

# **Gravity of Ascribing False Teachings to Christ**

*(In reference to the story of The Rich Man and Lazarus)*

**by Leroy Edwin Froom**

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## **A. Josephus Illuminates Dives-Lazarus Story**

Most fortunately for our investigation, Josephus left on record a "Discourse to the Greeks Concerning Hades," which illuminates Jesus' Dives and Lazarus story. Not only does it parallel Christ's narration, showing that it was based on a current Jewish belief, but it amplifies and explains the contemporary concepts and expressions of the Jews, frankly drawn from Platonism.

But it does more. It reveals at the same time how Christian advocates of Immortal-Soulism and Eternal Torment have, in their ardor, gone beyond the specifications of the parable, and read into it present eternal suffering for the wicked in the unquenchable fires of Gehenna, and this prior to the judgment—neither of which is justified by the original record. An epitome of Josephus' "Discourse on Hades," as currently held in the first century A.D., is here given rather fully because of its importance to our analysis. But first let us note the pertinency, relevancy, and admissibility of Josephus' testimony. An extract out of Josephus' "Discourse of the Greeks Concerning Hades." in *The Works of Flavius Josephus* (Whiston tr.).

### **1. REPRESENTATIVE CHARACTER OF JOSEPHUS' DEPICTION**

Flavius Josephus (died c. A.D. 100), celebrated Jewish priest and historian, was a Pharisee. He was not only highly trained in Jewish law but recorded the contemporary Jewish teachings, sayings, and traditions of the times. In fact, his writings constitute the most comprehensive Jewish history of the century. He was an enthusiastic admirer of Rome and its institutions, and basked in the sunshine of the favor of the emperors Vespasian and Titus, becoming adviser to Vespasian and serving as interpreter to Titus during the siege of Jerusalem, in A.D. 70—which act aroused the antipathy of the Jews. But this did not alter his competence as a witness.

Josephus' autobiography appears at the outset of his Works. Of priestly descent, he came from the "first of the twenty-four courses." He first studied the teachings of all three major sects—Pharisees, Sadducees, and Essenes and finally identified himself with the Pharisees.

Josephus received Roman citizenship, together with a pension, and adopted the name Flavius, after that of the imperial family. Thenceforth he devoted himself solely to writing. His works were highly esteemed by the Church Fathers, especially Jerome. And he was ever loyal to the Jewish customs and religion, as then held—particularly that of the Pharisees, in whom we are most interested. His works are still the most comprehensive source of information on the times and the beliefs and teachings of the Jews in the period of Christ and the apostles. Such is his competence and credibility as a firsthand witness.

## **2. MULTIPLE FEATURES OF HADES DESCRIBED**

Josephus explains that Hades is considered to be a "subterraneous region," where the "souls of righteous and unrighteous" are alike "detained," and wherein there is "perpetual darkness." It is a "place" for the "custody of souls," where "angel" guardians distribute "temporary punishment." In an adjacent but separate section is a "lake of unquenchable fire"—but into which, Josephus explicitly adds, "we suppose no one hath hitherto been cast." That is significant, and should be remembered. It is prepared for a "day afore-determined by God," "in which one righteous sentence shall deservedly be passed upon all men." The "unjust" and "disobedient" will then, and only then, be assigned to "everlasting punishment" while the "just" will obtain an "incorruptible and neverfading king dom." Both groups are "confined in Hades, but not in the same place."

## **3. "JUST" GUIDED BY "ANGELS" TO "BOSOM OF ABRAHAM."**

There is but "one descent into this" subterraneous region, "at whose gate . . . stands an archangel with an host" of angels. All who pass that way are "conducted down by the angels appointed over souls." "The just are guided to the right hand," which is a "region of light," with a "prospect of good things" to come. There is for them no toil, heat, or cold. They ever look upon the "countenance of the fathers and of the just." Here they wait for "eternal new life in heaven." And now comes the climactic sentence—"This place we call The bosom of Abraham." That is unmistakable identification, and must be remembered.

