THE MYSTERY OF HELL And How to Avoid It PAUL'S REVELATION

November 3, 2013 5th Sunday of Luke Revision E

Gospel: Luke 16:19-31

Epistle: 2 Corinthians 11:31-12:9

In the West today's Gospel lesson is used at about the same time in the Church year as in the East.

The Gospel lesson is one part of a series of teachings on the Kingdom of God (see below) that, except for the last two, is found only in Luke. This series contains a number of parables, events, and stories addressing various aspects of the Kingdom of God:

Luke 15	The Lost Sheep	Parable
	The Lost Coin	Story
	The Prodigal Son	Story
Luke 16	The Unjust Steward	Story
	The Rich Man & Lazarus	
Luke 17	The Ten Lepers	Event
Luke 18	The Tenacious Widow	Parable
	The Pharisee and the Publican	Parable
	The Rich Young Ruler	Event (also Matthew 9, Mark
		10
	The Blind Man of Jericho	Event (also Mark 10)

In this series, some are called parables, some aren't. Parables are fictional "what-if" stories used to teach a moral lesson. Some of the stories in this series are not called parables, and since this one names Lazarus as a certain individual (rather than just "a poor man"), the implication is that this event actually happened.

This series of kingdom teachings from Luke took place in late 29 AD and early 30 AD as Jesus was on His way to Jerusalem knowing He would be crucified. Two of these lessons – The Prodigal Son and the Pharisee and the Publican – are used in the Eastern Church during the weeks just prior to Lent. The Prodigal Son lesson is also used in the West during Lent. In addition, the Eastern lectionary covers the Ten Lepers, the Rich Young Ruler and the Blind Man of Jericho on successive Sundays: the 12th, 13th and 14th Sundays of Luke. The other four are used as weekday readings in the Eastern lectionary.

The Luke 16:19-31 passage describes a conversation between a man in Hades and one in Abraham's bosom. The rich man in Hades may not have done anything grossly immoral or evil Copyright © Mark Kern 2001

in the eyes of the world, but, like many people in our affluent Western society today, he lived to please himself in any way he could; pleasure was his god. We Americans are similarly obsessed with entertainment and sensual gratification. We seek to be entertained every minute thus preventing the silence that allows one to pray or commune with God. Yet we are indeed accountable to Him. Since he created us with free will that we might respond to His great love for us, He beckons us to love Him with all our being and our neighbor (made in God's image) as we love ourselves).

In verse 22, we find the beggar, who had been helpless and in misery in this life, carried to a place of great love, comfort and glory – sitting with Abraham. The Lord, who told this story also said that people from all over the world would thus sit down with Abraham, while those who were his physical children, but unbelieving, would be left out (Matthew 8:11-2). Verses 23-24 contrast the rich man in a state of torment due to great heat from a flame and very thirsty to say the least!

Many times, the Scriptures speak about the wrath of God. It is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men (Romans 1:18) and abides on him who does not believe (John 3:36; Ephesians 5:6). Those with hard and unrepentant hearts treasure up for themselves wrath on Judgment Day (Romans 2:5), while those justified by His Blood are saved from wrath (Romans 5:9). When the Wrath of God comes at the end times, it will be fierce (Revelation 16:19) and has been compared to a winepress squeezing out the last bit of juice (Revelation 14:19, 19:15). Those on the receiving end of the Wrath of God will get it full strength and will be tormented forever (Revelation 14:10-11). With these events at the end times, the Wrath of God is described as being complete (Revelation 15:1).

Appendix A summarized Scriptural descriptions of "hell." Some descriptive characteristics are: flame, heat, wailing, gnashing of teeth, but yet also black darkness. How this can be is somewhat of a mystery. Its location is also a mystery. It is described as just outside the New Jerusalem (Revelation 22:15, 14:9-11), where the righteous will be able to see and be abhorred at the place of the ungodly (Isaiah 66:24; compare Mark 9:43-48). This image of the so-near-yet-so-far is reinforced from the use of the term "Gehenna," the smoldering garbage dump outside the city of Jerusalem (Matthew 23:29-33).

