

## 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 Part 2

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#### Ready for the Rapture Part 2

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Related Topics: Death of the Believer; Hope Beyond the Grave; First Coming of Christ; Second Coming of Christ; The Translation of the Church; The Imminent Return of Christ for the Church; The Rapture; The Historical Nature of the Doctrine of the Rapture

Remember Paul had taught them well concerning the coming of Jesus for His Church. After Paul left, they wondered about those Christians who died before Jesus came back. Would those Christians miss out on that great event? Would they miss the victory and blessing of Jesus' coming for the Church?



*1 Thes 4:13 13But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope.*

When an unrepentant, unforgiven sinner dies, we mourn for them. When a believer dies we only mourn for ourselves, because they are with the Lord and we are here!

Absent from the body – Present with the Lord!

*2 Cor. 5:6-8 We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, 7for we walk by faith, not by sight. 8Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord.*

So Paul is going to explain this with Divine Authority!

*1 Thes 4:15 15For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord,*

**NLT:** I can tell you this directly from the Lord:

**Amplified:** For this we declare to you by the Lord's [own] word,

Some believe that by this Paul was referring to the direct revelation he received from Jesus in Arabia (Gal. 1:17)

*Gal. 1:12 For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.*

Some think it could also mean that it was an unrecorded saying of Jesus known amongst the apostles. The

bottom line is that it comes from Jesus, not Paul.

*1 Thes 4:15 that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep.*

FIRST — Those who have fallen asleep. The Bible knows nothing of soul sleep. It is the body that sleeps, not the soul. The word used here for asleep is the root word for koimeterion from which we get our English word cemetery.

Koimeterion = “a sleeping place”

This word was adopted by the early Christians as their optimistic name for the graveyard. It is the place where the bodies sleep, awaiting the resurrection.

SECOND — By the authority of Jesus Paul tells them that those who have died in Christ will actually precede the living into the presence of the Lord. At this very moment there are believers who are preceding us into the presence of the Lord. They are not lying in the grave in some kind of soul sleep or suspended animation. Paul made it clear that for the believer, to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord.

### **BIG QUESTION:**

When they precede us into the presence of the Lord are they before the Lord as disembodied spirits? Do they have some form of “temporary bodies”? Or do they receive their glorified body immediately?

We know from the Scriptures that the receiving of a glorified body is the final work of our redemption.

*Eph. 1:14 Paul says that the Holy Spirit living in us is the ...earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory.*

What does that mean? Weren't we redeemed by the cross, PAID IN FULL, it is finished? Yes, but there is a final outworking of that redemption.

*Romans 8:23 And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.*

*1 Cor. 15:53-55 For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. 54When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: “Death is swallowed up in victory.” 55 “O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?”*

Some believe that the dead who precede us into the presence of the Lord live there as disembodied spirits until they are united with their resurrected/glorified bodies.

The Scriptures do not support that at all.

*2 Cor. 5:2-5 For in this tent we groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling, 3if indeed by putting it on we may not be found naked. 4For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened—not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. 5He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee.*

Others believe that they are with the Lord in a spiritual body, awaiting their final glorified body. I don't see any passage that speaks of an interim body. I believe that there is a literal resurrection of their bodies. I also believe that they do not live in the presence of the Lord as disembodied spirits or in some interim body.

## HERE'S THE QUESTION:

How are they clothed in a glorified resurrected body before the rapture?

The answer lies in the nature of eternity! God dwells outside of time. He inhabits eternity. (Isa. 57:15) Eternity is not just a matter of infinite duration. It is a matter of always being in the now. For God there is no past — present — future. For God everything is in the now. The entire panorama of human history is all in the now for God.

Those who precede us into the presence of the Lord have received their resurrection bodies already because they live in the eternal "now." For us, the moment when the dead receive their resurrected / glorified bodies, is yet future. For them, those who have died and gone to be with the Lord, it is in the now!

THIRD — Paul's personal sense of the imminence of the rapture. We who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord. He saw himself and the Thessalonians as being alive when the Lord returns for His Church.

**CRUCIAL:** Paul, the author of the majority of the N.T., not only believed in this event, he believed that it was going to happen in his lifetime! There are many who call themselves Christians who do not believe this is going to happen.

It is staggering to see what professing Christians believe or have chosen to not believe.

