

The Approaching Advent of Christ

by
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CHAPTER V

THE RESURRECTION OF THE SAINTS IN THE APOCALYPSE

We now come to the closing book of the Canon in our inquiry concerning the time of the saints' resurrection. Here we shall find a complete confirmation of the conclusions drawn from the Prophets, Gospels, and the Epistles of Paul.

(1) Revelation 11:15-18 (R.V.).

The first passage to be considered is Rev. 11:15-18, which records the results of the blowing of the seventh or last trumpet. It reads as follows:

And the seventh angel sounded; and there followed great voices in heaven, and they said, "The kingdom of the world is become the kingdom of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever. And the four and twenty elders, which sit before God on their throne, fell upon their faces, and worshipped God. Saying, We give thee thanks, O Lord God, the Almighty, which art and which wast; because thou hast taken to thee thy great power, and didst reign. And the nations were wroth, and thy wrath came, and the time of the dead to be judged, and the time to give their reward to thy servants the prophets, and to the saints, and them that fear thy name, the small and the great; and to destroy them that destroy the earth."¹

Here we have once again the resurrection of the saints and their judgment for the works done in the body; and, as in the Prophets, Gospels, and Epistles, the resurrection is linked with the inauguration of the Kingdom of God and the Coming of the Lord. It is not disputed that the events of the seventh trumpet occur at the Day of the Lord. What is disputed by Darbyists is that they include the first resurrection. Let us examine this.

(a) Paul tells us that the dead in Christ shall be raised incorruptible at the Last Trumpet (1 Cor. 15:52). We have already seen that this trumpet sounds on the Day of the Lord, when Israel is converted and the Kingdom introduced. And here in Revelation 11:15 we have these very events under the seventh or last trumpet, which also blows at the Day of the Lord. The conclusion is inevitable, therefore, that the Last Trumpet of Paul and the Last Trumpet of John are one and the same. We are right, therefore, in inferring the resurrection from Revelation 11:15-18. It is no answer to object that Paul nowhere speaks of seven trumpets, for the *last* trumpet may be the last of two.² It will be sufficient if, in reading of the Last Trumpet in Paul, we credit him with having in mind the trumpet to sound at the Day of the Lord, and one or more that sounded previously. We must remember, moreover, that Paul was writing under

1 On the 24 elders, see the section at the end of this chapter.

2 1 Cor. 15:45 speaks of Christ as the *last* Adam, where there is only one previous--the *first* Adam.

the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and He was quite capable of forestalling a matter revealed more fully later. The point is well put by Bengel:

The full description of the trumpets is reserved for the Apocalypse; yet some things may be gathered from Matt. 24:31; 1 Thess. 4:16, concerning the *last* trumpet; and this epithet is expressed here, as one that takes for granted the trumpets that have preceded it; either because the Spirit has inspired Paul with an allusion, which anticipates the Apocalypse, or because Scripture, long before, teaches that some trumpets, though not definitely enumerated, are before *the last*.

And if we deny that Paul was anticipating, even unconsciously, the last trumpet of the Apocalypse, it makes things worse for the theorists. They want us to believe that Paul called the resurrection trumpet (which is to sound, on their view, before the Seventieth Week) the *last* trumpet, when he must have known from Isaiah 27:13 and the words of Christ in Matthew 24:31 that one, if not two, trumpets of momentous consequence were to *follow* it; for it is obvious that those trumpets sound at the Day of the Lord.

These difficulties and contradictions pass away, however, when we see that Paul's last trumpet sounds on the Day of the Lord and is therefore identical with Isaiah's, our Lord's, and John's, which do the same. We are warranted, therefore, in inferring from Revelation 11:15 that the seventh or last trumpet points to the resurrection from the dead.

It is objected again that this trumpet in Revelation 11 cannot be identical with that in Paul because the former is a woe-trumpet and the latter a trumpet of grace. But the real truth is that, alike in Paul and John, the Last Trumpet is both a trumpet of grace and a trumpet of woe. Towards the saved, it is a trumpet of grace. Certainly this is so in the Apocalypse. Otherwise, how can we account for the outburst of praise, joy and thanksgiving on the part of the Twenty-four Elders who, pre-tribs tell us, represent the raptured saints?

The Elders in heaven rejoice over the sounding of the seventh trumpet, because it is obviously a trumpet of grace as well as woe. It finishes the mystery of God and heralds the introduction of the Kingdom of Christ and of God, the resurrection, judgment, and rewarding of the saints, and the Coming of the Lord. If it is called a woe trumpet, it is only because of its effects upon the ungodly. In confirmation of this, I need only quote the words of F. W. Grant, a leading pre-trib scholar:

The third woe is the coming of the Kingdom! Yes: that to greet which the earth breaks out in gladness, the morning without clouds, the day which has no night, and the fulfilment of the first promise which fell upon man's ears when he stood a naked sinner before God to hear his doom, the constant theme of prophecy--now swelling into song and now sighed out in prayer--that kingdom is yet, to the "dwellers upon earth" the last and deepest woe.

To the mere "dwellers upon the earth," the last or seventh trumpet brings woe indeed; but to the saints of God it brings that Coming and Kingdom which have been their hope and joy for ages past. Hence it is a trumpet of incomparable grace; hence the rejoicing of the elders in heaven.

(b) The resurrection is unquestionably implied by the expression "the time of the dead to be judged," that is, the righteous dead only; for this book reveals that the unsaved dead are judged at the conclusion

of the Messianic Kingdom, not at its beginning (20:5, 11-14). The whole context proves, moreover, that only the prophets, saints, and God-fearers come within the scope of this judgment. The wicked dead are not so much as mentioned. Nor may the expression "the dead" be used to prove the contrary; for Paul himself uses the general expression "the dead" when he really means the righteous dead only. In the very chapter where he describes the resurrection (1 Cor. 15:42), he says, "so also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption." But the context proves that he there means only the righteous dead, for the ungodly will not be raised "in incorruption." So also in verse 52: "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." Here he certainly means only the righteous dead.

