

*SCRIPTURAL OBJECTIONS*

TO THE

DOCTRINE OF A PRE-TRIBULATION  
RAPTURE.

I. The first class of passages I shall notice are those that state that Christ remains in heaven till He comes to put down His enemies and set up His kingdom in power. This, of course, must be after the rise of Antichrist, whom He destroys at His coming; and as He is described as remaining in heaven till that time, it cannot be true that He descends previously and removes His Church by the alleged secret rapture.

"The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand till I make thy foes thy footstool." (Ps. cx.) "Jesus, whom the heavens must receive until the times of the restoration of all things, whereof God spake by the mouth of His holy prophets which have been since the world began."<sup>1</sup> (Acts iii. 21.) I have known this passage in Acts to be taken as meaning the eternal state, but such a view is untenable. It is the millennium which is the theme of the prophets, the eternal state being only hinted at.

"I am with you alway, even unto the consummation of the age." This promise implies the presence of Christians in the world till the end of the dispensation, and from the occasion on which it was spoken, plainly means Christ's presence with them by the spirit during the time of His session at the right hand of God.

II. The passages I shall next consider are those which describe the blessing of the righteous as not occurring till the time when the living wicked are punished.

"The harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels. As therefore the tares are gathered up and burned with fire; so shall it be in the end of the age. The Son of man shall send forth His angels, and they shall gather out of His kingdom all things that cause stumbling, and them that do iniquity, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire," &c. (Matt. xiii. 39-42.) Also in the parable of the gospel-net. "So shall it be at the end of the age; the angels shall come forth and sever the wicked from among the righteous, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire." (Matt. xiii. 49, 50.) The leading thought of both these parables seems to be the same under different aspects; viz., that though the true children of the kingdom are now intermingled with wicked professors of the name of Christ, there will one day be a severance of the two classes, and that this will occur at the coming of Christ, "at the consummation of the age." Now this teaching is directly contrary to the theory that the Church is to be taken away before the end of the age, and before the time of the punishment of the living wicked. I have quoted Christ's explanation of His own parable, and surely it is presumptuous to explain away the force of any of the expressions used by the divine Teacher in the exposition of His own words. The two parables from which I have quoted and that of the sower must be of especial importance, or specially liable to be misunderstood; for they are the only ones of which the detailed explanation is recorded. Now the expression "Gather first the tares," the force of which is not at all modified in Christ's explanation, and the words in the parable of the gospel-net, "severed from among the righteous,"

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<sup>1</sup> The quotations are all taken from the Revised Bible.

denote that wicked *professors* are to be removed from the earth before the righteous. Nothing could be more at variance with the pre-tribulation rapture theory than this. The word "first" is as difficult to explain satisfactorily in the light of this theory as the word "last" in 1 Cor. xv. 52--"at the last trump." No doubt many Christians have an impression on their mind that the Scripture states somewhere, that on Christ's descent to the air, the first event will be the rapture of the Church to meet the Lord. I confess I held this view myself until the statement of Christ's parable, which I felt I dare not put aside, caused me to attentively read the other passages that give some details respecting His coming. I found then, as indeed I ought to have taken for granted beforehand, that they were in perfect harmony with these words of Christ. The study of this branch of the subject opened up what was to me a new vein of truth, and my ideas as to the details of the second coming were cast into a different mould. As the view I am advocating respecting the order of events is not the usual one, I shall quote some other passages bearing upon the same point of time. "Behold, I tell 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." (1 Cor. xv. 52.) "The Lord Jesus Christ, who shall fashion anew the body of our humiliation, that it may be conformed to the body of His glory." (Phil. iii. 21.) "When Christ, who is our life, shall be manifested, then shall ye also with Him be manifested in glory." (Col. iii. 4.) "When He shall come to be glorified in His saints, and marvelled at in all them that believed." (2 Thess. i. 10.) "It is not yet made manifest what we shall be: we know that, if He shall be manifested we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him even as He is." (1 John iii. 2. Read also note at end.)

