the sake of your brethren who are in the world and present offerings, and for the sake of your children . . . on the very day on which I rose from the dead I grant to you all who are being punished a day and a night of ease for ever. (*Apoc. Paul 44*).

Thus, the prayers of Paul and the angels secured a Sabbath day rest for the wicked in the place of punishment. While it is not a complete release from judgment, the prayers of the righteous were effectual for securing relief for the wicked dead.

#### *Summary of Jewish and Christian Journeys to the Place of Punishment*

There is a strong interest in the underworld in Jewish and Christian literature. In the Hebrew Bible, the underworld is most often referred to as *šē'ōl*. At times, *šē'ōl* is a synonym for death, but also refers to a dark, dusty place where all the dead live, regardless of their righteousness. The Septuagint and other intertestamental literature in the Apocrypha continue this understanding, translating *šē'ōl* with the Greek ᾗδης. In the New Testament and Pseudepigrapha, however, the underworld is pictured as a place of punishment as the idea of ᾗδης was combined with the idea of γέεννα. The resulting picture was a fiery underworld, where the dead are punished for their misdeeds on earth.

Alongside the many references to the underworld in Jewish and Christian literature, there is a rich tradition of tales about the journey to the place of punishment. These journeys are not always to the world “below,” but often occur as seers travel to the end of the earth, or through the heavens. Unlike the similar stories in the Greco-Roman tradition, the Jewish and Christian journeys to the place of punishment are concerned with the fate of the wicked dead and the mercy of God. Two streams of tradition emerge from these stories. On the one hand, some of the stories of the journey to the place of punishment reject the possibility of postmortem repentance, and deny the efficacy of prayers for the dead. In these stories, humans have a chance to be righteous during their lives. At death, their fate is sealed. On the other hand, stories to the place of punishment offer hope to those who are punished in the afterlife. In these cases, the mercy of God extends beyond the grave and is still available to the wicked dead. This does not mean, however, that the dead are rescued completely from their torments. But often these accounts offer the hope of relief from torment in the afterlife.

The journey to the place of punishment is an important background against which to read the parable of the rich man and Lazarus. As we will see in the next chapter, the interpretation of the parable depends, in part, on understanding the rich tradition of these journeys.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Reading the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus in the Context of Luke's Gospel

In Chapters Three and Four I surveyed the journey to the place of punishment in Greco-Roman, Jewish, and Christian literature. The purpose of these chapters was to understand the background against which many of the themes in the parable would have been understood by an ancient auditor of Luke's Gospel. As we have seen, the tradition of the journey was well known and had a particular function in the document of which it was a part. With this background in place, we are now able to move to a reading of the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus. The goal of this chapter is to show how reading the parable against the background of the journey to the place of punishment sheds light on the function of the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus in the context of Luke's Gospel.

#### *Reading the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus*

The storyline of the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus is relatively straightforward. A rich man feasted everyday while Lazarus, a poor man, sat at his front gate, longing to eat some of his food. When the two characters died, they each entered the afterlife where their fates were reversed: the rich man was tormented in Hades, while the poor man was comforted with Abraham. As a result of his situation, the rich man called out to Abraham for relief from his torment, referring to the patriarch as Father. Abraham, confirming the familial tie, called the rich man "child," but denied the request. The rich man was now receiving bad things in the afterlife, and Lazarus was receiving

good things. This new situation was a reversal of their earthly circumstances. When the rich man was told that there was no way across the divide that separated him from Lazarus, he asked that Lazarus be sent to his brothers to warn them. His request was met with skepticism that the return from the dead would convince the brothers because they already had what they needed in the Law and Prophets.

The preceding summary of the parable reveals several themes that are important for reading the parable in its narrative context. The following seven topics emerge when the Pharisees, about whom the parable is spoken,<sup>1</sup> are factored in: (1) the interrelated themes of wealth, poverty, possessions, and reversal, (2) the characterization of the Pharisees, (3) the practice of table fellowship, (4) the possibility of postmortem punishment, (5) the identity of the children of Abraham, (6) the resurrection of the dead, and (7) the importance of the law and prophets.<sup>2</sup> These issues often overlap with one another and, although I will address them in order, some passages that fit in more than one section will be addressed only once.<sup>3</sup>

### *Wealth, Poverty, and the Reversal of Fortune*

The parable begins with a stark contrast drawn between the rich man and the poor man Lazarus: “Now, a certain man was rich, and he dressed himself in purple cloth

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<sup>1</sup> The majority of interpreters recognize that the Pharisees are the narrative audience of the parable. See, for example, Augustin George, “La parabole du riche et de Lazare,” *AsSeign* 57 (1971): 84; Hans Klein, *Das Lukasevangelium* (KEK, Band 1/3; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008), 551.

<sup>2</sup> George provides a similar, but shorter, list of themes in the parable: The importance of conversion, the privileged status of the poor in the Gospel of Luke, and representations of the fate of humanity between death and judgment; George, “La parabole,” 88-90.

<sup>3</sup> The exception to this order will be the treatment of wealth and poverty and the reversal of fortune in the Gospel. As we will see, these two themes are so interrelated in the Gospel that to separate them would be unnecessarily cumbersome.



and fine linen and partied lavishly each day. And a poor man, named Lazarus, had been placed at his gate, who was full of sores and longed to satisfy his hunger with what fell from the rich man's table. Instead, the dogs were even coming and licking his sores!" (Luke 16:19-21). Virtually all interpreters recognize that with this introduction issues of wealth and poverty are at the forefront of the parable. The wealth of the rich man in the parable is ostentatious. He was dressed in "purple cloth and fine linen" and feasted everyday (Luke 16:19).<sup>4</sup> Lazarus' extremely poor condition is exemplified by his unfilled desire to eat the scraps that fell from the table during these parties<sup>5</sup> and his association with the dogs who licked his sores. At death, however, this situation was radically reversed and the rich man was tormented and abandoned by Abraham, while Lazarus found himself in a place of comfort and honor.<sup>6</sup> In this way, the parable is one of the clearest illustrations of both concern for the poor and the reversal of fortune in the Gospel of Luke.

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<sup>4</sup> The dye used to produce purple clothing was very expensive. The reference to "fine linen" (βύσσως) probably refers to undergarments. Thus, the comfort of the rich man was exhibited by not only his feasting and outer garments, but those pieces of clothing that would not have been seen by others. See T.W. Manson, *The Sayings of Jesus: As Recorded in the Gospels according to St. Matthew and St. Luke* (London: SCM Press, 1949), 298; Simon J. Kistemaker, *The Parables of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1980), 236-37; Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel of Luke X-XXIV* (AB 28a; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1985), 1130-31; and Darrell L. Bock, *Luke 1:1-9:50* (BECNT; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1994), 1365.

<sup>5</sup> Joachim Jeremias suggests that these "scraps" were not crumbs, but pieces of bread used as napkins; Joachim Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus* (2d ed.; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1972), 184; see also Arland J. Hultgren, *The Parables of Jesus: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 112. In this way the wastefulness of the rich man is highlighted. Darrell Bock notes that later rabbis considered both depending on food from another and being covered with sores a sign of "a lack of life for the living"; Darrell L. Bock, "The Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus and the Ethics of Jesus," *SwJT* 40 (1997): 66.

<sup>6</sup> John York refers to Jesus' sayings of reversal and the other examples mentioned above as the "Explicit Bi-Polar Reversal in Luke"; John York, *The Last Shall Be First: The Rhetoric of Reversal in Luke* (JSNTSup 46; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991), chapter 2.

Luke's concern with wealth, poverty, and possessions in his Gospel is well documented.<sup>7</sup> The theme begins with Mary's declaration that God "has filled those who are hungry with good things and has sent those who are rich away empty" (Luke 1:53). Concern with possessions is a prominent theme of John the Baptist's and Jesus' message, both advocating a loose hold on possessions (Luke 3:11-13; 12:22-34). Jesus also criticized those who were rich and well fed (Luke 6:24-25) and who neglected mercy for the sake of tradition (Luke 11:42).<sup>8</sup> He offered blessing, however, to the poor, hungry, mournful, and excluded (Luke 6:20-23),<sup>9</sup> echoing Mary's announcement. Jesus' pronouncement of blessing extended also to those who abandoned their possessions in order to follow him (Luke 18:28-30; 19:1-9), but he lamented those who clung to their

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<sup>7</sup> Studies of Luke's portrayal of the poor and wealthy in his Gospel are legion and the literature is too abundant to be treated with the depth it deserves in this study. Helpful summaries of scholarship can be found in Robert J. Karris, "Poor and Rich: The Lukan *Sitz Im Leben*," in *Perspectives on Luke-Acts* (ed. Charles H. Talbert; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1978), 112-25; John R. Donahue, "Two Decades of Research on the Rich and Poor in Luke-Acts," in *Justice and the Holy: Essays in Honor of Walter Harrelson* (eds. Douglas A. Knight, and Peter J. Paris; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), 129-44; S. John Roth, *The Blind, the Lame, the Poor: Character Types in Luke-Acts* (JSNTSup 144; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 28-55; Thomas E. Phillips, *Reading Issues of Wealth and Poverty in Luke-Acts* (Studies in the Bible and Early Christianity 48; Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen Press, 2001), 5-43; François Bovon, *Luke the Theologian* (Second Revised Edition ed.; Waco, Tex.: Baylor University Press, 2006), 442-48; and James A. Metzger, *Consumption and Wealth in Luke's Travel Narrative* (Biblical Interpretation Series 88; Leiden: Brill, 2007), 1-11. Joel Green also provides an extensive bibliography of works on poverty in Luke; Joel B. Green, "Good News to Whom? Jesus and the 'Poor' in the Gospel of Luke," in *Jesus of Nazareth: Lord and Christ: Essays on the Historical Jesus and the New Testament* (eds. Joel B. Green, and Max Turner; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1994), 60, fn. 7. See also the works cited in Chapter Two relating to the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus.

<sup>8</sup> See also the parable of the Rich Fool, in which the rich man is called a "fool" by God for hoarding his wealth (Luke 12:16-21).

<sup>9</sup> On the relationship of these passages to the theme of the reversal of fortune in the Gospel of Luke, see François Bovon, *Das Evangelium nach Lukas* (EKKNT 3.3; Düsseldorf: Benziger Verlag, 2001), 110.

wealth (Luke 18:18-25).<sup>10</sup> According to Jesus, the desire to cling to wealth amounted to a rejection of God (Luke 16:13).<sup>11</sup>

The importance of the theme of wealth, poverty, and possessions is perhaps seen most clearly, however, in Jesus' first words following his baptism and temptation. Here Jesus, quoting Isaiah 61:1-2, declares, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me. He has sent me to announce good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the prisoners and gaining of sight to the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (Luke 4:18-19). This declaration in Luke's Gospel is generally seen as a programmatic statement expressing the purpose of Jesus' ministry.<sup>12</sup> It is not entirely clear, however, who the "poor" are in this announcement. In the history of research, there has been disagreement about whether the "poor" should be understood in an economic sense or more broadly as a cipher for those who recognized their need for God, the latter category including the wealthy.<sup>13</sup> Currently, however, the majority of scholars understand Luke's use of "poor" in the Gospel to include both of these groups,

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<sup>10</sup> See also Jesus's commendation of the poor widow who offered "all the livelihood that she had" as opposed to others who gave "out of their abundance" (Luke 21:1-4).

<sup>11</sup> It is instructive that while Jesus condemns those who choose to serve "Mammon" instead of God, he encourages his audience to be "rich toward God" (Luke 12:21).

<sup>12</sup> Thomas D'Sa calls this statement Jesus' "social manifesto"; Thomas D'Sa, "The Salvation of the Rich in the Gospel of Luke," *Vidyajyoti* 52 (1988): 171. See also Joel Green, who notes, "It has become axiomatic in studies of Luke that Jesus' sermon at Nazareth is programmatic for our understanding of the mission of Jesus in the Gospel"; Joel B. Green, *The Theology of the Gospel of Luke* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 76. See also Walter Pilgrim, *Good News to the Poor: Wealth and Poverty in Luke-Acts* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Augsburg, 1981), 64-66; Heinz Schürmann, *Das Lukasevangelium* (vol. 1; HTKNT; Freiburg: Herders, 1990), 225; David B. Gowler, "'At His Gate Lay a Poor Man': A Dialogic Reading of Luke 16:19-31," *PRSt* 32 (2005): 251; and Metzger, *Consumption and Wealth*, 14, 25-31. Preaching to the poor was so central to Jesus' ministry that he repeated his focus when John the Baptist sent disciples to ask if Jesus was the expected "Coming One" (Luke 7:18-23).

<sup>13</sup> The difference is essentially between those who understand the "poor" in the Gospel as a historical referent to those in poverty in the first century, and those who understand the "poor" as a literary device in the Gospel. For a helpful summary of the history of interpretation of this issue, see Roth, *The Blind*, 28-55.

but disagree about the relative emphasis placed on each category. Bruce Longenecker, for example, argues that Jesus' declaration in Luke 7:22, which echoes Luke 4:18-19, seems "intended to resonate with the Isaianic narrative of divine triumph, and in Isa. 61:1 'the poor' (πτωχός [LXX]) are most likely economically deprived, and perhaps even economically 'oppressed' (cf. NRSV; Isa. 61:6-9)."<sup>14</sup> He also recognizes, however, that Luke seems to include with the poor "those with illness and physical disabilities, those who had entered into despised professions, those excluded from the normal definition of the 'people of God,' those possessed by evil spirits, and any others who found themselves marginalized, the object of derision, or simply in need (not least, needing forgiveness)."<sup>15</sup> Luke is concerned, then, with both the economically deprived and those who are marginalized in society.

Luke's concern with both the economically poor and the marginalized in society can be seen throughout the Gospel of Luke. On the one hand, "the poor" are explicitly contrasted with the wealthy. For example, in response to the rich leader's question about inheriting eternal life, Jesus says to him, "Sell everything you have and distribute (the proceeds) to the poor (πτωχοῖς)."<sup>16</sup> The leader "became very sad" when he heard these things because "he was extremely wealthy (ἦν γὰρ πλούσιος σφόδρα)" (Luke 18:22-23).

The command to the rich leader was not to give his possessions to a generalized category

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<sup>14</sup> Bruce W. Longenecker, "Good News to the Poor: Jesus, Paul, and Jerusalem," in *Jesus and Paul Reconnected: Fresh Pathways into an Old Debate* (ed. Todd D. Still; Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 2007), 40.

