

Three Foundational Rapture Passages

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Three scripture passages demonstrate the pre-tribulation Rapture. Together these verses answer the who, the what, the when, the where, and the how questions concerning the Rapture of the Church. The central passage, 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18, details the sequence of events at the Rapture and the correlation between the resurrection of the bodies of dead Church Age believers and the Rapture of living saints. Paul borrows language from Jesus' statement in John 14:1–3 which designates the destination of the resurrected and Raptured Church. First Corinthians 15:50–58 reveals details of the duration and purpose of our transformation at the Rapture and confirms the sequence of events between the resurrection of dead and living Church Age believers. These three passages are not the only scriptural basis for the pre-tribulation Rapture, but together they provide a confident foundation that our future blessed hope precedes the Tribulation, Daniel's seventieth week.¹

What Happens When the Lord Returns (1 Thessalonians 4:13–18)

The apostle Paul penned two short epistles to the persecuted Thessalonica congregation to answer their questions concerning their loved ones who died before the return of Jesus. His purpose was to comfort and encourage rather than to warn or alarm (1 Thessalonians 4:13; 5:11). Paul states he already taught them about future events in God's plan, and thus they had no need know more about the "times and seasons" (1 Thessalonians 5:1). Jesus had used this exact phrase when He answered the disciples' inquiry about when He would restore the kingdom (Acts 1:6). At that time, before Pentecost and the birth of the Church, the body of Christ, His answer was that the disciples were *not* to know the times and seasons. Such a difference, from not to be informed about the times and seasons to being informed and instructing others, can be explained only by realizing that at the time of Acts 1 certain prophetic details were yet to be revealed.² Paul's writing of 1 Thessalonians twenty years later indicates many of these details had been divinely disclosed. Since the Thessalonian Christians had thus obviously been taught about the future return of the Lord and the Day of the Lord and understood the coming to be imminent, they had become confused when some of their loved ones died before the Lord's arrival. They feared that these dead believers would not participate in the coming of the Lord. Perhaps they

had received erroneous teaching indicating the day of the Lord had already arrived, and were afraid that they might already be in the Tribulation.³ In any case, their confusion certainly reinforces the belief that they had no expectation of any intervening prophecy which must necessarily take place prior to either the return of the Lord for the Church or the Day of the Lord. Paul writes both Thessalonian epistles to allay these fears by confirming that the dead saints had a role in the coming of Christ and that those living were not already in the Day of the Lord. Their misunderstanding and need for clarification clearly points to a contradiction with Paul's previous teaching about the imminent return of Christ.⁴ Pretribulationists define imminent as an event that is "'impending, hanging over one's head, ready to take place.'" An imminent event is one that is always ready to take place."⁵

The Context of Paul's Explanation. Five times in this epistle the Apostle speaks of the future coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. Each chapter, as divided in the English Bible, closes with a reference to our Lord's return. Three times in the epistle Paul references "wrath," two of which are uncontestedly eschatological.⁶ The first of these declares that Jesus rescues or delivers us from the "wrath to come" (1 Thessalonians 1:10). The second states that God has not destined or appointed the believer ("us") to wrath (1 Thessalonians 5:9). The wrath mentioned in these two verses points forward to divine judgments upon the earth within history, which means during the future tribulation period. Sandwiched between these two references, our passage explains how that deliverance takes place. At no point in any epistle does the New Testament warn Church Age believers how to protect themselves during the future tribulation period. If believers are expected to endure this time of intense divine judgment on the human race, then one would expect apostolic prescriptions for enduring such a horror. The context of 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 is one of comfort. Paul would have been quite irresponsible in his attempt to comfort believers about the return of Christ if he failed to warn of the horrors they must encounter prior to the return of Christ in the air.

The Purpose of Paul's Explanation (4:13). Paul does not write this discourse as some abstract explanation of eschatology. The apostle provides confident answers to comfort believers whose Christian loved ones had unexpectedly died physically. By understanding and internalizing this new information, the bereaved would not grieve like others, but would have

confident expectation of a future reunion with their beloved dead. This hope Paul described is not a wishful optimism, but objective eschatological certainty.⁷

The Basis for Our Confident Hope (4:14). The resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ was the clarion call of the future victory over death for all who trust in him (1 Corinthians 15:54–57). Our Lord’s resurrection from the dead is “the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep” (1 Corinthians 15:20). If we believe he died and rose again, and Paul assumes we do, there is a significant implication: Since Christ was victorious over physical death we should also believe that all Church Age believers who die physically will also undergo bodily resurrection. Thus, when He returns, we will be reunited with Jesus, and with all Church Age believers who previously died.

At this point Paul informs us that when the Lord returns He will be accompanied by those who “sleep in Jesus.” The euphemism “sleep” describes the temporary state of a believer’s physical body between physical death and resurrection (Matthew 27:52, John 11:11, Acts 13:36, 1 Corinthians 11:30, 1 Thessalonians 4:13–15).⁸ Since the dead in Christ return with Jesus before these saints receive their incorruptible resurrection bodies (cf., 1 Corinthians 15:52) this indicates some sort of interim body which allows the individual to have a conscious presence before the Lord at death (2 Corinthians 5:8).

