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The Rapture of the Church
First Thessalonians 4: 13-18

The Rapture of the Church DIG: How would the Thessalonian believers have felt if they had remained ignorant of Christ's resurrection and return? How would Paul's word here encourage them?

REFLECT: Do Rabbi Sha'ul's words of Christ coming like a thief in the night (at an unknown time) ease or stir up fear within you? Will you be ready or will you be left behind? Has God appointed us to suffer wrath?

Second Thessalonians 2:1-12 mentions a **man of lawlessness** who is held back until a later time. Since **the lawless one** (the antichrist) cannot be revealed until **the One who now holds him back (the Ruach ha-Kodesh) is taken out of the way**, the Tribulation cannot occur until the Body of **Christ** is removed from the earth. Since neither **the Rapture** nor the Body of **Christ** are mentioned in **Revelation, Chapters 6-18**, we can conclude that **the Rapture** precedes the Great Tribulation. Of all the views on the timing of **the Rapture**, only the pre-Tribulation position harmonizes with Scripture when we understand that **the Restrainer** is referring to **the Ruach ha-Kodesh**.[145] Three key passages need to be studied for a complete understanding of **the Rapture** (also see my commentary on **Isaiah, to see link click Eu – The Rapture and the Great Tribulation**).

The first passage is found in **John 14:1-3**. This passage does not detail the timing of **the Rapture** but does contain **the promise** of it. There, **Yeshua** says: **Do not let you hearts be troubled. Trust in God and trust also in Me. In My Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with Me that you also may be where I am.** The one key point is that this coming for the believers was for the purpose of taking them to where **He** was going. Since **Jesus** was going to heaven, this is a coming to take the righteous to heaven and not to earth. This is important because in the post-tribulationism believers meet **the Lord** in the air and return with **Him** to the earth. This is not the promise here. **He** is coming to take us to

heaven.[146]

The second passage is **First Thessalonians 4:13-18**, which describes **the program** of **the Rapture**. Paul wrote to the body of **believers** at Thessalonica: **Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. We believe that Yeshua died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep with Him.** The prophecy of **the Rapture** is as sure to be fulfilled as the prophecies of **Messiah's** death and resurrection.

*Dear Heavenly **Father**, We love and worship **You**! Though we do not know the exact date of **the Rapture**, world events say that it is soon. Please give us boldness and courage to share with our friends and family about your great love and also **Your** holiness. Eternity is forever. **And just as it is appointed for men to die once, and after this judgment (Hebrews 9:27).** In **Your** holy **Son's** name and power of resurrection. Amen*

According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have died. There is no written tradition of this, but whether **the Lord** spoke to Paul directly or through oral tradition, Rabbi Sha'ul assured the **Thessalonians** that **they** could dismiss **their** fears. One group of **believers** would **not precede** another.



For the Lord Himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together in the air. And so we will be with the Messiah

forever. Therefore, encourage each other with these words. The English word **rapture** comes from the Latin translation of the Bible called the Latin Vulgate. There, the word **caught up** is translated *rapturo*, and this is where we get the English term **rapture**. The events described here and **1 Corinthians 15:50-53** below, differ considerably from those that will accompany **Jesus'** return to the earth to set up **His** earthly kingdom **(Rev 19:11-21)**. This difference substantiates the distinction between **the Rapture** and the Second Coming.[147]

From the Greek translation of the Bible, the phrase **caught up** comes from the word *harpazo.* It has four meanings, all of which tell us a great deal about **the Rapture**. First, it can mean *to carry off by force.* **Satan** and **his** demons, whose kingdom runs through the lower atmosphere of the earth, will offer opposition to the believers going through their territory on their way to heaven. Paul speaks of **the Adversary** in **Ephesians 2:2** as **the ruler of the kingdom of the air**, and the word for **air** there means *the lower, denser, atmosphere.* That is why it will be necessary for **the Lord** to come down and *carry us off by supernatural force* against the opposition of **the dragon** of old and **his** demons.