<sup>15</sup> Longenecker, "Good News," 44, fn. 11. Longenecker is in explicit agreement with Joel Green on this point. See Green, "Good News," 59-74. For similar variations on this idea see David Peter Secombe, *Possessions and the Poor in Luke-Acts* (SNTSU Series B 6; Linz: A. Fuchs, 1982), 19; Thomas E. Schmidt, *Hostility to Wealth in the Synoptic Gospels* (JSNTSup 15; Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1987), 136; Phillips, *Wealth and Poverty*, 243, among others.

<sup>16</sup> See also Zacchaeus' commitment to give half of his belongings to the poor (τοῖς πτωχοῖς; Luke 19:8).

of marginalized people that would include other wealthy individuals who were disrespected, or to renounce wealth for the sake of renouncing wealth. Instead, the command was to distribute his possessions to those in need.<sup>17</sup> On the other hand, Luke highlights Jesus' concern for the marginalized in society throughout the Gospel as Jesus welcomes tax-collectors, sinners, and others who were excluded from society. I will focus on examples of Jesus interactions with the marginalized in more detail below.

The issues of wealth and poverty in the Gospel of Luke are intimately related to the well-known theme of reversal in the Gospel.<sup>18</sup> At several points throughout the narrative, Jesus succinctly states the expectation of the reversal: "For whoever wants to save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake, such a person will save it" (Luke 9:24; cf. 17:33); "Indeed, there are last who will be first, and first who will be last!" (Luke 13:30); "[E]veryone who exalts himself will be humbled and the one who humbles himself will be exalted" (Luke 14:11; cf. 18:14). The importance of the theme of reversal is evident from the beginning of the narrative in Mary's Song (Luke 1:46-55). After offering a praise to God for his blessing, mercy, and mighty acts, Mary spoke of a series

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<sup>17</sup> Jesus' parabolic speech often offers a critique of the wealthy, who fail to distribute their wealth. The clearest examples are the parable of the Rich Fool, who hoards his abundance, and the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus, in which the rich man fails to care for the poor at his gate. The parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus will be discussed below, but a comment on the parable of the Rich Fool is important at this point. Jesus' words to the rich ruler echo the moral of the parable of the Rich Fool. At the close of the parable, Jesus warns his audience that the fate of the rich fool will be shared by "the one who stores (things) up for himself and is not rich toward God (ὁ θησαυρίζων ἑαυτῷ καὶ μὴ εἰς θεὸν πλουτῶν)" (Luke 12:21). Jesus tells the rich ruler to give his possessions to the poor and he "will have treasure in heaven (θησαυρὸν ἐν [τοῖς] οὐρανοῖς; Luke 18:22). The importance of the location of a person's "treasure" can be seen in Luke 12:33-34. Here Jesus encourages his listeners, "Sell your possessions and give to the needy. Make for yourselves purses that do not get old, an inexhaustible treasure in heaven, where a thief cannot come near (it) nor a moth destroy (it). For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." The use of possessions in Luke is a clear indicator of a person's priorities.

<sup>18</sup> See Wolfgang Wiefel, *Das Evangelium nach Lukas* (THKNT 3; Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1988), 300. See York for a survey of research on the theme of reversal in the Gospel; York, *Reversal*, 10-38.

of reversals that “fulfill the promise made to Abraham and his posterity.”<sup>19</sup> These reversals involved the bringing down of rulers from their thrones and lifting up the lowly (ὑψώσεν ταπεινούς), and filling the hungry with good things but sending the rich away empty (πλουτοῦντας ἐξαπέστειλεν κενούς; Luke 1:52-53). The beatitudes and woes in Luke 6:20-26 echo Mary’s Song by offering blessings to the poor, hungry, weeping, and those who are despised, and by pronouncing woes on the rich, those who have plenty to eat, those who laugh, and those who now receive honor from others.

The themes of wealth and the reversal of fortune are features of the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus that many scholars have recognized.<sup>20</sup> As we saw in Chapter Two the majority of interpreters of the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus understand the term “poor” to refer to the literal poor (i.e., those in economic hardship). While some scholars highlight the economic implications of the parable more than others,<sup>21</sup> all scholars recognize that this is the primary meaning of “poor” in the parable. The importance of the themes of wealth, poverty, and reversal for reading the parable in its narrative context against the background of the journey to the place of punishment, however, have not been fully appreciated. Two points are particularly important. First, the reversal of fortune of the rich man and Lazarus after death mirrors the reversal of fortune of the wicked and the righteous in the journey to the place of punishment. When the parable is read against the background of this tradition, the reason for the reversal,

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<sup>19</sup> York, *Reversal*, 53.

<sup>20</sup> See the discussion in Chapter Two.

<sup>21</sup> See the work of William Herzog and Kenneth Bailey discussed in Chapter Two, as well as the work of Richard Rohrbaugh, who, while focusing on the impoverished condition of Lazarus, argues that “By using the strongest possible sociological contrast, and its total reversal in the end, Jesus highlights the radical, eschatological nature of his warning”; Richard Rohrbaugh, *The Biblical Interpreter: An Agrarian Bible in an Industrial Age* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), 78.

which, is left unstated in the parable, becomes more clear. As we saw in Aeneas' vision of Tartarus, one of the functions of the journey to the place of punishment was to reinforce certain ethical standards that were necessary for a harmonious society. In this vision of the place of punishment, the importance of caring for the needs of the poor was prominent. In this light, it becomes clear that the rich man was punished for his lack of care for Lazarus.

In the second place, reading the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus in its narrative context is important for two reasons in regard to the reversal of fortune of the "poor" Lazarus. On the one hand, the concern for the poor and the longing for the eschatological reversal of fortune in the Gospel of Luke prepares the reader for the reversal that takes place in the parable. The audience would not be surprised that the fate of the rich man and Lazarus have been reassigned in the afterlife. While this idea will be discussed again below, it is enough for now to mention that this mirrors the function of the journey to the place of punishment in the arguments of both Plato and Plutarch. On the other hand, the themes of wealth, poverty, and reversal in the Gospel of Luke aid the audience in determining the purpose of the parable. As will become more clear below, the purpose of the parable is to encourage obedience to the demands of the Law and the Prophets. In the context of Luke's Gospel, this is a demand to emulate the ministry of Jesus, which, as we have seen above, was characterized by ministry to the "poor." In the immediate context of the parable, the demand is clearly to obey the demands of the Law and the Prophets to care for the economically disadvantaged. In light of the overall context of the Gospel of Luke, however, it would be a mistake to exclude from this demand a care for the marginalized in society, as well. Indeed, the parable encourages an

obedience to the Law and the Prophets that is characterized by care for both those in economic hardship and the socially marginalized. It is at this point that a discussion of the Pharisees, to whom the parable is addressed, is important.

### *The Pharisees in the Gospel of Luke*

Following Jesus' parable in Luke 16:1-13, Luke introduces the Pharisees, described as "lovers of money," who were "ridiculing" Jesus (Luke 16:14).<sup>22</sup> Jesus rebuked the Pharisees for their negative reaction to his teaching on wealth, saying, "You are men who justify yourselves before people, but God knows your hearts. (I say this,) Because what is exalted among people is an abomination in the Lord's opinion" (Luke 16:15). Jesus' rebuke is, in part, illustrated by the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus. To a large degree the plot of the Third Gospel unfolds as Jesus interacts with the Pharisees and other religious leaders during confrontations that involve various questions about law observance and/or the nature of Jesus' authority.<sup>23</sup> Most often Jesus

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<sup>22</sup> It is important to note that the discussion of the Pharisees in this chapter is an attempt to discern the characterization of the Pharisees in the Gospel of Luke. In this way, the work here is more akin to the "socio-narratological" approach of David Gowler, rather than an attempt at historical reproduction of the Pharisaic movement; see David B. Gowler, *Host, Guest, Enemy, and Friend: Portraits of the Pharisees in Luke and Acts* (Emory Studies in Early Christianity 2; New York: Peter Lang, 1991), 9-14. For a discussion of the "historical Pharisees" and other early Jewish movements see Jacob Neusner, *From Politics to Piety: The Emergence of Pharisaic Judaism* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1973); E.P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (Philadelphia, Pa.: Fortress Press, 1985), 270-93; and E.P. Sanders, *Judaism: Practice and Belief 63 BCE - 66 CE* (Philadelphia, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 1992). See also James D.G. Dunn, "Pharisees, Sinners, and Jesus," in *The Social World of Formative Christianity and Judaism: Essays in Honor of Howard Clark Kee* (ed. Jacob Neusner and Peder Borgen; Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 1988), 264-289.

<sup>23</sup> On the importance of Jesus' conflict with the Pharisees for plot movement in Luke, see Gowler, *Host*, 177-180. See also John T. Carroll, "Luke's Portrayal of the Pharisees," *CBQ* 50 (1988): 607-612. For studies of the Pharisees in the writings attributed to Luke, see Jack Dean Kingsbury, "The Pharisees in Luke-Acts," in *The Four Gospels: Festschrift Franz Neyrick* (ed. Frans van Segbroeck; vol. 2.5; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1992), 1497-1512; Laurence L. Edwards, "Luke's Pharisees: Emerging Communities," in *Contesting Texts: Jews and Christians in Conversation about the Bible* (ed. Melody D. Knowles, et. al.; Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 2007), 119-140; Amy-Jill Levine, "Luke's Pharisees," in *In Search of the Historical Pharisees* (ed. Jacob Neusner and Bruce D. Chilton; Baylor University Press, 2007), 113-132; and Klein, *Lukasevangelium*, 217-219.



interpreted the demands of the law much differently from his opponents in these interactions. Thus, understanding how the Pharisees are characterized in the Gospel of Luke as a whole will aid our reading of the parable in its narrative context.<sup>24</sup>

The Pharisees are introduced for the first time in the narrative at Luke 5:17-26, when a group of Pharisees and teachers of the law from Galilee, Judea, and Jerusalem gathered to hear Jesus teach. At the same time several men brought a paralytic to Jesus for healing. When they were unable to enter through the door of the house because the crowd was so large, they climbed up to the roof, removed the roof tiles and lowered their friend down to Jesus. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the man, “Man, your sins have been forgiven” (Luke 5:20).<sup>25</sup> The scribes and Pharisees were indignant that Jesus would claim to have authority to forgive sins and, reasoning among themselves, accused Jesus of blasphemy.<sup>26</sup> Jesus, however, knew their thoughts and asked his opponents

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<sup>24</sup> Jesus’ conflict is with a wide range of religious leaders in Luke, including the Pharisees (Φαρισαῖος), Sadducees (Σαδδουκαῖος), lawyers (νομικός), scribes (γραμματεὺς), teachers of the law (νομοδιδάσκαλος), and chief priests (ἀρχιερεὺς). Often, a member of multiple groups is present during a conflict with Jesus. Some have argued that the term “lawyers,” “scribes,” and “teachers of the law” are used interchangeably to refer to the same general group. For example, see John Nolland, *Luke 1-9:20* (WBC; Nashville, Tenn.: Thomas Nelson, 1989), 233, and Bock, *Luke 1:1-9:50*, 482. In this chapter I will discuss only those instances where the Pharisees are the primary opponent of Jesus. The difficulty with this approach is that the Pharisees are not always the sole representatives of the Jewish religious leadership present during a particular section of the narrative. Often, the scribes, lawyers, or teachers of the law are present, as well. As a result, there is overlap in the following discussion of the Pharisees and other religious leaders.

<sup>25</sup> Nolland notes that faith in the Gospel of Luke “is attributed to those who act decisively on the basis of the conviction that God’s help is to be found with Jesus and gratefully receive God’s action through him”; Nolland, *Luke 1-9:20*, 235. See also Bock, *Luke 1:1-9:50*, 481.

<sup>26</sup> Bock argues that the essence of blasphemy in the second temple period was to somehow violate God’s majesty. He writes, “Such a violation is what the leadership claims is present . . . . They see Jesus claiming a divine prerogative and therefore violating God’s majesty by taking to himself something reserved for God”; Bock, *Luke 1:1-9:50*, 483. For a recent discussion of the divine prerogative of forgiveness in Second Temple Judaism see Daniel Johansson, “‘Who Can Forgive Sins But God Alone?’ Human and Angelic Agents, and Divine Forgiveness in Early Judaism,” *JSNT* 33 (2011): 351-74.

which was easier, forgiving sins or healing the man?<sup>27</sup> In order to prove that he did have the authority that he claimed, Jesus healed the man. Everyone was amazed when the man picked up his mat and walked out of the room.

This first conflict between Jesus and the religious leaders is an important encounter for several reasons. First, since this is the initial interaction between Jesus and the Pharisees, their response to Jesus presages their attitude towards him in the remainder of the narrative. In this case, their charge of blasphemy foreshadows their rejection of his message and the conflict that will ensue in the narrative. Second, the conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees is a disagreement over Jesus' authority to forgive sin, not over Jesus interpretation of the law, which is a valid critique from their perspective.<sup>28</sup> The audience of Luke's Gospel, however, is privy to information that justifies Jesus' claim, namely the divine approval of Jesus and his ministry and his divine lineage (cf. Luke 3:21-38). Finally, the fact that Jesus' first conflict with the Pharisees involves the care of a paralyzed man may be significant for interpreting the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus. Just as the paralyzed man had friends who took him to Jesus for assistance, so also Lazarus may have had someone help him to the gate before the house of the rich man.<sup>29</sup> The difference is that in the story at Luke 5, Jesus cares for the paralyzed man, while the rich man in Luke 16 ignores Lazarus at his gate.

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<sup>27</sup> As several commentators note, it is easier to make a claim that is not physically verifiable (i.e., to forgive sins) than a claim that is physically verifiable (i.e., healing the paralytic). Thus, Jesus' healing of the paralytic is the visual proof that he has the power to forgive sins. See also I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1978), 210, 214; and Bock, *Luke 1:1-9:50*, 485, among others.

<sup>28</sup> See Gowder, *Host*, 191-197.

