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The Rapture: Victory Over Death
First Corinthians 15:50-58, and First Thessalonians 4:15-18

The rapture: victory over death DIG: What is the rapture? Why is it so important for believers to understand? Why is the shofar so important to this message? What does the word "rapture" mean? How does this motivate you to witness to those you know who might be "left behind" if they don't make a commitment to follow Messiah as their Lord and Savior? How would Paul's words have comforted the Thessalonians or the Corinthians? Why do people ignore the reality of the Rapture today?

REFLECT: Does the reality of Messiah's return encourage you or threaten you? Who do you long to see again that has passed away? How would you feel if they weren't there? How can you be better prepared for that time? What is the most comforting thing here for you as you consider your own death? Or the death of a dear friend or loved one? What here is the hardest for you to understand? What has been the toughest death for you to experience? Do you get discouraged when your service is unnoticed or taken for granted?

Death is defeated, the King is alive.

The longest chapter in the book comes to a magnificent climax. **Paul** makes it clear that **those** who are **raptured** will not have **bodies** of **flesh and blood**. However, our **spirits/souls** will be with **the Lord** because **to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord (Second Corinthians 5:8).** In a poetic passage **the apostle** rejoices in the triumph that **Messiah** has won over **death itself**. This calls for thanksgiving, praise and glory to **ADONAI**, the source of **victory**.

Our rapture (15:50-54): Let me say this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot share in the Kingdom of God. It is not *this* **body** that will enter the life of the world to come. And I'm glad that **God** is not going to send our **bodies** to a repair shop because I would like to trade mine in for a new model. **Something that**

decays cannot share in what does not decay (15:50). This is what caused **the Corinthian** confusion in the first place. **They** asked, "How can people possibly rise when their **bodies** have completely **rotted away**?" **They** didn't understand that our **bodies** must be *different* in order to inherit **heaven** (**to see link click Dv – Our Resurrection Bodies**). However, like the seed that is planted **(15:42-44)**, **it** continues **its** identity, but in a radically and wonderfully different form.[508]

People could never have worked out for themselves what will happen at **the Rapture**, but **ADONAI** has revealed it. **Look, I will tell you a mystery** (Greek: *mysterion*), which is **a truth which God formerly concealed but has now revealed (Romans 11:25b) – not all of us will die! But we will all be changed,** from the natural to the supernatural **(15:51)!** For **the believer**, **death** is a doorway and not an empty pit. When we **die**, it's as if we will **fall asleep** here on earth and wake up in **heaven (Philippians 1:21** and **23)**. And for those **believers** who are **alive** at the time **Yeshua** returns, **they** will not have the experience of **dying** at all.



*Dear Heavenly **Father**, Praise **Your** immeasurable greatness of power that conquered **death**, raising **Messiah** and seating **Him** at **Your right hand in the heavenly places (Ephesians 1:20).** How glorious the thought that though life is full of problems, illnesses, trials, and misunderstandings; those who love **Yeshua** as our **Lord**, know for sure that when **the trumpet** is blown we will leave this earth to be with **You** forever! How gracious **You** are to not only forgive us, but to also take us to live with **You** in heaven for all eternity **(John 14:1-3)**!*

***Your steadfast love** is amazing! As **You** are united to and dwell within each of us who love **You (John 14:20,23), Your** presence in us enables us to also conquer **death**. **For if we have been united with Him in a death like His, we shall certainly be united with Him in a resurrection like His (Romans 6:5**). How incredibly great is **Your steadfast love**! David went thru many hard trials but he*

was an overcomer because he had learned the secret to overcoming in trials is to ***S-T-O-P****: Look up to* ***You*** *and remember your* ***Steadfast love (Psalms 59:9-10), Trust in God and not be afraid (Psalms 56:3-4*** *and* ***11) and Offer Praise (Psalm 56:3-10).***

Praise ***You*** *for the glorious thought of living for all eternity with* ***You*** *in complete peace and joy in heaven. Eternity is such a long time. I desire to serve* ***You*** *with all my heart and soul now on earth, not complaining about* ***trials****, but rather letting* ***You*** *use them to purify and mold me to be more like* ***Messiah****.* ***You have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith – more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire – may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Yeshua Messiah (First Peter 1:6c-7).*** *In the name of* ***Yeshua*** *and the power of* ***His*** *resurrection. Amen*

