

HE RAPTURE, PART 13

The first mention and allusion to the rapture is found in [John 14](#) where Jesus is comforting His disciples. He is about to be delivered over for crucifixion, and He is spending His last few hours with them and encouraging them. Obviously, they sense some anxiety about the things that are happening, and so Christ is trying to relieve some of that apprehension and fear. He has just told them that He would be betrayed, that He would be delivered over to His enemies and die, and that He will be going away and that they cannot go where He is going. From their perspective that was very difficult to accept. They had given up everything to follow Jesus – their home life, their trades, their positions, and their time, but now Christ is leaving and they do not know what all of that means for them. They would understand later, but what Jesus was telling them at that moment was very discouraging to them. They did not have a well-developed eschatology, so you can understand the anxiety and uneasiness that the disciples felt. Jesus says to them in [John 14:1-3](#),

Jn 14:1 (NKJV) **"Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. ² In My Father's house are many mansions; if *it were not so*, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. ³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, *there* you may be also.**

Now, I want you to see something important in this passage. What is Jesus talking about here? He is talking about His people being with Him in His Father's house where there are many dwelling places. He is talking about what we call heaven – being in heaven with Him. However, I want you to see that this is in complete contrast to the Second Coming at the end of the Tribulation. Seven years after the rapture occurs, Christ will come to the earth again for the second time. In the rapture, He does not come to the earth, but as [1 Thessalonians 4:17](#) says, He will meet the believers in the clouds, in the air.

1Th 4:17 (NKJV) **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.**

[1 Thessalonians 4:17](#) is not a meeting that occurs on the earth, but one that occurs in the heavens, in the clouds, in the air. However, at the Second Coming, nobody goes to heaven. Everyone is coming from heaven and going to the earth to live for 1000 years with Christ in what is known as the Millennium. In the rapture, everyone leaves. It includes the resurrection of the bodies of those Christians who have died, but their bodies are in the graves. [1 Thessalonians 4:16](#) says,

1Th 4:16 (NKJV) **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.**

The “**dead in Christ**” is a particular reference to New Testament believers ONLY. Old Testament saints are never stated to be “**in Christ**”. So, this is the snatching away of the church, the catching up of the church, the rapture of the church. In [1 Thessalonians 4](#), Paul is giving the Thessalonians encouragement that their loved ones who have died in Christ will precede them in the event we call the rapture.

Since the spirits of the “**dead in Christ**” are already with Christ, their bodies will rise to meet them when He comes in the rapture. Secondly, those Christians who are still alive on the earth will be “**caught up...to meet the Lord in the air**”.. However, at the Second Coming, every Christian comes with Christ. He brings His bride with Him. So, just from a point of contrast, the rapture and the Second Coming are

two very distinct and different events occurring at two very distinct and separate times. In the rapture, Christ comes **for** His bride, and at the Second Coming He comes **with** His bride. In the rapture, the church and all the New Testament saints who have died in Christ will be removed to be with Christ in heaven for a period of seven years. At the Second Coming, those individuals will be returning to reign with Christ on the earth for 1000 years. These are two totally different and distinct events.

As far as we know, the rapture is never mentioned in the Old Testament. In fact, and this is obviously the first allusion to the idea of the rapture in the New Testament, the Jews had no concept of this event. This going to the Father's house was an entirely new and foreign idea to them. Their understanding had to do with the Messiah setting up His kingdom on the earth, and they thought that was exactly what Christ was going to do – but obviously that was not happening and did not happen. In fact, they had no clue what the “**church**” was at this point. There had never been a church, or pastors, or elders, or deacons, or the Lord's Supper, or baptism. There had been the temple and priests and sacrifices and circumcision and feast days, but never the church. So, this idea of them first going to the Father's house was theologically difficult for them to understand and grasp. It was a completely novel idea to them, something they had never previously even heard or thought about. If they actually believed in the Old Testament concept of Sheol, there was not actually anything that inviting about that concept – this kind of unknown, unseen, and strange alien world where there was little to no information about what it may actually be like.

Now, I want you to notice that in these verses in [John 14](#) that there are no “signs” as to when this event is going to occur – none. The only things that we find in Scripture is that there will be a shout, the voice of an archangel, and the trumpet of God. [1 Thessalonians 4:16](#) as we read earlier, says,

1Th 4:16 (NKJV) 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.

