

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

The Rapture – Part 2

1

Introduction

This passage begins a new subject, a subject that intrigues people and offers hope to man and his world. The subject is the return of Jesus Christ to earth and the resurrection of the dead. It is a subject that men should study. The return of the Lord will not only bring blessings to believers, it will launch a terrifying judgment upon unbelievers.

1. The concern: Will believers be resurrected when Christ returns? (v. 13).
2. The comfort: departed believers will return with Christ (vv. 14–15).
3. The events of the Lord's return (vv. 16–18).

2

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. ¹⁴ For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus. ¹⁵ For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive *and* remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. ¹⁶ For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷ Then we who are alive *and* remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. ¹⁸ Therefore comfort one another with these words.

3

The Concern

1 Thessalonians 4:13

But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope.

The Thessalonian believers were concerned about believers who died before the Lord's return. Would their loved ones share in the resurrection when Christ returned to earth? Remember: the church at Thessalonica had just been founded. It was also being bitterly persecuted and attacked. Some of the believers were dying; perhaps some were even being martyred and Christ had not yet returned. They were eagerly looking for that blessed hope and the glorious appearing of Jesus Christ. However, would believers be resurrected when Christ returned?

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The Comfort

1 Thessalonians 4:14-15

For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus. ¹⁵ For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive *and* remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep.

The reality of the resurrection is forcefully declared. Departed believers will return with Christ. There are three proofs of this great fact given.

Departed believers are with the Lord, living face to face with Him. We do not have to wonder where they are. When they died, they went immediately to be with the Lord in heaven, and they shall never be separated from the Lord. Therefore, when He returns to earth, He will bring all departed believers with Him.

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The Events of the Lord's Return

1 Thessalonians 4:16-18

For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷ Then we who are alive *and* remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. ¹⁸ Therefore comfort one another with these words.

Having reassured the Thessalonians that their departed loved ones will not miss out on the Rapture, Paul gave a step-by-step description of that event.

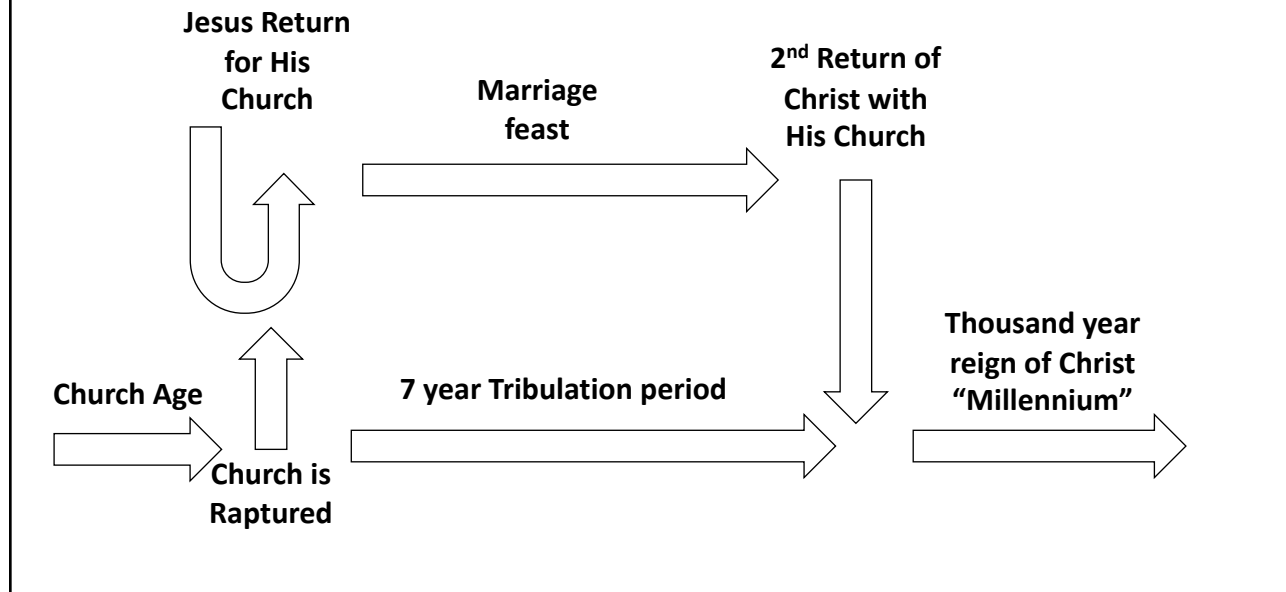
1. First, **the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven**. Jesus will return for His church. He will not send angels for it, in contrast to the gathering of the elect that takes place at the Second Coming.

