

Paradise: Popular Views and Divine Revelation

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PARADISE was lost on earth: why should it not be regained on earth? The Paradise of the past was a land bearing trees and surrounded by rivers (Gen. 2:8-17): should not the Paradise of the future be also on the face of this globe?

Popular notions concerning Paradise are exceedingly confused, but that is not to say that clear and true ideas are unattainable.

A very popular hymn represents Paradise as the place "where Jesus is",

"Where loyal hearts and true
Stand ever in the light,
All rapture through and through
In God's most holy sight."

But God has not promised heaven to the righteous. Even David has not gone there (Acts 2:34).

Popular theology caught up the Jewish fables of old, and mixed these with the superstitions of the nations, producing from them a blend of ideas of a quite unreal kind and bearing no relation to the Scriptures. The result is that today "Paradise" -- so far as the word is used at all -- has become a vague and mythical expression for some kind of future happiness.

Let us turn to the Scriptures direct for ourselves.

PARADISE IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Pardes, the Hebrew equivalent in the Old Testament, is said to be derived from the Old Persian, and means a garden, enclosure or park. It is only found three times in the Scriptures, viz.: Neh. 2:8, "Asaph the keeper of the king's forest"; Eccl. 2:5, "I made me gardens and orchards"; Song 4:13, "Thy plants (O sister-spouse) are an orchard of pomegranates with pleasant fruits".

The meaning here is sufficiently clear: Royal parks and gardens; the last quoted passage referring allegorically to the approaching "marriage of the Lamb", when "the righteous shall inherit the land and dwell therein for ever" (Psa. 37:29), when it "is become like the garden of Eden" (Ezek. 36:35).

From the foregoing it will appear that it is with good reason that the garden of Eden was considered a Paradise -- "Paradise Lost". The Septuagint translation of the Scriptures into Greek, which was made in the third century before Christ, used the term Paradeisos, not

only in the three passages quoted, but also in Genesis, 2 and 3, where the garden of Eden is spoken of, and also in other places where "the garden of the Lord" is referred to (Gen. 13:10; Num. 24:6; Isa. 51:3; Ezek. 28:13; 31:8, 9).

From these passages it may be ascertained with certainty that Paradise is to be seen in a regenerated earth, and that the "waste places of Zion" are to be included therein and transformed; also that its territory is to include the land where anciently the King of Tyre reigned in glory. In short, Paradise is the Kingdom of God centrally established in the Holy Land, and bearing rule over all the earth.

PARADISE IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

The New Testament bears out this. Like *pardes* in the Old Testament, the word *paradeisos* is found only three times in the New Testament -- viz., Luke 23:43, "Thou shalt be with me in Paradise"; 2 Cor. 12:4, "Caught up to Paradise"; Rev. 2:7, "To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life which is in the midst of the Paradise of God."

Christ's promise to the thief on the cross was a gracious answer to his astonishing request: "Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom". That time is still future; and when it comes, Jesus will reign where once he was crucified, and the thief will be remembered.

Paul's "visions and revelations of the Lord" (2 Cor. 12) are related to the same time, place, and development; for Paul preached the setting up of the kingdom of Christ "at his appearing" (2 Tim. 4:1), and rejoiced in prospect of a crown of righteousness "at that day" (verse 8). "The third heaven" is a figure of the perfect state upon earth, "the end", of which he speaks in 1 Cor. 15:24, when death itself shall be destroyed, and the Father revealed upon earth without mediation. The first heaven may be taken as the Mosaic economy in Israel (Deut. 31:1). The second, or "new heavens and a new earth" (Isa. 65:17), is found in Christ's Millennial reign in Jerusalem; during which, however, death still obtains among the subjects of his kingdom. "The third heaven" is revealed beforehand in Rev. 21:14, and is the post-millennial or perfect state, in which there shall be "no more death, neither sorrow nor crying . . . for the former things are passed away".

Christ's promise to him that overcometh (Rev. 2:7) is the offer, in beautiful and fitting metaphor, of eternal life in the Kingdom of God. Compare the similar promises to each of the seven churches (Rev. 2, 3).

HOW WE MAY ENTER PARADISE

In the end the tabernacle of God will be with men (Rev. 21:3), and they will enter Paradise, not indeed by going to heaven and leaving the earth to be burnt up, but by heaven coming to them, that the earth may be filled with God's glory (Num. 14:21) and abide for ever.

We must have the faith of the thief on the cross in "the Gospel of the Kingdom", and thereupon be baptized into Christ's name for the remission of sins: and thence forward, in patient well-doing in the way of his commandments, pray to be remembered in the day of his coming