

1 THESSALONIANS 4:13-18 | WORDS OF COMFORT FROM THE RAPTURE

- Important review of material foundational to this lesson:
 - The Thessalonian church was largely if not fully out of the Jewish community, whether by birth or by conversion.
 - Some evidence to support this claim:
 - Acts 17:1-7
 - They were the elect of God (1 Thess. 1:4)
 - Paul preached **the Gospel of God** (1 Thess. 2:9, defined in Rom. 1:1-2. See our note on 1 Thess. 2:9)
 - They were called into **his kingdom and his glory** (1 Thess. 2:12).
 - They became **followers of the churches of God which are in Judea** (1 Thess. 2:14, where, according to Galatians 1:14, Paul was not known).
 - Paul warned them and wanted them to be blameless at the Second Coming (1 Thess. 3:13).
 - Paul didn't need to speak of brotherly love because the Hebrew scriptures, which they followed, already told them to **love one another** (1 Thess. 4:9).
 - Beginning in 1 Thessalonians 4:1-2 and 10-11, Paul begins to give his own instruction and commands. At this point he is speaking to them as the authoritative apostle of the age of grace, and gives instructions related to *this age* rather than instructions related to the Kingdom (and thus the age of the Law).
 - In verse 1 Thessalonians 4:13, Paul continues his *apostolic instruction* of verses 10b-12, and thus he is speaking to those living in the Pauline age.
- Verse 13 –
 - Paul desires that the Thessalonians have some knowledge **concerning them which are asleep**, a group of people he will further define in verse 11.
 - Paul believes that the information that he (and only he) can provide would help them to **sorrow not** for these dead loved ones, **as others which have no hope**.
- Verse 14 –
 - Paul defines **them which are asleep** (v. 13) not as *all the dead*, but rather those **which sleep in Jesus**. In verse 16 they are again referred to as **the dead in Christ**. If those **which sleep in Jesus** are not deceased believers, then who can they be?
 - Paul places the death and resurrection of Jesus as the basis of hope for these dead. Belief alone, as presented here, is a solely Pauline idea. Concerning the resurrection specifically, Paul spoke of its necessity in 1 Corinthians 15:18, saying that without it **they which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished**.
 - This verse indirectly gives us information about these dead. Namely, that God will **bring with him** these dead, and thus they must currently be **with him**. This idea is also supported in 2 Corinthians 5:8.
 - The phrase **which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him** needs grammatical study.
 - **sleep in Jesus** is literally “through Jesus” and grammatically can go with “sleep” or with “bring.” Thus the KJV translators were wise in putting no punctuation. Note that NKJV changed to “God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus,” thus effectively removing the possibility “in Jesus” going with “sleep” OR with “bring.”
 - The interpretive question is therefore: *will God bring these people through Jesus? or is God bringing with Him those who sleep in Jesus?*
 - Because **him** in **with him** is an indirect object, it cannot say “God will bring the dead with Himself,” for the subject (God) cannot also be the indirect object (him). Furthermore, there is not teaching that God the Father is making any kind of trip to Earth, bringing anyone with Him.
 - We must conclude that *those who sleep will be sent by God with Jesus when Jesus makes the appearance referenced in this passage*.
- Verse 15 –
 - Paul's instruction comes from **the word of the Lord**.

- This is a phrase that, by its obvious context and by a study of the phrase in the 258 times it appears in the English Bible, alludes to divine revelation.
 - There is no place in the Bible that shares such information, thus this information must be considered part of the Pauline revelation/mystery, and thus related *only* to the body of Christ in this dispensation.
 - The instruction is that those **which are alive and remain** will take a *secondary place* in timing during this event. They will **not prevent them which are asleep**. Note that the Oxford English Dictionary gives the now obsolete definition of **prevent** as “To come, arrive, or appear before; to precede; to outrun, outstrip.”
- Verse 16 –
 - The **Lord himself** (clearly Jesus Christ) will someday **descend from heaven**, accompanied by **a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and the trump of God**.
 - Another grammatical note here removes the interpretation of Jehovah’s Witnesses that Jesus is Michael the Archangel.
 - The subject is **the Lord** and the verb is **shall descend**. Indirect objects are **the voice of the archangel and the trump of God**.
 - Once again, the subject cannot be the indirect object.
 - Note that Greek does not have a true “indirect object” in the sense of English, but that the dative case fulfills the same secondary role.
 - When the **Lord himself shall descend** then **the dead in Christ shall rise first**, thus completing the idea presented in verse 15, that the living **shall not prevent them which are asleep**.
- Verse 17 –
 - After **the dead in Christ shall rise**, then **we** (i.e.: those who hold to the premise of the death and resurrection of Christ given in verse 14) **shall be caught up**.
 - The word **caught up** is used in 2 Corinthians 12:2 of the one **caught up to the third heaven**.
 - The latin uses *rapturo*, from which we get the English word *rapture*. This is (arguably) the *only place in the Bible* that teaches about a “snatching away” of certain individuals.
 - These individuals are swept away **to meet the Lord in the air** and they remain with the Lord forevermore.
 - One *can* argue with the *timing* of the rapture, but one *cannot* argue with the *fact* of the rapture without simply denying the plain truth of Scripture.
- Verse 18 –
 - Paul looked at these words as *comforting*. They are a word from the Lord (v. 14) that gives new information to the Body of Christ about those who have died.

ARGUMENTS FOR A PRETRIBULATIONAL RAPTURE FROM THIS PASSAGE ALONE

- Why would Paul need to give information to a group of people who already had information about the Second Coming? His introduction in verse 13 seems to say that he has specifically Pauline information, related therefore to the *mystery* which was his alone (Eph. 3:2).
- Why does Paul speak ominously of matters of preparation for the Second Coming (1 Thess. 3:13-14) but present the appearance of the Lord in v. 13 and 18 as comforting and hopeful, if not for the fact that the *rapture* is a time of blessedness, but the Second Coming is a time of judgment?
- Why does Paul base this on revelation given to him alone (demanded by context, since there is no **word of the Lord** (v. 15) about this material except what Paul gives?
- The “resurrection unto rapture” of verses 16-17 does not align with the “resurrection unto judgment” found in Revelation 20.
- The details of the rapture simply do not align with the details of the Second Coming. Either this (or the other) passages are in error, or they are not talking about the same thing.
- The information about the rapture, found only with Paul, gives **hope** (v. 13) and **comfort** (v. 18). Nothing is more *hopeful* nor *comforting* than to know that, someday... SWOOSH!