

## YOUR GUIDE TO A STUDY ON THE RAPTURE



What follows is an excerpt from a study book on 1 Thessalonians. This excerpt profiles 1 Thessalonians 4-5 and the Rapture.

## 1 THESSALONIANS 4

### (The Rapture of the Church)

The second half of 1 Thessalonians 4 is one of the most important passages of Scripture in the New Testament. The topic is the return of the Lord—THE RAPTURE. Remember, Paul is writing to a group of believers whom he had discipled for just one month. It is very likely that these western realm new believers did not grow up with a knowledge of what we call the Old Testament. And not only was Paul’s “New Testament” teaching strikingly new to their ears, it preceded the circulation of the Gospels—meaning, the Thessalonians could not continue learning about the teachings of Jesus by reading Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John.

Paul’s task was to teach the wonders of the Old Testament *and* the great truths of the New Covenant in Christ—in less than a month. What a task. And now, a few months after Paul had left the Thessalonians, Paul writes a brief, five-chapter letter to review the fundamentals of the faith and share information on **priority** precepts. Amazingly, with so many stories to tell and doctrinal points to address, Paul is moved by the Spirit to teach on THE RAPTURE. The significance of this bears repeating: With most of the New Testament yet to be written, Paul is moved to teach on THE RAPTURE—a topic most churches today seldom, if ever, address. The topic was a priority

issue for Paul, who, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, presents in 1 Thessalonians 4, the most straightforward teaching on this subject in Scripture.

The importance of this issue requires an expanded look at last six verses of 1 Thessalonians chapter 4. **Please give serious attention to this two-part teaching on one of the key points of doctrine for the true Christian Church.**

## **THE RAPTURE**

The term Rapture<sup>1</sup> indicates a swift catching up or rescuing of God's people before the outpouring of wrath during the Tribulation. The English term Rapture comes from 1 Thessalonians 4:17. The Greek text of the New Testament uses the word *harpazo*, meaning to seize upon or to catch or snatch up. The Latin translators of the Greek New Testament Bible translated the word *harpazo*, *rapturo*. The Latin, *rapturo*, is root word for the term *Rapture*.

Through the Rapture, God will *catch up* his Church so faithful followers will not have to experience the tribulations and wrath noted in the book of Revelation. John, the writer of the book of Revelation, said it this way: the Church will be *"kept from the hour of testing that shall come*

---

<sup>1</sup> Sections of this are drawn from *Next on the Prophetic Horizon* (I Am A Watchman Publication, Union City, CA): 2020), 20-31

*upon the world.*"<sup>2</sup> Paul, writing of the quick and sudden nature of the Rapture wrote:

“Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.”<sup>3</sup>

Writing to the Thessalonian Church, Paul wrote:

“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: 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.”<sup>4</sup>

This is what Jesus said about the Rapture in Matthew 24.

“There will be two in the field, and then suddenly one will be left. There will be two women grinding at the mill. One will be taken, and one will be left.”<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> Revelation 3:10

<sup>3</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:51-53

<sup>4</sup> 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17

<sup>5</sup> Matthew 24:40-41

In Luke 12, Jesus spoke of the importance of expecting His return. In Matthew 24, Jesus spoke of the need to be watching, waiting, and ready for his return.

Implicit in the Rapture teaching is the thought that the Church (Gentile believers) will be **caught up** by Christ and thereby escape the fullness of God's wrath on the earth. This strongly-held dispensational view is tied to the teaching that God is not finished dealing with the Jews or Israel. Dispensationalists believe the recent fulfillment of prophecies concerning Israel (*Israel was restored as a nation in 1948, the Hebrew language returned to the land, the land of Israel has "blossomed", Israel has been attacked by superior forces but prevailed, Israel has prospered, Israel is a "stumbling stone" to many nations in the region, etc.*) indicate that God has a yet unfulfilled distinct and glorious plan for Israel. This view separates dispensationalists from advocates of Replacement and Covenant theology. Dispensationalists believe God will magnify Himself through the nation of Israel and the Jewish people in the future.

Further supporting the view that the Church is separate from God's working among the Jewish people in the last days is 2 Thessalonian's reference that at some point in the future, God will remove the "restrainer" (the Holy Spirit) from the earth.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> 2 Thessalonians 2:5

Dispensationalists believe that event closes the current Church Age, or, as Paul referred to it, the “time of the Gentiles.”<sup>7</sup> Dispensationalists believe the removal of the Holy Spirit, which currently dwells in the hearts of believers and “restrains” the work of Satan, is linked to the Rapture, for how can the Holy Spirit be removed without the body of Christ being removed? These future happenings support the dispensational view that the Church Age (this current dispensation) will soon come to a close and be followed by God doing a mighty work for and through the Jewish people during the Tribulation period.

