

***“Paul's First Letter to the Thessalonians —  
‘The Coming of the Lord, Dispensationally Considered:  
Living in the Light, Not in the Darkness’”***

**Review:**

- ***We are living in challenging times and, for some, they are more challenging than have ever been experienced before. For others, they do not compare at all (those that have served in the military, for example). However, the message of the apostle here in the words we shall share together today are relevant, it is clear, to all of us today and always. This teaching has been a comfort, I am sure, to so many down through the ages who have suffered so very greatly in times of war, famine, plague — or persecution. Most of us have not suffered in those ways, ever.***

***Now we face a great challenge nevertheless here in our land and our lives have necessarily changed very much. But the message of God to us today is the same — be comforted, for the Lord is near. Awaiting his calling and loving his appearing - that is our privilege for today, and always.***

- ***Well, for the Thessalonians, false teachers had come into their assembly and had led the believers astray as far as their faith and their expectations were concerned. So Paul needed to teach and remind them again:***
  - ***Verse 13 reads: “...But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope.” I wonder if the false teachers might have been teaching that there is no physical resurrection at all or that the promised resurrection was only a spiritual kind of thing.***
- ***In the next verses we came last time to the details of Paul’s encouragement. Christ’s resurrection is, Paul teaches here, the sure and eternal hope of believers and it is that teaching that is what these believers here needed so much.***

***1 Thess. 4:14-15***

14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him.

15 For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive [and] remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent **[precede]** them which are asleep.

- ***In verse 15 we see that those who have died are already with the Lord in spirit and they shall be with the Lord physically FIRST, before those that remain are joined together with him in the Rapture event. For they will be brought back WITH the Lord at the Rapture, and in resurrected bodies! This is the word of truth that the Thessalonian believers so much needed!***
- ***Our resurrection (and of course, transformation) will follow that of those that have gone before.***
  - ***The details of the teaching regarding the Rapture of the Church which is His Body are given here.***

**1 Thess. 4:16-17**

16 For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first:

17 Then we which are alive [and] remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we **[all]** ever be with the Lord. ***["caught up" here == "raptuo" in Latin == "raptured"]***

- ***The order is important. At the call, the shout, and the voice of the archangel:***
  - ***The dead in Christ will be raised incorruptible (with physical but resurrected bodies) when the Lord will come from heaven for this great meeting in the air.***
  - ***Then, we (who remain alive) will be caught up (and changed as 1 Cor. 15 reveals in more detail).***
  - ***Finally, we shall all be forever "with the Lord" (and our dear ones) as our heavenly inheritance is completed.***
- ***No greater comfort is offered by the Word of Our Living Lord Jesus as in these words:***

**1 Thess. 4:18** Wherefore comfort one another with these words.

- ***Paul closed this section of this chapter with an exhortation to be comforted in the midst of trials and persecutions. Comfort, comfort, comfort! Great comfort from Christ himself through his apostle is offered here through these words of the Lord. Taking by faith that***

*which a false teacher has taught is dangerous indeed, but reorienting our faith through this teaching regarding the coming Rapture of the Church can easily cancel out that error. So be it.*

- *Now we will focus on a scripture passage that is often misunderstood due primarily to a failure to “rightly divide the word of truth”. How important that always is!*

**Our Scripture Today: 1 Thess. 5:1-8 — The Rapture or Catching Up of the Church is Next on God’s Calendar — Comfort, not fear, is our grace gift for today.**

**Our Outline:**

- *The Rapture or Catching Up of the Church: It is Next on God’s Calendar*
- *The Rapture or Catching Up of the Church: Grace and the Tribulation are So Different!*

**I. The Rapture or Catching Up of the Church is Next on God’s Calendar:**

**[READ ] 1 Thess. 4:13, 17–18**

13 But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope.

...

