

Luke 16:28

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

For I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment.

Analysis

For I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment. The rich man's concern shifts from self (v. 24) to family. He has 'five brethren' (πέντε ἀδελφούς, pente adelphous) still living and presumably following his materialistic lifestyle. His request: send Lazarus to 'testify unto them' (διαμαρτύρηται αὐτοῖς, diamartyrētai autois)—to solemnly warn, to bear urgent witness. The purpose: 'lest they also come into this place of torment' (ἵνα μὴ καὶ αὐτοὶ ἔλθωσιν εἰς τὸν τόπον τοῦτον τῆς βασάνου, hina mē kai autoi elthōsin eis ton topon touton tēs basanou).

This reveals both genuine concern (he doesn't want his brothers to suffer) and profound delusion (he thinks a resurrection appearance would convince them when Scripture hasn't). Abraham's response (v. 29) is devastating: 'They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.' The brothers possess sufficient revelation in Scripture—they need no supernatural sign. If they ignore God's written word, even resurrection wouldn't convince them. Jesus' own resurrection would prove this: despite overwhelming evidence, religious leaders rejected Him and bribed guards to spread lies (Matthew 28:11-15).

The rich man's plea exposes the falsehood that people would believe if only given more evidence. Unbelief is fundamentally a heart problem, not an evidence problem. Those who reject Scripture's clear testimony won't be convinced by miracles. The parable concludes with Jesus' prophetic irony: one named Lazarus would rise from the dead (John 11), yet many still wouldn't believe (John 12:10-11).

Historical Context

The rich man's concern for his five brothers suggests they shared his wealthy, self-indulgent lifestyle, ignoring the poor and trusting riches. His assumption that resurrection testimony would convince them reflects common Jewish belief that miraculous signs would produce faith. Yet Jesus consistently refused to give signs to unbelievers (Matthew 12:38-39, 16:4) because miracles don't create genuine faith in hard hearts.

Abraham's response—"They have Moses and the prophets"—means the brothers possess the entire Old Testament revelation. Scripture repeatedly commands care for the poor and warns against trusting riches (Deuteronomy 15:7-11, Psalm 62:10, Proverbs 11:28, 23:4-5, Amos 6:1-7). If they won't obey clear scriptural commands, no miracle will change their hearts. Jesus' teaching anticipates His own resurrection—the ultimate sign that many would still reject. The Pharisees who heard this parable would soon witness Jesus' resurrection yet refuse to believe, proving Abraham's words prophetic. The sufficiency of Scripture and the necessity of heart transformation remain central Christian doctrines.

Related Passages

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Study Questions

1. What does the rich man's assumption that a resurrection appearance would convince his brothers reveal about misunderstanding unbelief's root cause?
2. How does Abraham's insistence on Scripture's sufficiency ('They have Moses and the prophets') challenge demands for additional evidence or experiences?
3. In what ways do you seek miraculous confirmation instead of simply obeying Scripture's clear commands about wealth, generosity, and compassion?

Interlinear Text

ἔχω γὰρ πέντε ἀδελφούς ὅπως διαμαρτύρηται αὐτοὶ
I have For five brethren that he may testify they
G2192 G1063 G4002 G80 G3704 G1263 G846

ἵνα μὴ καὶ αὐτοὶ ἔλθωσιν εἰς τὸν τόπον τοῦτον τῆς
G2443 G3361 **also they come into** G3588 **place this** G3588
G2532 G846 G2064 G1519 G5117 G5126

βασάνου
of torment
G931

Additional Cross-References

Acts 20:23 (Witness): Save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me.