## **4. "UNJUST" DRAGGED TO "NEIGHBORHOOD" OF HELL**

Turning next to the "unjust," Josephus says that they are "dragged by force to the left hand by the angels allotted for punishment." He refers to such souls as "prisoners driven by violence." The angels "reproach" them, "threaten" them, and "thrust them still downward." In fact, they are dragged "into the neighborhood of hell itself [Gehenna]," "hard by it," where they "continually hear the noise of it," and where they are near "the hot vapour itself." They have a "near view of this spectacle, as of a terrible and exceeding great prospect of fire," and are in "fearful expectation of a future judgment," and are "in effect punished thereby," in a preliminary way.

## **5. IMPASSABLE GULF SEPARATES THE TWO GROUPS**

But that is not all. They "see the place of the fathers and the just," which sight in itself is a punishment. And here is the second telltale parallel—"a chaos deep and large is fixed" between the two groups, so that neither can "pass over" to the other side. That is the next major point to be remembered. And this, Josephus declares, is Hades, wherein the souls of all men are confined until a proper season, which God hath determined. Then He will "make a resurrection of all men from the dead," "raising again those very bodies," which the Greeks erroneously think are "dissolved" forever, and will not be resurrected.

Then, declaring that "according to the doctrine of Plato" (who is thus frankly named), the Greeks believe that the "soul is created" and "made immortal by God," Josephus asserts that God is also able to make "immortal" the "body" He has "raised" to life. So, he continues, the Jews believe

that the "body will be raised again," and although it is "dissolved, it is not perished." Again, "to every body shall be its own soul restored."

## **6. ETERNAL TORMENT FOR WICKED AFTER JUDGMENT**

So, Josephus concludes, after just "judgment" at the "judgment-seat," the righteous will have an "everlasting fruition." But the wicked will then be allotted to "eternal punishment"—"unquenchable fire, and that without end, and a certain fiery worm., never dying." But that, according to Josephus, is still future, not present. The fire and the worm will not destroy the body, and the worm will continue its erosion with "never-ceasing grief." "Sleep" will not afford relief. And "death will not free them from their punishment"—which ideas again bear the earmark of Platonism. "Nor will the interceding prayers of their kindred profit them."

That, in careful epitome, is the portrayal of Hades, by Josephus. The startling similarity to circumstances in the parable of Dives and Lazarus is inescapable. Missing details are here supplied. Hazy points are here clarified. Jesus was clearly using a then-common tradition of the Jews to press home a moral lesson in a related field. And this Jewish concept of Hades was frankly derived from Platonism, through Apocryphal writers, but climaxing with Philo.

## **7. DEFLECTING INROADS IN INTER-TESTAMENTAL PERIOD**

Several pertinent points should here be noted. This period was critical. It was the Jewish transition hour. PHILO JUDAEUS (d. c. A.D. 47), of Alexandria, had lived in the generation just prior to Josephus. Under Philo the inroads of Greek Platonism reached their peak in deflecting the faith of a large segment of the Jews from the primal Mosaic teachings on Conditional Immortality and its inseparable corollary, the ultimate destruction of the wicked.

Over a period of some two hundred years prior to Christ, tangent positions had been developing under the impact of Platonic philosophy. Thus the concept that Hades contained two chambers appeared in 4 Ezra 4:41, along with the idea that the righteous inhabit one chamber (Wisdom of Solomon 3:1), while the wicked are accursed, scourged, and tormented in the other (1 Enoch 22:9-13). The Midrash (on Ruth 1:1, Proem) likewise assigns one chamber to the righteous, with the other to the wicked. The Talmud (Erubin 19") also tells of the torment of the wicked.

The visibility of one company to the other, in the respective chambers, is similarly in the Midrash (on Eccl. 7:14). And the wicked see the angels guard the righteous (4 Ezra 7:86). Both the Talmud (Kethuboth 104") and 4 Ezra 7:85-87, 91-95, tell of the welcoming of the righteous by companies of ministering angels. And 4 Maccabees 13:17 mentions the righteous as welcomed in Hades by Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. And finally, the righteous, as part of their reward, are privileged to sit "in Abraham's lap" (Talmud Kiddushin 72"). That is the third major point that should be borne in mind.

