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## So, When Does the Rapture Happen?

**1 Thessalonians 4:17: (NASB) *Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord.***



The rapture is one of those Bible teachings promoted by some that draws all kinds of attention. It is dramatic - millions of people all just vanishing at the same moment! It is sobering - what is left behind is a world that rapidly sinks into chaos and destruction! It is scary - God's judgment pronounced in an instant and you are either in or you are out! But the question is - is it true? Is this a real and legitimate teaching of Scripture we should truly heed or is it a fabrication of the minds of men based on a misrepresentation of Scripture? Let us find out!

To determine if the rapture is an authentic biblical teaching, it would be important to understand the context of its revealing. **The definitive text for this teaching:**

**1 Thessalonians 4:15-17**

**Before we go to the context of this text, we want to list other Scriptures that seem to support a rapture idea:** 1 Corinthians 15:51-52: It sounds pretty instantaneous and clearly includes both those who had previously died and those alive. Matthew 24:38-42: We seem to have a snatching away of some and not others. Daniel 12:1-3: These Scriptures describe the rescue of many from the sleep of death. The "rapture chapter" ends with this statement: 1 Thessalonians 4:18: (NASB) *Therefore comfort one another with these words.* What words?

**The previous chapter mentions the return of Jesus as a final destination for their holiness:**

1 Thessalonians 3:11-13: In these last few verses of chapter 3, the Apostle Paul is exhorting them to live a Christ-like life - *about in love toward another.*

**Paul continues to exhort them to a higher standard of moral living:** 1 Thessalonians 4:1: In other words, live an honest life with integrity, driven by the love of God. Like Jesus, we as his followers are to be a shining example to those around us.

**Paul now exhorts them to treat their brothers (believers) with the highest respect:**

1 Thessalonians 4:6: We extend this principle of being respectful of believers to doctrinal study. We may not all agree on a doctrinal teaching, but we can still be respectful of each other.

**Now he tells them to have the highest standards of personal integrity and responsibility with all men:** 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12: Christianity is a very giving, charitable life beyond what others might think is reasonable. But at the same time, Christianity is about personal responsibility. *Attend to your own business and work with your hands* - Just because you are a Christian does not mean you sit back and let others take care of you because you know that is what they are willing to do. Be responsible for yourself!

**Here Paul begins to unfold another form of higher living - having hope about the eternal future of fellow Christians who had died:** 1 Thessalonians 4:13-14: Might the martyred Stephen have been on Paul's mind when he wrote this? Stephen was a faithful Christian who died at the hands of Saul before his conversion to the Apostle Paul. The Christian faith was new at this time and Paul specifically did not want these new Christians to feel the grief others felt when those close to them died, because Jesus died and rose again. Those faithful who died would be the first receiving their reward. All of Paul's encouragement was built around living a Christ-like life, something they already knew. It had to do with "trading up" our human reactions for spiritual ones, such as the human reaction of grief for those who died.

At this point in the context are the "rapture Scriptures" we previously read in 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17 then the "encouragement verse" 1 Thessalonians 4:18: (NASB) *Therefore comfort one another with these words.* That is the end of a thought. What he says after, starting with chapter 5, is a new subject. Chapter 4 gives words of comfort and the building up of character, which the church at Thessalonica would have clearly understood.

The rapture concept was not taught until the early 1800's. From the time of the writing of the New Testament until then, there is no commentary or teaching to be found regarding this belief. So, how would the verses have been a *comfort* to the early Christians? What application of the teaching would the original readers have applied?



**The opening of the next chapter:** 1 Thessalonians 5:1-4: This is a clear reference to a time prophecy of the return of Jesus. What came before was simply an ordering of their hope in life, not a new doctrine of a rapture. Remember, 1 Thessalonians 4 was an ordering of events for the sake of Christian hope and understanding. From the context we can tell it was not meant to be a complete prophetic teaching regarding timing and events.

**How do these texts fit in with other prophetic statements regarding the resurrection process?** 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17: Paul begins these verses by revealing, according to the grace of God, a specific detail of the process of resurrection that we otherwise could not have known.

**A specific order of a specific resurrection:** 1 Thessalonians 4:15: *By the word of the Lord* - Paul was given an explanation by God, perhaps in a vision. *We...will not precede those who have fallen asleep* - those who "fell asleep" in death first will be raised first. This tells us there is a specific order within this first resurrection. **The following text tells us the more general order:** 1 Corinthians 15:20-23: Because of Adam, death comes upon all men. The resurrection of the dead comes because of Jesus. But there is an order: First is Christ, who has already been raised. Next comes *the first fruits* discussed in 1 Thessalonians 4:15. After, *those who are Christ's at his coming*.

