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The Resurrection and the Rapture - 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18



By Steven J. Hogan

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An essential and critical passage to understand with regards to Christ's coming, the resurrection and the rapture of believers is 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18. Here is what it says:

Verse 13: *"But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve as do the rest who have no hope."* Paul wrote this passage because of confusion in the Thessalonian church as to what would happen to fellow believers who had physically died, or as was said, had fallen asleep. He didn't want anyone to be uninformed or in error with regard to the truth of the resurrection, and how it related to their own lives, and the lives of loved ones who had already died.

Verse 14: *"For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus."* To clear up their confusion, Paul begins by declaring the foundational truth of Christ's death and resurrection, which is the basis for the resurrection of all believers. Paul links the resurrection of Christ with the future resurrection of those who had already died, which would include both Old Testament and church-age saints. God's plan is for all these believers to be resurrected, and return with Christ when He comes back to heaven, which is further explained in verses 15-16.

Verse 15a: *"For this we say to you by the word of the Lord…"* Before Paul continues, he emphasizes the truthfulness and extreme importance of this passage by saying that what he was sharing was not his or any man's idea, but rather *"the word of the Lord,"* the actual word of God.

Verse 15b: *"that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord…"* Paul is stating that the resurrection of believers occurs at the coming of the Lord, which he also says in 1 Corinthians 15:20-23: *"Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep… after that those who are Christ's at His coming."* This word *"coming,"* from the Greek *"parousia,"* is the most common word used in the New Testament when speaking about Christ's return, appearing over 20 times. It is a noun which means presence, and therefore speaks of the presence of the Lord.

By saying, *"we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord,"* it's obvious that Paul thought he might be alive on earth at Christ's coming. But it's about 2000 years later, and we are now living in the end-times, which means the truth of His coming is more relevant and applicable to our generation. I am both amazed and excited to think Christ's coming could take place in our lifetime. I believe many Christians now living on earth will remain, that is, be ones who survive great tribulation, and are here when Christ returns. And that Paul says these believers will *"remain until"* means the resurrection of the

believers is the very first event to occur at *“the coming of the Lord.”*

Verse 15c. “*will not precede those who have fallen asleep.”* The believers who have already died, and are now in heaven, will be resurrected before the resurrection of those still living on earth. I believe there will be only a split second or two between their resurrections, but nevertheless, all believers who have died will have the honor of being glorified, of getting their new bodies, before those on earth.

Verse 16: *“For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.”* God tells us what will be taking place just before the resurrection of all the believers:
1) The Lord Jesus Himself descends from heaven. Luke 21:27
2) As Jesus descends, He gives out a loud shout, a loud command heard round the earth. Jesus is not just announcing His coming, but is commanding believers to come to Him.
3) The archangel’s voice is clearly heard, joyfully proclaiming the coming of Christ.
4) The trumpet of God is also signaling the coming of Christ. 1 Corinthians 15:52
5) The dead in Christ, as stated in verse 14, will arise, that is, be resurrected, and as stated in verse 15, will arise first, before the Christians who are still living on earth.

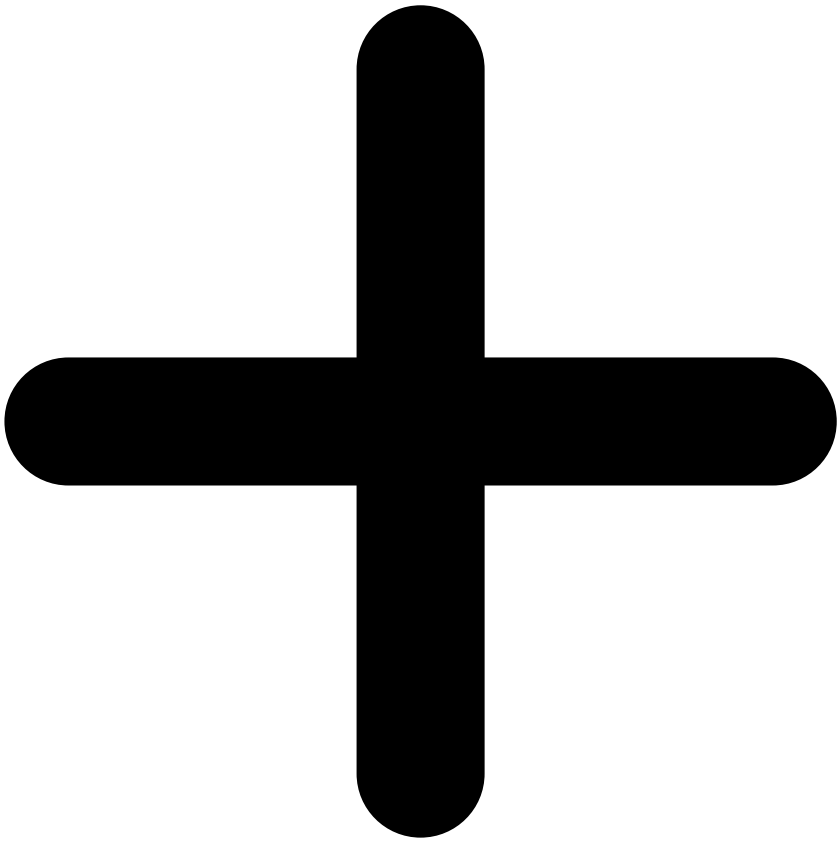
Verse 17: *“Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord.”* Paul goes on to tell us God’s plan for the resurrection of the believers living on earth:
6) The believers who are alive and remain on earth at Christ’s coming will be caught up. This phrase, *“caught up”*, from the Greek *“harpazo”,* means to be forcibly taken, to be seized, and is also translated as raptured. At Christ’s coming, all believers who are on earth will suddenly be lifted off the earth, be raptured, and immediately be

resurrected.
7) All the Christians being taken from the earth will be gathered together with the believers who had just been resurrected. Mark 13:27, 2 Thessalonians 2:1
8) All the resurrected believers, those who were in heaven, and those who were on earth, will meet the Lord in the air. How wonderful this will be, for all believers from all time will now be with the Lord, and be with Him forever! The coming of Christ, the glorification of all believers, and that they are finally with Christ, is the great climax and conclusion of this age, and the beginning of God's glorious plans for the rest of eternity.

Verse 18: *"Therefore, comfort one another with these words."* Now that we know these things, what should we do? We are to comfort and encourage other Christians by telling them that they will be resurrected, glorified, and fully saved, at Christ's coming. We are to tell them that they will be reunited with all believers who have ever lived, but most importantly, will be with the Lord forever. Should we not be excited about this, and looking forward to this, and *"encouraging one another, and all the more, as you see the day drawing near?"* Hebrews 10:25

Simply stated, all believers from Old Testament times and from the church age, will be resurrected, will be glorified, at the coming of Jesus Christ, and will be with Him forever. This is great news, wonderful news, magnificent news! Amen!

P.S. The Resurrection and the Rapture are two very important and related subjects. Here are two posts and an article which will give you further understanding: The Rapture of the Christians at the Second Coming of Christ, The Resurrection and Rapture of the Believers, and The Rapture of the Church.



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