**Reflection question: *By way of review, note three biblical references to the Rapture. Put the text in your own words.***

---



---



---



---



---



---



---



---

**Primary Rapture Views** There are three prominent schools of thought regarding **when** a Rapture will take place. Most dispensationalists hold the **pre-tribulation** view. An outline of the three views follows:

---

<sup>7</sup> Romans 11:25

- **Pre-wrath view:** The Pre-wrath position distinguishes between the Tribulation and the Great Tribulation—noting that in Scripture, the term *Great Tribulation* refers to the last three and a half years of the seven-year tribulation period. Advocates of this position therefore hold that a Rapture of the true Church will take place near the midpoint of the tribulation (hence, this view is also known as the mid-trib. view). Those who hold a mid-trib or pre-wrath position believe that the Church will be saved from the worst of (but not all of) the wrath to come.<sup>8</sup>
- **Post-tribulation view:** There are several schools of thought in the post-tribulation camp. The two most prominent are **1)** the seven-year tribulation period is not future and should be understood figuratively. This view holds that the term *tribulation* references the hardships Christians experience in their spiritual walk—past, present and future. The Church, it is believed, will be received by Christ when the Lord returns at the end of time **2)** The second (and dominant) view in this school of thought is that the seven-year tribulation period is yet future. Post-tribulationists hold that the Church will exist during the tribulation period, but believers will be sheltered by God’s protective hand in the midst of the greatest tribulations the earth has ever known. This view rejects the idea of a Rapture

---

<sup>8</sup> 1 Thessalonians 5:9

and holds that the return of Jesus in Revelation 19 is the same as his coming *in the clouds* in 1 Thessalonians 4.

- **Pre-tribulation view:** This view holds that the church will be raptured (caught up to be with Christ) at some point before the commencement of the seven-year tribulation period. This is the view most dispensationalists hold. The following material supports the dispensational pre-tribulation Rapture view.

The timing of some key future events may be unknown, but believers can know that Jesus will return and in the end, in the epic struggle of good versus evil, God will prevail. Until that time there will be unrest. There will be wars and rumors of wars and “troubles.” Are you ready? Will you commit to being *all in* for Him?<sup>9</sup> Remember, a great reward awaits those found doing the right thing, in the right way, at the right time, in the right place, and with the right heart when the Lord returns.

“So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him. Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom the master has put in charge of the servants in his household to give them their food at the proper time? It will be good for that servant whose master finds him doing so when he returns.”<sup>10</sup>

---

<sup>9</sup> A brief article and video on this topic can be accessed here: <https://tinyurl.com/2s6dn27e>

<sup>10</sup> Matthew 24:44-46



**Reflection question: *What Rapture view do you hold and why? Note: the author encourages the reader to keep an open mind and prayerfully consider the rest of the material in this section of the study book.***

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

### **The Rapture in the Old Testament**

There are many allusions and references to the Rapture in the Old Testament. The Fall Festival *the Feast of Trumpets*, for example, foreshadows the Rapture. The phrases, *no one knows the day or the hour* and *the thief in the night* are associated with that ancient Festival, as is the blowing of the trumpet, the days of awe, and a new beginning for all humanity. These associations have Rapture and tribulation connotations.

The Old Testament book, *The Songs of Solomon*, is about an unworthy bride being told to wait for the promised return of her

wonderful Groom. However, she's unfaithful, and when the Groom returns, she is not ready. He comes like a thief in the night, and she is left behind. The Lord's parable of the ten virgins and His teaching on the wedding banquet also reference the Rapture. Enoch and Elijah were both suddenly *caught up* into heaven by God. These stories, phrases, and book themes lay a foundation for the Rapture.

### **Scriptural support for the pre-tribulation Rapture view**

Historically, there have been three prominent views regarding the timing of the Rapture. The dispensationalist view is that the church will be raptured (caught up to be with Christ) at some point before the commencement of the seven-year tribulation period. Noted below is the Biblical foundation for that position.

The Tribulation describes a period of suffering unsurpassed, "such as was not since there was a nation, no, nor shall be"<sup>11</sup> The Tribulation period will be a time of intense wrath.<sup>12</sup> However, Scripture notes believers are **not appointed to wrath**<sup>13</sup> and will be *kept from the hour of testing that is coming upon the world.*<sup>14</sup> The Rapture represents the Lord fulfilling His promise to rescue faithful followers from a future time of "wrath."

---

<sup>11</sup> Daniel 12:1

<sup>12</sup> Revelation 6:16-17,11:18; 14:19; Zephaniah 1:15, 18

<sup>13</sup> 1 Thessalonians 5:9

<sup>14</sup> Revelation 3:10

Scripture also notes that the Holy Spirit...

- 1) dwells in the hearts of believers
- 2) holds back or restrains Satan and
- 3) will one day will be taken away. The taking away of the Spirit/Restrainer points to the Rapture, as removing the Spirit will require removing committed Christians from the earth.

This taking away of the Spirit is linked to the removal of the Church and the Rapture.<sup>15</sup>

“And now you know what is restraining, that he may be revealed in his own time. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only He who now restrains will do so until He is taken out of the way....”<sup>16</sup>

Many Scriptures note the “Jewishness” of the Tribulation events profiled in the book of Revelation. It is said to be the time of Jacob’s trouble,” it concerns “Daniel’s people,” a “false Messiah,” the city of Jerusalem, the twelve tribes of Israel, the “Temple” and a “flight on the Sabbath.” The Church is not mentioned in the book of Revelation after the judgments begin.

Jesus’ teaching on the end times indicates that the timing of the

---

<sup>15</sup> 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

<sup>16</sup> 2 Thessalonians 2:6-7 (NIV)

Rapture is immediately **after** the 'birth pains,' and before the seven-year Tribulation begins and the Antichrist rises to power. Matthew 24 reads:

<sup>29</sup> "Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. <sup>30</sup> Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. <sup>31</sup> And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

<sup>32</sup> "Now learn this parable from the fig tree: When its branch has already become tender and puts forth leaves, you know that summer *is* near. <sup>33</sup> So you also, when you see all these things, know that it is near—at the doors! <sup>34</sup> Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place. <sup>35</sup> Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away.