Just so is it in Revelation 11:18.³ We are told that it is "the time for the dead to be judged," yet the immediate context proves that only the righteous dead are in view; for at once we read, "And the time to give their reward to thy servants the prophets, and to the saints, and them that fear thy name, the small and the great." Prophets, saints, and godly--the whole company of the redeemed. These and no others are raised from the dead at this time to be judged.⁴

A consideration of Romans 14:10-12 (R.V.) and 1 Corinthians 3:13-15 will show that Christians are to be judged, [but] not in order to determine their salvation; for in this sense the believer comes not into judgment (John 5:24). But [it is] to determine and allot the reward of each according to his life and service. And there can be no doubt that "the judgment of the dead" in Revelation 11:18 refers to the judgment of the people of God that follows their resurrection.

(c) The resurrection of the just is further presupposed in Revelation 11:15-18 because it is at this time that the reward is given to the prophets, the saints, and the godly. Theorists seek to evade this by telling us that though the saints are judged and rewarded at this time, they are raised some years previously, that is, prior to the Seventieth Week of Daniel.⁵ But this is untenable. First, how could such a judgment (taking place years and possibly generations after the resurrection) be called a judgment of "the dead"? If the judgment and rewarding take place immediately after the resurrection, then there is some fitness in the term. But a judgment of people who have been raised for an indefinite period--of at least seven years--would not be called a judgment of "the dead."

Secondly, Kelly's plea brings him into contradiction to his own scheme. In his *Revelation* he tells us that the Twenty-four Elders of the Apocalypse represent the saints of the O.T. and the Church of the New, raised, raptured, and glorified in heaven before a single seal is opened or plague poured out (on 4-5); that is, they are seen as already judged and rewarded, for they are said to be robed, crowned, and enthroned--ideas that, if the Elders are human beings or represent human beings, clearly betoken that they have already been rewarded. And yet, to save his theory of the resurrection in the presence of Revelation 11:18, Kelly tells us that the giving of rewards is to take place at the Revelation of Christ on the Day of the Lord. But he cannot have it both ways. It is clear that the theory is not only at variance

3 It is important to note that in his great commentary, Theodore Zahn, whom Dr. Stalker called "the Nestor of N.T. criticism," gives "the time of the *nations* to be judged" as the true reading (*Offenbarung des Johannes*, vol. ii., p. 432): a deeply interesting suggestion. Unfortunately he does not develop the point.

4 The words "and destroy them that destroy the earth" have no reference to resurrection. Rev. 19:20-21 gives the scene; it refers to the destruction of Antichrist and his hosts.

5 See Kelly's *Revelation Expounded*, p. 133.

with Scripture, but also with itself.

There is, however, a much more cruel exposure of the unscriptural character of the theory that the rewarding of the saints is separated from their resurrection by a period of years. I refer to the words of our Lord, "Thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just" (Luke 14:14). The new system is in open opposition to the words of Christ. It separates the giving of rewards from the resurrection by a period of years, whereas the Lord Jesus Christ joined them together.

Inasmuch, therefore, as Revelation 11:18 depicts the giving of rewards to the whole company of the redeemed, we may be sure that this also is the time of the resurrection of the just.

It is relevant to point out here how fatal is the language of Revelation 11:18 to a new version of the pre-trib scheme that has been issued in the last decade or so. Some theorists are now teaching (in contrast to the early leaders) that the saints will be rewarded and judged at the Coming, and not the Glorious Appearing of Christ.⁶ In other words, they mean to say that when the Lord comes "for the Church," (before the Seventieth Week of Daniel), the saved will be rewarded immediately. This certainly obviates the difficulty of Luke 14:14. But while it is true that the saints are rewarded at the resurrection, it is utterly opposed to the passage in Revelation 11:18 to assert that they will be rewarded years and possibly generations before the Day of the Lord, as these writers assume. The words are clear, and it is impossible to evade them. The Elders burst out into thanksgiving, because the time for the inauguration of the Messianic Kingdom has come and the time "to give their reward to thy servants the prophets, and to the saints, and them that fear thy name, the small and the great" (R.V.). According to the theory, the prophets, saints, and God-fearers are rewarded years even before the *first* trumpet sounds. According to Scripture, they are judged and rewarded at the time of the seventh trumpet. Could contradiction be more hopeless?

It will be objected that Revelation 11:18 refers only to the saints who, *ex hypothei*, will arise after the Church has been raptured. But such a suggestion is inadmissible, for it means to say that "the prophets, the saints, and them that fear thy name" have no connection either with the Congregation of the O.T. or with the Church of the New! Such a preposterous suggestion need not detain us long. To take only one expression, "thy servants the prophets," can there be a doubt that the Old and New Testament prophets are here included? In 10:7 the same expression is used,⁷ and its meaning is not doubtful: "But in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he shall begin to sound, the mystery of God should be finished, as he hath declared (evangelized) to his servants the prophets."

Here the O.T. prophets are undoubtedly included, and possibly those of the New. And there can be no doubt, if sound principles of exegesis are to guide us, that they are referred to in Revelation 11:18, which occurs in the same vision. This being so, the scheme breaks down; for it presupposes that "all

6 Cf. ex. gr. Miss A. R. Habershon: "The judgment-seat of Christ . . . will take place at His coming to the air for His saints. . . . All the saved ones up to the time of His coming to the air will be judged according to their works, in order that they may receive commendation." *Parables*, pp. 93-4. See also Anderson, *Forgotten Truths*, chap. 11, and Hogg-Vine, *Thessalonians*, pp. 85-8, and *Touching the Coming*, 6.

