

# 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

## Chapter 4 – Hope that comforts

### Verse 13

*But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren* – It appears that Timothy reported to Paul several questions that the Thessalonians had concerning the second coming of Christ.

Paul's response is to clear up their misunderstandings.

*About those who are asleep* – Sleep is often used in Scripture as a euphemism for death. We get our English word *cemetery* from the Greek word used here.

*Asleep* – This metaphor is very appropriate in view of the resurrection.

#### Sleeper

Does not cease to exist.

Sleep is a temporary state.

Sleep has its waking.

#### Dead

Does not cease to exist.

Death is a temporary state.

Death has its resurrection.

Note Jesus' use of this metaphor in the death and resurrection of Lazarus in John 11:11-14.

*That you may not grieve, as do the rest who have no hope* - The pagan world of that time had no assurance of the afterlife. Theocritus wrote:

*"There is hope for those who are alive, but those who have died are without hope."*

Believers have... *"the hope of eternal life, which God, who cannot lie, promised long ages ago..."* Titus 1:2. Note also Titus 2:13, 3:7, 1 Peter 1:3.

### Verse 14

*For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again* – The "if" here is a first class conditional and could be translated "since". It is a condition that is true to reality.

*Even so, God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus* - Those who have believed in Jesus during the church age and have died (fallen asleep) will accompany Jesus when He returns at the rapture.

### Verse 15

*For we say to you by the word of the Lord* – The Bible does not record any direct statements by Jesus concerning the rapture. It appears that this truth was given to Paul by direct revelation. Note Galatians 1:12 and Ephesians 3:1-3.

*That we who are alive, and remain* – Notice Paul says "we". He expected the Lord to return during his lifetime. He believed in an imminent rapture (Philippians 4:5, Titus 2:13).

*Until the coming of the Lord* – The word for coming is *parousia* which means "appearing or arrival". It is not His Second Coming which will follow the tribulation. There a number of key differences between the two events.

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<b>The Rapture</b>	<b>The Second Coming</b>
1. Believers are caught up to meet Christ in the sky (1 Thess. 4:13-18).	1. Christ descends to the earth (Zech. 14: 1-8).
2. The dead are raised <i>prior</i> to Christ setting foot on the earth; in fact, he does not actually set foot on the earth at the rapture—he only comes to the sky (1 Thess. 4:17).	2. The dead are not raised until <i>after</i> Christ returns to the earth (Rev. 20:4).
3. Christ takes believers to Heaven (Jn. 14:1-4).	3. Christ ushers believers into the earthly millennium (Rev. 20:1-10).
4. The rapture is virtually instantaneous (1 Cor. 15:52).	4. The second coming occurs over a period of time (Matt. 24:30).
5. The bodies of living saints are "changed" into glorified bodies (1 Cor. 15: 51-57).	5. Living saints go into the millennium unchanged (as evidenced by the fact that they bear descendants (Isa. 65:17-25).
6. The rapture was a mystery not revealed in past ages (1 Cor 15:51).	6. The second coming was clearly revealed in the Old Testament (Zech. 14:1-8).

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*Shall not precede those who have fallen asleep* – When the resurrection of church age saints occurs those who have died will actually precede those who are still alive. Paul will speak directly to this in the next verse.

### **Verse 16**

*For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven* – It is Jesus Himself who will return for His bride. This again points to the rapture as the marriage of the Lamb takes place in heaven before the second coming (Revelation 19:7-9)

*With a shout* – An order or command. It is used by a commander giving orders to soldiers. Note how Jesus called Lazarus from the grave in John 11:43.

*With the voice of an archangel* – There is no definite article in the Greek so this could be an actual archangel or it could refer to how Jesus' voice sounded.

*With the trumpet of God* – This may be a literal trumpet (1 Corinthians 15:51-52) or it may be again referring to Jesus' voice. Note Revelation 1:10-13. The summons at the rapture could consist of three unique calls or simply one call that is described in three ways.

*And the dead in Christ shall rise first* – Notice that this resurrection is for those who are "in Christ". All of the saints of the church age who have died and are with Christ in spirit will receive their resurrection bodies. Paul deals with the resurrection of the body in detail in 1 Corinthians 15.

### **Verse 17**

*Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds* – There will be a generation of believers who do not die physically. Only two people in all of history to this point have not died physically, Enoch (Genesis 5:24), and Elijah (2 Kings 2:11). Our physical bodies will be changed or translated to our resurrection bodies (1 Corinthians 15:51-52) and we will be caught up with the saints who are raised from the dead to meet the Lord in the clouds.

*Caught up* – The Greek word is *harpazo* which means "to seize, to snatch out or away, to claim for one's self." The Latin word is "*rapto*" from which we get the word "*rapture*".

*To meet the Lord in the air* – This is not the second coming of Jesus back to earth to set up His kingdom (Note Zechariah 14:1-11).

*Meet the Lord* – This word only occurs three times in the New Testament. Notice the parallel use in Matthew 25:6.

*And thus we shall always be with the Lord* – In John 14:1-3 Jesus promises that when He comes again He will receive us to Himself that we may be with Him. We will be with Him in heaven during the tribulation, at the judgment seat, at the marriage supper of the Lamb, when He returns to set up the kingdom, during the kingdom, and forever in the new heavens and earth.

### **Verse 18**

*Therefore comfort one another with these words* – The comfort is that we know all of those who have died in Christ are with the Lord and that they will receive their resurrection bodies as we also will who are alive at the coming of Christ. Pretribulationists also see great comfort in knowing that we will be "caught up" before the tribulation and will not have to endure the wrath of God being poured out on the world during that time.