<sup>29</sup> On Lazarus' physical condition see Fitzmyer, *Luke X-XXIV*, 1311; and Darrell L. Bock, *Luke 9:51-24:53* (BECNT; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1996), 1366

Shortly after healing the paralytic, Jesus was invited to eat dinner at the house of Levi, the tax collector (Luke 5:29-32).<sup>30</sup> The Pharisees and scribes began to complain to Jesus' disciples saying, "On what basis do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?" (Luke 5:30).<sup>31</sup> Although the question was directed to the disciples, Jesus was the one who replied, "Healthy people do not have need of a doctor but those who are sick do. I have not come to call righteous people, but (to call) sinners to repentance" (Luke 5:31-32). This statement becomes indicative of Jesus' behavior throughout the Gospel of Luke, and the Pharisees fail to grasp its significance.<sup>32</sup> Thus, the Pharisees' critique of Jesus was based on their misunderstanding of his mission, just as in the healing of the paralytic. In this case, however, the issue of law observance in terms of food purity standards is also in question.<sup>33</sup> It is also likely that Jesus' programmatic statement is a not-so-thinly-veiled critique of the Pharisees' self-righteousness.<sup>34</sup> Pharisaic self-

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<sup>30</sup> As Marshall notes, Jesus' dining with a group of sinners is a fitting episode following his declaration of the forgiveness of sins; Marshall, *Luke*, 217.

<sup>31</sup> Marshall argues that since the Pharisees refused to eat with tax collectors and sinners, they must have rebuked the disciples sometime after the meal; Marshall, *Luke*, 221; and also Bock, *Luke 1:1-9:50*, 495. Along the same lines Nolland writes, "The presence of the Pharisees is unexplained. A question after the event would be easier to account for, but the evangelists economize and consolidate"; Nolland, *Luke 1-9:20*, 245. Fitzmyer argues that the presence of the Pharisees and the odd shift in person addressed in verses 30-31, "make it much more likely that the story reflects much more of an early Christian controversy than an explicit confrontation in Jesus' own ministry; the early church is answering an objection about its consorting with such undesirables in Palestinian society, by depicting Jesus so engaged"; Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel of Luke I-IX* (AB 28; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1981), 588-89. Although these assessments are most likely correct, it should be noted that there were times when "sinners" and Pharisees were present at the same meal. One example, that will be discussed below, is the presence of a sinful woman at the house of Simon the Pharisee (see Luke 7:36-50).

<sup>32</sup> See the note above on Luke 4:16-21.

<sup>33</sup> As Joel Green notes, the presence of the scribes, along with the Pharisees, in this confrontation "draws attention to an impending confrontation concerning legal matters"; Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke* (NICNT; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1997), 247.

<sup>34</sup> See, for example, Gowler, *Host*, 199-200; and Green, *Luke*, 247-48

righteousness becomes a major theme in later episodes, and directly affects the interpretation of the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus.<sup>35</sup>

Immediately following the scene at Levi's house, Jesus was questioned about the failure of his disciples to fast like the disciples of John the Baptist and the Pharisees (Luke 5:33-39).<sup>36</sup> Fasting was an important aspect of Jewish religious life, but Jesus' disciples were not following the traditional pattern of activity observed by the Pharisees and other Jewish leaders.<sup>37</sup> Jesus' response to his opponents was twofold. First, he compared himself to a bridegroom and his disciples to wedding guests. Just as it is inappropriate to fast at a wedding, so also it was inappropriate to fast while Jesus was in their midst. Instead, the time called for rejoicing. The manner in which Jesus and his disciples rejoiced as at a wedding banquet stands in stark contrast to the daily rejoicing of the rich man in the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus. Whereas the rich man's rejoicing resulted in neglect of the condition of the poor Lazarus, Jesus' rejoicing explicitly included those who were marginalized in society. Jesus' second response came in the parable of the new patch and the new wineskin. In both responses, Jesus stated that

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<sup>35</sup> That the Pharisees fail to understand the significance, and accept the practice, of Jesus' table fellowship with tax collectors and sinners can be seen in Luke 15:1-2. R. Alan Culpepper likens the grumbling of the Pharisees to the grumbling of the Israelites against Moses in Exod 16:7-12; R. Alan Culpepper, *The Gospel of Luke: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections* (NIB IX; ed. Leander E. Keck; Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 295-296.

<sup>36</sup> The identity of those who pose the question is not entirely clear. Marshall suggests that the fact that the disciples of the Pharisees are referred to in the third person mitigates against understanding "the Pharisees and their scribes" of 5:30 as the subject; Marshall, *Luke*, 244 (see also Bock, *Luke 1:1-9:50*, 514). Nolland, however, argues that since Luke has eliminated Mark's change in location, the controversy here is an extension of the preceding section. In this way, the question about fasting stands in stark contrast to the feasting of the disciples with tax collectors and sinners; Nolland, *Luke 1-9:20*, 247. Regardless of the identity of the interlocutors, Jesus is being pressed on his observance of traditional Jewish practice. On the importance of fasting in Jewish practice see Bock, *Luke 1:1-9:50*, 508-09.

<sup>37</sup> On fasting in the New Testament see Curtis C. Mitchell, "The Practice of Fasting in the New Testament," *BSac* 147 (1990): 455-469.

a new era was being ushered in with his ministry and any attempt to maintain the status quo seen in the tradition of the religious leaders would fail.<sup>38</sup>

In Luke 6:1-5 the scene shifts from the meal at Levi's house, but the conflict between the Pharisees and Jesus over law interpretation remains at the forefront. As Nolland notes, the controversies of Luke 5:27-39 provide the perspective for interpreting the controversies in Luke 6:1-11: Since Jesus is doing a new thing, it is reasonable to expect that his interpretation of the law will differ from the traditional understanding of the religious leaders.<sup>39</sup> The reinterpretation of the law began as Jesus' disciples were walking through a grain field on the Sabbath and "were plucking and eating the heads of grain after rubbing (the husks off) with their hands" (Luke 6:1). When the Pharisees saw this, they confronted Jesus with his disciples' unlawful behavior.<sup>40</sup> Jesus responded by pointing to the example of David and his companions who ate the consecrated bread that was reserved for priests. By using the example of David, Jesus assumed the role of "interpreter of the divine intention in the law."<sup>41</sup> On the basis of this role, Jesus then declared, "The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath" (Luke 6:5). The focus of conflict

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<sup>38</sup> John Nolland argues that the parable should not be read as a rejection of Judaism. Luke, indeed, stresses "the continuity between Judaism and Christianity and even between Pharisaism and Christianity. Instead, the parable points to the "need for the new to be allowed to have its own integrity"; Nolland, *Luke 1-9:20*, 249. Bock, however, while agreeing with Nolland that Luke does see continuity between Jesus and Judaism, there should be "no doubt that what Jesus offers is decidedly new and distinct as well"; Bock, *Luke 1:1-9:50*, 520.

<sup>39</sup> Nolland writes, "The theme of the old and the new from 5:27-39 provides perspective from which to approach 6:1-5 (and 6:6-11). The situation created by the presence of Jesus opens up new freedoms and possibilities which cannot be contained within the constraints of Pharisaic piety, and which, despite Pharisaic preference for the old, correspond to the true purpose of God for his people"; Nolland, *Luke 1-9:20*, 255.

<sup>40</sup> Read in light of the Mishnah, "the disciples were reaping, threshing, winnowing, and preparing food – a quadruple violation!"; Bock, *Luke 1:1-9:50*, 523.

<sup>41</sup> Nolland, *Luke 1-9:20*, 257.

between Jesus and the Pharisees in the narrative has moved from a misunderstanding of his mission to a disagreement over interpretation of the law and Jesus' authority over the law.<sup>42</sup> In particular, Jesus' interpretation of the law allowed for mercy, a quality that was lacking from the Pharisaical interpretation of the law.

Jesus' declaration of his authority over the Sabbath led to another Sabbath conflict with the Pharisees in Luke 6:6-11.<sup>43</sup> At issue was the appropriateness of healing on the Sabbath day. The story unfolds, however, in a manner different from the previous encounters. Jesus was teaching in the Synagogue, and from the outset the Pharisees and scribes are portrayed in a much more nefarious manner as they watched "him closely (to see) if he healed (people) on the Sabbath, so that they might find (a way) to accuse him" (Luke 6:7). With this statement it becomes clear that the Pharisees and scribes viewed Jesus as a threat.<sup>44</sup> As in the healing of the paralytic, however, Jesus knew the thoughts of his opponents and turned on the offensive. Jesus asked those present, "Is it in fact lawful to do good on the Sabbath or to do evil, to save a life or to destroy it?" (Luke 6:9). In this way, Jesus framed the debate in terms of showing mercy, instead of the question of what constitutes working on the Sabbath.<sup>45</sup> In answer to his own question, Jesus told the man with the shriveled hand to stretch it out (Luke 6:10). Just as in the story of the healing of the paralytic, the Pharisees and scribes reacted negatively to Jesus' miracle.

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<sup>42</sup> See Culpepper, *Luke*, 133-134.

<sup>43</sup> For the thematic similarities between this episode and the healing of the paralytic in Luke 5:17-26 see Nolland, *Luke 1-9:20*, 230-231.

<sup>44</sup> See Gowler, *Host*, 211. For their part the Pharisees are also a threat, functioning "as barriers to the healing of this man, and in fulfilling this role they also represent the synagogue and Sabbath as entities segregating this needy man from divine help"; Green, *Luke*, 255.

<sup>45</sup> See Culpepper, *Luke*, 135.

This time, however, Jesus' opponents did not question his authority, but were "filled with fury and began discussing with one another what they might do to Jesus" (Luke 6:11).<sup>46</sup>

The desire of the leaders to silence Jesus is transparent at this point in the narrative.

The rejection of Jesus' message and ministry can also be seen in the rejection by the religious leaders of the message of John the Baptist. In Luke 7:24-35 Jesus questioned those listening to him about the significance of John the Baptist. Jesus declared that John was a prophet and that "no one among those born of women is greater than John" (Luke 7:28). The tax collectors agreed with this statement, but the "Pharisees and lawyers, on the other hand, rejected God's will for them because they had not been baptized by him" (Luke 7:30). This rejection of John led Jesus to make a comparison between "the people of this generation" and "children sitting in the marketplace and calling out to one another, who say, 'We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not weep'" (Luke 7:32). The saying here is notoriously difficult to interpret,<sup>47</sup> but regardless of the exact identity of the children, what game they are playing, or who is referred to as "this generation," it is clear that the Pharisees and lawyers are portrayed as those who have not responded properly to that which has been revealed to them.

In Luke 5:32 Jesus declared that his mission was to call "sinners to repentance."

The constant misunderstanding of this mission by his opponents is illustrated well when

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<sup>46</sup> Kingsbury suggests that the religious leaders thought the healing of this man was inappropriate because his condition was not life threatening and he should have waited until another day to be healed, which was the popular expectation; Jack Dean Kingsbury, *Conflict in Luke: Jesus, Authorities, Disciples* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 89; see also Bock, *Luke 1:1-9:50*, 528. This expectation is at the forefront of the critique of Jesus' healing activity on the Sabbath at Luke 13:14.

<sup>47</sup> Nolland offers a helpful summary of the interpretive options; Nolland, *Luke 1-9:20*, 343-344. See also Culpepper, *Luke*, 165-167.

Jesus was invited to eat at the house of a Pharisee named Simon (Luke 7:36-50). While Jesus was at the house of Simon, a notorious woman in the city heard that he was there, brought an alabaster jar of perfume, and, entering the house, began to weep at Jesus' feet, while she anointed them with the oil.<sup>48</sup> Simon was offended and surprised that Jesus allowed the woman to do such a thing and said to himself, "This man, if he were a prophet, would have known who and what kind of (person) the woman is who is touching him, that she is a sinner" (Luke 7:39). The implication, of course, is that Jesus would shun the woman and forbid her to touch him any longer, if he knew who she was. Jesus, however, knew Simon's misgivings and asked the religious leader who would be more grateful, a person forgiven of a large debt or a small debt. Simon responded that the one with a large debt would surely be more grateful. Jesus approved of the answer and critiqued his host for not showing him basic elements of hospitality, like greeting him with a kiss and anointing his head with oil, while the woman had not ceased kissing his feet and anointing his feet with oil. As a result "her many sins are forgiven, because she loved much" (Luke 7:47). The implication in the story is not that the Pharisee did not need a large debt forgiven, but that he *perceived* that his debt was less than that of the woman. Thus, the self-righteousness of the Pharisees is highlighted.<sup>49</sup> When Jesus

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<sup>48</sup> There is much speculation as to the identity of this woman. Suggestions include Mary Magdalene, a local prostitute, a woman with a different dishonorable occupation, or an adulteress; see Bock, *Luke 1:1-9:50*, 695 for a list and bibliography. None of these possibilities can be confirmed with any certainty. In the final analysis, the identity of the woman does not matter. What matters is that she was a notorious sinner in the city and Jesus welcomed her and offered her forgiveness. See Charles Cosgrove for a helpful analysis of the woman's actions in a Greco-Roman context; Charles H. Cosgrove, "A Woman's Unbound Hair in the Greco-Roman World, With Special Reference to the Story of the 'Sinful Woman' in Luke 7:36-50," *JBL* 124 (2005): 675-692.

<sup>49</sup> Pharisaic self-righteousness is also highlighted at Luke 18:9-14 where a story is told "to some who had confidence in themselves that they were righteous and looked with contempt on the rest" (Luke 18:9). In the story, the two men went to temple to pray. The Pharisee gave thanks to God that he was "not like other people," including the tax collector, but was a law observer, giving his tithe and fasting twice each week. In contrast, the tax collector stood at a distance and prayed with humility asking that God



declared to the woman, “Your sins are forgiven” (Luke 7:48), those who were present at the meal recoiled at the thought that Jesus had the power to forgive sins, mirroring the reaction of those present when Jesus’ declared the paralytic’s sins to be forgiven (Luke 7:48; cf. Luke 5:20-21), and further illustrating the inability of the religious leaders to understand the nature of Jesus’ ministry.

The misunderstanding of Jesus’ mission by the Pharisees continues as Jesus made his way to Jerusalem in the so-called “Travel Narrative” in Luke 9:51-19:46. Perhaps the most scathing critique of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law by Jesus takes place in this portion of the narrative at Luke 11:37-54, through a series of “woes” pronounced on the religious leaders. Jesus was to eat at the home of a Pharisee, who was shocked that Jesus did not first wash before the meal. In response, Jesus began an extensive critique of the Pharisees and the lawyers based on their strict observance of the law, but their failure to show justice and mercy. He began by calling the Pharisees “Fools” because of their desire to be clean outwardly, while neglecting inner purity. Instead, he argued that the Pharisees should focus on becoming clean inside by making “the things inside (of you your) alms and all things will be clean for you!” (Luke 11:41).<sup>50</sup> The two examples of the Pharisees’ failure to show mercy is their strict observance of the laws of tithing and their desire for public honor (Luke 11:42-43; cf. 20:45-47). Jesus’ example of their

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would be favorably inclined to him. Because of his humble attitude the tax collector went home justified, rather than the prideful Pharisee.

