

THE THIEF ON THE CROSS

Luke 23:39-43

For years many have believed that when reading the KJV of Luke 23:43 (1542) that the thief went that day to be with Jesus in paradise. A closer look bears out the fact that neither the thief nor Jesus was in paradise that day and that a misplaced comma has caused this misunderstanding. When the comma is properly placed the passage reads — Verily I say unto thee today, thou shalt be with me in paradise.

Christ did not promise the thief that he would be with Him in paradise that day. He Himself did not go that day into paradise. He slept in the tomb, and in the morning of the resurrection He said, "I am not yet ascended to my Father." Jn. 20:17 (1587).

What Christ did say that day to the thief, on the day of crucifixion, on the day of apparent defeat and darkness, when all seemed lost, was "You will be with me in paradise." — The promise was given! The thief died with the assurance of eternal life like any other child of God, I Thess. 4:13-18 (1736), to be raised on that great resurrection morning.

In the original manuscripts of the scriptures, the Greek language was without punctuation. The comma in question and all other punctuation in the New Testament was put in hundreds of years after this was written by Dr. Luke.

The best way to clearly understand what Jesus meant that day when speaking to the thief is to answer some other questions:

1. What is paradise? (Lesson 8)
2. Did Jesus go to paradise on that day of His crucifixion? (Lesson 13)
3. What did Jesus teach about the time when men would enter upon their reward in paradise? (Lessons 6 & 7)

As our Savior hung on the cross there came one gleam of comfort from His agony. It was the prayer of the penitent thief. From the heart of the thief comes hope mingled with anguish as he cries out, "Lord remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom." Quickly the answer came. Soft and melodious the tone, full of love, compassion, and power the words — Verily I say unto thee today, thou shalt be with me in paradise. This assurance is also ours today, as we make Jesus our Savior and the Lord of our lives.