In his Antiquities, Josephus also gives this terse added testimony:

"They [the Pharisees] also believe that souls have an immortal vigour in them, and that under the earth there will be rewards or punishments, according as they have lived virtuously or viciously

in this life; and the latter are to be detained in an everlasting prison, but that the former shall have power to revive and live again."

It is therefore obvious that the principal points in the parable of Dives and Lazarus were based upon current Jewish folklore, which had infiltrated from Platonic philosophy. Christ met them on their own familiar ground and drew a fundamental moral lesson there from, capitalizing upon their preconceived opinions.

## **8. ADVOCATES INJECT UNWARRANTED ADDITIONS**

But the construction placed upon the parable of Dives and Lazarus by many modern proponents of Immortal- Soulism, who invoke the sanction of this parable by reading into it what is neither there in the original narrative in Luke nor sanctioned by Josephus' definitive elucidations, is both regrettable and unethical.

Please note the following in Josephus' discourse: First of all, Hades, in the section for wicked souls, here under discussion, is not Gehenna (which is defined as the "lake of fire"), but is only near Gehenna, or in the "neighborhood of hell." Second, according to Josephus, no one had yet been cast into the lake of fire. That is important and decisive. Third, any contemporary "punishment" is but "temporary," as the wicked may feel the breath of the "hot vapour." It is not eternal envelopment in the fires of Hell, as often pictured. Fourth, at the appointed time there will be a resurrection of the body, which will then be made immortal. In that feature the Jews differed from the Greek Platonists, as well as on the concept of transmigration. And fifth, according to Josephus' elucidation, the eternal punishing and the visitation of unquenchable fire will come only after the future judgment and its just sentences—which he declares had not yet taken place. Antiquities of the Jews, book 18, chapter 1, section 3.

That is a vastly different picture from the eisegetical portrayal of those who build present Eternal Torment for the immortally damned on this passage. Such are the regrettable lengths resorted to in an attempt to find Biblical support for an alien, pagan philosophy.

## **B. Literalism Violates Consistency, Vitiates Christ's Witness, Overturns Scripture Testimony**

### **1. SCOFIELD MAKES PASSAGE WHOLLY LITERAL**

Before we survey critically the inconsistencies of a literal interpretation, let us note one representative example of champion ship of the literalistic exposition, and its involvements. Dr. C. I. Scofield, in his well-known Scofield Reference Bible, in his note on Luke 16:23, says that the "hell" of this text—the Greek hades, and its Hebrew equivalent she'ol—is the "unseen world," "the place of departed human spirits between death and the resurrection." He then sharply distinguishes between hades (1) "before the ascension of Christ," and (2) hades "since the ascension of Christ." Advocating the literalistic interpretation, Scofield states that these passages "make it clear" that "hades was formerly in two divisions, the abodes respectively of the saved and the lost." The "former" (the "abode of the saved") was then "called 'paradise,' and 'Abraham's bosom.'" Scofield then states that "both designations were Talmudic, but adopted by

Christ in Luke 16:22; 23:43." And he declares, "the blessed dead were with Abraham, they were conscious and were 'com forted.'" Then he adds:

The lost were separated from the saved by a 'great gulf fixed' (Luke 16:26). The representative man of the lost who are now in hades is the rich man of Lk. 16:19-31. He was alive, conscious, in full exercise of his faculties, memory, etc., and in torment." (Italics supplied.)

In his "Hades since the ascension of Christ" section, Scofield says: "So far as the unsaved dead are concerned, no change of their place or condition is revealed in Scripture. At the judgment of the great white throne, hades will give them up, they will be judged, and will pass into the lake of fire (Rev. 20:13, 14)." But henceforth (since the ascension of Christ) Paradise has been changed to the "third heaven" (citing 2 Cor. 12:1-4). Now, "during the present church-age," the saved who have died are "absent from the body, at home with the Lord" (citing Eph. 4:8-10). And he concludes: "The wicked dead in hades, and the righteous dead 'at home with the Lord,' alike await the resurrection."