<sup>36</sup> "But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only. <sup>37</sup> But as the days of Noah *were*, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. <sup>38</sup> For

as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, <sup>39</sup>and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. <sup>40</sup>Then two *men* will be in the field: one will be taken and the other left. <sup>41</sup>Two *women will be* grinding at the mill: one will be taken and the other left. <sup>42</sup>Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming. <sup>43</sup>But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into. <sup>44</sup>Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.”<sup>17</sup>

### **When will the Rapture take place?**

Scripture stresses that “no one knows the day or the hour” of the Lord’s return.<sup>18</sup> However, Scripture notes that believers can (and should) recognize the season of His return:

“But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you. For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction

---

<sup>17</sup> Matthew 24:29-44

<sup>18</sup> Matthew 24:36

cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape. But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief.”<sup>19</sup>

Scripture also stresses the importance of readiness—and that servants who are found doing the right thing, the right way, at the right time, when the Lord returns, will be blessed.<sup>20</sup>

Some have taught that certain prophecies need to be fulfilled before the Rapture takes place. Among the suggestions are the Gog-Magog war noted in Ezekiel 38-39, the rise of the Antichrist, the destruction of Damascus, and the building of the third Temple. However, the requisite prophecies that were to precede the Rapture (as outlined in Matthew 24) have already been fulfilled. There are NO remaining prophetic requisites to the Rapture—the Lord may tarry, but there are no prophecies keeping the Rapture from taking place at any time. Affirming this truth, Theologians have coined the phrase, “the doctrine of imminence.” This means the Rapture can happen at any time, and therefore, Christians should maintain a sense of expectancy regarding the return of Christ.

In referencing the Rapture, Jesus emphasized expectancy and readiness. This is clear in the following parables: the thief and

---

<sup>19</sup> 1 Thessalonians 5:3-4

<sup>20</sup> Luke 12:40, 21:36

homeowner,<sup>21</sup> the servant, the Master, and the wedding banquet,<sup>22</sup> the wise manager,<sup>23</sup> and the 10 bridesmaids or virgins.<sup>24</sup> The Old Testament book, Song of Solomon also alludes to this truth as the unlikely bride (who represents Gentile believers) is told the Groom will depart for a time (this represents the Church Age) but will return (this is the Rapture). *In the story the bride is not ready and is left behind when the Master does return.*

**The “terminal generation”** In the Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24-25), Jesus spoke of events leading up to the commencement of the 7-year Tribulation (a season termed as *birth pains or pangs*), and the events associated with the reign of the Antichrist during the period termed, *the Great Tribulation*. The Olivet Discourse began in response to questions pertaining to the destruction of the Temple and the rebirth of Israel. Matthew 24:34 reads:

“This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled.”

Many Bible scholars believe that the *this generation* noted in Matthew 24:34 is this generation—the generation that saw Israel become a sovereign and independent nation—an event that happened on May, 1948. Psalm 90:10 presents a generation as being

---

<sup>21</sup> Matthew 24:42-44

<sup>22</sup> Luke 12:35-37

<sup>23</sup> Luke 12:41-46

<sup>24</sup> Matthew 25:1-13

70-80 years. This puts the world on borrowed time. The Lord may tarry, but the wise will be ready for the return of the Lord in an event known as the Rapture.

**Reflection question:** *What are your thoughts regarding the timing of the Rapture, and why is teaching “readiness” for the return of the Lord preferred over date setting or anticipating the Lord’s return during a particular season or year*

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

### **Questions and answers regarding the Rapture**

**Will Jesus return once or twice?** This can be confusing. Many have used the phrase, the *Second Coming* as a general term focusing on *that* Jesus will return, but not, *when* He will return. Some have linked the phrase to the Rapture and some to the *Glorious Appearing* (a phrase tied to Titus 2:13 and Revelation 19-20, where Jesus returns to earth, vanquishes the enemy, then sets



up the Millennial Kingdom). Will there be a Second Coming? YES, at the end of the Tribulation period. Will there be a Rapture? YES, before the beginning of the Tribulation. Is Jesus returning twice? Yes, in a manner of speaking. Jesus will return “in the clouds” to “catch up” faithful followers “in the air.”<sup>25</sup> That event is known as the Rapture. At the end of the Tribulation, Jesus will return and build His Millennial Kingdom on earth (Rev. 19-20). A few additional distinctions follow:

- At the Rapture, Jesus’ return is marked by joy and celebration.
- At the ‘Glorious Appearing,’ Jesus’ return is marked by war, wrath, and judgment.<sup>26</sup>
- At the Rapture, Jesus returns **for** His people. At the ‘Glorious Appearing,’ Jesus returns **with** His people.
- Verses that reference the Rapture, focus on what will happen **to** believers (they are ‘*caught up*’ to be with the Lord). Verses that reference the ‘Glorious Appearing’ focus on what will happen **to the enemies** of God (particularly the Antichrist and False Prophet).

Note: The Rapture event will happen suddenly—No prophecies need to be fulfilled before Jesus returns to rescue His Church. The Second Coming (the ‘Glorious Appearing’) can only happen after many prophecies are fulfilled. These prophecies are outlined

---

<sup>25</sup> 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17

<sup>26</sup> Revelation 19

in the book of Revelation and include: the rise of the Antichrist, the sealing of 144,000 witnesses, the mark of the Beast, and the rebuilding of the third Temple.