Another aspect of "hell" is suggested by Basil the Great (4th Century). He suggests that the "cutting in half" of the ungodly on Judgment Day (Matthew 24:51, Luke 12:46) refers to the eternal alienation of the soul from the Spirit. "Thus in hell there is no one who confesses, no one in death who remembers God, because the help of the Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:3, Matthew 16:17) is no longer available" (On the Holy Spirit, 40).

John Chrysostom (4th Century) makes a similar conclusion in discussing the death of the soul: "I will show you (not just) the bodies of men, but the souls of men slaughtered in the other world. For it is possible for a soul to be slain with the slaughter peculiar to the soul. For as there is a death of the body, so there is also of the soul. 'The soul that sins', says the Prophet, 'it shall die' (Ezekiel 18:4). The death of the soul, however, is not like the death of the body; it is far more shocking. For this bodily death, separating the soul from the body...when the body has been in time dissolved and crumbled away, it is again gathered together in incorruption, and

receives back its own proper soul. Such is this bodily death. But that of the soul is awful. For this death (of the soul), when dissolution takes place, does not let (the soul) pass or separate, as the death of the body does, but binds it down again to an imperishable body and consigns it to the unquenchable fire. This then is the death of the soul. And as therefore there is a death of the soul, so there is also a slaughter of the soul. What is the slaughter of the body? It is the being turned into a corpse, the being stripped of the energy derived from the soul. What is the slaughter of the soul? It is its being made a corpse also. And how is the soul made a corpse? Because as the body then becomes a corpse when the soul leaves it destitute of its own vital energy, so also does the soul then become a corpse when the Holy Spirit leaves it destitute of His spiritual energy" (Homily XVIII on Ephesians 5).

Isaac of Nineveh (7th Century) suggests that the love of God toward the ungodly in hell is a torment in itself (Homily 84). Gregory of Nyssa (4th Century) suggests that the gulf separating Lazarus and the rich man is made by decisions we make in this life and not necessarily by a parting of the earth (on the Soul and the Resurrection, Para 40).

When the New Jerusalem comes, there will be no night, nor will there be any sun or moon to give light (Revelation 21:22-25). The Glory of God illumines everything. This obviously refers to the uncreated light of God.

Similarly, the fires of hell are said to burn forever (Revelation 14:9-11, 21:8, 20:10). If this were physical fire, it would eventually burn itself out when all its fuel is consumed. Thus the fires of hell must be uncreated fire. God Himself is often described as a consuming fire (Hebrews 12:29, Exodus 24:17, Isaiah 33:14), and the Throne of God as being in the midst of fire (Ezekiel 1).

Could the uncreated light of God that illumines the earth and the uncreated fire from His Presence also cause the fires of hell? The Scriptures speak of how God will not be angry forever (Psalm 85:5, Isaiah 57:16). But yet God cannot change Who He is either. Perhaps another aspect to the torment of hell is for the unrighteous to live forever in the light of God where they would be continually repelled by His Holiness.

In discussing the good things the rich man had in his life verses the evil things Lazarus had (v.25), we are reminded of the suffering and groanings of Job, who complained that the wicked tend to live in ease and prosperity, often up to the very time of death, whereas others suffer so much. But Job was also aware that things would be quite different in the hereafter! (Job 21:7-16). Therefore, the Lord warns those who are rich, full of good earthly things, or well-spoken of by men in this life (Luke 6:24-26). James cries out that the rich would "weep and howl" if only they could see the eternal realities they face because of their life of wanton pleasure (James 5:1-6). This is covered in more detail in the Gospel lesson for the 9th Sunday of Luke (the rich Fool).

The Lord in His wisdom and mercy often does things deliberately to give us an opportunity to repent. Lazarus was "laid at the rich man's gate" in order that the rich man might have an opportunity to do some good work (v.20). All Lazarus wanted was the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table (v.21). But what did he get? The only mercy that was showed to him

was via the dogs who licked his sores (v.21). The saliva of dogs has some medicinal value, even if it isn't very aesthetically pleasing. However, the rich man's life was so focused on his own pleasure that he failed to take advantage of this opportunity at his gate.

