

Do I Suffer From Rapture Anxiety? (Part II)

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.*



God's plan for humanity is powerful, positive and proactive. It is built upon the ransom Jesus paid for every man, woman and child who ever lived. This plan is one of great joy! All scriptural events and prophecies point to the unfolding of this plan. As we observed in Part I of this series, the widely held Christian teaching of the rapture in all of its varied interpretations does not seem to fall in line with this plan. Instead of hope, it seems to bring distress and chaos. In Part I, we began systematically looking at the key elements of the scriptures from which this teaching is drawn. Our objective is to look at these texts in the context of the Bible itself and not the context of our opinions or our church's doctrine.

recap
recap

We found that the rapture teaching is quite involved, and "rapture" means different things to different people. In Part I, we briefly identified some of the main differences having to do with when, how and why Jesus returns. We talked about terms like pretribulation, midtribulation and posttribulation millennialism, as well as premillennialism and postmillennialism. There is even pretribulational dispensational premillennialism. There are a lot of different viewpoints on this, so we are methodically searching out the truth.

1 Thessalonians 4:15-18: (NASB) ¹⁵For 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 not precede those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁶For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷Then 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. ¹⁸Therefore comfort one another with these words.

Part I left off with the *trumpet of God* and will continue with that shortly.

Since the Apostle Paul could not be with the new Thessalonian brethren in person at that time, he wrote a letter to encourage them through their suffering and trials.

He expressed the joy they gave him:

1 Thessalonians 3:9,13: (NASB) ⁹For what thanks can we render to God for you in return for all the joy with which we rejoice before our God on your account.



Then he encouraged them by teaching about the future of all the faithful.

¹³so that He may establish your hearts without blame in holiness before our God and Father at the coming (parousia) of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.

One chapter later, Paul delves into the process of reuniting with loved ones who passed that the true church will experience:

1 Thessalonians 4:13: (NASB) *But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve as do the rest who have no hope.*

The purpose of this letter was to encourage hope and to build them up, not to scare them with violence and trauma. This is important to remember as we go through these verses.

1 Thessalonians 4:14-15: (Rotherham) ¹⁴...Jesus, died, and rose again, so, also will, God, bring forth with him, them who have fallen asleep through Jesus; ¹⁵For, this, unto you, do we say, by a word of the Lord,--that, we, the living who are left unto the presence of the Lord, shall in nowise get before them who have fallen asleep.

Understanding the *presence of the Lord* (which is often translated *coming of the Lord*) is essential to our understanding of the rapture teachings versus the scriptural teaching on this concept.

Jesus' presence is **NOT** a moment **IN** time, but a process **OF** time that is explained in three phases:

The process of the return of Jesus

- PHASE 1 Parousia
- PHASE 2 Epiphaneia
- PHASE 3 Apokalupsis

First Phase: Jesus and Paul both told us that Jesus' presence begins in a thief-like manner or "stealth mode":

1 Thessalonians 5:2: (NASB) *For you yourselves know full well that the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night.*



The Greek word *parousia* is used to describe how Jesus returns - he is present - he is in the house, so to speak, but it is too dark to see. He starts to stealthily take away Satan's kingdom.



Second Phase: Paul speaks of the manifestations of Jesus' return as targets for the faithful to watch for:

1 Timothy 6:14: (NASB) *That you keep the commandment without stain or reproach until the **appearing** <2015> of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

Appearance: Strong's Exhaustive Concordance #2015 *epiphaneia*; a manifestation, i.e. (specially) the advent of Christ (past or future)

The King James Version translates this word as appearing, brightness

This *appearing* in Greek is the *epiphaneia* phase. The beginning of the *parousia* was hidden, but in this next phase it is detectable. There are visible signs something is happening.

Third Phase: Jesus' return will be finally and fully recognized and disclosed to all of humanity:

Luke 17:26-27,30: (NASB) ²⁶...in the days of Noah... ²⁷ they were eating... drinking... until the day that Noah entered the ark, and the flood came... ³⁰It will be just the same on the day that the Son of Man is **revealed** <601>.



Revealed: (verb) Strong's Exhaustive Concordance #601 *apokalupto*; to take off the cover, i.e. disclose

Revealed is the Greek word for *apokalupsis* (noun form) which signifies revelation, uncovering, the unveiling of something previously hidden.



Now that these three phases of Jesus' return are established, we want to see where these different pieces of his return fit into this framework.