Secondly, it can mean *to snatch out of the way of danger.* The Bible teaches that **God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus the Messiah (First Thessalonians 5:9)**, and one of the purposes of the Great Tribulation is to bring **wrath** upon an unbelieving world. The prophet **Isaiah** tells us: **See, the Day of the Lord is coming – a cruel day, with wrath and fierce anger – to make the land desolate and destroy the sinners within it (Isaiah 13:9).** Thus, with **God's** timing the **wrath** of the Great Tribulation will be visited upon the earth. Because the Church is made up of **His** children, **our Lord** will come and *snatch us out of the way of danger.*

Thirdly, it can mean *to seize and carry off speedily.* To be caught up is used of divine power when transferring a person swiftly from one place to another. **Heaven** is beyond the farthest star. It has taken the light of some star 500,000,000 years to reach the earth, traveling 186,000 miles per second. If the Body of **Christ** traveled that fast at **the Rapture**, it would require 500,000,000 years to reach **heaven**. But we will go **to heaven** with the speed of thought. One moment we will be on the earth, and the next we will be in **heaven**.

Lastly, it can mean *to claim for one's self eagerly.* **The** great **Husband** from heaven will **come** to claim **His** Bride, the body of **Christ**, and eagerly take her with **Him** to **heaven**.[148] When we look at all four of these meanings we get a much clearer

picture of what **the Rapture** means to all **believers**. Indeed, **we wait for the blessed hope – the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus the Messiah (Titus 2:13).**

There are some significant parallels between **John 14:1-3** and **First Thes 4:13-18**. The words or phrases are almost an exact parallel. They follow one another in both passages in exactly the same order. Only the righteous are dealt with in each case. There is not a single irregularity in the progression of words from first to last. Either column takes the believer from the troubles of earth to the glories of heaven. It is, therefore, obvious that these two sections of scripture speak of the same event. How else does one explain the progression of eight specific words/phrases in exactly the same order, in two different passages, by two different spokesmen? It is clear that these passages refer to a single event: **the Rapture** of the Church.[149]

Parallels can be seen between John 14:1-3 and First Thessalonians 4:13-18

In **John 14:1-3** we see the word **troubled** in **verse 1**
and in **First Thessalonians 4:13-18** we see the word **grieve** in **verse 13**

In **John 14:1-3** we see the word **trust** in **verse 1**
and in **First Thessalonians 4:13-18** we see the word **believe** in **verse 14**

In **John 14:1-3** we see the words **God** and **Me** in **verse 1**
and in **First Thessalonians 4:13-18** we see the words **God** and **Jesus** in **verse 14**

In **John 14:1-3** we see the words **told you** in **verse 2**
and in **First Thessalonians 4:13-18** we see the words **tell you** in **verse 15**

In **John 14:1-3** we see the words **come back** in **verse 3**
and in **First Thessalonians 4:13-18** we see the words **coming of the Lord** in **verse 15**

In **John 14:1-3** we see the words **take you** in **verse 3**
and in **First Thessalonians 4:13-18** we see the words **caught up** in **verse 17**

In **John 14:1-3 we see the words to be with me** in **verse 3**
and in **First Thessalonians 4:13-18** we see the words **to meet the Lord** in **verse 17**

In John 14:1-3 we see the words be where I am in **verse 3**
and in **First Thessalonians 4:13-18** we see the words **be with the Lord forever** in **verse 17**

The third passage, **First Corinthians 15:50-53**, deals with **the passing** nature of our bodies at the time of **the Rapture**. **I declare to you, brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed – in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye.** The **eye** can move much faster than any other visible part of our bodies; therefore, the change will be instantaneous. It will happen **at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.** That **trumpet will sound** at the end of the Dispensation of Grace, when all **believers** will be removed from the earth. **For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. Christ's** resurrection broke the power of death for **those** who believe in **Him**, and one day, **when Yeshua** returns, **we will all be changed. The Rapture could be the ninth or tenth birth pain, depending on when the seven-year covenant between the antichrist and the nation of Isra'el is signed.**

After the terrible events of the Great Tribulation, **Jesus** states that **it will come upon all those who live on the face of the whole earth** (see my commentary on **The Life of Christ Jr – The Day and Hour Unknown**)**.** In other words, no one living **on the face of the whole earth** will be able to escape the judgments of the Great Tribulation. Nonetheless, there will be one way of escaping **the wrath of God**. You must believe in **Jesus**; believing in who **He** said **He** was, **the** divine **Son of God**. The means of escape is to **stand before the Son of Man** off **of the earth** because there will be no escape **on the earth (Luke 21:34-37)**. After **the Rapture**, **believers** will **stand before the Son of Man** at the Judgment Seat of **Christ** (see **Cc – For We Must all Appear Before the Judgment Seat of Christ**).