

Thieves in Paradise

DO YOU KNOW:

That one of the two thieves who were crucified with Jesus asked to be remembered by Him when He would come into His kingdom, and that Jesus assured him that he would be with Him in paradise (Luke 23:42, 43)?

That due to Jesus' and His disciples' widespread and repeated preaching, the people in general, including this thief, knew of this coming kingdom?

That the kingdom has two phases:

(1) its invisible, heavenly phase: Jesus and His Church, His Bride, the Little Flock (Revelation 21:2; Ephesians 5:23-32; Luke 12:32), and the Bridesmaids, the Great Company (Psalms 45:14, 15; Revelation 7:9-17; 19:9);

(2) its visible, earthly phase: the Worthies (Hebrews 11:39, 40; Genesis 13:14, 15; Acts 7:5; Matthew 11:11; Luke 13:28-30) and its subjects - mankind in general (Psalms 37:9-11, 22, 29, 34; Isaiah 60:21; Amos 9:14, 15)?

That by teaching His disciples to pray, "Thy kingdom come; thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven," Jesus showed that His kingdom on earth was future?

That the fulfillment of Bible prophecies shows that this reign of righteousness and peace over all the earth (Daniel 2:35, 44; 7:13, 14, 18, 27; Zechariah 14:9; Haggai 2:7; Hebrews 12:27, 28; Isaiah 9:6, 7; 2:2-4; Jeremiah 3:17) will soon come?

That, contrary to the views of some, the thief never asked Jesus to take him to heaven?

That he did not ask Jesus to remember him on the day they were crucified, but rather at a future time—"when thou comest into thy kingdom"?

That in reply Jesus solemnly assured him that his request would be granted, that He would indeed remember him when He would come into His kingdom, saying: "Verily [amen, or, it shall be so; that is, your request is granted] I say unto thee today, Thou shalt be with me in paradise"?

DO YOU KNOW:

That the word paradise, meaning garden, is used in the Bible to refer to:

(a) the garden of Eden, "the garden of God" (Genesis 2:8-15; Ezekiel 28:13), i.e., the perfect abode of Adam and Eve while sinless;

(b) God's abode, in heaven (Revelation 2:7);

(c) the earth after the kingdom is set up on it, as and after its curse of sin and death is increasingly removed (Revelation 22:1-3, compare Genesis 2:9, 10; 1 Corinthians 15:26), and it becomes increasingly (Daniel 2:35) "like the garden of Eden" (Ezekiel 36:35), i.e., Paradise Lost becomes Paradise Regained, which new earth was seen in vision and prophecy together with the third, the new heaven- the spiritual control of Christ (2 Corinthians 12:1-4; 2 Peter 3:6, 7, 12,

13; Revelation 21:1- 3)- that will supplant the spiritual control of Satan, "the god of this world" (2 Corinthians 4:4; Galatians 1:4; Ephesians 2:2)?

That of the three Biblically- mentioned paradises,

(a) was destroyed long before Jesus' death, and

(c) is still future; hence

(b) alone existed when Jesus died; but on the third day thereafter He stated that He had not yet gone there (John 20:17), nor did He go there until 40 days later (Acts 1:3- 11)?

That therefore the comma should have been placed after the word "today" in Luke 23:43, and not before it, as is done in many Bible translations?

That placing the comma before the word "today" (thus: "I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with me in paradise") would make Jesus a falsifier, for it would mean that He promised the thief that he would be with Him in paradise on the same day they were crucified, when He knew from the Scriptures that He was not going there that day, but on that day was to pour out His soul unto death (Isaiah 53:10, 12) and His soul was to descend into hell (hades- the death state- Acts 2:30- 32), from which He would not be raised until the third day (Luke 18:31- 33)?

That placing the comma after the word "today" (thus: "I say unto thee today, Thou shalt be with me in paradise") creates no such difficulties, for it shows that Jesus merely made the promise to the thief on that day, though the promise would not be fulfilled until Jesus would come into His kingdom?

DO YOU KNOW:

That commas and other punctuation marks, found in various Bible translations to aid the reader, were not placed there by Divine inspiration, since they are not found in the original Greek manuscripts of the New Testament- in fact, punctuation marks were not even invented until the ninth century after Christ- So there is nothing at all in the Divinely inspired record that requires the comma to be before instead of after the word "today"?

That heaven is a prepared place (John 14:1- 3; 1 Corinthians 2:9; Hebrews 10:34) for prepared people (Romans 9:23, 24)- i.e., those only who by self-denial and world-denial and taking up their crosses become Jesus' disciples (Matthew 16:24; Luke 14:26, 27), who are begotten of the Holy Spirit (1 John 5:1, 18; 1 Peter 1:3; John 3:3- 8), and who then faithfully follow in His steps (1 Peter 2:21; 1 John 2:6), by patient continuance in well-doing, including bringing forth the fruits of the Spirit, seeking for immortality, eternal life (Romans 2:7; Galatians 5:22, 23; Hebrews 12:14; James 1:4; 2 Peter 1:5- 11)?

That God holds all accountable for the sins they commit (Matthew 12:36; 1 Timothy 5:24) and commands them to repent (Acts 17:30; 3:19)?

That Jesus appreciated the dying thief's manifestation of reverence for God and true repentance for sins committed (Luke 23:40, 41), and therefore on that dark day graciously granted his request and gave him the comforting assurance that he would be with Him in paradise- the earthly phase of His kingdom- when it is established, for it is evident that the thief's repentance, So close to the time of

his death, did not give him time to be properly prepared for a place in the heavenly, spiritual phase of the kingdom?

That God did not promise that any who will be in the kingdom's heavenly phase or its earthly phase- including the penitent thief- would be rewarded at death; rather, He showed that they would sleep in death (1 Kings 2:10; Daniel 12:2; John 11:11- 14, 44; 1 Corinthians 15:6, 18, 20; 1 Thessalonians 4:13- 17) and get their rewards at the time of Jesus' Second Advent, in the resurrection awakening (John 14:3; Matthew 16:27; Luke 14:14; 2 Timothy 4:8; 1 Peter 1:7, 13)?

DO YOU KNOW:

That at Jesus' return in His kingdom (Luke 19:11, 12), His reward is with Him (Revelation 22:12), and "all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth," either "unto the resurrection of life," or "unto the resurrection of judgment"- for "there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust" (John 5:28, 29; Acts 24:15)?

That then Jesus will remember the penitent thief- He will awaken him from Adamic death with the "unjust," who were not previously on trial for life, for whom also He died (Hebrews 2:9; 1 John 2:2), and He will give them a knowledge of the Truth (1 Timothy 2:4) and a trial for life during His reign on earth (Revelation 5:10; 20:4, 6), in the Thousand- year Judgment Day (2 Peter 3:8), when He will "judge the world in righteousness" (Acts 17:31; Psalms 96:98) and make the entire earth into a paradise?

That "whosoever will" (Revelation 22:17) of these will gradually attain human perfection on the highway of holiness then cast up- "they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away" (Isaiah 35:8, 10; 62:10); all found worthy (the unworthy will be destroyed- Isaiah 65:20; Revelation 20:7- 9; 21:8; Psalms 145:20) will inherit everlasting life, not in heaven, but in the paradise on earth (Matthew 25:31- 46)?

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