Mark 13:26–27

Then they will see the Son of Man coming in the clouds with great power and glory. ²⁷ And then He will send His angels, and gather together His elect from the four winds, from the farthest part of earth to the farthest part of heaven

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2. Jesus will descend from heaven, where He has been since His ascension (Acts 1:9–11). Earlier in this letter, Paul commended the Thessalonians “to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come” (1:10). At his trial before the Sanhedrin, Stephen cried out, “Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!” (Acts 7:56). The writer of Hebrews said of Christ, “When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high” (Heb. 1:3).

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3. Jesus descend from heaven with a shout. The word "shout" means a "command" and has a military ring to it, as if the Commander is calling His troops to fall in. The dead saints in their resurrected bodies will join the raptured living believers in the ranks. The Lord's shout of command will be similar to His raising of Lazarus, when "He cried out with a loud voice, 'Lazarus, come forth' " (John 11:43). This is the hour "when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live" (John 5:25). The righteous dead of the church age will be the first to rise. This truth that must have greatly comforted the anxious Thessalonians.

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4. **The voice of the archangel** will sound. There is no definite article in the Greek text, which literally reads, "an archangel." In Jude 9, the only other passage in Scripture that mentions an archangel, the archangel is Michael. Scripture does not say whether or not he is the only archangel (there were seven archangels according to Jewish tradition). Thus, it is impossible to say who the **archangel** whose **voice** will be heard at that Rapture is. Whoever he is, he adds his **voice** to the Lord's shout of command.

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The passage does not tell us what the archangel shouts. We do know that the angels celebrate when one comes to know Jesus as Savior. Jesus states:

Luke 15:10

“Likewise, I say to you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”

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5. The sounding of the trumpet of God.

1Corinthians 15:51-52

Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed— ⁵² in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.

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Trumpets were used in Scripture for many reasons. They sounded at **Israel's feasts** (Num. 10:10), celebrations (2 Sam. 6:15), and convocations (Lev. 23:24), to sound an alarm in time of war (Num. 10:9) or for any other reason it was necessary to gather a crowd (Num. 10:2; Judg. 6:34) or make an announcement (1 Sam. 13:3; 2 Sam. 15:10; 20:1; 1 Kings 1:34, 39, 41). The **trumpet** at the Rapture has no connection to the trumpets of judgment in Revelation 8–11. It seems to have a twofold purpose: to assemble God's people (cf. Ex. 19:16–19) and to signal His deliverance (cf. Zech. 1:16; 9:14–16).

Next week we will look at the evidence for a pretribulation rapture.

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6. The dead in Christ will rise first. The dead saints will in no way be inferior to those alive at the Rapture. In fact, they will rise first, their glorified bodies joining with their glorified spirits to make them into the image of Christ, as the apostle John wrote: "We know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is" (1 John 3:2). Those who were in Christ in life will be so in death; death cannot separate believers from God (Rom. 8:38): "therefore whether we live or die, we are the Lord's" (Rom. 14:8).

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Finally, those believers **who are alive and remain will be caught up together with the dead saints in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord.** The word "**caught up**" *Harpazō* refers to a strong, irresistible, even violent act. In Matthew 11:12 it describes the taking of the kingdom of heaven by force. In John 10:12 it describes a wolf snatching sheep; in John 10:28–29 it speaks of the impossibility of anyone's snatching believers out of the hands of Jesus Christ and God the Father; in Acts 8:39 it speaks of Philip's being snatched away from the Ethiopian eunuch; and in 2 Corinthians 12:2, 4 it describes Paul's being caught up into the third heaven.

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The Greek word "**caught up**" was translated into the Latin word "**rapturo**" which is where we get the word "**Rapture**." It is when living believers are **caught up** and they are transformed receiving their glorified bodies (Phil. 3:21). "In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye" believers "will be changed" (1 Cor. 15:52). Believers will be rescued from the grasp of Satan, the fallen flesh, the evil world system, and the coming wrath of God.

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So What ...

1 Thessalonians 4:18

Therefore comfort one another with these words.

Paul's goal in this passage was not merely eschatological. Its goal was and is to **bring comfort to the believer**. God grants to all believers the encouraging comfort of knowing that Christ will one day return for them. At that monumental event, the dead in Christ will be raised, join with the living saints in the "Grand Reunion." We will experience a complete transformation of body and soul and we will be with God forever. Therefore, there is no need sorrow over the death of a believer like those without hope. We will be together again! No wonder Paul calls the return of Christ "**the blessed hope**" (Titus 2:13).