

**Pre-tribulation Rapture (part 1)****1 Thessalonians 4:13—18**

We previously discussed some of the views about the Rapture and now we will look at the pre-tribulation Rapture view. There are many who are backing away from this view in favor of a mid- or post-Tribulation Rapture. I believe this is happening because most people do not understand how Israel (Prophecy) and the Body of Christ (Mystery) are completely separate and distinct programs. When God works with Israel He does so with the understanding that Israel is made up of believers and unbelievers. The Church, the Body of Christ, on the other hand, is made up of only believers. This is why Israel needs to go through a purification process before entering the Millennial Kingdom. This purification takes place during the Tribulation (Malachi 3:2—4; Zechariah 13:9; Isaiah 1:25). In fact, the Tribulation has a two-fold purpose; to purify Israel (Daniel 9:24) and to punish the world (Deuteronomy 30:7; Jeremiah 30:11). This will lead to the end of the times of the Gentiles (Luke 21:24) and bring in the times of refreshing (Acts 3:19), the Millennial Kingdom, with Jesus Christ ruling from Jerusalem (Jeremiah 23:5—6).

The Church, the Body of Christ, is already as pure as can be. We were made pure (saints) by the washing of Christ's blood (Ephesians 5:26; 1 Corinthians 6:11; Titus 3:5). There is no reason for the Church to go through the purification process of the Tribulation. If people would only properly separate Israel from the Church then this confusion would not exist. This is why we will find absolutely no information about the Rapture outside of Paul's writings. Paul was revealed a Mystery, the contents revolved around the Church, the Body of Christ; a brand new entity (Ephesians 2:13—15; 3:5—6) composed of Jews and Gentiles and completely separated from Israel. Gentiles are now able to come to God directly without going through Israel. Many, even those who claim to be rightly dividing Scripture, will dip back into passages written to Israel while the Gospel of the Kingdom was being preached and claim they can find the Rapture. For instance, Matthew 24:40—41 depicts one man taken out of a field and one woman taken while grinding grain leaving those they were working with. They say those taken experienced the Rapture, being caught up to God. They ignore that this event is comparable to the days of Noah when the evil ones were taken, just as the tares were pulled up and burned in the parable depicting the end times (Matthew 13:24—30).

There are some who connect Matthew 24:42—44 with the Rapture. This passage is often used to show Jesus Christ coming back at an unexpected time to take us home with Him. However, Jesus will not be breaking into the house at night and steal us away. This passage is about (the house of) Israel not being ready and those not ready being taken and condemned. They will not be ready for His coming because they did not read the signs, as the believers within Israel will be doing. The believers will know when Jesus Christ will return and be ready for Him (Luke 21:36). We, on the other hand, have no signs to read. At best we have indications that the Rapture may be soon but no specific signs such as was given to Israel concerning the Second Coming.

**Pre-tribulation Rapture**

The pre-Tribulation Rapture is found only in Paul's writings. Everything we know about the Rapture is basically found in the following verses: 1 Corinthians 4:14; 15:51—57; 1 Thessalonians 1:10; 4:13—18; 5:8—11; 2 Thessalonians 2:1—8. Although we don't have a whole lot of information we have everything God wanted us to know and plenty to build our theology of the Rapture upon.

Paul had been training the Thessalonians in the importance of being sanctified and of understanding what happens to the believer at the coming of the Lord. The first thing Paul tells them is that Jesus Christ is alive in heaven and that He will be coming back to save believers from the wrath to come. Believers (the Church) will not experience this wrath, but Israel will during the Tribulation. Therefore, Paul is not speaking about an event concerning Israel.

Many who reject a Rapture understand the wrath to be hell. They interpret verses that state we will not experience wrath to mean we will not go to hell. 1 Thessalonians 5 seems to preclude this interpretation.

The whole context of verses 1—3 speaks of the Tribulation while verses 4—8 contrasts those in the Tribulation with the members of the Body of Christ. Paul concludes in verse 9 that we in the church are not destined for wrath (of the Tribulation of which he was just speaking). There is nothing about hell in the previous verses so why would Paul suddenly say we are not destined for the wrath of hell?

Paul continues to teach about the Rapture to the Thessalonians by answering the question: “What happens to believers who have died?” Paul’s answer is one that has comforted believers for hundreds of years, that those who have believed in the Gospel of Grace (believed in the Person of Jesus Christ and in His completed work of death, burial and resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:1—4)) but have since died will come back with Him when He comes to snatch up the living believers. These dead in Christ have a bodily form but their earthly body is in the grave. They are currently in God’s presence, awake, recognizable, and interacting with each other (Luke 16:19—31; 23:43; 2 Corinthians 5:8; Matthew 17:3; 1 Thessalonians 5:10; Revelation 6:9—11). Those who think the soul sleeps do so because they confuse the dead body being referred to as being asleep (John 11:11—12) with the soul.

These disembodied spirits desire to be clothed in their human bodies and this will happen at the resurrection (2 Corinthians 5:2—4). 1 Corinthians 15 fills us in on some details about what will happen at the Rapture. Verse 51 makes it clear that even though not all of us will be alive at the time of the Rapture that we will all be changed. Those who have died in Christ, according to verse 52, will be given their bodies then we will all be changed. The body needs to be changed to be able to live an eternity with Christ. We will be given the same type of body that Jesus was given when resurrected (Philippians 3:21). Just as the seed dies in the ground to bring a whole new plant, the Body dies, is buried but will rise again in an imperishable form, raised up in glory and given a new power that will be used for God’s purposes throughout eternity (1 Corinthians 15:42—44, 49).

Going back to 1 Thessalonians 4 we see that like 1 Corinthians 15:52, the dead in Christ will be raised first, then those who are alive will follow. The Lord will descend from heaven with a shout (I believe a shout of victory and joy because His great plan of salvation and His triumph over death have been accomplished). Shouting is portrayed in Scripture as a joyous occasion (recapturing the Ark of the Covenant—1 Chronicles 15:28; rebuilding of the temple—Ezra 3:11; the Millennial Kingdom—Isaiah 42:11; 44:23; at creation—Job 38:7) and as victory over an enemy (Amos 2:2; Psalm 5:11).

Along with this shout will be the voice of an archangel and the sounding of a trumpet. 1 Corinthians 15:52 calls this the last trump. When the trumpet is sounded, the dead in Christ will rise. This last trump is often confused with the seventh trumpet sounded in Revelation 11:15 declaring that the kingdoms of the world are now the kingdoms of Jesus Christ. These trumpet blasts in Revelation are completely unrelated to the last trump announcing the Rapture. If they were the same then the Rapture would indeed take place in the middle or even as late as the end of the Tribulation. All the trumpet calls in Revelation reveal pain and suffering as God pours out his wrath upon the world and He prepares to take control of the earth. The trump that we hear at the Rapture is one of rejoicing as we finally obtain our full inheritance. These are completely different and unrelated trumps.

Notice that there is no mention of the Lord coming to earth to set up His Kingdom. This would certainly be important information if that were the case. Instead, we see the Lord descending out of heaven and snatching us off the earth to be with Him. We will be serving Him in the heavens while Israel will be serving Him on this earth (1 Corinthians 6:2; Philippians 3:20). At the Second Coming Jesus Christ is seen alighting on the Mount of Olives then meeting with believing Israel who will be united with him for eternity at the marriage supper of the Lamb (Zechariah 14:1—4; Revelation 19:7—8; Matthew 22:1—14). We are already united with Christ as His Body with no need to be united as a bride.

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