



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 (Rev. 21: 2; Eph. 5: 23-32; Luke 12: 32), and the Bridesmaids, the Great Company (Psa. 45: 14, 15; Rev. 7: 9-17; 19: 9); (2) *its visible, earthly phase*: the Worthies (Heb. 11: 39, 40; Gen. 13: 14, 15; Acts 7: 5; Matt. 11: 11; Luke 13: 28-30) and its subjects—mankind in general (Psa. 37: 9-11, 22, 29, 34; Isa. 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 (Dan. 2: 35, 44; 7: 13, 14, 18, 27; Zech. 14: 9; Hag. 2: 7; Heb. 12: 27, 28; Isa. 9: 6, 7; 2: 2-4; Jer. 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" (Gen. 2: 8-15; Ezek. 28: 13), *i.e.*, the perfect abode of Adam and Eve while sinless; (b) God's abode, in heaven (Rev. 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 (Rev. 22: 1-3, comp. Gen. 2: 9, 10; 1 Cor. 15: 26), and it becomes increasingly (Dan. 2: 35) "like the garden of Eden" (Ezek. 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 Cor. 12: 1-4; 2 Pet. 3: 6, 7, 12, 13; Rev. 21: 1-3)—that will supplant the spiritual control of Satan, "the god of this world" (2 Cor. 4: 4; Gal. 1: 4; Eph. 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 (Isa. 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 Cor. 2: 9; Heb. 10: 34) for *prepared* people (Rom. 9: 23, 24)—*i.e.*, those only who by self- and world-denial and taking up their crosses become Jesus' disciples (Matt. 16: 24; Luke 14: 26, 27), who are begotten of the Holy Spirit (1 John 5: 1, 18; 1 Pet. 1: 3; John 3: 3-8), and who then faithfully follow in His steps (1 Pet. 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 (Rom. 2: 7; Gal. 5: 22, 23; Heb. 12: 14; James 1: 4; 2 Pet. 1: 5-11)?

- That God holds all accountable for the sins they commit (Matt. 12: 36; 1 Tim. 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; Dan. 12: 2; John 11: 11-14, 44; 1 Cor. 15: 6, 18, 20; 1 Thes. 4: 13-17) and get their rewards at the time of Jesus' Second Advent, in the resurrection awakening (John 14: 3; Matt. 16: 27; Luke 14: 14; 2 Tim. 4: 8; 1 Pet. 1: 7, 13)?

DO YOU KNOW: That at Jesus' return in His kingdom (Luke 19: 11, 12), His reward is with Him (Rev. 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 (Heb. 2: 9; 1 John 2: 2), and He will give them a knowledge of the Truth (1 Tim. 2: 4) and a trial for life during His reign on earth (Rev. 5: 10; 20: 4, 6), in the Thousand-year Judgment Day (2 Pet. 3: 8), when He will "judge the world in righteousness" (Acts 17: 31; Psa. 96: 1-13; 98: 1-9) and make the entire earth into a paradise?

- That "whosoever will" (Rev. 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" (Isa. 35: 8, 10; 62: 10); all found worthy (the unworthy will be destroyed—Isa. 65: 20; Rev. 20: 7-9; 21: 8; Psa. 145: 20) will inherit everlasting life, not in heaven, but in the paradise on earth (Matt. 25: 31-46)?