

"Upon this rock I will build my church"

**Matthew 16:18**

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## THE HOPE AND COMFORT OF THE RESURRECTION

1 THESSALONIANS 4:13-5:11

### INTRODUCTION

A. The letters to the Thessalonians were perhaps the first of the New Testament letters to be written.

1. They contain extensive writings on the subjects of the second coming of the Lord, the resurrection and the judgment.

2. Paul's emphasis on these subjects reflects the deep interest and concern that was present among the early Christians. That interest continues today as seen by the proliferation of speculative information being spread concerning these subjects by false teachers.

B. Just as there are many false doctrines today concerning our Lord's return, there were many misconceptions present in the early church about it that needed to be addressed.

C. Paul's letters to the Thessalonians were written to set the record straight about what would happen to those who had died before Jesus returned, and to give hope and comfort to the Christians who remained faithful in Thessalonica.

D. This theme of hope and comfort becomes clear to us in the last two chapters of the first letter.

E. This passage has been misused by premillennialists over the years to claim things that are not even remotely suggested by the passage.

F. What exactly does this passage teach concerning the Lord's return and the resurrection of the dead?

### DISCUSSION

#### I. THE MANNER OF CHRIST'S RETURN.

A. Paul's work at Thessalonica.

1. Came to the city from Philippi (Acts 17:1).

2. Preached in the synagogue for three sabbaths (Acts 17:4).

3. Probably worked here longer than three weeks (1 Thessalonians 2:9;

2 Thessalonians 3:8; Philippians 4:16).

4. Had great success here (Acts 17:6; 1 Thessalonians 1:8, 9).

5. When driven out, Paul went to Berea (Acts 17:10).

6. When driven from Berea, Paul left Silas and Timothy behind to strengthen and mature the young churches of that region, but soon sent for them to join him in Athens (Acts 17:14, 15).

7. Persecution of the fledgling church continued from the Jews, as well as from the pagan worshippers of the Greek gods (1 Thessalonians 2:14, 15; 3:3,4).

8. He soon sent Timothy back whom, later rejoining Paul in Corinth, was able to inform Paul of the Thessalonians' faithfulness and their concerns about the Lord's return.

a. Included concerns about when the Lord would return.

b. Also concern about what would happen to those Christians who had already died before Christ's return.

9. Interest in the Lord's return is seen by Paul's mentioning it in every chapter of this letter (1:10; 2:19; 3:13; 4:13-18; 5:1-11).

B. The manner of Christ's return.

1. Some Thessalonian Christians apparently believed that only the living would be able to enjoy the benefits of the Lord's return.

2. Paul gives comfort to them and us by detailing how the Lord will return.

3. Jesus will return personally (1 Thessalonians 4:16).

a. Will not come representatively.

b. Will not come figuratively.

4. Both living saints and righteous deceased will meet the Lord in the air (1 Thessalonians 4:14-17).

a. No evidence that Jesus will again set foot on the earth.

b. No seven-year period between our supposed rapture and the resurrection of the dead.

c. No period of tribulation followed by Armageddon.

d. Brother Foy Wallace wrote, “The apostle here states that the righteous who shall be alive at the coming of the Lord shall not ‘prevent’-- precede—the righteous dead in the ascension to meet him; but the dead in Christ shall rise first—that is, before the living in Christ are caught up; and together the ascending saints shall meet the descending Saviour; and ‘so shall ever be with the Lord.’ As for the resurrection and judgment of the wicked, other passages teach that the wicked will be raised and judged at the same last day upon which the righteous will ascend to meet the Lord—the difference exists not in the time of the resurrection but in the retribution and the reward.”<sup>1</sup>

e. Proof of brother Wallace’s statement is found in the first chapter of 2 Thessalonians.

5. Jesus will come audibly (1 Thessalonians 4:16).

a. “With a shout!”

b. “With the voice of the archangel!”

c. “With the trump of God!”

d. There is no clandestine return found here.

6. Jesus will come unexpectedly (1 Thessalonians 5:1-3).

a. He will come like a thief.

b. He will come like labor upon a woman with child.

c. If the Lord “raptured” His saints seven years before His return to punish the wicked, there would be no secret.

d. Brother Johnny Ramsey also observes, “In the very passage immediately following the chief proof-text of those teaching that there is a Rapture (1 Thessalonians 5:1-4), we read vivid words that forever teach that the righteous are not taken away before the Judgment Day but are present with the wicked until the time the wicked receive punishment, at which time the righteous receive their reward. The gospel is to be preached by the children of God until the end of the world (Matt. 28:20), but this would be impossible if the saints are raptured seven years prior to the world’s end!”<sup>2</sup>

7. The righteous will then ascend to heaven (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18).

a. In this passage Paul gives assurance that the dead in Christ will enjoy

the benefits available to all saints at the return of our Lord.

b. Both the resurrected righteous dead and the righteous living shall ascend to heaven and shall remain there forever!

c. There will be no return to this earth.