Now none of these passages speak of our being caught up at the first moment of Christ's appearing: but they all state, more or less directly, that we shall be glorified at that moment. 1 Thess. iv. I shall consider presently, as it is a most important passage. Many other passages may be cited to prove that the essential idea involved in obtaining the glory of God (which is ever put before us as the object of our hope, Rom. v. 2) is not the being caught up to meet the Lord, which takes place subsequently, but the being inwardly and outwardly conformed to Christ's image. This change is what is said to take place "in a moment," "at the last trump." The so-called rapture, though often implied, is only mentioned once in the Bible. Creation is waiting for the revealing of the sons of God, "the glory that shall be revealed to usward." "The liberty of the glory of the sons of God." "He also fore-ordained them to be conformed to the image of His Son." "Waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of the body." (Rom. viii.) "In this we groan, longing to be clothed upon with our habitation which is from heaven." (2 Cor. v. 2.) "The grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ." "That at the revelation of His glory [also] ye may rejoice with exceeding joy." "I am also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed." (1 Peter.) It may be asked, Why quote all these passages? Because I wish to point out that in none of them, nor in any that I know, is there a word out of keeping with the parable of the wheat and tares. All these passages speak of a change that takes place in the believer at the time of Christ's coming, revelation, or manifestation, different terms describing different aspects of the same event. None of them state that the rapture to the air is the first event. Now the parable states that the tares, the false professors, will be removed before the sons of God are gathered into the garner; but it never by a word implies that the righteous are not changed before this removal of the wicked; rather the contrary. Earlier in the parable a somewhat mysterious incident is told. The servants ask if it is their Lord's will that they should gather out the tares; and they are told "Nay, lest ye root up the wheat with them." They are told to wait till the time of harvest. Now this implies that at the time of harvest some change will have taken place that will preclude their making any mistake. "Then [τότε = at that time] shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father."

I shall now consider 1 Thess. iv. 16, 17. "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." I would like to remark here, though it is a point immaterial to my subject, that these words do not imply that the dead are raised before the living are changed. The passage states that the living will not precede the dead; *i.e.*, will not be caught up before the dead. I notice this as 1 Cor. xv. seems to imply that the resurrection of the dead and the change of the living take place at the same moment. The expression, "the dead in Christ shall rise first," only means that they shall rise before the living are caught up, and does not, taken with its context, imply that the resurrection of the dead and the change of the living are not effected simultaneously. Dead and living having been changed at the same moment, "then" both together shall be caught up. Now comes the point I want to notice particularly. The English word "then" has two distinct meanings, and there are two different Greek words rendered by it in the New Testament--"τοτε"="at that time"; and "ἔπειτα," the "then" of succession "afterwards." For instance, the former word occurs in 1 Cor. xv. 54, and the latter in 1 Cor. xv. 5-7, where successive events are related. Now, though this word only implies that one event is subsequent to another, and does not necessarily signify that there is an interval, it certainly admits of there being one. For instance, in 1 Cor. xv. 23, the word "ἔπειτα" (then) covers an interval of more than 1800 years; therefore, this being the word in 1 Thess. iv. 17, the thought is not contradicted that there may be a brief space between the glorification of the saints and their removal from the earth to meet the Lord in the air. I refer to the brief moment that must elapse while the tares are being gathered out of the field.

2 Thess. i. speaks of Christ being "marvelled at in them that believed," evidently from the context meaning that His glory seen in them will excite astonishment. The word "admire" in the Authorized Version, implying rather a pleasurable emotion, is not a good rendering, as the Greek word does not mean this. The sight of these glorified ones suddenly "shining forth" in their midst, some of whom perhaps they had just before been persecuting and accounting as sheep for the slaughter, will evoke no pleasurable feelings, but, on the contrary, dismay and anguish on the part of the wicked. (See Judges v. 31.) There is a striking metaphor in Isaiah which is perhaps intended to give us an idea of the spectacle which the earth will present during the interval which must elapse while the tares are being "first" gathered out of the harvest-field. I refer to the words in Isaiah xxvi., "Thy dead shall live, as My dead body shall they arise," inferring Christ to the Head of that body. "Awake and sing, ye that dwell in dust: for thy dew is as the dew of herbs." The image is that of a dew-bespangled field of herbs glistening under the morning sun. All over the earth the saints, whether called forth from the dust, or changed without death, shall, like sparkling dewdrops, be lit up with the glory of Christ, and transfigured by His healing beams, shall shine forth with dazzling brightness. (See Matt. xvii. 2; Luke ix. 29.)