1 Thessalonians 4:16: (NASB) *For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.*

This word for *shout* means a cry of incitement or a command.



Is this a literal shout? How do we know? Who is he talking to?



We reviewed the *shout* or command in Part I. It occurs in a spiritual sense. Its purpose is to first raise *the dead in Christ*. Different things happen at different times during his return.

In other words, this shout occurs on a spiritual wavelength we cannot hear.

Jesus returns as a thief, and yet we have this shout, this command given upon his return that is focused on gathering up his church. Only those who it is meant for will hear it.

Jesus described this shout or command:

John 5:28-29: (NASB) ²⁸*Do not marvel at this; for an hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs will hear his voice, ²⁹and will come forth...*

This gives us the big picture about how Jesus triggers or commands the resurrection of all people because he died for everyone's sins.

All who are in the tombs will hear his voice, and will come forth - Paul further explains the big picture that Jesus described with an order of events. While it seems to happen all at once...

...here we see it is a prolonged process:

1 Corinthians 15:22-23: (NASB) ²²*For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive. ²³But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ's at his coming (parousia).*

We will discuss this text soon.

This command is NOT a literal earthly shout; rather, it is a miraculous command to bring the faithful Christians out of death and into a spiritual life in heaven. They are the ones who hear the shout.



This happens while some of the faithful ones are still alive here on earth.

Everyone born from Adam dies because of sin. But because of Jesus, everyone will have the opportunity for life in the kingdom.

1 Thessalonians 4:16: (NASB) ¹⁶*For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.*

As we will see, *the voice of the archangel* is similar to the command for the true church to be raised from the dead. This is the voice of God's authority coming through Jesus when he returns. While it is not a physical earthly voice, it is focused on Israel.

It commands world events to open the door for Israel's reestablishment as a sovereign nation in their own land:

Daniel 12:1: (NASB) *Now at that time Michael ("who is like God"), the great prince who stands guard over the sons of your people (Israel), will arise (stand)...*

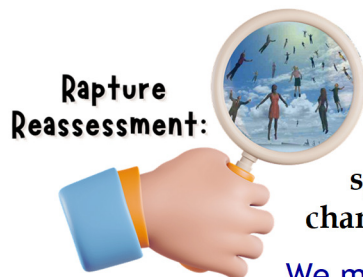
This is a prophetic view of Michael the archangel, the voice of God's authority standing for Israel. In the last episode, we briefly looked at the history of the establishment of Israel since our Lord's return. Israel's regathering began quietly in the 1800's. 1878 was when the first "moshava" in Israel called *Petah Tikvah* was established.

Merriam Webster Online Dictionary:

Moshava: noun

a settlement or colony of independent farmers in Israel who own and work their own land

It was a miracle requiring an amazing set of events for the Jewish people to finally return to their ancient homeland.



Rapture Reassessment:

Clearly the shout and the actions of the archangel carry high spiritual significance. Their effects are only able to be seen by those whom they directly affect and those who are specifically tuned into their true significance. By transforming these highly spiritual markers into worldly actions, the rapture teaching changes the whole meaning of Paul's teaching in Thessalonians.

We must be careful with how we interpret these markers. Are we interpreting them with preconceived ideas, or are we interpreting in line with what the Scriptures are telling us?

With the details we have just reviewed, it is important to realize we have just scratched the surface.

We have seen the shout and the voice of the archangel are not witnessed by the average human being. What about the trumpet? Who can hear it?

To start, let's acknowledge that it would be a rare occurrence to have a Bible verse show us two spiritual symbols and have the third one be a physical symbol. With this in mind, we also want to realize that, as we have seen, these events are happening during the phases of Jesus' return that are still not visible to the world. Context is such an important element in these texts.

1 Thessalonians 4:16: (NASB) *For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.*

Israel had a special sounding of a trumpet every 50th year that signaled a year of rejoicing and the returning of those things which had been lost:

Leviticus 25:9-10: (KJV) *⁹Then shalt thou cause the trumpet of the jubilee to sound...in the day of atonement...throughout all your land. ¹⁰And ye shall hallow the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof: it shall be a jubilee unto you; and ye shall return every man unto his possession, and ye shall return every man unto his family.*





This word for *trumpet* in Hebrew is shofar, and we can see these curved ram's horns still being used in Israel today at significant times.