<sup>50</sup> The only other time a character is called a “fool” in the Gospel is at Luke 12:20 when, in Jesus’ parable about the danger of greed, God calls the rich man a “fool” for hoarding his surplus crop. In the parable, the rich man’s death is imminent and all that he has hoarded is useless to him. Jesus closes the parable with these words, “So (shall it be for) the one who stores (things) up for himself and is not rich toward God” (Luke 12:21). A similar issue of storing up wealth for oneself is present in Jesus’ critique of the Pharisees and lawyers in Luke 11:37-54. For a recent discussion of the parable of the rich fool, see Matthew S. Rindge, *Jesus’ Parable of the Rich Fool: Luke 12:13-34 among Ancient Conversations on Death and Possessions* (SBL Early Christianity and Its Literature 6; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011).

practice of tithing involves “mint and rue and everything you grow” (Luke 11:42). The focus on seasonings like mint and rue, as well as other smaller garden vegetables,<sup>51</sup> makes the Pharisees’ strict observance of the laws of tithing stand out even more against their failure to practice justice and mercy.<sup>52</sup> One of the lawyers present at the meal told Jesus that his critique of the Pharisees was also insulting to the teachers of the law (Luke 11:45). This led to Jesus’ critique of these leaders as those who “load people with burdens that are hard to bear, but you yourselves won’t even touch those burdens with one of your fingers” (Luke 11:46). The lawyers are characterized as those who make unreasonable demands on their followers and are not willing to assist them. Instead, they hinder people from gaining the “key of knowledge” (Luke 11:52). Moreover, the lawyers are guilty of the bloodshed of the prophets who had been killed by their forefathers. The consequences of these murders “will be exacted from this generation” (Luke 11:51). As a result of this invective by Jesus, the scribes and Pharisees were further committed to bring about his downfall. They began to “lecture” Jesus and to be “very hostile” towards him, “lying in wait for him to catch him in what he said” (Luke 11:53-54). The desire to trap Jesus becomes characteristic of all the interaction between Jesus and the religious leaders in the Gospel from this point forward.

The next major critique of the Pharisees and lawyers comes in Luke 14 and combines both Sabbath laws and Jesus’ meal with his opponents. In this case Jesus dined with a Pharisee on the Sabbath and a man with dropsy was present. Jesus, aware of the religious leaders’ disapproval of healing on the Sabbath, asked the Pharisees and lawyers,

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<sup>51</sup> See LN 3.22, 29 for the definitions of these words.

<sup>52</sup> See also Kingsbury, *Conflict*, 92.

“Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath, or not?” (Luke 14:3).<sup>53</sup> When the Pharisees did not answer, possibly because they were aware that they could not answer correctly, Jesus healed the man in front of them. Jesus then reminded his audience that it was common practice to care for animals in need on the Sabbath. The implication is clear: If the needs of an animal are met on the Sabbath, so also should a human’s needs be addressed on the Sabbath. Jesus then told a parable to his fellow guests that critiqued the common practice of securing an honorable position at the table for oneself. The message of this parable mirrors Jesus’ critique of the Pharisees’ quest for honor seen in Luke 11:43, and will be discussed in more detail below.

Following the parable of the Steward (Luke 16:1-13) Luke introduces the Pharisees again. Here the Pharisees, who have been characterized as a group that consistently misunderstands Jesus’ mission, reacts to the parable by ridiculing Jesus. Luke says that this is due to the fact that they were “lovers of money” (φιλάγγοι; Luke 16:14). In language that echoes much of what has been said about the Pharisees before, Jesus told them, “You are men who justify yourselves before people, but God knows your hearts . . . what is exalted among people is an abomination in the Lord’s opinion” (Luke 16:15). This fits with the characterization of the Pharisees as an honor hungry group that observed the law outwardly, but was impure inside. Jesus’ critique of their love of money and failure to practice justice leads to the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> The Pharisees that were present at the meal “were watching him closely,” which raises the tension in the scene (Luke 14:1).

<sup>54</sup> The majority of commentators agree that the Pharisees are the narrative audience of the parable. See, for example, Frederick W. Danker, *Jesus and the New Age: A Commentary on St. Luke’s Gospel* (Revised and expanded ed.; Philadelphia, Penn.: Fortress Press, 1988), 283; Gowler, *Host*, 299; and Green, *Luke*, 602.

Jesus' conflict with the Jewish religious leaders revolved around three interrelated issues: the interpretation of the law, the practice of tradition, and the authority of Jesus. As Jesus chose to associate with people that were undesirable, the leaders failed to understand Jesus' mission, often rejecting Jesus' message outright. As we saw in the previous section, the mission of Jesus is explicitly geared towards reclaiming those who are on the margins of society. Jesus constantly reached out to the diseased, crippled, unclean, poor, and sinners of various categories, which he saw as a natural outworking of his mission to "seek and save the lost" (Luke 19:10). The Pharisees' constant disapproval of this message in favor of ritual purity, and their characterization by Luke as "lovers of money" makes them a perfect foil for the message of the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus.

#### *Table Fellowship in Luke*

As noted above, the rich man's conspicuous consumption of food creates one of the starkest contrasts between his lavish lifestyle and the poor condition of Lazarus. The rich man "partied lavishly each day," while Lazarus "longed to satisfy his hunger with what fell from the rich man's table" (Luke 16:19, 21). The proximity of Lazarus to the gate of the rich man's home (Luke 16:20) highlights the rich man's failure to care for his neighbor, who needed his assistance. The location of Lazarus and his longing to eat of the food that fell from the rich man's table implies that the rich man had the ability to care for the poor man's needs.<sup>55</sup> The rich man, however, failed to meet this need by even throwing his scraps outside for Lazarus to eat with the dogs. Moreover, while Lazarus

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<sup>55</sup> See Bernard Brandon Scott, *Hear Then the Parable: A Commentary on the Parables of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 149; Klein, *Lukasevangelium*, 553; and Michael Wolter, *Das Lukasevangelium* (HNT 5; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 559.

may not have expected an invitation to eat at the rich man's table, it was within the rich man's power to make this happen.<sup>56</sup> In this way, the practice of table fellowship becomes important to understanding the parable, particularly in light of the Gospel's depiction of Jesus' practice of table fellowship with the marginalized in society.

Table fellowship is a common theme throughout the Gospel of Luke.<sup>57</sup> In several cases, table fellowship was the cause of conflict between Jesus and his opponents. As we saw above, the first example of this is Jesus' presence at a dinner at Levi's house with a group of tax-collectors and sinners. The fact that Jesus' dining companions were tax collectors and sinners, figures on the margins of society, led to a statement about the purpose of his ministry: "Healthy people do not have need of a doctor but those who are sick do. I have not come to call righteous people, but (to call) sinners to repentance" (Luke 5:31-32). As a result of Jesus' willingness to dine with people of ill repute, he was known as "a glutton and a drunk, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!" (Luke 7:34). That Jesus was a friend of sinners was confirmed when he "entered the house of the Pharisee and sat down to eat," and allowed a notoriously sinful woman to offer him

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<sup>56</sup> While Lazarus may not have expected to be fed, Michael Wolter suggests that Lazarus' desire causes the reader to expect that Lazarus' needs will be met; Wolter, *Lukasevangelium*, 558-559.

<sup>57</sup> See Dennis E. Smith who provides a helpful overview of table fellowship in Luke and its relationship to ancient discussions of the symposium; Dennis E. Smith, "Table Fellowship as a Literary Motif in the Gospel of Luke," *JBL* 106 (1987): 613-83. Smith is not alone in recognizing the relationship of between several meal scenes in Luke and the symposium. For others who make similar arguments on various passages see X de Meeûs, "Composition De *Lc.* Xiv Et Genre Symposiaque," *ETL* 37 (1961): 847-70; J Delobel, "L'Onction Par La Pêcheresse: La Composition De *Lc.* Vii, 36-50," *ETL* 42 (1966): 415-75; and E. Springs Steele, "Luke 11:37-54 - a Modified Hellenistic Symposium?," *JBL* 103 (1984): 379-94. See also Willi Braun who argues that Luke 14:1-24 takes up a "Cynic-like critique of dominant Hellenistic symposiatic patterns" to make its moral point; Willi Braun, "Symposium Or Anti-Symposium? Reflections on Luke 14:1-24," *Toronto Journal of Theology* 8 (1992): 70-84.

hospitality that was not given by his host (Luke 7:36-38).<sup>58</sup> Again, a meal is the scene for Jesus' stinging rebuke of the Pharisees in Luke 11:37-52.

Meals, however, are not always the scene of conflict and rebuke in the Gospel of Luke. In several instances, Jesus was the host of a shared meal. The most dramatic example is the feeding of the 5,000 in Luke 9:10-17. In the context of questions about Jesus' identity,<sup>59</sup> Jesus welcomed the crowds, told them about the kingdom of God, and healed those in need of healing. When the day ended, Jesus responded to the disciples' request to dismiss the crowd by telling them to feed the crowd that had gathered. Despite the disciples' doubt, Jesus "took the five loaves and two fish, looked up toward heaven, and blessed them. Then he broke (them) and began giving (them) to the disciples to give to the crowd" (Luke 9:16). The feeding of the crowd has echoes with two other scenes of Jesus as the host of a meal. In both the Last Supper (Luke 22:7-38) and the meal with the disciples at Emmaus (Luke 24:28-32) Jesus took bread, gave thanks, broke the bread, and gave it to his disciples. In the case of the meal at Emmaus, the meal serves as the moment when Jesus' disciples recognized his true identity (Luke 24:31-32).<sup>60</sup> In this way,

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<sup>58</sup> See discussion above. While ancient understandings of hospitality involved eating a meal, not all meals are necessarily instances of hospitality. David Gowler is probably correct to read the present passage as an example of hospitality; Gowler, *Host*, 223-25. Another example of Jesus accepting hospitality from the marginalized is his interaction with Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10). For a detailed study of the ancient practice of hospitality see Andrew E. Arterbury, *Entertaining Angels: Early Christian Hospitality in Its Mediterranean Setting* (Sheffield, U.K.: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2005),

<sup>59</sup> Nolland notes that questions about Jesus' identity begin in Luke 8:25 as a result of the calming of the sea, are taken up again by Herod in Luke 9:7-9, and are answered by Peter in Luke 9:18-20; Nolland, *Luke 1-9:20*, 439-440, 445.

<sup>60</sup> To this example we might add the next appearance of Jesus to his disciples in which he eats broiled fish as a proof of his bodily resurrection (Luke 24:36-43). Other scenes that have components of sharing a meal include the healing of Peter's mother-in-law (Luke 4:38-39) and Martha's welcoming of Jesus into her home (Luke 10:38-42). Both incidents share words typically associated with meal preparation when in the context of the home: διηκόνη (Luke 4:39) and διακονεῖν (Luke 10:40); see Smith, "Table Fellowship," 622 fn. 31; 633.

Jesus' character was revealed at meals during which he and his opponents disagreed, while his identity was revealed during meals at which he was the host.

In addition to these key meal scenes, Jesus' parabolic teaching also involves meal scenes. Perhaps the most prominent section in Luke's Gospel in this regard is Luke 14 in which two parables are told regarding table fellowship.<sup>61</sup> The scene at Luke 14 has affinities both with Jesus' conflict with the Jewish rulers and the theme of reversal that has been discussed above. On the one hand, Jesus spoke the parables during a meal at the home of "one of the leaders of the Pharisees on a Sabbath day" (Luke 14:1a). The scene of the meal was tense as the Pharisees kept a close eye on Jesus. On the other hand, the first parable, in Luke 14:7-11, is a parable of reversal.<sup>62</sup> In this parable Jesus advocates humility when reclining at the meal, rather than seeking the most honored position and risking demotion when someone "more important than you has been invited" (Luke 14:8).<sup>63</sup> Dinner guests should not seek to honor themselves at a meal "because everyone who exalts himself will be humbled and the one who humbles himself will be exalted" (Luke 14:11).

Most important for our present purpose, however, is Jesus' teaching at Luke 14:12-24.<sup>64</sup> Not only did Jesus advocate humility when dining at a meal, but also

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<sup>61</sup> Other examples of meal scenes in parables include Jesus' parable on watchfulness (Luke 12:35-40) and the parable on the duty of discipleship (Luke 12:7-10). Smith argues that the parable on watchfulness indicates that the Messiah will serve at the eschatological banquet; Smith, "Table Fellowship," 632.

<sup>62</sup> On the nature of Luke 14:7-11 as a parable, see Willi Braun, *Feasting and Social Rhetoric in Luke 14* (SNTSMS 85; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 43-45, 169-171.

<sup>63</sup> See Dennis Smith for a helpful discussion of the parallels between Jesus' parable on table ranking and Plutarch's *The Dinner of the Seven Wise Men* and *Table Talk*; Smith, "Table Fellowship," 617-620.

<sup>64</sup> For a helpful discussion of these verses, see Braun, *Feasting*, 43-68.

humility when inviting guests to a meal. Rather than inviting friends, family, and rich neighbors who would be able to repay the host with a meal themselves, Jesus encouraged his hearers to invite “the poor, crippled, lame, (and) blind” (Luke 14:12-13).<sup>65</sup> The reason for this is that the host at this type of meal “will be repaid at the resurrection of the just” because the guests are unable to offer repayment during this life (Luke 14:14). Jesus’ encouragement to invite those who were not able to repay is countercultural and he illustrated the practice by telling a parable in which a man invited many people to a great meal that he was preparing. When he sent his servant to tell the invited guests that the meal was ready, all of the guests made excuses for their inability to attend the feast.<sup>66</sup> The householder was angry when the servant returned with the news and commanded him, “Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the city, and bring the poor and crippled and blind and lame here” (Luke 14:21). When this had been done and there was still room, the host commanded his servant, “Go out into the roads and paths and force (people) to come in, so that my house might be full” (Luke 14:23). As for those who had initially been invited to the meal, “none of those men who were invited will taste my meal!” (Luke 14:24).

