

# RAPTURE OR RESURRECTION?

By [The Analog Kingdom](#) | June 1, 1999

One of Scripture's most contended text has to be 1 Thessalonians 4:17. It is the trump card every pretribulation rapture<sup>1</sup> advocate pulls out from under their sleeve. But are the Thessalonian and overall Biblical context in congruence with this interpretation? Or, is this an example of using a text void of a context to support a pretext? Let's examine the deck.

Starting with verse 13, the apostle Paul begins a new subject concerning "those who have fallen asleep," and "the *coming (parousia)*<sup>2</sup> of the Lord." He goes on to explain that, "those who have fallen asleep" in Him will accompany Christ on His triumphant return, and that "we who are alive and remain until the *coming* of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep." Paul clearly anticipates some believers to survive until Christ's second coming and to "be caught up together with them (the dead in Christ) in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air." J. Barton Payne explains further on the language used:

"Specifically, the church is to go up *eis apantesin, to the meeting*, of the Lord. That is, the Lord descends from heaven, and the church ascends from earth to meet Him. But when they meet (since they do not stay in midair), one party must therefore turn about; and it would hardly be the Lord. For in the usage of *eis apantesin* elsewhere in Scripture, the contexts consistently describe how the ones who do the meeting then turn around and accompany the one who is met for the remainder of his journey. Examples are the virgins meeting the bridegroom (Mt. 25:6) and the disciples from Rome meeting Paul (Acts 28:15-16). Even so the church is to meet Christ in the air and thus join in His triumphant procession down to earth; cf. Rev.19:14."<sup>3</sup>

Elsewhere in 1 Thess. 5:1-6, and contrary to the pretribulation school of thought, Paul says that the "day of the Lord" should not overcome us *like a thief in the night*. For we do not belong to the darkness but are all "sons of light." He exhorts us to be alert, not asleep, and the very injunction to stay alert, to "watch," presupposes Christians on the earth to witness His coming. Even Christ himself, speaking on the topic of His own coming and the signs preceding it, says, "when these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near" (Luke

21:25-28). Therefore, it is evident that both Christ and Paul specifically taught that the church would be situated on the earth to witness the Lord's coming.

Paul also seems to describe an open and public coming in v.16, not some clandestine evacuation, "For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first." The latter here being a clear reference to the first resurrection, which takes place at the seventh and last trumpet when Christ returns to establish His millennial Kingdom (cf. Rev. 20:4-6). And the moments leading up to the sounding of the seventh trumpet in Revelation 11 delineate this resurrection scene: "Now after the three-and-a-half days the breath of life from God entered them (the two witnesses), and they stood on their feet, and great fear fell on those who saw them. And they heard a loud *voice* from heaven saying to them, 'Come up here.' And they ascended to heaven in a *cloud*, and their enemies saw them" (v. 11-12; cf. Rev. 1:7). The same is true for the Olivet discourse, which closely parallels Paul's teaching and the vision shown to John, when Christ teaches His disciples that they will "see the Son of Man coming on the *clouds* of heaven with power and great glory. And He will send His angels with a great sound of a *trumpet*, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other" (Matt. 24:30-31). Conspicuously open, public, and LOUD; ascending and descending in clouds. But the most significant similarity is the timing, the synchronization of the trumpets.

But who are these martyrs, the two witnesses? They are called "the two lampstands standing before the God of the earth" in Rev. 11:4, which seems to connect them to the seven lampstands at the end of Rev. 1. Christ, who stands in the midst of these seven, reveals the mystery of these symbols to John saying, "the seven lampstands which you saw are the seven churches" (Rev. 1:20). Can these two lampstands be the two churches whom Christ had no words of rebuke for in chapters 2 & 3 of Revelation? And did not threatened to remove their lampstand from its place? Moreover, the beast is said to *make war* with the two witnesses (Rev. 11:7), and yet curiously this reference is also applied to the Church in Rev. 12:17 & 13:7. "Since the resurrection and the heavenward ascension of the two witnesses corresponds to the actual experience of the dead in Christ, rising at His shout and at the sounding of the last trumpet, so as to meet Him in the air upon His return in the cloud,"<sup>4</sup> it seems fitting to identify the two witnesses with the Body of Christ (i.e., the Church). Those whom Christ

told not to fear the coming suffering and persecution from the Devil, but to be faithful, even to the point of death (“as firstfruits to God and to the Lamb,” Rev. 14:4), and He will reward them with a crown of life (Rev. 2:10). Also, note the strong resemblance between the witnesses and Christ’s own preternatural ministry: 3-day death, resurrection, and then ascension.

Two other popular rapture texts are 1 Corinthians 15 and Rev. 4. In 1 Cor. 15:51, Paul reveals a mystery that “we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed.” Again, he does not expect all believers will taste death, but all will change, “in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the *last trumpet*. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.” It’s simple, the dead in Christ are resurrected at the *last trumpet*, and the believers who remain change to an imperishable body instantly. The timing is unequivocal (cf. Isa. 27:12-13; Joel 2:1; Zec. 9:14).

On the other hand, John was told to “come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this” (Rev. 4:1). Some have suggested that this is a reference to a pretribulational rapture of the Church in the book of Revelation. But the context just doesn’t support the notion. John—and only John—is the object of the heavenly ascent, and the whole reason for the ascent is to have the future judgment of the world unveiled to him.

