

# Lazarus and the Dogs: The Diagnosis and Treatment

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This study explores the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus, elucidating the details of Lazarus' worldly suffering – what it is that ails him, and whether the dogs are friends or fiends. Fresh evidence from the classical world is brought to bear, including medical texts, miracle stories and philosophical treatises, in addition to overlooked Jewish and Christian testimony. The results establish the plausibility of maladies unrelated to diseases or skin conditions, and reveal the dogs to be positive characters that highlight Lazarus' penury and the rich man's depravity. New avenues into several broader interpretive issues of the parable are explored.

**Keywords:** parable, Lazarus, healing, medicine, dog, Rich Man and Lazarus

## Introduction

The parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus is a favourite among biblical scholars and theologians alike, generating an immense body of secondary literature devoted to many broad and important questions – literary, historical and theological.<sup>1</sup> The suffering Lazarus at the rich man's gate shares a privileged

- 1 Several monographs are devoted solely to the parable: M. R. Hauge, *The Biblical Tour of Hell* (NLT 485; London/ New York: Bloomsbury/T&T Clark, 2013); O. Lehtipuu, *The Afterlife Imagery in Luke's Story of the Rich Man and Lazarus* (NovTSup 123; Leiden: Brill, 2007); J. Hintzen, *Verkündigung und Wahrnehmung: Über das Verhältnis von Evangelium und Leser am Beispiel Lk 16, 19–31 im Rahmen des lukanischen Doppelwerkes 1* (Frankfurt: Hain, 1991). Among the many broad questions meriting attention are: if it is a parable at all; if it is possible to attribute any or all of it to the historical Jesus; if it refers to the resurrection of Jesus; if the story, in whole or in part, has been borrowed from some other source; if this Lazarus is to be equated somehow with the Lazarus in Bethany; if the description of the afterlife is intended to be normative for Christians; how one is to imagine 'Abraham's bosom' and how it could be within earshot of Hades; what the reason is for Lazarus' reward and the rich man's punishment; how this pericope relates to its immediate narrative context and other L parables; and what the central teaching of the parable is. For discussion and more questions still, see F. Bovon, *Luke 2: A Commentary on the Gospel of Luke 9:51–19:27* (ed. H. Koester; Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013) 473; and K. R. Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent: A Comprehensive Guide to the Parables of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008) 419–20.

place with the Prodigal Son and the Good Samaritan as the most evocative images of the human condition in the parables tradition. In spite of this, one observes in scholarship a decided focus on the afterlife scene of the parable and relatively little concern to understand Lazarus' earthly situation. In this neglect it seems that we have stepped over Lazarus once more on the way to our scholarly banquets. This study does not begin by attempting to solve any grand issues about the parable, instead it aims to understand the intimate details of Lazarus' suffering – what it is that ails him, and what the author means by informing us that 'even the dogs would come and lick his sores'. By contributing fresh evidence to these seemingly minor details we are compelled to see the entire parable in a new light and to rethink how we answer some of the broader questions.

### 1. Diagnosing Lazarus

Lazarus has been diagnosed with a host of ailments in scholarship – starving, hungry, paralysed, crippled, lame, blind, covered with weeping sores, suffering from various skin diseases including leprosy, or some combinations of these – generally with little distinction made between what is speculation and what is explicit in the text. Among all these diagnoses, only Lazarus' hunger is clear and specific. The origin of Lazarus as a blind, crippled or lame person derives from his perceived inability to drive away the dogs and, occasionally, the interpretation that he was 'hurled' there.<sup>2</sup> The ubiquitous ascription of impurity conferring skin diseases and weeping ulcers to him derives from the belief that Lazarus is 'covered with sores'.<sup>3</sup> This assumption needs especially to be

2 E.g. J. Jeremias: 'Lazarus is a cripple (ἐβέβλητο = *r<sup>e</sup>me* = "thrown down, lying"), suffering from a skin-disease' (*The Parables of Jesus* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1963<sup>2</sup>) 183); and D. Wenham: 'The Greek word literally means someone "thrown" down on the ground, suggesting that he was a cripple of some sort ... the revolting description of the dogs licking his sores suggests that he may have been severely disabled and so unable to protect himself' (*The Parables of Jesus* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1989) 142–3). The connection between being thrown and being crippled is unwarranted. It is perfectly possible to throw down people who are not crippled. There are two antithetical possibilities for the pluperfect passive ἐβέβλητο, either that Lazarus 'had been laid' at the rich man's gate or that he 'had been hurled'. While there are far earlier examples (e.g. Homer, *Il.* 5.574), in late Greek (i.e. New Testament period) the sense of βάλω in the passive voice lost the sense of 'thrown' or 'hurled' and entered the lexical range of 'set', 'place' or 'lay' (cf. Matt 4.18). The debate of its sense at Luke 16.20 has extended at least as far back as Jülicher and Godet (A. Jülicher, *Die Gleichnisreden Jesu* (2 vols; Freiburg im Breisgau: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1899) II.619; F. L. Godet, *A Commentary on the Gospel of St. Luke* (trans. E. W. Shalders and M. D. Cusin (2 vols.; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1889) II.177). Both interpretations have strong scholarly support; however, the contextual clues added by the present study lean in the direction of 'had been laid'.

3 For example, W. R. Herzog II: 'Lazarus is perpetually hungry, and in light of his skin condition, he is probably shunned as unclean' (*Parables as Subversive Speech: Jesus as Pedagogue of the*

challenged. On the remarkably rare occasions when scholars have commented on the *hapax legomenon* ἐίλκωμένος, always translated ‘covered’ or ‘full of sores’, the only texts used for comparison are the scant examples from the Septuagint.<sup>4</sup> As of yet, it seems that nobody has consulted ancient medical literature to see how the passive participle of ἐίλκώω is used, nor compared the cognate noun ἔλκος, biblically rare but extremely common elsewhere.<sup>5</sup> When we examine ancient medical literature for occurrences of ἐίλκώω and ἔλκος we find that the common translation of Luke 16.20–1 is either completely wrong, or lacks important nuances inherent to these terms.