**So, heavenly bound first, earthly bound second - all are resurrected:** John 5:28-29: Jesus "triggers" the resurrection because he died for everyone's sins. *Those who did the good deeds* - does this mean just being a "good person"? No, it means a follower of Jesus. The "everybody else" is raised to *a resurrection of judgment*. Jesus is explaining there are two parts to the work he did. The first part is those who followed him will rise from death to heaven, further broken down by the description we read in 1 Corinthians 15:23.

**Once you have all of the recipients of the ransom raised, The Day of Judgment occurs:** 1 Peter 2:12: Regardless of how you are treated, you are to treat an evildoer in a Christ-like fashion. They will remember that and will glorify God in the day of visitation and appreciate your example. **...and then, the great rule of peace and righteousness!** 1 Corinthians 15:24: The first details of this "rapture in question" text do clearly fit into the overall context of other scriptural statements and do not fall in line with the traditional rapture teaching.



**Not in the Bible, Rapture Panel 2014, Lamb and Lion Ministries**

- (Interviewer) *Fellas, I happen to know that all three of you believe in something called the rapture of the church. So, my first question is how can you believe in something called the rapture when it is not even mentioned in the Bible?*
- (Pastor) *Well, Dave, we use names to define individuals. If my wife was talking to someone about me she wouldn't say, "Well, that old guy that I married, five-foot ten, 170 pounds," and give a long definition, she would just say, "Dennis" and it's just a lot simpler. And so, we wouldn't have to use the word rapture at all. We could say, "I am just so excited about that great 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17. You know, the one where the Lord descends from heaven with a shout and the voice of an archangel and the trumpet of God and the dead in Christ will rise first and we that remain will be caught..." but it's a lot easier to say "rapture." The great snatching away.*

Is rapture REALLY not in the Bible? Now the questions become more detailed. If there is a rapture....do selected Christians really vanish? Do the faithful really float around in the air? Is it all really at the same moment? Is descending with a shout and a trumpet the way Jesus returns? 1 Thessalonians 4:15-16

**Shout:** Strong's #2752 *keleusma* (kel'-yoos-mah) or *keleuma* (kel'-yoo-mah); a cry of incitement; Thayers: an order, command, specifically, a stimulating cry, KJV - shout

Is this a literal shout? We do not believe so - why? Often prophecies use picture language where understanding the symbolism gives us the lesson.

**The voice of the archangel:** Daniel 12:1-3: (NASB) *Now at that time Michael* (meaning "who is like God," representing Jesus), *the great prince who stands guard over the sons of your people* (Israel), *will arise* (stand). *And there will be a time of distress such as never occurred since there was a nation until that time* (this is all during the time of the end - not some short period of time like an instant, but the process of the build up to and the time of trouble all



mentioned in Matthew 24); and at that time your people, everyone who is found written in the book, will be rescued.

This is the same time period of the Thessalonian Scriptures we have been reviewing. Both Daniel and Thessalonians are two different pictures of the same event BUT there is a problem. If we take them both literally, Michael arises AND descends at the same time, which cannot be true.

We submit symbolic language is used: To rise up (stand) = asserting authority; To descend from heaven = coming from God; Putting the two together: Jesus asserts his authority as the representative of God.

**Continuing in Daniel, Daniel focuses on the earthly resurrection:** <sup>2</sup>Many of those who sleep in the dust of the ground will awake, these to everlasting life, but the others to disgrace and everlasting contempt. (This is the resurrection of the earthly nature.) <sup>3</sup>Those who have insight (these are those who were already raised in the first resurrection) will shine brightly like the brightness of the expanse of heaven, and those who lead the many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.

Many aspects of several related events are shown here. This can only mean these events are taking place over a period of time and not all instantaneously as the rapture idea indicates.

This is why the return of Jesus is elsewhere described as the sunrise: Matthew 24:27: How can this be the sun? Doesn't it say lightning?

Let's look at Luke's rendering of the same verse: Luke 17:24: This word 796 can mean glare, lightning, brightness, or the gleam of a lamp. Jesus himself described his own return as a sunrise gradually revealed over time.



Harpazo - biblical concept, *Rapture Panel 2014, Lamb and Lion Ministries*

- (Pastor) 1 Thessalonians 4:17, "Then we who are still alive will be caught up with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air and so we will always be with the Lord." Now, the Greek word for caught up is harpazo. The Latin was rapturo and when we Englishize it, we get rapture turns to rapture. So, it is in the Bible. It's right there in 1 Thessalonians 4:17.
- (Interviewer) That's right, it is in Bible. It's in the Latin translation, which is the only Bible the Western world had for about 1,300 years. So, it comes right out of there. It doesn't have to be in English for it to be a biblical word, and furthermore I would point out that even if the word were not in the Bible, it represents a biblical concept.

Generally we do not use Latin as authoritative Scripture, but that is where it comes from.

