

# Word Study THIEVES

Ian S Davidson (Motherwell)

Theft is a sin. It was made the subject of one of the Ten Commandments. We read: **"You shall not steal."** (Exodus 20:15). There are clear passages in the New Testament scriptures forbidding theft: **"Know you not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God."** (I Corinthians 6:9,10); **"Let him who stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him who needs."** (Ephesians 4:28); **"Teach slaves to be subject to their masters in everything, to try to please them, not to talk back to them, and not to steal from them, but to show that they can be fully trusted, so that in every way they will make the teaching about God our Saviour attractive."** (Titus 2:9,10, N.I.V.); **"But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evil doer, or as a busybody in other men's matters."** (I Peter 4:15) Theft has been a problem in every age. It is a serious problem everywhere in the modern world. The costs to societies are incalculable.

## ADDITIONAL PASSAGES

There are other interesting passages that refer to theft. **"Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust corrupts, and where thieves do not break through and steal. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."** (Matthew 6: 19-21); **"Verily, verily, I say unto you, He who enters not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbs up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber."** (John 10:1); **"The thief comes not, but to steal and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life and have it more abundantly."** (John 10:10); **"For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night."** (I Thessalonians 5: 2) See also 2 Peter 3:10, Revelation 3:3 and 16:15.

## GREEK TERMS

The standard Greek word for a thief is *kleptes*. This is seen in the English word kleptomania. This is not the word that is used of the two who were crucified with Jesus. Each of these was a *lestes*, the term for a robber or a brigand. W.E.Vine points out that the Greek word is "akin to *leia*, booty, one who plunders openly and by violence". Clearly, a *lestes* was guilty of far worse crimes than a *kleptes*. Barabbas, whom the people demanded to be released at the time of Jesus' trial, was described by John as "a robber". (John 18:40) Again, the Greek word is *lestes*. Flavius Josephus, the Jewish historian, used the term to describe a Zealot insurgent. This is in line with Mark's description of Barabbas. We read: **"And there was one named Barabbas, who lay bound with them that had made insurrection with him, who had committed murder in the insurrection."** (Mark 15:7) I think F.F. Bruce is right when he wrote: "The two bandits – *lestai*, as Mark calls them (15:27) – who

were crucified with Jesus were probably involved in the same incident". Now we see why these two men were crucified by the Roman authorities: they were guilty of crimes punishable by death. (Incidentally, Luke describes the two men as "malefactors" (23:32,33,39), which simply means evildoers).

Jesus was, therefore, crucified between two dangerous criminals, who had been involved in violent struggles against the Roman occupiers. What sort of trial had these men received? What was the evidence against them? What were their ages? Where had they come from? These are questions about which we know nothing. Certainly, they were guilty. Luke records for us: **"And one of the malefactors who were hanged railed on Jesus, saying, If you be Christ, save yourself and us. But the other answering, rebuked him, saying, Do you not fear God, seeing you are in the same condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man has done nothing amiss."** (Luke 23:39-41).

### **SATAN'S LOSS**

Satan tried to make things as bad as possible for the Master because He was numbered with the transgressors. (Mark 15:28) Later, Paul wrote that a crucified Saviour was a stumbling-block to the Jews and foolishness to the Gentiles. (1 Corinthians 2:23) He also wrote: **"Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree: that the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ..."** (Galatians 3:13, 14a) Satan tried to paint the picture that Jesus was just a common criminal. He tried to blacken His name, but, of course, was unsuccessful. One of the great things to come out of Calvary was that Satan lost one of the two malefactors to the Master. I am sure he never expected that. We read: **"And he (the malefactor) said unto Jesus, Lord remember me when you come into your kingdom. And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto you, Today you shall be with me in paradise."** (Luke 23: 42,43) Could these words have followed a conversation not recorded by the Holy Spirit? In any event, Jesus saved the robber on the cross.

### **CONCLUDING THOUGHTS**

Salvation is available to all – to thieves, robbers, brigands, bandits, etc. The guilty might well be subject to capital punishment in many societies, but there is time for them to turn to God, who is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. (2 Peter 3:9b) Indeed, capital punishment very often concentrates the mind wonderfully on the spiritual and the eternal. It did in the case of the robber at Golgotha and his soul accompanied Jesus' soul to paradise of Hades. The soul of this famous "thief" is still there. He awaits the glorious return of the Lord, who will judge the world in righteousness and separate the sheep from the goats. The great tragedy in all this is that the second "thief" did not repent on the cross; and now, for him, it is too late. There is no second chance beyond the grave no matter what some men teach.

He had the opportunity to repent, but turned it down. He will regret the decision forever. Not for him eternal life and eternal joy, but eternal death and eternal sorrow. The eternal destiny of these two "thieves" should make us all think. It is either heaven or hell for everyone.