In classical literature, the word ἔλκος means ‘wound’ or ‘lesion’ in the broadest sense. Unlike ‘sores’ or ‘ulcers’ which imply a subdermal origin or infection or suppuration of some kind, we find that no such connotations are necessary for ἔλκος. In the Hippocratic corpus there are hundreds of references to ἔλκη, and the usage is remarkably varied. In several compositions such as *Epidemics*, it is clear that ἔλκος does describe skin ulcers and infections that accompany outbreaks of disease (see also *De prisca medicina* 19.1); however, several other Hippocratic treatises complicate this picture. By far the most important treatise for the proper understanding of ἔλκος is the eponymously titled *De ulceribus*, or *On Wounds*. Despite the treatise being precisely on the subject, for reasons unknown, *De ulceribus* does not appear in the BDAG entry for either ἔλκος or ἐίλκώω. It is here that we find the surest evidence that we have been mistaken in assuming Lazarus’ ἔλκη are simply ‘sores’ or the result of disease. In the entire treatise, reference to the source of a ἔλκος is either unnamed or explicitly due to *injury*, whether from weapons, falls or burns (*De ulceribus* 1, 3, and 13, respectively). These injuries are all described with ἔλκος, and regardless of whether they are infected or not. This treatise also offers explicit confirmation that a state of infection or putrefaction is nowhere implied. After listing a series

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*Oppressed* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1994) 118). Herzog commendably devotes much space to a discussion of Lazarus’ situation.

- 4 The most thorough treatment of Lazarus’ wounds in a medical context is undertaken by A. Weissenrieder, whose impressive study is limited by the assumption that these are the same ἔλκη as those in the LXX leitical code (*Images of Illness in the Gospel of Luke* (WUNT 11/164; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), especially 139–67). ἔλκος in the LXX generally refers to sores, rendering the Hebrew ׀חשׁ; see however Prov 25.20 where it renders נרר (the problematic Hebrew is translated by the NRSV as ‘wound’).
- 5 A.-J. Levine takes a step in the right direction in unhitching ἔλκος in this parable from the purity concerns in the leitical code by considering extra-biblical texts, albeit in a cognate form (ἐίλκωσις) and still from a ‘Jewish’ author (Josephus, *A.J.* 17.169; *Ag. Ap.* 2.143) (*Short Stories by Jesus: The Enigmatic Parables of a Controversial Rabbi* (New York: HarperOne, 2014) 281). On biblical ‘leprosy’, see J. S. Baden and C. R. Moss, ‘The Origin and Interpretation of Šāra‘at in Leviticus 13–14’, *JBL* 130 (2011) 643–62.

of ingredients to apply as a salve, the author writes: ‘These things in powder prevent recent wounds (ἔλκεα) from suppurating’ (*De ulceribus* 6). In other words, as the author explains, to prevent a ἔλκος from becoming a sore, one should apply the prescribed treatment.

Innumerable literary examples can be also be adduced in which ἔλκος describes a ‘wound’. Beginning as early as Homer, we can see that no connotations associated with ‘sores’ are necessary. In the aftermath of a battle, we find that Menelaus, having been grazed by an arrow, was left with a bleeding ἔλκος (Homer, *Il.* 4.190). Scores of other medical examples appear, for instance, in the Hippocratic treatises *Joints* (*Artic.*), and *Head Wounds* (*De capitis vulneribus*). In his discussion of the proper method of amputation, the author informs us that when a finger is severed cleanly at one of the joints, ‘ordinary treatment is sufficient for such wounds (ἔλκείων)’ (*Artic.* 68). To describe the stump of a severed finger as a ‘sore’ or ‘ulcer’ would be inappropriate. At *Head Wounds* 13 we see ἔλκος appear repeatedly where the treatment of ‘wounds’ is clearly described.

Arguably Hippocrates’ most important successor in classical medical literature was Galen, whose voluminous medical writings include several commentaries on various Hippocratic works. Perhaps noticing the broad application in the Hippocratic corpus, in his commentary on the above treatise, *On Joints*, Galen provides the reader with a definition of ἔλκος: ‘a break of continuity in part of the flesh is a ἔλκος, and in bone is called a fracture’ (*Comm. Hipp. Joints* 482).<sup>6</sup> In other words, what a fracture is to a bone, a ἔλκος is to the skin. It is difficult to understate the importance of Galen’s comment: a physician and rough contemporary of Luke gives us an explicit medical definition for the term in question. Like the Hippocratic writers whom Galen strives to follow, he understands and employs the term broadly, using it to describe various wounds, whether fresh, healing or putrid, resulting from any number of causes.<sup>7</sup>

The source of some confusion regarding these terms is the standard New Testament lexicon, BDAG, which is in need of some revision here. In the BDAG entry for ἔλκος, we read the following definition: ‘wound ... or sore, abscess, ulcer. The latter seems to be implied [in] Lk 16:21, for the narrative indicates that the beggar desires food, not medical attention.’<sup>8</sup> In other words, BDAG

6 τῆς συνεχείας ἢ λύσις ἔλκος μὲν ἐν σαρκώδει μορίῳ, κάταγμα δὲ ἐν ὀστέῳ καλεῖται.

7 Galen’s variable use of ἔλκος is observable at *Method of Medicine* 4.238k, where he moves on from discussing what we would call ‘wounds’ to ‘ulcers’ without notice. See the editors’ comment there: “‘Ulcer’ is now used instead of “wound” for *helkos* as the discussion has moved on to obviously chronic lesions’ (I. Johnston and G. H. R. Horsley, eds. and trans., *Galen: Method of Medicine*, vol. 1: *Books 1–4* (LCL 516; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011) 361 n. 6).

