

CHAPTER III

A HERMENEUTICAL STUDY OF LUKE 16:19-31

Hermeneutics is the science and art of interpretation.¹ The Greek word ἑρμηνεία means "explanation, interpretation."² This chapter is an explanation of possible interpretations of Luke 16:19-31 and a defense of the writer's interpretation. Some approaches to the passage will be noted, some terms clarified, some alternative views explained, and finally a literal interpretation of the passage defended.

Possible Hermeneutical Positions

Three basic ways of understanding the account of the rich man and Lazarus should be pointed out:

1. Christ wanted to show that riches do not last and that it is important to be kind to the poor. To illustrate this, He used ideas (e.g. Hades, Abraham's bosom) familiar to His listeners. Christ knew these ideas about what happened after death were false--that no places of such description existed. But He "accommodated Himself to error" (went along with the wrong ideas) in order to illustrate a point about riches.

2. Christ wanted to show what was becoming of the Jews and Gentiles. So He told a parable to help His listeners understand. In

¹A. Berkeley Michelsen, Interpreting the Bible (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1963), p. 3.

²Liddell and Scott, A Greek-English Lexicon, p. 690.

the parable, the Jews are represented by a rich man and the Gentiles are represented by a poor man (Lazarus).

In earlier times, while the Jews were richly cared for by God, they ignored the spiritually starving Gentiles at their gate. From now on, the Jews would be "tormented" among the nations and the Gentiles brought into the center of God's blessing and "comforted."

3. Christ wanted to show what would happen to unrepentant men after death (as well as to warn about riches). So He told His listeners what had happened to one rich man. Christ was explaining, in the best way men could understand, the terribleness of dying without accepting God's revelation of Himself in the Scriptures (and in Christ).

This third view does not exclude Luke 16:19-31 from being a parable. Many would hold that Christ is teaching these solemn truths by using a parable.

However, the writer, who holds view three, also holds that Christ was telling a true historical narrative rather than a parable. The following pages are an explanation of other positions but especially a clarification of the writer's understanding.

Terms Clarified

Three terms which need to be understood are "literal," "allegorical," and "parable." Although these words are often used in a most casual manner, they must be carefully studied.

Literal

The "literal" meaning is simply "the customarily acknowledged meaning of an expression in its particular context."¹ To say "the ground needs rain" is a plain, literal statement. To say "the ground is thirsty" is to use a non-literal or figurative expression.² A good hermeneutical rule for literal interpretation is that:

Whenever and wherever it is possible, the words of Scripture are to be understood literally, but when a statement appears to be contrary to our experience, or to known fact, or revealed truth; or seems to be at variance with the general teaching of the Scrip-³ tures, then we may reasonably expect that some figure is employed.

This principle, that a passage is to be interpreted literally unless it contradicts other teachings of Scripture, is often appealed to in regard to Luke 16:19-31. Seventh-day Adventists, for example, insist that:

To conclude from this parable [they assume it is a parable] that Jesus was teaching that at death the wicked are taken to a place where they undergo "torments" is to make Him here contradict His plain teaching on that subject upon other occasions, as well as the Bible as a whole.⁴

The obvious problem is that the interpreter is insisting that Luke 16:19-31 (and all other Scripture) must conform to his doctrinal position. At the heart of the problem of taking the passage literally is often the attitude, "This cannot be literal because I do not (or cannot or will not) believe it."

¹Michelsen, Interpreting the Bible, p. 33.

²Ethelbert W. Bullinger, Figures of Speech Used in the Bible (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1968), p. xv.

³Ibid.

⁴Nichol, The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary, V, 833.

This writer accepts the passage as literal and as "revealed truth." While there are figurative expressions used (e.g. "Abraham's bosom"), there are no objective reasons for forcing the account into a figurative mode.

"Literal," then, is an expression's customarily acknowledged meaning. To take Luke 16:19-31 as literal is to consider the rich man a rich man, the poor man a poor man, Hades as Hades, etc., and to not insist there is a secondary "hidden" or deeper meaning.