For **the raptured, the change** will be **in a moment, the blink of an eye.** It will not be a process, like a supernatural metamorphosis. It will be an instantaneous recreation from one form to another, from **the earthy** to **the heavenly**. **And the dead will be raised to live forever, and we too will be changed.** That **change** will occur **at the final shofar (15:52),** or **the ram's horn** which is sounded one hundred times on Rosh ha'Shanah, the Jewish New Year (see the commentary on **Leviticus Ee – Rosh Ha'Shanah**). Within Judaism **the shofar** has multiple symbolism, including **God's** creation and kingship, **His** revelation at Mount Sinai, prophetic warning, repentance, alertness, battle, Abraham's offering of Isaac (and its connection with **God's** mercy), the ingathering of **God's people** in exile, final judgment and **resurrection (Matthew 24:31)**.[509]

When we say this, we base it on the Lord's own word. While the common experience for most will be having to **die** in order to participate in **rapture**, there will be some **people living** at that time who will also participate. **We who remain alive when the Lord comes will certainly not take precedence over those who have died. For the Lord Himself will come down from heaven with a rousing cry, with a call from one of the ruling angels, and with God's shofar; those who died united with the Messiah will be the first to rise; then we who are left still alive will be caught up** (the Latin word for **caught up** is *rapturo*, from which comes the term **rapture**) **with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air; and thus we will always be with the Lord (First Thessalonians 4:15-17).**

Because earthly, natural **bodies** cannot occupy the eternal Kingdom, there has to be such a **Day** and such a **moment**, **for this material which can decay must be clothed with imperishability, this which is mortal must be clothed with immortality. When what decays puts on imperishability and what is mortal puts on immortality, then this passage in the TaNaKh (Isaiah 25:8) will be fulfilled: "Death is swallowed up in victory" (15:53-54). Death** is not merely destroyed so that it cannot do further harm, while all of the harm which it has brought on **God's children** remains. **Death** and all of its apparent victories are undone for **God's children**. What looked like a victory for **death** and like a defeat for us when our **bodies die** and **decay** shall be utterly reversed so that **death dies** in absolute defeat and our **bodies** live again in absolute **victory**.[510]

So encourage each other with these words (First Thessalonians 4:18). The fact that **believers** who have **died** will be resurrected to join the living **believers** with **the Lord Yeshua** when **He** comes, that **they** will actually precede **those** who are **alive** in that **day**, that **those** who are **alive** will be united with **them**, and that **they** will all be with **the Lord** forever, give abundant reasons for being **encouraged**. Not only do **believers** not grieve like unbelievers, but followers of **Messiah** can actually look forward eagerly to that great **day**. This is the great **hope** of the Church, to see **the Lord** and be united with **Him** forever. It is that which every believer should anticipate with joy. It is **the blessed fulfillment of our certain hope, which is the appearing of the Sh'khinah glory of our great God and the appearing of our Deliverer, Yeshua the Messiah (Titus 2:13).**[511]

Our victory song (15:55-58): There is **a preacher** of the old school, but **he** speaks as boldly as ever. **He** is not popular, though the world is **his** parish and **he** travels to every part of the globe and speaks in every language. **He** visits the poor, calls upon the rich, preaches to people of every religion and no religion, and the subject of **his** sermon is always the same. **He** is an eloquent **preacher**, often stirring feelings which no other preacher could, and bringing tears to eyes that never weep. No one is able to refute **his** arguments, nor is there any heart that has remained unmoved by the force of **his** appeals. **He** shatters lives with **his** message. Most people hate **him**; and deep down, everyone waits for **him**. Every gravestone is **his** pulpit, every website prints **his** text, and someday we all will be **his** sermon. **His** name? **Death**.

Therefore, quoting **Hosea**, **Paul** asks: **Death, where is your victory? Death, where is your sting (First Corinthians 15:55; Hosea 13:14).** To continue with

the metaphor, **Paul** implies that **death** left **its sting in Messiah**, as a bee leaves its stinger in its victim. **Yeshua** bore the whole of **death's sting** in order that we would have to bear none of **it**. However, right now **death** does have a **sting**. Right now it appears as though **death** does have the victory, for there is not a single person who will escape **death** if **the Lord** delays **His** Coming. But what appears to be a victory for **the angel of the Abyss (Revelation 9:11),** will ultimately end in **his** defeat, for **death itself** will be defeated along with **its angel (Revelation 20:10, 14-15)**.[512]

