

THE DEAD IN CHRIST WILL RISE FIRST

by T. B. Wilkinson

We are told that Paul, in at least two passages, bears out the idea of a first and second resurrection, in both of which righteous people will have a part. There is nothing in either passage cited that indicates such an idea. It is also said that one of these resurrections comes at the beginning of the millennium, and the other at the close, and there will also be wicked people in the last resurrection.

Those who thus argue already had the idea in their mind, and must make a vivid use of the imagination to find the least particle of support for it in the passages. Even the great Doctor Brents seems to have fallen for this error, and devotes an entire page in his valuable book (*The Gospel Plan of Salvation* – ww) to bolster it. Doctor Brents was a great writer, and a great thinker, but his arguments on this point are weak.

First Thessalonians 4:16-17 is the first passage. "The Lord himself shall descend from heaven, with a shout, and the voice of an arch angel, and with the trump of God; and the dead in Christ shall be raised first; then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them to meet the Lord in the air."

"The dead in Christ shall rise first." They have to cut the passage off at this point, and ignore the rest of it, to get their idea of a first resurrection, and that is childish and puny. Paul did not cut it off there. What is he talking about? First of what? First of the two classes. The apostle is writing about the dead in Christ, and we who are alive and remain. The dead will be raised before the living are changed, then the two will rise up together to meet the Lord in the air, and so to ever be with the Lord. "We which are alive and remain shall not prevent," or go before, those who are dead, or asleep. The dead in Christ will be raised first, then the living will be changed, and the two classes will arise to meet the Lord at one and the same time.

I am surprised that any man who can read simple English can read this passage and hold that it implies two resurrections. It is inexcusable, and no man will do it who is not blinded by a theory. There are no thousand years intervening between the two events. The dead will be raised and the living will be changed, but they go up to meet the Lord at the same moment. Let Paul explain it himself, if some further explanation is needed. "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". (I Cor. 15:51,52)

This is the same trump, the same resurrection, and the same change of living saints, and it is at the last trump. Two events take place, the dead are raised, the living are changed. And the dead were raised first, and this is the plain teaching from both passages.

But they make a worse blunder on the next passage. First Corinthians 15:23. "But every man in his own order: Christ the first fruits, afterwards they that are Christ's at His coming." Who are the first fruits? They answer that it must be the saints raised at the beginning of the millennium. Then who are the ones who will be Christ's at his coming? And will he not come before the millennium? Yes, they say the Lord will come before the millennium, and since the ones who have part in the last resurrection will be his at his coming they will be his when he comes for the millennium.

Yes, they say he will be here all through the millennium, therefore, he comes before it, and these last saints will be given him at that time. Then you must have the first fruits raised too quick, before he comes, and before the millennium. Where did we learn about that? If he came at the time the first fruits were raised, and then comes back for those who are his at his coming, a thousand years later, or at the end of the millennium, that makes too many comings. The Bible only mentions one return of the Lord to this earth, a second coming. This third coming is not mentioned by any of the inspired writers, and must be a bad guess.

But why speculate when Paul tells us that Christ himself was the first fruits of them that slept, that is of the dead (see verse 20). If Christ is the first fruits, and Paul said He was, then where do these brethren get these millions of saints they assume will be raised at the beginning of the millennium, and a thousand years before he comes the second time?

Christ was the first fruits of them that slept, and the saints will be given to Him at His coming. What coming? His second coming, the only personal coming the New Testament mentions, and in the two passages the apostle tells us just how it will come about. The dead will be raised first, then the living will be changed, and together they will rise up to meet the Lord in the air.

— *Bible Banner*
May, 1944