Allegorical

A second word which should be explained is "allegorical." The Greek word ἀλληγορία is from ἄλλος, "another" and ἀγορεύειν, "to speak in the assembly."¹ In its modern sense an allegory is "a fictitious narrative which has another and deeper meaning than that which is expressed."²

An allegory is to be distinguished from "allegorizing." In an allegory, sensible objects or persons often represent spiritual realities. The story of the sower, for example, is an allegory. The sower does not represent a sower, but the preacher; the seed does not represent a seed but the gospel, etc.

An allegory is an acceptable and often very effective way to teach truth, and

should not be confused with allegorizing, which takes a narrative that was not meant to teach truth by identification. By a point

¹Liddell and Scott, A Greek-English Lexicon, p. 13.

²Bullinger, Figures of Speech Used in the Bible, pp. 748-49.

by point comparison, allegorizing makes the narrative convey ideas different from those intended by the original author. Thus allegorizing is an arbitrary way of handling any author.¹

"Allegorical," then, is a type of interpretation imposed upon a passage of Scripture. Many, for example, say the rich man of Luke 16 represents not a rich man, but the Jews, etc.

To allegorize Luke 16:19-31 is a very subjective and potentially dangerous approach. "It would be safer to say there are no allegories in Scripture than to follow one's own judgment as to what is an allegory, and what is not."²

Parable

A "parable" is, etymologically, "a placing along side of" in order to compare.³ According to Hauck, a parable is "an independent similitude in which an evident or accepted truth from a known field (nature, human life) is designed to establish or illustrate a new truth in the preaching of Jesus (kingdom of God, God's nature and action, piety)."⁴

¹Michelsen, Interpreting the Bible, p. 231.

²Bullinger, Figures of Speech Used in the Bible, p. 749.

³Bernard Ramm, Protestant Biblical Interpretation (3rd ed.; Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1970), p. 278.

⁴F. Hauck, "παράβολη," Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Vol. V, ed. by Gerhard Kittel, trans. and ed. by Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1967), p. 752. For further discussion on the nature and definition of a parable, see such works as Edward N. Kirk, The Parables of Our Saviour (New York: R. Craighead, Printer, 1857), p. vii; William M. Taylor, The Parables of Our Saviour (New York: A.C. Armstrong and Son, 1910), p. 3; R.C. Trench, Parables, pp. 3ff.; A.B. Mickelsen, Interpreting the Bible, pp. 212ff.; and Milton S. Terry, Biblical Hermeneutics (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1974), pp. 276ff.

A parable is often said to be an extended simile (a comparison of two things using the words "like" or "as"). On the other hand, an allegory is said to be an extended metaphor (a direct comparison). Also, an allegory may have many points of comparison while a parable has one main point of comparison and an allegory may blend factual and non-factual experience while a parable is true to the factual experiences of life.¹

The story of the good Samaritan, for example, is clearly not an allegory. The good Samaritan is a good Samaritan and the wounded traveller is a wounded traveller. This story may have occurred or may have been only a parable. Yet no one would insist upon allegorizing it.

As was pointed out above, "allegorizing" is to be carefully distinguished from calling a story an "allegory." Luke 16:19-31 is seldom considered by interpreters to be an allegory as such. However, it is often considered to be a parable which must be "allegorized" to be understood properly.

Yet the account of the rich man and Lazarus makes good sense if it is considered a historical example. To make it a parable, a parable needing either literal or allegorical interpretation, is an assumption.²

The question naturally arises: Would not it be an assumption as well to consider Luke 16:19-31 as historical fact? The writer

¹Michelsen, Interpreting the Bible, pp. 212,213,230.

²William Arnot, The Parables of Our Lord (New York: T. Nelson and Sons, Paternoster Row, 1870), p. 467.

acknowledges the problem of being conclusive as to whether or not this passage is a parable.¹ While either position is possible, there is weighty evidence for considering it as a historical narrative. The evidence centers around the uniqueness of the account. If the Lord's portrayal of the rich man and Lazarus were a parable, it would be strikingly different from every other parable He told.

