

# ***International Bible Lessons Commentary***

## ***Luke 16:19-31***

***International Bible Lessons***  
**Sunday, January 26, 2014**

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The **International Bible Lesson** (*Uniform Sunday School Lessons Series*) for **Sunday, January 26, 2014**, is from **Luke 16:19-31**. **Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further** follow the verse-by-verse *International Bible Lesson Commentary* below. **Study Hints for Thinking Further**, a study guide for teachers, discusses the five questions below to help with class preparation and in conducting class discussion; these hints are available on the [International Bible Lessons Commentary](#) website. The weekly *International Bible Lesson* is posted each Saturday before the lesson is scheduled to be taught.

### ***International Bible Lesson Commentary***

#### **Luke 16:19-31**

**(Luke 16:19)** “There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day.

In this parable by Jesus, a rich man in purple and fine linen could indicate the man was of a royal family. To eat “sumptuously” meant he ate far more than he needed to maintain good health and he had plenty to share with others. The rich man could also be a political or religious leader who ignored those he considered far beneath him socially. Jesus indicated in the parable that he was a Jewish rich man, because he knew of father Abraham and he called him father Abraham when he saw him with Lazarus. Though he paid no attention to Lazarus when they both were alive, he recognized Lazarus too.

**(Luke 16:20)** And at his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores,

In religious circles and elsewhere, some people thought that rich people were wealthy because God blessed them and approved of their behavior, and poor or sick people were poor or sick because they lacked faith or were suffering the punishment of God for their sins. The Book of Job considers this way of thinking: Job’s comforters insisted that he was being punished by God and that was why he was suffering and had sores. If someone thinks the poor are being punished by God then they may also think they have no responsibility to help them or to help them would be contrary to God’s will. The Book of Job and this parable of Jesus refute this false thinking regarding the causes of suffering and riches. Lazarus was both poor and sick, but God was not punishing him for his sins; rather, Lazarus joined father Abraham in heaven and the rich man could not.

**(Luke 16:21) who longed to satisfy his hunger with what fell from the rich man's table; even the dogs would come and lick his sores.**

Lazarus was so destitute and suffered from such neglect that Jesus did not indicate that Lazarus ever had the courage to beg or ask anyone for help, especially the rich man. He longed to eat the garbage from the rich man's table, but the rich man probably used his garbage to feed his dogs. The dogs showed some interest in Lazarus, but the rich man showed none.

**(Luke 16:22) The poor man died and was carried away by the angels to be with Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried.**

When those who trust God die, angels come to carry them to heaven. Lazarus trusted God as his only source for what he needed in this life, and God honored his faith in him. God expected the rich man to care for Lazarus, but he did not; so, when he died he was simply buried – no angels came for him.

**(Luke 16:23) In Hades, where he was being tormented, he looked up and saw Abraham far away with Lazarus by his side.**

Jesus taught that heaven and hell are two separated destinations for those who die physically: a person who dies must go to one of these two places. Lazarus went to heaven to live with Abraham, who was declared righteous and saved because of his faith in God: Abraham believed God. Lazarus also believed God. The rich man went to Hades, because even though he may have “believed in” God, he did not “believe God” by doing what God commanded. If he had believed God, he would have obeyed God's law and have cared for the poor – especially his neighbor Lazarus, who the Bible commanded him to love. He would have loved his neighbor as himself, and Lazarus would have been fed well by him and his sores treated. Even if he thought Lazarus was being punished by God, he would have prayed for God's guidance in how best to help Lazarus make the changes he needed to make so he could help him get well and live right in the future.

**(Luke 16:24) He called out, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am in agony in these flames.’**

Probably, the rich man never had a thought about mercy for himself before he suffered in Hades, for he had eaten sumptuously. His behavior toward Lazarus had indicated he had no thought of mercy for those who had desperate needs. However, his conscience may have spoken to him to be merciful when he heard the Scriptures read in the synagogue, but it seems he suppressed that truth and ignored the Scriptures. In Hades, he asked for mercy to be shown to him in a concrete way by having Lazarus bring him a drop of water when he had never given a scrap of food to Lazarus. Perhaps he felt some guilt and knew that he did not deserve to ask for more than a drop of water. Perhaps surprisingly, he did not repent. He did not ask to be forgiven. He did not ask to be taken up to heaven to be with Abraham and Lazarus. Most probably, he recognized that he deserved to exist forever in Hades, and he had no interest in living with God in heaven.

