

# *The Approaching Advent of Christ*

by  
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## CHAPTER III

### THE RESURRECTION OF THE SAINTS IN THE GOSPELS

In our examination of the O.T., we found four passages in the prophecies of Isaiah and Daniel that taught clearly the resurrection of Israel's righteous dead. Alternative theories were examined but had to be rejected as straining the natural sense of the texts. In addition to this, we were able to locate with relative exactness the time of that resurrection. It is to take place at the Day of our Lord, when Antichrist is destroyed, Israel converted, and the Messianic Age introduced by the Coming of the Lord. This conclusion was reached not by forcing the language of the texts, but by carefully noting the context and adopting the plain, literal sense of the language; for, as the old divines used to say, "if the literal sense make good sense, seek no other sense."<sup>1</sup>

Now the conclusion we have reached concerning the resurrection of Israel's holy dead has been seen to be subversive of the new theories of the Advent. This being so, we should be warranted in claiming a verdict on the main issue; for if, as Kelly observed in his controversy with the postmillennialists, "one text is enough to hang heaven and earth upon," then four unambiguous texts are sufficient to sustain the doctrine of the End that the new system was intended to supplant.

Nevertheless, it is desirable to examine the teaching of the N.T. as well. And as the present work is intended for those who believe in a real inspiration of the Bible and the harmony of the word of prophecy, it is unnecessary to postulate an agreement between the Last Things of the Old and New Testaments. It is a reasonable presupposition that, given a clear revelation in the O.T. of the resurrection of Israel's dead, nothing in the New will contradict it. We may expect to find a further unfolding of the earlier revelation, but nothing less than plain teaching to the contrary will avail to make us abandon the conclusions already reached from the O.T. Does the N.T. contain any such teaching? In other words, does it indicate that the resurrection of the saints is to occur several years or decades before the Day of the Lord, as Darbyists insist? To this inquiry we now proceed.

(1) John 6:39-54; 11:24.

The first passage, or rather expression, to be considered is the saying of our Lord, "I will raise him up at the last day." It occurs in connection with the resurrection in five places of John's Gospel: 6:39, 40, 44, 54; 11:24.<sup>2</sup>

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1 Simcox (*CGT on Revelation*) cites a similar saying: "where the literal sense will stand, that furthest from the letter is the worst."

2 The expression "last day" occurs again in John 12:48, but it is of significance that nothing is said of resurrection. It refers to the generation of unbelievers who survive to the advent, which is viewed as near.

It is worthy of note that in every case in the above texts the resurrection referred to is clearly that of the faithful dead. It is the resurrection of "life" (John 5:29), inasmuch as Christ promises it to those who believe and feed on Him. With Martha, the resurrection of her brother is a matter of *hope*, for he had waited for the consolation of Israel. In other words, these texts all speak of the "resurrection of the just" (Luke 14:14). And we are told in every case that it takes place "at the last day." Here is a very definite point of time. Does it differ from that marked for the resurrection by Isaiah 26:19 [and] 25:8, Daniel 12:1-3 and 12:13? It does not. There is complete agreement between the prophecies of Isaiah and Daniel and the words of the Lord Jesus. Our Lord, however, is more specific. Isaiah had associated the resurrection with the conversion of Israel, the Coming of Jehovah, and the inauguration of the Messianic Age of blessedness for all peoples. Daniel linked it with the overthrow of Antichrist, the close of the Great Tribulation, and the deliverance of living Israel from the last great struggle. Our Lord associates it with the Last Day of the pre-Messianic Age, which is the same thing. Well does Meyer say: "It is the first resurrection that is meant (see on Luke 14:14, 20:34; Phil. 3:11; 1 Cor. 15:23), that to the *everlasting life of the Messianic Kingdom.*" (On John 6:39; italic his.)

The true sense of the phrase "the last day" is also given by Bullinger in his *Apocalypse*: "Martha expressed her belief in the resurrection 'at the last day' (John 11:24); i.e., the last day, at the end of the present age, and immediately before the introduction of the new age of the thousand years" (p. 621).