8 BDAG, 317–18. This comment is absent from the German edition on which BDAG is based.

suggests that Lazarus does not need or want medical attention if he has sores instead of wounds. This reasoning is very problematic. We uncover a similar state of affairs with the *hapax legomenon* εἰλκωμένος, ‘covered in sores.’ While the passive participial use of ἐλκόω is rarer, when we look at a text BDAG cites as evidence that Lazarus is ‘covered in sores’ we find that it indicates otherwise. The word appears three times in quick succession in *Oneirocritica*, a second-century CE work on the interpretation of dreams by Artemidorus:

A healthy and fleshy forehead is auspicious for all men and signifies candor and manliness, but a forehead that is wounded or diseased (ἠλκωμένον ἢ νοσοῦν) signifies disgrace together with harm. (1.23)

Dreaming that one has full cheeks is auspicious for everyone, but especially for women. Having cheeks that are lean or lacerated (ἠλκωμένους) signifies grief or mourning. Lean cheeks mean grief; lacerated (ἠλκωμένους) cheeks, mourning. For, in times of mourning, men mutilate their cheeks. (1.28)

Breasts are auspicious if they are free from every blemish ... but if the breasts are damaged in any way, for example, if they are ulcerated (ἠλκωμένοι), they signify sickness. (1.41)<sup>9</sup>

From these three oracles we are able to grasp clearly the versatility of εἰλκωμένος. In the first dream interpretation we witness the author making a crucial distinction, for here ἐλκόω is contrasted with νοσέω. In this contrast ἐλκόω specifically refers to the kinds of wounds that are neither diseased nor the result of a disease. In the second dream interpretation we are told explicitly that the ἔλκη are self-inflicted – wounds received during a mourning ritual of self-mutilation. Only in the final example would the interpretation suggested by BDAG and ubiquitous in scholarship be conceivable.

Further evidence for the passive participle appears in Xenophon’s, *On the Art of Horsemanship*, also cited by BDAG. Herein Xenophon describes the injury that a horse may suffer when the riding equipment is put on incorrectly: ‘If the halter is not easy about the ears, the horse will often rub his head against the manger and may often get sores (ἔλκη) in consequence. Now if there are sore places (ἐλκωμένων) thereabouts the horse is bound to be restive both when he is bridled and when he is rubbed down’ (5.1 (trans. Marchant and Bowersock, LCL)). The injuries appear in the place where the equipment rubs against the horse, causing chaffing or abrasions, and eventually suppuration. This is appropriately translated as ‘sore spots’, and these ἔλκη neither cover the body nor are they caused by disease. As with the noun, examples abound of the verb conveying different meanings in this form: ‘ulcerated’ from

9 Trans. R. J. White, *The Interpretation of Dreams: Oneirocritica by Artemidorus* (Torrance, CA: Original Books, 1990).

disease,<sup>10</sup> ‘wounded’ from fighting,<sup>11</sup> or ‘wounded’ neither from violence nor disease.<sup>12</sup>

From the preceding evidence, it is apparent that without clear justification to render the term otherwise, ἔλκη at Luke 16.21 should be translated conservatively, in a way that conveys a break in continuity of the flesh and does not specify disease or mechanical agency, or a state of suppuration. ‘Lesion’ is the most generic term for this definition. ‘Wound’, which pathologically refers to any sharp break in the skin regardless of a state of infection, offers a more colloquial alternative. The most generic term available for εἰλωμένος to indicate a body afflicted with more than one ‘laceration,’ ‘wound’ or ‘ulcer’ is the archaic ‘lesioned’, or, less precise but in common use, ‘wounded’. To overcome the great inertia of the belief that Lazarus suffers from disease or a skin condition, ‘sore’, ‘ulcer’ and ‘covered with sores’ should be avoided. It may be, in fact, a deliberate choice by the author to select this flexible lemma, which permits the hearer to imagine Lazarus suffering from various kinds of lesions – sores, cuts, abrasions, sunburns, some wounds suppurated, others not – as those people hungry and exposed on the street often do. Lazarus lies there wounded with lesions at the mercy of the dogs.

## 2. Lazarus and the Dogs

A sharp contrast in perspectives on how the dogs function in the narrative is best conveyed by two quotations: ‘That the dogs have mercy upon him and lick his sores simply goes to show how desperately and dependently he waits upon men, upon his fellowmen inside’, and ‘[t]he rich man allowed the sores of Lazarus to be disgustingly licked by the tongues of ravaging dogs.’ The former, by Karl Barth, is representative of a popular homiletic interpretation.<sup>13</sup> This interpretation is consistently refuted by biblical scholars who prefer the latter, here given by John Paul Heil.<sup>14</sup> A few standard works are worth citing to show that

10 E.g. Philo, *Joseph* 160 (§27): καθόπερ ἦν ἰατρῶν παῖδες ὀνομάζουσιν ἐρπηνα· καὶ γὰρ αὕτη πᾶσι τοῖς μέρεσιν ἐπιφουτῶσα τὴν κοινωνίαν τῶν ἠλωμένων σωμάτων ὄλην δι’ ὅλων στοιχηδὸν πυρὸς τρόπον ἐπινέμεται (‘this resembles what the physicians call “creeping”, for it also spreads successively like a fire on the framework, bit by bit, to all parts of the whole lesioned body’).

11 E.g. Aristotle, *Hist. an.* 612a33–5: ὅταν ἐλκωθῆ τι μαχομένοις (‘when wounded from fighting’).

12 E.g. Plutarch, *Adul. am.* 73b: τὸν δάκτυλον ἠλωμένον (literally, ‘a sore finger’).

13 K. Barth, ‘Miserable Lazarus (Text: Luke 16:19–31)’, *Union Theological Seminary Review* 46 (1934–5) 259–68, at 268.

14 J. P. Heil, *The Meal Scenes in Luke-Acts: An Audience-Oriented Approach* (SBLMS 52; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 1999) 138. Virtually every scholarly comment on this detail assumes a negative view of the dogs. Since the nineteenth century only a few scholars allow for other views of the dogs, namely: H. Klein, *Das Lukasevangelium* (Göttingen:

Professor Heil's view is merely illustrative of the ubiquitous understanding in scholarship. The *ABD* claims, "Today we commonly speak of the dog as "man's best friend." In the Bible, however the dog is always spoken of in contempt."<sup>15</sup> Similarly the *TDNT* says of Lazarus, 'this is hardly a reference to the sympathy of animals in contrast to the heartlessness of men. It is rather a sign of supreme wretchedness of the poor beggar; he has to endure even contact with these unclean animals.'<sup>16</sup> Likewise was Jülicher, the father of modern parables research, convinced that these were bad dogs:

