

Did the "Thief on the Cross" Enter PARADISE Immediately?

Jesus said He would be in the grave three days and three nights after His crucifixion. Then could the thief have been WITH Christ in Paradise that very day?

by Herman L. Hoeh

NOTICE Luke 23:43 carefully. Jesus said that the crucified malefactor would be WITH Him in Paradise. If we can prove *where* Jesus went when He died, then we can prove if the malefactor really went to Paradise *that day!*

Turn to I Corinthians 15:3-4. Paul reiterates: "For I delivered to you" — speaking to Christians — "among first things what also I received: that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; *AND THAT HE WAS BURIED*; and that He hath been raised on the third day according to the scriptures."

Notice that *Jesus* was buried — it does not say the body was buried, and that the soul went to Paradise. It reads that He — Jesus, Himself — *was buried*. He was *dead* for three days. He *DIED* for our sins. Then *He* came to life. *He* arose!

John gives us further proof of where Jesus was. "Now in the place where he was crucified there was a garden; and in the garden a new sepulchre, wherein was never man yet laid. There" — in the tomb — the grave — "laid they *Jesus*" (John 19:41-42). It was Jesus who was laid in the tomb, not merely the body of Jesus. *Jesus was dead!*

Jesus Was in Hell!

To make this even plainer, turn to Acts 2:31. Speaking of Christ, Peter quotes the prophet David as follows: "He [David] seeing this before spake of the RESURRECTION of Christ, that his soul was not left in *hell*, neither his flesh did see corruption."

This verse, translated in the King

James Version, proves that Jesus was not in Paradise, but in *hell*. The word "hell" ought to be rendered "grave." The original inspired Greek word used by Peter was *hades*, meaning the "grave." It does *not* mean a fiery, burning hell. The Bible uses another word for that.

Hell or the grave is not Paradise. Since Jesus did not enter Paradise that day — the day of the crucifixion — then neither did the malefactor enter it. Christ has "preeminence" in *all* things we read in Col. 1:18. Therefore the malefactor who repented *could not have preceded Christ* to Paradise. Whenever the repentant malefactor enters Paradise, Christ will be there too! He said so: "WITH ME shalt thou be in Paradise."

WHEN Did Jesus Preach to the Spirits in Prison?

Some have seized upon I Peter 3:19-20 as supposed proof that Jesus was alive when He was dead — that He preached to spirits in prison during the three days and three nights in which He was in the grave asleep in death!

But notice what these verses in Peter's letter really say. *Wicked angels* who followed Satan are in chains of darkness, *imprisoned* for their own folly (Jude 6). When did Jesus preach to the imprisoned spirits? Read it: "When once the longsuffering of God waited *IN THE DAYS OF NOAH*, while the ark was a preparing. . . ." That's *when* Jesus preached to the spirits or wicked angels — in the days of Noah, not during the time He was dead and buried in the grave!

Since we know where Jesus was when He died, we now need to locate Paradise.

Notice II Cor. 12:1-5. Paul speaks of one whom He knew who had marvelous visions and revelations from the Lord. In a vision he was "caught up to the third heaven" — God's throne! "He was caught up into PARADISE, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter." Then Paradise is located in the presence of God's throne.

What Is Paradise Like?

Let's continue with the Bible description of Paradise. Turn to Revelation 2:7. "To him that OVERCOMETH, to him will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the Paradise of God" (ASV). Observe that the tree of life is in the Paradise of God.

Next, turn to Revelation 22:1-2. These two verses are referring to "the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down *out of heaven from God*" (Rev. 21:2, ASV). In this city, which is also a type of the Church, we find "a river of water of life, bright as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb, in the midst of the street thereof. And on this side of the river and on that was the *tree of life* . . ." (ASV.) THE NEW JERUSALEM CONTAINS THE TREE OF LIFE. In the new Jerusalem is the Paradise of God.

Jesus said the repentant malefactor would be with Him in this Paradise! The new Jerusalem is not yet finished. Jesus is still preparing a place for us in it (John 14:2). Not until *after the millennium* will it be fully ready (Rev.

20:1-5). Not until then will it descend to earth — *not until then* will the repentant malefactor enter Paradise!

Then what did Jesus mean by saying, "TODAY shalt thou be with me in paradise"?

You probably have assumed that Jesus promised the thief that he would be with Him in paradise that very day.

Nothing could be further from the truth!

Remember the thief had asked earlier, "Lord, remember me WHEN thou comest into thy Kingdom" (Luke 23:42). The plain fact is that Jesus has not yet come into His Kingdom (Luke 11:2; 19:11; I Cor. 11:26; I Thes. 4:13-17; I Cor. 15:23, 49-52). [Editor's Note: For a more detailed and technical exposition of Christ's Kingdom, write for our booklet *Just What Do You Mean . . . Kingdom of God?*]

What Jesus REALLY SAID!

Additionally, *proper punctuation* helps explain Luke 23:43. Most trans-

lations are improperly punctuated in order to make it appear that Jesus would be in Paradise that day. But the Bible proves Jesus was *not* in Paradise that day. A comma placed before the word "today" is incorrect. The comma should follow it — "Verily I say unto thee today, shalt thou be with me in paradise."

Open your Bible to this controversial verse. Notice the PUNCTUATION. Remember that punctuation was not used in the inspired Greek which Luke wrote. It was added into the Greek and English centuries later. The punctuation in this verse was added by men.

Here is exactly, word for word, the order in the inspired original Greek, which you can verify at any public library: "Verily I say to thee today, 'With me shalt thou be in the Paradise.'"

By using the word "today," Jesus was stressing *the time of His promise* — not the time He would be in Paradise.

The repentant malefactor crucified with Jesus is still dead and buried. Jesus

alone is the firstborn from the dead (Romans 8:29; Acts 26:23; I Cor. 15:23). But the time is coming when this man shall be resurrected also and eventually shall enter the Paradise of God promised *to come to this earth!*

If you want to know more about this coming Paradise of God, and how you can qualify to be in it, write for our free booklets *The Wonderful World Tomorrow — What It Will Be Like* and *What Is a Real Christian?* □

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