

# Punishment Immediately after Death : A Probable Egyptian Remnant in the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus

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In the Jewish and Christian faiths, beliefs about the fates of sinners after death gradually changed during the first two centuries C. E. The most prominent view in the days of Jesus of Nazareth was that sinners are not punished immediately after death but held in “detention,” awaiting punishment at the last judgment, as represented in *1 Enoch* and later in *2 Enoch*, *4 Ezra*, and *2 Baruch*. The belief that the eternal punishment of sinners begins immediately after death remained a minority view, at least during the first century C.E. In this context, the parable of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16: 19–31 (likely derived from Jesus himself) is rather peculiar, in that it refers to the punishment of the rich man in Hades immediately after death; there is no other such depiction in the New Testament.

My proposal is that this peculiarity can be best explained by appealing to the original framework of the judgment of the dead in the Egyptian tale of Setme and his son Si-Osiris, as it likely forms the background of the plot of the parable. This proposal agrees with and reinforces the old theory that an older version of this tale was presumably imported into Palestine by Alexandrian Jews, before by the time of Jesus; retold by rabbis as a Jewish story, later included in *ySanh. 23c//yHag. 77d* as a story of a tax collector and Torah scholars; and became popular enough to be used by Jesus.