In the licking of wounds by the dogs one would like to find an expression of their commiseration. It would act as a dramatic highpoint if even irrational animals were trying to ease the pain of a suffering person. But the Hebrew did not take dogs to be companions or friends of humans - he numbers them along with the wild animals like foxes and pigs.<sup>17</sup>

Since Jülicher in the nineteenth century, scholarly opinion has not budged on the matter. In this case, however, it is the popular homiletic interpretation that is correct, and the 'scholarly' interpretation that is wrong.<sup>18</sup> The pervasive negative views concerning dogs fall on their face for a few important reasons.<sup>19</sup> First, while

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Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006) 553; Levine, *Short Stories*, 258–60; J. Nolland, *Luke 9:21–18:34* (WBC 35B; Dallas: Word Books, 1993) 828–29; E. Pax, 'Der Reiche und der arme Lazarus: Eine Milieustudie', *SBFLA* 25 (1975) 254–68, at 261; R. C. Trench, *Notes on the Parables of Our Lord* (New York: Appleton & Company, 1869) 374; and T. Zahn, *Das Evangelium des Lukas* (Leipzig: Deichert, 1920; repr., Wuppertal: Brockhaus, 1988) 584–5. Ambivalent are H. J. Cadbury, 'Animals and Symbolism in Luke (Lexical Notes on Luke-Acts, IX),' in *Studies in New Testament and Early Christian Literature: Essays in Honor of Allen P. Wikgren*, ed. D. E. Aune (Leiden: Brill, 1972), 3–15; and J. D. M. Derrett, 'Fresh Light on St Luke xvi, II Dives and Lazarus and the Preceding Sayings,' *NTS* 7 (1960–61): 364–80, at 372.

15 E. Firmage, 'Zoology', *ABD* IV.1143. A supposed contrast with modern sensibilities is made frequently, e.g. Bovon, *Luke*, 480.

16 O. Michel, 'κύων', *TDNT* III.1103. Lest one think this a purely Protestant affair, see also J. L. McKenzie, 'Dog', *Dictionary of the Bible* (Milwaukee: Bruce, 1965) 202.

17 Jülicher, *Die Gleichnisreden Jesu*, 620: 'In dem Belegen der Wunden durch die Hunde findet man jetzt gerne eine Aeusserung ihres Mitgeföhls; das wirkt als ein dramatischer Höhepunkt, wenn selbst die vernunftlosen Tiere den Schmerz eines elenden Menschen zu lindern sich bemühen. Aber als Genossen und Freunde des Menschen gelten dem Hebräer die Hunde nicht, er rechnet sie neben Füchsen und Schweinen zu den wilden Tieren.'

18 For the wake-up call on this issue in the Hebrew Bible, see G. D. Miller, 'Attitudes toward Dogs in Ancient Israel: A Reassessment', *JSOT* 32 (2008) 487–500.

19 Occasionally a philological argument to support the negative view is advanced on the basis of the construction ἀλλὰ καί preceding οἱ κύνες (e.g. H. Hendrickx, *The Parables of Jesus* (London/San Francisco: G. Chapman/Harper & Row, 1986) 201; and A. Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to St Luke* (ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1922<sup>5</sup>) 391). On the contrary, as the discussion in BDF (§448) indicates, it must be

dogs are used in negative epithets and presented negatively in several passages, it is patently false that they are never viewed positively in the Bible.<sup>20</sup> Second, dogs are nowhere to be found among the animals defined as unclean in the Bible.<sup>21</sup> Third, the frequent claim that dogs were perceived to be vile animals then in contrast to modern sensibilities is simply wrong.<sup>22</sup>

### 2.1 *Human-Canine Reciprocity in the Ancient Mediterranean World*

Dogs appear to have functioned as companions for humans in the region by the fourth millennium BCE at the latest, with hunting dogs appearing already in the Epic of Gilgamesh and on several Assyrian and Egyptian reliefs.<sup>23</sup> In the Levant, domesticated dogs may already appear in the destruction layers of Jericho as early as 7000 BCE, and excavations at Ashkelon have unearthed hundreds of ritually buried domestic dogs.<sup>24</sup> While there are biblical examples of dogs being cast in a negative light, if they ever were viewed as unclean, by the

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context that decides whether ἄλλᾶ καὶ is used progressively or contrastively. M. E. Thrall argues that it 'must be regarded as progressive'; however, her argument is not philological, but based again on the presumption of the dogs as negative characters: 'To regard καὶ as attached to οἱ κύνες with the meaning of "also" or "even" would make no sense, as no other agents of the poor man's misery have been specifically mentioned' (*Greek Particles in the New Testament: Linguistic and Exegetical Studies* (NTTS 3; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962) 14). Following Thrall's logic, should the dogs be positive characters, giving them a special emphasis with these particles would make perfect sense. This construction is not discussed by Smyth (H. W. Smyth, *Greek Grammar* (rev. G. M. Messing; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1956).

- 20 C. Franco's recent study offers a thorough and definitive treatment of the curious ways dogs seem to occupy antithetical positions in Ancient Greece - on the one hand used for insults, offensive epithets, euphemisms for sexual depravity and taboo eating habits, yet also admired, respected and praised (see the tribute from Columella below). Though Franco focuses on Greek sources, her reflections on method and her cross-cultural insights yield results equally relevant to Jews, especially during the Hellenistic and Roman periods (*Shameless: The Canine and the Feminine in Ancient Greece* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2014)).
- 21 This is not because the authors of the Pentateuch were unfamiliar with dogs. They appear twice in texts adjacent to or within legal material (Exod 11.7; 22.30).
- 22 In addition to Miller, 'Attitudes toward Dogs', see D. Brewer, T. Clark and A. Phillips, *Dogs in Antiquity: Anubis to Cerberus, the Origins of the Domestic Dog* (Warminster: Aris & Phillips, 2001).
- 23 For plates, see R. H. A. Merlen, *De Canibus: Dog and Hound in Antiquity* (London: J. A. Allen, 1971).
- 24 For dogs at Jericho, see G. S. Cansdale, *Animals and Man* (New York: Praeger, 1953) 121. For the dogs at Ashkelon, which may number in the thousands, see L. E. Stager, 'Why Were Hundreds of Dogs Buried at Ashkelon?', *BAR* 17.3 (1991) 26-42, especially 39-42, where the possibility that they are part of a healing cult is discussed.



