

The Approaching Advent of Christ

by
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CHAPTER IV

THE RESURRECTION OF THE SAINTS IN ST. PAUL'S EPISTLES

We now come to consider the testimony of Paul's Epistles on the epoch of the resurrection of the saints. So far we have found that the Prophets and the Lord Jesus Christ locate the resurrection at the inauguration of the Messianic Kingdom, whereas pre-tribs bring it forward by a considerable period of time. Are the Epistles in harmony with the earlier revelations? Let us see.

(1) Romans 11:15.

For if the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be, but life from the dead?

In this chapter the Apostle demonstrates that the apostasy of Israel is neither total nor final. Many believe in Jesus as Messiah; and Israel as a nation shall be finally saved. Here, in verse 15, Paul links the conversion of Israel with the first resurrection.

It should be admitted that the other view--of an awakening among the Nations at the conversion of Israel--has something to commend it; but the present writer agrees with those who find in the text the idea stressed by Darby, Kelly, and Trotter, that when Israel repents the saints are raised.

Eighty years ago two outstanding commentators in Germany were Meyer and Hofmann, who often differed in their view of a difficult text, the former being severely grammatical while the latter brought to it a singularly original mind and a comprehensive grasp of the Scriptures as a whole. Yet on Romans 11:15, they agreed that it referred to the resurrection. Godet objected to this, saying that these expositors were to be most distrusted when they were in agreement! But the verdict has gone against Godet, the graver commentaries in Germany and Britain¹ increasingly following the lead of the two great rivals in N.T. exposition--namely, that Paul is following Isaiah and Daniel in linking the renewal of Israel with the Kingdom and the resurrection.

(2) 1 Corinthians 15:50-54.

Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption. Behold, I show you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed. In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump; for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. But when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then

1 Zahn, Sanday and Headlam, and many others.

shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, "Death is swallowed up in victory" (R.V.).

Here is the highest and most glorious revelation in Scripture concerning the resurrection and transfiguration of the saints. It occurs as the climax of the long chapter on the resurrection of Christ and the holy dead. Our only concern, however, is to know if we can find any clue to guide us in our inquiry concerning the time of the resurrection. Other aspects of this chapter will come before us later. At present, this one suffices.

Is there any clue to guide us? Yes, a very decided one, and one that for open minds will settle the whole controversy. Paul not only describes the resurrection and transfiguration of the saints, [but] he emphatically indicates the time for the fulfillment of these wonderful events. Here are his words: "So WHEN this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, THEN shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, 'Death is swallowed up in victory'" (v. 54).

Nothing could be clearer than the Apostle's argument here. The resurrection and transfiguration of the faithful dead will take place in fulfillment of an O.T. prophecy. This occurs in Isaiah 25:8, which we have already considered. Now if, to use Bellett's illustration, we go back to Isaiah using the lamp that Paul has furnished us with, what do we find? Why, that the resurrection of the saints and the victory over death *synchronize with the inauguration of the Theocratic Kingdom, the Coming of Jehovah, and the conversion of living Israel*. Following are Isaiah's words (25:6-9 R.V.): "And in this mountain shall the Lord of Hosts make unto all peoples a feast of fat things, a feast of wine on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined." Here we have the inauguration of the Kingdom under the figure of a banquet. "And He will destroy in this mountain the face of the covering that is cast over all peoples, and the veil that is spread over all nations. He hath swallowed up death for ever; and the Lord God will wipe away tears from off all faces." Here we have the resurrection, which according to Paul includes the raising of Christians.

Beautifully does Dr. Wheeler Robinson say in his essay in *The Study Bible*: "We seem to see the great King rising to greet the long procession of suffering and sorrowing humanity, which wears the veil of the mourner. His royal hand removes the veil and wipes away the tears, and destroys their cause for ever" (p. 121). Again: "And the reproach of His people shall He take away from off all the earth: for the Lord hath spoken it."

This gives us the rehabilitation of Israel, long put to shame before the Gentiles by their age-long dispersion and apparent abandonment by Jehovah. Again: "And it shall be said in that day, 'Lo, this is our God; we have waited for Him, and He will save us: this is the Lord; we have waited for Him, we will be glad and rejoice in His salvation.'" Here we have the repentance and conversion of Israel at the Coming of Jehovah.

It will be seen, therefore, that Paul, so far from detaching the resurrection from the Kingdom and the conversion of Israel, takes his stand with Isaiah, Daniel, and the Lord Jesus Christ in linking them up inseparably. In the very act of revealing new truth about the Christian hope, he shows that the theory of his holding to a special coming and resurrection "for the Church" is the veriest [utmost] fiction. The Coming of Jehovah-Jesus is the hope of both Israel and the Church.

