

"Priests Of God And Of Christ"

Br. Eugene Burns

John opens his message of Jesus Christ with the prayer, "To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen." (Revelation 1:5, 6) This thought is not introduced and forgotten subsequently in this book—it is one of the great truths of Revelation.

The exaltation of the saints is confirmed in Revelation 2:26, 27, "He who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, I will give him power over the nations and he shall rule them with a rod of iron, as when earthen pots are broken in pieces, even as I myself have received from my Father; and I will give him the morning star. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." Again the grand theme of exaltation over the nations is promised the overcomers, powers of judgment, even powers that Christ has already received from His Father. Whatever else, this clearly affirms the Church shares in judgment and power over the nations before the Kingdoms of this world are overthrown. It is authority exercised in righteous anger and violence, dashing the nations to pieces like a potter's vessel.

Again "He who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I myself conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne. He who has an ear, let him hear what the spirit says to the churches." (Revelation 3:21, 22) There the promise is extended to each overcomer to share in Jesus' throne without limit of time. The throne to be shared is one occupied by Jesus since His exaltation above all principalities and powers, and every name that is named. So exalted is this throne of Jesus, that in Hebrews we read, "But of the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever, the righteous scepter is the scepter of thy kingdom." And to strengthen the duration of Jesus' regal power, we read further, "Thou, Lord, didst found the earth in the beginning, and heavens are the work of thy hands; they will perish, but thou remainest; they will all grow old like a garment, like a mantle thou wilt roll them up, and they will be changed. But thou art the same, and they years shall never end." But to what angel has he ever said, Sit at my right hand, till I make thy enemies a stool for thy feet?" (Hebrews 1:10-13) The duration of Jesus' rule "will never end." We probably are well agreed here that this is the correct interpretation of those words of Hebrews—yes, Jesus' kingship and rule are forever.

Paul certainly knew that Jesus would be a priest and king forever. He wrote, "For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him; and to him Abraham apportioned a tenth part of everything. He is first, by translation of his name, king of righteousness, and then he is also king of Salem, that is, king of peace. He is without father or mother or genealogy, and has neither beginning of days nor end of life, but resembling the Son of God he continues a priest for ever. . . ." This becomes even more evident when another priest arises in the likeness of Melchizedek, who has become a priest, not according to a legal requirement concerning bodily descent but by the power of an indestructible life. For it is witnessed of him, "Thou art a priest for ever, after the order of Melchizedek." "And if you still have trouble accepting this, then we also have God's oath for it. "And it was not without an oath. Those who formerly became priests took their office without an oath, but this one was addressed with an oath, "The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind, Thou art a priest for ever." (Hebrews 7:15-24, Rev. Standard Vers.)

This Melchizedek priesthood is the priesthood and royalty we are invited to share. Jesus does not hold two regal offices. He holds one regal office, invested with all power in heaven and in earth—priest and King of God. It is all inclusive.

The church also shares a regal position in God's eternal purposes. In the throne scene of Rev. 4, the 24 elders have 24 golden crowns, which they cast before the throne of God, saying "Thou art worthy, Lord, to receive glory and honor and power; for thou hast created all things and for thy pleasure they are and were created." Revelation 4:10, 11.

It is my understanding that the 24 Elders represent the 24 courses of the priesthood—foreordained in God's eternal purpose. These foreordained offices of the priesthood, God planned to represent Him, to be the offices through which his blessings will flow forever. From these offices will come the blessing and honor and glory that God has to bestow. These offices, at the time of John's vision still were not occupied by the personality of the saints, though some saints, like Paul, had already proved worthy of office, and were qualified to speak for one of the offices (elders) in Revelation 7:13. The 24 offices of the priesthood (the 24 elders) are foreordained. But the persons who fill these offices are not foreordained. They are ordained and elected during the Gospel Age.