Persian period they had clearly shed some taboo.<sup>25</sup> If Isa 56.10–11 is not an allusion to guard dogs of some property, then it certainly makes reference to them being used for tending flocks. Likewise, dogs are mentioned positively in Job 30.1 where they clearly function as sheep dogs. In neither case is the reader expected to be scandalised by these semi-domesticated dogs. By the time we reach Tobit, the author gladly depicts a pet dog exiting the Jewish home with Tobias to tag along on the adventure to Media, probably serving alongside the angel Raphael as Tobias's co-guardian (Tob 6.2; 11.4).<sup>26</sup>

In the New Testament, domesticated dogs are the central metaphor in the story of the Syro-Phoenecian woman (Mark 7.27–30 // Matt 15.26–8). In this story a woman begs Jesus to expel a demon from her ailing daughter. After Jesus' initial refusal, 'It is not good to take the bread from the children and feed it to the dogs', he is won over by the woman's retort, 'Yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs eat the crumbs that fall from the table of their master.' This is not evidence for Jewish domestic use of dogs per se, since these are the words of a Syro-Phoenecian, but it does signal that Jesus was familiar enough with the domestic presence of dogs beneath dining tables for the metaphor to persuade him.<sup>27</sup> The Mishnah likewise confirms domestic use of dogs, ruling on when an owner is culpable for their pet's bite (B. Qam. 5.3) and the chaining of a house dog (B. Qam. 7.7); it even records a debate on domestication:

25 Dogs appear in metaphors, similes and epithets, usually with negative connotations: Judg 7.5; 1 Sam 17.43; 24.15; 2 Sam 3.8; 9.8; 16.9; 2 Kings 8.13; Isa 66.3; Ps 59.7, 15; occasionally with specific reference to sexual taboo: Deut 23.19; possibly Phil 3.2 and Rev 22.15. They are frequently depicted interacting with dead bodies, especially eating them and drinking blood: 1 Kings 14.11; 16.4; 21.19, 23–4; 2 Kings 9.10, 36; 22.38; Jer 15.3; Ps 68.24; see also Ps 22.17, 21. Note in Ps 68.24 that the Israelites are owners of the dogs in some way. While it is clear that the dog is chosen to accentuate the extreme image of enemies being eaten by animals, this does not confer on dogs any particular connotation of 'uncleanness' different from a bear or lion doing the same action. Dogs are also frequently the subject of proverbs: Eccles 9.4; 2 Prov 26.11 // 2 Pet 2.22; Prov 26.17; Matt 7.6.

26 Dogs make cameos in various other late Second Temple works, e.g. 1 En. 89–90; 4QMMT B 8–9; 4Q306. MMT brings up dogs in the context of its austere regulations for Jerusalem. According to MMT, dogs should be forbidden from the city 'since they may eat some of the bones from the Temple with flesh on them, for Jerusalem is the holy camp'. The logical connection between the clauses is not entirely clear, i.e. it is not obvious whether dogs are banned because they specifically are perceived as contaminants, or because the devoted foods are at general risk of violability with dogs having a particular reputation for stealing unguarded bones, or some combination thereof (cf. Exod 22.30, Jer 15.3 and Matt 7.6).

27 Bovon claims that even though Luke does not report the incident with the Syro-Phoenecian woman, he must have known it (*Luke*, 480). Derrett contends that first-century Palestinian palaces would have had guard dogs, though he cites no evidence ('Fresh Light', 372), and similarly Nolland claims without citation that 'dogs were used as watch dogs and hunting dogs, and were even at times kept as domestic pets' (*Luke 9:21–18:34*, 828–9).

‘(Rabbi Jose:) “The dog is categorised as a wild animal.” Rabbi Meir said, “a kind of cattle”’ (Kil. 8.6).<sup>28</sup>

The classical world for its part informs us already in the *Odyssey* that Odysseus’ faithful dog, Argos, died of joy upon recognising the scent of his long-lost master (Homer, *Od.* 17.290–327). In this same passage we learn of the different domestic roles for which dogs were bred, including table dogs bred for beauty (17.306–17). There is abundant evidence among Greek and Roman literary and iconographic sources across the centuries for dogs as pets, and present at the tables of the wealthy.<sup>29</sup> Luke’s first-century contemporary, Columella, gushes: ‘What human being more clearly or so vociferously gives warning of the presence of a wild beast or of a thief as does the dog by its barking? What servant is more attached to his master than is a dog? What companion more faithful? What guardian more incorruptible? What more wakeful night-watchman can be found? Lastly, what more steadfast avenger or defender?’ (*Rust.* 7.12.1 (trans. Forster, LCL)).<sup>30</sup> In the Jewish world then, as in Greco-Roman culture, it seems that wild dogs could be viewed negatively, while domesticated dogs were not. Even so, wild dogs were not ‘unclean’ in the sense of a *Reinheitsgebot*, instead, as in the classical conception, they were ‘unclean’ in the sense of unkempt or unpleasant. We can safely say, then, that the dogs in the parable are worth a second look.

As with Lazarus’ ailment, scholars have seldom taken the opportunity to look outside the Bible for how dogs licking him might be perceived by Luke’s audience.<sup>31</sup> When we turn to the classical material concerning dogs, we quickly find

28 כלב מין חיה: רבי מאיר אומר מין בהמה Ned. 4.3 and Hull. 4.2. The debate between Rabbi Jose and Rabbi Meir concerning the classification of the dog is further evidence for the liminal position of this animal discussed below.

29 As early as the *Odyssey*, the practice of bringing home a doggy bag for the pets is attested, ‘as when dogs fawn around their master as he comes from a feast, for he always brings them bits to delight their hearts’ (Homer, *Od.* 10.216–17 (trans. Murray, rev. Dimock, LCL)); the same tradition appears in some versions of the fable attested in Babrius, *Fables* 129 (LCL enumeration). Examples of dogs as house pets abound, see additionally Plato, *Lysis* 211e; Artemidorus, *Onir.* 2.11; Plutarch, *Tranq. an.* 13 (472D). For iconographic representations of pet dogs, see R. Hamilton, *Choes and Anthesteria: Athenian Iconography and Ritual* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992) 84–111; J. Busuttill, ‘The Maltese Dog’, *GR* 16 (1969) 205–8. For table dogs, see Xenophon, *Mem.* 2.7.13; Aesop, *Fab.* 283 (Hausrath’s enumeration); Oppian, *Cynegetica* or *The Chase* 472–6. For iconographic evidence of dogs with their masters at table, see already the famous Eurytios Krater dating to about 600 BCE, which depicts leashed dogs beneath the tables at a symposium.

