

B. We Have a Promise, 4:15

Next comes the positive declaration that the Christian dead will actually be raised first and will therefore undoubtedly have a share in the kingdom. The statement is made as authoritative as possible by stating that it is the word of the Lord. There are two possible explanations of how Paul knew this was a word from the Lord. It could be an otherwise unrecorded saying of Christ (as is Acts 20:35) or it may have come to Paul by direct revelation (cf. Acts 16:6; 18:9). In any case, the Thessalonians need not be worried; in reality the dead will have a foremost place, for the living shall in no wise (emphatic negative) precede those who are asleep at the Lord's return. Notice that Paul included himself among that living group and evidently expected to live until the return of Christ (cf. Phil. 4:5; Titus 2:13; written later in his life). One of the wonderful things about the hope of His coming is that it burns brightly in the hearts of each generation of Christians regardless of how long His return is delayed.

C. We Have a Picture, 4:16-18

Paul now fills in the details of the picture of what will happen when the Lord returns.

1. A return, 16. Christ Himself will return. The word *Himself* is in the emphatic position in the sentence and emphasizes that no intermediary, but the Lord Himself, will usher in this great event. Because it will be He Himself who comes, the attendant circumstances will display all the grandeur due His personal presence. There will be a shout. It is a word of command used in classical Greek for the shout with which an officer gives the order to his troops or his crew. There is in the word a ring of authority and a note of urgency. It is not said who utters the shout, whether it is the Lord or an archangel. However, the voice of an archangel will be heard. Michael is the only archangel mentioned in the Bible (Jude 9), but it is not impossible that there are other archangels (notice the absence of the definite article here - an archangel, not the archangel). Notice also Daniel 10:13 which designates Michael as "one of the chief princes." Though Gabriel is mentioned as a high-ranking angel (Dan. 8:16; 9:21; Luke 1: 19, 26) he is not specifically designated as an archangel. The Jews listed seven chief angels together. The trumpet of God will also sound when He comes. This is also referred to twice in 1 Corinthians 15:52.

2. A resurrection, 16. Again the priority of the dead is mentioned, for they shall be raised first. It is not that they shall be raised before the rest of the dead but before those who are alive at the Lord's coming are changed. "Dead in Christ" is a synonymous description of those who "sleep in Jesus."

The phrase "in Christ" seems to restrict the group raised to believers of this age (since the day of Pentecost) and not believers of all time. If this is so, then one would assume that Old Testament believers will be raised at the second coming of Christ.

3. A rapture, 17. Next in order ("then," *epeita*, implies order of events and not necessarily any lengthy interval between) there will be the change in the living. We shall be caught up. The word

means "seize" or "snatch" and the Latin translation of this verb uses the word from which we get "rapture" in English. Thus the translation of living believers is called the rapture of the church. Rapture means the act of conveying a person from one place to another and thus is properly used of this transport of the living to heaven. Paul used it of his own experience of being caught up into the third heaven (2 Cor. 12:2, 4; cf. also Acts 8:39 and Rev. 12:5). The word also includes the idea of seizing hastily (Acts 23:10). It seems clear from these other occurrences of the word that Paul had in mind being taken to another location, i.e. heaven, and not just into the mid-air to turn around suddenly and return to the earth (as posttribulationism teaches). He also implies in this idea of rapture the necessary change in mortal bodies in order to fit them for immortal existence in heaven. This is stated in greater detail in 1 Corinthians 15:50-53, and while the method of this change is never revealed, it is clear that Paul believed that it is possible to have a metamorphosis without the dissolution caused by death.

4. A reunion, 17. The reunion is actually twofold. It is first of all with loved ones who have died, for we shall be caught up together with them. Second, it is a meeting with the Lord in the air (with a view to proceeding on into heaven, not returning to the earth immediately, as stated above in the posttribulation senario). "The natural consequence of this blissful meeting with the Lord is that there will be no subsequent parting"¹⁰After His return there will be uninterrupted union and communion with our Lord.

e. A reassurance, 18. As a result of what has been stated there should be no sorrowing but rather comfort concerning those who have died. Notice how Paul sticks to the subject -the dead in Christ. He says nothing in this passage about the resurrection of the wicked, the intermediate state, judgment, means of translation, or reign with Christ. In this passage our hope is centered on the assurance of the resurrection of the dead in Christ, the change in the living, and the eternal union with our Lord. Repeating these truths will bring assurance to the heart.