In the context of Leviticus 25, Israel had a Sabbath rest for the land every seven years. For six years they would raise crops, but in the seventh year the land would rest in order to restore for future crops.

After seven of these cycles, or 49 years, the following 50th year was the jubilee. This was a time of liberty and restoration. Hired servants were released, prisoners were set free and sold inheritances reverted back to the inheritor. Anything that grew naturally in the fields was made available to everyone for free, recognizing that the land belonged to God. It was a giant "reset" button of forgiveness and redemption - and it all started with the sound of the *shofar*, the trumpet.



The object of the jubilee was to restore Israel the way God had originally organized them.

When this trumpet sounded, it signaled the beginning of this year of Jubilee. It is important to recognize that the sounding of the trumpet was NOT for the entire year, but only when it first began. All that happened in that year of Jubilee happened after the sounding of this trumpet. It started a process.

There is a powerful picture: the trumpet sounds for the dead to be raised, as this is the beginning of the restoration of what was once lost.

Acts 3:19-21: (NLT) ¹⁹Now repent of your sins and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped away. ²⁰Then times of refreshment will come from the presence of the Lord, and He will again send you Jesus, your appointed Messiah. ²¹For he must remain in heaven until the time for the final restoration of all things, as God promised long ago through His holy prophets.

The jubilee was all about restoration. *He must remain in heaven until the time for the final restoration of all things.* The Apostle Paul taught us that the *restoration* for the world could not start until Jesus returned.

This is how we know the purpose of that trumpet in 1 Thessalonians 4:16. There are many trumpets in the Bible, but this one - just like Israel's jubilee year - signifies something new is starting, the *restoration of all things* for the whole world, beginning with the church - the faithful followers of Jesus.



In Part I, we mentioned three common scripture passages cited by those who believe in a rapture:

1 Thessalonians 4:15-18 - as we have been discussing

1 Corinthians 15:51-52 - *in the twinkling of an eye...the trumpet will sound...the dead will be raised*


Matthew 24:36-41 - *two men...two women...one will be taken and one will be left*

We have been discussing 1 Thessalonians 4:15-18, but there is also a trumpet in the second frequently-quoted scripture, 1 Corinthians 15:52.

 What about the trumpet in 1 Corinthians 15:52 - is it the same as the trumpet in 1 Thessalonians 4:16?

 We believe it is. This describes a heavenly resurrection and is therefore a heavenly trumpet.

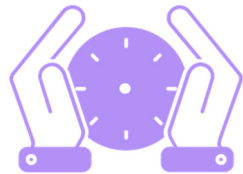
God's kingdom on earth begins to be established when the true church has its change, when it is resurrected:

 1 Corinthians 15:51-53: (NASB) ⁵¹Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, ⁵²in a moment, 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 be changed. ⁵³For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality.

Many translations of these scriptures read “at the last trumpet;” however, there is a subtle translation issue here:


1 Corinthians 15:52: (Rotherham) *In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, during the last trumpet; for it shall sound, and, the dead, shall be raised, incorruptible, and we shall be changed.*

During or “*in*” *the last trumpet* indicates that this will happen as a result of the proclamation of that trumpet. The proclamation opens up the door - it begins the process. *During the last trumpet* means during the process in which this trumpet started. This implies a period OF time rather than a moment IN time. The rapture teaching instead says all of this happens instantaneously.




During the last trumpet means *during the process* that this trumpet started. This implies a *period of time* rather than a *moment in time*.

This trumpet is a spiritual symbol that the times of restoration are beginning, just like the jubilee began for Old Testament Israel.

Did you notice how this is the *last trumpet*? If you have heard Handel's “Messiah,” you will recognize this. The *last trumpet* is the seventh trumpet of Revelation 11:15 (NASB) that pronounces, *The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our LORD and of His Christ; and he will reign forever and ever*. The trumpet is obviously symbolic because no one ever heard the previous six. 

 Who “hears” this trumpet?

 Only those whom it directly affects will hear this trumpet. Like the shout or command, everyone does not hear the trumpet. This trumpet - this sounding that restitution is starting - is in the spiritual realm first.



The third set of scriptures often cited as proof by those who believe in a rapture is Matthew 24:36-41. This is the famous one about two men in the field; one will be taken and one will be left. There are two women grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one will be left. Curiously, the context of Matthew 24 also has a trumpet, found in a very symbolic set of circumstances.