## **2. INCONSISTENCIES INVOLVED IN LITERAL INTERPRETATION**

This story of Dives and Lazarus is either the narrative of a literal, historical episode or it is merely a fictional parable. It cannot be both, or half and half, as some seek to make it. If literal, it must be true to fact and consistent in detail. If it be a parable, then only the primary moral truth to be conveyed need concern us, with the narrative subject to the recognized licenses and limitations of an imaginary illustration.

However, many insist on its literality. But a literal application breaks down under the weight of its own absurdities and contradictions, as will become apparent under scrutiny, and when cited to support the popular concept of the Innate Immortality of the soul. For example, contenders for literalism hold Dives and Lazarus to be disembodied spirits; that is, destitute of bodies. Here, then, we have two ghosts, or shades, devoid of bodies and bodily organs—though there is not the remotest reference to the soul or spirit of man. Yet Dives is here represented as having "eyes" that see, a "tongue" that speaks, and as seeking relief from cooling water by means of the "finger" of Lazarus—real bodily parts. That surely must be an embarrassing inconsistency to the literalist who treats them as historical and literal. But that was all part of the Jewish tale.

Further, an unbridgeable, material gulf is incomprehensible on the hypothesis of immaterial spirit beings in the nether regions. Disembodied "souls," or "spirits," are supposed to penetrate or pass everywhere. Again, if "Abraham's bosom" is figurative, then "Abraham" cannot logically be literal. It would surely be the height of incongruity to have Abraham literal but his bosom figurative! As to Abraham, in Scripture record he died and his sons buried him (Gen. 25:8, 9), and there is no account of his resurrection, as was the case with Moses (Deut. 34:5; Jude 9; Matt. 17:3). According to Hebrews 11:8-19, like all the patriarchs, Abraham has not yet received the promise, but is awaiting that "better resurrection" at the second coming of Christ (vs. 35, 39, 40). Among other incongruities, literalism places Heaven and Hell within geographical speaking and seeing distance of each other—with saints and sinners eternally holding futile converse. (Ponder once more the case of a husband and wife so situated, or a parent and child.) Again, Dives lifted up "his eyes, being in torments," and said, "... I am tormented in this flame" (Luke 16:23, 24),

but nothing is said in the parable as to the duration of his torment. But according to clear statements of Scripture, any such torment occurs only in connection with the second death, and follows, but never precedes, the Second Advent (2 Thess. 1:7, 8).

Such a conflicting literalistic contention clearly goes too far. The fires of Gehenna do not precede the Second Advent. And in this parable, Dives is in Hades, not in Gehenna. But when the figurative and fictional character of the parable of Dives and Lazarus is recognized, then the plaguing incongruities as to time, place, space, distance, et cetera, all vanish. The story, with all its inconsistencies, is simply told to convey an important moral or spiritual truth.

### **3. LITERALISM CONTRADICTS CHRIST'S EXPLICIT DECLARATIONS**

But that is not all. To use this parable as proof that men receive their rewards at death is squarely to contradict Christ Himself, who explicitly states that the righteous and the wicked receive their reward "when the Son of man shall come in his glory" (Matt. 25:31-44). He definitely placed the recompense at the resurrection, the time of harvest, and end of the world—when the "wheat" of God's people are gathered unto His garner, and the wicked, like "tares," are bundled for burning (Matt. 13:30, 49; Luke 14:14). As elsewhere seen, Jesus referred to "hell" (Matt. 10:28), "hell fire" (Matt. 5:22), the "resurrection of damnation" (John 5:29), the "damnation of hell" (Matt. 23:33), and "eternal damnation" (Mark 3:29). But He always put them as future, not present, and as following, not preceding, His second coming (Matt. 25:32, 33, 46). And Jesus declared that He was going to prepare a place for us in the "many mansions" of His "Father's house" (John 14:2). But He states that He will not "come again" to "receive" us until His second advent (v. 3).

