

(Part 4 of 6 from)

## THE MEDIATORIAL KINGDOM IN THE APOCALYPSE

Alva J. McClain

### CHAPTER XXVI

From *The Greatness of the Kingdom* (1959)

#### III. THE REVELATION OF THE PERIOD OF THE MILLENNIAL KINGDOM (Rev. 19:11-20:15)

It will have been long ago anticipated by the readers of this Commentary, that I cannot consent to distort its words from their plain sense and chronological place in the prophecy, on account of any considerations of difficulty, or any risk of abuses which the doctrine of the millennium may bring with it. Those who lived next to the Apostles, and the whole Church for 300 years, understood them in the plain literal sense: and it is a strange sight in these days to see expositors who are among the first in reverence of antiquity, complacently casting aside the most cogent instance of unanimity which primitive antiquity presents. As regards the text itself, no legitimate treatment of it will extort what is known as the spiritual interpretation now in fashion. If, in a passage where *two resurrections* are mentioned, where certain *souls lived* at the first, and the rest of the dead lived only at the end of a specified period after that first,--if in such a passage the first resurrection may be understood to mean *spiritual* rising with Christ, while the second means *literal* rising from the grave;--then there is an end to all significance in language, and Scripture is wiped out as a definite testimony to any thing. If the first resurrection is spiritual, then so is the second, which I suppose none will be hardy enough to maintain: but if the second is literal, then so is the first, which in common with the whole primitive Church and many of the best modern expositors, I do maintain, and receive as an article of faith and hope. -- *Henry Alford*<sup>1</sup>

There have been minor differences among premillennial interpreters with reference to some details of Revelation 20, but these are as nothing when compared to the confusion which reigns among postmillennial and amillennial writers who attempt to expound the chapter. One need only read the more recent literature of these schools to find that they seem to be a united family only in their unyielding scorn for the premillennial viewpoint and in their opinion that "the thousand years" are not a thousand years.

Although the twentieth chapter of Revelation holds a place of high importance in the

---

<sup>1</sup> Henry Alford, *New Testament for English Readers*, on "The Millennial Reign" in Rev. 20:4-6.

eschatology of the Kingdom, it is inexcusable misrepresentation to allege, as some opponents have, that the weight of the premillennial view rests mainly upon that chapter. As already indicated earlier in this volume, the correct view of the Kingdom must represent an eschatology formulated from an examination of the *whole* of Old and New Testament prophecy; and its essential features can be established apart from Revelation 20.<sup>2</sup> If Biblical prophecy in general teaches anything clearly, it is that Messiah will come in great glory at the end of the present age to establish His Kingdom over all the earth; and this is the firm core of Premillennialism. The unique contributions of Revelation 20 are at least two: first, a *chronology* of the coming Kingdom; and, second, a concise *outline* of constitutive events in their proper order, so clear that there should be no cause for misunderstanding.<sup>3</sup>

In approaching the events of Revelation 20, we should begin with the grand event described in chapter 19:11-21, for it is this glorious coming of Christ which gives meaning to all that follows. In fact, viewed from a literary standpoint, this last part of chapter 19 might well have been made the first part of chapter 20.

#### 1. *The Arrival of the King* (Rev. 19:11-16)

Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him. -- Rev. 1:7

As to the *identity* of the central Person in Rev. 19:11-16 there can be no serious question, as there has been in the case of other figures which appear in earlier visions of the book. The *names* He bears are alone sufficient to put the matter beyond dispute: He is called "Faithful and True" (vs. 11). His name is called "The Word of God" (vs. 13). On His thigh there is the name, "KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS" (vs. 16). Added to this glittering array, there is a name known only to Himself, an intimation of the mystery of Deity (vs. 12). His *appearance* also confirms His identity: His eyes are as a flame of fire, and many crowns are upon His head (vs. 12). He wears vesture stained with blood; not His own, but that of the winepress of divine wrath (vs. 15), reminding us that His is the hand which loosed the divine judgments of chapters 6-19. His *activities* are in character: In righteousness He judges and makes war (vs. 11); descending from heaven, He leads the heavenly armies (vs. 14); with the sharp sword of His mouth, He comes to smite the nations and to rule them with a rod of iron (vs. 15). All the rays of Biblical prophecy come into sharp focus here as they point to Jesus, the incarnate and glorified Son of God, and no other. For the last word

---

2 "The millennial reign on earth does not rest on an isolated passage, but all Old Testament prophecy goes on the same view" (A. R. Fausset on Rev. 20:5, *Commentary*, Unabridged).