In verses 28-31, the rich man was remorseful and begged that his five brothers might be warned by Lazarus rising from the dead so that they might not find themselves in his predicament. Abraham stated that this would do no good. Throughout the Scriptures we are told that if a person sees and obeys Scripture, he will be saved. Thus Isaiah warned the people not to listen to mediums and wizards, false sources of spiritual enlightenment, but to hear the Law and the Prophets (Isaiah 8:19-20). He insisted that every word of Scripture is spoken by God (Isaiah 34:16).

But the Apostle John and the Lord tell us how Scripture saves us: not by our obeying the letter of the Law, but by obeying the spirit of the Law (Matthew 22:37-40), Matthew 5:18), which brings us to Christ. That is, Moses himself accuses those who reject the Lord (John 5:39-40, 45-47); he is read in every synagogue, on every Sabbath, throughout many generations (Acts 15:21). Those in Berea are commended for honestly searching the Scriptures, leading them to faith in Christ (Acts 17:11-22). The Apostle Paul also says that the purpose of Scripture is to lead us to Christ and equip us for good works (2 Timothy 3:15-17). Faith itself is a gift (Ephesians 2:9); the written word is the chief visible means by which God gives us this gift of faith.

In the story of our Gospel lesson, Abraham stated that those who refused to heed these sacred writings would not believe even when confronted with someone rising from death (v.31). This was demonstrated by the chief priests seeking to kill Lazarus after he had been raised (John 12:10-11).

While the study and contemplation of hell and eternal punishment may be difficult to bear and even frightening to consider, there are good purposes for doing so. As John Chrysostom said: "None of those who have hell before their eyes will fall into hell. No one of those who belittle hell will escape hell. If the Ninevites had not feared destruction, they would have been overthrown; but because they feared, they were not overthrown. If in the time of Noah they had feared the deluge, they would not have been drowned. Nothing is so profitable as to converse concerning hell. It renders our souls purer than any silver. For hear the prophet saying, 'Your judgments were always before me' (Psalm 18:22). But when we are about to come before the Judgment-seat of Christ, it will be too late to entreat the Judge. And yet He grants a long season of forbearance. He does not snatch us away in the midst of our sins, but permits us time to put them off' (Homily II on 2 Thessalonians 1).

APPENDIX A

Descriptions of Hell in the Scriptures

Words Used to Describe Hell

Hebrew

Sheol (7585): Hades, implying a subterranean location

Shakhat (7845): a pit or a trap used figuratively implying destruction

Abaddon (11): destruction, from the verb "to wander away"

Greek

Hades (86): lit. The unseen; in Greek Mythology, the subterranean abode of the dead corresponding to the Hebrew Sheol (Compare Philippians 2:10, Ephesians 4:9)

Tartaros (5020): In Greek Mythology, the deepest abyss in Hades for the worst offenders

Abussos (12): From negative participle plus buthos = sea; implies the ocean bottom and below; abyss. Note that in Revelation 21:1 there is no more sea.

Phrear (5421): a hole in the ground; a pit. Used to describe a shaft leading to the abyss

Gehenna (1067): Gay-Hinnom; Valley of Hinnom, a smoldering garbage dump outside Jerusalem. Besides trash, the Valley of Hinnom also included the effluent of all the latrines in Jerusalem

Limnen tou puros (3041 & 4442): Lake of Fire

Passages Describing Hell

Deuteronomy 32:21-22 – Sheol, as a subterranean place, includes fire

Isaiah 66:21-24 – For those in Sheol, their worm (lit. maggot) will not die and their fire shall not be quenched. This passage is amplified in Revelation 20-22, and is quoted in Mark 9:42-48

Job 33:17-18 – Sheol and shakhat are sometimes used together to imply hell

Proverbs 15:11 – Sheol and abaddon are also used together to imply hell

Job 31:12 – Fire is also associated with abaddon

Acts 2:27, 31 – In the Nicean Creed, we say that Jesus descended into hell. Here we see one place where that statement comes from: Jesus was not left in Hades.