Jesus Himself will descend from heaven and there will be a shout. The Greek word for “**shout**” does not occur anywhere else in the New Testament and it means a cry of incitement, or of urging on. It is considered to be a command, an order that someone is giving – similar to that of a command given in the armed forces by a superior officer.

In all likelihood, Christ will give a shout and be attended with a shout; that is, with a multitude who will lift up their voices, like that of an army rushing into a conflict. We simply do not know exactly what it will be or who will actually make the attending shout. It could be the angels, it could be the New Testament saints who are coming back to be resurrected with their bodies, or it could be those who are alive and remain and are suddenly caught up, or it be could a combination of any or all of the above. We just do not know. In my mind, I like to think of it being Christ – but I will not belabor that point. Many of the commentaries are divided on exactly what happens. I think that if we read [1 Thessalonians 4:16](#) at face value, it appears that the “Captain of our salvation” is the One making the shout. I am sure that if there are others with Him that they will also feel compelled to do exactly what their captain is doing. It would be similar to an army general shouting to his men to enter the battle in front of them, and so they shout with him as they move forward into the battle. [John 5:28-29](#), speaking of Christ Himself, says,

Jn 5:28 (NKJV) Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice²⁹ and come forth--those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.

The emphasis here is that those who are in the graves will “**hear His voice**” – the audible voice of Jesus Christ.

Likewise, the word “**archangel**” occurs nowhere else in the New Testament, except in [Jude 1:9](#), where it is applied to Michael. It properly means a chief angel, one who is first, or one who is over other angels. The only archangel, therefore, which is named in the Scriptures is Michael. Once again, we do not know what he is going to say, but I think that we can reasonably assume that as the leader of the angels who have contended with the fallen angels, as one who is the warrior angel, he is ready for the final chapter to be written. As he sees the believers coming out of the graves and off the earth to meet the Lord, he gets excited and has something to say that he simply cannot contain. Then it says, “**and with the trumpet of God**”. This is simply the trumpet which God appoints to be sounded on this very solemn occasion. Trumpets were used in the Old Testament to summons people – often to battle, and often to worship. Obviously, the second one would be in order here. These are the only physical signs that we are given regarding the rapture of the church.

So, why are **the disciples not to have their hearts troubled**? It is because they are going to go to the “**Father’s house**”. Look for a moment at [1 Thessalonians 1:9-10](#),

1Th 1:9 (NKJV) For they themselves declare concerning us what manner of entry we had to you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God,¹⁰ and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.

In v10 of this passage, the Thessalonians were actually “**waiting**” for Christ to come. They were anticipating that it would happen at any time. They were very conscious of that possibility, but many of their loved ones who had become New Testament believers had already died since Christ had been resurrected, and so they were unsure as to what would happen to their loved ones who had died in Christ if the rapture occurred. They had no concept whatsoever that it would be at least 2000 years away. They just did not know what was going to happen to their loved ones. So, in [1 Thessalonians 4:13](#) Paul begins to explain to them what will happen, and he says,

1Th 4:13 (NKJV) 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.

He says “**I do not want you to be ignorant**” or afraid for them, and he begins to explain what is going to happen in v14-18.

1Th 4:14 (NKJV) 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.**

Notice in v14 that Paul says that when Jesus returns that He is going to bring with Him those who have died in Christ, or all of the New Testament saints who have died. He is going to bring back the spirits of those New Testament believers who have died so that their spirits can be re-united with their glorified bodies. V16 is clear that “**the dead in Christ will rise first**”, and that can only mean the bodies of those who have previously died because their spirits are with Christ. [2 Corinthians 5:8](#) is clear that “**to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord**”. For the spirit to be absent from the body simply means that the body is in the grave. So, when the Lord returns in the rapture, He is coming with all of those New Testament Christians who have died and have not yet been reunited with their bodies.

Now, looking at [1 Thessalonians 1:9-10](#) again, it seems in those verses that the timetable is the governing factor. The encouragement is to (1) wait for Christ to come from heaven (which obviously He had not yet done at that time), so that they (2) may be delivered from the “**wrath to come**” (which obviously had not been poured out yet in accordance with Revelation). For the Thessalonians, Revelation had not yet even been written. So, the “**wrath to come**” that is being spoken of here is the period of the Tribulation that is preceded by Christ coming from heaven to deliver the saints from that wrath that is going to be poured out on the earth.