- 70% of those who have graduated from protestant seminaries do NOT believe in the virgin birth.
- 80% of them do NOT believe that the Scriptures are inspired and inerrant.
- 60% do NOT believe in the physical resurrection of Jesus from the dead.
- Nearly 90% do NOT believe in the physical return of Jesus to the earth

**NOTE WELL:** As far as I'm concerned NONE of that is debatable! I don't know what Bible they believe. I don't know what Jesus they believe in! But it isn't the Jesus that I believe in or the Bible that I believe. Because the Jesus that I believe in was born of a virgin! The Jesus that I believe in died for the sins of the world! The Jesus that I believe in rose from the dead and ascended into heaven and He is coming back to get me! That fact should not be debatable. He is coming again and He will receive us to Himself. (John 14)

Somewhere along the line there is going to be an interruption of human history. Whether you are pre-trib, mid-trib or post-trib. The fact is miraculous. That in an instant we will be changed.

*1 Cor 15:51-52 Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, 52in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye,*

Moment = The word is ATAMOS — the smallest measurable increment of time.

## KEY POINT:

There should be no argument about this happening. I'm not saying that there can't be differences about when it will happen (pre-mid or post trib.), but there can be no argument about the fact itself! The Scriptures teach that it is going to happen.

## KEY INSIGHT:

For you and I to live in eternity, in the presence of God, there has to be a transition. When we see Moses and Elijah on the Mount of Transfiguration with Jesus they had been changed. They were not the same.

In the Latin Vulgate, a translation of the Bible into Latin by a man named Jerome in the late 5th century. Jerome translated the word Harpazo with the Latin word RAPTUS —from which we get our English word "rapture."

If you look up the word "RAPT" in Webster's Dictionary you will find that it is defined as "to be caught up". I hope that you are satisfied with that. The Bible doesn't say the word "RAPTURE," but the Bible says that we will be CAUGHT UP, TAKEN AWAY!

CAUGHT UP = a compound form of the word HARPAZO.

That word is used 14 times in 13 verses in the New Testament. You do NOT have to be able to read Greek to understand it. Let me read the verses to you and you will get a sense of what HARPAZO means.

*Mat 11:12 From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and the violent TAKE IT BY FORCE.*

HARPAZO means to be taken away by force.

*Mat 12:29 NKJV "Or how can one enter a strong man's house and PLUNDER HIS GOODS, unless he first binds the strong man? And then he will plunder his house.*

HARPAZO - to forcefully take away his goods.

*Mat 13:19 NKJV "When anyone hears the word of the kingdom, and does not understand it, then the wicked one comes and SNATCHES AWAY what was sown in his heart. This is he who received seed by the wayside.*

HARPAZO - to SNATCH AWAY.

*John 6:15 NKJV Therefore when Jesus perceived that they were about to come and take him by force to make Him king, He departed again to the mountain by Himself alone.*

HARPAZO = to take by force

I like that, because I want to be taken away by force out of this world.

*John 10:12 NKJV "But a hireling, he who is not the shepherd, one who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf catches (HARPAZO) the sheep and scatters them.*

*John 10:28 NKJV "And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand.*

HARPAZO = to be snatched away from

I want to be SNATCHED out of this world.

*John 10:29 NKJV "My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them (HARPAZO) out of My Father's hand.*

No one can snatch us out of our Father's hand, but He will snatch us out of the grips of this fallen corrupted world.

*Acts 8:39 NKJV Now when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away (HARPAZO), so that the eunuch saw him no more; and he went on his way rejoicing.*

*Acts 23:10 NKJV Now when there arose a great dissension, the commander, fearing lest Paul might be pulled to pieces by them, commanded the soldiers to go down and take him by force (HARPAZO) from*

*among them, and bring him into the barracks.*

*2 Cor 12:2, 4 NKJV I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago; whether in the body I do not know, or whether out of the body I do not know, God knows; such a one was caught up (HARPAZO) to the third heaven....*

*4 how he was (HARPAZO) caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter.*

*Jude v. 23 NKJV save others by snatching them out (HARPAZO) of the fire*

I like that. I want to be pulled out of this world before it is toasted!

*Rev 12:5 NKJV She bore a male Child who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron. And her Child was (HARPAZO) caught up to God and His throne.*

### KEY APPLICATION:

You might say that you don't believe in the rapture because you don't see that particular English word in the Bible. Everywhere this word is used and in whatever forms it is used, it means to be CAUGHT UP, SNATCHED AWAY, TAKEN AWAY BY FORCE.

When you think of what Paul is talking about this word HARPAZO is the perfect word to describe it. Think about the force that would be necessary to snatch a single human being AWAY in the smallest measurable increment of time, at the speed of light, from one place to another, from one form to another (to translate and transform). This is beyond what we can understand.