3 As the President of Faith Theological Seminary has written: "In earlier books of the Bible we have glimpses of phases of the Millennial Kingdom or of the return of Christ . . . . At the end of the Bible, in Revelation 19 and 20, a picture is given to gather them together and show their arrangement in the pattern of God's plan . . . . It is so clear that one marvels that anyone should misunderstand it" (Dr. Allan A. MacRae, an address published under the title "The Millennial Kingdom of Christ").

from heaven just before His descent reminds the reader that "the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy" (vs. 10).

From the description in Rev. 19:11-16 it must be clear that, in the inauguration of His Mediatorial Kingdom on earth, our Lord will come down from heaven exactly as He declared He would: personally, visibly, gloriously, powerfully, and with hosts of angels (Matt. 24:26-30; 25:31). Included in the heavenly "armies" which attend Him, Alford insists, we should see the "glorified saints" of the Church. Whether this identification be correct or not, it is certain that these "saints" shall be with Him when He comes to reign (I Thess. 3:13). It would be inconceivable that the Lamb's "wife," after the blessed consummation of the marriage in heaven, should ever again be separated from her glorious Bridegroom. The promise is that we shall "ever be with the Lord" (I Thess. 4:17). Today, during her life on earth, Christ is "with" the Church *spiritually*: "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the age" (Matt. 28:20). But when its membership is complete, the Church will be taken up from the earth by rapture and resurrection to be *personally* "with" her divine Head. And this conjugal relationship will be everlasting, never to be broken by divorce, nor marred by any separation.

## 2. *The Defeat of the Beast* (Rev. 19:17-21)

And the beast was taken. -- Rev. 19:20

Throughout chapters 6-19, during the pre-Kingdom judgments upon the world, there is a definite progression in the gathering of the massive forces of evil. The pseudo-messiah of 6:2 rides swiftly to his goal of world political power, and then is revealed in his true character as the "beast" of 13:1-5. Following the consolidation of his power, the judgment of God is concentrated upon his "throne," and his kingdom is plunged into "darkness" (16:10). His immediate reaction is a move to gather his forces for a test of strength. With a show of superhuman "signs," he sets out to bring together the military resources of the kings of the entire world, for a rendezvous in the great plain of Esdraelon (16:16), scene of so many battles in ancient days.<sup>4</sup> There they now appear in Revelation 19 for the climactic judgment which will clear the way for the establishment of Christ's Kingdom on earth (19:17-21).

If the question be raised as to why this fateful gathering should take place in the land of Palestine, the obvious answer is that, according to the record of chapters 6-19, the only area of successful open resistance to the beast remaining on earth appears in the 144,000 protected by the divine seal (7:1-8); and these are *Israelites*. Furthermore, they are not only "on earth" (as Alford rightly notes),<sup>5</sup> but more specifically, in the vision they appear on "Mount Sion" (14:1), and therefore are in the historic land of Israel. Except for these,<sup>6</sup> all

4 On the "geographical" identification, see E. R. Craven in Lange's *Commentary, in loc.*

5 Henry Alford on Rev. 14:3, *The Greek New Testament*, 4th ed., 1871.

6 The reference to the 144,000 as "the first fruits unto God and to the Lamb" (14:4) cannot mean

other open opposition has been abolished by the beast. The two great witnesses have been killed (11:7). The apostate church has been utterly destroyed (17:16). What is left of the nation of Israel has been forced to take refuge in the wilderness (12:14). All others, whether Jew or Gentile, who rejected the mark of the beast have been martyred (13:15). Could anything be more reasonable, therefore, than to find the satanic dictator now, with his throne and kingdom shaking under the terrible judgment of the fifth vial (16:10), in this emergency turning his ominous attention toward that land and city where down through the times of divine revelation most of the troubles of Satan have been centered? Moreover, according to Old Testament prophecy, the hard core of resistance to the beast at the end will be Jewish, and centered in Jerusalem (cf. Zech. 12:1-9). And surely nothing could be more ironically appropriate than for God to permit the military assembly in Palestine in order that His final judgment might fall in the land<sup>7</sup> where a satanically inspired world once passed its judgment upon God's own Mediatorial King. Furthermore, there is divine propriety in the manner of judgment which will now put an end to Satan's long misrule upon earth. Whereas the previous judgments of Rev. 6-18 have been inflicted by our Lord from His place in heaven through *angelic* agency, the doom of the beast is reserved for the personal hand of the true King of kings. There will be no intermediate agent now, but He Himself will speak the word of execution (19:21).