30 For a similarly effusive contemporary of Luke, see Publius’ praise of his lapdog, Issa, in Martial, *Epigrams* 1.109. Martial also describes Publius painting a picture of Issa.

31 Archbishop Trench observes that ‘medical virtue’ has been ascribed to dogs, though he cites only medieval evidence, the proverb *Lingua canis dum lingit vulnas, curat*, which first appears in the thirteenth-century Aberdeen Bestiary (folio 19v) (Trench, *Notes on the Parables*, 374). Similarly, K. E. Bailey notes that dogs are ascribed medical roles in the eleventh century by Ibn al-Tayyib, though Bailey continues to perpetuate the view that they are unclean (*Jesus*

that they are celebrated precisely for their skill as healers and that they have a lengthy pedigree serving in medical roles, specifically through the act of licking.

## 2.2 *Saliva as Medicine*

The use of saliva in ancient medicine as a healing agent is well known, and was evidently a tool in Jesus' repertoire (Mark 7.33; 8.23; John 9.6).<sup>32</sup> So too would its curative power have been recognised by the audiences of the Gospels.<sup>33</sup> The belief in the curative power of saliva was not limited to the popular class, but endorsed by two of Luke's contemporaries, the most renowned physicians of the first and second centuries CE. We find that both Pliny the Elder and Galen list numerous medical applications for saliva, specifically as a cure for skin ulcerations:

Let us therefore believe that lichens too and leprous sores are kept in check by continual application of fasting saliva ... Sensation in any numbed limb is restored by spitting into the bosom, or if the upper eyelids are touched with saliva. (Pliny, *Natural History* 28.7.37–8 (trans. Rackham, LCL)).

And you may observe the extent of the alteration which occurs to food in the mouth if you will chew some corn and then apply it to an unripe (undigested) boil: you will see it rapidly transmuting – in fact entirely digesting – the boil, though it cannot do anything of the kind if you mix it with water. And do not let this surprise you; this phlegm (saliva) in the mouth is also a cure for lichens. (Galen, *On the Natural Faculties* 3.7.163 (trans. Brock, LCL))<sup>34</sup>

With respect to skin abnormalities, the power of human saliva as a treatment was by no means exotic but appears almost peculiar to ἔλκη. Were one to write a prescription for a poor man in the ancient world to treat these symptoms, the application of saliva to the affected parts would probably be it.<sup>35</sup>

With specific reference to dogs in a medical context the evidence is stronger still. Beginning with the aforementioned Argos, the pet of Odysseus, dogs became celebrated for their medical discernment and efficacy as healers. It was precisely the example of Argos, able to recognise his master's scent from experience, that served as evidence for medical empiricists that experience is the best diagnostic

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*through Middle Eastern Eyes: Cultural Studies in the Gospels* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008) 386).

32 See also the famous example from Suetonius of Vespasian healing a blind man with his saliva (*Vesp.* 7.2–3).

33 D. E. Aune, 'Magic in Early Christianity', *ANRW* II.23.2 (1980) 1507–57, at 1537–8.

34 'Lichens' is apparently a superficial skin disease. See the note in A. J. Brock, ed. and trans., *Galen: On the Natural Faculties* (LCL 71; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1916) 253.

35 While knowledge of the medical application of saliva could be used to support the theory that the author of the Gospel of Luke was a physician, it is worth emphasising that this was not specialised knowledge. The belief in the healing properties of saliva was ubiquitous.

means (e.g. Sextus Empiricus, *Pyr.* 1.68). The second-century physician and philosopher Sextus Empiricus goes on to claim that dogs, by reason of their medical expertise, are virtuous and perfect in their capacity of internal reasoning (ἡ τελειότης τοῦ ἐνδιαθέτου λόγου). Dogs are such good physicians that Sextus claims they observe by their very nature the prescriptions of Hippocrates. In nearly the same breath Sextus notes a particular medical skill that is characteristic of the dog:

Moreover, the dog is capable of comprehending and assuaging his own sufferings; for when a thorn has got stuck in his foot he hastens to remove it by rubbing his foot on the ground and by using his teeth. And if he has a wound (ἔλκος) anywhere, because dirty wounds (ἔλκη) are hard to cure whereas clean ones heal easily, the dog gently licks off the pus that has gathered. Nay more, the dog admirably observes the prescription of Hippocrates: rest being what cures the foot, whenever he gets his foot hurt he lifts it up and keeps it as far as possible free from pressure. (Sextus Empiricus, *Pyr.* 1.70–1 (trans. Bury, LCL))

Remarkably, Sextus is not alone in associating dogs with a foundational medical figure and observing their ability to treat wounds. Aelian (170–ca. 222 CE) says:

A dog burdened with a full stomach knows of a herb that grows on dry stone walls, and if he eats it he vomits all that is paining him ... so he restores his health without any need of medical assistance. Further, he voids a quantity of black bile which if retained causes madness, a troublesome disease in dogs. And when infected by worms dogs eat the awns of corn, according to Aristotle [*Hist. An.* 612a.31]. When wounded they have their tongue as a medicine, and with their tongue they lick around the wounded place and restore it to a healthy condition; bandages, compresses and the compounding of medicines they scorn. (*Nat. an.* 8.9 (trans. adapted from Scholfield, LCL))<sup>36</sup>

Just as Sextus, Aelian notes a prestigious medical lineage found in Aristotle's observation of the dog's ability to treat sickness. So too does Aelian indicate the dog's ability to treat wounds, describing the tongue and licking explicitly as a medicine. These two sources reveal a different paradigm with which to understand the act of the dogs in the parable.

