

EDEN

By

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“Thou shall be with me in Paradise.” (Luke 23:43)

The first three chapters of Genesis tell of man’s innocence in Eden, of his fall under a curse, of his death, and hope of life. T. Robert Ingram writes, “What might be called the synopsis of all of History, including the glorious Gospel of Redemption, is here.” What happened in Eden and what was promised by God there is a background for all scripture. From Genesis 4 onward, the Bible is written to a race that has forfeited life and has as its primary object the restoration of innocence in order to be allowed to live again according to the original design.

Strangely enough those who dwell on prophecy are too concerned with the kingdoms of this world and the purely fleshly and material details about them to consider the original purpose of God and the ultimate destiny to which He is leading. Yet, the route is clearly marked in the Scripture.

It is significant that in the very hour of dying to pay the sinner’s death penalty, when asked by the thief on the cross to “remember” him, Jesus answered, “Thou shall be with me in Paradise” (Luke 23:43). The Greek language did not include punctuation. When the translators put this into English, they already had developed their human traditions, so they punctuated it according to preconceived notions. Placing a comma after “thee” created confusion; for Jesus did not ascend to heaven on that day, and Paradise certainly is not the grave. Three days after the crucifixion Jesus declared, “I am not yet ascended unto the Father” (John 20:17). Obviously, then, Jesus was not promising that the thief would be with him that very day in Paradise.

Since there was no punctuation in the original, it would make more sense (and harmonize with other scripture) to place the comma after “today”, making it read, “Verily I say unto thee today, Thou shall be with me in Paradise.” This was in answer to the thief’s request, “Remember me when thou come into thy Kingdom.”

According to the Winston dictionary, Paradise is defined as: the Garden of Eden. While we cannot rely upon man’s definitions for biblical terms, this definition is borne out in scripture. The Genesis account of Eden says, “And out of the ground made Jehovah God to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil” (Gen. 2:9). The promise made to the church is that “to him that overcomes will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God” (Rev. 2:7). The tree of life was available in man’s original innocence, before Adam and Eve took up rebellious arms against God. After their sin, they were driven from the garden “lest also he put forth his

hand and take of the tree of life and eat and live forever.” Without the tree of life, man has suffered the pangs of death from Adam until now.

But in the future eternal state, the tree of life is once more present in the Paradise of God. “Blessed are they that wash their robes, that they may have the right to come to the tree of Life, and may enter in by the gates into the city” (Rev. 22:14).

We conclude from this that Paradise has reference to the original state of innocence in the Garden of Eden, where Adam had perfect, unhindered fellowship with God, and to the eternal state of man, made innocent by Christ, where he will again live in perfect harmony and fellowship with God. This will be possible by a resurrection of the dead and creation of a “new earth wherein dwells righteousness” (2 Pet. 3:13). We hasten to add that the new creation is expected to be even more glorious than the Eden from which Adam was driven.

Nevertheless, to have an over-all view of God’s revelation and purpose, we need some appreciation of the original Paradise. First of all, it was a place prepared by God with everything pleasant to the eye and good for food. There was perfect harmony between man and God so that man had no lust for vainglory. As long as man walked with God, taking “every good and perfect gift” from His hand as He had ordered, there was no sin in enjoying things pleasant to the eye, good for food, not was there any “vainglory of life”. Man gloried in God, and his life was indeed glorious. Real joy and glory were derived from all that God had given, because it was received in innocence, that is, in perfect obedience to God and in humble acceptance of all that the Creator provided for man to enjoy.

We must add that in his innocence, and in Paradise itself, man was not what we today call “free”. He was still under the rule of God. There was one tree forbidden to him. There were other rules, too, such as the command to have dominion over all other created things on earth and the rule of marriage. Adam’s happiness was not marred by this restraint. In fact, we can see that the restraint was placed there in order to secure his happiness and his life; for the statement of God was simply, “The day thou shall eat of it, thou shall surely die”, which implied that he could live forever as long as he lived by the rules.