### **4. LITERALISM CONTRADICTS INSPIRED REVELATION'S DICTUMS**

Furthermore, if the narrative is literal, then the beggar received his reward and the rich man his punishment immediately upon death, in the interim before the judgment day and the consequent separation of the good and evil. But such a procedure is repugnant to all justice. Paul said that God "hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness" (Acts 17:31). That was still future in apostolic times. And the day of separation will not come until "the Son of man shall come in his glory . . . : and before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another" (Matt. 25:31, 32).

Christ's own promise is, "Behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be" (Rev. 22:12). That tallies with His promise, "Thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just" (Luke 14:14). That also was Paul's personal expectation: "There is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day" (2 Tim. 4:8). And, as seen again and again, literalism squarely contradicts the uniform testimony of the Old Testament—that the dead, both righteous and wicked, without reference to character, lie silent and unconscious in the sleep of the first death until the resurrection day. In the Biblical Hades there is no speech, sight, or pain. It is not a place of torture. But the Pharisees had made God's Word void, as concerns the condition of the dead,<sup>6</sup> by their "traditions" derived from pagan Platonic philosophy, which in turn had been borrowed from Egypt, Babylon, and Persia. So it was that

Dives is here pictured as in a place of torment, living in insufferable flames. It was simply Hebraized Platonism, and was in no way condoned or endorsed by Christ. See Ps. 6:5; 31:17; 88:11; 115:17; 146:4; Eccl. 9:6, 10; 12:7; Isa. 38:17-19, et cetera.

## **C. Gravity of Ascribing False Teaching to Christ, Embodiment of Truth**

### **1. USE OF PARABLE NOT ENDORSEMENT OF ITS THEOLOGY**

The question arises, Did not Jesus' use of this Jewish belief make Him endorse the fictitious plot of the parable? Rather, is it not like the Christian story of the man who dreamed that he died and went to the gates of Heaven? Saint Peter supposedly met him there, and gave him a long piece of chalk. He told him to climb to the top of some marble stairs, and there he would find a blackboard on which he was to write down all his sins. Making his way slowly up the stairs, he met a friend hastening down. In his surprise he asked his friend where he was going, and the friend replied, "I'm going down for more chalk." Now, we ask in all seriousness, would the telling of that story commit one to believing the literality of the theology of the illustration, or rather the point it was designed to convey?

### **2. GRAVITY OF IMPLIED CHARGES AGAINST CHRIST**

The seriousness of charging that Christ personally believed, publicly sanctioned, and actually set forth as truth this Greco-Jewish parable involving Immortal-Soulism, is to charge Him with gross inconsistency, neutralizing His own testimony, playing false to truth, and contradicting His own eighteen illustrations, from animate and inanimate life, concerning the doom of the wicked. Without exception, He taught the utter, ultimate destruction of the wicked. It is likewise to put Christ in total conflict with His own seven references to the complete destruction and disappearance of being, for the wicked, in His definitive descriptions of the relentless fires of Gehenna.

More than that, to attribute belief and endorsement of this fable of Dives and Lazarus to Christ is to make Him deny His own uniformly consistent and multiple teachings on Hades—the term actually used for "hell" in this parable—as a state of unconscious sleep for all men, good and bad, between death and the resurrection (as in John 11:11, 14), from which there must be an awakening before there is any return of consciousness, thought, or activity, and where none of the wicked are at present undergoing torment.

It likewise puts Christ in the position of endorsing the contention that Hades is eternal, whereas according to the Apocalypse, it is at last to be destroyed (Rev. 20:14). And even the fires of Gehenna are ultimately to burn out and disappear when they have done their appointed work, and the wicked are no more, and all pain and death and torment end forever, as the new heavens and new earth supersede the present world that is to be destroyed in the coming lake of fire (Revelation 21 and 22; 2 Peter 3:10-13).