7 In the Revelation alone the phrase "(the) prophets" occurs in the following passages: 10:7; 11:18; 16:6; 18:20, 24; 22:6, 9; cf. 11:10. The reader may judge whether all these instances mean prophets others than those of Ancient Israel and the Christian Church.

the saved ones" (including the O.T. prophets and saints) will have been judged and rewarded years before the seventh trumpet sounds, whereas it is the doctrine of our text that they are so judged at the Last Trumpet on the Day of the Lord.

The only interpretation of Revelation 11:18 that avoids the difficulties and contradictions examined is that which combines the elements of truth in both schools of pre-trib advocates, to the exclusion of their errors. With Darby, Kelly, Trotter, and C.H.M., we must find here the giving of rewards to the whole company of the Old and New Testament saints. With Habershon and Anderson we must associate this (as Christ so emphatically said) with "the resurrection of the just." It is at the seventh trumpet of Revelation 11:18 that the saints of Luke 14:14 are raised to life and rewarded. Paul says the same in 1 Corinthians 15:52 and 1 Thessalonians 4:16.

(d) The resurrection is presupposed in Revelation 11:15-18 because, in the fourth place, it is here that the Coming of the Lord takes place. In verse 17 the Elders sing: "We give thee thanks, O Lord God, the Almighty, which art and which wast" (R.V.). The words "and art to come" are an interpolation and are omitted by all modern editors and versions, including Darby's. The omission is of profound significance, for the expression *ho erchomenos* means "the Coming One"; and its exclusion here, in contrast to Revelation 1:4, 1:8, and 4:8, is because God in Christ *has now come*. Prior to this He was "the Coming One." Now He has actually come. The last Trumpet brings us to the Coming of the Lord. The expression "The Coming One" is a favorite title for our Lord among advocates of pre-trib theories. Let them consider, therefore, when it is that the Coming One comes. It is not before but after the Seventieth Week of Daniel. That the title "the Coming One" was applied to Christ is indubitable. It was a well-known designation in Israel and the Church for the Messiah, our Lord. When John the Baptist sent his disciples to Christ, his query was, "Art thou the Coming One?"⁸ And more significant for our purpose is the occurrence of the phrase in Hebrews 10:37: "There is still but a short time, and then The Coming One will come, and will not delay."⁹ A study of Mark 11:9, Luke 13:35, 19:38, Psalm 118:26, Daniel 7:13-14, etc., will show what is meant.

We need have no hesitation then in affirming that Revelation 11:17 indicates that "the Coming One" comes at this point, and that, therefore, the resurrection of the saints takes place here.

Another proof that the Coming of the Lord Jesus takes place here and not a generation earlier is that the Lord Himself says: "Behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give each one according as his work shall be" (Rev. 22:12). The Lord's reward for His saints is *with* Him; that is, at His Coming He will reward the faithful.

(e) The resurrection of the saints is presupposed in Revelation 11:15-18, in the fifth place, because the Last Trumpet brings the inauguration of the Messianic Kingdom according to Isaiah 25:8; 26:19; Daniel 12:2-3, 13; John 6:39-54; Luke 14:14-15; 20:34; 1 Corinthians 15:50, 54.

I conclude our examination of the seventh trumpet in the words of one of the greatest living scholars and the most eminent advocate of Premillennialism:

At the seventh blast of the trumpet, which is closely connected with the fifth and sixth by 9:12,

8 Matt. 11:3, Darby's translation. So also Moffatt, Wade, and Weymouth.

9 Weymouth's version; so Moffatt.

11:14, in spite of their being separated by the episode in 10:1-11:14, there is again, as in the case of the opening of the seventh seal, no description of what happens; but we have here expressed by the songs of praise in heaven, just as in the former case by the silence, what takes place when the seventh act is performed. God and Christ have begun their world rule (11:15). God is no longer the One who is to come in the future (11:17; cf. per contra 1:4, *ho erchomenos*) but the One who has come to judgment in order to punish enemies and to reward the godly. It is, in fact, "the last trump," of which Christian prophecy had already spoken elsewhere (1 Cor. 15:52; 1 Thess. 4:12). As announced beforehand in 10:7, and as we saw it in 8:1, the end has again been reached; but it is not described.¹⁰

So also Canon Faussett:¹¹

The words "at the *last* trump the dead shall be raised" (1 Cor. 15:52) refer to the righteous only, as the whole context proves. The trumpet is "last," not in the sense of sounding the earth's death-knell before its burning, but as *last of the seven*, which close our present age, and usher in, with preliminary judgments on the Anti-Christian foes, Christ's reign on the earth, as Rev. 11:15 proves: "The seventh angel sounded and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdom of the Lord and His Christ, and He shall reign for ever and ever."¹²

(2) Revelation 20:4-6 (R.V.).

One more passage in the Revelation remains to be considered. It reads as follows:

And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them; 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. Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection; over these the second death hath no power; but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years.

10 Theodore Zahn: *INT*, ii., p. 398.

11 *The Second Advent*, pp. 131-2, "British Weekly" extra, 1887.

12 The contents of the Seventh Trumpet may be summarized as follows:

(a) Upon the World.

1. Jehovah assumes the Sovereignty.
2. The messianic Kingdom is established.

(b) Upon the Ungodly.

1. The wrath of the Nations (Ps. 2) gives place to the wrath of the Lamb (cf. 6th seal).
2. The destroyers of the earth (Antichrist and his hosts) are destroyed (cf. 19:19ff.).

(c) Upon the people of God.

1. The Coming One comes.
2. The holy dead are raised and judged.
3. The prophets, saints and godly are rewarded.

Into the millennial controversy that long raged over this passage, it is unnecessary now to enter. The present volume presupposes that both resurrections--between which lies the thousand years' reign of Christ--are literal, and that any other interpretation is a violation of sound exegesis.

What concerns us at present, however, is merely to ascertain the *time* of this resurrection relative to the Day of the Lord.

