

The Thief on the Cross: Why He Is NOT Our Example of Conversion

by Bill Crews

1. The thief (robber is the better word) lived and died while the law of Moses was binding. Jesus was born under that law (Galatians 4:4), and abolished the binding force of that law by his death on the cross (Colossians 2:14).
2. The thief lived and died before the New Covenant or the gospel of Christ was in effect. *“For where a testament is there must of necessity be the death of him that made it. For a testament is of force where there hath been a death; for it doth never avail while he that made it liveth”* (Hebrews 9:16-17). The New Covenant or Testament was not announced until Pentecost of Acts 2 (Jeremiah 31:31-34 — prophecy of a **new** covenant; Luke 24:46-47 — the time was near; Acts 2:22-38 — fulfilled).
3. When the thief said, *“Jesus, remember me when thou comest in thy kingdom”* and was told, *“Today shalt thou be with me in paradise”* (Luke 23:42-43), the one who made the testament was yet alive and was not yet bound by the terms of the testament. It was **after He died** that His testament was in effect (Hebrews 9:16-17).

The question is not, **“Was the thief on the cross saved?”**; but, **“Is the thief a New Testament example of gospel conversion?”** We are not in the same circumstances as was the thief. We live this side of the death of Christ; he lived the other side. We live under the gospel; he lived under the law of Moses. We live under the great commission (Matthew 28:19-20; Mark 16:15-16); he lived before the great commission was given. We have commands he never had. Acts 2:38; 22:16; Galatians 3:27; 1 Peter 3:21 and Romans 6:3-4 were all given after the death and resurrection of Christ. Then why go to the thief in an effort to escape the necessity of baptism when we must face these passages in the judgment? (Really, no man can know that the thief was or was not baptized; he could have been, either under the preaching of John the Baptist (Matthew 3 :5-6) or the preaching of Jesus (John 4:1-2). The books of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John were written to produce faith in Jesus as the Christ. The book of Acts was written to answer the question, **“What must I do to be saved?”** Go then to the book of Acts, not to the thief on the cross, for gospel examples of conversion.

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