First, we see a dramatic upheaval in the “sun” - the light of the pure gospel. It darkens, loses some of its strength and is corrupted. The “moon,” the light of the Mosaic Law, no longer gives off its light. This is a time of spiritual darkness.

AS THE MOON IS A REFLECTION OF THE LIGHT OF THE SUN,



Matthew 24:29-31: (NASB) ²⁹But **immediately** <1161> <2112> after the tribulation of those days the sun (the light of the pure gospel) will be darkened, and the moon (the Mosaic Law) will not give its light, and the stars (the influence of inspired teachers - the apostles) will fall from the sky, and the powers of the heavens (symbolically, the false religious powers) will be shaken.

In other words, this is a dark time when truth is obscured. Jesus describes this as happening at the time of his return. Truth and the purity of the gospel are being obscured. It is an environment of Christian doctrinal error.

We will consider the next verse when we examine the clouds in Part III:

³⁰And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory.

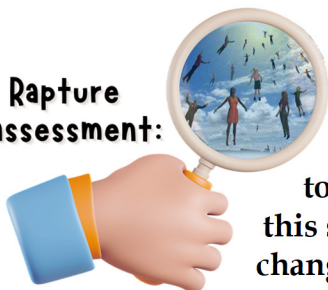
The following verse is different from the verses in 1 Thessalonians 4.

We see this as an earthly work that the true church does in conjunction with the return of Jesus and the “clouds of trouble” of the times:

³¹And he will send forth his angels with a great trumpet and they will gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other.

This is not happening in heaven, or in the spiritual realm. It happens here on earth with the gathering out of the true church from all of these erroneous places.

Rapture Reassessment:



Similar to the command and the voice of the archangel in this verse, this trumpet also carries a highly spiritual significance. Its heavenly “sounding” shows us that the times of restitution are clearly underway, and that the time for Satan’s rule is going to rapidly wind down. Once again, we see that by transforming this spiritual marker into a worldly action, the rapture teaching changes the whole meaning of Paul’s teaching in Thessalonians.

This sounding of the trumpet is not the earthly sounding of an earthly trumpet. It is an important symbol but easily misunderstood. What a blessing to have scriptural context as our guide!

We have the symbols in order, but what about the miraculous raising of the faithful? Is this literal and is it instantaneous?

As we continue with the last phrase of 1 Thessalonians 4:16, we need to clearly connect all the pieces. Jesus returns in “stealth mode.” While in this mode, he issues a spiritual command for the dead in Christ to be raised. With the voice of the archangel in the spirit realm, he then works out the beginning stages of Israel’s regathering. Both of these actions show that the trumpet of jubilee is sounding in the spiritual realm as well, and the times of restitution are beginning.



Exactly how does this raising of the dead in Christ happen?
Do the dead Christians from the past 2,000 years all rise in an instant?



We are not told exactly how it happens or in what time frame

1 Thessalonians 4:16: (NASB) *¹⁶For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.*

It does not say the time frame happens “immediately,” or that the *dead in Christ* are *caught up*. It says they have the privilege of being the first to meet the Lord Jesus.



What DO we know for sure?

First, these are in the first group to be raised from the dead:

1 Corinthians 15:22-23: (NASB) *²²For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive. ²³But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ's at his coming (presence - parousia).*

We have three groups to be resurrected in order:

Christ - the first fruits - those who are Christ's

- *Christ* - Jesus, the head of the body, was resurrected first to a heavenly reward.

Colossians 1:18: (NASB) *He is also head of the body, the church; and he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he himself will come to have first place in everything.*

- *the first fruits* - a heavenly reward for the body of Christ, his most faithful followers, comprised of:

1. (the “first” of *the body's first fruits*) the apostles and other faithful followers who were asleep in death before the return of Jesus.

2. (the “second” of *the body's first fruits*) his faithful followers who die after the return of Jesus. As they die one-by-one, they are immediately resurrected to heaven *in the twinkling of an eye*.

- *those who are Christ's* - as discussed in Part I, this is the “everybody else.” They are “Christ’s” because he ransomed them by taking the place of Adam. The rest of mankind, all who were not faithful followers of Jesus, will be resurrected on earth.