Reading the record of Revelation 19:17-21, the question occurs as to how any rational earthly ruler could think to pit his strength against the King of kings. But this is only a piece of the greater mystery of the illimitable ambition of Satan himself, who from the beginning has not hesitated to match his strength and ingenuity against the omnipotence of Deity (Isa. 14:12-14). And the beast is *Satan's* king, energized and driven by him in his mad endeavors (Rev. 13:4). If we should need any closer evidence of the boundless ambition of even ordinary human beings, there is today an example before our eyes--in a government of men who in Russia have set out with the openly avowed policy of abolishing God from the universe. "If they do these things in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry?" (Luke 12:31). For sinful humanity, any large measure of success is always heady wine. And we should recall that the beast, at the apex of his power, will have accomplished in a brief space of time something unparalleled in human history: the building of a world empire above and beyond successful challenge by any human force on earth. "All the

---

the first in *time* of all the redeemed in world history, for this would displace the saints of the Old Testament. In the context of Revelation they are the "firstfruits" of the nation of Israel to be redeemed out of end-time judgments, to form the nucleus of the living nation on earth in the Millennial Kingdom. For they are divinely protected from physical harm and therefore do not die (7:3).

7 The objection that Palestine offers no area of sufficient size to permit the assembling of the military forces of the world, although still being repeated monotonously, has been rendered wholly meaningless by recent developments in military weapons. At this writing, we are being reliably informed that as few as fifty H-bombs, carried by as many planes and exploded at strategic places, could effectively destroy the national existence of the Soviet Union, or any other comparable power.

world wondered after the beast . . . saying, Who is like unto the beast? Who is able to make war with him?" (Rev. 13:3-4).

One remarkable feature of the final conflict is that the heavenly "armies" of our Lord bear no weapons and strike no blows. In all that vast assembly, only its regal Leader bears a sword. His vesture alone, not theirs, is stained with blood. Thus, we are told, the opposing armies "were slain by the sword of him that sat upon the horse, which sword proceeded out of his mouth" (Rev. 19:21). Now this would be utterly strange if the conflict were wholly a *spiritual* affair, such as that pictured in Ephesians 6:10-17. For in that case the saints would be obligated to put on the whole armor of God and fight against the "rulers of the darkness of this world." But the situation at the end is totally different: for this is a battle which, though basically between spiritual forces, nevertheless breaks out into the realm of "flesh and blood" so that even the fowls of heaven are filled with it (19:21). The cautious comment of Alford here is very much to the point: "All must not be thus spiritualized. For if so, what is this gathering? Why is His [Christ's] personal presence wanted for the victory?"<sup>8</sup>

The truth of the matter is that a *spiritual* cause may produce tangible effects which are physical in nature. The beast and his armies appear at the end-time in "flesh and blood," but our Lord will need no physical weapons to destroy them. He has only to speak the "Word" and they perish. Thus the hosts of Pharaoh perished in the Red Sea; and the 185,000 soldiers of Sennacherib perished outside the walls of Jerusalem. So also Ananias and Sapphira died in the Early Church. These are historical facts of divine revelation which cannot be gainsaid; and they wholly invalidate all interpretations which assume that spiritual forces must never produce any but spiritual effects. If it is argued that such a holocaust of physical destruction as that pictured in Revelation 19 is wholly out of character for "the meek and lowly Jesus," the answer is that this same Jesus is none other than the Incarnation of that God whose destroying hand was made bare again and again in Old Testament history.

### 3. *The Binding of Satan* (Rev. 20:1-3)

And he laid hold on the dragon. -- *Rev. 20:2*

Having cast the "beast" and the "false prophet" alive into the lake of fire and having destroyed their deluded followers, the time has come to deal with that great evil spirit who is ultimately responsible for the delusion of the nations. For this purpose, now, an angel comes down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit, and a great chain in his hand. Of his action we read that "he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years; and cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled; and after that he must be loosed a little season"

---

<sup>8</sup> Henry Alford, *ibid.*, *in loc.*

(20:1-3).