What conclusion can we draw from the vision in Revelation 20:1-6? Just this: that here we have the clearest refutation possible of the pre-trib system. For according to those theories, the first resurrection is to take place at least seven years before the Day of the Lord and the millennium, some time even before the *rise of Antichrist*. According to this vision of the Apocalypse, the first resurrection takes place in immediate association with the *destruction* of Antichrist and the establishment of the Messianic Kingdom. Thus we have exactly the same teaching as in all the earlier Scriptures.

The theorists plead that the O.T. saints and the Church of the New have already been raised prior to the Day of the Lord and this vision of the Apocalypse. The reply to this is simple. Not a word is said by John in the whole of the Revelation of any such resurrection. Nothing can be found of an earlier one, either here or in any other part of the Word of God. If such a prior resurrection was known to John, as the theory presupposes, then how is it conceivable that he would call this resurrection the *first*? John ought to have written, "this is the *second* resurrection; blessed and holy is he that hath part in the *second* resurrection." But that he wrote *first* resurrection will be proof to all candid readers that he knew of none before it.

It is contended by pre-trib writers that the first resurrection extends over a long period. It began with and includes [1] the resurrection of those raised during our Lord' ministry; [2] of Christ Himself; [3] then (in the future) of the O.T. saints and N.T. Church at the "Coming"; [4] and finally of the "tribulation" saints at the beginning of the millennium. This is all very interesting, but may we not have some Scripture proof for it? Where do they read that the resurrection of Lazarus and others raised at the time of Christ began the first resurrection? For one thing, as Meyer and others have pointed out, we have no reason to suppose that the people so raised did not die again. Indeed, this is necessitated by the emphatic declaration of the Apostles that Christ--not Lazarus--was "the first-born from the dead."¹³ Moreover, those then raised were still in the image of the earthly. It will be otherwise at the first resurrection.

On Rev. 1:5 Archbishop Trench remarks:

Christ is indeed "the first begotten of the dead," notwithstanding that such risings from the grave as that of the widow's son, and Jairus's daughter, and Lazarus, and his who revived at the touch of Elisha's bones (2 Kings 13:21), went before. "None of them could be truly said to be 'Begotten from the dead,' but rather begotten to die again; for to be born and begotten from the dead includes an everlasting freedom from the power and approach of death" (Jackson). But there was for them no repeal of the sentence of death, but a respite only; not to say that even during their period of respite they carried about with them a body of death.¹⁴

¹³ Col. 1:18; cf. Rev. 1:5, and especially Acts 26:23. See A. V., Goodspeed, Moffatt, and Wade.

¹⁴ *Seven Churches of Asia*, p. 11. Edersheim remarks that the above cases were instances of "resuscitation" rather than of resurrection, ii., p. 397. So even W. Trotter, p. 454.

Trench then quotes the apt remark of Alcuin: "He is therefore named the 'First-begotten' because all who rose before Him were about to die again."

We may therefore eliminate these cases of Lazarus and others raised in the past for the simple reason that they are yet to rise in the first resurrection at the Last Day.

"But," our objector will insist, "you must admit in view of 1 Corinthians 15:20,23, that Christ's resurrection is connected with that of His people." Certainly it is a pledge or guarantee of the future resurrection of His people; but how does this prove that there are going to be two "first" resurrections in the future separated by a generation? If the resurrection of the saints is to take place at the Millennium, how can there be another "first" resurrection years after it, yet still at the beginning of the Millennium?

Having thus disposed of the sophistry that seeks to find a resurrection prior to the "first," let us consider further the words of the vision (20:4-5). There are three distinct classes mentioned in the passage.

(a) First, there are those of whom John says: "I saw thrones and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them" (4a).

Who are these? The whole body of saints who live to see the *Parousia* at this time. They are transferred from earth to occupy thrones in the kingly rule of Christ. It is the Rapture of the survivors in 1 Thessalonians 4:17. It is not said that this class was raised from the dead, but simply that they took the thrones prepared for them. We have seen them suffering and enduring throughout the book. Now they are seen as overcomers who inherit the sovereignty in the kingdom. It is here that they receive the Morning Star.

A decisive conclusion follows from the enthronement of the living saints at 20:42: it is that Darbyist theories are excluded. These presuppose that the heavenly redeemed, including those who survive to the *Parousia*, occupy their thrones and are glorified several years before the Millennium.¹⁵ We are to see all this in the Twenty-four Elders crowned and seated in chapter 4. But our passage locates the sitting upon thrones at the beginning of the Millennium. The language is clear and decisive on the point. John says: "I saw thrones"; obviously they were empty. Then he adds: "and they sat upon them." That is, he sees a company *in the very act of sitting down on their thrones*. It is now, not a generation earlier, that the living saints are rewarded and ascend their thrones. Matthew 19:28 says the same thing of the Apostles, locating their enthronement at this very time.

(b) John mentions a *second* class that is honored at this time: "I saw the souls of them that had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus, and for the word of God" (R.V.).

(c) Thirdly, he speaks of "such as worshipped not the beast, neither his image, and received not the mark upon their forehead and upon their hand."

Of these two classes we read that "they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years."

15 See the commentaries of Kelly, F. S. Grant, Ottman, Darby, and, in fact, of all their expositors, except Thomas Newberry and Dr. Bullinger, on the Twenty-four Elders in Rev. 4-5.

It is contended by theorists that these two classes consist only of saints who are to be converted and martyred *after* the Church is removed to heaven.¹⁶ They are those who die during, or just before, the Great Tribulation and have no connection with the Church in Christ Jesus. There is some truth, but more error in these views. It is true that the third class consists of those who fall in the last Great Tribulation. Whether they have any connection with the Church, I leave for the present. But it is thoroughly wrong to limit the second class--those "that had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and the word of God"--to latter-day saints, martyred, as Grant says, "in the time of the seals." It is wrong to assert that this class includes no Christians but is restricted to half-enlightened Jews and Gentiles raised a generation after the Church. The proof of this is simple: the Church herself is not raised until this very time. Such is the doctrine of Christ, Paul, and of John in this very book (11:15-18). Secondly, without raising questions to be fully discussed later, it is to be insisted, and strongly insisted upon, that "beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God" is a description, and a glorious description, of the martyrdom of a Christian. Unnumbered multitudes throughout the Church's history, including Peter and Paul, have been slain "for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God." It is here they rise.