- **Revelation 20:13-14** The sea, death and Hades gave up the dead in them for judgment. Then, death and Hades were thrown into the Lake of Fire and there was no more sea.
- **2 Peter 2:4** God did not spare the angels who sinned, but consigning to Tartarus delivered (them) in chains of gloom. They were being watched and guarded awaiting judgment.
- **Revelation 9:1-4** A star fell from heaven and was given the key to the shaft (Gk *phrear*) of the abyss (abussos). Out of the shaft came smoke like from a great furnace and from the smoke came locusts (or demons) to torment unbelievers. Perhaps these are the ones consigned to "Tartarus" in 2 Peter 2:4.
- Genesis 7:11 (Septuagint) In the Greek rendering of the Old Testament (200 BC), it was the fountains of the great abyss (abussos) that burst open to create the major source of the flood water. Even today, the ocean bottoms are referred to as the "abyssal plains" (National Geographic World Atlas).
- **Matthew 13:41-43** This is the conclusion of the parable of the Wheat and the Tares. Here Hell is described as a furnace where there will be wailing and gnashing of teeth.
- **Jude 13** Here hell is described as "the black darkness."

What is Abraham's Bosom?

The Greek word for bosom, *kolpos*, is similar to the English word bosom and implies more than just physical anatomy.

- **John 13:23** John leaned on Jesus' bosom at the Last Supper. Here physical anatomy is obvious.
- **John 1:18** The Only Begotten Son is in the bosom of the Father. More than physical anatomy is implied: "bosom" here implies a true oneness.
- **Luke 6:38** The reward for generosity is "good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over will be put into your bosom." This is not an allusion to some type of trash compactor. "Bosom" here implies generally things within one's control or possession.

Thus Abraham's bosom in our Gospel lesson implies (1) a oneness of Lazarus with Abraham and (2) a place that is under Abraham's control as one of the Patriarchs of the Faith.

Luke 13:27-29 – A further aspect of Abraham's bosom is the gathering of the Patriarchs, the Prophets, the saints and the righteous in the Kingdom of God. With the eyes of faith in the Liturgy, we can get a tiny glimpse of this as we look through the windows of heaven (icons).

All this represents a bewildering array of terms: Hades, the abyss, the Lake of Fire, Abraham's bosom, heaven. There is a mystery to this that we won't know until the Lord returns.

Just as the New Jerusalem is the place prepared for the righteous (Revelation 21:2, John 14:2-34), so hell (in its various descriptive terms) is the place prepared for the devil and his legions (Matthew 25:41, 2 Peter 2:4) and for the ungodly (Jude 13, 2 Peter 1:17). We are told hell will consist of darkness, flame, weeping and gnashing of teeth, and that it will not be part of the New Jerusalem, but will be outside (Revelation 22:15, 14:9-11, Isaiah 66:24). But how can Hades, much less death, be thrown into the Lake of Fire? This suggests that Hades (and consequently Abraham's bosom) are temporary abodes and that the Lake of Fire and the New Jerusalem are the final destinations. To consider such merely adds to the mystery.

PAUL'S REVELATION

November 3, 2013 19th Sunday after Pentecost Revision D

Epistle: 2 Corinthians 11:31-12:9

Today's Epistle is used in the West either on the 9th Sunday after Pentecost or two Sundays before Lent. In the Orthodox lectionary, today's Epistle lesson is also used for the Feast Day of Peter and Paul on June 29.

The lesson focuses on some of the visions and revelations that the Apostle Paul experienced. These visions were great revelations, but Paul had kept silent about them for 14 years (2 Corinthians 12:2). Since 2 Corinthians was written in 55 AD, this places the time of the revelations in 41 AD, which would be about 7 years after Paul was converted on the road to Damascus. Thus the visions occurred while Paul was in Tarsus (Acts 9:29-30) and about 4 years before Barnabas brought him to Antioch to help out with the church there (Acts 11:25-26). For more details of this and for a history of the early life of Paul, see the Epistle lesson for the 20th Sunday of Pentecost.

The Apostle John experienced similar visions and revelations (Revelation 1:10-11, 17, Revelation 4:1-2), which occurred on "the Lord's Day" (Revelation 1:10) or Sunday. (Ignatius in 107 AD wrote the Christians no longer keep the Sabbath but live in accordance with the Lord's Day: Magnesians 9:1). John did not say whether he was bodily translated to heaven (Revelation 4:1-2). Like Paul, he may not have known.

