

A BIBLE PROPHECY ADVENTURE REVELATION SEMINARS

THE THIEF ON THE CROSS Luke 23:39-43

For years many have believed that when reading the KJV of Luke 23:43 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.

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, 1 Thess. 4:13-18, 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 Saviour 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 Saviour and the Lord of our lives.

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SPIRIT, BREATH, SOUL

Spirit and Breath

Job 27:3 also points out that the "spirit" and the "breath" are the same. Job further states that this spirit or breath is in his nostrils. Please remember that it was the "breath" that God placed in Adam's nostrils at creation, Genesis 2:7. So the spirit that returns to God when a person dies is the breath of life. Keep in mind that the spirit, or breath, returns to God, at death, but not the disembodied soul. Never, in the Bible, is the disembodied soul said to return to God at death.

The word "breath", here, is not referring to one's common breathing, but breath as the "divine spark of life". It is this breath or "divine spark of life" that returns back to God at death. Only God has the power to create life and He retains that power exclusively.

Soul

At creation, two things combine to make a soul: body and breath. Until these two things combine, a soul does not exist. At death, these two things (body and breath) separate. The body returns to dust and the breath returns to God, and once again, the soul no longer exists. The soul goes nowhere at death. It simply ceases to be.

A simple illustration may help clarify this point. Suppose that combine lumber and nails and make a box: lumber plus nails equals box. Then suppose that I no longer want the box so I pull the nails, and put them in a pile, and stack the lumber in another place. What happens to the box? Where does it go? It goes nowhere. It simply ceases to be. The box is a combination of two things. There is no such thing as a box, unless lumber and nails are combined to make it. The nails and lumber still exist but there is no box until the two are joined together. So with the soul: the breath exists and the body returns to dust, but the soul does not exist unless the two are combined.



Death, Soul and Spirit

Death is not life in heaven, hell, limbo or purgatory. It is not life of any kind, anywhere. In death, the soul does not live, the spirit does not live. No shadowy substance of any kind lives. It is the exact opposite of life - death.

The words "soul" and "spirit" are used over 1600 times in the Bible, but not one time are either given any life or personality or wisdom or knowledge when separated from the body.

The word "soul" does have other basic meanings in the Bible. Usually it means a person or a living being, Genesis 2:7. But sometimes it means "life". Job 12:10. And sometimes it simply means the "mind" or "intellect". Psalm 139:14. In all cases, however, the definition is the same: body plus breath equals soul. And in all cases the soul does not exist when body and breath are separated. Many English words have several meanings, but, this is not confusing; the context usually clarifies which meaning is intended.

SLEEP AND ETERNAL LIFE

Sleep

Sleep is a beautiful illustration of death. It is like going to bed at night, when we are tired, with assurance of waking in the morning. This takes the fear out of death for the Christian. They lie down to sleep — with the quiet assurance that Jesus will awaken them in the morning of the resurrection at His second coming.

Death is called "sleep" at least fifty times in the Bible. We are to regard it as a sound, dreamless sleep. A person may have been in the tomb 1000 years, but when raised at the resurrection it will seem to him that he merely dozed off for a moment. When angels meet God's resurrected saints at their gravesides, Matthew 24:31, it will be like a loving mother greeting her child after a brief nap.

Eternal Life

Man is not immortal. He is subject to death. But God's people do, indeed, have eternal life now. Eternal life is that miraculous, new, Jesus-filled life, which begins at conversion and will be continued in heaven. God's promise is that His faithful people, who now have eternal life, will not suffer the second death, Revelation 2:11, from which there is no resurrection. The first death, which all must die, does not remove the gift of eternal life. It only interrupts it while the saints sleep briefly. It continues in heaven after the resurrection.