It is important to bear in mind, as Plummer in his *Matthew* has said, that "the Jews divided time into two ages, the Messianic Age, and that which preceded it" (p. 180). This was a fundamental idea of Hebrew eschatology; and it was adopted by our Lord and His Apostles.<sup>3</sup> Our Lord, for example, in speaking of those who have left home and relatives and possessions for the sake of the Kingdom, observes that even "in this present time" they receive much more than they lose, while "in the world (age) to come" they shall receive life everlasting (Mark 10:30). Here, as frequently in the Gospels and Epistles, the pre-Messianic Age is contrasted with the Age of the Kingdom.

Now our Lord teaches us in His discourse on the Bread of Life that the resurrection of His people (not merely of the faithful in Israel but of all who believe in His Name and feed upon Him by faith) will take place "at the last day." And having regard to His fundamental ideas on Eschatology, there can be no doubt that "the last day" is the closing day of the Age that precedes the Messianic Kingdom of glory. This is the conception of the Prophets: Jehovah comes, Antichrist is slain, Israel repents, the sleeping saints rise, the Kingdom comes in power. It is the last day of this present evil Age, the first of the Age to come. This is also the doctrine of Christ, except that the resurrection now embraces those that the Father has given to Him, and have life through His name.

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3 In reference to the pre-Messianic period, the following terms are used: (a) **The age:** Matt. 13:22,39,40,49; 24:3; 28:20; Mark 4:19. (b) **This age:** Matt. 12:32; Luke 16:8; 20:34; Rom. 12:2; 1 Cor. 1:20; 2:6-8; 3:18; 2 Cor. 4:4; Eph. 1:21. (c) **This time:** Mark 10:30; Luke 18:30. (d) **The time that now is:** Rom. 8:18; 11:5. (e) **The age that now is:** 1 Tim. 6:17; 2 Tim. 4:10; Tit. 2:12. (f) **This present age:** Gal. 1:4. In reference to the future Messianic Age the following are used: (a) **That age:** Luke 20:35. (b) **The coming age:** Mark 10:30; Luke 18:30. (c) **The future age:** Matt. 12:32; Heb. 6:5; Eph. 1:22; Cf. Heb. 2:5, "the habitable-world which is to come." See Dalman, *Words of Jesus*, p. 147 ff.; Saphir, *Hebrews*, i., Lecture 5. In the former work a great Talmudic scholar informs us; in the second a great Hebrew Christian.

It may be contended that the Lord was referring to the last day of the Dispensation or age of the Church, which, *ex hypothesi*, ends some years before the end of "this present age." But this suggestion will not bear examination. First, when the Lord delivered the discourse on the Bread of Life, not a word had been spoken by Him about the "Church." Indeed, it is pre-tribs who tell us that the revelation concerning the "Dispensation of the Church" was held back for Paul to disclose. How, therefore, can Christ's words about "the last day" be applied to a dispensation that, as the theory itself presupposes, was only revealed later? Secondly, the term "dispensation of the Church" is not a Scriptural expression, and, as used by the objector, assumes the very thing to be proved; namely, that "the last day" of the Church's existence upon earth does not coincide with "the last day" of the pre-Messianic Age; whereas it is to be noted that even after revealing in his Epistles the calling of the Church, the Apostle Paul, like Christ, continues to employ the usual expressions of Hebrew eschatology--"this age" and "the age to come."<sup>4</sup> In Ephesians 1:21,<sup>5</sup> when dwelling on the exaltation of the Head of the Church, he says that the Name of Christ has been exalted above every name that is named, "not only in this age, but also in that which is to come"; that is, as Meyer says, above every name "named in the present world-period, before the Parousia, and in the future one, after the Parousia. Paul, no less than our Lord, knows nothing of an intermediate period intervening between the resurrection of the saints and the Messianic Age.

In view, therefore, of the fact that our Lord speaks of only two dispensations in time, "this present age" and "the age to come," we are bound to conclude that "the last day" in His thought was the closing day of this present evil Age, when Israel shall be saved and the righteous dead raised, as the Prophets Daniel and Isaiah had already taught.

Some may object that the expression "last day" refers not to a literal day but to the last period of God's dealings with men in time; that is, to the age of the kingdom which follows this present age and will extend to the Last Judgment, when the rest of the dead are raised. Something might be said in favor of this, for Peter has a saying that one day with the Lord is as a thousand years; and the Day of the Lord in the Old and New Testaments sometimes refers not only to the day when Messiah comes in glory but also to the period of His Reign.<sup>6</sup> But even this admission does not help the objector, for on his theory the resurrection belongs in time to "this present age," a decade or a generation *before* the Day of the Lord begins.

