

The Rapture

Key Verse:
“For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath, but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

1 Thessalonians 5:9

Extra: Why don't Christians grieve "as those who have no hope"?

Level 5 lesson 41

Read: 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18
Further: Psalm 20

In the last lesson, Paul commended the Thessalonian Christians for waiting expectantly for Jesus to come again from Heaven. However, the way Jesus would come and the reason for it was not too clear. The Apostle Paul had only spent a limited time with them to explain these things. They knew that there was to be a great “gathering together” of believers to meet the Lord somehow, sometime, somewhere - but how would it happen? They were uncertain. In fact, some of them were sad, because they thought that their Christian brothers and sisters who had died in the meantime, had missed out on this wonderful event!

In this lovely passage of Scripture, Paul answers the question, “Will those who have died ‘in Christ’ miss out on the great ‘gathering together’ of all the saints (Christians), and can we expect to ever see them again?” God doesn’t want us to be ignorant of this wonderful event we call ‘the Rapture’, which could take place any day. The word Rapture is not in the Bible but comes from the Latin equivalent of the Greek word “Harpazo” which in verse 17 is translated “caught up.” It has the sense of being “snatched away,” much like a wolf would snatch a lamb from the flock.

CERTAIN COMFORT. This is a passage of real comfort to Christians who have lost loved ones. Of course, Christians still grieve at the death of a loved one; the sense of loss is very real. However, they do not grieve as those who have no hope (v13). Christians know that those who love the Lord are “away from the body, but at home with the Lord!” (2 Corinthians 5:8). Christians don’t say goodbye forever - it is only till we meet again in glory! What comfort this is.

Verse 14 gives the grounds on which we qualify for this great event: we believe that Jesus died and rose again. Those who haven’t believed will be left behind to face God’s judgement on this wicked world. Note also that those who have died ‘in Christ’ are said to be merely asleep. The concept of sleep never refers to the soul of man.

Nowhere does the Bible ever teach that the spirit of a man is ever unconscious. It is only our bodies that are “asleep”. From a medical point of view they are dead, but from a Christian view-point only asleep; because Jesus has the power of resurrection and so the bodies will one day be ‘woken’ to eternal life at ‘the Rapture’ when Christ comes for His bride, the Church.

“CAUGHT UP”! When Christ appears the dead “in Christ” will actually rise first, but immediately, we who are still alive “in Christ” will be “caught up” with them to meet the Lord in the air. This is the day that all Christians are waiting for with eager anticipation! This is an absolutely certain event. Verse 15 says, “According to the Lord’s own Word” - this revelation was given to Paul by the Lord Himself, who does not lie!

Notice that it is the Lord Jesus Himself who is coming for His bride, the Church. He is not just sending an angel. He’s coming Himself! Although there will be a company of angels who will come with Him. The Archangel Michael will give a shout, there will be a trumpet call of assembly; and all those who love the Saviour, whether dead or alive, will be snatched out of this world to meet the Lord in the air. And so spend the rest of eternity with Him in glory.

“IMMINENT” Return. Notice that we are going to meet the Lord. The Greek word translated “to meet” is “apantesis”. This word was most commonly used to speak of a company of town folk going out to meet a conquering ruler coming back to his city in triumph and escorting him back home. What a lovely picture of the Lord, going back to His Father’s house in triumph, escorted by all His beloved, admiring people!

There is no prophecy remaining to be fulfilled before this day when the Lord will come. His coming is imminent. That means that it could happen any time! Are you ready for it? Are you ready to meet the Lord? It would be a terrible thing to be left behind. If you haven’t already asked the Lord to forgive your sins, to be your Saviour, and offered Him your life, do it now - and you too will be ready to meet the Lord in that moment of time!

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

1. Why were some of the Thessalonians grieving?	.....
2. Why is the death of Christians sometimes referred to as sleep?	.....
3. Who will be taken to meet the Lord on the day of His return?	.....
4. Who will be left behind on that day?	.....
5. Are you ready to meet the Lord? Tell us how.	.....

My Name is Age

Significant Statement

Key Verse:

“And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with Me.”

John 14:3

Extra: Research some features of Christ’s resurrection body.