As if to shut out once for all the theories that have been based upon this passage, John himself has interpreted it for us. In chapter 1:9 we read: "I John, your brother, and partaker with you in the tribulation and kingdom and patience, which are in Jesus, was in the isle called Patmos, *for the word of God and the testimony of Jesus*" (R.V.).

Here is the same expression, and it is applied by John the Apostle to himself. In his valuable work on *The Seven Churches*, Archbishop Trench says:

The unprejudiced reader will hardly be persuaded that St. John sets himself forth here as any other than such a *constrained* dweller in Patmos, one dwelling there not by his own choice, but who had been banished thither "for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ." (p. 21).

Some have taught that "for the word of God and the testimony of Jesus" in verse 9 means that John went to Patmos to receive the Revelation. Bullinger is characteristically dogmatic upon the point. But the idea is negated by the use elsewhere of the phrase *dia ton logon* (Rev. 6:9, 20:4; Matt. 13:21; Mark 4:17; cf. 1 Peter 3:14; Col. 4:3; 2 Tim. 1:12). It can only mean "*because of* the word of God." That is, his activity as a preacher was the cause of his banishment. Bullinger's bold denial of this banishment, in the interests of his wild theory that the Seven Churches of Asia were not yet in existence when John wrote the Revelation and would only arise after the Rapture, need not detain us. When his exposition of the Apocalypse came out month-by-month in his magazine "Things to Come," (London), he was answered verse-by-verse on Revelation 2-3 by a giant among American prophetic students, Nathaniel West; and the refutation in "Watchword and Truth" month-by-month was complete and crushing.

We may still be sure that "for the word of God and the testimony of Jesus" explained the reason of John's tribulation in A.D. 96 and the death of martyrs at that time. They were slain, in a word, because

16 See Kelly, *Revelation*, p. 417; Grant, *in loco*; Ottman, p. 430; Darby, *Apocalypse*, p. 135, and *Synopsis*; Newberry, p. 118; Trotter, pp. 477-8.

they were Christians; that is, they adhered to Christ's teaching and God's word even at the cost of their lives.

Equally certain is it, therefore, that the same expression in Revelation 20:4 must denote the same class of people.¹⁷ To tell us that it means Christians in 1:9 and non- or semi-Christians in 20:4 is to put an enormous strain on our credulity. No reasonable doubt can exist that when John says that he saw "the souls of them that had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God" come to life, he is meaning to depict the resurrection of all who, since the time of Christ, have been slain because of their Christian service and belief. Not one syllable requires us to restrict it to those slain in the time of the Seventieth Week. In contrast to those of the next class (who fall under Antichrist), this one contains the resurrection of all the martyrs slain throughout the history of the Church. And it is to be noted that it takes place at the beginning of the millennium, not several years or decades before it.

Under the Last Trumpet (11:15-18) the government of the world had passed to our Lord, so that He should exercise it in His kingly reign. His first acts were to raise and reward the prophets, the saints, and the God-fearers--the whole company of the redeemed of both Old and New Testaments, and to destroy the destroyers of mankind. Nothing particular had been said of the Antichrist and the Prince of this world--*the origo et fons* [origin and source]--of the world's sorrow. The visions of 19:11-20:1-6 describe Antichrist's overthrow, and the binding of Satan, and the joy that comes to the world. Nothing also had been in the earlier vision of the overcomers; nothing of those who had been faithful unto death. The vision of 20:1-6 does this. The blessedness of both is more particularly described. The survivors of the Great Tribulation sit upon thrones; it is what pre-tribs call "the Rapture." And the martyrs of all ages rise and become kings with Christ during His kingly rule.

Sir Robert Anderson is absolutely right when he says: "The facts and events brought before us in ch. 20:4 are but an episode within the far wider prophecy of ch. 11:15." ("Things to Come," vi., p. 101).

If it is borne in mind that the Last Trumpet--like the last seal (8:1) and the last plague (16:17)--brings us *up to* the Day of the Lord (Rev. 19:7-11 ff.) and the inauguration of the Messianic reign (20:1-6) and no farther, no doubt upon this point will remain. The first resurrection had already been described under the seventh or Last Trumpet. It embraced the whole of the redeemed that sleep as well as the recompense of those who do not die before the *Parousia*.

It was an essential part of the Apostolic hope that all the saints would share the kingly rule of Christ at His Appearing and Kingdom. In 1 Corinthians 6:2 we read: "Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world?" And the meaning has been well given by Plummer in the *ICC* on 1 Corinthians:

It is in the Messianic Kingdom that the saints will share in Christ's Reign over the created universe. "Judge" here does not here mean "condemn," and "the world" does not mean "the evil world." . . . It is not clear that *krinousin* here means "will pronounce judgment upon"; it is perhaps used in the Hebraic sense of "ruling." So also in Matt. 19:28. . . . The saints are to share in the final perfection of the Messianic Reign of Christ. They themselves are to appear

17 The expression is examined at greater length in the last chapter of this volume. A. T. Robertson says: "The reason for (*dia* and the accusative) John's presence in Patmos, naturally as a result of persecution already alluded to, not for the purpose of preaching there or of receiving the visions. See verse 2 for the phrase" vi, p. 290).

before the Judge (Rom. 14:10; 2 Tim. 4:1) and are then to share His glory (2 Tim. 4:8; Rom. 8:17; Dan. 7:22; Rev. 2:26-27; 3:21; 20:4) (p. 111).

This is exactly the doctrine of Revelation. At the Last Trumpet (11:18) the saints "appear before the Judge" (cf. 22:12). At 20:4a, which is immediately subsequent, they themselves sit on thrones and "share His glory."