Perhaps it is to this critical moment that Rev. iii. 9 refers: "Behold, I give of the synagogue of Satan, of them that say they are Jews, and they are not, but do lie; behold, I will make them to worship before thy feet, and to *know* that I have loved thee."

The following passages are also confirmatory of the view that the blessing of the righteous synchronizes with the punishment of the wicked. "As as it came to pass in the days of Noah, even so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man. They ate, they drank, they married . . . until *the day* that Noah entered into the ark, when the flood came, and destroyed them all. . . .

But *in the day* that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone," &c. (Luke xvii. 26-29.) Here Christ compares the destruction of the wicked which took place at the times of Noah and Lot to that which will occur at His coming. In both cases he draws attention to the fact that it occurred on the same day on which the righteous were delivered by God, and adds, "so shall it be also in the day that the Son of man is revealed." Other parables, as those of the talents<sup>2</sup> and wedding garment, teach the same truth; viz., that the righteous will remain on the earth till the time of the punishment of nominal professors.

2 Thess. i. 6-8 states distinctly that the persecuted saints will enter into rest at the time when judgments are poured out on their persecutors and the rejecters of the gospel at Christ's revelation in glory. If the doctrine of the apostle had been, that the saints were to be removed from the earth some years before Christ's appearing to execute vengeance, nothing could be more misleading than his statement, "And to you who are troubled rest with us, *when* the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance," &c.

III. The third class of scriptures which I shall notice are those which intimate that the saints are not glorified till after the great tribulation has taken place. "Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun shall be darkened . . . and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn when they shall see the Son of man coming. . . . And He shall send forth His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other." (Matt. xxiv.) This passage states in the plainest terms that the elect are gathered to Christ at His coming in glory after the tribulation. It has been objected that there is no mention of resurrection here, and therefore it is the gathering of Israel from different parts of the earth that is spoken of. This suggestion is contradicted by Isaiah lxvi.; the gathering of those Israelites who shall be in distant parts of the earth is there described. Their restoration evidently will occur, not in a supernatural way at the moment of the Lord's appearing, but subsequently those that are spared of the nations that come against Jerusalem shall go out as messengers, and the Jews will then travel to the land by the ordinary means of locomotion. As to there being no mention of resurrection, the word is not used in many passages in the epistles which are always understood as referring to that time. Who would think that the gathering unto Christ spoken of in 2 Thess. ii. 1 was not the rapture, because of the word resurrection not occurring in the passage or indeed in the epistle, though it is replete with reference to the subject? This objection therefore is most frivolous. Mr. Bennett, in his excellent little book on the Second Advent (Nisbet and Co., Berners Street, London), makes some good remarks while protesting against the Judaizing of Matt. xxiv. He writes, "The proof afforded by this chapter is so convincing" (as to the falsity of the pre-tribulation rapture theory) "that it may be well asked, Can any reply be attempted? There is one way, and one only, of evading the force of the conclusions drawn from this prophecy. It is asserted that Christ spoke to the disciples as Jews, not as Christians, and that consequently the chapter had nothing to do with the Church, but is limited in its scope to the Jews. This assertion shows to what desperate straits the advocates of their theory are driven. The closing verses of Matt. xxiii. seem expressly designed to warn us against such an extraordinary idea. Christ there closes His testimony to Israel. He 'went out,' and on the mount of Olives--outside the city--He instructed His disciples. But further, if we are told that this chapter is Jewish, why not extend the principle? Is John xiv. Jewish? If not, why not? The apostles to whom it was spoken were all Jews. I have just as much right to say that John xiv.-xvii. is Jewish; *i.e.* not for the Church, as Matt. xxiv. In truth we can hardly believe that such a theory could have been started had it not been for the maintenance of a system."

