



"The storms of life no more indicate the absence of God than clouds indicate the absence of the sun."

—John Blanchard

08-May-15

What Happened to the Thief on the Cross? (Part Three)

If the [thief on the cross](#) lived again the day that he was crucified, ascending to heaven, not only would he have gone there without [Jesus Christ](#), but he also would have been a jarring exception to the Bible's clear statements about when the resurrection takes place. For example, [John 3:13](#) clearly reads, "*No one has ascended to heaven* but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man" (our emphasis throughout). What about all of the [Old Testament](#) saints? What about all of the "heroes of [faith](#)" of Hebrews 11? Most people *assume* they are in heaven in the presence of [God](#), yet if we are willing to believe Jesus' plain statement, we know that cannot be the case.

Where is [King David](#), a "man after God's heart"? The Bible tells us where he is *not*: "*For David did not ascend into the heavens*" ([Acts 2:34](#))! Where is he? The answer is found a few verses before: "Men and brethren, let me speak freely to you of the patriarch David, that *he is both dead and buried, and his tomb is with us to this day*" (verse 29). King David is not in heaven but dead and buried, sleeping until the [resurrection from the dead](#).

Is it logical that the thief on the cross would [go to heaven](#), when Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, [Isaac](#), Jacob, Joseph, [Moses](#), and all the rest

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in Hebrews 11 were not accorded that honor? No, the end of the chapter even addresses that:

And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise, God having provided something better for us, that *they should not be made perfect apart from us.* ([Hebrews 11:39-40](#))

These heroes of faith did not receive the promises because God planned that both they and the audience of the [book of Hebrews](#) would "be made perfect" together—at the same time. "Going to heaven" was never an Old Testament promise, nor is it a New Testament promise. What God promises is our being "made perfect," and the Old Testament saints will be made perfect at the same time as the New Testament saints. [Philippians 3:10-12](#) explains that this "perfection" happens only at the resurrection of the dead, while [John 3:13](#) and [Acts 2:34](#) both show that this does not occur when each individual dies. Instead, in [I Corinthians 15:50-54](#), Paul writes that it is not until *the last trumpet* that the saints will be resurrected and made perfect:

Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the [kingdom of God](#); nor does corruption inherit incorruption. Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, *at the last trumpet*. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory."

"The dead will be raised" only when the last trumpet sounds, and those saints still living will be changed into spirit beings immediately thereafter. That last trumpet is shown to take place when Christ returns (see [I Thessalonians 4:15-17](#)). What this means is that the resurrection to immortal life—the perfecting of the saints—does not take place until Christ comes back to establish His Kingdom on this earth. The only exception to this has been Jesus Christ Himself. As [Hebrews 11:40](#) shows, the thief on the cross could not have been "made perfect"—resurrected with an incorruptible spirit body—ahead

of all of the saints of God. He most certainly could not have been made perfect before Christ!

Much of the misunderstanding of this verse stems from the placement of the comma. Modern translations predominately place a comma after the word "you," giving the impression that the remaining phrase—"today you will be with Me in Paradise"—means that the criminal to whom Jesus was speaking would be with Him in Paradise later that day. However, it must be remembered that none of the ancient Greek manuscripts of the New Testament contain any punctuation—various translators added it centuries later. Thus, without punctuation, [Luke 23:43](#) reads, "And Jesus said to him assuredly I say to you today you will be with Me in Paradise."

On the surface, putting a comma after the word "you" seems harmless enough. However, if He indeed had meant that the criminal would be in Paradise with Him that very day, He would have contradicted Himself and the Bible on numerous accounts! As we have seen, Jesus Himself was not in Paradise that day but was dead and buried, awaiting His resurrection [three days and three nights](#) later. However, this apparent dilemma is easily resolved if the comma is placed after the word "today." Properly punctuated, [Luke 23:43](#) reads, "And Jesus said to him, 'Assuredly, I say to you today, you will be with Me in Paradise.'"

In Part Four, we will explore the structure of this sentence more closely, showing that it is not an anomaly in Scripture.

- David C. Grabbe

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[Boaz and Pentecost](#)

by Richard T. Ritenbaugh

Some authors choose the enigmatic titles for their books. The name of Boaz (a type of Christ) appears many times more than Ruth (a type of the church), indicating Christ's intense work on behalf of the church, harvesting the

firstfruits to the Lord. The whole period from the wavesheaf offering to the offering of the baked loaves constitutes God's harvesting of the firstfruits. It is our obligation to get in line to do our part, as Ruth diligently did her part. Ruth originally was a foreigner (a Moabitess) a type of worldly person outside the covenant, who nevertheless commits herself to Naomi (a type of Israel) and her God, and ultimately becomes redeemed by Boaz, a gracious provider, who instructs the reapers to leave Ruth a generous portion of grain as well as offering her protection and safety, admonishing her not to glean in another field, but to stay close to his women servants, keeping her eyes on the field, following the examples of the other servants, drinking only from what the young men have drawn. In addition to providing graciously, Boaz was a righteous judge, having gathered all the details of Ruth's virtuous and selfless life as he had gathered the grain, winnowing the chaff from the good kernels. After Boaz judged Ruth, he lovingly and lawfully redeemed her as Christ has redeemed His Church.

From the Archives: Featured Article

[Peter's Trumpets Message—on Pentecost](#)

by Charles Whitaker

Peter's first sermon took place on the Day of Pentecost, yet his subject seems to 'fit' the Day of Trumpets. Charles Whitaker explains that the fulfillment of Pentecost begins what will be completed in the fulfillment of Trumpets.

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