### **3. MAKES CHRIST GUILTY OF PURVEYING ERROR AND PERVERSION**

Such a charge makes Christ guilty of endorsing all the multiple inconsistencies of a literalistic interpretation of a then-current Jewish fable in which the fictional figures comport with notions of retribution during the period of "death" clearly adopted from Platonism, which makes death but a continuation of life in the after world. It would thus charge Christ with guilt in the purveyance of error and perversion. It would put Him into direct conflict with the all-sufficiency of Scripture, and of His own timeless admonition: "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead" (Luke 16:31).

#### **4. DEMANDS OF RESURRECTION BROUGHT ON CRISIS**

To accept the Platonic dogma of Immortal-Soulism is to cast over board all that Moses and the prophets have written—God's appointed witness, as well as all that Christ taught. Moreover, one did actually rise from the dead a short time later and bore his testimony (Lazarus, in John 11). Christ's carping critics there proved the futility of such an appearance. In fact, it was this very episode—Christ's last and crowning miracle—that brought on the crisis in the rejection of Jesus as the life-giving Messiah.

It was this very miracle, demanded by Dives, that spurred the priests on to plot and accomplish Christ's death (John 11:47-54). Christ's words were eternally true—they were neither persuaded by Lazarus' resurrection (John 11) nor by His own, which climaxed it all (Matt. 28:1-6). They were not at all persuaded (Luke 16:31), much less did they repent (v. 30).

### **D. Major Area of Disagreement Between Christ and Pharisees**

We must not conclude this survey without stressing the fact that the nature and destiny of man was a major area of disagreement between Christ and the Pharisees. He was a Scripturalist, sustaining the unvarying teaching of Moses and the prophets on the nature and destiny of man. They were Platonists, having left the scriptural platform and espoused the Innate-Immortality postulate of Platonic deduction and philosophy. Christ was a Conditionalist, proclaiming eternal life and immortality as a gift, restricted to those only who should believe and receive Him as the Life and the Resurrection. They were Immortal-Soulists, holding to the natural, inherent, constitutional immortality of the human soul. To that position they were now irrevocably committed.

#### **1. DIFFERENCES AS OPPOSITE AS LIGHT AND DARKNESS**

As to the destiny of man, Christ taught the ultimate and utter destruction of the willful sinner. Man, as a rejector of life, truth, and light, is mortal, and hence susceptible to death and destruction. But the Pharisees taught that the soul of man is innately and indefeasibly immortal and indestructible, and that therefore the damned will live on forever in excruciating torment. The difference was sharply drawn and mutually exclusive. The contrast was as fundamental as the difference between light and darkness.

This matter of the soul and its destiny was an area of fundamental disagreement between Christ and the Pharisees. On this issue their positions were diametrically opposed and irreconcilable. But they were not only totally opposite, they were mutually destructive. If Christ was right, they



were wrong. If Christ's teachings were true, theirs were erroneous —and vice versa. Obviously, if Christ was victorious, they were defeated. There was no escape from such a conclusion. It was over this basic issue that the culminating crisis came in their relationships, as they rejected His truth and chose to cling to their own error. It was the irreconcilability of the two positions, among other things, that finally led them completely to reject Christ and His distasteful teachings on the life, death, and destiny of man. They would have none of His life program. On this there could be no compromise, no capitulation. That meant that He must be silenced, put out of the way. His witness must be crushed—otherwise their own position was doomed. It was a question of stark survival, for they saw the outcome with crystal clearness. He must go.

## **2. CHRIST MUST NOT BE ARRAYED AGAINST CHRIST**

That is why it is inconceivable that Christ, in this controverted parable based on the fictitious but representative characters of Dives and Lazarus, in their fabled converse, cannot logically, scripturally, or ethically be made to support the Pharisaic position on an error that Christ came to counteract and overthrow. To do so is to array Christ against Himself (Matt. 12:25; Mark 3:24, 25; Luke 14:17, 18), and in this instance the Dives-Lazarus narrative against the total emphasis and weight of His whole message and mission.