I'm not huge, but I'm not tiny either. God is going to get a fair amount of glory when He does that to me. Some of us are going to give Him more glory than others, some of us less, but the amount of power required to do that is greater than force of gravity holding you on planet earth! It is unimaginable. Caught up! Snatched away! Taken by force in the twinkling of an eye! All of this is UNDENIABLE!

The debate comes in over the timing. When does this take place? There are a number of views.

- The first view is the PRE-TRIBULATION view. I call this "The CORRECT view". It states that the Church will be snatched away out of the world BEFORE the beginning of a seven year period of time known as The Great Tribulation."
- Mid-Tribulation view. Those who hold to this view do so because they see the WRATH OF GOD as not beginning until the 2nd half of that 7 year period of time called The Great Tribulation. They say that since we have not been appointed unto wrath (1 Thes. 5:9) God will take us out mid-way through and thus save us from wrath. (QUOTE: Walvoord – "The Rapture Question" p.119)
- The Partial Rapture view. This says that spiritual Christians will be raptured and carnal Christians will be left behind. This is a great tool to beat the sheep with. After they have been beaten up all week by the world, the flesh and the devil, you can get them in church on Sunday and beat them again. To say that the spiritual Christian will be taken and the carnal Christian will be left behind is kind of like a "protestant purgatory". Think of it. Suppose you are a spiritual Christian and your are driving East or West on Interstate 80 and somebody cuts you off and endangers the life of you and your family. And just as you say, "I can't believe you, ya big creep", the trumpet blows and you are left behind! All that time you had been trying so hard and then you blow it and your left on Interstate 80! Isn't that ridiculous? You know why it is? Because it belittles the atoning work of Christ! You see, the ONLY reason that a human being who deserves to go to hell is sinful by nature and dead in trespasses and sin can be born again pronounced Justified, Sanctified and Glorified, can be changed in an atomos and at the speed of light, can have corruption put on incorruption and mortality put on immortality, is because Jesus Christ died on the cross and not because you or I have behaved. Having said that, BEHAVE! It is NOT an excuse to sin.

*Rom 6:1-2 What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? 2By no means!*

*How can we who died to sin still live in it?*

*So we can throw out that one too.*

- Post-Tribulation view. This is NOT my view at all. There are many great scholars, and godly men and women who have believed that this event will be at the end of The Great Tribulation. That the Church will be raptured to meet the Lord in the air as He descends in His return to the earth. I am not a great scholar. I have opinions from studying the Scriptures. (You will hear them on occasion.) I believe that the only position that is consistent with imminence is a pre-tribulation position. WHY? Because if you take a post-tribulation position, you are saying that Jesus can not come for 7 years. The Post Tribulation position also says that the blessed hope of the Church is to live through the most terrorizing time that the human race has ever seen. That is not a blessed hope at all. We can't comfort one another with those words. There are those who justify the Post-Trib View by saying, "Well why should 21st century Christians avoid the horrors that the 1st three centuries of Christians had to endure?" REMEMBER, the Great Tribulation is about the wrath of God. But let me give to you ONE MORE reason why I find it impossible to see the rapture at the end of the Tribulation.

*Matthew 25:31-32 "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. 32 Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.*

*The Millennium – the Messianic Kingdom – is essentially sandwiched between 2 bookends of Judgment! This judgment (in Matt 25) takes place on earth at the very end of the Great Tribulation immediately after the Battle of Armageddon when Christ returns to the earth. By contrast, the Great White Throne Judgment takes place at the END of this 1,000 year reign of Christ upon the earth somewhere in space. Those who take the position that the RAPTURE of the Church takes place at the END of the Great Tribulation consistently avoid this passage in their discussion of eschatology. WHY? Because if the rapture took place at the END of the Great Tribulation and the church met the Lord in the air while He was coming from heaven to the earth to set up His millennial kingdom. There would be NO NEED to separate the sheep from the goats because the rapture would have accomplished that already. Only goats would be left on the earth.*

## Closing:

THE RAPTURE – Jesus coming FOR His Church  
THE SECOND COMING – Jesus coming WITH His Church.

Many signs must precede that coming (Matt 24-25). In His Second Coming every eye shall see Him, but in regards to the Coming of Jesus For His Church, no sign has to precede that coming. It is a coming that is only realized by the Church.

**KEY QUESTION:** How does this effect your life as a believer?

Does it help you to prioritize? I believe this truth, I teach this truth, but I struggle. I pray that it will have a greater impact on my life. BUT - I AM READY! We don't even have to get out of the parking lot. We can leave our cars... They can have them.

**ARE YOU READY?**

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