To make **his** point, **the apostle** reminds us that **the sting of death is sin; and sin draws its power from the Torah (15:56).** This verse sums up what is taught at length in **Romans 3:19-31, 5:12-21** and **7:1-25**. The harm in **death** is caused by **sin**. **Here is how it works: it was through one individual (Adam) that sin entered the world, and through sin, death; and in this way death passed through the whole human race, inasmuch as everyone sinned (Romans 5:12).** Only where there is **sin**, can **death** deal a fatal blow. Where **sin** has been removed, **death** can only interrupt the earthly and usher in **the heavenly**. That is what **Messiah** has done for **those** who have trusted in **Him**. Our **sins have been forgiven for His sake (First John 2:12).** Right now **death** is not gone, but **the sign of death, sin,** is gone. **For if, because of the offense of one man (Adam), death ruled through that one man; how much more will those receiving the overflowing grace, that is, the gift of being considered righteous, rule in life through the one man Yeshua Messiah (Romans 5:17)!**

It is not, of course, that **believers** no longer **sin**, but that the **sins** we commit are already covered by **Messiah's** atoning **blood**, so that **sin's** effect is not permanently fatal. **The blood of God's Son, Yeshua, purifies us from all sin (1 Jn 1:7b).** However, for unbelievers, who have rejected **Messiah's** sacrifice on their behalf; instead of accepting **the Sacrifice**, they become the sacrifice, and **death's sting** remains in them for all eternity.

But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Yeshua the Messiah (First Corinthians 15:57; Romans 7:24-25)! Messiah lived a sinless life on our behalf, **completing the Torah** (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ Dg – The Completion of the Torah**), removing our **sin** by **Himself** by paying the penalty for **it**, satisfying every claim of **God's** holiness with a perfect sacrifice; and conquering **death** by being **raised from the dead**. All of that great **victory He** accomplished for **us** and **gave** to **us**. **Messiah redeemed us from**

the curse pronounced in the Torah by becoming cursed on our behalf (Galatians 3:13a). He took our **curse**, our guilty verdict, and instead, gave us **victory** in its place.

For **believers**, **death** has no more power, because **God** has taken away our **sin**. **Since God shares a common physical nature as human beings, He became like them and shared that same human nature; so that by His death he might render ineffective the one who had power over death (that is, the Adversary), and thus set free those who had been in bondage all their lives because of their fear of death (Hebrews 2:14-15).** For **believers**, **death** is but the passing of our spirits from this life to the next, leaving the earth to be with **the Lord**. **Paul** had only one reason for wanting to remain on earth: to continue **his** ministry for **Messiah** on behalf of others. But for **his** own benefit and joy **he** had only one desire: **to go off and be with Messiah – that is better by far (Philippians 1:23-24).**

In **Messiah's victory over death, death's sting** has been removed; it is declawed, defanged, disarmed, and destroyed. **Death and sh'ol were hurled into the lake of fire . . . and He will wipe away every tear from the eyes of believers. There will no longer be any death; and there will no longer be any mourning, crying or pain (Revelation 20:14** and **21:4).**

So, as a result of everything that **Messiah** has done for us, we should **stand firm and immovable, always doing the Lord's work as vigorously as you can, knowing that united with the Lord your efforts are not in vain (15:58).** In other words, we should strive to stay in the will of **God**, not being erratic, scatterbrained, or easily discouraged, but to use our spiritual gifts to the fullest in the knowledge that **the Ruach Ha'Kodesh** will make them effective. Because **ADONAI** has so abundantly gone beyond **Himself** for us who deserve nothing from **Him**, we should determine to **work as vigorously as we can** in service to **Him**, to whom we owe everything. How can we take it easy when so many around us are going to hell and so many believers around us need encouragement, and help of every sort?

No, until **the Lord** returns there are souls to reach and ministries of every sort to be completed. Every believer should work uncompromisingly as **the Spirit** has gifted and leads. Our money, time, energy, talents, gifts, **bodies**, minds and spirits should be invested in the **Lord's work**. Our praise and thanksgiving must be given hands and feet. As **James** tells us: **Indeed, just as the body without a spirit is dead,**

so too faith without actions is dead (James 2:26). Our **work** for **the Lord**, if it is truly for **Him** and done in **His** power, cannot fail to accomplish what **He** desires. Every good work that **believers** do in this life has eternal benefits that **the Lord Himself** guarantees: **Yeshua** says: **Pay attention! I am coming soon, and My rewards are with Me to give to each person according to what he or she has done (Revelation 22:12).** Thus, we have **God's** own promise that our **efforts are not in vain.**[513]