The language here is very specific: The object of the angel's action is the *dragon* of the Book of Revelation, the ancient *serpent* of Genesis, whose well-known names are the *Devil* and *Satan*. The angel lays "hold" on him, binds him, casts him into the abyss, shuts him up, seals the prison, and thus renders him powerless to deceive the nations for a period of a "thousand years." If this language does not mean that the immobilization of Satan is complete, so far as his deception of the nations (Grk. *ethnē*) is concerned, then there is no way to express the idea. And this binding of Satan, according to St. John's account, takes place at the coming of Christ in glory to establish His reign on earth for a thousand years. After making all legitimate allowance for possible figurative and symbolical terms, the central facts here are so clear that there should never have been any serious dispute about them. And this was the case during the first three hundred years of the Early Church. But since that time the passage (and the entire chapter) has been a battleground of theological conflict.

Of all the divine acts described in Revelation 20, none appears to be more reasonable than the binding and imprisonment of Satan. In the first place, if there is ever to be a Kingdom of God on earth, a reign characterized by the total absence of war and by rigid control of disease and death, it should be evident that in such a kingdom there can be no place left for the great deceiver of the nations, who is said to have not only the power of inflicting disease upon men (Job 2:7) but also the "power of death" itself (Heb. 2:14), to say nothing of his control over the demonic world (Matt. 12:22-26). To be sure, the vast powers of Satan have never been outside the permissive control of our sovereign God, but the continued exercise of such powers would be utterly incongruous within an established Kingdom of God on earth. This is suggested in the pattern of prayer where we are taught not only to pray, "Thy Kingdom come," but also "Deliver us from the evil one" (Matt. 6:10, 13, ASV). At the coming of our Lord these petitions will be answered, not only in part, but fully. In that wonderful day there will be no room left for the diabolical activities of "the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that *now* worketh in the children of disobedience" (Eph. 2:2, italics added). Satan shall be bound in such a way that he can deceive the nations "no more" till the thousand-year reign of Christ is done.

In the second place, such a binding of Satan for a thousand years will constitute a conclusive demonstration of man's personal responsibility for his own depravity. Although Satan has indeed been the originator of much of the evil of our fallen race, he cannot be charged with all of it. Yet the alibi of Eden--"The serpent beguiled me"--has never ceased to be the excuse offered by men for their sins. Our Lord struck at this alibi when, after enumerating a terrible catalogue of human iniquities, He declared that their source was "from within, out of the heart of men" (Mark 7:21-23). Yet men--even Christians--have been loathe to believe that this is altogether true. Through the ages of God's dealing with a fallen race, He has tested its members under many different conditions; and in every test, apart from the grace of God, man has always proven to be a

failure.<sup>9</sup> But *sinful* men have never been given an opportunity to "prove" what they will do in an environment from which the great deceiver of souls has been completely banished. The purpose here is not to acquaint *God* with something which He does not now know, but rather to prove to *men* themselves how desperately wicked they really are. The complete immobilization of Satan for a thousand years, therefore, will lay the basis for God's final argument against the popular doctrine of the inherent goodness of man when placed in the right kind of environment. It might be thought that all orthodox theologians would recognize the value of such a demonstration of the doctrine of total depravity, but such is not the case.

On the other hand, the binding of Satan will show under the rule of Christ the yet unrealized and vast possibilities of human life in physical existence on earth, even where sin still exists in a society composed of both regenerated and unregenerated men. For, great as the progress of the world has been in many ways, by all reasonable men it is generally agreed that things ought to be almost infinitely better than they are. What this binding of Satan by our Lord will mean to the world has been well stated by Fausset: "A mighty purification will be effected by Christ's coming. Though sin will not be abolished--for men will still be in the flesh (Isa. 65:20)--sin will no longer be a universal power, for the flesh is no longer seduced by Satan. He will not be, as now, 'the god and prince of the world'; nor will the world 'lie in the wicked one': the flesh will be evermore overcome. Christ will reign with His transfigured saints over men in the flesh (Auberlen). The nations in the millennium will be prepared for a higher state, as Adam in Paradise, supposing he had lived in an unfallen state."<sup>10</sup>