**Reflection question:** *Note three ways the Rapture is described in Scripture differently than the “second coming” of Christ.*

---



---



---



---



---



---



---



---



---



---

### **Why do some speak of the lateness of the hour?**

Many believe that the day of the return of the Lord is near. Prophecy teachers note this truth by stating the hour is *late*, or, the prophetic clock indicates the *hour is late*. The following verses indicate that believers should maintain a state of readiness for the Lord can return at any time:

- “The end of all things is near. Therefore be alert and of sober mind...”<sup>27</sup>

---

<sup>27</sup> 1 Peter 4:7a

- “Be patient...because the Lord’s coming is near. Don’t grumble against one another, brothers and sisters, or you will be judged. The Judge is standing at the door!”<sup>28</sup>
- “Remember, I am coming soon!...”<sup>29</sup>

**Reflection question: *How does recognizing the “lateness of the hour” correlate with Jesus’ statements in Matthew 24:42 and Matthew 25:13?***

---



---



---



---



---



---



---

### **Do Old Testament stories foreshadow the Rapture?**

In general, a rapture is God’s plan to save the faithful from judgment. We see throughout Scripture that it is in God’s nature to provide a way of escape in the midst of coming judgment. In the story of the Exodus, God saved His people from the plague of death that swept across Egypt.<sup>30</sup> God saved Noah and his family from the flood.<sup>31</sup> God saved Lot and his

---

<sup>28</sup> James 5:8-9

<sup>29</sup> Revelation 22:7a

<sup>30</sup> Exodus 11

<sup>31</sup> Genesis 6-8

daughters from the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.<sup>32</sup> The idea of God saving faithful followers from the terrible tribulations of the last days is in perfect harmony with how God has worked through the ages.

### **Do Old Testament weddings point to the Rapture?**

Noted below are parallels between ancient Jewish weddings and the Rapture of the Church:

1. In Hebrew culture, the Father determined the day and hour of the wedding banquet. Often, *only the Father knew* the day and the hour (see Mark 13:32).
2. In Hebrew culture, there was a waiting period between the betrothal and the wedding banquet. Many argue this represents the current Church Age—the period from Pentecost to the Rapture. When Jesus returns the Church Age will cease,<sup>33</sup> raptured believers will rejoice, and the 7-year Tribulation will begin.
3. During this waiting period, the Groom would prepare a home for his bride.<sup>34</sup> At the time chosen by the father, the

---

<sup>32</sup> Genesis 19

<sup>33</sup> Romans 11:25

<sup>34</sup> John 14:1-3

groom was sent to receive his bride (who was to remain in a state of readiness)

4. As the groom approached the home of the bride, the shofar would sound. The sound of the trumpet is associated with the return of Christ in 1 Thessalonians 4. Note that Luke 12:35 states that the Bride of Christ (the Church) must be ready for the groom's arrival. In fact, when the world hears the trumpet sound,<sup>35</sup> it will be too late to prepare for the return of the Lord.

The disciples were either from the region of Galilee or familiar with Jewish and Galilean wedding customs. The disciples clearly understood Jesus' meaning and His comparisons between wedding customs and His return.

**Reflection question: *How does one's understanding of the Old Testament increase one's understanding of the New Testament Rapture teaching?***

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

<sup>35</sup> 1 Thessalonians 4:16

### **Is today's 'Church' mentioned in the book of Revelation?**

Dispensationalists believe the book of Revelation speaks of *future* events, is written in chronological order, and that the last mention of the Church is in Revelation 4 (before a great crowd is seen in heaven—which is a reference to the Rapture).

### **Is the Rapture mentioned in the Olivet Discourse?**

The Olivet Discourse<sup>36</sup> is the longest recorded teaching by Jesus on the end times. This great teaching, however, can be difficult to follow as Jesus references the destruction of the second Temple, the Rapture, the woes of the days leading up to the Tribulation (birth pangs), and the Second Coming, without clear introductions to these topics. However, it is believed that references to the Rapture are found in Matthew 24:36-44, 25:1-13.

### **Is the word *rapture* in English Bibles?**

No, however, there are several well-embraced doctrines surrounding terms that are not in the English Bible (such as: missions and Trinity). Key church doctrines are not built on single words (as the Bible is now available in hundreds of languages), but on teachings that have strong Scriptural foundations. The word *rapture* is not in the original text, but in the first language translation of the text (Latin) the word *rapturo* is used, and, according to Tommy Ice, director of the Pre-Trib Study

---

<sup>36</sup> Matthew 24-25

Center, the first seven English translations of the Bible (prepared between 1384-1608) all translated the Greek word *harpazo* in 1 Thess. 4:17, departure, meaning, the sudden departure of believers. Dispensationalists hold that though the term rapture is not found in English Bible translations, it has a strong biblical foundation.