Further confirmation that Paul linked the resurrection with the Kingdom is furnished by the context of our passage in 1 Corinthians. In verse 50 he says: "Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot

inherit the Kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption." That is, kingly rule in the Future Age is not for mere human nature but for the new humanity in the Last Adam, who is a quickening Spirit. Hence he proceeds to deal with the resurrection and transfiguration of the saints--transfiguration [being] essential for kingly rule. This is the secret truth now revealed.

The reader may ask what explanation pre-tribs give of this fundamental difficulty in 1 Corinthians 15:54 and how they attempt to reconcile their theories with this Scripture. As a rule, they have nothing to say about it. They pay it the perpetual compliment of leaving it alone; or it is one of those "details that it is inexpedient to inquire about (though usually a craving for the least detail of the End-time characterizes the school). Especially was this reluctance seen in dealing with premillennial colleagues like Tregelles and B. W. Newton, who with inconvenient persistence pointed out the grave discrepancy between the new scheme of the End and the plain teaching of Isaiah 25:8 and 1 Corinthians 15:54. So far as I am aware, no pre-trib writer has ever honestly faced the question. One is reminded of a story recorded by Plutarch (quoted by Provost Salmon), that when Pericles was puzzling himself what account of his expenditure he should give the Athenian people, he got the advice from Alcibiades that it would be wiser to study how he could avoid giving any account at all.

When, however, the advocates of the new theories were arguing, not with fellow premillennialists but with postmillennialists like David Brown and Agar Beet, they forgot themselves and used arguments that were a complete negation of the position they maintained against all orthodox premillennialists since earliest times. I have already cited the case of Kelly, who by stating that the resurrection in Isaiah 25 "synchronizes with the deliverance of Israel" gave away the whole case for the new theories of the Parousia. I wish now to cite the case of Darby. One would scarcely have expected him to expound a crucial passage in a manner that subverted his entire scheme of the prophetic future. Yet such is the case. It is not a little remarkable, and will astonish some. In his *Second Coming* he writes as follows in seeking to prove that the Advent must be premillennial:

I wish to refer you to the connection of the passage in the 15th of 1st Corinthians with the 25th of Isaiah, because *the connection of these two things--the resurrection of the saints, and the restoration of Israel--will thereby be strongly brought out.* The Apostle says that "when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, 'Death is swallowed up in victory.' If you turn to the 25th Isaiah, you will see that *this takes place at this time which we call the millennium: when, the Jews being restored to their place on the earth, there is that era of blessedness among the nations which is commonly called the millennium.* It is there said, 'Thou shalt bring down the noise of strangers, as the heat in a dry place; even the heat with the shadow of a cloud: the branch of the terrible ones shall be brought low. And in this mountain shall the Lord of Hosts make unto all people a feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined. And he will destroy in this mountain the face of the covering cast over all people, and the veil that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death in victory.'" *That is at the time the resurrection takes place;* for it is said in Corinthians, "Then shall come to pass the saying which is written, Death is swallowed up in victory." *And thus it appears that the time when this resurrection takes place is the time when the Lord restores Israel, when He establishes Israel's place in Zion, and takes away the veil from off the face of all nations* (p. 84).

Sound doctrine! Yet every word of it is a complete refutation of theories telling us that the resurrection

does *not* synchronize with the millennium and the conversion of Israel but precedes them by a period of from seven to seventy, if not hundreds, of years (for there is not the slightest certainty or even knowledge on the question) and that this period is characterized by increasing lawlessness and Israel's reception of Antichrist.

Trotter also makes the same damaging admission. Commenting on 1 Corinthians 15:54, he remarks on the word "then": "Not '*eita*' as in verse 24, but '*tote*,' the literal and uniform meaning of which is *at that time*." He then continues:

Now the only passage in which this saying is written is Isaiah 25:8; and there it is so interwoven with unmistakable predictions of millennial blessedness, that for the Apostle to say, as he here does, that it is to come to pass at the same time as the resurrection and glorification of the saints, is equivalent to his declaring in plain terms that the Millennium is there introduced (pp. 468-9).

On the same text Kelly says in his *Second Coming*: "It appears on apostolic authority that the epoch of the resurrection of the righteous is bound up with the return and deliverance of Israel, as well as with the millennial blessing of all nations" (p. 57).

This is the very point that we are contending for!

We leave this passage in Corinthians, therefore, [being] authorized by Darby, Kelly, and Trotter to believe that Paul, like Isaiah, Daniel, and the Lord Jesus Christ, locates the first resurrection at the Day of the Lord, that is, at the close of the apocalyptic Week.

(3) 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 (R.V.).