The parable of the Great Banquet illustrates Jesus’ practice of table fellowship with the marginalized in society. Even when he was dining at the home of a religious leader, Jesus welcomed the marginal (e.g., Luke 7:36-50), or advocates for the inclusion

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<sup>65</sup> The similarity of this list to the lists of people to whom Jesus’ ministry was directed in Luke 4:18-19 and 7:22 are obvious. All three lists include the poor and blind. Luke 7:22 also shares the lame with the list in Luke 14:13. The unique categories in each list are the captive and oppressed (Luke 4:18-19), lepers, the mute, and the dead (Luke 7:22), and the crippled (Luke 14:13).

<sup>66</sup> The excuses made by those who refuse the invitation to the banquet (the purchase of a field, the purchase of oxen, a recent marriage) echo the excuses made by those who refuse Jesus’ call to discipleship in Luke 9:59-62 (burial of a dead relative, saying goodbye to family).



of the marginal at meals (e.g., Luke 14:12-24). Jesus' example of eating with those who were not considered socially acceptable by the wealthy and religious leaders functions as the standard for his followers, who were to emulate his welcome of the marginalized in society.<sup>67</sup> Against this background the rich man's refusal to care for Lazarus by inviting him to eat at his table functions as an example of a character who embodies a lifestyle that is antithetical to Jesus' message.<sup>68</sup>

Jesus was intent on reaching the marginalized in society, whether this marginalization was due to economic or social factors. Often this ministry took place during a meal that he shared with those who were unclean or who were unable to return his hospitality. The parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus, directed as it was to the Pharisees, also functions as a critique of the religious leaders who were focused on symbols of status and power at the expense of showing mercy to the outcasts. In this way, the failure of the rich man to offer table fellowship to Lazarus further exemplifies the critique of the religious leaders as those who rejected the aims of Jesus.

### *Postmortem Punishment*

Perhaps the most striking image in the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus is the rich man's torment in Hades: "Now it happened that the poor man died and he was carried away by angels to Abraham's side. Then the rich man also died and was buried. In Hades, when he looked up, being in torment, he saw Abraham from a distance and Lazarus at his side" (Luke 16:22-23). It is also the most obvious connection between the

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<sup>67</sup> See also Braun, *Feasting*, 177-180.

<sup>68</sup> Wolter argues that the scene of Lazarus in Abraham's bosom is a symbol of his honored position at an eschatological banquet; see Wolter, *Lukasevangelium*, 560. If this is the case, the failure of the rich man to invite Lazarus to his table stands in stark contrast to Abraham's welcome of Lazarus at his table.

parable and the journey the place of punishment. Many scholars view this reversal of fortune from a life of luxury to an afterlife of agony as the primary message of the parable.<sup>69</sup> In this way, the possibility of postmortem punishment is important for interpreting the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus. The parable is not, however, the first, or only, indication of the possibility of postmortem punishment in the Gospel of Luke. From the outset of the narrative the threat of fiery judgment is a key element in the preaching of John the Baptist. He called out to those approaching him, “Offspring of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Therefore, produce fruit worthy of repentance . . . . The ax, in fact, is already laid at the root of the trees. Thus, every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire” (Luke 3:7-9).<sup>70</sup> Moreover, John anticipated that the one to come after him would carry out this judgment, “I baptize you with water, but one more powerful than me is coming . . . . He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand to clean up his threshing floor and gather together the wheat into his storehouse; but he will burn the chaff in unquenchable fire” (Luke 3:16-17).

Jesus himself continued John’s message by warning those who rejected him about their impending judgment. First, when Jesus commissioned a large group of his disciples to prepare the way before him by telling people that “the kingdom of God has come near,” he offered a warning to those who would not welcome those he sent. He says that on the day of judgment “it will be more tolerable for Sodom” than for the city the rejects the

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<sup>69</sup> See Chapter Two for a discussion of those who hold this position.

<sup>70</sup> Culpepper writes, “If John’s preaching is part of the preparation for Jesus’ ministry, Luke could hardly have found a more disturbing introduction than John’s address to the crowds”; Culpepper, *Luke*, 83. John’s warning against the assumption of blessing based on Abrahamic lineage will be discussed below.

disciples' message (Luke 10:12).<sup>71</sup> Woes were pronounced on specific cities like Chorazin and Bethsaida because even cities like Tyre and Sidon would have repented at the miracles that were performed there. Capernaum received perhaps the sharpest criticism when Jesus announced, "Capernaum, will you really be elevated to heaven? (No!) You will go down to Hades!" (Luke 10:15). Instead, these cities should be like Nineveh, which repented at the preaching of Jonah. As a result, "the men of Nineveh will come back to life with this generation at the judgment and will condemn it" (Luke 11:32). The importance of repentance is repeated when Jesus answered the crowd's questions about the tragedies in Galilee and Siloam. He told those listening to him that the people who died were not "worse sinners" or "worse offenders" because of their demise (Luke 13:2, 4). Indeed, all those who fail to repent will likewise perish (Luke 13:3, 5). Because of this threat of judgment, Jesus told those around them, "Do not shy away from those who kill the body and afterwards cannot do anything more. I will show you whom to fear: Fear the one who, after killing, has authority to throw (you) into Gehenna. Yes, I tell you, fear this one!" (Luke 12:4-5). This threat of being thrown into γέεννα (or, alternately, ᾠδης) became a common theme in these pronouncements. What, then, was required to avoid this fate?

In John's preaching, he advocated the production of "fruit worthy of repentance" (Luke 3:8). When the crowds asked him what they should do, he responded by telling them to share their possessions. He also told tax collectors and soldiers not to extort

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<sup>71</sup> Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke* (SP 3; Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1991), 168.

money from people, but to be content with their pay (Luke 3:11-14).<sup>72</sup> In Jesus' preaching, he warned against the rejection of his message in cities in which he had performed many miracles. As we have seen above, this message was defined by his care for the marginalized, which is expressed programmatically in Luke 4:18-19 (cf. Luke 7:22). In this way, both John's and Jesus' warnings have an ethical focus on caring for the marginalized. For John the Baptist, the demand for repentance, illustrated by certain deeds, was not directed just to the crowds in general, but also to tax collectors and soldiers, which is important for two reasons. First, John's preaching was a prelude to Jesus' message of repentance offered to those who were despised in society. Second, John's preaching was focused on fair treatment of the oppressed by those in power. In the case of Jesus' preaching, his denunciation of certain cities was based on their failure to recognize the significance of the miracles that he performed in them. Since Jesus' miraculous work in the Gospel of Luke involved the healing of paralytics, lepers, the demon possessed, the sick, the blind, and the raising of the dead (cf. Luke 4:18-19; 7:22), a rejection of Jesus' miraculous work is a rejection of his mission. Therefore, those who reject Jesus' miraculous work in the fulfillment of his mission to care for the marginalized ran the risk of postmortem punishment. In this way, the rich man's torment in ᾗδης is no surprise in the narrative of the Gospel.

### *Children of Abraham*

When the rich man found himself in torment in Hades after his death, he lifted his eyes and saw both Abraham and Lazarus. His first instinct was to call out to Abraham,

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<sup>72</sup> It is likely that these two groups are related to one another, with the soldiers providing protection to the tax collectors; see Bock, *Luke 1:1-9:50*, 313.

“Father Abraham! Take pity on me and send Lazarus so that he can wet the tip of his finger with water and cool my tongue, since I am in anguish in these flames” (Luke 16:24). As many scholars have noted, the rich man is here appealing to his status as a “child of Abraham” for aid in his torment.<sup>73</sup> Abraham’s reply confirms the rich man’s appeal to his relational status, but denies the benefits sought by the rich man: On the one hand, Abraham calls the rich man “child”; on the other hand, the rich man’s lineage cannot alter his fate or alleviate his distress in Hades (Luke 16:25-26).<sup>74</sup> The issue raised here is the benefit of Abrahamic descent.<sup>75</sup> It is clear in the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus that Abrahamic descent does not have value for alleviating one’s postmortem punishment.

The scene in Hades does not raise a new question in the narrative, but revisits a question that was raised at the beginning of the Gospel. Just as the issue of postmortem punishment found expression in the preaching of John the Baptist, so also the value of Abrahamic descent is addressed. As noted above, John exhorted those who came to him to “produce fruit worthy of repentance” in order to “flee from the coming wrath” (Luke 3:7-8). The focus on outward manifestations of repentance is explicitly contrasted with trust in Abrahamic ancestry. John says, “Therefore, produce fruit worthy of repentance and do not begin to say among yourselves, ‘We have a father—Abraham.’ For I tell you,

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<sup>73</sup> In addition to the works cited in Chapter Two, see, for example, Marshall, *Luke*, 637; Fitzmyer, *Luke X-XXIV*, 1133; Culpepper, *Luke*, 317, and Bock, *Luke 9:51-24:53*, 1370-71.

<sup>74</sup> Joseph Fitzmyer writes, “Abraham addresses him as *teknon*, acknowledging indeed the rich man’s kinship, but not his right to a share in Abraham’s merits; Fitzmyer, *Luke X-XXIV*, 1133. Given John the Baptist’s warning noted above, Green calls the rich man’s request “as ironic as it is presumptuous”; Green, *Luke*, 608.

<sup>75</sup> On the importance of the Abrahamic Covenant in the Gospel of Luke see Nils A. Dahl, *Jesus in the Memory of the Early Church* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1976), 66-86.

God is able to raise up children for Abraham from these stones” (Luke 3:8-9). The implication is clear, despite a tradition that assumed protection from divine wrath, bloodline will not offer shelter on the day of Lord.<sup>76</sup> Instead, a person must reorient his or her life around the purposes of God. In the immediate context such a reorientation entails the sharing of possessions, avoiding extortion, and contentment with pay (Luke 3:10-14). In the larger context, one must embrace the purpose of God as seen in the ministry of Jesus to the marginalized (Luke 4:18-19; 7:22).

Against this background a character like Zacchaeus, the chief tax collector, exemplifies the behavior of a true child of Abraham.<sup>77</sup> Just as John the Baptist exhorted the crowds, “The one who has two shirts should share with the one who does not have (one), and the one who has food should do the same,” Zacchaeus declared, “Half my belongings, Lord, I am giving to the poor!” (Luke 3:11; cf. 19:8). And just as John the Baptist charged the tax collectors not to extort others (μηδένα διασεΐσητε μηδὲ συκοφαντήσητε), so also Zacchaeus offered to make restitution if he had extorted money from others (εἴ τινός τι ἐσυκοφάνησα ἀποδίδωμι τετραπλοῦν ἀποδίδωμι τετραπλοῦν; Luke 3:14; cf. 19:8). Jesus’ declaration following Zacchaeus’ promise not only confirms the penitent’s status (“Today, salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of

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<sup>76</sup> Bock writes, “[Abrahamic] heritage was thought to bring protection from God since judgment comes on the nations, not on the people of Abraham”; Bock, *Luke 1:1-9:50*, 305. See also Turid Karlsen Seim for a discussion of the nature of the children of Abraham in Luke and Acts; Turid Karlsen Seim, “Abraham, Ancestor or Archetype? A Comparison of Abraham Language in 4 Maccabees and Luke-Acts,” in *Antiquity and Humanity: Essays on Ancient Religion and Philosophy: Presented to Hans Dieter Betz on His 70th Birthday* (ed. Adela Yarbro Collins and Margaret M. Mitchell; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), 27-42.

<sup>77</sup> On the importance of Zacchaeus’ actions as a sign of his standing as a child of Abraham see Mikeal C. Parsons, *Body and Character in Luke and Acts: The Subversion of Physiognomy in Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2006), 82.

Abraham!”), but also associates the tax collector with the mission of Jesus (“Indeed, the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost; Luke 19:9-10; cf. 5:32).

The theme of the identity of the true children of Abraham in the Gospel of Luke is important for reading the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus. Most importantly, the redefinition of the true children of Abraham in the Gospel dovetails with the demand for obedience to the Law and Prophets at the conclusion to the parable. As we have seen above, true children of Abraham are not those who are physically descended from Abraham, but those who identify with the ministry of Jesus to the marginalized. The parable is clear that the rich man did not meet this criteria and that his physical descent is not enough to rescue him from the torment that he experienced in the afterlife.

### *The Raising of the Dead*

After the rich man’s request for relief was rejected by Abraham, he turned his attention to the well-being of his family and asked Abraham to send Lazarus to warn his brothers about his fate, “I ask you then, Father, that you send him to my father’s house—for I have five brothers—so that he might alert them in order that they too will not come to this place of torment” (Luke 16:27-28). Abraham rejected the request, by pointing to the witness of Moses and the Prophets that was already available.<sup>78</sup> The rich man was desperate and replied, “No, Father Abraham! But if someone from the dead goes to them, then they will repent” (Luke 16:30). Abraham, still not convinced, referred to Moses and the Prophets again and said, “If they do not pay attention to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead!” (Luke 16:27-31).

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<sup>78</sup> The importance of the law and prophets in the Gospel of Luke and the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus will be discussed in more detail in the next section below.

Much of the scholarly discussion of these verses has focused on the verb ἀνίστημι, used in the phrase “if someone rises from the dead,” and the use of this verb in reference to Jesus’ resurrection.<sup>79</sup> The consensus is that Abraham’s reply in Luke 16:31 is a reference to the resurrection of Jesus, albeit a reference after the event. Darrell Bock’s statement is representative, “Abraham’s comment clearly alludes to Jesus’ approaching resurrection. Literarily, this makes Abraham testify to Jesus’ approaching work, though that would only become clear after the fact.”<sup>80</sup> In what follows I will critique this consensus along two lines. First, the scholarly consensus that Abraham makes a “clear reference” to Jesus’ resurrection is based on the use of ἀνίστημι in Lukan contexts that refer clearly to Jesus’ resurrection.<sup>81</sup> While it is true that Luke uses the verb in reference to Jesus’ resurrection in the Gospel, the scholarly consensus does not adequately take into account of other uses of the verb ἀνίστημι in the Gospel, or the topic of resurrection of the dead in general in the Gospel. With a fuller view of the use of ἀνίστημι, it will become apparent that a “clear” reference to Jesus’ resurrection at Luke 16:31 is assumed, not unambiguous. Second, I will address the lack of scholarly discussion of the journey to the place of punishment in Greco-Roman, Jewish, and Christian texts in relation to the request for a messenger from beyond the grave. A more complete understanding of

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<sup>79</sup> See Chapter Two for a discussion of John Dominic Crossan’s view of the use of ἀνίστημι in Luke.