The Events at the Coming of the Lord (1 Thessalonians 4:15–17). To reinforce the divine authority of his comments, Paul asserts that information regarding these events originates directly from Jesus. This was part of the “mystery” revelation given to Paul by the Lord Jesus for the edification of Church Age believers (1 Corinthians 15:51). This was new information, previously not revealed in the Old Testament or the Gospels. No specific revelation on the relation between the resurrection of living and dead believers had yet been given. Paul summarizes his comforting answer in verse 15: those believers alive at the coming of the Lord would be Raptured immediately following the bodily resurrection of those believers in Christ who had already died. Paul’s inclusion of himself as part of the group that would still be alive at the Lord’s coming reinforces his sense of the imminent return of the Lord. Paul then describes the sequence of events.

First, the Lord Himself will descend from heaven (4:16a). When compared with John 14:3, this confirms that the place to which Jesus said He was going and from which He would return

must be heaven (more below at John 14:3; cf., 1 Thessalonians 1:10). Since His ascension, the glorified resurrected body of the Lord Jesus Christ has been seated at the right hand of God the Father, on the Father's throne in heaven (Psalms 110:1 cf., Acts 2:33, 5:31; Colossians 3:1; Hebrews 8:1, 10:12, 12:2; Revelation 3:21). The emphatic use of "Himself" reinforces that this will be the *same* Jesus who ascended through the clouds to return to heaven (Acts 1:11, Hebrews 4:14) and not an angel or other divine representative. Just as Jesus ascended *through* the heavens to God, so, too He will descend or come down *from* heaven (*katabaino*). In His descent He will be accompanied by those church age believers who have already died and are in their interim state (1 Thessalonians 4:14).

Second, the Lord's descent will be heralded by three simultaneous sounds (4:16b). First, there is a shout. 'Shout' (*keleusma*) was a common Greek word for the verbal directive or command issued by someone in authority to those under him. *Keleusma* is used in the Apocrypha for a military command, a royal directive, a prophet's mandate or God's directive.⁹ The New Testament uses the word in the same way—commands from human authorities as well as divine mandates. The usage is too broad and general to claim that this is the shout of triumph of the Lord returning to the earth in conquest, which would indicate the return at the end of the Tribulation period. The shout alerts the Church to our Lord's return and commands them to 'form up' on Him. Nothing informs the reader of the identity of the one who shouts the command. Some have suggested it is the archangel, but John 11:25 indicates that at the "voice of the Son of God" the dead will live (John 5:25).

The second of the three simultaneous sounds is the voice of "an archangel" (NKJV).¹⁰ Only one archangel is mentioned in Scripture, Michael (Jude 9). At the same time there is a blast of the "trumpet of God." Trumpets are used many times in Scripture to herald some new event in God's plan for the future. In the book of Revelation the middle series of judgments are each announced by a sounding trumpet. In 1 Corinthians 15:52 the dead are raised by the blast of the "last trumpet." More will be said of the identification of this trumpet later, but for now it will be identified as the last trumpet of the Church Age and is identical to the trumpet mentioned in 1 Thessalonians 4:17 and Revelation 4:1. Though these three events may indeed describe only one combined sound, the repetition of the preposition with each clause suggests three distinct, but simultaneous events to signal the assembly of the Church with her Lord.

The third event is the resurrection of the physical bodies of the dead believers. Paul comforts his readers that those who have died “in Christ” participate first, immediately followed by those still alive at His coming. He strongly emphasizes the timing: the living “will *not* precede” the dead.¹¹ This is extremely significant for both here and in 1 Corinthians 15 we see that the resurrection of the dead precedes the translation of the living. This is also clear from the use of the term “first” (*proton*), and “then” (*epeita*). These express a temporal or chronological sequence.¹²

The dynamics of this transformation is described in more detail in the section below on 1 Corinthians 15:50–58. That this does not refer to a general resurrection of the dead saints from all history is clear as they are described as the dead “in Christ.” Old Testament saints are never described as being “in Christ.” Only those who believe in Christ subsequent to His death are united with His death, burial, and resurrection through the baptism by means of the Holy Spirit (Romans 6:3; 2 Corinthians 5:17) and entered into the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:13).

The fourth event follows immediately after the resurrection of the dead church age believers. All living believers will subsequently be caught up to meet the Lord in the air. “Caught up” translates the Greek verb, *harpazo*, “to snatch, seize, to suddenly grab or take something away.” The translation of this verb in the Latin *Vulgate*, by the verb *rapio*, is the basis for the English term “Rapture.”¹³ Thus, the claim that “Rapture” is a word not found in the Bible is spurious. The word Rapture *is* biblical.

The destination of both those resurrected and Raptured is the clouds in the air. There those alive and translated are reunited with departed loved ones and with our Lord. Paul comforts with the truth that from the moment of this reunion we will always be with the Lord (4:17c).