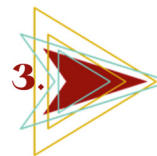


Second, this does not have to be instantaneous, meaning each raised in the same moment:

1 Corinthians 15:52: (Rotherham) *...during the last trumpet; for it shall sound, and, the dead, shall be raised, incorruptible, and we shall be changed.*

This does not mean the resurrecting happens only for the few seconds the trumpet is actually blowing. *During the last trumpet* - the process of God setting up His kingdom and the restitution of all things.

We are not given a specific, clear-cut time frame. Could this be instantaneous? Yes. Could it take longer? Yes. We do not have enough information to say for sure. For us it does not matter; it is just important that it happens.



Third, this is a miraculous power from God working through Jesus using the voice of the archangel - the authority of God. Here is an example:

John 11:43-44: (NASB) ⁴³*When he had said these things, he cried out with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth.* ⁴⁴*The man who had died came forth, bound hand and foot with wrappings, and his face was wrapped around with a cloth. Jesus said to them, Unbind him, and let him go.*

The command *Lazarus come forth* is a “goose bump” moment! Lazarus had been dead for days; then the miraculous happened. By the power of God’s spirit, he was brought back to life! Could it be that this is what happens as Jesus calls each of the faithful Christians to come forth from death, one by one? What a beautiful picture of the love of God through Christ and of the power of the ransom - the command to come out of death into what is (in the case of the faithful) divine, eternal life.



Check out our CQ Kids videos:
WHY DID JESUS RAISE LAZARUS FROM THE DEAD?
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1 Thessalonians 4:16-17: (NASB) ¹⁶*For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first (the first group of the faithful to be raised: the “first” of the first fruits).* ¹⁷*Then we who are alive and remain (the second group of faithful to be raised: the remainder of the first fruits) 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.*



Then we who are alive and remain - for the second group of first fruits, are their human lives instantly ended once the first group of faithful are resurrected?



The answer is no, but we will methodically review how we know that to be true.



Traditional rapture teaching says that either Christ officially or unofficially returns (see Part I) and does two things:

- ❖ He instantly resurrects all of the faithful Christians who had died (*the dead in Christ will rise first*).
- ❖ In the next instant, Jesus physically snatches up all the faithful LIVING Christians into the air, and they go away to heaven for what is typically thought to be a seven-year period of time (*we who are alive and remain will be caught up together...*)

1 Thessalonians 4:17: (NASB) *Then <1899> 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.*

Let's start with the first word of this verse - the word *Then*.

Then: Strong's Exhaustive Concordance #1899 *epeita*; thereafter

Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon: thereupon, thereafter, then, afterwards

This word, especially in Paul's writings, does NOT usually have an immediacy attached to it:

1 Corinthians 15:4-6: (NASB) ⁴and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, ⁵and that he appeared to Cephas (Peter), then to the twelve. ⁶After that <1899> he appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep.

The Greek word translated into English as *after that* is the same word for **then <1899>**.

After that or *then* he appeared to more than 500 brethren, meaning there was some time in between. It did NOT happen instantaneously. It did not happen in the next moment, in the next hour or in the next day.

Here is another example of this same word. The Apostle Paul says instead of going to Jerusalem, he went to Arabia:

Galatians 1:17-18: (NASB) ¹⁷Nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; but I went away to Arabia, and returned once more to Damascus. ¹⁸Then <1899> three years later I went up to Jerusalem to become acquainted with Cephas (Peter), and stayed with him fifteen days.

In this example, **Then <1899>** was three years later, which is not instantaneous. Some amount of time passed between.

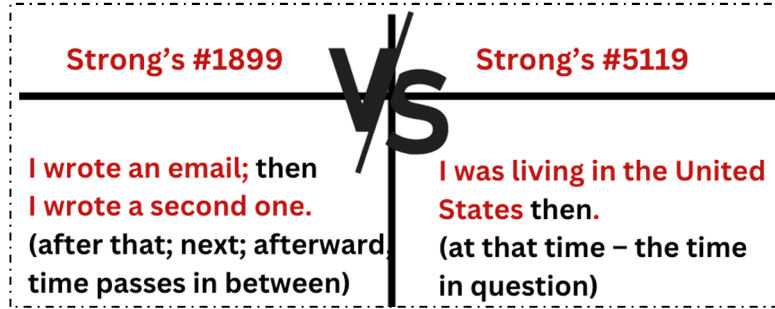
This is in contrast to the Greek word Strong's #5119 meaning "at that time" - the time in question. This also is translated into English as *then*.