This writer holds the position that Luke 16:19-31 is not a parable. However, if one were to assume, for the sake of argument, that it is a parable, certain things about it would differ from any other New Testament parable. If Luke 16:19-31 is a parable, then:

1. It would be the only New Testament parable which describes things that are outside the realm of human experience. The other parables talk about things with which the listener was familiar. In Matthew 13, for example, there is a sower (verses 3ff.), fruit (verse 8), wheat and tares (verses 24ff.), and a net and sea (verses 47ff.). Other parables use similar common objects as illustrations. But the account of the rich man and Lazarus talks about what happens to two men after death--a realm where no one listening had had any personal experience. A parable is often called an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. Luke 16:19-31, however, far transcends the earthly sphere!
2. It would be the only parable where the Lord uses a proper name (Lazarus). This fact is always cited when an interpreter is giving support for the historicity of the account. Lang, for example, holds that "were it a parable there would have been no occasion to give his name."² Cadbury notes that even in narrative the Synoptic tradition is sparing of personal names, and that usually "Luke shows a characteristic aversion or

¹Both positions have been held from the earliest times. One ancient manuscript (D) does call it a parable, and a large number of modern commentators assume it is one. Among the ancients considering it to be a historic narrative are Tertullian (*de Anima*, 7), and Ambrose (*Exposito Evangelii secundum Lucum, ad loc*). Cadbury, "A Proper Name for Dives (Lexical Notes on Luke-Acts VI)," p. 399.

²Lang, *The Parabolic Teaching of Scripture*, p. 261.

apology for Semitic names of places as well as persons."¹ Whatever one may or may not attempt to prove from the inclusion of Lazarus' name, it is obviously a unique and unusual occurrence.

3. It would be the only New Testament parable which repeatedly mentions a historical person, Abraham (Moses also) in verses 23,24,25,29,30. Furthermore, this historical person actually carries on a conversation with the rich man.
4. It would be the only New Testament parable describing where the dead go (i.e. Abraham's bosom, Hades, place of torment).
5. This would be the only parable which the Lord told that mentions angels. (Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43, 47-49 is an example of angels being mentioned in the explanation of the parable but not in the parable itself.)

Furthermore, if Hades is not a real place of torment (as some who make this a parable insist) then this would be the only parable in which the Lord Jesus taught error instead of truth. God forbid!²

Sometimes the question is posed as to why Luke 16:19-31 is not a parable if Luke 16:1-13 is one. The answer lies in the distinctiveness of Luke 16:19-31 and its unique characteristics. While some believe that the "parable" of the Unjust Steward was an actual event rather than a parable, this writer discussed it as a parable--its commonly-accepted mode. In either case, the lesson presented would be the same. As the following section explains, the truth of Luke 16:19-31 should be clear whether or not it is considered a parable.

¹Cadbury, "A Proper Name for Dives (Lexical Notes on Luke-Acts VI)," p. 399.

²George W. Zeller, "A Study of Luke 16" (Unpublished Sunday School notes, Middletown Bible Church, Middletown, Connecticut, 1975), p. 3.

Alternative Views Explained

This hermeneutical study began with a brief summary of three ways of interpreting Luke 16:19-31. Next, the terms "literal," "allegorical," and "parable" were explained in some detail. In this section some false interpretations of the passage will be examined.

Actually, the question of whether the account of the rich man and Lazarus is a parable or a historical incident is not necessary to discuss. In either mode, vital truth is being taught. Any intelligent reader of the Bible would maintain that a parable conveys important truth, rather than propagates falsehood.

For example, the parable of the tares among the wheat in Matthew 13:24-30 is interpreted by the Lord in verses 36-43 of that chapter. This parable teaches definite truth about the end of the age, the kingdom, the angels, the devil, the punishment of the wicked, and the kingdom of God and its blessedness for the righteous. Even though the method of communication is the parable, the message to be communicated is true.