The emphasis in these verses is of a movement upward, to meet Christ who has completed His descent and awaits in the clouds. No indication of a further downward movement is present (the posttribulational interpretation). However, this alone is not sufficient evidence on which to base the timing of the Rapture.

One final consideration in this verse is the meaning of the word, “to meet.” Some have contended that this word, *apantēsis*, “is to be understood as a technical term for a civic custom of

antiquity whereby a public welcome was accorded by a city to important visitors.”¹ Those going out to meet the dignitary would then return with him to the city. This analogy is then used to support a post-tribulation view of the rapture. That Christians go up to meet Jesus then immediately descend with him to the earth. Thomas Ice has delineated the errors in this view as well as others. Gordon Fee has documented a number of other scholarly works which have also rejected this view. Unfortunately Bob Gundry remains unconvinced.¹⁴ Fee concludes, “a recent investigation of the word has demonstrated that this is unlikely, and that all the other accouterments of such ceremonial receptions are altogether missing from this passage.”¹⁵

The message of the Rapture is one of comfort (4:18). The conclusion from this description is that rather than being frightened by events preceding the coming of the Lord, such as the period of intense judgments during the time of Daniel’s seventieth week, we are to be comforted as we anticipate the coming of the Lord for His own. Church age believers are not looking for the antichrist, but for the Lord Jesus Christ; we are not looking for the signs of judgment, but for the appearance of our Blessed Hope.

The Rapture precedes the Day of the Lord. (1 Thessalonians 5:1-10). Beginning in 5:1 Paul introduces a new and related subject, indicated by his use of *peri de*. Paul now answers the Thessalonian believers’ worries by reminding them that they will not go through the Day of the Lord. Paul describes the conditions preceding the Day of the Lord as a time of “peace and safety,” which cannot describe any period during the period of Daniel’s seventieth week. The Day of the Lord is further described as a time of “sudden destruction,” for the unbelieving world, an unanticipated, unexpected time of divine judgment and wrath. The Old Testament sometimes refers to this Day of the Lord with the idiom, “day of wrath” (Psalm 110:5; Ezekiel 7:12, 19) and the time of “Jacob’s wrath.” The Thessalonians are comforted by knowing that God has not appointed them (“us” in the text refers to believers) to wrath, but to deliverance. Throughout 1 Thessalonians Paul reminds them that Jesus will deliver them, and the rest of the Church, from the “wrath to come.”²

¹ E. Peterson, “*Apantēsis*,” *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 10 vols., ed. Gerhard Kittel (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 1:380–81.

² Zane C. Hodges, “1 Thessalonians 5:1-11 and the Rapture,” *Chafer Theological Seminary Journal* 6 (October-December 2000):31-32.

Though some attempt to restrict the Day of the Lord to only the latter half of Daniel's Seventieth week, the period following the abomination of desolation, and thus place the Rapture at some point within the seven years, this view has two major problems. First, it voids the imminent expectation of Christ's return for the church, for something must necessarily intervene between now and the rapture. Second, it misconstrues the timing of the first two series of judgments (the seal and trumpet judgments) which must precede the abomination of desolation and which must occur in the first half of the Tribulation.¹⁶

Fifteen Significant Differences between the Rapture and the Second Coming

A number of significant differences are found in the description of the Rapture and the Second Coming of Christ.

- At the Rapture Jesus comes for His own [church age believers], at the Second Coming Jesus comes with His own [church age believers].
- At the time of the Rapture Jesus comes only in the air (1 Thessalonians 4:17), at the Second Coming Jesus comes to the earth (Revelation 19:11-18).
- At the Rapture, living saints receive resurrection bodies (1 Thessalonians 4:17), at the Second Coming, no living believers receive resurrection bodies.
- At the Rapture translated saints go to heaven, at the Second Coming translated saints go to earth.
- At the Rapture, Jesus comes in the air and returns to heaven (John 14:3), at the Second Coming Jesus establishes His kingdom on the earth.
- At the Rapture, there is no judgment on the unsaved upon the earth, the Second Coming concludes God's judgments on the earthdwellers.
- At the Rapture Christ claims His bride, at the Second Coming Christ comes with His bride.
- The Rapture delivers the saints from the wrath to come, the Second Coming concludes the wrath to come (Daniel's seventieth week).
- The Rapture is imminent and its proximity is not announced by any prophetic signs; the Second Coming is preceded by specific, recognizable signs.
- The Rapture involves only the saved of the church age, the Second Coming involves all on the earth. The saved of the Old Testament are resurrected after the Second Coming.

- The Rapture is not mentioned in the Old Testament, but the Second Coming is predicted often in the Old Testament.
- Satan is not mentioned in reference to the Rapture, but after the Second Coming, Satan is bound (Revelation 20:2–3).
- No prophecy must be fulfilled before the Rapture, many prophecies must be fulfilled before the Second Coming.
- At the Rapture only those who meet Him in the air will see Him, at the Second Coming every eye shall see Him.
- The Rapture is called the Day of Christ (2 Thessalonians 2:2; Philippians 1:10; 2:16), the Second Coming comes as part of the Day of the Lord (Joel 2:31–32; 1 Thessalonians 5:2).