Why did Paul keep silent about these things so long? And why did he break silence at this time? He states that it is not profitable for him to boast of such things (2 Corinthians 12:1). However, the Corinthians had been putting up with others that had boasted (foolishly) of their own visions (2 Corinthians 11:18-20). While Paul was reluctant, he could also see that some of the flock in Corinth were in danger of perishing: those that had not repented from uncleanness, fornications and lewdness (2 Corinthians 12:31). He needed to get their attention regarding the things he had been saying and show them that the Gnostic heretics they had been putting up with hadn't seen what he had seen.

John Chrysostom adds that Paul was caught up into Paradise – at the beginning of his apostleship – so that he might not be inferior to the rest of the Apostles, or seem to be. For they had accompanied Christ but Paul had not (Homily XXVI on 2 Corinthians 12).

The third heaven, which Paul and John saw in their visions, is a term used by First Century Jews to describe heavenly realms. For example, the sun is described as stopping in midheaven, or the second heaven, for Joshua (Joshua 10:13). Birds also fly in midheaven (Revelation 8:13, 19:17), where the boundaries between the heavens are undoubtedly somewhat blurred.

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In order that Paul might not get too conceited concerning his visions, the Lord also gave him a "thorn in the flesh", "a messenger of Satan" to beat him up. (Greek: *kolaphizo* = to strike with the fist). Much speculation has been made concerning whether this was some physical problem or whether it refers to some people that Paul fought against. Verses 9-10 imply a physical weakness; however, John Chrysostom states that the thorn in the flesh was Alexander the Coppersmith and those with him (Ibid.).

Alexander was most likely the son of Simon of Cyrene, who had been pressed into service to carry Jesus' cross at the crucifixion (Mark 15:21). Simon and his sons, Alexander and Rufus, were probably among those men from Cyprus and Cyrene (Acts 11:20) who had started the Church in Antioch.

Rufus was in Antioch when Paul and Barnabas were sent off on their First Missionary Journey and when Paul and Silas were sent off on the Second. After the Second Missionary Journey, Rufus was sent to Rome by Peter and Paul and was there when Paul wrote Romans (Romans 16:13). Later Rufus was ordained Bishop of Thebes in Egypt; he was eventually martyred in 107 AD along with Ignatius, the Bishop of Antioch.

Alexander chose a different path for himself, however. He was associated with the craftsmen such as Demetrius the silversmith in Ephesus (Acts 19:24) who built small idols; he opposed Paul in about 54 AD (Acts 19:33). Later Paul referred to Alexander as a coppersmith (2 Timothy 4:14). Yet he rejected the faith. Along with Hymenaeus, Paul felt it necessary to deliver them to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme (1 Timothy 1:19-20). They were part of a Gnostic heresy that claimed that the resurrection was already past (2 Timothy 2:16-18); this overthrew the faith of some people. Finally, it was Alexander that was primarily responsible for Paul's martyrdom in about 67 AD (2 Timothy 4:14). Paul warned Timothy to beware of Alexander because he greatly resisted Paul's words (2 Timothy 4:15). The implication is that he went out of his way to have Paul hunted down, arrested and accused before the Roman authorities.

Whether the "thorn in the flesh" was Alexander or some physical weakness, Paul asked the Lord three times to remove it (2 Corinthians 12:8). But each time, the Lord said, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in (your) weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9).

Paul's example is a good lesson for us today. Whether we have had visions of the Lord in glory or not, the Lord will put limits on us so that we don't get too exalted above measure (2 Corinthians 12:7). That way the Lord gets the glory for the achievements and His strength is made perfect in our weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9). From Paul's point of view, he took pleasure in infirmities, reproaches, needs, persecutions and distresses for Christ's sake (2 Corinthians 12:10). For being weak, then he was strong.

Messengers of Satan

The term "messenger of Satan" (or angel of Satan) needs further clarification. We note that Paul's "weakness", whether physical or personal was "a messenger from Satan" (v.7). The life of Job also contains illustrations of both physical and personal messengers from Satan. Job was a descendant of Esau who lived during the years that Israel was in Egypt. His ordeals began with the Lord pointing out to Satan that Job was unique on the earth "a blameless and upright man, fearing God and turning away from evil" (Job 1:8). Job even offered prayers and offerings for his ten children consecrating them just in case they had sinned in their heart (Job 1:6). Satan felt that if Job were poor and destitute, Job would curse God to His face (Job 1:11). So the Lord allowed Satan to send several "messengers" his way.