We now come to the passage that, more than any other, is relied upon by pre-tribs to prove that the saints are raised some considerable time before the Day of the Lord. It reads as follows:

But I would not have you ignorant, brethren, concerning them that fall asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as the rest which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also that are fallen asleep in Jesus will God bring with Him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we that are alive, that are left unto the coming of the Lord, shall in no wise precede them that are fallen asleep. For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven, with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first; then we that are alive, that are left, shall together with them be caught up in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air; and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words.

Only one consideration will occupy us here: what evidence does it afford us in our search to find the *time* of the first resurrection? The singular thing is that beyond the elementary fact of its occurring at the Advent, the passage *in itself* furnishes no evidence whatever upon the point. Without anticipating topics to be raised later, it may be said here that the passage under consideration does not pretend to be an exhaustive description of the *Parousia*, even as it concerns the Church--for there is no mention of the transfiguration of the living saints, nor even of the risen; no mention of the judgment-seat of Christ and the rewarding of the saints; none of the marriage-supper of the Lamb. Still less does the passage

aim at *describing* the Last Things in general. The Apostle is concerned with one, and only one, aspect of the Advent--and that is the relation of the sleeping to the surviving saints when the Lord comes. The Thessalonians feared that the dead whom they mourned would be at a disadvantage at the *Parousia*. Paul shows by the Spirit of God that, if anything, they will have the advantage, since the Lord will raise them first at His Coming, and only then will the living believers be caught up with them to meet the Lord.

Admirably does Canon Faussett say in his commentary:

His point being established that the dead in Christ shall be on terms of equal advantage with those found alive at Christ's coming, he leaves undefined here the other events foretold elsewhere (as not being necessary to his discussion), Christ's reign on earth with His saints (1 Cor. 6:2-3), the final judgment and glorification of His saints in the new heaven and earth.

So far, therefore, as this passage in 1 Thessalonians is concerned, we are not told when the resurrection will take place relative to the Seventieth Week of Daniel. If one thinks that the resurrection will take place centuries before the apocalyptic Week sets in, there is nothing in the passage to contradict it. If, as Newberry and others taught, one believes that the Lord will come at the beginning of that Week, or, with others, in the middle of it, there is likewise nothing in this passage to discourage us. For a similar reason there is nothing against the view that I am contending for, namely, that the first resurrection takes place subsequent to the Week, namely, at the Day of the Lord. This section in 1 Thessalonians 4 simply does not deal with the question. Indeed, there is nothing in the text to show that the resurrection is even a premillennial one. This must be learned from other Scriptures.

And even if we admit, for argument's sake, that the "Coming" here referred to concerns the Church alone, this does not prove that the resurrection must take place before the apocalyptic Week, for it might take place subsequent to that week and still concern the Church alone. Only by referring to other Scriptures can the point be determined, for 1 Thessalonians 4 is silent upon it. Such suggestions will be irksome to those who always find what they want in a text. Others will recognize their reasonableness.

So much for negative reasoning based upon this isolated text. When, however, we turn to other Scriptures (for as Peter tells us, "no prophecy of Scripture is of private interpretation," 2 Pet. 1:20), we are not left in doubt upon the matter. Pre-tribs themselves furnish us with reasons that smash their central position.

They all admit, in the first place, that this resurrection in 1 Thessalonians 4 includes the resurrection of all the righteous dead since Abel. This is a fundamental point in the scheme. Very well then. This means that 1 Thessalonians 4 synchronizes with the resurrection in Isaiah 25:8, 26:19, Daniel 12:1-3, 12-13, Matthew 13:43, Luke 14:14, 20:35, and John 6:39, 40, 45, 54, and 11:24-25. And we have already proved that these passages clearly locate the resurrection of the saints in Israel at the commencement of the Messianic Kingdom, when Antichrist is destroyed and Israel is converted by the appearing of Jehovah. The whole Darbyist case collapses, therefore, before their admission that 1 Thessalonians 4 includes the raising of the O.T. saints.

The theorists admit, in the second place, that this resurrection in 1 Thessalonians 4 is identical with the one in 1 Corinthians 15:50-57. This admission also destroys their whole position, for we have just seen--with the concurrence of Darby, Kelly, and Trotter--that Paul, following Isaiah 25:8, locates the

resurrection of the saints at the beginning of the kingly rule of Christ, when Israel is converted.

What, therefore, but the exigencies of a mistaken system of prophetic interpretation could have led these same writers, and a thousand-and-one followers, to enounce [proclaim] a set of theories that proceed upon the presupposition that the first resurrection does *not* coincide with Israel's conversion but precedes it by about a generation; does *not* synchronize with the establishment of Israel in Zion but rather with the beginning of their troubles under Antichrist; does *not* introduce the times of refreshing for all nations but the times of Antichrist and the darkest night that Israel and the nations have ever seen?

(4) 1 Corinthians 15:21-26.