In the light of Daniel 7:9, 13-14, 22, 27; 1 Corinthians 6:2, 4:8, 15:22-23; 2 Timothy 2:11-12; Luke 12:32, there can be no doubt that it is the whole company of the heavenly redeemed--the prophets, saints, and godly of Revelation 11:18--who are here raised or changed at the *Parousia*, to share the kingly rule of our Lord.

It is wrong, therefore, to assert, as some advocates¹⁸ and most critics of Premillennialism assert, that the first resurrection is limited to martyrs. Such an idea is foreign to all Scripture and is not required by our passage. In Luke 14:14 it is "the just" who are raised; in John 6:39, 44, it is "the Elect" (cf. Matt. 24:31); in John 6:40, "believers"; in 6:54, those who feed on the Son of Man; in 1 Thessalonians 4:16, "the dead in Christ"; in 1 Corinthians 15:23, "they that are Christ's"; while John teaches in Revelation 11:18 that the whole company of the redeemed will rise and be rewarded--and 20:4a presupposes it. We have only to interpret the latter Scripture in the larger context of the Apocalypse and the whole N.T.

In confirmation of our general view of Revelation 20:4, I append the words of two writers with large claims on the attention of students of prophecy. In the first extract Canon Faussett extends the denotation of those in the first class, and, in the last resort, he is right; but *me judice* [in my opinion], Zahn is the more accurate. In the "British Weekly" debate of 1887, Faussett wrote: "Three classes are designated to live and reign with Christ as 'priests of God and of Christ, a thousand years'; first, the saints caught up to meet and return with the Lord: 'they sat upon thrones'; secondly, the martyrs beheaded for the witness of Jesus; thirdly, 'such as worshipped not the beast' (world-power)." Zahn interprets in his *INT* (vol. 3, p. 400):

With this the *seventh vision* (19:11-21:8) is introduced. Here is at last represented the event which was by intimation anticipated as far back as 8:1, and again in 11:15-18 and 19:7, announced as being in the immediate future. Jesus Himself comes upon the scene of action in order that, after overcoming Antichrist and binding Satan, He may enter upon His kingly rule of a thousand years upon earth--a reign in which there shall participate not only the congregation who live to witness His coming, but also those who remained true till death, and who on that day are to be brought to life. Not till the millennium has expired do the general judgment, the destruction of death, and the creation of a new world take place.

Before leaving the Book of Revelation and its doctrine of the saints' resurrection, it is necessary to examine an argument that is confidently put forward by pre-tribs to prove their theory of a resurrection of the holy dead some years before the coming of Antichrist. It is drawn from the vision of heaven recorded in chapters 4-5 of the Apocalypse. Darby and other expositors contended that the Twenty-four Elders crowned and seated on thrones represent the saints of Israel and the Church, who are raised, transfigured, and raptured at the Second Coming. As the Elders are seen in heaven before the opening

18 Cf. de Burgh on the Apocalypse; Van Oosterzee, *N.T. Theology* and *The Person and Work of the Redeemer*.

of the seals, the blowing of the trumpets, and the outpouring of the vials, we are therefore to conclude that the Church will be raptured to heaven before the trials of the End-time.¹⁹

If the Twenty-four Elders represent the raptured saints in heaven before the Seventieth Week, why do we not see the saints themselves instead of twenty-four symbols? All pre-tribs admit that John was transported in spirit to the time that immediately precedes the Day of the Lord; to the time, moreover, when the Church, *ex hypothesi*, is already in heaven. Well, where is the Church? We do not see her but simply twenty-four heavenly beings. It will not do to say that the Apocalypse is a symbolical book, because in every other case where John sees the saints in heaven he sees the saints themselves, and not merely symbols or representatives. In chapter 6:9-11 we see the souls of the martyrs slain before the End-time; in 7:9-17 the innumerable multitude of martyrs who fall in the last tribulation under Antichrist and stand before the throne; in 15:2-3 those who had gained the victory over the beast and his image. Since, therefore, John in vision saw heaven when the Church, *ex hypothesi*, was already there, why did he not say, "I saw the saints of the Rapture and the first resurrection?" Why is it that he sees only twenty-four individuals?

Even if we admit that the Twenty-four Elders symbolize redeemed beings, we can have no certainty whom they represent. Indeed, on this hypothesis, there are about as many interpretations as there are Elders. Some take them as symbolical of the Christian ministry; others of the Patriarchs and Apostles; yet others of the O.T. believers; others again of the disembodied spirits in heaven. How are we going to decide among the rival theories? John has nowhere expressed his preference for any of them, so that any symbolical interpretation must be guesswork. Even pre-trib writers cannot agree among themselves. Newberry adopts the view that the Elders do not signify the Church at all but are "symbolic representatives of the saints of the former dispensation, from Adam and Abel to Pentecost" (p. 40). The Church which is Christ's Body this writer finds in the "four living creatures."

In view of all this uncertainty, I venture to think that to build an imposing superstructure on the identification of the Twenty-four Elders is extremely precarious.

If the Twenty-four Elders represent the saints previously raised and raptured to heaven before the Great Tribulation begins, why is it that no mention is made of these events in the verses preceding the vision of the Elders? Is it reasonable to believe that the most momentous event in the whole history of the race--the *Second* Coming of Christ followed by the resurrection of the sleeping saints and their rapture together with that of the surviving believers--should take place *and yet not a single syllable be recorded of it?*

[Even] if the reader can persuade himself, as C.H.M. (p. 47) does, that "no one can understand the book of the Apocalypse [Revelation] who does not see this." namely, the unrecorded coming, we cannot. For it compels us to believe that a volume that, as Burgh has said, is "the book of the second advent," does not treat of the *Second* Advent at all but of the third or fourth! The Secret Coming is so very secret that John passes it over in silence. The Church is on earth in Revelation 2-3, the Twenty-four Elders are in heaven at chapter 4; therefore, argues the theorist, the Advent of Christ took place between the two!