The real issue, then, is one of interpretation. Many groups not only insist it must be a parable (which admittedly colors their interpretation), but also go on to draw far out conclusions regarding its message. The following discussion covers the view that the Lord was accommodating Himself to error (including the view held by Seventh-day Adventists), the allegorical view taken by Jehovah's Witnesses and thirdly the milder allegorical view that the Lord was presenting a hidden meaning.

Accommodation to Error

Use of a familiar folk tale

A common liberal view of this passage is that the rich man and Lazarus are "ideal" figures in a didactic "exemplary story," and that "it is irrelevant whether the persons are purely imaginary, traditional within a folk tale, or even ultimately historical."¹ Many interpreters hold that the Lord was using a familiar folk tale for a new purpose. The story is said to have been popular amongst the Jewish teachers and to have been of Egyptian origin.² H. Gressmann (Vom Reichen Mann und Armen Lazarus, 1918), for example, holds that the story was originally a lost Egyptian tale. The closest descendant is said to be the Demotic tale of Satme.³ Gressmann holds that the story travelled to Palestine from Egypt and was adapted by the Jews. The rabbis told a similar story where a poor but pious law student was buried, as well as a rich, godless publican. The poor man is rewarded in the next world for his piety and the rich man was punished. There are seven different versions of the story, the earliest apparently being in the Palestinian Talmud (Chagiga, ii, p. 772).⁴ The idea that the account of Lazarus and the rich man was adapted and borrowed from a lost Egyptian tale, and that, for example, "Abraham must be a Jewish

¹Grobel, ". . . Whose Name Was Neves," p. 374ff.

²G. B. Caird, The Gospel of Luke (Baltimore, Maryland: Penguin Books, 1963), p. 191.

³Grobel, ". . . Whose Name Was Neves," p. 374ff.

⁴John Martin Creed, The Gospel According to St. Luke (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1965), p. 210.

substitute for the pagan god Oseris,"¹ goes far beyond the question of whether or not Luke 16:19-31 is a parable. No one could possibly believe in the inspiration and authority of Scripture and hold this view. The hermeneutical problem involved is a basic presupposition that Scripture is not inspired by God, and that any comparisons of the Bible with other literature can be explained as borrowings.

Use of Pharisaic ideas

There is no doubt that some of the ideas concerning the after-life in the account of Lazarus and the rich man were earlier Jewish concepts.² However, the Pharisees seemed to see Hades as a temporary place where it would be possible even to repent. They "cherished the hope that the dead, after a preliminary experience either of reward or of penalty in Hades, would be recalled to life by him (the Messiah) and be requited each according to his individual deeds."³ As to the possibility of repentance in Hades, the rabbis seem to hold divergent opinions. In one place two rabbis' opinions are brought together by the explanation that Gentile sinners could not repent in hell, but Israelites could (Erubin 19a). In another place, a sinner rebellious against God is said to be thrown into Gehenna, but that if he repents he is cast from it, like an arrow is shot forth from a bow (Tanchuma 27b).⁴ On the obvious problem with holding two contradictory opinions

¹Grobel, ". . . Whose Name Was Neves," p. 380.

²Supra., pp. 20-21. ³Thayer, Greek-English Lexicon, p. 649.