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2 In this parable the Lord is described as returning "after a long time."

There are many other things in Matt. xxiv. which bear on the point, but I shall not refer to them; for if the passage is received at all, the verses I have quoted are fatal to the secret rapture doctrine. Verses 26, 27 seem especially intended to guard the saints against being disturbed by this doctrine, or one of a similar kind.

1 Cor. xv. 54 is quoted from Isaiah xxv., and is introduced by the statement, "Then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written." Therefore our resurrection synchronizes with the Lord's appearing to Israel *and* the taking away of "the veil that is spread over all nations." I shall quote the verse with its beautiful context, "He hath swallowed up death for ever; and the Lord God will wipe away tears from off all faces; and the reproach of His people shall He take away from off all the earth: for the Lord hath spoken it. And it shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for Him, and He will save us," &c. (Isaiah xxv. 8, 9.) Therefore, 1 Cor. xv. is conclusive also as to the resurrection of the saints being after the tribulation. Though our hope differs from Israel's hope, because ours is heavenly glory and theirs earthly, we have in a sense the same hope--the appearing in glory of our great God and Saviour. (Titus ii. 13; Isa. xxxv. 4.) Hence Paul before Agrippa avows his hope to be identical with that of Israel. (Acts xxvi. 7.)

In 1 Cor. xv. we are also told that the resurrection takes place at the last trump. Now as there are seven trumpets mentioned in the Apocalypse, the most natural meaning of this statement is that this resurrection trump is either the seventh, or, as I am inclined to believe, one subsequent to it. It is called the trump of God in 1 Thess. iv., and is therefore identical with the trump of Zech. ix. 14--"And the Lord shall be seen over them, and His arrow shall go forth as the lightning; and the Lord God shall blow the trumpet, and shall go with the whirlwinds of the south." From Isaiah xxvii. 13 we also learn that this trumpet will be recognized by the refugees from the Antichrist's oppression, who are hiding in the neighbouring land of Assyria, and that they will know the joyful sound as the signal of their deliverance.

While noticing the word "last," I would draw attention to the reiterated declaration of Christ in John vi. 39, 40, 44, 54, that the believer will be raised on the last day. This expression ought to preclude the idea that believers are to be taken away some years before the end of the dispensation.

We are many times told that we are in "the last days," and this expression, also, is irreconcilable with the theory that the Church is to be taken away, and then there is to be another supplementary dispensation between its alleged removal and the coming of Christ in glory.

Finally, in the vision of the glorified and enthroned saints in Rev. xx. 4, John saw "such as worshipped not the beast, neither his image, and received not the mark upon their forehead and their hand." And this is declared to be the "first resurrection." I do not lay stress on the part of the Book in which this vision occurs, though I believe that has significance, but on the fact that saints are seen by John glorified who have been through the tribulation under antichrist, coupled with the declaration that "this is the first resurrection."

It has been said that though the Church is caught up before the tribulation, that the semi-Christian believers who, according to this theory, come into existence after the rapture, are raised at the commencement of the millennium, at least those of them that have been martyred. This vision, they say, pictures the result of the last act of the first resurrection. But by thus

theorizing they add to the Scripture. It is not said this is the last act of the first resurrection, but *this is the first resurrection*.

The way in which this, as well as many other passages that I have drawn attention to are explained, in a sense quite contrary to their natural meaning by this school who profess to be literalists, proves that

"Prejudice has neither eye nor ear."

It would be well for those who expound Scripture, if they would keep before their minds Prov. xxx. 5, 6--"Every word of God is purified: He is a shield unto them that trust in Him. Add thou not to His words, lest He reprove thee, and thou be found a liar." Better for us to lay aside our fondly-cherished theories than, in the manner of Origen, as described by Mosheim, to explain away the truth "because it is incompatible with our favourite sentiments."

Edmund Shackleton, *Will the Church Escape the Great Tribulation?* 3rd ed. (Aylesbury: Hunt, Barnard & Co., n.d.)