

1 Thess 4:13-18 - **“END TIMES – THE RAPTURE”**

Last week we shared from Daniel’s prophecies that a time is coming when JESUS CHRIST will return to the Earth and rule over all nations during the time we refer to as the MILLENNIUM.

But this is not the next event on the prophetic calendar, so let’s take a moment to consider the broad outline of God’s Plan for the END TIMES to see where things fit relative to one another.

I do need to say from the outset that there are some differing views of these events, depending on the system of interpretation used.

We will consider the three main overall views of End Times prophecy in a later message, but it is sufficient today to say that in our study, we are applying a “LITERAL” method of interpretation of Prophecy. So, if the Scripture is clear and gives times or details, we take them literally and precisely.

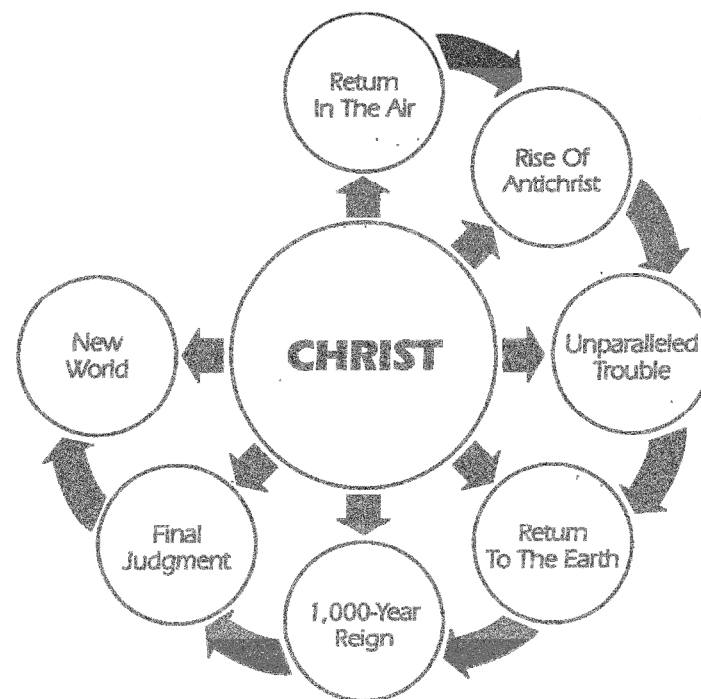
And where figurative language is used, we interpret those images in light of the context or other Scriptures or events that make the meaning clear. The alternative method applied is “ALLEGORICAL” in nature or a more symbolic application of times or events.

To illustrate the difference briefly, we take all UNFULFILLED PROPHECIES made to and about Israel to pertain to that NATION.

By contrast, those in the “allegorical” camp believe that the JEWS no longer have a place in God’s plan and that any unfulfilled prophecies made to Israel should now to be applied to “SPIRITUAL ISRAEL” or the Church. Obviously this will lead us to some very different conclusions in this area.

Proponents of both groups broadly agree that taking a “LITERAL” method of interpretation will lead to the basic body of teaching you are hearing today!

So let’s consider an overall **OUTLINE OF GOD’S PLAN FOR THE END TIMES** from the “literal” view point.



NOTE:

- **CHRIST is at the CENTRE**
- **The 1st event on this prophetic plan is CHRIST’S RETURN in the AIR, also referred to as the “RAPTURE OF THE CHURCH”**
- **Then, the RISE of ANTICHRIST**

- The TRIBULATION period on the Earth
- Christ's RETURN to the EARTH, more commonly known as the "SECOND COMING"
- Then, the MILLENNIUM
- Great WHITE THRONE JUDGMENT
- New HEAVENS and a NEW EARTH

Today we want to focus on Christ's RETURN in the AIR, also referred to as the "RAPTURE OF THE CHURCH"

Let's commence our study by considering the latter part of John chapter 13.

The setting in this chapter is the LAST SUPPER where Jesus shared some disturbing information with His disciples.

He told them:

- One of them was going to betray Him (v 21)
- He would be going away and they would not be able to follow Him (v 33)

- Even Peter would deny he knew JESUS that very night (v 38)

One can only imagine the **CONFUSION AND HEAVINESS IN THE ROOM** as Jesus said these things. BUT THEN He gave He followed with these wonderful words of encouragement:

[John 14:1-3] *"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. 2. 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. 3. 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."*

Look what Jesus was telling them:

- They were not to be 'stirred up', 'agitated'
- In the same way that a bridegroom in the Jewish tradition would go to his Father's house to build on extra rooms to receive his bride, Jesus was going to prepare a place for His followers

- This place was in “His Father’s house” = HEAVEN
- He would come again to receive them
- They would be with Him where He is = in HEAVEN

What an incredible promise!