It is amusing to read the explanations that pre-tribs give of the failure of John to record the Secret

19 See the pre-trib commentaries generally. I do not give extracts here because the view is already well-known and needs only to be stated.

Coming and Rapture. One and all tell us that the Apocalypse is a "book of judgment," and, moreover, being "symbolical" does not lend itself to a plain declaration on the subject. "The judicial character of the Revelation," says Kelly in *The Revelation Expounded*," excludes that wondrous act" (p. 84). Indeed, one gets the idea that if the Rapture had been recorded in Revelation, our friends would have felt constrained to refer it to the Jewish Remnant, or some other company in their dispensational system. For to expect a clear statement of the Rapture of the *Church* in a book of prophecy and judgment is not at all an appropriate thing, so it is gravely argued! Yet it is these same writers who clutch, like drowning men at a straw, at the mere change of John's viewpoint in Revelation 4:1 as a type of rapture, and with eagerness deduce a pre-tribulation rapture from the ascension of the Manchild (12:5) nineteen hundred years ago! At one time a rapture in Revelation is quite unsuitable; at another it is an absolute necessity!

"But," our friends insist, "if you do not admit a rapture at Revelation 4:1, then you must confess that a rapture cannot be found at all in the Apocalypse. It is not mentioned at 1:7, 11:17-18, 19:6-20, 20:1-6."

Well, if no mention is made in the Apocalypse of the Rapture, [then] surely it is the part of a careful student to inquire whether the Christian hope is not portrayed under different imagery and expressions. And I reply that it is. If John does not describe the Rapture, it is because his heart is inditing [dictating] a far better matter. He is setting forth the *real* Christian hope, which is association with the King in His glory. To quote a pre-trib writer:

The Rapture is an incident of the Coming, spoken of, directly, *once* and only once; and then given as a new revelation to meet the sorrows of the Lord's bereaved. It is never repeated. This in itself has its value and beauty, as I have dwelt on elsewhere; but it may well be that, in our joy at the recovery of this truth, *we have given it a prominence and place not quite in accord with the prominence and place given it in the Scriptures. Personally, I have long so thought.*²⁰

Such is the admission of a friendly writer; and if such a damaging concession is made from within the camp, what must be the sober truth from without? It is not merely that these writers have given the Rapture "a prominence and place that is *not quite* in accord with the prominence and place given it in the Scripture," but that they have made a fetish of what is merely "an incident in the Coming"--of an incident, moreover, that has no prominence whatever in Scripture, since on this writer's own admission the Rapture is spoken of directly "once, and only once."

Christendom is like unto a man that was invited to go up a high tower that soared to heaven (five hundred cubits and ten) and from the pinnacle to see an expanse of fields wherein did move sheep, and oxen, and horses, and other beasts of the plain. And there was a pageant of waving grain, of trees, and streams and landscapes to make glad the heart of man. And behind was a chain of mountains over which the sun would rise on the morrow. Now that man, when he was told that the kingdom of nature was to be seen after a journey to the top and that the going [up] was thrilling, being a dull man [he] did like awake at night, saying, "Oh, the elevator!"

It is curious that pre-tribs have not seen that if the Rapture is our hope, as they insist, then we are forced to believe that Paul dealt with the Christian hope only in an odd verse or two in one Epistle, and the other Apostles in their writings never dealt with it at all. The glorious fifteenth chapter of 1

²⁰ F. C. Jennings: *The Time of the End*, p. 13.

Corinthians, where the highest glory of the redeemed is described, must henceforth be considered as not setting forth the Christian hope (as Bullinger latterly advocated) since it contains no reference to the Rapture. It is time that Bible students rid themselves of this obsession and came to distinguish between the Christian hope and a "mere incident of the coming."

Here then is our reply to those who tell us that we ought to see a rapture of the Church at Revelation 4:1, since otherwise the Apocalypse does not refer to our hope: The Rapture is not our hope but a mere "incident of the coming." Our hope is Christ the Lord (1 Tim. 1:1) and the heavenly glory that follows for His redeemed at the first resurrection. And these are so clear in the Apocalypse that he who runs may read.

At chapter 20:4-6 we read: "I saw thrones and they sat upon them." Who are these? Beyond all question, the saints to whom the sovereignty has been promised. And foremost among them, as Zahn says,²¹ will be "the congregation who live to witness His coming." It is "the saints transfigured at Christ's coming, who 'sit upon thrones.'"²² No doubt this class will include the large number of believers who shall have died a peaceful death, but it is composed primarily of "those who are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord" (1 Thess. 4:17). Here is the greatest misfortune of the whole system. The first resurrection is the grave of all the new theories of the Advent. The Apostle has condemned the new program by linking the first resurrection with the millennium; and for most people, at least, there can be no resurrection before "the first."

It is at 20:4, not 4:1, that the resurrection, rapture, and enthronement of the saints take place. An incidental point in support of this, and worth noticing, is that in Revelation 4:4, John, when he ascended to heaven, saw the Elders *already in a sitting position on the thrones*. There is no suggestion that the Elders had just sat down on them when John had the vision. From the language used, they may have been there since the creation, whereas the theory requires that they should have taken their thrones simultaneously with John's arrival in heaven. For the Apostle's rapture, according to the theory, symbolized the Rapture of the saints whom the Twenty-four Elders are supposed to represent. In chapter 20:4, however, the Seer saw the redeemed transferred from their places here below to the thrones that God had prepared for them.

That the opinion should arise that the Twenty-four Elders represent the saints risen and raptured is natural enough in view of the ancient readings of Revelation 5:9-10. For there we read the following song of the elders:

Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed *us* to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; and hast made *us* unto our God kings and priests; and *we* shall reign on the earth.