**Reflection question:** *How does one counter the argument that the Rapture teaching is untrue or unbiblical because the word Rapture is not mentioned by Jesus or any New Testament writer.*

---



---



---



---



---



---



---



---

### **Is the Rapture teaching less than 200 years old?**

It is true that some trace the beginning of the Rapture teaching to John Darby's ministry in the early 1800s. However, Bible scholars note there are formal teachings on the Rapture in the writings of the early church fathers in the second-century A.D. Of primary importance, however, is the abundance of first-century Scripture verses that reference the Rapture. A few quotes and substantiating facts (drawn from the book, *Dispensationalism before Darby* by William C Watson) follow:

- Writings from The Apostolic Brethren, an unofficial and persecuted monastic order, wrote in 1316: *“The brethren will be **transferred** into Paradise, in which are Enoch and Elijah. And in this way, they will be preserved unharmed from the persecution of Antichrist.”*<sup>37</sup>

- From Denys ‘van Leeuwen, a 15<sup>th</sup> century Dutch Carthusian monk:

“In a moment in ye twinkling of an ey...in the sownyng of the last trumpe shal be the lugement...The daye of **our lorde shal come**...O howe blessed and how happy shal he be that now entendeth to the poure langwysshynge nedy people....for our **Lorde wil delivere** them therefore from alle daungler...”<sup>38</sup>

- Early 17<sup>th</sup> century preacher Thomas Draxe (d. 1618) wrote that just as God saved Noah from the judgment of the flood, the Lord will save those before the wrath of the last days.

“If wee beleeeue the doctrine of the resurrection, wee must not immoderately weepe, or mourne for our friends

---

<sup>37</sup> Anon., *The History of Brother Dolcino in Francis X. Gumerlock, ‘A Rapture Citation in the Fourteenth Century,’ Bibliotheca Sacra* lv. 159, no. 635; July-Sept. 2002), 354-355

<sup>38</sup> Leewen, Denys van, *Corden, Whiche treteth of the four last and final things that ben to come* (1479)



departed...for they die not but sleep awhile in the earth, and afterwards the bodie shall awake and **ascend to glorie**; they are nor perished but...one day meete together in the Place and parliament of heauen...[we shall] be raosed ...accounted worth to escape al those things that shall come upon the world...”<sup>39</sup>

- Joseph Mede (1586-1639) wrote that the “*saints would be **translated** into the air...[so that] they may be preserved during the conflagration of the earth...*”<sup>40</sup>

*“The resurrection of those which slept in Christ, and the rapture of those which shall be left alive....shall translate them into heaven...”*

- Joseph Hall (1574-1656), Bishop of Exeter, wrote of how the taking of Moses, Enoch, and Elijah portend a rapture of believers in the future.

*“The saints of God are not lost...but as...Elias...was **rapt into Heaven...**[so] shall we...**when Christ...shall appear**. Then shall we also appear with him in glory...We shall not all sleep, we shall be changed...[Nothing] shall keep us from appearing with*

---

<sup>39</sup> Draxe, Thomas, *An Alarm to the Last Judgment. Or An exact discourse of the second coming of Christ* (London, 1615), 126,128. Ibid., 58-59

<sup>40</sup> Mede, *Works*, III, 611. (Cited in H. Orton Wiley; *Christian Theology*, Chapter 34: The Second Advent (Nazarene Publishing House, 1940)

*him...when the fiery Chariot shall come and sweep thee from this Vale of Mortality.”*<sup>41</sup>

- In his book, *History of the Christian Church*, the eminent Church Historian Peter Shift notes that the following early (pre-fourth century) church fathers believed in the Millennium, the rise of Israel, and the Rapture: Barnabas, Papias, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Methodius, and Lactantius.
- The second-century works, *The Shepherd of Hermas* and *The Apocalypse of Elijah* reference the Rapture.

Dispensationalists reject the notion that the Rapture teaching is a new doctrine, but rather, ties the teaching to the ministry of Christ. Dispensationalists hold the Old Testament references the Rapture, Jesus spoke of the Rapture, and Paul and the Apostles urged believers to anticipate and prepare spiritually for the return of Jesus in the Rapture.

**Reflection question: *How can one respond to the argument that the Rapture teaching is untrue or unbiblical because it is only about 200 years old?***

---



---



---



---



---

<sup>41</sup> Hall, Joseph, *The Contemplations upon the History of the New Testament, now complete* (London, 1708), 96

## 1 THESSALONIANS 5

### (TEXT)

<sup>1</sup> But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you. <sup>2</sup> For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. <sup>3</sup> For when they say, "Peace and safety!" then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape. <sup>4</sup> But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief. <sup>5</sup> You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness. <sup>6</sup> Therefore let us not sleep, as others *do*, but let us watch and be sober. <sup>7</sup> For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night. <sup>8</sup> But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and *as* a helmet the hope of salvation. <sup>9</sup> For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>10</sup> who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him.

<sup>11</sup> Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing.

<sup>12</sup> And we urge you, brethren, to recognize those who labor among you, and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, <sup>13</sup> and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. Be at peace among yourselves.

<sup>14</sup> Now we exhort you, brethren, warn those who are unruly, comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all. <sup>15</sup> See that no one renders evil for evil to anyone, but always pursue what is good both for yourselves and for all.

<sup>16</sup> Rejoice always, <sup>17</sup> pray without ceasing, <sup>18</sup> in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

<sup>19</sup> Do not quench the Spirit. <sup>20</sup> Do not despise prophecies. <sup>21</sup> Test all things; hold fast what is good. <sup>22</sup> Abstain from every form of evil.

<sup>23</sup> Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>24</sup> He who calls you *is* faithful, who also will do *it*.

<sup>25</sup> Brethren, pray for us.

<sup>26</sup> Greet all the brethren with a holy kiss.