#### 4. *The Thrones of Judgment* (Rev. 20:4)

And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them. --  
*Rev. 20:4*

It is not without significance that after the binding of Satan the very first scene shown to John was a plurality of "thrones." And in harmony with the general usage of this term in Revelation, judicial action is associated with these thrones: "judgment" is given to those who sit thus enthroned. This is as it should be. For here manifestly we have the actual beginning of the thousand-year Kingdom; and the activities of such a reign must begin with *judicial* action. Since this Kingdom will begin on earth with the actual situation existing here as the coming of Christ finds it, there will be many crucial matters needing to be settled by such action without delay. Among these will be the determination of what nations and what persons will be permitted to enter that blessed age and enjoy its wonderful benefits; the adjudication of ancient wrongs; the solution of the immediate

---

<sup>9</sup> To ridicule the idea of God testing sinful men under different conditions, as some anti-dispensationalists are fond of doing, only shows that the objectors have not read their Bibles carefully (cf. Deut. 8:2, etc.).

<sup>10</sup> A. R. Fausset, *ibid.*, on Revelation 20:3.

problems of a complex society; and the assignment of responsibilities within the divine government as it will exist among men. Even today, in spite of our limited knowledge, intelligent men can put their fingers upon a thousand things in government that should be changed. But at present, getting things changed is either almost infinitesimally slow or is accomplished by revolution which may leave the situation worse than it was before.

A question now arises: Who are the persons seated on the thrones seen by John? The passage does not *name* them. They cannot be angels, for judicial action is no part of their proper activity. Nor can these enthroned judges be the martyrs mentioned in the next clause of verse 4, as Beza and others have thought. Lange is right in saying that "The context also is against it. First, John saw the thrones and those who seated themselves upon them; and *then* the beheaded ones who revived and reigned with Christ";<sup>11</sup> but he overlooks the most important clue pointing to their true identification. This is a question which is best settled within the context of the Book of Revelation itself. The only persons who appear on thrones elsewhere in the book are the twenty-four elders of 4:4 and 11:16. And since the judges of chapter 20:4 are brought before us *unnamed*, as if readers were expected to know who they are, exegetical logic and good sense point back to the same persons. These were associated with the pre-Kingdom judgments of chapters 6-19 poured out from *heaven*; and what could be more reasonable than to find the same group associated with the judgments with which the Kingdom now begins on *earth*? As already indicated in the foregoing argument, these elders represent the Church of the present age, the Body and Bride of Christ. Only to this group of the saved is reserved the exalted assignment of judicial responsibilities in the Kingdom of our Lord. They are to act, under Him, as associate justices in the affairs of the Kingdom.

The *nature* of this judicial activity needs to be considered more precisely. Certainly, it cannot be the kind of judging which would weigh the secret thoughts and motives of men, and decide their eternal destinies. Only God can render such judgment, and the Father has committed all this to the Son (John 5:22). There are some things which Deity cannot share with finite beings, no matter how good and perfect they may be. The judgment assigned in Revelation 20:4, therefore, must be of the same nature as that promised in Luke 22:29-30 and I Corinthians 6:2; and these promises in their context must be limited to such matters as are appropriate to the abilities of the saints, then made perfect in goodness and wisdom; but who, we must never forget, still remain finite beings. What God can and may do in the perfecting of His Church, we must admit, passes beyond present human imagination (I Cor. 2:9); but we shall never become gods. There is a judging activity, however, of which men are capable even today, though very imperfectly. This consists in the investigation of facts, the interpretation of existing law, its application to specific cases, and the rendering of verdicts. Since throughout the Millennial Kingdom human life will continue with the possibilities of sin and error, though greatly restrained and controlled, it should be obvious that there will be need for such judicial activity then as well as now. But the immeasurable

---

<sup>11</sup> See Lange, *in loc.*

superiority of this millennial judging will be the absence of that prejudice and fallibility so characteristic of present human courts, even at their best. For, in that glad day, there will be no weariness, no disease, no weakening of the faculties of the mind by reason of age, and no sinful inclinations to cloud the pure judgments which will be issued by the perfected members of the Church. And each of the judges, we must not forget, will then be fully possessed and indwelt without hindrance by the Holy Spirit of God, who is "the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord" (Isa. 11:2). Then at last justice will "roll down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream" upon a world where too often at present judgment has been turned into "wormwood."