Certainly these words seem conclusive that here we have the redeemed. All this, however, is changed now. Both the R.V. and Amer. R.V., and every independent translation that has since appeared, have radically altered the reading and translation. The R.V. bids us read the song of the elders thus:

They sing a new song, saying, Worthy art thou to take the book, and to open the seals thereof:

21 INT, iii. p. 400.

22 Faussett, *The Second Advent* " (British Weekly)", p. 132.

for thou wast slain, and didst purchase unto God with thy blood men of every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation, and madest them to be unto our God a kingdom and priests; and they reign upon the earth.

It is pleasing, as well as just, to record Darby's absolute fairness in rejecting the old reading.

It is scarcely necessary to point out how the new translation has swept away completely whatever basis existed for making these Twenty-four Elders symbols of the heavenly redeemed; for not only do they not associate themselves with saved beings, but they hold themselves detached. They celebrate not their own redemption, but that of men--and of men moreover, gathered out of every nation and tribe and tongue and people, including Israel. In other words, they celebrate the salvation of the Ecclesia of God, for neither Scripture nor the new tradition knows of any other election saved out of all people prior to the Seventieth Week of Daniel. The natural inference from these consideration is that the Twenty-four Elders do not belong to the Church, and do not symbolize the Church of God. "The true reading," says Bullinger in his *Apocalypse*, "separates the singers from the Redeemed, and makes them heavenly beings who need no redemption, but who sing of the redemption wrought for others" (p. 243).

This brings us to a further point, that there is absolutely no evidence that these Twenty-four Elders are human beings at all or have any connection with the redeemed. A careful consideration of all the passages²³ where they are mentioned will warrant the following conclusions:

- (1) They are glorious heavenly beings taking the lead in the praise and worship of God.
- (2) They celebrate with joy each crisis in the onward march of events to the consummation of the Kingdom.
- (3) They seem never to have known the experience of conflict, sin, pardon and victory; yet they rejoice over the blessedness of those who have, and give glory to God for His grace in the victory of those who overcome.
- (4) They distinctly disassociate themselves from the prophets, saints, and godly of ages past who rise in the resurrection at the Last Trumpet and are rewarded. This passage indicates that *they* have not known death or service on earth.
- (5) Acting as assessors prior to the great consummation, they disappear from the scene when the new assessors--the great multitude of the heavenly redeemed--sit down on thrones and exercise judgment with the Lord Jesus at His coming. See 20:4; 1 Corinthians 6:2; 4:8; Matthew 19:28.

In view of these considerations we are warranted in concluding that these Twenty-four Elders are not redeemed beings. The following words from the commentary of Dr. Anderson Scott in *The Century Bible* give, in our view, the true interpretation:

The difficulty of finding any satisfactory explanation of these figures as representative human beings, suggests the question whether they belong to this order at all. . . . And since the other figures in this scene, the "living creatures," belong undoubtedly to the order of heavenly beings,

23 Rev. 4:4, 10; 5:5, 6, 8, 11, 14; 7:12, 13; 11:16; 14:3; 19:4.

antecedent probability lies with those who, like Spitta and Gunkel, maintain that the elders belong to this order--that they are angels. From Isaiah 24:23 we learn that the name of "elders" (R.V. "ancients") was given to certain angelic beings, who seem to have been conceived of as a kind of Divine consistory assembled in the presence of God (p. 163).

In a war-time article ("British Weekly," September 28th, 1916), the late Sir W. Robertson Nicoll paraphrased the view of that great expositor, A. B. Davidson, on the Sealed Book and the Twenty-four Elders:

These spectators are inspired by admiration and not by gratitude. The sacrificial work of Christ may have removed their perplexities and satisfied their longing. They may have felt the wave of stillness and peace that passed over the universe when the Lamb of God was slain and took away the sin of the world, but it is in the main a judgment from the outside that they form. Their praise of Christ is that He has redeemed men of every tribe and made them kings, and His work, in their estimation, is the central moral deed of the universe, qualifying Him to unveil the book of the Divine purposes.

We are not left to the Elders of Isaiah 24:23 for help in identifying the four and twenty Elders on thrones. Paul makes reference in two of his Epistles²⁴ to angelic Lords or Rulers, who exercise authority in the heavenlies. In Ephesians he tells us that Christ has been exalted "in the heavenly sphere, above all the angelic Rulers, Authorities, Powers, and Lords"; and in Colossians the Apostle informs us that all things, "including Thrones, angelic Lords, celestial Powers and Rulers, have been created by Him and for Him."

Now while it may be true that the Apostle in Colossians shows a "spirit of impatience with this elaborate angelology," as Lightfoot puts in in his *Colossians* (p. 150), his references to them in Ephesians "show that he regarded them as actually existent and intelligent forces."²⁵ Why, therefore, when John came to describe the vision he had of heaven, should we be surprised to find twenty-four "thrones" occupied by angelic lords who are yet in subjection to Christ? Indeed, we should rather be surprised, in view of other Scriptures, if he failed to mention them.

Bullinger also, I believe, gives the true interpretation of the Elders in the following words taken from his commentary on the Apocalypse:

These four and twenty elders are the princely leaders, rulers, and governors of Heaven's worship. They are kings and priests. They were not and cannot be the Church of God. They are seen already crowned when the throne is first set up. They are crowned now. They were not and are not redeemed, for they distinguish between themselves and those who are redeemed. See their song below (chap. 5:9-10 and R.V.). They speak of the time of "giving the reward to thy servants" (11:18), not to *us* servants. They are heavenly, unfallen beings, and therefore they are arrayed in white robes (p. 219).

This same view of the Twenty-four Elders is being taken by most of the great exegetes in Germany, Britain and the United States: Zahn, Charles, Peake, Moffatt, H. T. Andrews, and Beckwith. These, and

24 Eph. 1:11; Col. 1:16, Moffatt's translation.

25 Dean Armitage Robinson, *Ephesians*, p. 157.

in fact, pretty well all recent commentators outside pre-tribs, interpret the Elders as leaders in the praise and worship of heaven. The old interpretation is abandoned, except by those who need it as a prop to an edifice reared on insecure foundations.