<sup>27</sup> I charge you by the Lord that this <sup>[h]</sup>epistle be read to all the holy brethren.

<sup>28</sup> The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ *be* with you. Amen.

## 1 THESSALONIANS 5

The first ten verses in chapter 5 summarize the last six verses in chapter 4. They remind followers of Christ of eight important truths:

1. The Lord **will** come (in the Rapture) as a “thief in the night”<sup>42</sup> Here Paul signals that the event has **not** yet happened. *Note that Paul had been told that false teachers were telling the Thessalonians that Jesus had come and that his friends now feared they had somehow missed the Rapture and had not been counted worthy.* Paul clarifies that the Rapture event will be profound and has not yet occurred. When the Rapture occurs, though some will argue that the Lord did not rapture the millions missing,<sup>43</sup> no one will be able to deny that millions are missing.<sup>44</sup> The event will be profound and supernatural.
  
2. The Rapture will take most by surprise. Paul notes that when the Rapture does occur, it will be as many are saying, “Peace and safety...”<sup>45</sup> Notably, most churches today do not prioritize teaching on the imminency of the Rapture and the need for all

---

<sup>42</sup> 1 Thessalonians 5:2

<sup>43</sup> [Tinyurl.com/apvryeax](http://Tinyurl.com/apvryeax)

<sup>44</sup> The I AM A WATCHMAN ministry has prepared a post-rapture focused recording arguing against the probable false claim that the millions taken in the Rapture were taken by aliens. Here is the link to that three-part, 48-minute recording: [Tinyurl.com/4rwpb98d](http://Tinyurl.com/4rwpb98d)

<sup>45</sup> 1 Thessalonians 5:3a

to be spiritually prepared for the return of the Lord. Israel boasts of their military might (which is impressive but will not save them from the attacks mentioned in the book of Revelation). Their might does not impress God, nor will it somehow qualify residents to be raptured—only faith in Christ can do that. America is haughty—confident in its technology and industrial complex. But, that too, will not save from the Tribulations to come—only faith in Christ and rescue via the Rapture can do that. Many churches teach that God is (only) love, that judgment will not come, and that there is no need to be *radical* or *all in* for Jesus. Beware those who say all is well, that there is no need to expect unrest or the ‘birth pains’ Jesus spoke of in Luke 21 and Matthew 24. Beware those who look for security in the things of man, rather than in the wonder-working power of God. The Rapture will come—the wise will be spiritually prepared.

**Reflection question: *The Rapture has not yet occurred—all will know when it happens. How can believers today help the complacent have a better sense of expectancy?***

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

- 3.** Scripture provides insight regarding the things that will unfold in the last days. Paul writes that we “are not in the darkness”<sup>46</sup> about such things. The more than 1000 prophecies in Scripture provide insight into the working of God. More than 90% of specific prophecies in Scripture have already been fulfilled and verified to be true. Prophecies telegraph the working of God. The remaining 100 or so prophecies to be fulfilled concern the events of the last days and will unfold exactly as predicted. The Psalmist wrote: “Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path.”<sup>47</sup> We, the “children of light”<sup>48</sup> are blessed with the gift of God’s Word, which illuminates how to live today, and casts light on what is going to happen tomorrow.
- 4.** Believers are to “watch and be sober.”<sup>49</sup> The calling is clear and echoes Jesus’ commands in Matthew 24:42, 25:13, and 26:40-41. We are to watch for the signs that Jesus said would precede his return and warn all to be spiritually prepared for the next great prophetic event—the Rapture. The admonition is to *be sober*. The context of the verse indicates a need to be *vigilant*. The two terms (*sober* and *vigilant*) are linked in 1 Peter 5:8. In our culture, the admonition could read to strive to be in

---

<sup>46</sup> 1 Thessalonians 5:4a

<sup>47</sup> Psalm 119:105

<sup>48</sup> 1 Thessalonians 5:5a

<sup>49</sup> 1 Thessalonians 5:6b

the right place, at the right time, doing the right thing, with the right heart, when the Lord returns.

**Reflection question:** *Scripture commands believers to use Bible prophecy to warn the lost and identify (watch for) signs announcing that the return of the Lord is near. Note three prophecies or news events that seem to indicate the return of the Lord is near.*

---



---



---



---



---



---



---



---



---



---



---

5. Believers demonstrate vigilance by guarding their hearts (desires) and minds (thoughts). Paul expresses this thought by challenging believers to put “on the breastplate of faith”<sup>50</sup> and the “helmet”<sup>51</sup> of love. The imagery foreshadows the spiritual armor Paul would later articulate in Ephesians 6. Here Paul’s

<sup>50</sup> 1 Thessalonians 5:8b

<sup>51</sup> 1 Thessalonians 5:8c



wording invites images of guarding the *head* and the *heart*—our *thoughts* and *desires*, for these areas the enemy loves to attack. Paul’s counsel regarding how to do this is found in Philippians 4:8. There Paul encourages believers to replace the negative with the positive. Rather than hoping not to dwell on the negative, Paul counsels believers to fill their minds with the positive. He writes:

“Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue...[or] any praise, think on these things.”