Think of it this way. Christ is coming for His church to specifically deliver them from the “**wrath to come**”. It would be hermeneutically inconsistent not to connect His coming with His delivering them from this wrath. In my mind, you simply cannot disconnect the two. If you disconnect the two and the church actually goes through the Tribulation wrath, then it would be meaningless to even include the term “**wrath to come**” in [1 Thessalonians 1:9-10](#) if the believers were NOT going to be delivered from it. Please appreciate that Revelation uses the term “**wrath**” more than any other book in the New Testament. For instance, [Revelation 6:17](#) says,

Rev 6:17 (NKJV) **For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand?"**

[Revelation 15:1 and 16:1](#) say,

Rev 15:1 (NKJV) **Then I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvelous: seven angels having the seven last plagues, for in them the wrath of God is complete.**

Rev 16:1 (NKJV) **Then I heard a loud voice from the temple saying to the seven angels, "Go and pour out the bowls of the wrath of God on the earth."**

Since the time that Paul wrote this, historically there has not been this universal “**wrath to come**” that has been poured out. There certainly have been difficult times for the Jews and other nations with wars and famines and persecutions, but not God’s wrath being poured out like it will be in the time of the Tribulation / Great Tribulation. Then to further encourage the believers, in [1 Thessalonians 4:15](#) Paul says,

1Th 4:15 (NKJV) **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.***

I.e., what Paul is telling these Thessalonians is that what he is saying is a direct revelation from God – **“the word of the Lord”** Himself. Normally when Paul writes he does not tell his readers that *“What I am saying is a direct word from God”*, but apparently the clarification and understanding of this passage was so critical for these believers that Paul did not hesitate to tell them that this was a direct word from God.

Just as a point of information, and we will deal with this later in our studies, but in [1 Thessalonians 4](#) Paul is clarifying for the Thessalonians their concerns relative to the “rapture” of the church and what will happen to their saved loved ones. However, in [1 Thessalonians 5](#), Paul deals with the Thessalonians concern for what is called the **“day of the Lord”**. This is a very well-known eschatological term that is used 19 times in the Old Testament and 4 times in the New Testament. The rapture and the **“day of the Lord”** are two different and very distinct events. The rapture is a glorious event for believers, but the **“day of the Lord”** is a horrific event for those who have rejected Christ and describes God’s indescribable future judgment on the wicked. It will be that time when God in His righteousness simply pours out His wrath on the wicked. For instance, speaking in the context of these last days events and God’s final judgment, Paul says in [2 Thessalonians 1:8](#),

2Th 1:8 (NKJV) in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The people are saying **“peace and safety”**, and then sudden destruction. [1 Thessalonians 5:3](#) says,

1Th 5:3 (NKJV) For when they say, "Peace and safety!" then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape.

The **“day of the Lord”** signifies the miraculous and extraordinary interventions of God in human history for the sole purpose of judgment. It will all culminate in His final judgment of the wicked and the destruction of the present heavens and earth as we know it. [Revelation 21:1](#) says,

Rev 21:1 (NKJV) Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea.

The great verse for us as believers is [1 Thessalonians 5:9](#). You must understand this verse in its context – which is the final events of God pouring out His wrath in the **“Day of the Lord”**. It says,

1Th 5:9 (NKJV) For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ,

Now, I want us to look at [1 Corinthians 15:51-53](#),

**1Co 15:51 (NKJV) 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.⁵³ For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal *must* put on immortality.**

If you read this chronologically, there is a spiritual mystery that unfolds. There is a changing, a transformation that occurs in just a moment. There is a trumpet that sounds and dead people being raised, and then WE shall be changed (those who are still alive). So, I have to ask – *“What is the mystery spoken of here, the spiritual truth that was not known beforehand, but has now been revealed?”* Well, it is the

rapture of the church. It is the fact that not all will die, but some saints will be changed without “sleeping”, without dying , but all will be changed – those who have died and those who are alive. Whether believers die or they are raptured, their bodies will be gloriously transformed from corruptible to incorruptible, from mortal to immortal, from the natural body to the spiritual body – everlasting and without decay.

I do not know about you, but all of this is great news. I glory in the wonder of what Christ has done for us and what He is going to do for us in the future. My prayer is that you also will revel in these marvelous realities that may be very close and could easily happen in our lifetime. Even so, come quickly Lord Jesus!