#### 5. *The Resurrection of Martyred Saints* (Rev. 20:4,5, ASV)

And I saw the souls of them that had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus, and for the word of God, and such as worshipped not the beast, neither his image, and received not the mark upon their forehead and upon their hand; and they lived, and reigned with Christ a thousand years. The rest of the dead lived not until the thousand years should be finished. This is the first resurrection. -- Rev. 20:4-5, ASV

a. The term "souls" (*psuchai*) here seems clearly to mean souls that had been *disembodied physically*. And thus it was understood by the Early Church Fathers generally. In fact, it is in the highest degree improbable that any other view would ever have been proposed except for the rise of philosophic antagonism toward a premillennial resurrection of saints. Since that time a vast amount of ingenuity has been expended in trying to spiritualize everything possible in the context.<sup>12</sup> In support of the idea of *disembodied* "souls," the following facts should be noted:

First, the writer of Revelation is very precise in his language, distinguishing carefully between the *persons* who had suffered decapitation and their "souls" which survived the terrible ordeal. John does not say that he saw "souls" that had been beheaded, but that he saw the souls of "*them*" that had been thus executed. There is no confusion here whatever, except in the minds of interpreters who for various reasons hesitate to accept the record at its normal value.

Second, while it is true that the Greek *psuchē* may sometimes be rendered in the sense of physical "life" (cf. Acts 20:10), even in the majority of such cases the idea of "soul" as a metaphysical entity cannot be excluded. For in the Bible it is the presence of this

---

<sup>12</sup> As an example, the reader is referred to a recent book under the title of *Revelation Twenty* by J. Marcellus Kik (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Pub. Co., 1955). He attempts to show that *psuchē* in the New Testament generally means "life"; then translates the term in Rev. 20:4 by the noun "lives"; and finally paraphrases it as "victorious lives," thus substituting a *moral* meaning for the original metaphysical idea. By this devious process, the *psuchē* of Rev. 20:4 becomes *a way of living!*

metaphysical entity that maintains man's physical life: "the body without the spirit is dead" (Jas. 2:26).<sup>13</sup> When Paul reassuringly said concerning the young man who fell out of the window, "His life [*psuchē*] is in him" (Acts 20:10), the passage could just as properly have been translated, "His soul is in him." Furthermore, the Bible more than once uses the term *psuchē* to distinguish sharply between physical and metaphysical existence. "Fear not them which kill the body, and are not able to kill the soul (*psuchē*)," Jesus warned, "but rather fear him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matt. 10:28).

Third, in the context of the Apocalypse, this vision of "souls" in 20:4 should recall to our minds at once the similar vision under the fifth seal (6:9-11) where we find the *first* of the honored company of martyrs during the sore afflictions of chapters 6-19. Then follows the vision of 7:9-17 which reveals how *vast* the number will be--"a great multitude." And the vision of 20:4 presents the *completed* company at the end of the beast's reign. The language of St. John is exactly the same at the beginning as at the end: In each place he tells us that he "saw" the "souls" of people who had been killed (6:8; 20:4).

Fourth, to argue that the soul, as an immaterial element of man's person, is wholly intangible is to yield overmuch to philosophic notions. In the Word of God, the soul is very real; certainly not altogether outside the realm of possible tangibility. Our Lord taught this clearly in His remarkable story of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31). The language of this passage is strikingly similar to that in Rev. 6:9-11, where the *souls* in heaven are not only seen by St. John but themselves see, hear, speak, are at rest, and are concerned with what is happening on earth. Furthermore, these souls are comforted with the divine assurance that justice in their cases will be done, but they must wait until the full number of the martyrs out of "the great tribulation" is complete. Such language cannot be materialized into mere physical blood crying out from the ground (as Hengstenberg) or dissolved into "victorious lives" (as Kik). For if the souls of the rich man and Lazarus were literal, there is no sound reason for doubting the reality of the martyred souls seen in Revelation 6:9-11; and if these are real, so also are the souls in Revelation 20:4.

