

self 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 which are alive, and remain, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord."

The coming of the Lord Jesus Christ is mentioned in every chapter in both these epistles; and is spoken of as the solace and comfort of his faithful followers. In the second epistle, chapter ii. 8, this coming is placed before the destruction of the man of sin in the temple of God, and is made the cause and means of that destruction. The terms used in the passage *epiphancia* and *parousias*, signify a *visible* and *personal* coming; and, when used in scripture, always denote the *actual presence* of the person or thing of which they speak. They never signify anything unreal or figurative. The same coming of our Lord, which is predicted, 1 Tim. iv. 14, 2 Tim. iv. 1, Titus ii. 13, 1 Cor. xv. 23, 1 Thess. ii. 19, and in other passages is the coming of which the apostle speaks in the passage before us. Whatever, then, we may understand the man of sin to signify; or whatever time we may understand to be the time of his destruction, it is a *revealed fact* that his destruction will only be effected by the *visible and personal coming of the Lord Jesus Christ*. To this coming of our Lord, the apostle directs the attention of the Thessalonians, as an antidote to their grief under the sorrows of bereavement. When their Lord comes, he will bring his saints, who have slept in him, with him. Then he will raise the pious dead, and change the saints who shall then be living; and both shall be caught up to meet the Lord in the air, and to be forever with him. The man of sin, in 2 Thess. ii. 1-8, and the beast, Dan. vii. 11, are one and the same person; his destruction, we see by the latter passage, takes place before the establishment of the kingdom of Christ in the earth; that destruction is only effected by the visible and personal coming of our Lord Jesus Christ; and the resurrection of the saints takes place at the time of that coming. We are, therefore, led to the conclusion, that the coming of Christ in glory, the destruction of the man of sin, and the *First Resurrection*, are anterior to the kingdom of Christ in the world. To this period the attention of the saints at Thessalonica was directed, as the time when the sorrows of separation would be forgotten, and when families and friends, now divided by death, should be united in ineffable glory and felicity.

Heb. xi. 32-35.—"And what shall I say more? for the time would fail me to tell of Gideon, and of Barack, and of Sampson, and of Jephthæ, of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets; who, through faith, subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness,

obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again; and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a *BETTER RESURRECTION*."

The better resurrection, which was the hope of these believers and sufferers, can only be that *from amongst* the dead, so frequently mentioned in scripture, when one part of the dead are raised from the grave, and the other part are left, for the time being, under the empire of death. The Holy Scriptures not only teach us that this resurrection is connected with the attainment of glory and felicity, but that it involves priority in the order of time. This fact has been found so frequently in the passages above mentioned, that it seems superfluous to insist upon it here. The only point which demands notice, is, that this better resurrection was the object of the faith and hope of the faithful saints of God from the earliest ages. Why was it that they were contented to wander like exiles, banished from friends and home? Why was it, that in trial and suffering, they stood firm, and stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, and refused deliverance, when subjected to torture? The answer given by the inspired apostle is, *that they might obtain a better resurrection*.

Rev. xx 4-6.—"And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years. But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished: this is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power; but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years."

In this passage we have two resurrections, and a thousand years intervening between them. Those who share in the first resurrection are divided into two classes—they who had suffered a violent death in maintaining the truth of God, and they who had preserved their profession of Christianity untainted by the abominations of the beast. These were raised from amongst the dead a thousand years before the rest of the dead; and, during this period, were exalted to glory and dignity, and reigned with Christ. These happy characters are pronounced *blessed* and *holy*; over them the second death has no power.

Their happiness is complete. They are set apart for the enjoyment of peculiar honours and privileges. And they are established in felicity and glory. Their glory differs in nothing but *degrees*, from the glory of Christ their Lord; and their felicity differs in nothing but *measure*, from that of the Only-Begotten of the Father. In this life they *suffered* with him;—now they *reign* with him. Once they endured the loss of all things, and counted life itself not dear in his service: now they are raised from the dead, tread the ashes of the wicked under their feet, and with their Lord take possession of the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven. They were formerly the subjects of persecution, imprisonment and death for the sake of their Saviour; now with him they reign in the earth, have power over the nations, and rule them with a rod of iron. This is only the beginning of their joy. They reign with him a thousand years. Satan is then loosed for a season, and permitted to seduce some of the nations of the earth into rebellion and destruction; after this he is cast into the lake of fire, and rendered incapable of seducing and destroying any more. Then cometh the end. The rest of the dead, small and great, are raised and judged; and death and hell, and whosoever are not found written in the book of life, are cast into the lake of fire. A change now takes place in the mode of Divine government. The earth becomes the subject of a second generation. At its former renewal, it was made a scene of happiness and holiness under the administration of Christ and his saints; now it is raised to a higher state of perfection and glory, and made the residence of Deity itself: "Behold the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain; for the former things are passed away." The Son now delivers up the kingdom to the Father; and the supreme government is administered immediately by God himself. Then those who previously reigned with Christ a thousand years, shall reign with both THE FATHER AND THE SON FOR EVER AND EVER. The honour of thus reigning in perpetual glory, will be the distinguishing reward of those who have been faithful to their Lord, during his bodily absence from his church; and especially of those who counted not their life dear, that they might finish their course with joy. This is the blessedness of him who hath part in the *FIRST RESURRECTION*.

There are many other passages in which the First Resurrection is either stated, or