⁴C. G. Montefiore, Rabbinic Literature and Gospel Teachings (New York: KTAV Publishing House, 1970), p. 359.

at the same time, one critic has explained:

It is characteristic of the Rabbis that these divergent opinions about repentance after death continue to flourish side by side. The Rabbis did not mind these inconsistencies. They thought of one thing at a time, regardless of consequences. They felt the danger of letting people think that one could repent with ease after death, and thus continue to lead a sinful life upon earth; so they preached the doctrine that after death there could be, and there was, no room or opportunity for repentance. Yet, on the other hand, they were no pessimists, and they were reluctant to put any limit on repentance or forgiveness and on the grace and goodness of God. Hence they also taught the doctrine that repentance was possible after death. The one doctrine was in flagrant contradiction to the other; but they did not notice, or did not mind, the contradiction. Both doctrines were useful or even necessary, and so both doctrines were used and taught.¹

It is true that the Pharisees believed in the existence of the saved and lost after death. The Lord affirms this truth in Luke 16 and elsewhere. However, as the above quote shows, there was little consistent understanding as to what was involved past the door of death. The chasm (verse 26) was not a usual figure of Jewish Eschatology.² Also many of the other details of Luke 16:19-31, not to mention the overall thrust, were beyond the realm of Pharisaic thought.

Interpreters who insist that the Lord was using common beliefs of His listeners for illustrative purposes, rather than to teach truth, have failed to carefully examine the confused state of Jewish eschatology. Yet, many of the cults insist that this account cannot be a factual account of the afterlife and that Christ merely drew upon contemporary Pharisaic notions. This argument is used by Seventh-day Adventists for support for their doctrine of annihilation.

¹Ibid., pp. 359-360, quoting H. Loewe.

²Creed, The Gospel According to St. Luke, p. 213.

Seventh-day Adventists

Seventh-day Adventist commentators emphasize that the details of a parable should not be used to teach doctrine. They pose the question as to why Jesus would "introduce into a parable figurative illustrations that do not accurately represent truth as clearly set forth elsewhere in the Scriptures?"

Their answer is simple:

He was meeting people on their own ground. Many in the audience--without the least Old Testament Scriptural reason for doing so--had come to believe in the doctrine of a conscious state of existence between death and the resurrection. This erroneous belief . . . had become part of Judaism by the time of Jesus . . . In this parable Jesus simply made use of a popular belief in order to make forcibly clear an important lesson He sought to plant in the minds of His hearers.¹

They point out, then, that just because the Lord taught with contemporary ideas does not mean he agreed with what He Himself said. Another Seventh-day Adventist writer, Horn, explains in a similar vein:

Jesus' use of the term "Abraham's bosom" in His parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Lk. 16:22), must not be construed as His endorsement of Jewish eschatological concepts concerning the rewards of the righteous. To do so would make Him contradict His literal statements elsewhere concerning the condition of man in death . . . He was simply drawing upon contemporary concepts for an illustration.²

The Seventh-day Adventist, as has been noted, cannot correctly say that the Lord "was simply drawing upon contemporary concepts." The contemporary ideas concerning death and the afterlife were shadowy and

¹Nichol, ed. The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary, pp. 830-31. The underlining has been added.

²Siegfried H. Horn, Seventh-day Adventist Bible Dictionary (Washington D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1960), p. 11. The underlining has been added.

often contradictory. The main concept which the Lord used was the contemporary belief in existence of the soul immediately after death.

This brings to the forefront the main difficulty of Seventh-day Adventists and other cults believing in soul sleep: they approach the passage with the preconception that there is not conscious existence immediately after death. They contend that "to conclude from this parable that Jesus was teaching that at death the wicked are taken to a place where they undergo 'torments' is to make Him here contradict His plain teaching on that subject upon other occasions, as well as the Bible as a whole."¹

Allegorical Interpretation

Introductory remarks

In the preceding section, where accommodation to error has been considered, two basic ideas were discussed: (1) The liberal notion of Christ using an Egyptian Folk tale; and (2) The cultist belief that the Lord was using contemporary Pharisaic conceptions simply for illustrative purposes. The first idea, that a folk tale was being used, is possible only to those not holding to the inspiration and authority of the Bible. The real problem of such interpreters is a disbelief in God and His revealed Word. Such an approach leaves the interpreter with a real difficulty in explaining what is being said. Grobel, for example, accepts the claim that this account (Luke 16:19-31) was not included "for the purposes of conveying instruction about life here-

¹Nichol, ed., The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary, p. 833.

after." He goes on to say that the reason it was included "still lacks any generally accepted answer."¹

The second idea, that the Lord was using erroneous Pharisaic conceptions as an illustration, fails to recognize the divergent nature of many contemporary ideas on death and the afterlife. More seriously, those who hold this view have preconceptions as to what the rest of the Bible teaches about Hades and the afterlife. They are eager to make the account of Lazarus and the rich man fit into their particular system of teaching.