It is only philosophical nonsense and speculation to answer the question, “Why did God put the tree there if it could bring death?” Suffice it to say that Adam had a clear choice of NOT eating of it, and the stakes were so high (life or death) that only a deep desire to rebel and break off the restraint could have induced him to do it. He knew that God did not lie. His belief of the devil’s lie, “Thou shall NOT surely die,” is evidence of his desire to rebel. Paul writes that those who HAVE NO LOVE OF THE TRUTH are given a lie (2 Thess. 2:10-12), and Jesus said, “He that loves me not keeps not my words” (John 14:24). So all who are following the false doctrines of Satan, who believe the religion of evolution rather than the truth revealed by God, who seem to want to believe in Christ but somehow just can’t muster up the faith, all such are simply showing their lack of love of their Creator.

The failure to believe God is based on the same principle as Adam's failure, the desire to "Know good and evil", that is, the desire to determine for one's self what is good for him. This is known today as "freedom", as seen in the so-called Women's Liberation movement, which so permeates the thinking of many young women that they are literally destroying their chances for a happy home and a life of order and fulfillment. You cannot have freedom to do as you please and still be in harmony with the Creator. That is why Jesus said, "You shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free." It is knowing Him to the point of living by His law that gives freedom.

The innocence of Adam was glorious. Who can imagine the peace that one might have who had never once in all his lifetime committed any act which he might regret? Think of the joy that Adam and Eve had in living in harmony kind of in partnership with God Himself. Innocence was glorious in this fact that man was acting in concert with God, the Creator and Sustainer of the universe. There is always a certain exhilaration and joy when one is working with friends to a common goal, whether it is pitching a tent at a campsite, or the grueling work of pouring cement for the foundation of a new home. There is joy in working in harmony with others of like mind. Adam was working in harmony with the whole universe, including its God.

Therefore, Adam could live in perfect happiness. So long as this innocence and harmony with God continued, his life was indeed one of "peace and joy in believing" (Rom. 15:13).

Upon his sin, the harmony was broken, the restraints were violated, and the law of God went into effect that "The soul that sins, it shall die." As Adam's children, we all live under the result of this violation, for this mortal quality of death passed on to all his descendents. The catastrophe was not limited to Adam and Eve's death. The curse extended to all that over which man had dominion. "The whole creation groans and travails in pain together until now", because God said "cursed is the ground for thy sake" (Rom. 8:22; Gen. 3:17). Some geologists suggest that the terrible curse was of such a severe nature that it produced shattering changes in the earth's makeup. Roman s 8:20-22 seems to bear this out.

But the "Genesis Synopsis" does not end there. There was the promise of Christ and His total victory over Satan. This was then pictured for Adam and Eve in the slaying of the animals and the covering of their de-glorified bodies with the skins. Their hope was in Christ's coming, to die for sin. That they and all their descendents who accept His payment and its consequences might again be innocent, subject to the Creator, not seeking to determine their destiny for themselves, but to live in harmony with His design, and grow into His image. Even now all who are redeemed (clothed in Christ's righteousness) are filled "with all joy and peace in believing" (Rom. 15:13).

There is even more. With innocence restored, Paradise itself is to be restored. Once more the tree of life will be provided that man may "eat thereof and live forever."

The wicked teaching of the world is that man sprang from animals and that he still has the subconscious desire to return to a savage stage of unrestrained animal behavior. This idea is demonstrated in jungle music, formless art, nudism (the naked ape) and the rebellion against God's (natural) law. But the tendency in this direction is in keeping with Adam's sin, prompted by Satan, to depart from the original innocent and happy state. In his sinful state, man does not return, but departs farther and farther from God's image.

However, the instinct to return to Eden is there. When one truly believes the Gospel, he repents, halts the downward slide, is cleansed by Christ, and begins the trek to the Paradise of God. To return to the original state is to finally arrive at the image of God, in a new Paradise, once again to serve God.

“And there shall be no curse any more; and the throne of God and the Lamb shall be therein; and his servants shall serve him” (Rev. 22:3).

There is nothing in the plan for a temporal Utopia, a “kingdom of this world.” This was the mistaken idea if the Jews and one reason they rejected the Messiah. “My kingdom is not of this world,” He said. When He returns, it will be judgment upon all who have rejected Him and eternal Paradise for all who have received Him. Man's eternal life hinges upon his being made innocent and thus fit to live in the Paradise of God.

“Thou shall be with me in Paradise.”

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