Level 5 lesson 42

Read John 14:1-6

Further: 1 Corinthians 15:51-57

We have been studying “the Rapture” as part of our studies in Thessalonians. Let’s look now at two other Scripture passages which speak about it. In John 14, Jesus told the disciples that He must be crucified. He also told them of His resurrection after 3 days. This was not what they expected of the Messiah, and they were puzzled and upset. Jesus comforts them by saying, “In my Father’s house are many rooms. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go to prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with Me, that you also may be where I am” (v2-3)

Jewish Wedding Ceremony. To understand the significance of Jesus’ statement, it helps to know something about Jewish weddings. When two Israelites married in those days, there was a ceremony in the bride’s village, usually at her father’s house, and the two would be legally married. However, they did not live together yet.

First, the groom would return to his father’s house, and prepare a place for his bride, usually by building an apartment onto his father’s house. This usually took about a year. Then, at a certain time, unknown exactly to his bride, he would return for her, along with his friends and family. Together, the whole bridal party would proceed back to his father’s house with joy and dancing for the final wedding ceremony, after which the bride and bridegroom would live together as husband and wife.

Do you see the wonderful picture? We represent the Bride of Christ and our Bridegroom is the Lord Jesus Christ (see John 3:28-30). He has gone back to His Father’s house in Heaven and is preparing a place for us (all true Christians are collectively called “the Bride of Christ” – see also Ephesians 5:23-33). Notice in John 14:3 that He has promised to return for His bride! This is the event we call the Rapture, the exact time of which is unknown to the bride. Following this, there will be a great marriage supper (Revelation 19:6-9) when the Bridegroom returns to His Father’s house in Heaven and celebrates with His bride.

Are you prepared and ready, enthusiastically serving the Lord while you wait expectantly for His return?

Thomas claimed not to know where the Lord was going, nor the way. This led to the Lord Jesus’ great statement, “I am the Way, the Truth and the Life. No-one comes to the Father except through me.”(v6) How true this is! We can only come to God through the Lord Jesus Christ.

From Death to Life Eternal. Now we turn to that other passage: 1 Corinthians 15, beginning at verse 51, “Listen, I tell you a mystery. We will not all sleep but we will all be changed.” When the Lord returns for His bride, many will be asleep in death, but not all. There will be some who will still be alive at that time, but whether alive or dead, we shall all be changed. “In a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet, for the trumpet will sound and the dead will be raised imperishable and we will all be changed” (v52).

Notice that it will happen suddenly. There will be no time to get ready - we have to be ready NOW! The dead whose bodies have been lying in their graves corrupted and decaying, will be raised imperishable, never to see corruption or death again. All those who have died “in Christ” have been in the conscious presence of the Lord since their death, but are only now given their new resurrection bodies with which to serve the Lord for all eternity.

A mortal is a person who is alive but subject to death. Those who are alive at this time are changed, to be no longer subject to death. They will never see corruption or death of any kind. They will become immortal, “for the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality” (v53).

Every believer will receive an incredible new body - immortal and incorruptible like our Lord’s resurrection body! Remember how after His resurrection, the Lord’s body was not bound by the laws of nature any more? For example, He could appear in rooms and then disappear again. This is the kind of body Christians will receive on that day. “Then the saying that is written will come true, ‘Death has been swallowed up in victory’. Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?”(v54-55). This is when we will really appreciate what Christ accomplished for us on Calvary! He triumphed over death in His own resurrection and because He lives, we shall live also, with Him in Heaven forever (John 14:19)! How important to be ready when He comes!

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

1. Why do you think that the disciples were troubled, as recorded in John 14?

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2. Where is “My Father’s house” located?

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3. Will it matter whether we are alive or dead at the time of “the Rapture”?

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4. What is the only thing that will matter at this time?

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5. What did Jesus accomplish for us at Calvary?

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The Second Coming of Christ

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

Further: 2 Thessalonians 2:1-10

Key Verse:

“As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man.”

