

**Introduction:**

The Thessalonian church was eagerly awaiting the return of Jesus Christ, this is evident throughout the letter. But apparently some of their number had now passed away. Did this mean that they would be forever separated from their loved ones if Jesus were to return to set up His kingdom here on earth? Paul writes this section to them to clear things up.

**The Term *Rapture***

Our modern understanding of the word *rapture* doesn't exactly coincide with the biblical, end-times event. *The Rapture*, however, is still a perfectly good name for the event in question. Rapture is essentially the state or experience of being carried away. The English word usually means *to be carried away* in an ecstasy of spirit or overwhelming emotion. The Latin root *rapturo*, from which our word rapture comes, referred to not only to a spiritual or emotional ecstasy, but to an actual physical removal of something or someone from one place to another. In other words, it means to be carried away in spirit or in body. So the Rapture of the church means the carrying away of the church from earth to heaven.

**Today's Passage:**

**1 Thess 4:13-18 NKJV** <sup>13</sup>*But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. <sup>14</sup>For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus.*

<sup>15</sup>*For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. <sup>16</sup>For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. <sup>17</sup>Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. <sup>18</sup>Therefore comfort one another with these words.*

**A Quick Overview of the Passage:**

1. The Thessalonian church seems to have been concerned about their separation from those among them who had died should the Lord come back during their lifetime. Paul wants them to fully understand what to expect in order to eliminate excessive sorrow over things to come.
2. The Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout and with the sound of a trumpet.
3. The dead in Christ will rise first.
4. We who are alive and remain upon the earth will be “caught up” (Gr. verb *harpazo*) together with them in the clouds.
5. We will meet the Lord.
6. We shall always be with Him.
7. This passage is intended for our immediate comfort as it was for the Thessalonian church, but it does not mean that the Rapture had to happen in Paul's or the Thessalonians' lifetimes.

## Other Closely Related Passages:

**John 14:1-3 NKJV** <sup>1</sup>*“Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. [Note the message of comfort] <sup>2</sup>In My Father’s house are many mansions [dwellings or dwelling places, places to live]; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. <sup>3</sup>And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.*

Take note that in the above passage Jesus is coming to take us to where He already is and has been. He is not speaking of His coming to establish His kingdom.

**1 Cor 15:50-53 NKJV** <sup>50</sup>*Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption. <sup>51</sup>Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed— <sup>52</sup>in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. <sup>53</sup>For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.*

- **The Concept of The Rapture**

The Greek word from which we take the term “rapture” appears in 1 Thessalonians 4:17, translated “caught up.” The Latin translation of this verse used the word *rapturo*. The Greek word it translates is the verb *harpazo*, which means to snatch or take away. Elsewhere it is used to describe how the Spirit caught up Philip near Gaza and brought him to Caesarea (Acts 8:39) and to describe Paul’s experience of being caught up into the third heaven (2 Cor. 12:2-4). Thus there can be no doubt that the word is used in 1 Thessalonians 4:17 to indicate the actual removal of people from earth to heaven.

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- **Review of the Components of the Rapture (1 Thes. 4:13-18)**

1 *The return of Christ (v. 16)*. The Lord Himself will return for His people. There will be a shout of command (whether uttered by the Lord or an archangel is not stated), and the trumpet of God. We might guess that the trumpet blast will summon the dead in Christ to their resurrection as well as sounding a warning to those who have rejected Him and thus have missed the Rapture.

2. *A resurrection (v. 16)*. At this time only the dead in Christ will be raised. This means believers since the Day of Pentecost, for though there were believers before then, none of them were placed “in Christ.” The dead in Christ will be raised just before living believers are changed.

3. *A transformation (v. 17)*. Both groups will experience their respective changes “in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye” (1 Cor. 15:52). The entire procedure will be instantaneous, not gradual. The resurrection of the dead and the transformation of the living will occur in an instant of time.

Strictly speaking, however, living believers are the ones who will be “caught up” or *raptured*. This means they will be caught up into the Lord’s presence without having to experience physical death.

4. *A reassurance (v. 18)*. The truth of the Rapture both comforts and encourages us (for the word does have both meanings).

**1Jn 3:1-3 NKJV** <sup>1</sup>Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. <sup>2</sup>Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. <sup>3</sup>And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.

**Resources:**

1. LaHaye and Hindson, eds.; *The Popular Encyclopedia of Bible Prophecy*; Eugene, OR; Harvest House Publishers, 2004
2. *Tim Lahaye Prophecy Study Bible*, AMG Publishers, 2001
3. Charles Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, Chicago, Moody Press, 1986, 1999
4. [http://www.blueletterbible.org/faq/don\\_stewart/stewart.cfm?id=132](http://www.blueletterbible.org/faq/don_stewart/stewart.cfm?id=132)
5. John Walvoord, *The Rapture Question: Revised and Enlarged Edition*, Grand Rapids, Zondervan Publishing House, 1979
6. Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1994
7. <http://www.spurgeon.org/eschat.htm#3c>
8. Normal L. Geisler and Thomas Howe, *The Big Book of Bible Difficulties*, Grand Rapids, Baker Books, 1992