Where Do We Go With the Lord When He Returns? (John 14:1–3)

The fourteenth chapter of John may not appear at first to be a strong Rapture passage. However, the late Mennonite commentator on Revelation, J. B. Smith, noted eight striking vocabulary parallels occur between these verses and 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18.¹⁷ Smith also compared the vocabulary in these two passages to the Second Coming passage of Revelation 19:11–12 and found no significant similarities.¹⁸ It is also striking that these eight words or phrases occur in the same order in both passages.¹⁹

Both John 14:1–3 and 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18 are designed to ease the mind of distressed believers. In John 14:1 Jesus comforts believers who are confused and disturbed by the announcement of His departure; in 1 Thessalonians 4:13 Paul comforts those who are grieving. Both passages emphasize belief in Christ as a central discriminating factor (John 14:1, 1 Thessalonians 4:14). Both passages focus on God and Jesus—“God...Me” (John 14:1), “Jesus...God,” (1 Thessalonians 4:14). Both passages instruct their audience, “told you,” (John 14:2), “say to you,” (1 Thessalonians 4:15). The return of Jesus is mentioned next in both (John 14:3; 1 Thessalonians 4:15). John records Jesus then saying He will receive them (John 14:3) and Paul says believers will be caught up to Him (1 Thessalonians 4:17). Their destiny is “to Myself” (John 14:3) and “to meet the Lord” (1 Thessalonians 4:17). And finally, in both passages, believers will continue to be with the Lord (John 14:3; 1 Thessalonians 4:17). Together, these eight phrases, common to both passages, reinforce their connection.

The night before our Lord went to the cross He celebrated the Passover seder with His

disciples. Following the seder, Jesus announces his impending departure. Confused, Peter inquires where He is going and why they cannot follow Him. Jesus answers by announcing that He is going to His Father's house to prepare places for them and, since He is doing this, He will come again and receive all believers to Himself that where He is they also may be. The announcement that He "will come again" certainly places His instruction here within the realm of eschatology.

Understanding what Jesus meant in four key phrases demonstrates that He was indeed speaking of what would transpire at the Rapture and where Church Age believers would go after the return mentioned in John 14:3: the meaning and location of the "Father's house" (John 14:2a), the meaning of "mansions" (John 14:2b), the location of these mansions (John 14:2c), and Jesus destiny with those He returns for at that time (John 14:3).

What and where is the "Father's house" (John 14:2a)? The phrase "my Father's house" has only one other similar use. In John 2:16, Jesus used a similar phrase to refer to the Temple. The important distinction between the two phrases is that in John 2:16 Jesus uses the masculine noun *oikos*, but in John 14:2 He uses the feminine noun *oikia*. Though cognates, these two terms do demonstrate a subtle distinction in their use. *Oikos* is typically used with "of God" as a designation for the Temple in the Septuagint, as well as in John 2:16, *oikia* never is.²⁰ *Oikia* is used of a standard house or dwelling, but never for the Temple of God. This important distinction clarifies that Jesus is not speaking of the Temple in John 14:2. By the analogy of Scripture we discover that the place to which Jesus was going is the throne of God where he would be seated at the right hand of the Father's throne (Psa 110:1; cf., Acts 2:33–35; Revelation 3:21). Jesus' destiny was not earthly but the heavenly abode of the Father.²¹ There he would sit until the Father would give him the Kingdom (Daniel 7:14).

Determination of the meaning of this phrase would also be indicated through standard usage. The phrase "father's house" is used twenty-one times in the Old Testament. Analysis of these passages, reveal that the literal meaning of the standard day to day dwelling place of the person's father is the meaning, e.g., Eleazar was sent by Abraham to "my father's house" (Gen 24:38), when he arrived he inquired of Rebekah if there was room to lodge in her "father's house" (Gen. 24:23). Both of these passages, as well as numerous others reinforce the direct implication that the focus is on the permanent abode of the father. Additional support for heaven being the abode

of God the Father is found in ten passages which specifically refer to our “Father who is in heaven.” (Matt 5:16; 6:1, 9; 7:11, 21; 10:32, 33; 16:17; Mk 11:25; Heb 8:1). As covenant theologian Leon Morris concludes, “My Father’s house” clearly refers to heaven.”²²

Mansions or dwelling places? (John 14:2b). The image of mansions in heaven has unfortunately been firmly ingrained in the hymnology and idiom of Christianity due to Tyndale’s use of the English word “mansion,” based on the Latin Vulgate “*mansiones*,” which translated the Greek term, *mone*. However, the Greek *mone* has little to do with an expansive, impressive dwelling. The word *mone* is best understood as a dwelling place, perhaps an apartment or flat, but also of a temporary dwelling such as an inn.²³ *Mone* is used only one other time in the New Testament, (John 14:23) where it describes the indwelling abode of the Father and the Son in the individual believer, a nuance quite different from that in 14:2, the abode of the Father. On the basis of that usage, Robert H. Gundry stresses the connection with μένω, and sees a reference to “spiritual positions in Christ, much as in Pauline theology.”²⁴ Unfortunately, that view fails to fit the context of the next phrase, “that where I am you may be also.” Scripture clearly teaches that Church Age believers are positionally in Christ, but John does not use μένω in the upper room discourse except to describe a believer’s ongoing fellowship with Christ.²⁵ The imagery Jesus is using, that of rooms in the Father’s house, naturally fits the idea of individual residences within heaven, the “house” of God the Father. In John 14:2 Jesus describes future abodes the believer will have in heaven while awaiting the conclusion to the events of Daniel’s seventieth week, at which time they will return with the Lord in power and glory.