<sup>80</sup> Bock, *Luke 9:51-24:53*, 1377.

<sup>81</sup> Bock’s work is again representative as he correctly notes the use of ἀνίστημι in reference to Jesus’ resurrection in Luke and Acts, as well as the use of the cognate noun ἀνάστασις in reference to Jesus’ resurrection in Acts; Bock, *Luke 9:51-24:53*, 1377. The use of ἀνάστασις in the Gospel of Luke will not affect the argument of this section. The noun is used six times in the Gospel, four of which are found in Jesus’ dispute with the Sadducees about marriage and “those who are found worthy to experience that age and the resurrection of the dead” (Luke 20:35; cf. 20:27, 33, 36). The other two uses of the noun occur in Simeon’s prophecy that Jesus “is destined to lead to the fall and rise of many in Israel” (Luke 2:34), and in Jesus’ promise that those who invite the poor, crippled, lame, and blind to meals “will be repaid . . . at the resurrection of the just” (Luke 14:14).



Luke's use of ἀνίστημι in the Gospel, coupled with an awareness of the theme of the journey to the place of punishment, will call into question the conclusion that Abraham is "literarily" testifying "to Jesus' approaching work."

The word ἀνίστημι is used in the Gospel of Luke 27 times. These occurrences can be divided into two broad categories, non-resurrection and resurrection, the second of which can be further divided into three sections.<sup>82</sup> The most common use of the verb is found in non-resurrection contexts, and simply refers to a person standing up, or getting up. For example, at Luke 1:39 Mary "got up and went" (ἀναστᾶσα . . . ἐπορεύθη) to visit Elizabeth. Later in the narrative a lawyer "stood up" (ἀνέστη) in order to test Jesus with a question (Luke 10:25). Most of the occurrences in this category are similarly mundane, and need not be discussed here.<sup>83</sup>

As indicated above, however, the word ἀνίστημι is used in contexts that clearly refer to the resurrection of the dead. For example, Jesus himself uses the verb to refer to his impending suffering, death, and resurrection. He says, "Indeed, [the Son of Man] will be handed over to the Gentiles and will be ridiculed, mistreated, and spit on. After they have whipped him, they will kill him; and on the third day he will rise again (καὶ τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τῇ τρίτῃ ἀναστήσεται)" (Luke 18:32-33). The men at the tomb echo these words

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<sup>82</sup> In anticipation of the discussion in this section, the division of Luke's use of ἀνίστημι is as follows: Non-resurrection contexts (Luke 1:39; 4:16, 29, 38-39; 5:25; 5:28; 6:8; 10:25; 11:7-8; 15:18, 20; 17:19; 22:45-46; 23:1; 24:12, 33); Reference to the resurrection of Jesus (Luke 18:33; 24:7, 46); Reference to the resurrection at the day of judgment (Luke 11:32); and Reference to the resurrection of the dead in a more general sense, not counting Luke 16:31, (Luke 8:55; 9:8, 19).

<sup>83</sup> Perhaps a word of caution is important here in light of the fact that ἀνίστημι is used, as we will see, in the context of raising the dead. There are several incidents in which the word is used in the context of miraculous healing. For example, when Jesus heals Peter's mother in law, Luke says that Jesus "got up" (ἀναστᾶς) and entered Simon's house. After rebuking the fever, the woman "got up" (ἀναστᾶσα) and began to serve those present (Luke 4:38-39). While it may be tempting to give the verb significance in this context, reading it as an indication that Peter's mother in law was dead at this point, caution is in order. It is not clear in the context of the passage that Peter's mother in law was dead. As we will see, the death of the person raised to life is stressed in clear instances of Jesus raising a person from the dead.

following Jesus' resurrection, "Remember how he told you while he was still in Galilee, saying that the Son of Man must be handed over into the hands of sinful men, be crucified, and on the third day rise again (καὶ τῇ τρίτῃ ἡμέρᾳ ἀναστῆναι)" (Luke 24:7). Finally, Jesus himself reminds his disciples of the necessity of the Messiah's suffering and resurrection, "Thus it was written, that the Christ would suffer [and] rise from the dead on the third day (παθεῖν τὸν χριστὸν καὶ ἀναστῆναι ἐκ νεκρῶν τῇ τρίτῃ ἡμέρᾳ)" (Luke 24:46). The verb ἀνίστημι is clearly used to refer to Jesus' resurrection in each of these instances because of the reference to his death by crucifixion.

It is important to recognize, however, that ἀνίστημι is not used to refer *only* to Jesus' resurrection. Indeed, in the majority of contexts in which ἀνίστημι is used to refer to the resurrection of the dead, Jesus is not the referent. In the first place, ἀνίστημι is used one time to refer to the resurrection at the day of judgment. As noted above, when Jesus utters woes against the cities that reject his message he says, "The men of Nineveh will come back to life (ἀναστήσονται) with this generation at the judgment and will condemn it" (Luke 11:32). Secondly, if we do not count the use of ἀνίστημι at Luke 16:31, the verb is used to refer to the resurrection of people who had died, other than Jesus, three times. Two of these references are related to the question of Jesus' identity and will be discussed here. The question is first raised by Herod's uncertainty about who Jesus was, and the rumors that were swirling about his true identity. The three options listed are that John the Baptist had risen from the dead, that Elijah had returned, or "that some ancient prophet had risen (προφήτης τις τῶν ἀρχαίων ἀνέστη)" (Luke 9:7-8). When Jesus himself asked the disciples about his identity, they repeated these three possibilities (Luke 9:19).

The brief survey of ἀνίστημι in the Gospel of Luke reveals that the use of the verb can be divided into two broad categories. In the first category, the resurrection of the dead is not an issue. The verb is used simply to refer to a person standing up. The second category, however, is related to the resurrection of the dead and can be further divided into three sections. First, ἀνίστημι is clearly used with reference to Jesus' resurrection.<sup>84</sup> Second, the verb is used once with reference to the resurrection that will occur at the day of judgment. Finally, ἀνίστημι is used to refer, in a more general way, to the resurrection of a dead person. In summary, ἀνίστημι is primarily used by Luke simply to refer to someone rising or standing. It also occurs in contexts referring to the resurrection of the dead. The majority of these occurrences, however, are in reference to a person other than Jesus. This evidence calls into question any "obvious" reference to Jesus' resurrection in Luke 16:31. Instead, the evidence shows that, contrary to the scholarly consensus, ἀνίστημι is *a* word, not *the* word, used for the resurrection of the dead in general, or the resurrection of Jesus in particular.<sup>85</sup> Thus, not all occurrences of ἀνίστημι refer to Jesus' resurrection, which calls into question Bock's comment noted above that Abraham's declaration in Luke 16:31 "clearly alludes to Jesus' approaching resurrection" and that "Literarily, this makes Abraham testify to Jesus' approaching work." In light of the above analysis of the verb ἀνίστημι, Abraham may be referring to something other than Jesus' resurrection in his declaration at the end of the parable.

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<sup>84</sup> Luke uses ἀνίστημι in this way three times in the Gospel: Luke.

<sup>85</sup> It should also be noted that the other word used to refer to the resurrection of the dead in the Gospel of Luke is the verb ἐγείρω. Importantly, the meaning of ἐγείρω in the Gospel of Luke mirrors that of ἀνίστημι. The division of Luke's use of ἐγείρω is as follows: Non-resurrection contexts (Luke 1:69; 3:8; 5:23-24; 6:8; 7:16; 11:8; 13:25; 21:10); Reference to the resurrection of Jesus (Luke 9:22; 24:6, 34); Reference to the resurrection at the day of judgment (Luke 11:31; 20:37); and Reference to the resurrection of the dead in a more general sense (Luke 7:14, 22; 8:54; 9:7).

It is at this point that the tradition of the journey to the place of the punishment found in Greco-Roman, Jewish, and Christian texts is helpful. As we have seen in Chapters Three and Four, the journey to the place of punishment was an important theme in Greco-Roman, Jewish, and Christian literature. The stories of the descents of gods and heroes made the theme a part of the cultural landscape in the Greco-Roman world as they were repeated as part of the liturgy in popular religion. Influential texts like Homer's *Odyssey* and Virgil's *Aeneid* ensured that those in the Greco-Roman world were aware of the descent of the heroes to the underworld in search of oracular advice. Works by Plato and Plutarch that told of the journey of a dead person to the place of punishment and that person's return to the land of the living would have served as examples of the use of the theme for rhetorical purposes. The nature of the underworld would have been clear to those familiar with the Jewish Scriptures and other Jewish writings. *Šē'ōl* as the dwelling place of the dead, *γέεννα* as the place of punishment, and journeys to the place of punishment would have been known from the Hebrew Bible and Pseudepigrapha. Christian texts confirm the importance of the place of punishment in this tradition, and later Christian texts continue the interest in the fate of the wicked dead in the place of punishment.

It is also this background that informs a reading of the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus. To be sure, the parable is not descent in a strict sense in light of the documents discussed in Chapters Three and Four, but the theme is in the background.<sup>86</sup> The location of the parable in *ᾗδης* clearly refers to the place of the dead in the ancient world. The *ᾗδης* of the parable is not, however, the simple dark world populated by

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<sup>86</sup> As noted in Chapter One, the parable is certainly more “catabatic,” rather than a “catabasis.”

shadowy spirits that we read about in the Hebrew Bible. It is a fiery place where the dead are punished, which is similar to depictions of the place of punishment in Greco-Roman literature, the Pseudepigrapha, and other Christian texts. Like some of the notorious criminals in the tradition of the place of punishment, the rich man finds himself in torment, unable to bring himself relief. The proximity of a place of blessedness to the place of punishment is also similar to depictions of the underworld in ancient literature. Aeneas, for example, must pass by the place of punishment to reach the Elysian fields, Thespesius saw places of “bacchic revelry” in his tour of the otherworld, Enoch saw paradise on the same level of heaven as the place of punishment, and Peter travelled a short distance to the north from paradise to see the place of punishment.

Most importantly, however, the questions raised in journeys to the place of punishment are raised in the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus. In the first place, the journey to the place of punishment in Jewish and Christian literature is primarily concerned with the fate of the dead. When the wicked dead are discussed, the question about the possibility of postmortem repentance or relief from suffering is at the forefront. As we saw in Chapter Four, two streams of thought developed in the tradition. On the one hand, in documents like *1 Enoch*, *2 Enoch*, and *4 Ezra*, the possibility of repentance after death is emphatically denied. On the other hand, some texts, like the *Apocalypse of Zephaniah*, *Testament of Abraham*, *Apocalypse of Peter*, and *Apocalypse of Paul*, offer hope of repentance for the wicked dead, or at the very least, alleviation of suffering. It is precisely this for which the rich man asks in Luke 16:24, when he requests a drop of water from Lazarus’ finger. The response by Abraham places Luke squarely in the

stream of tradition that denies hope for the wicked dead. For Luke, death seals the fate of humans, and the rich man has no hope of mercy.

In the second place, the rich man's request after this denial of compassion by Abraham echoes the Greco-Roman tradition of descent to the place of punishment. Two issues are the most important. First, the overall pattern in the Greco-Roman stories involving heroes is the search for oracular advice: Odysseus travelled to ἔδης in order to obtain information necessary for his journey home; Aeneas went to the underworld to receive a proleptic vision of both the greatness of the Roman empire and the demands placed upon its citizens. In the case of humans who died and journeyed the place of punishment, the result was a revelatory message that functioned as a conversion narrative.

The rich man's request in Luke 16:27-31 reflects this tradition, and it is against the background of this tradition and the meaning of ἀνίστημι in the Gospel of Luke that we can understand the rich man's request. The rich man's request that his family be warned of their impending doom was a request Abraham would send Lazarus (πέμψης αὐτὸν) to his father's house as the messenger.<sup>87</sup> When Abraham denied this second request because the brothers already had "Moses and the Prophets" (Luke 16:29), the rich man again pleaded his case, saying, "No, Father Abraham! But if someone goes from the dead to them (ἐάν τις ἀπὸ νεκρῶν πορευθῇ πρὸς αὐτοὺς), then they will repent" (Luke 16:30).<sup>88</sup> It is only after these requests that Abraham states that the brothers would not be persuaded "even if someone rises from the dead!" (οὐδ' ἐάν τις ἐκ νεκρῶν ἀναστῇ

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<sup>87</sup> See Chapter Two for Joachim Jeremias' argument that Lazarus's role in the parable ends with the reversal of fortune and that the rich man and his family come to the fore. Vincent Tanghe argues, contra Jeremias, that Lazarus has a distinct role throughout the parable. In this section, Lazarus' potential "mission" to warn the rich man's brothers is pronounced; Vincent Tanghe, "Abraham, son Fils et son Envoyé (Luc 16, 19-31)," *RB* 91 (1984): 570-572.

<sup>88</sup> Author's translation.

πεισθήσονται; Luke 16:31). If this denial is understood in light of the first two requests, the focus in the parable does not appear to be on the resurrection of Jesus. Rather, the focus in the parable is on the return of a messenger with an authoritative account of the place of punishment. In this reading, the meaning of ἀνίστημι is determined by the request of the rich man for Abraham to send Lazarus (πέμψης αὐτόν) and the rich man's certainty that someone “goes from the dead” (ἀπὸ νεκρῶν πορευθῆ) to the brothers will be persuasive. In light of the Greco-Roman tradition of the journey to the place of punishment, he is justified. Indeed, the return from the journey was the rule that is confirmed by the exceptions to it. Given the ubiquitous nature of the story in Greco-Roman tradition, it is likely that the audience of Luke's Gospel would have had the same expectations as the rich man.<sup>89</sup> The violation of the cultural assumption, then, is important for interpreting the message of the parable.<sup>90</sup> It is to this that we now turn.

### *The Importance of the Law and Prophets*

Abraham's refusal of the rich man's request is explicitly linked to the Law and the Prophets. The importance of the Law and Prophets in the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus can be seen on two counts. First, the parable is introduced with Jesus' saying, “The Law and the Prophets (testified) until John. Since then, the kingdom of God has been preached and everyone is using violence against it. It is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one stroke of the Law to fail” (Luke 16:16-17). The importance of

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<sup>89</sup> This is not to say that the audience of the Gospel of Luke may not also have thought ultimately of the resurrection of Jesus. In this way, the dialogue at the end of the parable may function on multiple levels. On one level, the parable operates within the cultural expectations associated with the journey to the place of punishment. On another level, the parable operates in the overall Christian Narrative of Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection. See also George, “La parabole,” 88.