### 2.3 Dogs Healing People

The dog's healing powers breach the porous boundary into the miraculous and the magical. Independent of the world of the physicians,<sup>37</sup> in the cult of the

36 It may be significant that Aelian attaches a preposition to λείχω, possibly specifying that the dog licks *around* the edges of the wounds. See also the quotation from Philostratus below and the magical spell in which licking the edges of the wound is specified (*PDM* xiv.603–9). There are several variants of the lemma λείχω in the textual tradition of Luke 16.21 that similarly affix prepositions, perhaps implying the same procedure.

37 As E. J. Edelstein and L. Edelstein claim, 'there is no evidence whatever that physicians participated in temple healings' (*Asclepius: Collection and Interpretation of the Testimonies*, vol. II (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998) 158).

healing god Asclepius, dogs were often the means of affecting cures for temple visitors. Sacred dogs appear in our earliest evidence of the Asclepian cult.<sup>38</sup> Like the sacred snakes, dogs roamed the Asclepian temples and conveyed the power of the deity by their touch. The famed Epidaurian tablets (second half of the fourth century BCE) record the following cures:

Lyson of Hermione, a blind boy. While wide-awake he had his eyes cured by one of the dogs in the Temple and went away healed ... A dog cured a boy from Aegina. He had a growth on the neck. When he had come to the god, one of the sacred dogs healed him - while he was awake - with its tongue and made him well. (*IG* IV<sup>2</sup>/1.121.20, 122.26)<sup>39</sup>

As a combination of the miraculous with the magical and medicinal we must also take note of a story in Philostratus' *Life of Apollonius of Tyana* (ca. 217 CE). This account of a first-century figure often compared with Jesus contains a story about a boy who goes mad after a bite from a rabid dog. After locating and calming the dog, Apollonius gathered a crowd, and then 'told the dog to lick around the bite, so that the boy's wounder should also be his doctor. Immediately the boy turned to greet his father, recognised his mother, spoke to his friends, and took a drink from the Cydnus' (Philostratus, *Vit. Apoll.* 6.43 (trans. adapted from Jones, LCL)).<sup>40</sup>

Last but not least, we ought to note that the interpretation of the early Church seems to disagree with the current scholarly consensus: from Jerome in the West, "Even the dogs would come and lick his sores." What no man deigned to bathe and touch, gentle beasts lick',<sup>41</sup> to Cyril of Alexandria in the East:

Yes, it says that even the dogs licked his sores, and did not injure him, yet sympathized with him and cared for him. Animals relieve their own sufferings with their tongues, as they remove what pains them and gently soothe the sores. The rich man was crueler than the dogs because he felt no sympathy or compassion for him but was completely unmerciful. (*Commentary on Luke* 3 (trans. A. Just Jr, *ACCS NT* III.261))

38 It has been suggested that the sacred dog in the Asclepian cult is a vestige of an older healing cult (Edelstein, *Asclepius*, II.186-87).

39 Trans. Edelstein, *Asclepius*, 1.233-34. In another source we learn of a sacred snake curing a man by licking around his eyes (Aristophanes, *Wealth* 727-41).

40 For the sake of completeness, we may note that two spells from the Demotic papyri, dating to the third century CE or slightly later, ascribe a numinous healing power to dog saliva and a dog's lick (*PDM* xiv.554-62, 603-9). As in the story of Apollonius, in the first spell a wounding or venomous power is attributed to dog saliva, which can, in turn, be cured by dog saliva. We are not far off in the colloquialism, 'hair of the dog that bit you'.

41 Jerome, *Homilies* 86 ('On Saint Luke on Lazarus and Dives 16.19-31'); trans. M. L. Ewald, *The Homilies of Saint Jerome*, vol. II: *Homilies 60-96* (FC 57; Baltimore: Catholic University of America Press, 1966).

Cyril does not merely provide another testimony about the positive portrayal of the dogs, but also gives confirmation that early Christian readers shared the medicinal understanding of a dog's lick, and that they too applied it to the dogs in this parable.<sup>42</sup> The diverse sources explored here, whether medical treatises, accounts of miraculous healings, philosophical writings or Church Fathers, speak with one accord: a dog's lick is salubrious.

### 3. Re-evaluations and Conclusions

The results of this study controvert the scholarly consensus with respect to what ails Lazarus, how dogs were perceived in the ancient world, and the role they play in this parable. The best evidence for the role of the dogs and the meaning of ἔλκος is found not in the Hebrew Bible, but in Luke's Hellenistic world. It is by no means clear that Lazarus is unclean in any cultic sense, suffering from either 'unclean' dogs or leprosy sores. The continued appeal to skin disease and sores is most likely a vestige of the pre-modern view that Lazarus was a leper.<sup>43</sup> While we now accept that locating Hansen's disease in the Bible is problematic, the continued use of these terms for Lazarus is perhaps an indication that we have found nothing better with which to diagnose him. Recognising the positive role of the dogs also removes the most important crutch to the theory that Lazarus

42 John Chrysostom is the earliest attestation of the negative evaluation of the dogs: καὶ τοῦτο αὐτὸ πάλιν ἐδήλωσεν, εἰπὼν ὅτι οἱ κύνες ἀπέλειχον τὰ ἔλκη αὐτοῦ. οὕτως ἦν ἐξησθηνηκώς, ὡς μηδὲ τοὺς κύνες ἀποσοβῆσαι δύνασθαι, ἀλλὰ νεκρὸς ἔμψυχος ἔκειτο, ἐπιόντας μὲν αὐτοῦς θεωρῶν, ἀμύνασθαι δὲ οὐκ ἰσχύων ('And this is shown again since it says that the dogs were licking from his wounds. For he had become so weak that he was unable to scare away the dogs, but was lying there alive as though dead, seeing them coming, but without the strength to fend them off', John Chrysostom, *Laz.* 1 (PG 48.975-6)). This would seem decisive evidence for his interpretation; however, in another homily on this parable we find: τοῦ ἀνθρώπου οἱ κύνες φιλανθρωπότεροι ἔλειχον αὐτοῦ τὰ τραύματα καὶ τὴν σηπεδῶνα περιήρουν καὶ ἐξεκάθαιρον ('The dogs were more humane than the human since they were licking his wounds and clearing away the surrounding putrefaction and cleaning them out' (John Chrysostom, *Laz.* 6.5 (PG 48.1034)). This interpretation not only evaluates the dogs as sympathetic, but shares Cyril's knowledge of their ability to cleanse wounds. These two mutually exclusive interpretations are difficult to explain. It is possible that Chrysostom contradicts himself to make different points, which would not be out of character for him. On the other hand, distinct words are used for both 'lick', ἀπέλειχον and ἔλειχον (see also the textual variants in Luke 16.21), and 'wound', ἔλκη and τραύματα. These discrepancies and the antithetical interpretation might suggest that one or the other homily is spurious.