Where is Jesus preparing these places? (14:2c) By combining the conclusions from the previous two questions, Jesus does not speak of preparing dwelling places on earth, but in heaven. Jesus is answering Peter’s question in 13:36–37, which is, “Where are you going?” Peter is not ask a question in view of the crucifixion, Jesus’ immediate destiny, for that event was still not clear to the disciples. Peter desires to know Jesus’ ultimate destiny. Since Jesus, the Second Person of the Trinity, had been with his Father from all eternity (John 1:1–4) He announces His return to the Father.

The idea of preparation is also important to understand. Jesus was not talking about a construction project, but providing a temporary residence for the arrival of His bride, the Church, until the wedding. The wedding feast occurs just prior to the Second Coming of Christ

(Revelation 19:7–10).

Jesus promises to return to receive us to where He is (John 14:3). Though some commentators attempt to interpret this to mean Jesus coming for the believer at death, this has no support in Scripture, which instead speaks of the angels coming for the believer (Luke 16:22) and of Jesus awaiting the arrival of the believer (Acts 7:56). Jesus use of the present tense—“I am coming”—has a future nuance, for His future coming is so certain that it is expressed as a present reality.²⁶ The present tense may describe an event that is *wholly* subsequent to the time of speaking, expressed as if in the present. Such confidence comforts those confused or anxious about a current situation. This same phrase, also in the present tense, is used seven times by Jesus in His Revelation to John. Though the events of Revelation are revealed to John over sixty years after the statement of John 14:3, the meaning is the same. Jesus’ future coming is certain, it is not to be confused with the coming of the Holy Spirit or the events of the A.D. 70 judgment on Israel.

Two more observations secure our understanding of this passage. First, since Jesus is going away to the domain of the Father *in heaven*, it is to that location that He promises to take the believers for whom He will come. If this does not refer to that location to which He was going, then, as Wayne Brindle observes, this is irrelevant, if not worthless information.²⁷ In the post-tribulation analysis, the destiny of believers at the Rapture is not heaven, but the earth, a view clearly in contrast to the statement of John 14:3. Since Jesus’ destiny was heaven, this must be also be the location to which He will take the Church. Second, in the following verses (14:6–7) Jesus answers Thomas’ question by saying clearly that He is going to the Father.

Thus, John 14:1–3 clearly speaks of Jesus departure from the earthly realm to the heavenly abode of the Father. There He will prepare for the arrival of the Church and the marriage of the Bride. Following Jewish wedding customs, He will later return to the earth to take His Bride to the location He has prepared, which is not on the earth but in heaven.³ Once the bride is gathered, then the purification which occurs at the judgment seat of Christ follows, and then the wedding feast which occurs before the Second Coming.

This means that this future return to take believers to their heavenly abodes cannot be at the

³ Renald E Showers, *Maranatha Our Lord, Come!* (Bellmawr, New Jersey: The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry, Inc., 1995).

same time as the coming to the earth described in Revelation 19:7ff. In that case, Jesus would simply be catching up the bride to Himself on His way down to the earth with no time for either the Judgment Seat of Christ or the Wedding Feast. The destiny of the church then would be the earth rather than heaven. John 13:1–3 clearly tells us that our Lord will take us to heaven at His return at the Rapture.

Our Victory in Christ:

How Christians are Resurrected and Raptured (1 Cor. 15:50–58)

The fifteenth chapter of 1 Corinthians provides an in-depth *apologia* for physical bodily resurrection from the dead. The first eleven verses list the evidence and witnesses for the physical bodily resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. The following verses (1 Corinthians 15:12–34) explain that without Christ’s resurrection from the dead, Christianity has no foundation. In this explanation Paul also provides a general order of events: the resurrection of Jesus is the first in order, next the resurrection of all who are Christ’s at His coming, then the end. The phrase “those who are Christ’s” has one clear parallel and one similar statement, both indicate Church Age believers only, *not* inclusive of Old Testament believers (Galatians 5:24, cf., 1 Corinthians 6:15).²⁸ Since Paul is addressing the concerns of Church Age believers he does not focus on other future resurrections (i.e., Old Testament saints, Tribulation martyrs, or the unsaved).²⁹ The certainty as Christ’s past resurrection makes certain the future resurrection of the Corinthian believers.