Jehovah's Witness interpretation

An obvious problem arises when an allegorical interpretation is forced upon Luke 16:19-31. Then, as has been concluded, the interpreter's subjectivity is given a free hand. The cults characteristically interpret this passage to support their particular view of Hades and eternal punishment, and in fact their particular view of God's plan in general.

As an example, Jehovah's Witnesses maintain that a literal interpretation of this account makes no sense: "it is unreasonable to suppose that one goes to hell because he is rich, wears good clothing and has plenty to eat. . . . It would be ridiculous to believe that in order to go to heaven one must be a beggar, lie at some rich man's gate . . ." Since their understanding (?) of its literal meaning is so "absurd," they have arrived at an allegorical meaning which they apparently find logical and convincing:

¹Grobel, ". . . Whose Name Was Neves," p. 375.

By this parable Jesus uttered a prophecy which has been undergoing its modern fulfillment since A.D. 1919. It has its applications to two classes existing on earth today. The rich man represents the ultraselfish class of the clergy of Christendom, who are now afar off from God and dead to his favor and service and tormented by the Kingdom truth proclaimed. Lazarus depicts the faithful remnant of the body of Christ. These, on being delivered from modern Babylon since 1919, receive God's favor, pictured by the "bosom position of Abraham," and are comforted through his Word.¹

Many other examples could be given as to the ends to which men have gone in interpreting the account of Lazarus and the rich man. Any allegorical interpretation is subjective and dangerous. Even though His Words may be difficult ones to accept, it is hermeneutically consistent and grammatically and logically possible to take Christ's teaching at face value. He was not weaving a tale needing allegorical interpretation; rather, He was teaching some important lessons in clear language.

General Allegorical View

The most common allegorical or figurative meaning given to Luke 16:19-31 associates it with God's dealing with the Jews and Gentiles. The rich man is the Jewish nation, rich in privilege and position because of God's grace. Lazarus is representative of the Gentiles, "spiritually poor, naked, hungry, homeless, within reach of the privileged people, yet by them left destitute." The old dispensation runs out, both die and the Jews and Gentiles are thrust into "the last times." The Gentiles are brought into a favored position with

¹Let God be True (Brooklyn, New York: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, Inc., 1946), pp. 98-99.

God while the Jews are cast out.¹

This allegorical interpretation is held by many who basically interpret Scripture in a sound manner. They hold that Luke 16:19-31 does teach truth concerning the afterlife, but that it also has a figurative interpretation. Habershon, for example, says that:

It seems that one line of teaching in the parable is that though Israel had refused to share their riches with the Gentiles, yet the unbelieving nation would be cast out, and would see the despised Gentiles in Abraham's bosom acknowledged by the Father of the faithful as his children.²

Trench, seems to agree that this account also has an allegorical meaning. Dives, he says, is representative of the Jewish nation, "clad in the purple of the king, and the fine linen of the priest," and given all spiritual blessing.

But as Dives looked for relief from Lazarus, so is the Jew looking for the alleviation of his miseries through some bettering of his outward estate,--some improvement of his civil condition, but which, if granted to him, would prove no more than a drop of water on the tongue. He knows not that it is the wrath of God which constitutes his misery.³

Many interpreters who find an allegorical meaning in this account do not make that spiritualized meaning to be "far out" or antithetical to Scripture in general. While it may be tempting to assert that the picture in Luke 16:19-31 is not to be understood with

¹Arnot, The Parables of Our Lord, p. 467. Arnot summarizes this interpretation well but does not endorse it.