43 At some point before the eleventh century, Lazarus' sores were equated with leprosy, and he was canonised as the patron saint of lepers. See S. L. Wailes, *Medieval Allegories of Jesus' Parables* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987) 255. It seems that the tradition of leprosy did not completely overtake the view that Lazarus' wounds were the result of abuse. In Leandro Bazzano's 1595 painting *Dives and Lazarus* a figure in dark clothing, either in the employ of the rich man or representing an anonymous assailant, is depicted giving Lazarus lashes.

is a cripple, paralysed or blind. As the theory goes, it is due to his infirmity that Lazarus cannot escape the torturous laps by the dogs. With no desire to resist his canine nurses, Lazarus' immobility must be based on some other ground. Lazarus is hungry and bears the marks of one exposed on the street, he lies at the gate with lesions.

With the biblical information set straight, the banquet of the rich man must also be scrutinised. The primary objection against dogs being present at the feast or owned by the rich man is that they are unclean animals. This obstacle removed, we are free to correctly understand a Roman banquet scene and observe what is insinuated by Lazarus' longing. When Jesus says that Lazarus desires to eat the morsels that fall from the rich man's table, he indicates that Lazarus desires the task of the rich man's table dog, to lie beneath the table waiting for the scraps. At aristocratic banquets the presence of table dogs was customary, serving as decorations that would signal the rich man's opulence.<sup>44</sup> By their presence the dogs attest to 'the richness of a laden table, the abundance of food able to feed many useless mouths, and presumably, the more dogs at the table, the more splendid was the effect of the display'.<sup>45</sup> Even though dogs are not mentioned in the description of the banquet, table dogs are clearly in view when the narrator divulges Lazarus' desire to eat the table scraps in verse 21. This verse balances two relative clauses, one in which the table dogs are implied and one in which the dogs at the gate appear. Thus the dogs licking Lazarus at the gate mirror the rich man's, completing a trio of grotesque parodic features of the earthly scene. In the same way the rich man's clothing of purple and fine linen finds its grotesque counterpart in Lazarus' lesioned body, and Lazarus lying at the gate languishing is a mime of the rich man reclining at banquets, so also the dogs that lick Lazarus parody the rich man's dogs at his banquet table.

While the standard interpretation of the afterlife scene finds the basis for the condemnation of the rich man in the contrast between the concern for his brothers and his callousness towards Lazarus, we may put a finer point on this moral. The author signals that in his envy of the rich man's table dogs Lazarus does not aspire to equality with the rich man's brothers, he longs merely for the position of the lowliest servants.<sup>46</sup> In the household hierarchy, the dogs are last at the table, 'the seat of the miserable lowly',<sup>47</sup> but members of the household they are nonetheless. The moral failures commonly ascribed to the rich man may all be

44 See n. 29 above. According to C. Mainoldi, the dog is a specific marker of the aristocratic feast (*L'image du loup et du chien dans la Grèce ancienne d'Homère à Platon* (Paris: Ophrys, 1984) 113).

45 Franco, *Shameless*, 24.

46 One is reminded of a similar longing in another special L example story, the Prodigal Son (Luke 15.16-17).

47 Franco, *Shameless*, 24.

governed by the exclusion of Lazarus from even this lowest place of honour in his household.

The ubiquitous scholarly interpretation of the earthly scene views Lazarus as a wretch who is mistreated by everyone and everything, only receiving comfort in the afterlife. We must now come to a different conclusion about how to read the parable. The findings of this article suggest that everyone and everything is showing Lazarus mercy, except the damned rich man. The licking of the dogs serves to dramatically highlight this point – even irrational animals acting on instinct are more humane. The function of this seemingly small narrative detail is not exhausted here, however. It is from this detail that the narrator treats the ancient reader to a delicious irony concerning the rich man's punishment, an irony that has eluded the modern reader until now. The pain-quenching wet tongues of the dogs are the last detail we receive concerning Lazarus' earthly life. The first thing we learn of the rich man, in his afterlife, is that he begs for a wet tongue (Luke 16.24).

Finally, we may add another layer to the rhetorical artistry of the story befitting the character complexity, moral dilemmas and paraenetic dimensions that are hallmarks of the L parables and example stories.<sup>48</sup> A motif of liminal spaces and characters emerges by completing a trio of pairings in the parable. The breaches in the most intimate barrier, which is Lazarus' very flesh, create a liminal space, a broken membrane dividing the dangers of the outside from his vulnerable insides, his body serving as the stage upon which his claim to personhood is contested. These openings are occupied by the dogs, liminal creatures that transgress the boundary of animal and humankind, the household and the pariahs. Lazarus, for his part, occupies the opening in the wall, the rich man's gate, the liminal space both literally and symbolically between the insiders and the outsiders, the household and the street. The yawning chasm fixed between Lazarus, Abraham and the rich man marks the third liminal space between eternal torment and comfort. In keeping with the function of other example stories and L parables, it is this final space where we may locate the hearer, the liminal character whose fate is yet undetermined, now faced with the challenge to decide, 'What should I do?'

48 For examples, see the Friend at Midnight (Luke 11.5–8), the Prodigal Son (Luke 15.11–32), the Shrewd Manager (Luke 16.1–13), the Good Samaritan (Luke 16.29–37), the Judge and the Widow (Luke 18.1–8) and the Pharisee and the Tax Collector (Luke 18.9–14). For detailed discussion of these features in the L parables and example stories, see B. Heininger, *Metaphorik, Erzählstruktur und szenisch-dramatische Gestaltung in den Sondergutgleichnissen bei Lukas* (NTAbh 24; Münster: Aschendorff, 1991).