The authors of a recent work<sup>7</sup> assert that "the last day" is a prolonged period "covering more than a thousand years," which

opens with the resurrection and rapture of believers, and closes with the resurrection and judgment of those who have not accepted Christ, and includes the Millennium which intervenes. It is not "the end of the world," vulgarly so called, but the last day, or period, of man's accountability to God in his condition as a fallen being.

What proof is offered of these astonishing assertions? None except the requirements of their program of the End. Their scheme requires it; therefore it is so. But two considerations will show how flimsy it

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4 See references above.

5 R.V. mg., Moffatt, Weymouth.

6 See chapter 12, where the view of A. B. Davidson and others is quoted.

7 *Touching the Coming*, by Hogg and Vine (p. 159).

is. First, even on Darbyist presuppositions the interval from the Rapture to the Last Judgment is not one period but most certainly two: the first, from the Rapture to the Day of the Lord, is of unknown length (some think that it will be a trifling epoch of three and a half years, others seven, still others seventy, while Anderson asserts that the Scriptures will still harmonize if the period should last for a thousand years); the second, the kingly rule of Messiah, which lasts for a millennium. And these two periods are also two distinct *Dispensations*: the one, when the Holy Spirit is retired to heaven at the Rapture,<sup>8</sup> to let in a flood of lawlessness issuing in the triumph of evil; the other, that of God's sovereignty, when His will shall be done on earth as it is done in heaven, the glorious Parousia of the Son of Man forming the nexus of the two Dispensations. More astonishing still than this jumble is the attempt to fasten on our Lord the belief that "the last day" comes, and with it the *rise* and triumph of Antichrist, terrible persecution for His saints, and deeper distress than Israel has ever known. We may be sure that Our Lord never believed *that*. Everywhere in His thought this evil Age gives place to His Reign.

If we adhere to the simple terminology of our Lord and Paul about "the last day," "the present Age," and "the coming Age," all will be plain; and we shall be saved at the very outset from the danger of getting lost in a labyrinth of dispensational traditions, which lose nothing by comparison with the refinements of the Rabbis.

(2) Luke 20:34-36.

Jesus said unto them, "The sons of this age marry, and are given in marriage: but they that are accounted worthy to attain to that age, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry nor are given in marriage; for neither can they die any more: for they are equal unto the angels: and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection" (R. V. mg.).

Here again in the clearest manner "that age"--the Age to come--is contrasted with "this age"--the Age that now is. Here are the two great divisions of Hebrew eschatology: the *present* Age of Gentile dominion, Jewish subjection, and civilization without God; and *that* Age, when the dead shall be raised and the Kingdom introduced by the Messiah. It is these two ages that our Lord has in mind. In this present Age mortal men marry and give in marriage. But they who are counted worthy of the future Age marry not, for they become sexless as the angels, being sons of God and sons of the resurrection. It is important to note the order of the words: "they that are accounted worthy to attain to that age, and the resurrection from the dead"--*not* "the resurrection from the dead, and that age"; but first, the Messianic Age, then the resurrection. The resurrection of the just is the first result of the Messianic reign.

This passage is in exact accordance with the one last considered: "I will raise him up at the last day." For, just as the last note of one octave is the first note of the next, so the last day of this present Age is the first of the Messianic Age to follow.

Some theorists have sought to escape from this difficulty by assuming that the Lord was here speaking of "a resurrection-age." If they mean by this that the future Age of the Kingdom will be introduced by the resurrection of the righteous dead, they are enunciating a scriptural truth--a truth, moreover, that

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<sup>8</sup> These writers [Hogg and Vine], it is fair to say, disbelieve in the removal of the Holy Spirit at the Rapture (*Thessalonians*, pp. 258-9), but their position is a novelty in the school.