Matthew 24:37

Extra: In what ways will the world be ‘as it was in the days of Noah’ at the coming of the Son of Man? (See Key Verse)

Level 5 lesson 43

We now return to Paul’s letters to the Thessalonians. We want to distinguish between the Rapture (when Christ takes all the Christians to Heaven) and the Lord’s Second Coming to earth (to establish His earthly Kingdom for a period of 1000 years, which is known as the Millennium – Revelation 20:1-10). The Rapture comes first and is followed by a 7 year period of terrible judgement on earth known as “the Tribulation.” The Old Testament speaks of it often and at great length: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Joel, Amos, Zechariah, and Malachi are the main prophets who write about this terrible time of judgement. In the New Testament, the main passages are Matthew 24-25 and Revelation 6-18. This period of the future is also referred to as the beginning of “the Day of the Lord.”

Now remember, at this point in the future God has already snatched the whole Church out of this world, before His judgement falls on the wicked. God did not appoint us to wrath but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Thessalonians 5:9). However, even as judgement falls, the grace of God is revealed. The Holy Spirit will convert and seal 144,000 Jews - 12,000 from each tribe (Revelation 7:4-8), who will preach the Gospel of the Kingdom throughout the whole world and proclaim the imminent return of the Messiah.

Although many will turn to God, they will not form part of “the Church, or the Bride of Christ” because she has already gone to Heaven. These saved ones are called Tribulation Saints and many of them will suffer persecution and even be martyred for their faith. You can read about this time in Matthew 24 and in the Book of Revelation chapters 7-18. It is the time of God’s great judgement upon those living on the earth – a terrible time to be alive.

As you read 2 Thessalonians 2, you will see that after the Church has gone, along with its restraining influence on sin in the world, the Lawless one, sometimes called “Antichrist” or the “Man of Sin,” will be revealed and will lead the world even further away from God. But God’s judgement is not long in coming. The judgement of God and the sin of man is so great during this time, that the Lord said, “If those days had not been cut short, no-one would survive - but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened” (Matthew 24:22).

God’s grace is such that even His judgement is tempered with His mercy!

The 7 year Tribulation will end with the return of Christ to earth as He promised. He will not come this time as the suffering sin-bearer, but as the King of Kings and Lord of Lords! Isn’t it thrilling to know that our Lord who was bitterly rejected, humiliated and finally crucified, will at last be vindicated, honoured and exalted in the very place of His rejection, as His feet stand again on the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem (Zechariah 14:4)!

Those who have survived the Tribulation period will each be judged on a personal basis by the Lord Himself (Matthew 25:31-46). Many will perish, but those who belong to Christ, will enter the Millennial Kingdom. Christ will reign over them, and all true Christians in His Church will come back to reign with Him in their glorified resurrection bodies. However, they will not be part of the Millennial Kingdom’s population; that will be the “tribulation saints” and the children who will be born to them.

The Millennial Kingdom will be a wonderful time to be alive as the Lord reigns in complete righteousness on the earth. Satan will be bound during this thousand years (Revelation 20:3). No open rebellion will be tolerated and it will be a blessed time of peace and righteousness (Isaiah 65:18-25). The curse upon earth from the time of Adam’s sin will mainly be removed. There will be no infant mortality; in fact, the normal life span will be increased to hundreds of years, perhaps for the entire one thousand years! Wild animals will no longer prey on each other or be dangerous. The soil will be given new increased fertility and it will be a time of peace, prosperity and righteousness.

The end of the Millennial Kingdom will be the end of history as such, and the earth will then be dissolved. The saints from every age (Old Testament saints, the Church saints, Tribulation saints and Millennial saints) will all live with Christ in the New Heavens and New Earth in complete righteousness, for all eternity. But all unbelievers will stand before the Great White Throne to be judged, and when their names are not found written in Jesus’ Book of Life they will be cast into the Lake of Fire forever (Revelation 20:11-15)!

No wonder Paul wrote, ‘O the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable His judgements, and His paths beyond tracing out’ (Romans 11:33)! How very important it is to be ready when the Lord comes for His own!

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

1. Try to put the events of this study in the correct order.

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2. Will “the Church” still be on earth during the Tribulation? Why or why not?

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3. Describe some features of the Tribulation.

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4. Describe some features of the Millennial Kingdom.