16 For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first:

17 Then we which are alive [and] remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.

- *It is not stated here directly that what is being written of is the Rapture followed by the Tribulation period. That truth, the Blessed Hope, is however what is hinted at here in verses 25 and 26. At that point when the fulness of the Gentiles have come in, the Rapture will occur and God’s focus will turn again to his people the Jews. This is the time of the Tribulation, the end of which will occur when God sends back his son, our Lord Jesus Christ, Israel’s Messiah, to fulfill Israel’s hope for the land of promise.*
- *Rather, this is a simple statement of the Rapture of the Church which is his Body. There is nothing here about the timing of it in the plan of the ages except that it will not be before those who have died in the Lord have been resurrected FIRST. For the timing of it in*

*relationship to the prophetic calendar for Israel we need to go ahead to chapter 5 and to Paul's second letter to this church which we shall begin in today's study.*

**II. The Rapture or Catching Up of the Church: Grace and the Tribulation are So Different!**

- *Comfort and encouragement are our lot, not tribulation, enduring the wrath of God until the end, and required preparations therefore for the return of the Lord to earth and the establishing of the Kingdom.*
- *The Rapture event MUST occur just before the beginning of the fulfillment of the prophetic references found in Rom. 11:26-27, or, in other words, when the Lord God again turns his attention to Israel (and the nations, of course). There is no evidence of any overlap between these two dispensational workings of God. One is for Israel and the Jews, the other is for the Gentiles and the church which is his Body.*

***[READ ] Rom. 11:25-27***

***25 For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in.***

***26 And so [then] all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob:***

***27 For this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins.***

- *Until the Lord returns his focus and work to the Jews, the church which is his Body is necessarily the central focus here in this letter and in many others of the apostle. This is a high level doctrinal teaching with a significant "dispensational" aspect. God's work with Israel and the Jews in the spotlight is a very different working of God than when he has the Gentiles and the Body of Christ in the focus.*

*When all the elect of this glorious and heavenly dispensation have been saved, we shall be caught up into heaven's glory and the time of Jacob's Trouble here on this earth will begin (Jer. 30:7). The Second coming of Christ and the establishing of the earthly, Messianic Kingdom will at that point only be 7 years future since the Tribulation, according to Daniel and the book of Revelation, is clearly stated to be 7 years long, broken into two equal parts of 3 1/2 years or 1260 days.*

- ***Now we will look at the key verses here and continue with this great subject next week:***

***[READ ] 1 Thess. 5:1-3***

1 But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you.  
 2 For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night.  
 3 For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape.

- ***But what did they not know perfectly? Well, exactly what Paul was teaching them here. They had known it but had given it up for other teachings contrary to what the apostle had taught them so well.***

***[READ ] 1 Thess. 5:4-5***

4 But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief.  
 5 Ye are all the children [lit. "sons] of light, and the children [lit. "sons] of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness.

***[READ ] 1 Thess. 5:6-8***

6 Therefore let us not sleep, as [do] others; but let us watch and be sober.  
 7 For they that sleep sleep in the night; and they that be drunken are drunken in the night.  
 8 But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation ***[the Rapture itself!]***.

- ***There are critically important dispensational contrasts here and NOT statements about comparative virtue, spirituality, maturity or simply personal ethics and morality that would have been applicable in any age or dispensation. These statements are also very different with what had already been exhorted of the Jews by their prophets and teachers regarding to coming time of Jacob's Trouble.***

***This is not a statement only about these believers being lights in the darkness or walking differently than others. Yes, they are being exhorted to be that and to do just that. But the larger implication here has to do with the day and the night. They are in the day and the children of the day, NOT THE NIGHT! That makes all the***

*difference Paul writes here.*

- *We must take careful note of the words and expressions used here. They are designed by the Holy Spirit to make crystal clear the many distinctions between the Tribulation period that the Jews of the future will necessarily be enduring, and, on the other hand, the Dispensation of the Grace of God in which we are living today:*
  - *Verses 1 & 2: “times and seasons” and “the day of the Lord”:*
    - *“times and seasons” - see Acts 1:1-7 for the only other use of this expression referring to the tribulation period, the second coming, and the kingdom*
    - *In other words, as Paul simply states here: “the day of the Lord”. This coming time is a time of great trial for Jews and for Israel and it will also be a time of great trial for the entire world. See also Zeph. 1:14-18; Zech. 14:1-9.*
  - *Verses 3-4: “peace and safety”: The “peace and safety” phrase here will be reality at the very beginning of the Tribulation when peace and safety is finally declared by the world ruler (antichrist?). There has never been “peace and safety” during this dispensation of the grace of God. But after the Rapture (which may itself probably cause a worldwide crisis of fear and impending doom) peace and safety will be proclaimed by Satan’s ruling emissaries and the wars of history will be caused to cease for a time.*