Christ’s resurrection is further described through an Old Testament analogy, firstfruits, which depicts the initial production of the field, but the term also implies that much more production would follow. Consistent with what our Lord already promises in John 14:2–3, Jesus will return for those who compose the Church, “those who are Christ’s at His coming.” This coming though, would not include Old Testament saints, who are not resurrected until just prior to the Millennial Kingdom, but would include all church age believers, both those “asleep in Christ,” and those alive (1 Thessalonians 4:16).

Evidence of different stages of resurrection comes from 1 Corinthians 15:23–25. First, distinct groups are resurrected.³⁰ Second, lengthy time periods separate some of these

resurrections. The resurrection of Christ precedes the next group to be resurrected by at least two thousand years. Then there is another period of Christ's reigning over His kingdom before He delivers the kingdom to God the Father (1 Corinthians 15:24). The term "the end" describes the final victory of God and Christ over all opposing "rule and all authority and power." The time frame preceding "the end" must certainly include both the seven year Tribulation period but also the one thousand year kingdom. It is during the time frame of Daniel's seventieth week (the tribulation) that the Lamb brings judgment upon the kingdoms of the earth through the seal, trumpet, and bowl judgments which culminates in His victory at the Second Advent. But at that point all enemies have not been vanquished. Even during the millennial reign Christ will still be subduing His enemies. Death, the final enemy (1 Corinthians 15:26), is not conclusively defeated until after the annihilation of those who follow Satan in his last revolt against God, the last battle of Gog and Magog (Revelation 20:7-9). Death is not finally conquered until Satan is finally defeated (Hebrews 2:14). From this we see the firstfruits resurrection of Christ, followed by at least two thousand years and another resurrection. Though amillennialism and postmillennialism see only one final resurrection here, when this is compared with Revelation 20 we know that at least one thousand years must come between the resurrection of Revelation 20:4 and the resurrection of the dead (Revelation 20:12-14).

Paul then answers two questions: How are the dead raised? What kind of body do they have? (1 Corinthians 15:35ff). In his answer the apostle explains what happens to those who have died as well as their relationship to those who have not passed through death at the time of the resurrection. As in 1 Thessalonians 4:16-18, first the dead receive their resurrection bodies, then the living. In 1 Corinthians 15:50-58 Paul provides never before revealed information about what transpires for those who are not dead at the time of Christ's coming.

The previous verses established the truth that mortal, corruptible bodies must first be transformed into immortal, incorruptible bodies before participating in kingdom rule. Now, Paul gives previously unrevealed information, called a "mystery" (1 Corinthians 15:51).

The term "mystery" is critical to the significance of this passage for its bearing on the timing of the Rapture. "Mystery" is most often a Pauline term for never before disclosed divine revelation. The significance of this is often ignored or overlooked.³¹ The Old Testament clearly revealed a future resurrection of the dead (Daniel 12:2), but revealed nothing about the event or

the timing of the Rapture. Furthermore, as Walvoord emphasizes, nothing is said in the Old Testament about the Church, the Church Age, or the translation of the Church, although Christ's Second Coming is clearly described as subsequent to the Tribulation.

The Rapture, as the "catching up" of living, Church Age believers only (those who are "dead in Christ" are resurrected first), could not be revealed in the Old Testament since nothing is said of a future Church. To have revealed the existence of another people of God in the future, and the intercalation between the cross and the crown, would have prejudiced the real offer of the Kingdom by hinting of a future rejection by Israel. Thus nothing about the Church could have been revealed in the Old Testament without affecting the legitimacy of the offer of the kingdom. So the mention of the direct translation of living believers into the resurrection bodies is something unknown in Old Testament revelation because it is not associated with the Second Coming.

Paul explains that not all church age believers will undergo physical death, euphemistically called "sleep". Those still alive (cf., 1 Thessalonians 4:16) would be changed or altered in a moment, "the twinkling of an eye." The speed of this is described by the Greek word *atomos*, "a moment," a unit of time so small it cannot be subdivided—a nanosecond.

The timing of this event will be "at the last trumpet." The sounding of a trumpet indicated an announcement or signal of something about to happen. The attempt to equate this "last trumpet" with that of the seventh of last trumpet of Revelation 11:15–18 is a stretch. Trumpets were used in Old Testament times to summon God's people to Himself (Exod 20:18; Lev. 25:9, Ps 98:6). Many trumpets are described in reference to the end times. The seventh trumpet in Revelation in fact contains seven additional judgments, the bowl judgments, which come during the second half of the Tribulation. To identify the "last trumpet" of 1 Corinthians 15 with any of the trumpet judgments of the Tribulation would not only contradict the imminent expectation of the Rapture, but would provide a fairly precise time for the occurrence of the Rapture. This trumpet blast indicated here, signals the end of the Church Age and the signal for Church Age believers to form up on Christ in the air. The use of the "we" here indicates Paul expected to be alive at this time, an evidence of his imminent expectation. If the tribulation were to intervene before this transformation, then he would not have been able to make this assumption.