subverts the new system in that it links the resurrection of the saints with the Messianic Age,<sup>9</sup> whereas the system separates them by several years, and interposes the frightful triumph of lawlessness and Antichrist through the removal, *ex hypothesi*, of the Holy Spirit to heaven. But what they mean us to understand is that "the resurrection-age," as they conceive of it, will begin with the resurrection of the sleeping saints of Israel and the Church *before* the Seventieth Week, and include the later resurrection of the saints martyred in the tribulation subsequent to that prior resurrection. But this is fallacious. First, it sets Christ in opposition to Isaiah and Daniel, who locate the resurrection of Israel's faithful dead at the Day of the Lord. Secondly, the suggestion proceeds upon a complete blunder regarding the meaning of the expression "that age." As we have seen, it refers to the future Messianic Age, or, as we should say, to the millennium. Our Lord speaks of those who are counted worthy to attain to, or have part in, the Messianic Age *and* the resurrection from the dead. The "age" is not a period covering a supposed series of resurrections, the first of which occurs within this present evil age, but the well-known Age of the Kingdom which follows the Great Tribulation. And the addition of the words "*and* the resurrection from the dead" makes this doubly sure by indicating that the resurrection is a result of the coming of the Kingdom. When our Lord comes, then the Kingdom and the resurrection come too.

Plummer in *ICC* on Luke remarks that our Lord used the expression, "those accounted worthy to attain to that age and the resurrection," with a view to correcting "the assumption that all the sons of this world will enter the Kingdom, which begins with the resurrection"; and he then adds: "The expression 'that age' in itself implies resurrection; but, inasmuch as this is the doctrine in dispute, the resurrection is specially mentioned" (p. 469).

(3) Matthew 13:43.

Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father.

These words are the conclusion to our Lord's interpretation of the Parable of the Tares, which we shall examine in all its bearings in a later chapter. It will suffice for the present to indicate its harmony with the prophecies of Isaiah, Daniel, and the Lord Jesus on the time of the resurrection.

It was a saying of one of the most devout of Darbyist teachers that when he found a text of the O.T. cited or referred to in the N.T., he felt as if the Holy Spirit had put a lamp into his hand wherewith to explore afresh the earlier revelation; "and having learned all he could by that light, he often traveled back with his lamp in his hand to the N.T. again, and reread that which was written there, by the light he had gathered from the Old."<sup>10</sup> Now if we follow this excellent example in the case of Matthew 13:43 and Daniel 12:3, we shall have no doubt that the Lord is expounding Daniel and setting forth the transfiguration of the risen saints at the resurrection; that He is "conveying the idea of a sublime display of majestic splendor, of the glory of the righteous in the future Kingdom of the Messiah. Comp. Dan. 12:3" (Meyer).

The passage contains another statement of the *time* of the resurrection. It is to take place *at that time*, that is, at the time when notorious sinners and stumbling-blocks are rooted out of the Kingdom (vv. 41-

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9 This is Trotter's view: pp. 447-8, "Were this (Luke 20:34-6) the only passage on the subject, it seems to us decisive . . . as to its being at the commencement of an age or era on which the character of resurrection is stamped: as our Lord says, 'that age'." Admirable!

10 J. G. Bellett, cited by Bland, p. 138.

42); the transfiguration of the risen saints takes place simultaneously with the destruction of the ungodly at the Advent.

We are not to suppose that the saints had been transfigured a generation before and concealed in heaven, but, as Alexander McLaren beautifully says:

Freed from association with evil, they are touched with a new splendor, caught from Him, and blaze out like the sun; for so close is their association, that their myriad glories melt as into a single great light. Now, amid gloom and cloud, they gleam like tiny tapers far apart; then, gathered into one, they flame in the forehead of the morning sky, "a glorious church, not having spot, nor wrinkle, nor any such thing."<sup>11</sup>

(4) Luke 14:14-15.

A fourth--indeed the classic--passage on the resurrection of the just occurs in Luke 14:14, where the Lord, just before relating the Parable of the Great Supper, remarks: "and thou shalt be blessed; for they cannot recompense thee: for thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just."