Hence the saints sing in the presence of the 24 elders (Revelation 14:3). Those ordained of God to be kings and priests sing in the presence of the foreordained offices of the priesthood which they shall shortly occupy. For soon that which was foreordained and those who have been ordained will become one, and the saints will be installed in office for the ages of the ages. Those who were "called for the praise of His glory" will use their office vigorously, bringing glory and honor and blessing to Him that sitteth upon the throne.

Why 24 elders? David was denied the right of building the temple of God. But he made preparations for it. In 1 Chronicles 24:1-19 we see how he divided the priesthood into 24 courses to serve in order when the temple, the church in its permanent condition is complete and ready for service.

If our understanding of the 24 elders, is correct, it would indicate the priesthood of glory is considered in the permanent picture of the throne scene. It is God's eternal purpose that the church should reign. The foreordained priesthood describes its office saying, "Thou art worthy to take the scroll and to break its seals, for thou wast slain and by thy blood didst purchase for God men of every tribe and language, people and nation; thou hast made of them a royal house, to serve our God as priests; and they shall reign upon earth." (Revelation 5:9, 10) The reign on earth is not stated to limit the area of their reign, but to show the scope of this reign will include earth.

Nothing in this scripture would indicate the church's royalty and priestliness end at any point—the scriptures preclude this. So does God's own oath preclude an end to the royalty and priestliness of the Church. Incidentally, without being repetitious, for those who may not be aware of the understanding that the 24 elders represent offices of the priesthood foreordained in God's eternal purpose, we feel it important to add for clarification that when God's foreordained purpose will be accomplished and those ordained by the Holy Spirit fill the foreordained office, then the person or personality of the priests and kings will be added to the foreordained office. This fulfillment of God's purpose will occur when the Church is exalted to the glory of office, plane K on the chart.

We continue in the throne scene of Rev. 5. The question is raised in this chapter—"Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?" The one to serve in God's eternal purpose, to represent the throne, to open the seals made by the living God had to be worthy!

Jesus is identified in this throne scene. He received the divine scroll sealed with seven seals, for He was worthy. The four living ones and the 24 elders (or courses of the foreordained priesthood) sing the new song first heard here, saying, "Worthy art thou to take the scroll and to open its seals, for thou wast slain and by thy blood didst ransom men for God from every tribe and tongue and hast made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on earth." (Revelation 5:9, 10) Again, a class is identified who shall, when their persons are added to the foreordained priesthood, shall become a kingdom and priests unto God. Their regal standing and royalty is in the house of God, not the house of men. They are priests of God, an everlasting priesthood who shall always represent him in spiritual matters. Of course, the main part of our concern at this point in history is for those for whom the Lamb was slain—those whom God So loved that he gave his only begotten son, that whoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life. Hence the beautiful words, "And they shall reign on the earth."—Revelation 5:10.

In this same scene the living ones, the foreordained offices of the priesthood represented in the elders, the angels numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, are heard saying, "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!" But to show the majesty and glory that surrounds Jesus, in the same breath he is identified with Him that sitteth on the throne, "To him who sits upon the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might for ever and ever. And the four living creatures said, "Amen!" and the elders fell down and worshipped." Can there be more exalted language than this to show the regal sovereignty of our beloved Master? Without controversy this text shows that he enters into the glory and honor and might of God Himself, and his position is sealed by the four attributes of God, who add their final and unalterable "Amen" —so be it.

Can anyone doubt from these words that Jesus is king and Lord? This parallels Ephesians 1:19-22, "What is the immeasurable greatness of his power in us who believe, according to the working of his great might which he accomplished in Christ when he raised him from the dead and made him sit at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come; and he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all." We are going into the matter purposely to refresh our minds.

Somewhere, brethren are getting the idea that Jesus reign for only 1,000 years. Hence there is an extravagant anxiety to make every last minute of his reign glorious. Equally pressing has been the thought that the church only reign for a thousand years and no wonder that there is such great concern lest some members fail to get a full showing in the reign.

I call you to witness in the face of all the scriptures read to this point—there is no limit to the reign of Christ and his Church. We have God's own oath for it that they are priests forever after the order of Melchizedek. If God's throne is eternal, then the Christ shares in his reigning house, and they will without a scripture to the contrary, remain His priesthood forever.