**(Luke 16:25) But Abraham said, ‘Child, remember that during your lifetime you received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner evil things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in agony.**

The rich man did not directly ask Lazarus for help, which might have been too humbling. Perhaps he thought that Lazarus would have rejected helping him as he had rejected Lazarus on earth. Perhaps father Abraham would command Lazarus to help him. In Hades, he did not repent for what he had neglected to do (his sin of omission for not helping Lazarus). With compassion and gentleness, Abraham called him “child” because he was a physical descendant of Abraham. Abraham reminded him that his suffering was just because he was not a spiritual descendant of Abraham (a person who lives by faith in God). He had received good things on earth, and he had refused to share those good things with Lazarus. Lazarus had received evil things on earth, but because of his faith in God in spite of his suffering in earth he was comforted in heaven.

**(Luke 16:26) Besides all this, between you and us a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who might want to pass from here to you cannot do so, and no one can cross from there to us.’**

God in His grace does not make His children face the question of whether or not they should help those being justly punished in Hades, for God has created a great chasm between those who live by faith in Him and those who refuse to live by faith in Him (love and obey Him because they trust Him and His Word). Even if Abraham and Lazarus had felt moved to try to help the rich man, God has revealed in the Bible that salvation involves what we believe and do on earth in response to His Word, especially whether or not we believe in and love God and also love our neighbor as followers of His Son, Jesus. Furthermore, if the faithless were able to enter heaven, they would soon ruin heaven and make others miserable because of their evil self-centered behavior.

**(Luke 16:27) He said, ‘Then, father, I beg you to send him to my father’s house—**

The rich man did not argue, because he knew that Abraham was right and his sufferings were just punishment. In Hades, he had no incentive to repent or ask forgiveness, but in Hades he showed some concern for his family because they also lived without any thought of God or the consequences of disobeying God. They had no thought of compassion or of helping others. They did not believe God and they did not live by faith in God.

**(Luke 16:28) for I have five brothers—that he may warn them, so that they will not also come into this place of torment.’**

Here again, the rich man did not speak to Lazarus, but he wanted Abraham to send Lazarus on another errand for him (after all, on earth he was an influential rich man and it was difficult for him to change his selfish thinking). He had totally disregarded Lazarus on earth, but now he wanted Lazarus to serve him and those in his family who were just like him (but had not yet died). He did not ask that his brothers be taught to

love God and help the poor, but that they be warned to do something to avoid Hades.

**(Luke 16:29) Abraham replied, ‘They have Moses and the prophets; they should listen to them.’**

Abraham replied (and of course these are the words of Jesus in the parable) that those who have the Scriptures need to listen to (or obey) the Scriptures. If someone listens to Moses and the prophets, they will believe God and love God and their neighbors; they will recognize Jesus is the Messiah and believe the words of Jesus. People have all the truth they need in the Bible to live by faith in God, so they have no excuses for not believing God and living on the basis of believing God.

**(Luke 16:30) He said, ‘No, father Abraham; but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.’**

Throughout their lives these rich men had access to the Scriptures and the synagogue teachers who taught from the Scriptures. They knew about father Abraham from the Scriptures, but they had never believed God as Abraham had believed God in a way that moved them to obey God, love God, and love others. The rich man thought if Lazarus went back from the dead and warned them that they would repent. The rich man himself did not repent or ask to be sent back to his brothers (of course, this would not have been permitted either).

**(Luke 16:31) He said to him, ‘If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.’”**

In Jesus’ parable, Abraham replied truthfully that those who will not listen to the Scriptures will not believe God or repent even if they see someone raised from the dead. After Jesus raised His friend Lazarus from the dead, the Jewish leaders still did not believe, but they wanted to kill both Lazarus and Jesus. Jesus proved His statement to be true, because after His resurrection from the dead the religious leaders who had not listened to what Moses and the prophets said, but had crucified him, were not convinced that Jesus was the Messiah; they were not convinced to repent of their sins or do what God commanded them to avoid Hades. Instead, they were more determined to try to silence the apostles and kill some of them.

### **Five Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further**

1. Why did the rich man go to Hades after he died?
2. Do you think the rich man’s attitude about wealth was the same or similar to everyone else in his family? Give a reason for your answers.
3. Do you think the rich man thought he was religious enough and blessed by God so that he was surprised when he began his existence after death in Hades?

4. Do you think Lazarus went to heaven just because he was poor? Why might someone think that?

5. Why should people repent?

Begin or close your class by reading the short weekly *International Bible Lesson*.

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