<sup>90</sup> See also Richard Bauckham, “The Rich Man and Lazarus: The Parable and the Parallels,” *NTS* 37 (1991): 244-245.

the Law and prophets is again evident at the end of parable when the rich man's request that someone be sent from the dead to warn his family is rejected twice for the same reason: "They have Moses and the Prophets. Let them pay attention to them!" (Luke 16:29; cf. 16:31). In this way the importance of the Law and the Prophets form a bookend to the parable and highlight the need to obey the Law and prophets in order to avoid the rich man's fate. In this way, obedience to the Law and Prophets is more authoritative than a message about postmortem suffering from someone who has received a vision from beyond the grave.

Throughout the Gospel of Luke the Law and Prophets are held in high regard. For example, the descriptions of the parents of both John the Baptist and Jesus highlight their obedience of the law. In the first case, Zechariah and Elizabeth are introduced in such a way that their priestly lineage and obedience to Torah are in focus: Zechariah was a priest "from the priestly division of Abijah," and Elizabeth was "from the daughters of Aaron" (Luke 1:5). Moreover, "both were righteous before God, and lived in conformity with all the commands and decrees of the Lord; (they were) blameless" (Luke 1:6). Such an introduction is meant to highlight the honor of the characters.<sup>91</sup> The Law observance of Zechariah and Elizabeth is seen when John is born and they have him circumcised on the eighth day (Luke 1:57).

Jesus' parents, as well, are examples of Law observance at the beginning of the narrative as can be seen in Luke 2:21-24. Just as John the Baptist had been circumcised and named on the eighth day, so also was Jesus. Luke also reports that Mary and Joseph brought the child to Jerusalem in order to offer sacrifice. The significance of these events

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<sup>91</sup> See Green, *Luke*, 65; Culpepper, *Luke*, 45.



is indicated by Luke when he writes that they were explicitly performed in accordance with the “Law of the Lord” (Luke 2:23-24). Moreover, when Mary and Joseph brought Jesus into the temple precincts, they did so “in order that they might do in regard to him according to what is customary from the Law” (Luke 2:27). In all of this, Mary and Joseph are characterized as “pious, law-abiding Jews.”<sup>92</sup> The theme of Law observance continues when Luke writes that the family’s custom was to attend the Passover feast in Jerusalem every year (Luke 2:41-42). Charles Talbert argues that this description of the family in Luke 2:21-52 presents them as “a family for whom obedience was an unargued assumption of life.”<sup>93</sup> In this way, the importance of the Law is firmly established at the beginning of the narrative.

The remainder of the narrative confirms the importance of law observance, but Jesus consistently redefined what it meant to obey the Law. On the one hand, Jesus affirmed the traditional practice of the Law when he healed lepers and encouraged the one restored to offer proper sacrifices for the cleansing (Luke 5:12-14; 17:11-19).<sup>94</sup> On the other hand, there is no record of Jesus himself offering sacrifices for cleansing when he has made himself unclean by coming in contact with a leper, a dead body (Luke 7:14; 8:54-55), or a woman with uncontrollable bleeding (Luke 8:42b-48). Moreover, Jesus’ interpretation of the Law, and particularly his attendant refusal to follow the traditions of the Jewish leaders, led to many confrontations with the religious leaders, who are characterized as a group opposed to the work of the prophets (see Luke 11:47-48).

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<sup>92</sup> Bock, *Luke 1:1-9:50*, 235.

<sup>93</sup> Talbert, *Reading Luke*, 38.

<sup>94</sup> On the ritual to be performed see Culpepper, *Luke*, 119.

Jesus' mission, however, was united with both the Law and the Prophets in an important way that affects reading the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus. In the first place, as we saw above, Jesus' ministry was explicitly an outworking of the prophetic message found in Isaiah 61, which led to much of the controversy in the Gospel. Jesus offered hope to the poor, imprisoned, blind, oppressed, lame, leprous, deaf, and dead (see Luke 4:16-18; 7:22). This ministry to the marginal and those in need found expression in his encounter with a lawyer in Luke 10:25-29. In response to the man's question, "Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus turned the man's focus to the Law, "What has been written in the Law?" (Luke 10:25-26). The lawyer's response that the love of God and neighbor are the key was met with approval by Jesus. The question then turned to the identity of the neighbor, which is illustrated by the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-37). In the end, the proper outworking of love for God and neighbor is to have mercy on those in need (Luke 10:36-37).<sup>95</sup> The conclusion of the parable of the Good Samaritan echoes the purpose of the ministry of Jesus and unites his ministry with both the Law and Prophets.

In this light, the rich man's failure to care for Lazarus at his gate is a failure to obey the Law and Prophets as exemplified by Jesus' ministry. In particular, the rich man has failed to use his resources in order to care for the marginalized and has, thus, disassociated himself from the ministry of Jesus. The failure of proper use of wealth is a theme that ties Luke 16 together and a look at the context will aid our interpretation of the parable.

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<sup>95</sup> It is interesting that Jesus does not directly answer the lawyer's question by identifying the neighbor in an objective sense (i.e., whom should a person love), but in a subjective sense (i.e., how should a person love).

Charles Talbert treats Luke 16:14-31 as a unit, calling it “an attack on the Pharisaic assumptions about wealth . . . organized into a two-pronged group of sayings (vv. 14-18), followed by a double edged parable (vv. 19-31).”<sup>96</sup> The parable itself functions as an exposition of Luke 16:14-18.<sup>97</sup> Thus, the first part of the parable (Luke 16:19-26) is a comment on the Pharisees’ love of wealth (Luke 16:14-15); while the second part of the parable (Luke 16:27-31) is a comment on the continuing validity of the Law and the Prophets (Luke 16:16-18).<sup>98</sup> Read in this way, the parable is told for at least two reasons: (1) to provide further evidence of the argument proposed by Jesus in Luke 16:14-18; and (2) to confront the audience, against the background of the journey to the place of punishment, with the impending doom in the afterlife that awaits those who fail to obey the Law and the Prophets. In this way the παραβολή of Luke 16:19-31 corresponds to Jesus’ words in Luke 16:14-18 in much the same way that the μῦθος corresponds to the λόγος in the journeys to the place of punishment in Plato and Plutarch. As noted in Chapter Three, the function of μῦθος as proof of λόγος is made explicit in Plutarch’s *Sera numinis vindicta* and *De genio Socratis*. Moreover, Aristotle identifies the parable as a means of proof in a similar manner:

It remains to speak of the proofs common to all branches of rhetoric . . . . These common proofs are of two kinds, example and enthymeme . . . . There are two kinds of examples; namely, one which consists in relating things that have happened before, and another in inventing them oneself. The latter are subdivided

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<sup>96</sup> Talbert, *Reading Luke*, 185.

<sup>97</sup> Talbert, *Reading Luke*, 185, following E. Earle Ellis, *The Gospel of Luke* (Revised ed.; Greenwood, S.C.: Attic Press, 1974), 201.

<sup>98</sup> Luke 16:18 is a notoriously awkward saying in this section. Heidi J. Hornik and Mikeal C. Parsons suggest that there was a financial motive behind the desire to divorce and remarry; Heidi J. Hornik, and Mikeal C. Parsons, *Illuminating Luke: The Public Ministry of Christ in Italian Renaissance and Baroque Painting* (New York: T&T Clark, 2005), 104, note 15; see also John Nolland, *Luke 9:21-18:34* (WBC 35B; Nashville, Tenn.: Thomas Nelson, 1993), 821-22.

into comparisons (παραβολή) or fables, such as those of Aesop and the Libyan. (*Rhet.* 2.20.1-3)

Thus, the use of παραβολή as proof of the argument advanced in Luke 16:14-18 is consistent with established rhetorical practices.

How, then, does this affect the interpretation of the parable of the rich man and Lazarus? In order answer this question, we must first determine Jesus' argument (λόγος) of Luke 16:14-18, which is comprised of two groups of sayings. In the first group, Luke 16:14-15, the themes are (1) wealth is not necessarily a sign of righteousness; and (2) God regards those who are proud as abominations.<sup>99</sup> Because of their love of money, the Pharisees have illustrated their lack of spiritual insight, which is manifested in their disregard for the Law and the Prophets. What significance are the Law and the Prophets in Luke 16:16? In light of the overall theme of the chapter (i.e., the use and misuse of wealth), the juxtaposition of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16:19-31, and the discussion above about the relationship of the Law and Prophets to the ministry of Jesus, the importance of the Law and the Prophets in this context is their demand to care for the poor.<sup>100</sup> Far from superseding the demands of the Law and the Prophets, the preaching of the Kingdom intensifies their demand, and provides an "interpretive lens through which the scriptures of Israel are to be read."<sup>101</sup>

The λόγος of Luke 16:14-18 is the enduring demand of the Law, manifest in the present context as the demand to care for the poor. The parable of the rich man and Lazarus serves to strengthen this argument in two ways: (1) by highlighting the

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<sup>99</sup> Talbert, *Reading Luke*, 186-87.

<sup>100</sup> See also Talbert, *Reading Luke*, 187.

<sup>101</sup> Longenecker, *Remember the Poor*, 335.

eschatological significance of obedience to the demand of the Law and the Prophets; and (2) by confirming the continuing, self-sufficient demand of the Law and the Prophets. Each of these two points stand in stark relief against the background of the journey to the place of punishment. In the first place, the parable of the rich man and Lazarus narrates the torment of the rich man following his death. As we have seen above, Luke's account stands in the tradition that there is no relief for the wicked dead. Unlike, those punished in *Apocalypse of Peter*, for example, there is no relief for suffering. In the second place, the parable highlights the continuing, self-sufficient demand of the Law and the Prophets because they do not require the support of an otherworldly messenger. As we have seen above, Abraham's refusal to send Lazarus back to warn the rich man's brothers violates a central theme in the journey to the place of punishment in Greco-Roman literature. In this way, the focus of the parable is on obedience to the Law and Prophets, particularly in their demand for care of the poor.

### *Summary*

The parable of the rich man and Lazarus is an integral part of the Gospel of Luke as seen by the seven themes of the parable that tie it to the narrative context. In the first place, the parable is addressed specifically to the Pharisees. Throughout the Gospel of Luke the Pharisees misunderstand and reject the ministry of Jesus. This is particularly the case in terms of Jesus' ministry to the marginalized. As we saw above, the programmatic statement for Jesus' ministry is found in Luke 4:18-19 where he says

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,  
because he has anointed me.  
He has sent me to announce good news to the poor,  
to proclaim release to the prisoners  
and gaining of sight to the blind,

to set the oppressed free,  
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

Throughout the Gospel Jesus' fulfillment of this mission is seen in his interaction with those who are marginalized by society, whether they are economically or socially shunned. On the one hand, Jesus is clear that those with wealth have the responsibility to care for the poor who are hungry and naked. On the other hand, Jesus spent his time with "tax-collectors and sinners," drawing the ire of the religious leaders, especially in his scandalous table fellowship with the unclean. From the beginning of the narrative, beginning with the ministry of John the Baptist, the emphasis in the Gospel is on behaving in a way that is indicative of repentance, followed by deeds of righteousness. Abrahamic lineage is not enough to secure God's favor. In this way, the threat of postmortem punishment is real for those who reject God's emissary. The focus on deeds of righteousness finds its ultimate expression in obedience to the Law and Prophets as exhibited in the ministry of Jesus.

The parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus not only exhibits these important themes in the Gospel of Luke, but read against the background of the journey to the place of punishment, the message of the parable is shocking. The rich man had the qualities of someone blessed by God. He was rich, well-dressed, and had an abundance of food. Lazarus stands in stark contrast to this figure and appears to be cursed by God. The situations of the two characters, however, are reversed at death and the rich man is in torment in *ᾠδης*. He expects to be shown mercy based on his status as a child of Abraham, but his presumption is false. Instead, his fate is secured as a result of his failure to observe the Law and the Prophets, particularly in their demand to care for the poor. At this point Luke stands in the stream of tradition regarding journeys to the place

of punishment that does not allow for postmortem repentance. As a result of his condition, the rich man asks for someone be sent from the dead to his brothers in order to warn them. The Greco-Roman tradition supports the rich man's request as those who journeyed to the place of punishment returned with an authoritative message that functioned as a conversion story. This cultural expectation is, however, rejected and places the emphasis squarely on obedience to the Law and Prophets in their demand to care for the poor. Those who reject this demand will be rejected, just as the rich man was rejected, no matter what their lineage. Those, however, who obey the Law and the Prophets follow the example of Jesus, caring for the marginalized and receiving an eternal reward.

## CHAPTER SIX

### Conclusion

The goal of this dissertation is to show how reading the parable against the background of the journey to the place of punishment sheds light on the function of the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus in the context of Luke's Gospel. I have argued that stories of the journey to the place of punishment were well known in the ancient world and had a particular function in the document of which they were a part. With this background in place, I offered a reading of the parable against the background of the journey to the place of punishment with a view towards how the tale of the journey to the place of punishment sheds light on the function of the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus in the context of Luke's Gospel. While the parable is not a catabasis *per se*, it is "catabatic," and draws on themes of the journey to the place of punishment. In this concluding chapter I will summarize the major themes discussed in the previous chapters, which have led to the conclusion that the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus functions rhetorically to encourage fidelity to the ethical demands of the Gospel of Luke, which are expressed most clearly in the demands of the Law and Prophets to care for the marginalized.

#### *The Function of the Journey to the Place of Punishment in Ancient Literature*

In order to summarize the function of the journey to the place of punishment in ancient literature, I will begin with the journey of Odysseus to Hades. This journey is significant, not only because it is the earliest example of a journey to Hades, but also



because it illustrates the function of a journey to the place of punishment in the context of a larger narrative. As noted in Chapter Three, one of the key concerns of the *Odyssey* is the propensity of humanity to blame the gods for grief that is suffered “beyond [the] allotted portion,” when in actuality this grief is caused by their own “blind folly” (ἄτασθαλῖαι; see *Od.* 1.1-9). Instead of blaming the gods for misfortune, humans should take care to observe the warnings of the gods (see *Od.* 1:32-43). As we have also seen in Chapter Three, one of the prime examples of ἄτασθαλῖαι in the proemium of the *Odyssey* is the foolish decision by Odysseus’ shipmates to slaughter and eat the cattle of Helios on the island of Thrinakia. This foolish decision led to the death of all the men and the loss of their ship. Odysseus was spared, but only because he had sought the counsel of the gods instead of eating the cattle of Helios. His obedience can be traced, in part, to the warning he received from Teiresias during his journey to Hades. In this way, the journey to Hades in the *Odyssey* functions as a revelation of the will of the gods. Odysseus’ ability to heed the warning will determine his fate in the narrative. If he chooses to leave the cattle of Helios alone, he will live; if he chooses to harm the cattle of Helios he will be punished for his disobedience and “blind folly” (ἄτασθαλῖαι).