First the Sabeans attacked and took all Job's oxen and donkeys, killing Job's herdsmen in the process (Job 1:14-15). Second, "the fire of God" fell from heaven and burned up all the sheep, killing the shepherds with the sheep (Job 1:16). Third, the Chaldean raiders came and took all Job's camels, killing the keepers who were defending. Lastly, while Job's children were having a feast at the house of the oldest son "on his day" (probably his birthday, Job 1:4) a great wind came from across the wilderness, collapsing the house on top of them and killing them all (Job 1:18-19). Thus these messengers were two personal ones (the Sabeans and the Chaldeans) and two miraculous ones (the fire of God and the great wind). Today's insurance industry would refer to these last two as "acts of God" even though their source is an act of Satan.

Job's response to all this was to prepare himself to worship the Lord saying, "Naked I came from my mother's womb and naked I shall return there. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the Name of the Lord" (Job 1:21). Meanwhile, the Lord pointed out to Satan that Job held fast to his integrity "even though you incited Me against him to ruin him without cause" (Job 2:3). Satan replied that if Job were plagued with diseases on his bone and his flesh, he would curse God to His face (Job 2:5). So the Lord allowed Satan to send more "messengers" to Job.

The next "messenger from Satan" was a physical one: "severe boils from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head" (Job 2:7). Now destitute and unable to afford any medical attention, Job's only medical alternative was scrapping the pus off his skin with a piece of broken pottery. Completely disfigured by these diseases, Job's wife advised him: "Do you still hold fast your integrity? Just curse God and die!" (Job 2:9). When three of his friends came to see him after hearing of his adversity, they didn't even recognize him at first because of his disfigurement. When they did, they openly wept (Job 2:11-12). Following this, they sat down with him for seven days without saying a word, for they saw that his pain was very great (Job 2:13). For Job, it was so bad he wished he had never been born (Job 3:1).

Following this came the last messenger: the inquisition. Job's three friends thought that Job had some secret sin that brought all this evil down on his own head. Eliphaz the Temanite suggested that those who plow iniquity and sow trouble harvest it. The innocent and upright don't perish for no reason (Job 4:7-8). Bilhad the Shuhite suggested that perhaps Job's sons had sinned and had gotten their just reward. If Job, himself were without guilt, surely God would have, by now, restored his righteous estate. After all, God will not reject a man of integrity nor

will He support evil doers (Job 8:4, 6, 20). Job claimed he was innocent. Zephan the Naamathite suggested that the Lord knows false men without investigating their circumstances. "If you would direct your heart right and spread out your hand to Him (that is, in prayer); if iniquity is in your hand, put it far away and do not let wickedness dwell in your tents (Job 11:4, 11-14). The effect of all this on Job was that "the tents of the destroyers prosper while the just and blameless man is a joke (Job 12:4, 6).

This last messenger from Satan was perhaps the cruelest and the most difficult to deal with. After all, there was ample evidence all around Job that it was true! Chrysostom commented that "the reproaches of Job's friends appeared more grievous than the worms and the sores. For there is nothing more intolerable to those in affliction than a word capable of stinging the soul" (Homily XII on 2 Corinthians 6). This is exactly what the "messengers of Satan" see to convince us of also: that God is not faithful, that He doesn't care about us and that we should only trust in what we can see.

Paul reminds us that the usefulness of our "thorns in the flesh" or "messengers of Satan" are that we don't get exalted above measure (v.7). After all, we are to bear our crosses as our Lord bore His (Mark 8:34-37), and as He humbled Himself to death on the Cross, so should we. The Lord told Paul, and He tells us, "My grace is sufficient for you for My strength is made perfect in weakness" (v.9). Going through all he went through, it's hard to imagine the Lord's grace being sufficient for Job; but it was. Paul also said, "God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it" (1 Corinthians 10:13).

The Lord saw His Cross (which itself was a messenger of Satan) as His Glory (John 12:23). Job wasn't aware of what was going on in heaven between the Lord and Satan, but eventually He realized that his ordeal was for his glory also. And as a result, Job was rewarded both in this life and in the age to come (Job 42:10-17, James 5:11).