Still another passage in 1 Corinthians calls for comment in any examination of the new theories of the *Parousia*. Anyone who has immersed himself in pre-trib prophetic literature knows that a vital part of their scheme of the End is the program of the resurrection. It is as follows:

- (a) The resurrection of the redeemed at the Advent according to 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17.
- (b) The resurrection of an immense multitude of saints, converted and martyred *after* the resurrection and Rapture just mentioned. This takes place several years after the former one, namely, at the Day of the Lord.
- (c) The resurrection of the rest of the dead at the conclusion of the millennium.

Let us test this by the teaching of the Apostle Paul. We quote from Weymouth's version (Second Edition) not only for its greater faithfulness to the Greek at one or two important points, but for its happy illumination of some difficult sayings. It undoubtedly represents the attitude of modern scientific exegesis toward this passage of Scripture.

For seeing that death came through man, through man comes also the resurrection of the dead. For just as through Adam all die, so also through Christ all will be made alive again. But this will happen to each in the right order--Christ having been the first to rise, and afterwards Christ's people rising at His return. Later on, comes the End, when He is to surrender the Kingship to God, the Father, when He shall have overthrown all other government and all other authority and power. For He must continue King until He shall have put all His enemies under His feet (Ps. 8:6; 110:1). The last enemy that is to be overthrown is Death; for He will have put all things in subject under His feet.

Here is a passage where the great Apostle is dealing expressly with "the resurrection of the dead"--not merely of the righteous, but of the totality of the human race. Through Adam death passed upon all men; through Christ the whole human race shall be raised. And the Apostle even gives us the program of the resurrection:

1. Christ the first-fruits.
2. The redeemed, at Christ's Coming to establish His kingly rule.
3. The End, when the rest of the dead are raised at the close of Christ's kingdom and His delivering the sovereignty to God the Father. Increasingly Lietzmann's view is being followed that "End" means

"Rest" or "Remainder."

Allowing for differences on details, the great commentators of Germany² are finding in the passage a resurrection of the saints at the beginning of Christ's Kingdom and another at its close, in substantial agreement with John in the Apocalypse, chapter 20. One cannot fail to see that the interpretation is ruinous to Darby's scheme. Not a word is said about the resurrection of a special class of "tribulation" saints seven years or more after the Coming when the redeemed are raised. If Paul entertained any such notion, here was the appropriate place to say so, for he is distinguishing the classes in the resurrection of the whole human race.

According to Scofield, in his *Bible Correspondence Course*, the visions of Revelation 7 warrant the belief that before the End "the overwhelming majority" of the inhabitants of the earth will be converted to God by the preaching of the 144,000 Israelites. And the vision of 7:9-17 makes it absolutely certain that they are martyrs awaiting the resurrection of 20:4-6. Very well then. We are asked by pre-tribs to believe that the Holy Spirit, in giving the precise classes and the order of the resurrection, passed over this immense company of martyrs who, according to the theorists, rise several years or decades *after* 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17, and "those that are Christ's" in 1 Corinthians 15:23. To uninfatuated readers, the suggestion is utterly incredible.

The only reason why Paul did not introduce another resurrection of saints after that of Christians was because he knew of no such special and separate resurrection. He knew of only one "out"-resurrection, one one harvest, that of Christ's people at His Arrival.³ And he further precludes the idea of a second "first" resurrection by locating the resurrection of the Church itself at the beginning of the Messianic Kingdom. Darby, Kelly, and Trotter all bore witness to this, as we saw a moment ago.

We leave the consideration of Paul's Epistles,⁴ therefore, with the conviction that he, like Isaiah, Daniel, and the Lord Jesus Christ, locates the resurrection of the saints at the Day of the Lord, when Israel is converted and the Kingdom is set up in power.

2 So Lietzmann, J. Weiss, Bachmann, Bousset and Zahn. The interpretation goes back to Godet, Meyer and DeWette. In England Canon Evans, Peake, Teignmouth Shore, and others accept it. W. F. Howard says, "There is good reason to follow several recent commentators in taking 24a as meaning, 'Then the *rest*, when He shall deliver up the Kingdom to God.'" (*Abingdon Commentary*.)

3 On the word "*parousia*" and a recent rabbinical attempt to save the new program by making it mean "*presence*," the reader is referred to our chapter on the "Coming." There it is shown that the humblest Christian in the first century knew that the word meant the triumphant arrival of Messiah to put down all authority, and then reign. The petty kings and emperors had their Parousias and their Days, when on a visit to a town; our Lord and Emperor, Jesus the Messiah, has His Day and His Parousia, when He comes forth to vindicate God's righteousness, plead the cause of His followers, and inaugurate the Age to come.

4 The passage in Philippians 3:11 furnishes nothing to guide us in finding the time of the resurrection.