In both 1 Thessalonians 4:16 and in 1 Corinthians 15:52 the resurrection of the dead to their

immortal body immediately precedes the instantaneous translation of the living saints into their immortal bodies. Both occur within the twinkling of an eye. However, in Rev. 20:4, the resurrection of the dead at the time of the Tribulation *follows* the arrival of Christ on the earth. If there is no pre-Tribulation Rapture, then Church Age believers would not be distinguished from Tribulation believers and both would become martyrs during the Tribulation since the Church, in their view, would continue through the full seven years of Daniel's seventieth week. The sequence of events at the return of Christ does not mention the translation of the living. The physical resurrection of the Tribulation martyrs occurs only after the return of Christ and His victory of the Armageddon campaign, the casting of the Antichrist and False Prophet into the Lake of Fire, and the incarceration of Satan in the Abyss. This sequence of events does not at all resemble the sequence in 1 Thessalonians 4 or in 1 Corinthians 15. Thus the resurrection and translation of Church Age believers cannot be placed at the end of the Tribulation.

Conclusion

From these passages we learn that a specific order of events occur at Christ's return for for the Church. He returns in the clouds; in a nanosecond the dead in Christ receive their resurrection bodies immediately before the living believers are translated into their resurrection bodies and snatched up to be with the Lord in the clouds. From there the Lord will return to the Father's house where He has prepared temporary dwelling places for His bride. Immediately following this the purification of the bride occurs at the judgment seat of Christ and then Jesus will take the seven sealed scroll and open it to begin the process of defeating His enemies on the earth. This will take seven years, at the conclusion of which He will return with His bride to the earth, defeat the armies of the Antichrist and the Kings of the earth, and then raise the tribulation martyrs from the dead and give them their resurrection bodies. At that time he will then establish His kingdom.

One common thread connects these three passages, the thread of imminency. Nothing is said to indicate some intervening event must occur before Our Lord returns. In all these passages, the assumption is that Jesus could return for us today. No antichrist, no tribulation, no day of the Lord, will indicate its proximity.

¹ Daniel's seventieth week refers to the last seven years God decreed for Israel as outlined in the chronology for Israel recorded by Daniel (Daniel 9:24–27). In this paper, the final seven year period prior to the Second Coming of

Jesus Christ, usually referred to as the Tribulation, will also be described by the more precise term, Daniel's seventieth week. Daniel's Seventieth Week is also equivalent to the Day of the Lord.

² Since a legitimate offer of the kingdom was still to be made to Israel by Peter in Acts 2 and Acts 3, and their acceptance would have brought in the kingdom, our Lord was intentionally silent at this point to give Israel a second legitimate chance to accept Him as their Messiah before the judgment of A.D. 70 would come. Alva J. McClain, "The Greatness of the Kingdom, Part IV: The Mediatorial Kingdom from the Acts Period to the Eternal State," *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 112:148 (Dallas: Dallas Theological Seminary), 305-307.

³ Gerald B. Stanton, *Kept From the Hour: Biblical Evidence for the Pretribulational Return of Christ* (Miami Springs, Fla.: Schoettle Publishing Co., 1991), 84. The term "Day of the Lord" is much discussed. Even those who believe it is sometimes used to describe some historic judgments of God, all see it as a term for the end time judgments of God against His enemies. Among pre-tribulationists some believe it refers only to the seven-year period of the Tribulation (Arnold Fruchtenbaum, *The Footsteps of the Messiah* (Tustin, CA.: Ariel Ministries, , and others also include the Millennial kingdom as well. At the very least, almost all agree that it refers to the entire seven-year Tribulation.

⁴ Imminency might be defined in one of two ways. The first, that no prophecy must be fulfilled as a condition for the Rapture, that it is a signless event. The second, that no prophecy will be fulfilled prior to the Rapture. It is this writers belief that the first definition is preferable because it allows for the possible fulfillment of some prophecies, such as the beginning of a return of ethnic Israel to the land in unbelief in preparation for the events which transpire within the seventieth week prophesied by Daniel.

⁵ Ryrie, *Come Quickly*, 21-2.

⁶ Debate occurs on the use of wrath in 1 Thessalonians 2:16 because of the use of the aorist tense. By using a past tense form, some commentators suggest this refers to the ongoing judgment of God on pagan Gentiles during human history as Paul does in Romans 1:18. However, a strong case can be made that, since Paul is focused on a future wrath in both Thessalonian epistles, the aorist tense of φθάνω views the future event with such certainty that it is spoken of in the past tense.

⁷ Colin Brown, *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1986), 2:241.

⁸ The Greek word *koimao* is often attested in extrabiblical literature as a euphemism for death. In the Scripture it is only used for believers. This word does not refer to the nonscriptural doctrine of "soul sleep" but to the rest of the physical body of the believer after physical death.

⁹ BDAG suggests "*the Lord will come down with a cry of command = when the command is given*" William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 538.

¹⁰ Both "voice" and "archangel" lack the article in the Greek text. This anarthrous construction often emphasizes the quality of the nouns and does not indicate the same thing as an indefinite pronoun in English. This should be understood to refer to Michael, *the* archangel.