- Did He mean when they died? NO, the imagery suggests He was coming to get them when the place was ready

What was Jesus referring to and WHEN would it happen?

As part of the answer we need to move forward some 15 years from when Jesus’ promise was given.

According to Acts 17, on his 2nd Missionary journey, Paul had visited the port city of THESSALONICA where:

- he shared for three Sabbath days with Jews and devout Greeks,

- And a great number of people became followers of Jesus.

So great was this response that jealous Jews caused an uproar in the City and Paul and Silas had to leave town.

I wonder what he shared that so stirred them up?

Paul was concerned for the NEW BELIEVERS they’d left behind so,

- He sent Timothy back to encourage the believers.
- Timothy’s report was good and Paul wrote to the Church

(1 Th 1:8-10) The Lord's message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia-- your faith in God has become known everywhere. Therefore we do not need to say anything about it, [9] for they themselves report what kind of reception you gave us.

They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, [10] and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead--Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.

What a packed statement in vv 9-10:

- They **TURNED** away from **PAGANISM / IDOLATRY**
- They started to **SERVE GOD**
- And they were **WAITING FOR THE RETURN** of Christ from **HEAVEN**
- **JESUS WHO DELIVERS US FROM THE WRATH TO COME**

Here there are ONE decision, TWO activities and a PROMISE!

From the TONE of Paul's letter and the way he writes, two things are evident here:

1. He must have **SPOKEN TO THEM** on these matters before
2. The **THEME OF CHRIST'S RETURN WAS UPPERMOST** in his thinking

And we find he constantly comes back to this theme throughout the letter:

- *(1 Th 2:19) "... what is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes? Is it not you?"*
- *(1 Th 3:13) "May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones."*

Now, some of the Thessalonians must have understood Paul's teachings on the Lord's return as **something that would happen in their immediate future** – in their lifetime - so when some among them started to die,

they were somewhat perplexed as to what part these ones would have in the Lord's return.

So when he came to 4:13ff, we find that Paul launched into a **very detailed teaching concerning the STEP by STEP process of Jesus' return for believers**

READ: 1 Thess. 4:13-18

- v 13 - don't be UNINFORMED
 - those who have no hope – inscriptions on tombs as well as references in literature indicated that pagans had a deep fear of death as the end of everything; the Christian message was in stark contrast to that idea!
- v 14 - those who have died believing in Christ (their spirits) will come WITH JESUS

QUESTION: "WHERE are they NOW?"

(2 Cor 5:8) "...*away* (absent, emigrate, quit, vacate) *from the body and at home* (present, to be in one's home country) *with the Lord.*"

(Phil 1:21-23) *For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain... I desire to depart* (from the body) *and be* (to exist) *with* (together with, beside) *Christ, which is better by far...*"

- v 15 - I know this BY REVELATION from the LORD
 - those who are alive at the time will certainly not be resurrected before those who have died
- v 16 - The LORD HIMSELF (not an angel)
 - will DESCEND from HEAVEN
 - with a SHOUT
 - with the VOICE of an ARCHANGEL
 - with the TRUMPET call of GOD
 - DEAD in CHRIST will be RESURRECTED

- v 17 - those **ALIVE** will be **CAUGHT UP** together with them

- To **MEET** the **LORD IN THE AIR**
- So shall we **ALWAYS** be with the **LORD**

- v 18 - therefore, **COMFORT** one another

This event is what many of us call
THE RAPTURE of the **CHURCH**.

RAPTURE IS NOT a word used in our English Bible but it is in the LATIN VULGATE.

Gk harpadzo = to snatch away, to seize, pluck, catch up

“Rapture” comes from the **LATIN** translation ‘raptus’ or ‘rapere’ = “caught up”

- Some have mistakenly called it a “secret rapture”
- It’s **NOT** “secret” – **BUT** “**SUDDEN**”
- **IMMINENT** – no warning!

LET’S GO TO **ANOTHER KEY TEXT** to fill in some details

READ: 1 Cor.15:50-53

This is found in the great passage on **RESURRECTION**.

These verses tell us:

- v 50 - **Flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom**
- v 51 - **All CHRISTIANS** will undergo change
- v 52 - In a split second, the trumpet will sound and the dead will be **RAISED** with glorified bodies
- v 53 - The living will be **CHANGED** to glorified bodies

Tim La Haye in “Rapture Under Attack” gives his impression of this time:

I expect the Rapture to be electrifyingly sudden but not secret, for when Christ calls His living saints to be with Him, millions of

people will suddenly vanish from the earth. An unsaved person who happens to be in the company of a believer will know immediately that his friend has vanished. There will certainly be worldwide recognition of the fact, for if over two hundred million people suddenly depart this earth, leaving their earthly belongings behind, pandemonium and confusion will certainly reign for a time.

