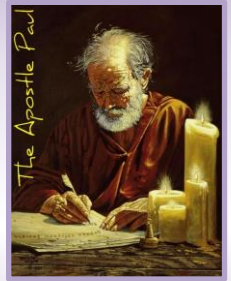


# THESSALONIANS

## There Is Hope!



### Lesson 07: Comforting Hope ... [1 THESSALONIANS 4:13-18]

#### PREVIEW

Paul teaches the saints at Thessalonica that their “born-again” loved ones who have died will not miss the rapture of the church. All true believers in Christ, whether dead or alive, can be comforted in knowing that one day Christ will come to gather them to be with Him forever.

#### REUNION OF THE SAINTS: 1 THESSALONIANS 4:13-14

The Thessalonian believers were concerned for their fellow believers who had died in the Lord. Apparently there was some concern that those believers who had died would miss the Rapture and associated victory and blessings of Jesus’ return. Paul addresses their concern and intends to provide comfort and hope as well. Paul starts out in verse 13 with a declaration that he does not want the Thessalonians to be ignorant.

IGNORANT : agnoeō (äg-no-e'-ō): UNDERSTAND NOT

Paul makes this plea for understanding elsewhere.

- ❖ Don't be **IGNORANT** about God's plan for Israel (Romans 11:25).
- ❖ Don't be **IGNORANT** about spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 12:1).
- ❖ Don't be **IGNORANT** about suffering and trials in the Christian life (2 Corinthians 1:8).
- ❖ Don't be **IGNORANT** about the rapture and the second coming of Jesus (1 Thessalonians 4:13).

The phrase “*THOSE WHO HAVE FALLEN ASLEEP*”, in verse 13, is a euphemism for those who have died. Even in our culture we use the idea of sleep to represent death (e.g. “eternal rest”, “rest in peace”, etc.). The “*THOSE*” here in this verse refers to believers.

Note it is the body that sleeps and not the soul. The doctrine of soul sleep, i.e., *the soul goes to sleep at death*, is an unscriptural viewpoint.

Similarly the phrase “*THOSE WHO SLEEP IN JESUS*”, found in verse 14, refers to Christians who have died; the spirits are now in the presence of Jesus (2 Corinthians 5:8; Philippians 1:21-24), their bodies have the appearance of sleep in the grave.

<sup>8</sup> We are **confident**, yes, **well pleased** rather to be **absent from the body** and **to be present with the Lord**.

– 2 Corinthians 5:8 ... NKJV

As Christians, we may mourn the death of other believers; but not **as others who have no hope**.

Our sorrow is like the sadness of seeing someone off on a long trip, knowing you will see them again but not for a long time.

How certain is your hope? It depends upon your certainty concerning the death and resurrection of Christ. His resurrection is God's seal and evidence for ours. We are confident because Jesus lives and our union with Him is stronger than death. Our resurrection hope is in Jesus (1 Corinthians 15:20-23). Christ's resurrection is the first fruits. We are the later fruits.

#### COMING OF THE LORD: 1 THESSALONIANS 4:15-16

In verse 15 Paul emphasizes, with the phrase “by the word of the Lord”, that this was an authoritative command. Although we do not know whether Paul received it by direct revelation or if it was an unrecorded saying of Jesus, we do know that it came from Jesus; it did not originate with Paul. In addition verse 15 instructs us that those who died in Christ would not be at a disadvantage when the Lord returns.

“The living will have no advantage over those fallen asleep; they will not meet the returning Christ ahead of the dead, nor will they have any precedence in the blessedness at His coming.”

... Edmond Hiebert

The following table shows the sequence of events associated with the Rapture (verses 15-17).

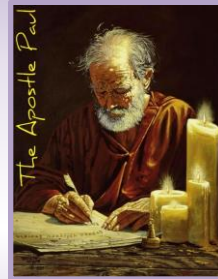
#### RAPTURE SEQUENCE OF EVENTS (v15-17)

#	EVENT
1	The Lord Himself will descend from heaven
2	With a shout
3	With the voice of the archangel
4	And with the trumpet of God
5	And the dead in Christ shall rise first
6	Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with those who have been resurrected in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.

3 distinct sounds  
RAPTURE WILL NOT BE SILENT OR SECRET

# THESSALONIANS

## There Is Hope!



### Lesson 07: Comforting Hope ... [1 THESSALONIANS 4:13-18]

Notice *"the dead in Christ rise first"*, followed by *"we who are alive and remain"*. The second phrase consists of two qualifiers (1) *"to be alive"* and (2) *"to remain"*. This refers to believers in Christ, who are alive and expecting His return (remaining in Him).

#### ARE YOU ALIVE AND REMAINING IN CHRIST?

We do not need to worry about our loved ones who have died in the Lord. This should bring us comfort. We will be with them again. This should bring us hope.

#### CAUGHT UP TOGETHER: 1 THESSALONIANS 4:17-18

In the ancient Greek, the phrase *to meet* was used as a technical term to describe the official welcoming of honored guests. This passage, verses 17 and 18, is the basis for the New Testament doctrine of the rapture, the catching away of believers to be with Jesus. The word rapture is not in the ancient Greek text, but comes from the Latin Vulgate, which translates the phrase caught up with *rapturus*, from which we get our English word rapture. Paul's statement, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, is both dramatic and fantastic. He speaks of believers flying upward, *"caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air"*. We wouldn't believe this unless the Bible told us it were so, not any more than we would believe that God who became a Baby, that He did miracles, that He died on a cross and He lives in us. Notice we will meet the Lord in the air - signifying the victory over the current ruler of the air - our adversary, Satan (1 Peter 5:8; Ephesians 2:2).

Paul's language here is so straightforward and free from figurative speech that there is no missing his intent, no doubt regarding the certainty of the event, only its timing. The timing of the Rapture event in the chronology of God's prophetic plan is a matter of significant debate among Christians. The debate about this *"catching away"* centers on where it fits in with this final seven-year period, popularly known as the Great Tribulation (Matthew 24:21... Olivet Discourse).

- The **PRE-TRIBULATION** rapture position believes believers are **CAUGHT UP BEFORE** this final seven-year period.
- The **MID-TRIBULATION** rapture position believes believers are **CAUGHT UP IN THE MIST** of this final seven-year period.
- The **PRE-WRATH** rapture position believes believers are **CAUGHT UP AT SOME TIME IN THE SECOND HALF** of this final seven-year period.
- The **POST-TRIBULATION** rapture position believes believers are **CAUGHT UP AT THE END** of this final seven-year period.

Supporters of the different *"CAUGHT UP"* positions believe their position is supported by Scripture. There are good Christian scholars in each of the camps. We should not divide over this issue.

The manner in which Jesus will gather us to Himself is impressive. But the main point is that whatever the state of the believer (dead or alive) at the Lord's coming, they will always be with the Lord. This is the great reward of heaven - *to be with Jesus*. Death can't break our unity with Jesus or with other believers.

In verse 18, Paul did not instruct the Thessalonian believers to **TAKE COMFORT**, but to **GIVE COMFORT**. In the way God works, we always receive comfort as we give it. The truth of the return of Jesus for His people, and the eternal union of Jesus and His people is to be a source of comfort for true believers. This concluding statement of Paul only makes sense if the catching away of the previous verses actually delivers believers from an impending danger. If the catching away only brings humanity to God for judgment, there is little comfort in these words. Jesus is coming for His saints - comfort one another with these words!