1 Thessalonians 4:17: (NASB) Then we who are alive and remain will be **caught up <726> together <260>** with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord.



Harpazo - snatch three uses, *Rapture Panel 2014, Lamb and Lion Ministries*

- (Other Pastor) Nathan talked about the Greek word harpazo. Actually, you find that three times in the New Testament. Once is the 1 Thessalonians passage where it talks about us being caught up or snatched. It's basically meaning a violent grab or a snatch; to take something for yourself. You also find it where Jesus said, "I give my sheep eternal life and they'll never perish and neither shall anyone snatch them out of my hand." It's the same exact word. They won't rapture. They won't violently take them away from me. And then also with Philip when he baptized the Ethiopian eunuch, the Bible says when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away. Snatched him away. So, it is essentially Christ snatching the church to himself and exactly what he said he would do.

Harpazo is used many more than three times in the New Testament - see the Bonus Material for more on this.

**Caught up:** Strong's: NT: 726 harpazo (har-pad'-zo); to sieze (in various applications)  
KJV - catch (away, up), pluck, pull, take (by force)

**Two examples:** Matthew 13:19 Jude 1:23 This admonishment is to rescue those in spiritual danger; you have to change where they are. **What is meant in our Thessalonians text by the use of this word?** 1 Corinthians 15:51-52: The fact that we shall not all sleep but rather be changed indicates a plucking out/snatching away of the faithful out of the clutches of death. This is very dramatic! For some who were faithful, like Stephen, the first Christian martyr,



would have been asleep in death for almost 2,000 years. At the end of the age, at the return of Jesus, those who die faithful will not sleep in death. They are snatched out of the hands of death to instantaneously be with Jesus. 1 Corinthians 15:53-58: Does the word *together* mean simultaneously or in association with? It can mean both. While we do not believe in a rapture, we do believe in the readiness. We believe in being faithful as Christians and living a life of sacrifice. We do not believe true Christianity should be based on fear; rather on the desire to love and serve God.

1 Thessalonians 4:17: (NASB) *Then we who are alive and remain will be **caught up <726> together <260>** with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord.*

**Proof #1: Every time the Apostle Paul uses the word, he uses it in the same way - “in association with” and not “at the same moment.”** Romans 3:12 Colossians 4:3 1 Thessalonians 5:10 1 Timothy 5:13 Philemon 1:22

**Proof #2: The last phrase of the verse clearly lends itself towards the “association” definition. ...and so we shall *always* be with the Lord.** (In association with the Lord; the body of Christ will be complete.)

**Caught up <726> together <260>** -We can see through scriptural reasoning this phrase really means those who are still alive when the dead in Christ are raised will have the unique privilege of not having to sleep in death to wait for their spiritual life. The verse is saying that as each member of these faithful ones at the end of the age completes their walk with Jesus, they join those who have gone on before them, *not simultaneously* but as each is ready. Where are they joined?

**In the clouds - not literal clouds, but symbolic clouds:** Zephaniah 1:14-15: *Clouds and thick darkness* describe the day of trouble. Jesus returns in the context of great trouble, or *clouds*.

Instead of trying to create the Hollywood imagery of this all happening at a moment, we want to step back and have the Scriptures define what all of this means. Jesus described his return as *a thief in the night*. The thief is already there by the time he is discovered. He further describes his return as a sunrise, a gradual revealing. There are different stages of his return.

**Finally, a quick word on a verse that we mentioned early on but did not comment on:** Matthew 24:40-42: We understand this to be the calling out from all walks of life to be a true Christian with the emphasis on coming OUT of the corrupted systems of Christianity.

**Two will be in the field - according to Jesus, a field is symbolic of the world:** Matthew 13:37-38: *Grinding at the mill* – The mill was a place where food was prepared. Where is spiritual food prepared? Theological schools and the ministry, perhaps Christians in name only.

**Where were these people in the field and the mill taken to? Matthew does not tell us, but Luke’s account does:** Luke 17:34-37: They are taken to the food of truth - not heaven. Luke adds another comparison of two in a bed. Beds are a symbolism of doctrine - see Isaiah 28:20.

At the time of Jesus’ return, there will be a calling out from the church systems those looking to find a true understanding of Scriptures. These Matthew/Luke texts show people being brought to a new understanding in this life of truth - spiritual food. These do not have anything to do with an afterlife.

The Scripture used for the rapture is not stated in the context of some great revelation or prophecy. It is stated as something that should be used to comfort one another and yet it was not mentioned until the 1800’s. When that rapture Scripture is compared against others mentioning the time of Jesus’ return, it does not fit. It is a process and not a moment. It is important to realize the Scriptures do reveal themselves if we are patient enough to walk through the context of all the applicable texts.

*So, when does the rapture happen?  
For Jonathan and Rick and Christian Questions...  
Think about it...!*