Revelation 11:15-17, "Then the 7th angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, 'The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever.' And the twenty-four elders who sit on their thrones before God fell on their faces and worshipped God, saying, 'We give thanks to thee, Lord God Almighty, who art and who wast, that thou hast taken thy great power and begun to reign.' The nations raged, but thy wrath came, and the time for the dead to be judged, for rewarding thy servants, the prophets and saints, and those who fear thy name, both small and great, and for destroying the destroyers of the earth."

If we are living in the days of the sounding of the 7th trump, if the Lord has returned with the voice of the archangel and the trump of God, if the time of harvest has begun when he sends his angels with a trumpet to gather his elect together from the four corners of the earth and from one end of heaven to the other, if the dead in Christ have been raised at the sounding of the last trump, and if the jubilee trump has sounded, then indeed, the kingdoms of this world have become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ. This is not an event of the future but an event which we Bible Students have born witness to before the world, in this time of harvest, that the Kingdoms of this world have become the Kingdoms of the Lord and of His Christ. Such is the message begun by Bro. Russell that has gone forth and is still going forth by the angels gathering his elect from one end of heaven to the other.

Is it not strange that suddenly brethren now find it difficult to believe that the reign of Christ has begun from any standpoint? If indeed this message is still future, then we have borne false witness to the world, the anger of the nations is not explainable in any way in relation to the exercise of our Lord's regal authority. One point

more emerges—let us not forget it, the reign spoken of here is not a limited one, but the messages comes through loud and clear— "He shall reign for ever and ever" (for the ages). No thousand year limit, remember that!

The mystery of God is finished during the sounding of the seventh trump, not before—Revelation 10:7, "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 to his servants the prophets." The 7th trump cannot begin after the Church is glorified. Revelation 14:1-5, "Then I looked, and lo, on Mount Zion stood the Lamb, and with him 144,000 who had his name and his Fathers name written on their foreheads. I heard a voice from heaven like the sound of many waters and like the sound of loud thunder: the voice I heard was like the sound of harpers playing on their harps, and they sing a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and before the elders (the saints singing before the offices they shall occupy). No one could learn that song except the 144,000 who had been redeemed from the earth. It is these who have not defiled themselves with women, for they are chaste; it is these who follow the Lamb wherever he goes; these have been redeemed from mankind as firstfruits for God and the Lamb, and in their mouth no lie was found, for they are spotless." Contemporaneous with this announcement is an-other announcement that "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great." This proclamation of Babylon's fall was in 1878.

Zion is the ruling hill of Jerusalem. It is the seat of governing authority. Christ occupies this seat, and associated with him in this picture is the 144,000. We do not believe that the 144,000 identified with Jesus in this scene were all called, chosen and faithful—God speaks of those things which are not as though they were. Many crowns have been lost and gained in this interim. None the less, the 144,000 are shown in this picture of the Lamb on Mt. Zion. Psalm 2 reads, "yet have I set my king on Zion, my holy hill." This is not something yet to occur. It is history. If we cannot understand prophecy when it is fulfilled, then we are in trouble.

Remember the message of Revelation 11 is part of the third woe, embodying the wrath of God against Babylon and against the nations. To place the starting point into the future is to have the third woe begin after the glorification of the church, in the period some look upon as Jesus' reign of peace. Then this scripture would fall into a contradiction with subsequent Revelation declarations that would refer to Christ's reign as a 1,000 year period. This

scripture says he shall reign for ever and ever or for the ages. To place this picture into the future is to say that the 144,000 will be identified with Christ on Zion's hill in the future, is to put the whole story of chapter 14 future, which would place the harvest future, after the saints are glorified, the vine of the earth would still remain unharvested after the saints are glorified, and we would be expected to overcome the beast and its image on the other side of the veil. This is all squarely incompatible with present truth understanding.