Fifth, there is a definite sequence indicated by John's use of the verbs "saw" and "beheaded." He did not see the souls as they were being killed; but saw them (aorist tense) after they had been beheaded (perfect tense); suggesting that the intermediate state into which the souls had been introduced by the act of beheading still existed when John saw them.

b. Concerning these disembodied souls, John says that "*they lived and reigned*" with Christ! Here instead of following the clear thought connection of the context, the opposers of a premillennial resurrection of saints have expended much labor and ingenuity in efforts to show that the verb rendered "lived" does not refer to a resurrection of the body, but rather to the giving of *spiritual* life. According to their argument, the souls here are *regenerated*

---

13 The problem of Dichotomy versus Trichotomy does not impair the argument.

instead of resurrected. Against this view the following facts are presented:

First, although the verb *zaō* is used of both physical and spiritual life, the context of Revelation 20:4 is decisive in favor of the former. That the beheading in the passage is literal and physical not many have had the hardihood to deny, though they cannot agree among themselves as to just where and when it takes place. Upon this one admission of literality their entire case goes to pieces. For, if the people involved were beheaded *physically*, and then lived again, common sense would suggest that they received back the same category of life that had been lost.

Second, to argue that the life here is the kind of life received by the sinner in regeneration, is to introduce theological confusion into the passage. For the people who "lived" are the same people who had earlier lost their lives "for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God" (vs. 4). Thus we would reach the absurdity of having souls being regenerated *after*<sup>14</sup> they had been beheaded for their faithfulness to Christ! If the verb "lived" in Revelation 20:4 means that these souls were made alive *spiritually*, then it follows that they must have been *dead* spiritually until that time. But how could unregenerated people have been faithful in their witness to Jesus, as the passage declares that they were?

#### 6. *The First Resurrection* (Rev. 20:5).

In 20:5 the writer of Revelation specifically identifies the kind of life referred to by the words "they lived" in verse 4. "This," he says, "is the first resurrection." Such a clear definition should be enough to settle the question. But again there has been prodigious labor expended in attempts to show that the term "resurrection" (*anastasis*) here refers to regeneration. Against these attempts the following may be said:

a. In spite of all that has been written on the point, no one has ever produced a single indisputable instance in the New Testament where the Greek *anastasis* is ever applied to man's soul, or an instance where the new birth is ever called a "resurrection." This would be strange if the terms were ever regarded as interchangeable. The very etymology of the Greek term suggests the idea of the standing up again of a body which has been laid down in the grave. Such an idea would be wholly incongruous when applied to the soul or spirit.

b. Those who try to change the "first resurrection" of Rev. 20:5 into spiritual regeneration generally use the great passage of John 5:24-25 as a point of departure. This deserves some attention. The first resurrection, it is alleged, is found in verse 25: "The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live." Now this is admittedly a clear reference to spiritual regeneration; but it is to be noted that our Lord is careful *not* to call it a "resurrection." Not only so, but He moves

---

<sup>14</sup> Mr. Kik argues rather curiously that, because of the frequent use of the *aorist* verb forms in 20:4, therefore the actions in that verse must take place at the *same* time. But he strangely makes no mention of the *perfect* tense verb for "beheaded" (*Revelation Twenty*, p. 52).

from the subject of spiritual life in verses 24-25 to the specific subject of physical life in verses 28-29, and only the latter is called "resurrection" (*anastasis*). Moreover, only those who are the recipients of resurrection are said to "come forth" from "*the graves*," as we might naturally expect.

Still further, in John 5:25-28 our Lord lays an exegetical foundation for the two resurrections of Revelation 20, by affirming that the saved will come forth unto "the resurrection of life" and the unsaved to "the resurrection of judgment" (John 5:29, ASV). And the order is correct: first, the saved; then, the unsaved. Finally, Christ distinguishes in *time* definitely between His work of regeneration and His work of resurrection. As to the time of the former work he says, "The hour is coming, and now is" (vs. 25). But of the work of resurrection he says only, "The hour is coming" (vs. 28), a clear reference to an eschatological "hour." Thus the work of regeneration proceeds during the present hour--"now," and also during an "hour" which is "*coming*"; i.e., the eschatological hour. But the work of resurrection is reserved wholly for the eschatological hour. It should be obvious that since the present "hour" of regeneration has already lasted 1900 years, there is no reason why the future hour may not last for a "thousand years," beginning with the resurrection of the saved and ending with the resurrection of the unsaved, as Revelation 20 states the order. Thus our Lord outlined the framework of a future age characterized by two divine works: first, the work of *spiritual* regeneration; and second, the work of *bodily* resurrection. The details are filled in by the Old Testament prophets and the Book of Revelation. The age will begin with the resurrection of the saints of past ages, and it will end with the resurrection of the unsaved. During the same age multitudes will be saved by the work of *regeneration*, and for these, apparently, there will be no physical death.