It is to take the unthinkable position of siding with the Pharisees against Christ. And it is to place Christ in the inconceivable position of adopting the false reasoning of Platonic pagan philosophy as against the inspired revelation of the Scriptures of truth. It is unquestionably to take the path of deviation from the straight and narrow way of truth and life.

And it involves charging Christ with supporting the gross absurdities inherent in a literalistic, Immortal-Soulist interpretation of the story of Dives and Lazarus. It is virtually to undo His entire life's testimony in a sell out to the Pharisees. That cannot be! But it must here be added that this same issue persists, in varying degrees, to this day, propelled by the great medieval Latin apostasy, and perpetuated in many Protestant circles. Hence the confusion and conflict over this question in these modern times.

In the light of these sobering facts and fundamental principles, and in the light of Christ's impeccable truthfulness and His own personification and embodiment of truth, we must therefore deny and reject the validity of the literalist interpretation of this parable-fable as supporting the Innate Immortality of the soul and the Eternal Torment of the damned. Christ, we maintain, was consistent and truthful, and unwavering to the end in His adherence to, and enunciation of, the truth as to man and his destiny.

We must not place Christ in the unthinkable position of endorsing the Platonic error that was so repugnant to His very nature as the Fountainhead of life and truth. He must not be betrayed in the house of His Christian friends. He must not be crucified upon a cross of Innate-Immortality error.

## **E. Conclusion: Immortal Soulism Collapses Under Scrutiny**

### **1. FOURFOLD CASE AGAINST POPULAR CONTENTION**

In the light of the full-rounded evidence here surveyed, we reject the story of Dives and Lazarus as in any way proving the continuing consciousness of the dead or as establishing the postulate of the Eternal Torment of the wicked. Such a dual contention is wholly without logical justification, and, as seen, flatly contravenes both the testimony of Christ and the consistent witness of Scripture. Death is consistently set forth throughout the Old Testament as a condition of silence, darkness, and unconsciousness, not of life and activity, and joy or agony. In the light of all the facts and factors, we must consequently conclude:

(1) That the characters in this dialogue, with its parabolic personifications, were wholly imaginary. The legendary episode did not happen literally, and could not happen;

(2) That the timing was likewise fictitious, for it clearly antedated the Biblical sequence, and is consequently in conflict with Bible truth in this area; and

(3) That, as this is the only place in the New Testament where Hades is portrayed as a place of torment, in this fable form—just as in the Old Testament Isaiah raises dead kings in she'ol to utter a taunt upon Babylon (Isa. 14:4-11)—it can not and does not nullify the whole galaxy of positive, explicit, non figurative and inescapable Bible teaching upon which alone Christian doctrine is to be built and sustained. Pagan Platonism, polluting the Jewish faith, which Jesus cited but did not endorse in this legendary fable-parable, should never be allowed to corrupt sound Christian doctrine, which Christ came to establish and protect.

## **2. SPECIFIC COUNTS AGAINST ACCEPTANCE ARE DETERMINATIVE**

We should therefore reject the contention that the sleeping souls of the damned are presently alive in torment, for that implies that man's reward is received at death. But that fallacy—

(1) Nullifies the judgment by anticipating its appointed time.

(2) Completely contradicts the clear testimony that the dead are asleep.

(3) Represents disembodied spirits as inconsistently possessing bodily members.

(4) Puts the spirits in full view of each other forever in the future world—another example of the infiltration of Persian Dualism into Platonism, and thence into Jewish thinking.

Or, to put it in another way: (1) God's appointed time of grace for man is before death and the resurrection— which is the main point and purpose of the parable; (2) retribution comes only after the resurrection; and (3) life after death is always contingent and consequent upon the resurrection. These determinative principles are violated in a literal interpretation. The story of Dives and Lazarus was never designed to teach conditions on the other side of death. That is an extraneous contention that has been introduced without warrant. It is fallacious as an argument and is unworthy of the name of sound exegesis. The literalistic "problem" of the passage collapses under the weight of its own inconsistencies.