Revelation 17 is concerned with the John class understanding the judgment of the great whore. Without attempting to go into the details of this chapter, without any chance of disagreement we would certainly all affirm the point of climax is reached when the ten horns and the beast make "war on the Lamb, and the Lamb overcomes them, for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings, and those that are with him are called and chosen and faithful." (Revelation 7:13, 14) Not only is he King and Lord, but it is clear that he is exercising this kingship and lordship, this is the reason for his victory. Here is proof that Christ exercises his kingly office before Babylon is destroyed. Those who cannot see Jesus reigning until after Satan is bound are going to be hard pressed to explain Babylon's warfare against the King of Kings How can they war against a King who is not a king? who cannot be a king until his reign begins by and by?

Revelation 19:11-16, "Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! He who sat upon it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems; and he has a name inscribed which no one knows but he himself. He is clad in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God. And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, followed him on white horses. From his mouth issues a sharp sword with which to smite the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron; he will tread the wine press of the fury of his wrath of God the Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has a name inscribed, King of kings and Lord of lords."

I call you to witness that the King of kings and Lord of lords, in righteousness, judges and makes war. On his head are many diadems or crowns. The leopard-like beast had no crowns on its heads, only on its horns. But this King is invested with authority, all authority in heaven and earth. This king is a warring king, his raiment is dipped in blood. This king has a war on his hands. Against him are the leopard-like beast, and guess who is with

him—the false prophet. The kings of the earth and their armies too, join in battle against the King of kings. To date the reign of Christ after Satan is bound is to be at variance with the substance of Rev. 19. The beast is taken, and with him the false prophet, and they are cast alive into the lake of fire. Surely, only the King of kings has such power as to do this. Nor is this warfare unrelated to the harvest period. Rev. 17 starts on the note of taking the saints into the wilderness condition to show them the judgment of the great whore. Rev. 19 is a similar picture concentrating on showing how our King and Lord dispatches the beast and false prophet. The lesson here is no different from that of 1 Timothy 6:15 where we read, "Who in his time will show who is that blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords." There must be a manifestation of our Lord's sovereignty before the world will accept Him as their king.

It is not until the leopard-like beast is destroyed along with the false prophet, and after the Lord slays his opponents with the Words of his mouth that the great King and Lord is triumphant. This is the point where organized opposition is destroyed. This does not mean that all enemies are put down, but it does mean an end to the great organizations that have opposed His authority. In 1 Corinthians 15 we recognize that it will take the duration of his reign to actually put down all enemies. "He must reign until he has put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death." Rev. 20 brings us to the triumphal entry of the conquering King taking place. Here in the triumphal march, the Devil is, as it were, being handled as any vanquished king—in chains, and incarcerated in the abyss. In that the Sinaitic does not sustain the thought that Satan is bound a thousand years of Revelation 20:2. We doubt that he is. While it might be there, we feel no manuscript carries the same weight on Revelation as does the Sinaitic, as it is by far the oldest. Even if it is authentic (and we must concede this as a possibility), it would have to be understood in terms of the duration of the thousand years, as obviously, the King was ruling and reigning before Satan was defeated. It is the rule of our King that clearly resulted in the destruction of the organized opposition to his reign.

Revelation 20:4, which I will read from the Sinaitic, "And I saw thrones and they sat upon them and matter for judgment was given to them and the souls of those having been beheaded on account of the witness of Jesus and on account of the Word of the God whoever did not worship the wild beast nor the image of him and did not receive the mark upon the forehead and upon the hand of them and they lived and reigned with the Christ 1,000 years."