²Ada R. Habershon, The Study of the Parables (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publishers, 1957), p. 163.

³Trench, Parables, pp. 170-71.

"absurd literalness," and that rather "behind its figures of speech are solemn realities,"¹ it is a dangerous assertion. For once the door to allegorical interpretation is opened, the allegorical meaning is limited only by the interpreter's imagination. This writer holds to a literal interpretation of this account and agrees with Arnot that Luke 16:19-31 must be taken "as in the first instance and mainly a direct moral lesson, accounting its allegorical capabilities secondary and to us uncertain."²

Literal Interpretation Defended

The first three sections of this chapter have dealt with the hermeneutics of Luke 16:19-31 in a summary of three approaches to the passage; an examination of three key terms; and thirdly in an appraisal of fallacious interpretations of the passage. Following are some concluding remarks on the author's position, the position that Luke 16:19-31 must be interpreted literally.

As has been noted, many refuse to take Christ at His Word because their preconceived theological system does not allow for it. Jehovah's witnesses, for example, ask why "those who know that the Bible does not teach the immortality of the soul continue to put a literal application on an obvious parable?"³ When a group's doctrine

¹Eerdman, The Gospel of Luke, p. 150.

²Arnot, The Parables of Our Lord, p. 467.

³Is This Life All There Is? (Brooklyn, New York: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1974), p. 109.

does not agree with the teachings of this passage, they allegorize the passage to make it harmonize with their view. Certainly a more solid basis of interpretation must be found than the subjective basis of allegorizing. The following discussion centers around the necessity of taking Christ at His Word--of accepting His teaching as being a literal rather than a figurative mode.

First of all, the Lord does not make any corrections concerning the concepts of the Pharisees. Had the Lord been using their ideas merely as a vehicle to illustrate other truths (i.e. if the idea of conscious punishment after death were a Pharisaic misconception) He would certainly have made the correction. The Lord once told the Sadducees, who did not believe in a resurrection (Mt. 22:23), "Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures" (Mt. 22:29). It is only reasonable to expect that in Luke 16, had these ideas concerning the afterlife been untrue, the Lord would have noted that instead of reinforcing erroneous concepts.

Secondly, it is important to realize that the narrative form of Luke 16:19-31 in no way indicates that the Lord was accommodating Himself to the error of His day in order to illustrate a point. Even if the account of the rich man and Lazarus were a parable, a parable can teach truth in the same way a historical account can. Luke 12:16-20 is a parable (verse 16) but it teaches definite things about death and riches. The parable also talks about a real Person--GOD (verse 20)!

In conclusion, this writer accepts Luke 16:19-31 as a historical incident in which Christ teaches true concepts of the afterlife.

Yet, whether the illustration is held to be a specific historical incident (related in a story form) or a parable (as some would assume) does not alter its effectiveness. Because Christ spoke these words and did not amend or correct them, they are best accepted at face value. Certainly He would not intentionally mislead or misrepresent facts in such a serious matter. He Who IS Truth (Jn. 14:6) certainly could not accommodate to error.

This passage, then, can be approached with the confident assurance that Christ's words are trustworthy in what they say concerning the afterlife and Hades. The intended meaning is clear without allegorizing. An objective, careful, and Spirit-led examination of the passage can result in the best understanding of its meaning.

Summary

In the hermeneutical study, first of all three ways of interpreting Luke 16:19-31 were summarized. Then the terms "literal," "allegorical," and "parable" were explained. Next, some false interpretations of the passage were examined.

The Lord could not have been accommodating to error (as liberal interpreters and Seventh-day Adventists hold) or using contemporary concepts merely for illustrative purposes. In fact, any kind of allegorical interpretation is both subjective and unnecessary. The position of the writer was emphasized--the position that Christ was teaching about the afterlife by using a historical incident.

The following chapter deals with some devotional and practical aspects of the accounts of the rich man and Lazarus. May these thoughts be of special meaning and encouragement to the reader.