At that time: Strong's Exhaustive Concordance #5119 *tote*; the when, i.e. at the time that (of the past or future, also in consecution)

Greek English Lexicon: 1) then 2) at that time



Example:



We are taking the time here to look at these words to understand that the **then <1899>** in 1 Thessalonians 4:17 means “afterwards.” It is not connected or linked in time. At one point something happened, then, after that, at some other point in time, something else happened. This is in contrast to **then <5119>**, when two or more events are immediately connected.

We will look at two scriptural examples of **then <5119>**, “at that time,” events connected immediately.

When Jesus is revealed, the true church will THEN - at that time - be revealed along with him:

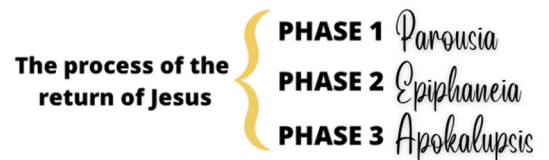
Colossians 3:2-4: (NASB) ²Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. ³For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. ⁴When Christ, who is our life, is **revealed <5319>** from **<5318>** (to render apparent), **then <5119>** (at that time, the same time) you also will be **revealed <5319>** from **<5319>** (to render apparent) with him in glory.

Revealed: Strong's Exhaustive Concordance #5318 *phaneroo*; to render apparent (literally or figuratively) - appear, manifestly declare, (make) manifest

Then <5119> intrinsically ties these two events together: when Christ is revealed, **then** the faithful will be revealed at the same time. There is a direct connection of timing.

This is in contrast to **then <1899>** meaning “afterwards.” If we say, “We had a snow storm; then the snow melted.” This could be a week later, a day later or even an hour later.

Colossians 3:4 verifies the stages of Jesus' return beginning stealthily, up to his being fully disclosed when everyone shall see him.



Here is another example of a connection of timing. The glory of Jesus' return is directly associated with the individual judgments upon humanity:

Matthew 16:27: (NASB) For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of his Father with his angels, and will **then <5119>** (at that time) repay every man according to his deeds.

There is a direct connection - this happens and THEN that happens.



Then we who are alive and remain - for the second group of first fruits, are their human lives instantly ended once the first group of faithful are resurrected?



No, this is NOT an instantaneous event. There is not an immediate time connection based on the Greek word used for *then <1899>*; rather, it shows a specific order of events.

The unfolding of the events surrounding Jesus' return are separate events, not needing to be simultaneous or tied together in time. The Apostle Paul used specific words to give us this understanding of a specific order of events.



Rapture Reassessment:

In 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17, the Apostle Paul systematically explains a sequence of events and not a traumatic moment in time as the rapture teaching implies. His explanation is not only reasonable but is filled with hope, as it looks forward to a spiritual uniting with our Lord Jesus.

This puts an entirely different feeling to what these scriptures actually teach. It is such a relief that God's plan does NOT bring the instant chaos and trauma that many seem to believe.

If this is not a moment in time, then what does “being caught up together with them in the clouds” mean?

This is a relevant question. Once again, let's look at these verses and try and read them - not with a rapture-teaching bias - but with a scripturally and contextually-sound understanding. By building this reasoning step-by-step, we will see a logic unfold in exact harmony with what the rest of the scriptures reveal about the stages of the return of Jesus.

1 Thessalonians 4:16-17: (NASB) *¹⁶For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷Then (after that) 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.*

In some Christian circles, *we who are alive and remain will be caught up* gets confused with other verses that are teaching different things may sound similar.


Let's look back to our Lord's great prophecy during which he returns in Matthew 24:38-42. At first glance, having two men in the field and two women grinding at the mill with one taken and one left from each pair sounds like it could be similar to being *caught up together with them in the clouds*.


It comes down to the words, context and overall picture of what Jesus is teaching.




Earlier, we looked at a few verses before this where the sun and moon were darkened - this will become relevant in a moment:

Matthew 24:38-42: (NASB) ³⁸For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, ³⁹and they did not understand until the flood came and took them all away; so will the **coming <3952>** (presence) of the Son of Man be. ⁴⁰**Then <5119>** (at that time) there will be two men in the field; one will be **taken <3880>** and one will be left. ⁴¹Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be **taken <3880>** and one will be left. ⁴²Therefore be on the alert, for you do not know which day your Lord is coming.