A million conversations will end mid-sentence. A million phone receivers will suddenly go dead

A woman will reach for a man's hand in the dark...and no one will be there.

...Think of the countless homes where, "in the twinkling of an eye," only clothes will remain in the chair where a believer sat moments before. Consider the passengers aboard airplanes with a Christian crew. Many believe that the Rapture will result in titanic chaos as Christian auto and bus drivers, train

engineers, pilots and others suddenly vanish. The Rapture just may create the greatest freeway gridlock in history!

It would seem evident that the three texts we've looked at today all speak of the one event. Let's put it together into a sequence of steps that seems to be indicated:

ORDER OF RAPTURE:

1. THE LORD HIMSELF WILL DESCEND

- from His Father's house, where He is preparing a place for us (John 14:1-3 and 1 Thess. 4:16)

2. HE IS COMING TO RECEIVE US TO HIMSELF

- John 14:1-3

3. HE RESURRECTS BELIEVERS WHO HAVE DIED

- 1 Thess.4:14-15

4. THE LORD SHOUTS AS HE DESCENDS

- With a “loud command” (1 Thess.4:16)

5. WE WILL HEAR THE VOICE OF THE ARCHANGEL

- 1 Thess 4:16

6. WE WILL HEAR THE TRUMPET CALL OF GOD

- 1 Thess. 4:16
- His last trumpet *for the Church*
- *NOT the seventh trumpet of Rev 11:15*

7. THE DEAD IN CHRIST WILL RISE FIRST.

- The corruptible ashes of dead bodies are made incorruptible and joined together with their spirit, which Jesus brings with Him (1 Thess.4:16-17)

8. LIVING BELIEVERS SHALL BE CHANGED

- made incorruptible / our bodies made “immortal”
- 1 Cor. 15:51,53

9. THEN WE SHALL BE CAUGHT UP [RAPTURED] TOGETHER WITH THEM

- in the clouds
- To meet the Lord in the air (1 Thess.4:17)

10. TO “RECEIVE YOU TO MYSELF”

- Jesus takes us to the Father’s house “that where I am, you may be also” (John 14:3)

11. “THUS WE SHALL ALWAYS BE WITH THE LORD”

- 1 Thess.4:17

This is the great doctrine of the RAPTURE of the Church!

The QUESTION on everyone’s lips is “WHEN?” WHEN will this happen?

We don't know, exactly!

- IMMINENT – no warning!
- The RAPTURE will take place **BEFORE the time of Great Tribulation** on the earth:

Why? Briefly:

A. THE RAPTURE AND THE 2ND COMING OF CHRIST ARE TWO DISTINCT EVENTS:

RAPTURE - Lord comes IN THE AIR (1 Thess 4:17)

2ND COMING - Lord comes TO THE EARTH (Zech 14:4)

RAPTURE – The Lord comes FOR His people (John 14:3)

2ND COMING – The Lord comes WITH His SAINTS (Jude 14)

RAPTURE – BRINGS BLESSING (1 Thess 4:18)

2ND COMING - BRINGS JUDGMENT (2 Thess 1:5-10)

B. VARIOUS TEXTS INDICATE THE CHURCH WILL NOT PASS THROUGH THE TIME OF WRATH

The time that is coming is described as:

(Mat 24:21) ... great distress, unequaled from the beginning of the world until now-- and never to be equaled again.

Evidence: Church not included in WRATH

(Rev 3:10) Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth.

(1 Th 1:10) ...and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead-- Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.

(1 Th 5:9) For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.

AND: The CHURCH is not mentioned in Rev 6-18 when the judgements are being poured out on the earth.

C. DANIEL'S 70 WEEKS only applies to ISRAEL (Dan 9:24-27)

D. THE LORD'S RETURN IS IMMINENT; BUT 2nd coming can be worked out once end times begins

E. ANTICHRIST CANNOT BE REVEALED UNTIL the Holy Spirit working in the Church is taken out of the way

We will deal with these issues in later messages

As we conclude today, you may say

“The RAPTURE - SO WHAT?”

Since this could occur at any time, let us:

1. BE READY!

• YOU MUST BE A CHRISTIAN to be part of the RAPTURE

• (Luke 12:35-40) "Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning, [36] like men waiting for their master to return from a wedding banquet, so that when he comes and knocks they can immediately open the door for him. [37] It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when he comes. I tell you the truth, he will dress himself to serve, will have them recline at the table and will come and wait on them. [38] It will be good for those servants whose master finds them ready, even if he comes in the second or third watch of the night. [39] But understand this: If the owner of the house

had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into. [40] You also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him."

2. BE PURE

- **(1 John 3:2-3)** *Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. [3] Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure.*
- **(Titus 2:11-13)** *For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. [12] It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, [13] while we wait for the blessed hope--the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ...*

3. BE CONFIDENT!

- **Jesus IS coming again!**