¹¹ The grammatical structure here uses a double negative (*ou me*) with a subjunctive mood verb, the strongest way to emphasize the impossibility of an action.

¹² William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 361.

¹³ The text of the Latin Vulgate translates the Greek verb, *harpazo*, with the Latin verb *rapio*. In this context the form *rapiemur* (future active indicative, first person plural) is used. Over time, *rapturo*, the future active participle was used in theological writings which then developed into the English word, “Rapture.” *S.v. rapio, A Latin Dictionary*. Founded on Andrews' edition of Freund's Latin dictionary. revised, enlarged, and in great part rewritten by. Charlton T. Lewis, Ph.D. and. Charles Short, LL.D. Oxford. Clarendon Press. 1879. On the Perseus website, <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:text:1999.04.0059:alphabetic%20letter=R:entry%20group=2:entry=rapio&toc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.04.0059%3Aalphabetic+letter%3DR%3Aentry+group%3D3>.

¹⁴ Gordon D. Fee, *The First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2009), 180.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Robert L. Dean, Jr. “Chronological Issues in the Book of Revelation,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 168:670 (Dallas: Dallas Theological Seminary, April-June, 2011), 217-226. A version of this paper is also available on the www.pre-trib.org website.

¹⁷ Renald Showers cites the following individuals who see a connection between John 14:1–3 and 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18: J. H. Bernard, James Montgomery Boice, Arno C. Gaebelin, Arthur Pink, Rudolf Schnackenburg, F. F. Bruce, R. V. G. Tasker, and W. E. Vine in *Maranatha: Our Lord, Come!* (Bellmawr, N.J.: Friends of Israel, 1995), p. 162.

¹⁸ Smith wrote, “Hence it is impossible that one sentence or even one phrase can be alike in the two lists... And finally not one word in the two lists is used in the same relation or connection.” J. B. Smith, *A Revelation of Jesus Christ: A Commentary on the Book of Revelation* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1961), 312.

¹⁹ Ibid, “The words or phrases are almost an exact parallel. They follow one another in both passages in exactly the same order. Only the righteous are dealt with in each case. There is not a single irregularity in the progression of words from first to last. Either column [passage] takes the believer from the troubles of earth to the glories of heaven.”

²⁰ *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey William Bromiley and Gerhard Friedrich, electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964–1976). 5:121, 132. Gerald L. Borchert, vol. 25B, *John 12–21*, electronic ed., Logos Library System; *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2003), 103. See also *NIDNTT* II, 250 as well as George Gunn, “John 14:1–3 “The Father’s House: Are We There Yet?” Unpublished paper www.pre-trib.org.

²¹ Old Testament usage of the phrase “Father’s house” indicates a place that was previously left while the person went away on a trip. In this analogy, Jesus left the Father’s house for a sojourn on earth and then returned at His ascension, cf., Gen. 12:1; 20:13; Gen. 24:7; 28:21; 31:30, 34; 38:11 50:22; Lev. 22:12–13; 1 Sam. 18:1–4.

²² Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995), 567.

²³ Gerald L. Borchert, vol. 25B, *John 12–21*, electronic ed., Logos Library System; *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2003), 104. Also, TDNT cites Pausanias who uses the word for an inn or place of halt on a journey; E.J. Goodspeed who cites it as used for a watch-house in a police district, and the *Papyrus Grecs d’époque Byzantine*, ed. J. Maspéro, 1911 ff. which uses it for a shepherds hut in a field: *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley and Gerhard Friedrich, electronic ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964-).

²⁴ Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995). Morris lists the reference for Gundry's statement as, *ZNTW*, 58 [1967], p. 70.

²⁵ Robert Dean, Jr,

²⁶ Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics - Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Zondervan Publishing House and Galaxie Software, 1999; 2002), 536.

²⁷ Wayne A. Brindle, "Biblical Evidence for the Imminence of the Rapture," *BibSac* 158:630 (Dallas: Dallas Theological Seminary), 2001, 138.

²⁸ Other illuminating phrases are "body of Christ," (Col. 1:24) which is composed of those who have put off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ" (Col. 2:11).

²⁹ Five discrete resurrections are identified in Scripture. The first four are combined as one event, the *first* resurrection (Revelation 20:5). These four resurrections are: 1) the resurrection of Jesus Christ (Matthew 28:1-8), 2) the resurrection of the "dead in Christ" at the time of the Rapture (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18), 3) the resurrection of Old Testament saints, for they must be resurrected to participate in the future Kingdom of Christ (Psa. 50:1-6; Isaiah 26:19), 4) the resurrection of tribulation saints (Revelation 20:4). The fifth resurrection is the resurrection of the unbelievers of all the ages to appear before the Great White Throne (Revelation 20:12).

³⁰ The resurrection of distinct groups at different times is indicated by the word *tagma* ("order"), a word which often has military application, meaning divisions, companies, groups, or ranks.

³¹ John F. Walvoord, *The Rapture Question: Revised and Enlarged Edition*, 248.