*The first 3 1/2 years of the Tribulation until the mid point of the Tribulation where the man of lawlessness is revealed openly will be a time that is so deceiving that even the Jews will be convinced to make a treaty with their arch enemies.*

*The exhortation for believers during those months will be to watch and be prepared and ready looking for the signs that will signify that the time is right to flee into the wilderness (See Matt. 24 & 25, Luke 21 and Rev. 12 for the very similar language).*

- *“night” and “day”: Normally used of periods of time during the ordinary 24 hour solar day. But here “night” and “day” have*

**very different characteristics. For the words are used here “dispensationally”.**

- **“them” and “us”: The ones living in the “night” compared with the ones who are “of” the day (verse 5). These are two totally distinctive groups. Again, this is dispensational teaching, not teaching about some believers who are obedient as opposed to others who are not, all living in the same time and circumstances as in the prophetic scriptures. Rather, it is about believers living in an entirely different dispensational setting.**
- **“appointed to wrath”: Those living in the night, or in “the day of the Lord” have been “appointed unto wrath” meaning, to live in this period leading directly to the Second Coming of Israel’s Messiah. This is called “The Time of Jacob’s Trouble”, you will recall. The Thessalonians, on the contrary, are “appointed not to wrath” , verse 9, as are we who are living under grace today.**

**[REREAD ] 1 Thess. 5:6-8**

6 Therefore let us not sleep, as [do] others; but let us watch and be sober.

7 For they that sleep sleep in the night; and they that be drunken are drunken in the night.

8 But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation **[the Rapture itself!]**.

- **This is absolutely NOT applicable to the Jewish saints living in the Tribulation period who had to endure to the end as the teachings by our Lord in the gospels testify and also the Old Testament and the book of Revelation. They were required to watch and wait for the signs of the times and then to be obedient to the Lord’s commandments. If they did not they would experience the everlasting torment of the judgment:**
- **This highly relevant to today, is it not? Peace and safety! Well, there is none of that now but we surely all want it. Right? And we work hard for it. But the enemy is very pleased to use our great efforts also for his glory if he can. In the Tribulation period he surely will use it to his great advantage. What about today?**

**Amen and amen.**

### **Conclusions:**

- ***Glory, glory, glory! The “catching up or rapture” of the church the Body of Christ is not revealed in prophecy. The Rapture MUST Occur Before the Time of Jacob’s Trouble! Amen.***
- ***The teachings given to the church which is his Body are very different from those given to “kingdom” saints. The church which is his body is appointed a special working under grace and that is to continue until and only until its appointed end which is the rapture or catching up BEFORE the tribulation period begins. At that point God changes his focus from the Body church and grace to the Kingdom and Israel.***
- ***That is what Paul teaches in these scriptures and that is what he calls the blessed hope in Titus 2:13, to be called into heaven to meet the Lord in the air together with those other members of the body of Christ that have died previously. Only members of Christ’s body church are part of this resurrection / translation / transformation, not the other believers that had a kingdom hope.***
- ***Next time we will continue here in this chapter. In summary, the Rapture or Blessed Hope is the final event in the Dispensation of the Grace of God. After that, the Lord God will refocus on his chosen people Israel, set aside during our current dispensation but then again the central focus of the scriptures of prophecy, including the Old Testament, our Lord’s earthly ministry, and the book of Revelation. The time of light will end and the time of darkness will begin. The church will be gone and the nation of Israel will be the focus. Israel and Jerusalem will be the main focus indeed.***

***The Rapture or Catching Up of the Church is Next on God’s Calendar — SUCH ABUNDANT COMFORT AND NOT TIMES OF FEAR AND COMING JUDGMENT, is our grace gift for today.***

***For we are living in the light and not in the darkness:***

***Amen.***