Then there’s the time Christ describes “the day when the Son of Man is revealed” in Luke 17:30-37, saying, “I tell you, in that night there will be two men in one bed: the one will be taken and the other will be left. Two women will be grinding together: the one will be taken and the other left. Two men will be in the field: the one will be taken and the other left.” Then His disciples ask Him the key question: “Where, Lord?” And He replies, “Wherever the body is, there the eagles will be gathered together.” So where are they taken? To “the supper of the great God,” at “the great winepress of the wrath of God,” during the harvest of the earth: “One like the Son of Man” seated on a white *cloud* with a crown of gold and a sharp sickle reaps the harvest. While another angel gathers “the clusters of the vine of the earth” and throws them into “the great winepress of the wrath of God,” where they are trampled into a river of blood (Rev. 14:14-20). Later in Rev. 19:17-18, the call goes out to all the birds in the air to come and gorge on the flesh of all men, both free and slave, small and great, at “the supper of the great God.” The picture parallels the parables of Matt. 13 on the

discriminatory gathering by the angels of the wheat and the tares (v. 30), and of the good fish and bad (v. 48; cf. Matt.25:1-13).

Compared to all the other Biblical texts, the tenets of a pretrib-rapture seem indefensible against the context of 2 Thessalonians chapter 2. Paul's principal topic is the second coming of Christ. He starts by plainly referring to "the *coming* of our Lord Jesus Christ" and our "*gathering (episynagoge)*"<sup>5</sup> together to Him" as concurrent events—a day that all brothers are anticipating. He has to remind the Thessalonians not to be troubled by rumors nor to be deceived by anyone, that "the day of Christ" has come. The straightforward passage goes on to say, that "that Day will not come unless the *falling away (apostasia)*"<sup>6</sup> comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition." Who opposes and exalts himself, usurping everything that is called God, "so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God" (v. 3-4). Him whose coming "is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth," (v. 9-10). These are the signs leading up to the return of the Lord (cf. Mark 13:14, 28-29). And this is the one "whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming" (2 Thess. 2:8).

Thus, the preponderance of passages indisputably predicts our Lord gathering us together at His second advent, and that "day" will not come until these signs manifest themselves. But when the "day of visitation" does come, "the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken" (Matt. 24:29). Then He will return in the clouds and with a loud command the last trumpet will signal the harvest of the earth, and the angels will be sent to gather the wheat and the tares. But the dead in Christ, the Body, will resurrect first. Then they who remain will exchange their mortal bodies for immortal ones, and will be gathered to Him and assembled with them in the clouds, to join in His procession down to the Mount of Olives (cf. Acts 1:9-11; Zec. 14:4; Rev. 14:1) to participate in the millennial kingdom. And many will come from the east and the west to take their seats in "the marriage supper of the Lamb"<sup>7</sup> (Rev. 19:9; Luke 13:29). But at the time of harvest, He will tell the reapers, "First gather together the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn" (Matt. 13:30).

It is written: “whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it” (Luke 9:24). Be faithful unto death, fear not the labor pains of the end—for God will seal us. “Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on” (Rev. 14:13), and “Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb” (Rev. 19:9).

## NOTES

1. Rapture: The word originated from the Latin equivalent, *rapere*, found in the Latin Vulgate (1Thess.4:17). The original Greek word from which it is translated is *harpazo* and means “to seize” (Strong’s #726). In most English Bibles it has been translated “caught up.” Rapture has become synonymous with a pretribulation gathering which claims that “the ‘shout,’ and the ‘voice,’ and the ‘trumpet’ will be heard only by believers, and that the ‘rising’ described in this verse (1Thess.4:16) will be invisible to the sinners left on earth. The effect, if this picture is accurate, would be that thousands and thousands of people would suddenly disappear into thin air (‘*the great disappearance!*’), silently and without warning.” (*The Rex Humbard Prophecy Bible*, p. 25).

2. *Parousia* (Greek): presence; from *pareimi*, meaning “to be present” (persons or things). *Parousia* denotes “active presence.” *Pareimi* also means “to have come,” “to come,” and *parousia* “arrival.” “. . . The *parousia* will be a definitive manifestation when God’s eternal rule supersedes history,” (G. Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* [abridged edition], pp. 791, 793). “Clearly Christ’s second coming meant a great deal to the New Testament writers. Paul, for example, mentions it in most of his letters. He makes a good deal of use of the word *parousia* (14 times), which meant originally ‘presence’ (Phil.2:12) and thus a ‘coming to be present’ . . . It was used of the ‘coming’ of a king or emperor visiting a province and, in some religions, of the manifestation of the deity. In the New Testament it came to be used as a technical term for the second coming of a King,” (*Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, p.720 ).

3. J. Barton Payne, *Encyclopedia of Biblical Prophecy*, p. 561.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 617.

5. *Episynagoge* (Grk.): assembly, meeting. “Thus in 2 Th.2:1 *episynagoge* and *parousia* introduce the eschatological teaching that follows. The object of the *epe* is the returning Lord; it is to meet him that his people is assembled,” (G. Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* [abridged edition], p. 1112).

6. *Apostasia* (Grk.): defection from truth [ “apostasy” ], (from *Strong’s Dictionary of Bible Words*, #646). “Based on *apostates* (politically a ‘rebel,’ religiously an ‘apostate’), this term signifies the state (not the act) of apostasy,” (G. Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* [abridged edition], p. 89).

7. “The marriage supper of the Lamb.” Some pretribulationists connect this reference with the “*mansions*” (*mone*) in John 14—which means “abiding.” They say we will be in heaven dining at the “marriage supper of the Lamb” while enjoying the *mansions* prepared for us. But the context is clear, the “marriage supper” takes place on the earth in the millennial Kingdom (cf. Isa.25:6) and “in both John 14:2 and 14:23 the reference (*mone*) is individual rather than universal or eschatological. Salvation consists of union with God and Christ through their dwelling in believers” (G. Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* [abridged edition], p. 582), and the believers dwelling in them.

(Scripture citations in English are from the *New King James Version*)