c. Returning now to the record in Revelation 20, we should observe the precise language with which the two resurrections are described. Certain people who had been *beheaded* are said to "*live*," and this is defined as "the first resurrection." As for the rest of the dead, John says, they "*lived not again until the thousand years were finished*" (vs. 4-5). At the end of the thousand years, in the divine record, the resurrection of these "dead" is described in detail. If these two resurrections are not of the same *bodily* character, then language is of no value in conveying ideas, and we might well join in the dictum of Dean Alford as expressed on the point at issue: "If, in a passage where *two resurrections* are mentioned, where certain *souls lived* at the first, and the rest of the *dead lived* only at the end of a specified period after that first,--if in such a passage the first resurrection may be understood to mean *spiritual* rising with Christ, while the second means *literal* rising from the grave;--then there is an end to all significance in language, and Scripture is wiped out as a definite testimony to anything."<sup>15</sup>

d. The words, "This is the first resurrection," do not mean that this resurrection is confined to the "beheaded" martyrs of verse 4. For, in the Biblical record, the Church of

---

15 For the full quotation see pp. 475-476 [pg. 1 of this section].

the present age, the bride of Christ, has already appeared in her glorified state in heaven (19:19). And the two witnesses of chapter 11 were resurrected almost immediately following their death (11:11-12). As a matter of fact, there are various classes of saved people who will have a part in this "first resurrection." But the martyrs of the judgment period of chapters 6-19 constitute the last of these classes. When these martyrs "live" again, the Holy Spirit writes *finis* to this blessed resurrection with the pronouncement--"This is the first resurrection" (20:5). In the excellent comment of Lange: "With these words the Seer constitutes that entire resurrection-process which begins with the Parousia of Christ, a distinct dogmatical conception."<sup>16</sup>

It is significant that when the record moves from the resurrection of the martyred saints of verses 4-5 to the material in verse 6, the writer seems to broaden the scope of the first resurrection. It is no longer a specific class under consideration (the "beheaded ones"), but the statement becomes very general: "Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power" (vs. 6). There is room left here for all the various groups of the saved, from the "church of the firstborn" (Heb. 12:23) down to the last martyr of the end-time.

e. The doctrine of a special resurrection for the redeemed, as taught in Revelation 20, is not something new, but is in harmony with the general tenor of all previous divine revelation regarding the Mediatorial Kingdom. In the Old Testament, while the resurrection of the unrighteous is taught by implication, it is the resurrection of the righteous which is emphasized in such passages as Isaiah 25:8, 26:19, Ezekiel 37:1-14, Daniel 12:2, and Hosea 13:14. There was a sound reason for this. The Mediatorial Kingdom of history was on earth, not a kingdom in some far-off heaven. When this Kingdom came to an end, the prophets spoke of its future restoration in splendor and glory; and again it was to be on earth, with its center at Jerusalem in the land of Palestine. To have a part in that coming Kingdom was the deepest longing of every devout Israelite, to whom, therefore, physical death was a very terrible thing, for it seemed to interpose a formidable barrier to his participation in the coming Kingdom. The inspired answer to this distressing problem, in the prophets, was the doctrine of a resurrection for the righteous: "Thy dead men shall live," Isaiah writes, "Awake and sing, ye that dwell in dust" (26:19). And Ezekiel, writing in the midst of the captives who said, "Our hope is lost; we are clean cut off," speaks thus for Jehovah, "Ye shall know that I am Jehovah, when I have opened your graves, . . . O my people. And I will put my Spirit in you, and ye shall live, and I will place you in your own land" (37:11, 13-14, ASV).

In the New Testament it was this of which the Apostle Paul spoke to his people as "the hope and resurrection of the dead" (Acts 23:6; cf. 24:21, 26:6-8). Our Lord referred to the same event as a special resurrection in which only those would participate who are "sons of God, being sons of the resurrection" (Luke 20:35-36, ASV); and in another place He

---

16 J. P. Lange, *Revelation of St. John, in loc.*

speaks of it as "the resurrection of the just" (Luke 14:14). To have a part in this resurrection was so great a prize, according to the Apostle Paul, that he could afford to lose everything in its attainment; and actually count the loss as nothing (Phil. 3:8-11). In the light of this well-attested Biblical doctrine, it would be passing strange if nothing were said about it in the Apocalypse which is pre-eminently the New Testament book of the coming Kingdom.