

HARD SAYINGS

SESSION #14: The Rapture of the Church (1 Thess. 4:13-18)

Text

1. What does it actually say?
2. Is it descriptive or prescriptive? Genre?
3. What is hard about this passage?
4. What are we looking to understand about this passage as we begin to examine it?

Historical Context

“Timothy related to Paul a Thessalonian question about the timing of the day of the Lord (5:1-2)... Paul reassures the Thessalonians that they are destined not for wrath but for salvation on the day of the Lord... Perhaps the simplest explanation is that these new Christians were questioning their own final salvation in view of the recent unexpected deaths (4:13). They may even have wondered whether the deaths were an expression of divine disapproval.” –Colin Nicholl, *ESV Study Bible*

History of Interpretation

Millennial Views

- Historic Premillennialism: Jesus returns before the 1000 year reign of Christ
- Amillennialism: the 1000 year reign is synonymous with the Church-age.
- Postmillennialism: Jesus will return after 1000 years of Christian flourishing
- Dispensational Premillennialism: Left Behind

Rapture/Tribulation Views (mainly in Dispensational Premillennialism)

- Pretribulation: Rapture happens before 7-year tribulation
- Midtrib: rapture happens 3.5 years into the 7-year tribulation
- Posttribulation: not common dispensational view; default view for everyone else

Literary Context:

1 Thessalonians

OUTLINE (from ESV Study Bible)

- I. Opening (1:1)
- II. Thanksgiving and Encouragement (1:2-3:13)
- III. **Instruction and Exhortation (4:1-5:28)**
 - A. On pleasing God (4:1-12)
 - B. **On the second coming of Jesus (4:13-5:11)**
 - C. On community conduct (5:12-22)
 - D. Prayer, assurance, and conclusion (5:23-28)

The Day of the Lord (1 Thessalonians 5:1-11)

See also: Isa. 2:10–12; 13:6, 9; Ezek. 7:19; 13:5; 30:3; Joel 1:15; 2:1, 11, 31; 3:14; Amos 5:18–20; Zeph. 1:7–8, 14, 18; 2:2–3; Zech. 14:1; Mal. 3:2; 4:5

The Other Rapture Passage (Matthew 24:36-44)

³⁷ For as were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. ³⁸ For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, ³⁹ and they were unaware until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. ⁴⁰ Then two men will be in the field; one will be taken and one left. ⁴¹ Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one left.

Historical Context (from Hard Sayings by R.C. Sproul)

“When [Roman Legions] returned to Rome in victory, they would camp about a mile outside the city, and an envoy would come into the senate to announce that the troops were back and that they were victorious. Immediately, preparations were made for the triumphal entry of the Roman soldiers back into the city square.... After everything was prepared, everyone who was a citizen of the city of Rome was notified by a signal from the trumpeter of the Roman legions that the triumphal procession was about to begin. The Roman citizens then left the city and went out and joined the gathered soldiers and marched together with them back into the city through the arch, participating in the victory of their armies.”

Trusted Interpreters

Westminster Confession of Faith Ch. 32: Of the State after Death and of the Resurrection

32.2 At the last day, such as are found alive shall not die, but be changed; and all the dead shall be raised up with the self-same bodies, and none other, although with different qualities, which shall be united again to their souls forever.

From Sound Interpretation to Useful Application

1. What do we learn about God?
2. How does this passage shape our hearts to glorify God?
3. What do we learn about people?
4. How does this passage change how we live as citizens of God’s Kingdom?