6. Believers can have hope because Christ offers salvation, and those who place their trust in Him will be rescued in the Rapture. Note that there are no sentence breaks (periods) in the original text, and the reference to “*hope*” at the end of verse 8 flows into the “*We are not appointed to wrath*” phrase in the beginning of verse 9. To what does the *wrath* in verse 9 refer? It refers to the events associated with the Tribulation period. Believers have hope because Christ will rescue His people from the tribulation and the wrath that is coming to the world. *Note: This verse strongly supports the pre-tribulation Rapture view.*

**Reflection question: Note three ways believers can guard their heart and mind, and have hope that believers will be taken in the Rapture and escape the “wrath” that is to come.**

---



---



---



---



---



---



---



---

7. Believers are to “*comfort yourselves together*” and “*edify one another*.”<sup>52</sup> The admonition is to stay connected with brothers and sisters in the faith, and to encourage brothers and sisters in the faith. Simply put, God designed things such that we are *better together*. Solomon wrote: “Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their work.”<sup>53</sup> The road ahead will be difficult. Our workload is made lighter, and we accomplish more when the work is shared. Further, we tend to stay more focused, more positive, and are better able to persevere when we are connected with brothers and sisters in the faith. I realize there are sometimes challenges and barriers to this, but the biblical mandate is to prayerfully explore

---

<sup>52</sup> 1 Thessalonians 5:11a

<sup>53</sup> Ecclesiastes 4:9

options and to connect with the body of Christ as possible. Regarding our relationships with brothers and sisters in the faith, Paul counsels: “comfort the feebleminded,”<sup>54</sup> support the weak, be patient toward all men.

8. Believers are to honor those who lead in ministry. The NIV translation of verses 12-13 reads: *“Acknowledge those who work hard among you, who care for you in the Lord and who admonish you. Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work.”* Those who lead in ministry are special targets of the enemy. The weight of constant oppression and attack is heavy to bear. Paul encourages the body of Christ to go *above and beyond* in supporting and encouraging their leaders. Call, write, serve, give, encourage, love, and pray for those who lead. Let them know that you *have their back*. Put down gossip and negative talk. A recent Barna Research Group study<sup>55</sup> showed that 42% of Pastors considered stepping away from full-time ministry in the last 12 months. 43% of Pastors reported “feeling lonely.” 56% reported overwhelming “stress” and almost 30% report their role in ministry has had a negative impact on their family. Prayerfully consider what you can do to make things better for those who lead in your local church.

---

<sup>54</sup> The NIV reads: “comfort the disheartened”

<sup>55</sup> [www.barna.com/research/pastors-quitting-ministry/](http://www.barna.com/research/pastors-quitting-ministry/)

**Reflection question:** *Note three ways you can “edify” a fellow believer and honor one in a position of authority. Create an action plan to put feet to your thoughts.*

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## 1 THESSALONIANS 5

### (PART 2)

Paul closes his letter to the Thessalonians with a presentation of rapid-fire exhortations. Most believe these are a review of important teaching points he shared when he ministered to the brethren in Thessalonica. Now, in closing the Epistle, Paul takes the opportunity to review the spiritual precepts the Lord had placed on his heart:

1. In verse 16, Paul reminds believers to “*rejoice* evermore.” The word for *rejoice* in the original Greek text is **pantōtē** (*pan´tot-eh*), meaning everywhere and at every time.<sup>56</sup> Here, Paul is encouraging a proper perspective. Remember both Jewish and Roman officials persecuted the believers in Thessalonica. The attacks were brutal. But amid the turmoil, Paul encouraged trust—trust that God has a plan and can bring “beauty from ashes.”<sup>57</sup> It is easy to rejoice when all is well—the mark of Christian maturity is the ability to rejoice in the midst of persecution and challenges. The perspective that Paul encourages is possible when one focuses on the positive elements mentioned in Philippians 4:8 and the promise that Jesus is coming and will reward His faithful followers.

---

<sup>56</sup> James Strong, *The New Strong's Dictionary of Hebrew and Greek Words* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1996)

<sup>57</sup> Isaiah 61:1-3

2. In verse 17, Paul orders believers to “Pray without ceasing.” The Greek word for the phrase *without ceasing* is **adialēiptōs** (*ad-ee-al-ipe'-toce*). The term means without interruption or omission.<sup>58</sup> The order reminds believers to pray at all times for all things. Philippians 4:6 notes that we are “Make our **every** supplication be known unto God.” As long as there is a need, believers need to pray. Prayer is a great resource and an essential component of a dynamic Christian walk.

**Reflection question: *Prayer and praise (rejoicing) are two fundamentals of the faith. They are essential for spiritual growth, a powerful witness, and overcoming and persevering in the faith. Note three ways you can improve or expand your personal prayer and praise times with the Lord.***

---



---



---



---



---



---



---



---



---



---



---



---

<sup>58</sup> James Strong, *The New Strong's Dictionary of Hebrew and Greek Words* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1996)

3. In verse 18, Paul commands, “In everything give *thanks*.” The word in the original text for *thanks* is **ěucharistěō** (*yoo-khar-is-teh'-o*). The term means to *be grateful*. The word is a verb—an action word indicating the expression of *gratitude toward someone or for something*.<sup>59</sup> This verse is often misunderstood. Paul is not encouraging believers (who are often sorely oppressed) to give thanks **for** everything, but rather, to give thanks **in** everything. **In** every situation, in triumph and in trial, we are to give thanks **to the Lord** for His promises to *never leave nor forsake us*,<sup>60</sup> to *comfort us*,<sup>61</sup> and *strengthen us*<sup>62</sup> are wonderful and sure.