 Notice we are not told where they are taken to. Are they taken to heaven? Is this the rapture?

 No! The first reason is because this **then <5119>** means “at that time,” a connected event, not “afterwards.” This word “taken” in Matthew 24, has a very different meaning than the words “caught up” in 1 Thessalonians.

Taken: Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance #3880 *paralambano*; to receive near, i.e. associate with oneself (in any familiar or intimate act or relation); by analogy, to assume an office; figuratively, to learn

 The second reason is because the word for *caught up* in 1 Thessalonians 4:17 means “to seize, to carry off by force.” It gives a very different description. We will discuss this *caught up* thoroughly in Part III, but for now we see that *taken* is different.

Let’s look at two examples of the same word *taken* as used in Matthew 24.

EXAMPLE

Matthew 1:20: (NASB) *But when he had considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to **take <3880>** Mary as your wife; for the child who has been conceived in her is of the holy spirit.*

Taking Mary as a wife is not a “snatching away.” It is being joined to Joseph in marriage.

EXAMPLE

Mark 14:33-34: (NASB) ³³And he **took <3880>** with him Peter and James and John, and began to be very distressed and troubled. ³⁴And he said to them, *my soul is deeply grieved to the point of death; remain here and keep watch.*

Jesus brought Peter, James and John with him.

Caught up in 1 Thessalonians 4:17 means “to be snatched up by force,” but in Matthew 24:40-41, the people are described as being *taken*, meaning “receive near,” as in, “I am going to take you with me.” These are not synonymous or interchangeable words.

Somebody could argue that someone could be taken and also be snatched up. Perhaps, but let’s finish the context to see where they are taken.

The teaching in Matthew 24 has nothing to do with being snatched up to heaven. How do we know? Jesus tells us!

 *Let's look at Luke's account of this same teaching.*

It is important to put all the pieces together from the different gospels to get the whole picture:

Luke 17:34-37: (YLT) ³⁴*I say to you, In that night, there shall be two men on one couch, the one shall be **taken <3880>** (received near), and the other shall be left.*

This verse, though not in Matthew, describes two men are at rest and comfortable on one couch. We understand this to relate to the time Jesus previously described in Matthew 24:29-31 as an environment of Christian doctrinal error - ...*the sun (symbolically the light of the gospel) will be darkened, and the moon (symbolically the light from the Law) will not give its light, and the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of the heavens (symbolically, the false religious powers) will be shaken.*

This foretold of a dark time when the truth of the gospel would be obscured, around the time of his return.

Let's see what else Luke says about this:

³⁵*two women shall be grinding at the same place together, the one shall be **taken <3880>**, and the other shall be left...*

Grinding takes place at a mill; the place where food is prepared. All of this is symbolic language from Jesus, talking about his return. We understand the mill to symbolize any theological school and ministry that supports doctrinal error (the sun being darkened/the truth being obscured).

One is removed:

³⁶*two men shall be in the field, the one shall be **taken <3880>**, and the other left.*

Jesus told us in other places that to *be in the field* is to be in the world, outside of Christian culture, whether erroneous or pure. These verses show the “calling out” of people from all walks of life to be true Christians, with the emphasis on calling them OUT of any corrupted systems of Christianity.

But where are they taken to?



The third reason this is not a rapture is because of where the people are taken.

³⁷*And they answering say to him, Where, sir? And he said to them, Where the body is, there will the eagles be gathered together.*

They are taken to the metaphorical food of truth and not heaven!

Some Bible translations say *vultures* instead of *eagles*. Although bald eagles have a reputation for being impressive predators, they often scavenge dead animal matter or steal kill from other predators. Eagles soar high, perhaps a picture of spiritual eyesight. Vultures fly low, perhaps a picture of an earthly focus.





Believers in a rapture say they are taken to heaven, but Jesus says in [Luke 17:37](#) they are taken to where the food is. What food? If the previous context of the previous verses was all about Christian and spiritual corruption of the truth, then these are taken out of that environment and brought to the environment of pure and nourishing “food.”

In [Matthew 24](#), Jesus teaches that there is a sifting work on the earth at the time of his return. We want to be in the right place - being taken out of error and brought to spiritual food.

[John 4:23](#): (NASB) ²³*But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers.*

Worship the Father in spirit and in whatever you think... no, that is not what it says. ...in what a bunch of people teach... no. In spirit and in truth! We must be overly zealous to know the truth in Scripture.

