

The Thief on the Cross

Our message today concerns a question often asked about one of the malefactors crucified with Jesus. In **Luke 23:39-43**, we read about the account of the thief on the cross.

Because of the answer that Jesus gave to the thief, many believe today that all one has to do to go to heaven is simply believe and accept by faith your salvation. Remember, it is only after all Scripture has been examined on any particular subject can true Bible doctrine be established.

The salvation process was not perfected and completed at the cross. It was only initiated but not consummated until the Return of Jesus in AD 70 of the first century.

The way into heaven was not opened until God's wrath upon Jerusalem was fulfilled. The Book of Revelation from chapter one to chapter 22 is the account of the coming judgment of God upon the Covenant-breaking Nation of Israel, Jerusalem, and the Temple.

The destruction of the Temple is described by Jesus in **Matthew 24**, in **Mark 13**, and in **Luke 21**. In each of these chapters, the Scripture stated that all the events spoken of **would all be fulfilled before their generation would pass**.

The Scripture plainly states that the way into the Holiest was not yet manifested while the Temple in Jerusalem was still standing. (**Hebrews 9:8**)

In **Leviticus chapter 16**, we read about the Day of Atonement which covered the sins of the people for one year. When the high priest went into the most holy place in the tabernacle, he took the blood of atonement with him.

When he came out of the most holy place, it was seen by all Israel that the sacrifice was accepted by God. This is something that only the High Priest could do.

The Bible tells us in Hebrews that Jesus was a High Priest of good things to come. (**Hebrews 9:6-7, 11-12**) Jesus established the New Covenant with His own blood. (**Hebrews 9:12, 14-15**)

No one could go into heaven until the High Priest typology was fulfilled. Jesus fulfilled the High Priest typology. (**Hebrews 9:24-28**) Jesus opened up heaven for all, who through faith and obedience to the Gospel message of Jesus Christ, could enter.

The thief on the cross was told by the Lord Jesus that he would be with Him in paradise. Notice the word **“to-day”** is used in this verse. (**Luke 23:43**)

The word **“to-day”**, as used in this verse, did not mean a 24-hour day. The word **“to-day”** here means **“a time for embracing the salvation graciously offered”**.

We can see this same context used in **Hebrews 3:13, 15**. Forgiveness was extended to the thief on the cross that day and he embraced it. Because Jesus is God manifest in the flesh, He had the power to forgive sin. (**1 Timothy 3:16, Luke. 5:21, 23-24**) The thief died that day knowing that his sins were forgiven by Jesus.

The Bible begins in a paradise and ends in a paradise. Paradise means a place of eternal life and happiness. The thief on the cross, though under the Old Covenant, was forgiven for his sins.

Although he was forgiven of his sins, he could not go into heaven yet, but had to go into the grave like all the rest of the faithful. He, like all of the other patriarchs, prophets, and righteous ones, had to wait for the Day of Resurrection.

The word for **“grave”** is Hades or Sheol. ([Strong's H#7585](#)) All the living know that they will die. (**Ecclesiastes 9:5, 3:2, Ezra 18:4, Hebrews 9:27**)

The Bible speaks of only one resurrection. (**John 5:25, 28-29**) The Apostle Paul also wrote about this one resurrection. (**Acts 24:14-15 23:6**) The Apostles, who were taught by Jesus, believed in the resurrection of the dead. The resurrection that they taught was not a physical resurrection of dead bodies, but rather a spiritual resurrection.

Jesus spoke of the resurrection of the church that would occur on the last day of the last days in the year AD 70 of the first century. **(John 6:39,40,44,54)**

In **Matthew 16:18**, Jesus said that the gates of the cemeteries were not going to keep His church from resurrecting on the last day. Job also makes a reference to the **“bars”** of the grave. **(Job 17:16)**

The Book of Revelation speaks about the beginning of the White Throne Judgment in AD 70. **(Revelation 20:11)** At this time, death and Hell, **(Hades- the holding place of the dead)** were emptied out and destroyed. Since AD 70, the White Throne Judgment is ongoing and will be throughout all eternity.

Remember, the New Covenant is everlasting and eternal; it has no end. Now, when people die without obeying the Gospel message, they go directly to God's judgment. **(Hebrews 9:27)**

The question that is asked is what about the Resurrection of born-again Christians? Born-again Christians will never die spiritually. We all will die a physical death.

We all know that this will happen. **(Ecclesiastes 9:5, John 8:51, 11:25-26)** We receive resurrection life and power when we are born again through the Gospel message of Jesus Christ. **(Romans 6:3-5, John 3:3,5,7, Acts 2:37-39)**

When we are born again, the promise that we receive is eternal life. **(1 John 2:25, Romans 6:23)** Therefore, born-again Christians don't need a resurrection because they received it already at the rebirth experience. **(John 11:25-26)**

It is at death that the born-again Christian receives his new body. **(2 Corinthians 5:1)** Our physical bodies cannot enter God's spiritual Kingdom. God said that our physical bodies will return to the earth where it came from. **(Genesis 3:19)**

Conclusion

The thief on the cross died under the Old Covenant which was still in place until AD 70. Jesus, the Messiah, forgave the thief on the cross on that day.

The thief died in a forgiven state. It was on Resurrection Day that the thief was raised with all the rest of the righteous dead unto everlasting life in the year AD 70 of the first century.

To use the thief on the cross as an example of how to be “saved” under the New Covenant is to completely take this event out of its context.

Beginning on the Day of Pentecost, the Apostles went everywhere baptizing in the Name of Jesus Christ and witnessed many receiving the Holy Ghost with the evidence of speaking in other tongues as the Apostles themselves did.

The Apostles made sure that their receptive hearers were born again of the water and of the Spirit.

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