4. In verse 19, Paul directs believers not to “quench not the Spirit.” The word in the Greek text for *quench* is **sběnnumi** (*sben'-noo-mee*). In English, the focus of the word is the *end* result—that is, the flame is **put out**. In the Greek text, the focus is on the *act* of putting out the flame. Paul is not suggesting that one can lose the Spirit of God (i.e., by quenching the Spirit). Paul is, however, noting that humans

---

<sup>59</sup> James Strong, *The New Strong's Dictionary of Hebrew and Greek Words* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1996)

<sup>60</sup> Hebrews 13:5b

<sup>61</sup> John 15:26

<sup>62</sup> Acts 1:8

can choose not to utilize, access, yield to, or follow the leading of the Holy Spirit in their life. This can be done via willful defiance, but most often occurs when believers fail to pray for and request the full activation of the Spirit in their life. Pray for the development of the fruit of the Spirit<sup>63</sup> in your life. Ask the Spirit of God to empower, anoint, and lead you so that your life honors God and is filled with purpose.

**Reflection question: *Note two things to do and two things to avoid to address Paul's directives to "in everything give thanks" and "quench not the Spirit."***

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

5. In verse 20, Paul counsels believers to “despise not prophesyings.” The NIV reads: “Do not treat prophecies with contempt.” The word translated *despise* in the original text is

---

<sup>63</sup> Galatians 5:21-22



**ěxōuthěněō** (*ex-oo-then-eh'-o*); it can mean to hold in contempt, but more often, the term is rendered less harshly—indicating to improperly or under-estimate. Sadly, though few church leaders would say they *despise* Bible prophecy, many leaders in ministry under-estimate or undervalue the importance of Bible prophecy. Paul wrote this verse under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, who knew that Paul, Peter, Luke, and John would pen scores of prophecies in the coming years—most of these have a direct bearing on the times in which we live today. Paul’s directive to the Thessalonians, and to believers today, is to study and share Bible prophecy. Prophecy warns, informs, and can strengthen our witness as it provides empirical proof for the integrity of Scripture.

- 6.** In verse 21, Paul shares a verse that can be a powerful witnessing aid. He writes, “Prove all things; hold fast [to] that which is good.” Many Bible translations read, “Test all things and hold on to what is true.” Christians today are often accused of being simple-minded and anti-scientific. We are told we are like lemmings, simply believing without asking basic questions. Those who wish to refute these accusations can cite this verse, which commands believers to test, try, and prove everything. Like the Bereans,<sup>64</sup> believers are encouraged to study and to examine the evidence, and to make a reasoned decision regarding what is true. There are some things one must accept by faith, for our human minds simply can not grasp the mysteries of the universe nor the glory, power, and plan of God. Still, God blessed this age with amazing research tools and schools of science so the true seeker can validate the integrity of Scripture.

---

<sup>64</sup> Acts 17:11

Archeologists, historians, and manuscript experts verify the biblical record to be true. A field of study called Apologetics is dedicated to examining, testing, and proving the biblical record. The more these fields of science develop, the more they verify the accuracy of Scripture. Archeologists, for example, have made over 200 significant finds since 1880—all support the biblical record. No discovery has disproven the biblical record. Scientists continue to make discoveries about the vastness of space and the smallest of particles—these studies point to the precision of creation and evidence “intelligent design.” The only difference between science and theology on this point is that Christians know the name of One responsible for the precision of creation.

Christianity has been scrutinized for about 2000 years. Every teaching, story, book, writer, and doctrine has been tested and proved time and time again. The truth can be rejected, but it can not be refuted. For the last 50 years, apologists like John Ankerberg, Lee Strobel, Darrell Bock, Norm Geisler, Josh McDowell, J. Warner Wallace, and William Lane Craig have done an excellent job defending the faith and providing believers with science-based answers for the great questions of our time. Follow this footnote for a link to a three-part teaching on Apologetics and a free .pdf download of a book titled, *The Discipleship Handbook*.<sup>65</sup>

7. In verse 22, Paul summarizes his directives by writing: “*Abstain* from all appearance of evil.” The Greek word for *abstain* is **apēchōmai** (*ap-ekh'-om-ahēe*). More than simply meaning

---

<sup>65</sup> <https://tinyurl.com/5ekfvpch>

*don't*, the word points to the process of *holding oneself off [or back]*.<sup>66</sup> The word reminds the believer that a spiritual battle is waging and that, like fighting a riptide, one must constantly work to avoid being swept away by a dangerous current. To abstain means to run from, but also, to be exceptionally mindful of the slippery slope that threatens a calamitous fall. It may be tempting to flirt with sin—and many today suggest there is no harm in dabbling in what is forbidden in Scripture, but Satan is an expert liar, manipulator, tempter, and trickster—his skill must be respected, and his designs for you must be acknowledged lest you pay a heavy price. The wise will purposely and strategically distance themselves from evil while embracing the *to-do* directives Paul presents in his writings to the Thessalonians.

**Reflection question:** *Note two resources you can access to test or prove the integrity of Scripture, two things you can do to learn more about Bible prophecy, and two steps you can take to purposely and strategically distance yourself from evil.*

---



---



---



---



---



---



---



---



---



---

<sup>66</sup> James Strong, *The New Strong's Dictionary of Hebrew and Greek Words* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1996)

**FIRST**

**THESSALONIANS**