This is clearly a throw-back to the Papal beast which had power to make war on the saints and to conquer them and authority was given it over every tribe and people and tongue and nation, and all who dwell on the earth. Here was the rule of the beast, and then subsequently the image of the beast joined in the reign of sin and oppression. They formed & triumphate of the beast, the false prophet and the kings of the earth, and refused the authority of the King of kings. Chapter 19 told of the defeat of this unholy alliance, and now in this scene the King triumphant holds undisputed sway. We clearly established from Rev. 19 that he was King and Lord having many crowns before they were defeated, hence Revelation 20:4 is not in any sense endeavoring to establish the length of Christ's reign as it is to identify the victors in the battle that was just completed. Now we have the saints triumphant, the beast and image which oppressed them, overthrown. The saints are depicted as living with him, and from 1 Cor. we know the dead would rise at the last trump, which began in 1878. Hence Revelation 20:4 is not trying to pinpoint the date of the resurrection of the saints no more than it is trying to establish the beginning point of the reign. Clearly the reign was under way in Rev. 19, when the King of kings, wearing many crowns was making war and destroying the opposing forces. We therefore have reasonable internal proof that Jesus reign does not date from Revelation 20:4. For Rev. 11 we learned his assumption of power marked the third woe upon the nations. The Lord is his own interpreter and He will make it plain.

Revelation 20:6, again reading from the Sinaitic, "Blessed and holy the one having a part in the resurrection the first one, upon these the second death has no authority by they shall be the priests both of the God and of the Christ and will reign with him The 1,000 years. Sometimes we study these things for years, and the real substance of the statement just goes by us. Somehow the 1,000 year. So overshadowed my thinking that the real substance of this text was lost sight of. The emphasis of this verse is not on the 1,000 year reign of Christ and the church, but on the first resurrection, "Blessed and holy the having a part in the resurrection, upon these the second death has no power, but they shall be priests both (of men? no; of the world? no) God and of the Christ (head) and will reign with him the 1,000 year.. This is confirming what the whole of Revelation and of all the scriptures confirm, the everlasting role of kings and priests that the church will have. Remember, not one scripture we have cited says anything about the church being priests of men, but always emphasize. their regal priesthood of God and of the Christ (head). Of course, God's priests and kings will serve the interests of men

in bringing them to God, but let us preserve the beauty of the picture and recognize that they are priests of God and of Christ, first, foremost and always. This scripture is not endeavoring to pinpoint the beginning of the reign of Christ. No, of course not—it is identifying the first resurrection which according to the scriptures was to be at the sounding of the last trump. (See 1 Corinthians 15:51-53 and 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18) This is where the resurrection of the dead in Christ occurred—at the last trump. Only those who understand the harvest truth know this mystery that Paul speaks of, when he says we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable—that is when this mortal puts on immortality. That is the same thing Revelation 20:6 is talking about—the resurrection. This is confirmed in Rev. 14, "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from henceforth, they shall rest from their labor but their works do follow them." Bro. Russell says firmly that the resurrection of the sleeping saints was His first executive act. Rev. 20 brings in the 1,000 year of Christ, but not with a view marking its beginning point, but to show how it affects those who were loyal to his cause, they share in the spoils and triumph of their King and Lord. Remember the subject here is the first resurrection, not the reign of the Church. If the trump has sounded, then Rev. 20:6 must have already begun its fulfillment, because the scriptures link the first resurrection with the trump.

What about the end of the 1,000 years—will this affect the reign of the Church with her Lord? The answer is in Rev. 21. The New Jerusalem represents the church as a government, as Babylon represented the false ruling church. This new Jerusalem has no temple—not really, for "the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it." As men gain perfection they shall, if worthy be allowed entrance into this city. Hence the kings, all men will be kings, "shall bring their glory and honor into it." (Revelation 21:22-26) "And night shall be no more; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they (all mankind) shall reign for ever and ever."-Revelation 22:5. So if all men are going to reign for ever and ever on the earth, why should we think the church's reign will be over in a thousand years? Only one aspect of the reign will be at an end. The reign of reconciliation will have an end, but will be followed by the reign of glory. The Lord God Almighty and the Lamb will never cease to be the temple of this city, nor will the priesthood of this city ever cease to be. This priesthood or eternity, has been called for the praise of His glory, hence they shall, as God shows unto the saints the riches of grace, they shall have to communicate this to creation, and to

convey God's blessings as Melchisedec did to Abraham, but on an eternal basis.