This passage in itself furnishes no information concerning the relative time of the resurrection; but, taken in connection with what follows, it supplies a decisive consideration; for when Christ spoke of the first resurrection, one of His hearers exclaimed, "Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God" (v. 15). This shows how unmistakably the resurrection of the holy dead in Israel was linked with the coming of the Messianic Kingdom. As Meyer has it:

To the idea of the resurrection of the righteous is very naturally linked, in the case of this fellow-guest, the thought of the future eating with the patriarchs of the nation (Matt. 13:11; Luke 13:28 ff.) in the (millennial) Messianic Kingdom to be set up. This transporting prospect, in which his mistaken security is manifested, compels his exclamation.<sup>12</sup>

Bullinger, in his *Ten Sermons*, says: "This man evidently connected the 'resurrection of the just' with the entering into and the establishment of the Kingdom" (p. 153).

Anyone who has thought independently on this subject and filled his mind with the conceptions of the Prophets and our Lord on the Last Things, must be forced to the conclusion that there is something fundamentally wrong with a program of the resurrection that, far from introducing the age of peace, renewal, and righteousness for living Israel, will rather presage her entrance upon the times of Antichrist. No Hebrew would sponsor such a view. The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews settled this matter once for all when he penned the words: "And when He again bringeth in the firstborn into the world, He saith, And let all the angels of God worship Him."<sup>13</sup> Westcott's commentary on Hebrews

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11 Matt. 2, p. 243. Cf. Bengel: "They shall not burn as the ungodly, but they shine forth singly, and much more, collectively. What can be sweeter, even to think of, than this?" (E.T.)

12 So Edersheim, ii., p. 249; Godet, *Luke*, ii., 135, and others.

13 Darby, the author of a new program of the End--a secret, pre-tribulation Parousia, followed by the rise of Antichrist, was bound to resist the reference to the approaching advent. See his notes to the *New Translation*. But, grammar apart, the reference to Psalm 97, a Kingdom Psalm, is decisive for students of prophecy, that the Day of The Lord is in view in Heb. 1:6. Saphir says the Psalm has

gives the background and the true meaning:

One main object of the Epistle is to meet a feeling of present disappointment. The first introduction of the Son into the world, described in v. 2, had not issued in an open triumph and satisfied men's desires, so that there was good reason why the writer should point forward specially to the Return in which Messiah's work was to be consummated. . . . For the present He has been withdrawn from the "inhabited earth," the limited scene of man's present labors; but at the Return He will enter it once more with sovereign triumph; Acts 1:11.

And if we may say that the new program of the End is repugnant to Hebrew tradition and ideals, it is noteworthy that though the last hundred years have produced many eminent Hebrew Christians, not one of them has embraced the scheme under examination. The works of Adolph Saphir are deservedly held in high esteem by all well-read Darbyists; yet, though those writings reveal that Saphir was a close student of Darby and was open to his better influence, he rejected his view of the End. Here are two relevant passages, which we cannot refrain from quoting:<sup>14</sup>

At the coming of the Lord *to establish His Kingdom*, the dead who are asleep in Jesus, as well as the saints who are then living, will be gathered to receive from their Lord the recompense of the reward.

Again:

Assurance, or fullness of hope (cf. Col. 2:2; 1 Thess. 1:5; Heb. 10:22), means a living, constant and firm expectation of the coming of our Lord Jesus, who will give rest and glory unto all who wait for Him. We rejoice in hope of the glory of God. By hope we anticipate the future blessedness, and thus live in the power of heavenly realities, influenced by the promised reward. Thus the apostle, who so clearly teaches us that we have been saved by grace through faith, also teaches that we are saved by hope; we wait for the adoption, that is the redemption of the body. In this patient waiting we are the followers of the O.T. saints. They also, from Abraham, to whom God confirmed the promise by oath, *looked unto the same advent of Messiah which we are awaiting*. The fathers, who pertained specially to the Hebrews (Rom. 9), *cherished the same hope*, which was more fully revealed by the gospel, and which, therefore, we should hold fast with greater steadfastness and joy.

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no reference to the first Advent but to Jehovah's coming to subdue His enemies and be the rejoicing of His people (i., p. 90). Nairne (*Cam.Bible*) says the usage of this Epistle favors "Whenever he brings again." The idiomatic translations of Conybeare and Howson, Isaacs (1933), Way (1926), Wade (1934) agree with Goodspeed and the American and English revisers.

14 The first quotation is from *The Lord's Prayer* (pp. 187-8), the second from *Hebrews* i., p. 330; two golden works.