



1 THESSALONIANS

A Study of Paul's Letters to a New and Growing Church with a Hopeful Future

◆ **Wednesday April 8, 2009**
(1 Thess. 4:13 – 5:11)

The Rapture and “Day of the Lord” (Second Coming)

^{1TH 4:13} Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. ¹⁴ We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. ¹⁵ According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁶ For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷ After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. ¹⁸ Therefore encourage each other with these words.

^{1TH 5:1} Now, brothers, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, ² for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. ³ While people are saying, "Peace and safety," destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.

^{1TH 5:4} But you, brothers, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief. ⁵ You are all sons of the light and sons of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness. ⁶ So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be alert and self-controlled. ⁷ For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night. ⁸ But since we belong to the day, let us be self-controlled, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet. ⁹ For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. ¹⁰ He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him. ¹¹ Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.

Chapter 4:1-12 Living to Please God	Chapter 4:13 – 5:11 The Rapture & Second Coming	Chapter 5:12-28 Living to Please God
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The Return of Christ

We noted that this discussion regarding the end times was sandwiched between instructions on how we are to live now.

- 1) Before we see the full reign of God on earth in the fullest and most visible sense (a physical, material, social, and political way), believers will experience it now in an inward, spiritual sense.
- 2) The kingdom of God comes in two stages – *spiritually first*, and then *materially later*.
- 3) Because the Lord could return at any moment, we are encouraged to be found faithful at the time He comes to visit us, or as it has been said, “The Christian’s hope for the future must have a sanctifying influence upon the present.” (Titus 2:11-14; Col. 3:4-5; 1 John 3:2-3)

The Issues in Thessalonica

(Young believers with questions)

- 1) What happens to believers when they die?
- 2) Since they were experiencing many trials, they wondered whether or not they had missed out on the Rapture (the gathering of the church to heaven – John 14:1-3) and were experiencing the time of great judgment known as “The Day of the Lord.”

Evidently, the rumor was spreading that the “Day of the Lord” had already come (see 2 Thess. 2:2).

JESUS’ TEACHING ON THE RAPTURE

JOHN 14:1 “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. ² In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. ³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.

- 3) Will those Christians that have already died (and whose bodies are decaying) miss out on the blessing of the physical transformation that comes when Christ returns to earth to gather his people to heaven (Phi. 3:20-21)?

PHI 3:20 But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹ who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.

Key Vocabulary Terms for Today’s Lesson

“Fall Asleep” or “Fallen Asleep”	A euphemism for physical death.
Parousia	Greek word that means “arrival, presence, or coming.” It is the word that is translated as “coming” (NIV) in v. 15.
“Day of the Lord”	A great cataclysmic event of future judgment that comes upon the wicked. (used 19X in the OT, 4X in the NT). It was known to describe historical judgments on Israel and future eschatological divine judgments on the wicked. Also known as the “Day of Vengeance” – (Isa. 34:8; 61:2; 63:4)
Archangel	The highest ranking angel, or a “chief prince.” Only one is mentioned by name in Scripture (Michael – Daniel 10:13, Jude 9, Revelation 12:7-9), but it is possible that there may be more.
Trumpet Call	Often used to gather and rally God’s people, announce feasts, celebrations, sound in alarm in battle, or to announce deliverance.
Dead in Christ	Those who have accepted Christ and are born again who have already died and whose spirits (souls) have already gone to heaven and been made morally perfect.

The Rapture – 4:13-18

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Principles Taught

- 1) Paul encourages the church that those Christians who have already died will not miss out on the Rapture and their physical transformation since Christ will bring the souls of those who are already in heaven with him on that day.

According to this passage (vv.13-14), why should Christians grieve differently for fellow Christians who die?

What is the basis of this hope or why can we believe this will happen? (v.14, 15)

*How do we know that their **souls** are already with Jesus? (cf. 2 Cor. 5:8, Phi. 1:23)*

- 2) Those Christians who have died will be raised to life first (v.16) when the Lord returns and they will be united to a new spiritual, glorified body.

^{1CO 15:42} So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; ⁴³ it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; ⁴⁴ it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body... ⁵¹ Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed-- ⁵² in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. ⁵³ For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. ⁵⁴ When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory."

- 3) Those Christians who are alive at the time of Christ's return will follow the resurrected dead and will join them to meet the Lord together in the air (v.17).

(Note: Our souls and bodies will then be perfected too.)

^{1 JOHN 3:2} Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.

^{1 COR 15:51} Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed.

^{PHI 3:20} But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹ who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.

4) The Rapture will be a dramatic event (loud command, archangel's voice, trumpet call), where the Lord himself (personally, visibly, and bodily) will return from heaven to receive his people to himself and take them there (John 14:1-3).