The admonitory nature of the journey to the underworld is also seen in Aeneas’ vision of Tartarus. There are, however, important differences in the nature of the warning that is given to Aeneas from that given to Odysseus. To begin, Aeneas did not receive a direct command to avoid certain behaviors. Instead, he witnessed the torment of several figures who were punished for their wrongdoings. The punishments he saw were divided into two types. On the one hand, Aeneas witnessed the torment of mythological figures like Salmoneus, Ixion, Tantalus, and Pirithous, who in their pride

had transgressed against the gods and received due punishment. On the other hand, Aeneas saw the punishment of various types of people, including patricides, people who hoarded wealth, and those who did not care for their relatives in need. As noted above, all of those punished in Tartarus were guilty of violating the laws of *pietas*.<sup>1</sup> In this way, the warning given to Aeneas is not only vivid, but also ethical in nature. Whereas Odysseus was warned to respect the gods, Aeneas was warned to respect the gods and to avoid certain behaviors that would lead to torment in Tartarus. In light of the nationalistic nature of Aeneas' later vision of Rome's greatness when he reached the Elysian Fields, the warnings in Tartarus were not, however, merely negative commands. Rather they function as bold exhortations to remain faithful to the virtues that made Rome great. The vision of Tartarus in the Aeneid is, then, a powerful means of promoting a set of ethical ideals that should be practiced by members of the community.

The ethical concerns of the descent to the underworld are not limited to Aeneas' journey, but are present in other Jewish, Christian, and Greco-Roman descents. A common theme that runs through many of the punishments in these descents is the judgment of the powerful for their oppression of others. This ethical concern can be seen in Aeneas' vision of the punishment of those who hoarded wealth and failed to care for their needy relatives. It can also be seen in Enoch's vision of the place of punishment in *1 Enoch*. Those punished in Enoch's vision include not only the Watchers, who had oppressed human beings by consuming their goods, but also the punishment of wicked rulers who oppressed the people (*1 Enoch* 62-63). While the misdeeds of these kings, governors, high officials, and landlords is not stated explicitly, the fact that these

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<sup>11</sup> See R.G. Austin, *P. Vergili*, 193, quoted above.

oppressors “possess the land” is an indication that their abuse of the people involves taking advantage of the poor. Indeed, one aspect of the salvation of the “righteous and elect ones” is that “they shall eat and rest and rise with that Son of Man forever and ever” (*1 Enoch* 62:15).<sup>2</sup> The ethical concern to care for the poor is more explicit in the vision of the place of punishment in *2 Enoch* 10. In this place of “cruel darkness and lightless gloom” many wicked were punished, including those who seized “the poor by the throat” and took away their possessions. These wicked people also failed to meet the needs of the poor, despite their ability to provide for them. In this way they were guilty of bringing about “the death of the hungry by starvation.” In the Greco-Roman tradition the ethical concern to care for the poor is evident not only in Aeneas’s journey, but also in Lucian’s discussion of the journey to the place of punishment, in which one of the critiques of the tyrant Megapenthes was his failure to care for Micylus, the poor cobbler who lived next door to him.<sup>3</sup> What each of these examples indicates is that one of the consistent causes of judgment in the place of punishment was the abuse of the poor and the failure to care for their needs. This is not to say that the journey to the place of punishment was concerned exclusively with the ethical demand to care for the poor,<sup>4</sup> but

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<sup>2</sup> George W.E. Nickelsburg has highlighted the relationship between *1 Enoch* and Luke in the concern for the poor in each document. His comments focus, however, on *1 Enoch* 92-105; George W.E. Nickelsburg, “Riches, the Rich, and God’s Judgment in *1 Enoch* 92-105 and the Gospel according to Luke,” *NTS* 25 (1979): 324-344. See also George W.E. Nickelsburg, “Revisiting the Rich and the Poor in *1 Enoch* 92-105 and the Gospel according to Luke,” in *George W.E. Nickelsburg in Perspective: An Ongoing Dialogue of Learning* (vol. 2; ed. Jacob Neusner and Alan J. Avery-Peck; Leiden: Brill, 2003), 547-571.

<sup>3</sup> The similarity between Megapenthes’ failure to care for Micylus and the rich man’s failure to care for Lazarus is emphasized by Ronald F. Hock, “Lazarus and Micylus: Greco-Roman Backgrounds to Luke 16:19-31,” *JBL* 106 (1987): 447-463.

<sup>4</sup> In each of the journeys discussed above, the wicked are punished for ethical failures that included more than just the oppression of the poor. In *2 Enoch* 10, for example, the wicked are punished for sodomy, witchcraft, stealing, lying, and idolatry, among other misdeeds.

that the journey offered a vivid representation of the reversal of fortune of the oppressed and the oppressor in the place of punishment.

Not only does the journey to the place of punishment function to encourage obedience to the demands of the gods, often seen in the ethical demand to care for the oppressed, but it also functions to provide evidence that the judgment of the wicked is assured. This rhetorical function of the journey to the place of punishment is seen most clearly in the works of Plato and Plutarch. In Plato's "Myth of Er" and Plutarch's *De sera numinis vindicta* the story of the journey to the place of punishment follows a discussion about theodicy: How is it that the wicked prosper, while the good are oppressed? As proof that the wicked will receive their due after they die, a myth (μῦθος) is told to complement the rational argument (λόγος). Indeed, the dialogue partners in Plutarch's *De Sera numinis vindicta* are not satisfied with the λόγος, and elect to reserve judgment on the argument until they hear the μῦθος (see *Sera* 563B). It is also important to note that in these stories the person who took the journey to the place of punishment returned to the land of the living with a tale to tell.<sup>5</sup> In the case of Thespesius in Plutarch's *Sera*, the journey functions as a conversion story, as Thespesius's way of life was radically altered as a result of his journey. In this way, the locus of authority became the visionary experience of the one who travelled to the place of punishment.

It is also important to recognize the necessary corollary to the traveller's role as an authoritative witness of otherworld realities, namely that the traveller has returned from the underworld in order to tell the tale. As we saw in Chapter Three, the ability of the traveller to return to the land of the living in Greco-Roman journeys to the place of

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<sup>5</sup> This is also seen in Plutarch's *De genio Socratis* discussed in Chapter Three.

punishment was assumed. The exceptions seen in Orpheus' descent to rescue Eurydice and Lucian's satirical tale involving Micyllus and Megapenthes prove the rule. Orpheus' failure, for example, functions to create a pathos for Orpheus, who tragically lost his wife a second time. It is at this point, however, that the journeys to the place of punishment in Jewish and Christian literature deviate from the standard account in the Greco-Roman literature. As we have seen in Chapter Four the Jewish and Christian journey to the place of punishment was concerned with the punishment that was afflicted on the wicked in the afterlife. This concern gave rise to two streams of thought regarding the eternal fate of the wicked. On the one hand, certain documents offered hope that the wicked dead would receive relief from their torment. Whether this was a twelfth-hour rescue (*Testament of Abraham*), temporary relief in the form of Sabbath rest (*Apocalypse of Paul*), or outright postmortem salvation for the wicked (*Apocalypse of Zephaniah*; *Apocalypse of Peter*), God's mercy extended beyond the grave and the wicked had an opportunity beyond death to repent. On the other hand, documents like *1 Enoch*, *2 Enoch*, and *4 Ezra* make clear that God's mercy is great, but that it does not extend beyond the grave. Once the wicked are in torment, their lot is unchangeable. These two streams in the Jewish and Christian tradition of descent to the underworld would have created tension for the first-century audience of Luke's Gospel, who would have been familiar with both the Greco-Roman and the Jewish and Christian traditions. In general, there would be an expectation not only that someone who travelled to the place of punishment would return, but also the possibility that the wicked who were punished in the afterlife would receive relief. The second stream in the Jewish and Christian tradition would, however, deny the possibility of postmortem repentance. Importantly, however, in the

Greco-Roman, Jewish, and Christian tradition of the journey to the place of punishment, the traveller, himself, is able to return with an authoritative message.

With this overview in place, the journey to the place of punishment in Greco-Roman, Jewish, and Christian literature can be summarized as follows. The journey to the place of punishment was used by authors to provide insight into the will of the gods, so that people would behave in a proper manner. Most often this instruction was in the form of negative commands, or images, in the sense that the revelation communicated what a person should not do.<sup>6</sup> These negative examples functioned in a way to encourage a set of ethical ideals, often associated with the care for the oppressed. The journey was also used as rhetorical proof of a rational argument. These stories provided a means of communication that was not available by using logic, and the story that was told of postmortem punishment functioned as an authoritative, often transformative, tale.

#### *Reading the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus as the Authorial Audience*

While the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus is not a catabasis in a strict sense, it is catabatic and shares several features with the journey that would have evoked the imagery of the tradition among the audience of the Gospel of Luke. The most obvious connection with the journey to the place of punishment is the setting of the parable. When the rich man dies, he finds himself in torment in ᾗδης. The description of the rich man's agony in flames and his longing to slake his thirst with a drop of water from Lazarus' finger is reminiscent of the punishment of the wicked in Greco-Roman, Jewish, and Christian journeys to the place of punishment.

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<sup>6</sup> For example, Odysseus should not molest the cattle of Helios, Aeneas saw visions of people that failed to care for their relatives, and Enoch was shown the punishment of rulers who had oppressed the poor.

Even more than this, however, is that as the parable concludes, there is an assumption by the rich man that visions of the place of punishment can be made known to the living in the story world.<sup>7</sup> Not only that, but the rich man assumes that the vision will be authoritative, encouraging his brothers to change their lifestyle. The rhetorical function of the parable is determined by the way in which the parable corresponds to these expectations, and, perhaps more importantly, the way in which the parable violates these expectations. As we saw in Chapter Five, the rich man's request that Lazarus be sent back to the land of the living to warn the brothers of their impending doom was emphatically denied by Abraham twice. It is important to recognize that Abraham does not reject the request because it is impossible for the dead to return with a message to the living, but that the request is rejected because there is already a sufficient means of warning present in the form of the demands of the Law and Prophets.<sup>8</sup> Abraham's message is not, "Lazarus cannot return because the dead do not warn the living." Instead, Abraham's message is, "Lazarus does not need to return because there is sufficient revelation given in the Law and the Prophets." In this way, the locus of authority is transferred from an authoritative witness from the otherworld to the present, enduring

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<sup>7</sup> It is important to recognize that even if the traveller to the place of punishment does not return with a tale to tell, the audience of the journey is given a vision of the place of punishment. As François Bovon notes, regardless of the return of someone to warn the rich man's brothers of their impending doom, the audience has witnessed the scene in the underworld and is faced with an ethical decision; François Bovon, *Das Evangelium nach Lukas* (EKKNT 3.3; Düsseldorf: Benziger Verlag, 2001), 123-124. See also Darrell L. Bock, "The Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus and the Ethics of Jesus," *SwJT* 40 (1997): 69; Outi Lehtipuu, *The Afterlife Imagery in Luke's Story of the Rich Man and Lazarus* (NovTSup 123; Brill, 2007), 195.

<sup>8</sup> The reason Abraham gives for the rejection of a return is even more emphatic given the fact that he could have made a second reference to the "great chasm" that separated the rich man from Lazarus (cf. Luke 16:26).

demand of the Law and the Prophets.<sup>9</sup> The importance of the Law and the Prophets is also highlighted by the fact that reference to the Law and Prophets forms a bookend around the parable. As noted in Chapter Five, the parable follows the statement that “It is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one stroke of the Law to fail” (Luke 16:17). This statement is “proved” by the parable much in the same way that the rational argument (λόγος) is “proved” by the myth of the journey to the place of punishment (μῦθος) in the works of Plato and Plutarch.

The nature of the demand of the Law and Prophets that underlies Abraham’s refusal becomes clear in light of the common ethical themes shared between the parable, the overall narrative of the Gospel of Luke, and the journey to the place of punishment in ancient literature. As seen above, many of the journeys to the place of punishment in ancient literature are concerned with the oppression of the weak by the powerful. As we saw in Chapter Five, this theme is present throughout the Gospel of Luke, finding expression in the purpose statement of Jesus’ mission where Jesus declared that his mission on earth was to bring good news to the marginalized (cf. Luke 4:18-19). Throughout the Gospel of Luke, Jesus worked out this mission by accepting those who were marginalized in society, a practice that led to confrontation with the religious leaders. The failure of the religious leaders to accept Jesus’ mission is portrayed in the narrative as a rejection of Jesus, himself. Thus, in the narrative characters are judged by their approval and acceptance of Jesus’ message, rather than their lineage or social status.

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<sup>9</sup> In this reading, Abraham’s denial is crucial to interpreting the parable. It is not merely “a curt reminder that [the rich man’s] brothers have Moses and the prophets”; Darrell L. Bock, “Ethics of Jesus,” 68.



In this context, the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus becomes a clear example of the failure to emulate Jesus' acceptance of the marginalized. As noted in Chapter Five, the narrative audience of the parable is the Pharisees, who were "lovers of money" (Luke 16:14), which brings issues of wealth and poverty to the forefront. The rich man's failure to care for poor Lazarus, who lay outside of the gate, is an illustration of failure to care for the marginalized in the way exemplified by Jesus. The failure to care for the marginalized as exemplified by Jesus is a failure to obey the demands of the Law and the Prophets.

The rhetorical function of the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus in the context of the Gospel of Luke, then, is to encourage fidelity to the Law and the Prophets, particularly in their demand to care for the marginalized. The well-known journey to the place of punishment is used as vivid proof that the demands of the Law and the Prophets will endure, even if heaven and earth pass away. By violating the expectation of an authoritative message from the place of punishment, the locus of authority is placed squarely on the Law and the Prophets. The authorial audience of Luke's Gospel would have been encouraged to emulate the ministry of Jesus, which is an example of obedience to the Law and the Prophets.

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