## II. FALSE DOCTRINE OF THE RAPTURE EXPOSED.

A. The premillennialists contend there will be two resurrections and two comings of Christ.

1. He will come for His living and departed saints, the rapture, at the beginning of the seven years of tribulation. This is the first coming of Christ and the first phase of the first resurrection.

2. This can happen at any time and also represents the end of the church age.

3. At the end of the tribulation, the Lord will return with His saints and there will be a second phase of the first resurrection, as those who were martyred during the previous seven years are raised to join the Lord and the saints who have returned. This is the Lord's second coming.

4. At His return the Lord will end the Battle of Armageddon, the righteous will be victorious, and the Lord's thousand-year reign on earth will commence.

5. At the conclusion of the millennium, the unrighteous will be raised for the judgment, and then eternity will begin. This is the second resurrection.

B. Premillennialists' proof text for the rapture (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18).

1. While the word rapture is not found in the English translations of the Bible, the Greek word "harpazo" which means "to seize, carry off by force" or to "snatch or catch away" is found in this text (v. 17).

2. This passage was not written to teach that there will be a rapture, or two resurrections, or two comings of our Lord.

3. Instead it was written to give comfort to Christians who were uncertain about the fate of their departed loved ones.

4. Other passages clearly teach that there will be a general resurrection of all the dead at the same time, and that is what is under consideration

here (Hebrews 9:27; 2 Thessalonians 1:5-10; Matthew 25:31-46).

5. Paul is merely emphasizing that which gives the greatest comfort and hope to Christians of all ages: their resurrection to be with the Lord forever in Heaven.

C. The premillennial theory of the two comings.

1. Premillennialists claim that the two comings of Christ are taught by the use of two different words in the Greek.

a. “Parousia”: referring to His presence.

b. “Epiphaneia”: referring to His manifestation.

2. The “parousia” will take place when Jesus comes for His saints at the rapture.

3. The “epiphaneia” will occur when Jesus comes with His saints at the close of the tribulation period.

4. The Bible makes no such distinction in the use of these words, but they are used interchangeably.

5. Both words are used in 2 Thessalonians 2:8, and there is no time to be found between His presence and His manifestation.

6. Brother Foy Wallace clearly points out the fallacy of this doctrine by a close examination of 1 Thessalonians 3:13.

a. “Here it says that Jesus Christ will come ‘with all his saints’ at the parousia. But the millennial theory is that he comes ‘for his saints’ at the parousia, and ‘with’ the saints at the epiphaneia. So Paul made a slip—he has the Lord coming ‘with’ the saints when he should be coming ‘for’ them. Paul has the Lord coming ‘with’ his saints seven years too early to fit the millennial theory.”<sup>3</sup>

b. “Now, since the premillennial theory teaches that the parousia will be when Christ comes ‘for the saints’ and will take place seven years before the epiphaneia when he shall come ‘with the saints’—but Paul plainly says in 1 Thessalonians 3:13 that Christ will come ‘with all his saints’ at the parousia—it follows that the premillennial theory is a flat denial of the statement of Paul, and to believe the theory is to deny the word of God.”<sup>4</sup>

7. We can also see Jesus bringing with Him the dead saints at the very time He is to come for His saints (cf. 1 Thessalonians 4:14).

D. There is no room in the Bible for this false theory of the rapture, two resurrections and two comings of our Lord.

## CONCLUSION

A. Christians are given great hope and comfort by the writings of the apostle Paul in this passage concerning the resurrection of the dead and our future reward in Heaven.

B. That comfort is diminished by those who continue to tamper with the word of God by propagating the false theories of premillennialism.

C. May we ever look for the day when Jesus will return for His saints at the end of time, and may we do so with sober minds and hearts as we strive to put on the Christian graces.

## ENDNOTES

1 Wallace, Foy E., Jr., God's Prophetic Word (Foy E. Wallace, Jr. Publications, Oklahoma City, 1946), p. 260.

2 Ramsey, Johnny, "New Testament Books Disprove Premillennialism" Restorer, Vol. 19, No. 1 (1999), p.7.

3 Wallace, p. 242.

4 Ibid., p. 243.

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