5) It will look very similar to how Jesus left when he ascended to heaven after his resurrection.

AC 1:9 After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight. ¹⁰ They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. ¹¹ "Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven."

6) We are promised that as soon as this happens, we will be "with the Lord forever" (v. 17), and that this is to be an encouraging promise for us to long for (v.18). For He "rescues us from the coming wrath" (1:10), and *we were not appointed* to "suffer wrath" (5:9)

Name two Old Testament figures that have already experienced something like the rapture.

Name one NT character who experienced a "temporary rapture," though it wasn't to heaven.

Note: Paul wanted this to be such a note of encouragement to the church that he closed every single chapter of this book with a reminder about it.

^{1:10} and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead--Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.

^{2:19} For what is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes? Is it not you? ²⁰ Indeed, you are our glory and joy.

^{3:13} May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones.

^{4:17} After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. ¹⁸ Therefore encourage each other with these words.

^{1TH 5:23} May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

NOTE: Paul does not directly address the timing of the Rapture, but the collective teaching of Scripture is that Christ's coming is imminent (at any time), and therefore we should be "alert, watchful."

Since the church is to be *encouraged* by His imminent coming, and since they are promised *not to suffer wrath*, it is possible that the Rapture will happen prior to the "time of trial" (Rev. 3:10) or The Great Tribulation, which climaxes with the "Day of the Lord." If true, this would mean then that the Second Coming of Christ would come in two stages, first to come *for* His church (Rapture), and then after the 7 year Tribulation, to come *with* His church to defeat the Anti-Christ, to bound Satan for 1,000 years, establishing His millennial kingdom and reign on earth.

“The Day of the Lord” – 5:1-11

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Principles Taught

- 1) The “Day of the Lord” is to be a climactic day of judgment, a day of wrath where destruction will fall upon the earth - a dreadful time. Paul seemingly is making a transition away from the joyful idea of the Rapture to the horrific “Day of the Lord,” which may suggest that they happen at different times.
 - * The “Day of the Lord” is here likely the climax of the Tribulation, where the Lord returns to earth to overthrow the Anti-Christ, which would adequately explain 2 Thessalonians 2:2-4 which says that the “Day of the Lord” will not happen until a worldwide rebellion takes place and the person who is the Anti-Christ (“Man of lawlessness”) is revealed (Rev. 13) and rules only to be destroyed and cast into the Lake of Fire (Rev. 19:20) after the Battle of Armageddon (Rev. 16:19, Zechariah 14:1-4). Even though these things and other signs will precede it (see also Matthew 24:4-33), no one will know its exact timing. **It will come like “a thief in the night.” (1 Thess. 5:2)**
 - * The “Day of the Lord” is a phrase that is also seemingly associated with the final dissolution (2 Peter 3:10) and destruction of the earth which happens after the 1,000 year reign of Christ, ushering God’s new creation of a New Heaven and a New Earth.
- 2) The Day of the Lord will happen while many are falsely prophesying that “Peace and Safety” has come to the earth, perhaps because of the deceitful power and reign of the Anti-Christ and how he rallies nations together in the one worldwide rebellion. For he has signed a 7-year peace treaty with Israel at the beginning of the Tribulation (Daniel 9:27) which he will break about halfway (3.5 years) into the Tribulation.
- 3) In. v 4, Paul seems to indicate that the Thessalonians will not take part in (“be surprised by”) the “Day of the Lord” since they are not in the “spiritual darkness” that the “Day of the Lord” is designed to destroy and overthrow. **This would especially be true of they were already “Raptured.”**
 - COL 1:13** For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, ¹⁴ in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.
- 4) Paul states that all Christians should be looking imminently for these things while being prepared for its coming. Since they do not belong to the realm of darkness (sin) and all its practices (lack of self-control, drunkenness) that will be judged on the “Day of the Lord,

they therefore should not live like they are in that darkness. He spurs them on to self-controlled living, with once again the triad of *faith, love and hope* as definitive markers of their lives.

Note: Paul contrasts the life of sin (darkness) with the life of a Christian (light).

MT 5:14 **"You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵ Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. ¹⁶ In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.**

1JN 1:5 **This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. ⁶ If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. ⁷ But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.**

Paul ends this book with encouragement he began the last chapter with, that due to their future "Rapture" from earth when Jesus comes, they will not have to fear the wrath of God that is associated with the "Day of the Lord." And due to the contrast he is making in this chapter, it may also include deliverance from the eternal wrath of God that those who live in darkness will endure for eternity. For we will not endure that wrath, but will instead "live together with Him" forever.

⁹ For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. ¹⁰ He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him. ¹¹ Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.