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5. What has thrilled, excited or affected you most from this study?

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“The Greatest”

Read John 5:31-47

Further: Luke 15

Key Verse:

“But these were written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.”

John 20:31

Extra: Why did Jesus condemn the Pharisees so strongly?

Level 5 lesson 44

The Greatest Man. Christmas is a special time. It’s set aside to remember the birth of the greatest man who ever set foot on this planet, Jesus Christ. All around the world, people from every race and culture will celebrate His birth in Bethlehem, over 2000 years ago. But of course, He was much more than just a great man. He claimed to be God and the promised Saviour! So what evidence do we have to back up His claims? This is what His enemies also wanted to know.

Jesus responded in verse 31 by saying, “If I bear testify about myself, my testimony is not valid.” Now at first that may sound a bit strange; surely everything the Lord said was true? Of course it is! So what did He mean? Well the ‘I’ of His statement is emphatic and literally means “if I ALONE testify...” From a legal perspective, more than just one witness about the facts was needed. If a claim was true then there would certainly be other witnesses. In the following verses Jesus presents FOUR other witnesses that strongly support the truth about His identity and claims to be God.

The Greatest Prophet. The first was in verse 33, where Jesus pointed to the testimony of John the Baptist, who He described as the greatest prophet born of a woman. The Jews had questioned John, and he had told them that Jesus was the Messiah and the Son of God. The whole purpose of John’s ministry was to be the forerunner of Christ, “to prepare the way of the Lord.” When he saw Christ, he proclaimed “Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” He went on to say, that since Jesus had now come, “He must increase and I must decrease.” Some believed John’s testimony and trusted in Jesus, but many did not. However, his reliable prophetic testimony still stood as a testimony to the validity of Christ’s claims.

The Greatest Works. These were a greater witness than even John the Baptist. The miracles of healing, the raising of the dead, Christ’s power over nature and matter; in fact EVERYTHING He did was an extremely powerful testimony to the truth of His

claims to be God. You may remember when John the Baptist was in prison, he sent his disciples to ask Jesus plainly if He was the Messiah. Jesus simply told the disciples to tell John, “The blind receive sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor” (Luke 7:20-22)! Jesus’ works are self-evident.

The Greatest Person. The third witness Jesus mentions is God the Father Himself. He is of course, “greater than all” (John 10:29). Jesus said “He who sent Me has borne witness of Me” (v37). Remember when Jesus was baptised by John the Baptist in the Jordan River? As Jesus came up out of the water, the heavens opened and the voice of God was heard saying, “This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.” What a testimony! A similar statement was heard on the mountain-top by Peter, James, and John some time later, when Jesus was transfigured before their eyes (Luke 9:28-36).

The Greatest Book. Finally Jesus pointed His adversaries to the Old Testament Scriptures, “You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about ME!” (v39). Moses wrote the first five books of the Bible (called the Pentateuch) and the Jewish leaders had great honour and respect for Moses’ words. Yet they obviously didn’t believe them, for as Jesus said, “He wrote about ME!”

Jesus was accusing these Pharisees for reading and studying the Scriptures, and then rejecting them! If they had really believed what they had studied, then they would have believed Him too! The Bible, which of course now includes the New Testament, witnesses about our Saviour from beginning to end. Unless we believe that the Bible is pointing us to Jesus Christ as the only Saviour of the world, then like the Pharisees, they will not help us but instead condemn us. So Jesus presented this marvellous four-fold witness to the truth of His claims to being God. This Christmas, consider again the wonderful facts surrounding the birth and life of Jesus Christ; and if you haven’t already, put your faith and trust in Him and receive the greatest gift of all this Christmas - having your sins forgiven and living a new life in Christ. God bless you all!

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

1. How can we best understand v31?	.....
2. What had John the Baptist told people about Jesus?	.....
3. What were some of the works Jesus claimed proved His identity as the Son of God?	.....
4. What was the Father’s testimony concerning Jesus?	.....
5. Who is the Bible really about? Why is this important to understand?	.....

THERE ARE NO LESSONS IN JANUARY. THE NEXT LESSONS WILL BE SENT IN FEBRUARY