Erich Sauer throws light on some additional facets of the rapture that are often overlooked. "[At the rapture] for the first time the church of all times and all lands will be with one another. Thus the completed church will exist for the first time, but not on earth but in the air (I Thess. 4:17). Till then there exist only churches (in the plural, Rev. 22:16), and the church of a *generation* living at any one time on earth. . . . *Triumph!* For the air is the very base of operations of the Enemy. It is from the air that the world is at present ruled by demon powers. . . . But now exactly in the region of his power, at the very headquarters of the conquered foe, there takes place the meeting of the Conqueror, and His victorious hosts. The triumph cannot be greater; a more glorious fetival of victory cannot be. Christ has conquered completely. His church had overcome absolutely. Therefore the crowning of the persecuted takes place at the headquarters of their defeated Persecutor".¹¹

¹⁰ Plummer, op. cit , p.77.

¹¹ Erich Sauer, *The Triumph of the Crucified* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952), pp. 105-6.

III. INSTRUCTION AND EXHORTATIONS CONCERNING THE DAY OF THE LORD, 5:1-11

A. A Definition of the Day of the Lord. It is a time of God's special intervention in the affairs of human history. The use of the phrase in the Bible includes three facets of the Day of the Lord. (1) Historical—God's intervention in the affairs of Israel and heathen nations (Zeph. 1:14-18; Ezek. 30:3). (2) Illustrative—an historical event that illustrates some future aspect of the Day (Joel 2:1-11). (3) Future which includes the coming tribulation years (Isa. 2:12-19; 4:1), the second coming of Christ (Joel 2:30-32), and the millennium (Isa. 4:2; 12), sometimes focusing on one or another of these future events.

B. The Relation of the Day of the Lord to the Rapture of the Church, 5:1. The opening phrase of 5:1 (two words in the Greek translated "but" or "now") indicates that the Day of the Lord does not include the rapture. That opening phrase, *peri de*, Paul uses regularly in his letters to introduce a new subject (see 1 Cor. 7:1, 25; 8:1; 12:1; 16:1, 12; 1 Thess. 4:9; 5:1). Therefore, Paul is indicating that the Day of the Lord is a new subject from the rapture which he has described in the preceding paragraph. This conclusion is reinforced by the fact that Paul elsewhere calls the rapture a mystery (1 Cor. 15:51) which is something not revealed in the Old Testament but revealed in the New Testament. The rapture is not revealed in the Old Testament whereas the Day of the Lord is. The phrase "day of the Lord" occurs 20 times; "last days," 14 times; "that day," 100 times. Obviously the day of the Lord was well known from the Old Testament and included in Paul's teaching about the future. Since the rapture is not a part of the Day of the Lord, then it must occur before the beginning of the Day; i.e., before the tribulation begins. Thus it cannot be within the tribulation (midtribulationism) or at the end with the second coming (posttribulationism). To summarize: Paul's use of *peri de* and his contrast between the rapture unrevealed in the Old Testament and the Day of the Lord often taught in the Old Testament strongly support a pretribulation rapture of the church.

C. The Beginning of the Day of the Lord, 5:2-3. A second matter in relation to the return of Christ comes up for discussion. Not only were the believers concerned about the fate of loved ones who died before the return, but like so many others they wanted to know something about *when* the event would occur. The disciples also had asked when (Mark 13:3-4), and the Lord had told them that He could not give them any new light on the question (Acts 1:7). Paul, too, appeals to what they already know and asks them to wait patiently and work hard in the meantime. We need not think that the question was prompted by idle curiosity. If the time of the appearing is unknown, it is natural to be apprehensive about whether anyone now alive will live to see it. Paul tries to show his readers that certain things about the coming of the Lord are more important than whether they would be alive when it occurred.

letter of 2nd century:

"Irene to Taonnophris and Philon, greeting!

I was as much grieved and shed as many tears over Eumoiros as I shed for Didymas. I did everything that was fitting and so did my whole family.

But still there is nothing one can do in the face of such of such trouble. So I leave you to comfort yourselves. Farewell."

In Thess there is an inscription on a sepulchre which "told the bystander that after death there is no revival, after the grave no meeting of those who have loved each other on earth." Conybeare and H.

Sleep for death means

- 1. Person does not cease to exist*
- 2. Temporary - will awake.*

1. Soul Sleep

Lk 16:28, 23-43

2 Cor 5:5 Phil 1:23

Rev. 6:9-10

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Thompson 124
those restless bec Lord hasn't come yet.