

THE "GOOD" THIEF

In Luke chapter 23, there is a very interesting account of two men who were crucified together with Jesus Christ.

Both these men were not ordinary criminals. Otherwise, they would not have been condemned to death by crucifixion which was the harshest punishment imposed by the Roman authorities.

They were actually rebels. Anti-Roman insurrectionists who resorted to robbery and violence (Matthew 27:38; Mark 15:27).

One of the rebels told Jesus Christ, "If You are who you claim to be, why don't you do something and get us out of this?"

But the other criminal chastised him. "This man is innocent; but, you and I are guilty of our crimes." And then he turns to Jesus.

Notice verse 42 of Luke 23.

42 Then he said to Jesus, "Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom."

43 And Jesus said to him, "Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise."

This is a frequently cited yet largely misunderstood account in the Bible that many have called Christ and the "good" thief.

However, this was no ordinary thief, and neither was he good.

Bible scholars have mistakenly assumed that Christ assured the "good" thief he would enter paradise on that exact same day Christ died!

Is that what the Bible says?

Did the "good" thief enter paradise on the day Christ died?

Did Christ go to paradise on the day He died?

Notice John chapter 19 and verse 41.

41 Now in the place where He was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb in which no one had yet been laid.

42 So there they laid Jesus, because of the Jews' Preparation Day, for the tomb was nearby.

Here in plain language is where Jesus was.

He was buried in a new or unused tomb located in the garden close to where He was crucified.

He did not go to paradise that day.

The "good" thief was not buried in the same tomb with Him!

The Bible definitively states that this criminal was not buried with Jesus that day!

Notice Acts chapter 2.

Where did Jesus go?

The answer is in Acts chapter 2 and verse 31.

31 He, foreseeing this, spoke concerning the resurrection of the Christ, that His soul was not left in Hades, nor did His flesh see corruption.

Referring to King David's prophecy, Peter says Jesus Christ was in a place called Hades which the King James Version translates as hell.

But other versions render the Greek word hades more accurately as grave.

Christ was dead, buried and in the grave. He was not in paradise that day (1 Corinthians 15:3-4)!

Where then is paradise?

According to Thayer's Greek Lexicon, paradise is "a garden, a pleasure-ground, grove, park." Obviously, the grave is neither a garden, a park nor a pleasure-ground.

The apostle Paul wrote about a man in Christ who over 14 years ago was taken up into Paradise, the very throne of God.

Paradise therefore is in the presence of God's throne in the third heaven (Matthew 5:34; Acts 7:49; Hebrews 8:1).

What then did Jesus mean when He promised the "good" thief "Today you shall be with me in paradise"?

The correct understanding of what Jesus promised the "good" thief is solved by the proper use of punctuation!

Most translations were improperly punctuated to make it appear that Christ would be in paradise together with the "good" thief the day that He [Christ] died.

Since the inspired original Greek—having no punctuation—could be read either way, we had to present clear scriptural references to prove what Jesus actually meant when He said "Today you shall be with me in paradise"!

The Companion Bible says the following in Appendix 173 titled "To-day" (Luke 23:43).

"The interpretation of this verse depends entirely on punctuation, which rests wholly on human authority, the Greek manuscripts having no punctuation of any kind till the ninth century, and then it is only a dot (in the middle of the line) separating each word."

By placing the comma following the word "today" instead of before it, we can know what Christ promised in Luke chapter 23 and verse 43.

43 And Jesus said to him, "Assuredly, I say to you today, you will be with Me in Paradise."

Jesus was emphasizing the time of His promise, not the time the "good" thief would be with Him in paradise.

So, where is the "good" thief now?

There is no scriptural evidence indicating where the "good" thief may have been buried.

Very likely, he is buried in a mass grave, awaiting the resurrection that Christ promised him on that day of the crucifixion.

Christ knew that the "good" thief would be resurrected back to physical life in the second resurrection (Revelation 20:12-13).

At that time, the "good" thief will have his opportunity to learn the truth of God for the very first time.

And then, upon repentance, obedience and overcoming, he will receive the gift of eternal life in the paradise of God which will then be on this earth (Revelation 2:7; 21:2; 22:1-2)!