Jesus and the apostles teach this over and over:

[John 17:17](#): (NASB) ¹⁷*Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth.*

This reminds us of the following:

[Revelation 18:4](#): (NASB) *...Come out of her my people, so that you will not participate in her sins...*

This advises true Christians to leave the false Christian systems teaching erroneous doctrines, such as the rapture. We want to carefully focus on truth of Scripture rather than the teachings of men. This is why it is important to examine the small details. Jesus prays for his followers to be sanctified in truth. God’s word, the Bible, is truth.

We have seen that being *caught up* and being *taken* are very different things. [Matthew 24](#) has nothing to do with rapture-like thinking. So far, we have spent time to understand what it does NOT say. In Part III, we will cover what it DOES say.

Rapture Reassessment:



It should be clear that [1 Thessalonians 4:16-17](#) are verses full of symbols and spiritual activity that is not able to be witnessed on earth. The trumpet sounds, and the kingdom work of earthly restitution begins in the spirit realm first. We see that those true followers of Jesus who slept in death over the last 2,000 years are the first to receive a new life. Those disciples who are alive at that time will each be changed in due time. All of this adds up to scriptural truth and not hysterical chaos and trauma!

A recap of what the pieces of [1 Thessalonians 4:16-17](#) symbolize:




For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a shout

He descends from heaven with a spiritual command - calling the faithful out of the sleep of death from the last 2,000 years. The command is for them to come forth from their graves.


recap
recap

 *with the voice*

The voice of God's authority. From Daniel 12, we see how God's authority is primarily focused on the reestablishment of Israel, which had been prophesied many times. Prophecy was fulfilled with the first settlement in 1878 and then as Israel became a nation in 1948.


 *of the archangel*

Jesus, the voice of God's authority. There is no other being who could fulfill that role!


 *and with the trumpet of God*

The jubilee trumpet, the *shofar*, which was blown every 50th year in ancient Israel to restore what was lost. It was a massive reorganization, putting society back to the order in which God had set it up.

The *times of restitution* are a massive restoration of the earth, putting it back into the order in which God and Jesus set it up in the beginning, as well setting up an equitable government under our Lord. It starts in the spiritual realm. We do not see it yet, but wait...we will see its results!

 *and the dead in Christ will rise first*

Those who have been faithful unto death from Jesus' death until the return of Jesus are the "first" of the *first fruits* to be called from death as a part of this Grand Jubilee. The great restoration of the earth and its societies is exciting as it unfolds in the heavens. There is no chaos here!

 *Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds*

We described what it is NOT, not what it IS. We will continue this in Part III to uncover the meaning of this last piece.

This will seal the meaning of what the Apostle Paul is teaching. The results will be inspiring!

*So, do I suffer from rapture anxiety?
For Jonathan, Rick, Julie and Christian Questions...
Think about it...!*

All quoted scriptures are from the 1995 version of NASB unless otherwise indicated.



Join us next week for our podcast on December 26, 2022

Ep. 1261: Am I Listening to the Angel?

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Study QUESTIONS

Ep. 1260: Do I Suffer From Rapture Anxiety? (Part 2)

<https://christianquestions.com/doctrine/1260-rapture-anxiety-2>

See:  CQRewind
SHOW NOTES

Many of the questions below are based on 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18:

1. To whom did the Apostle Paul write 1 Thessalonians? Why did he write it? (See 1 Thessalonians 3:9,13)
2. Explain and name the three stages of Jesus' return. (See 1 Thessalonians 5:2, 1 Timothy 6:14, Luke 17:26-30)
3. Why does Jesus "descend from heaven with a shout"? Does everyone hear the shout? How is this possible if Jesus is returning as "a thief in the night"? (See John 5:28-29)
4. What significance does "the voice of the archangel" lend to the shout? What does it command? Who is Michael the archangel? (See Daniel 12:1)
5. What did the sounding of a trumpet every 50 years in ancient Israel indicate? What was the purpose of this event? How does this foreshadow the trumpet in 1 Thessalonians 4:17? When does this new event start? What does Acts 3:19-21 tell us about it? (See Leviticus 25:8-10)
6. Does the blowing of the trumpet in 1 Corinthians 15:52 mean an instantaneous resurrection of the dead? Explain. What regime change does the "last trumpet" proclaim in Revelation 11:15? Who hears this trumpet?
7. What is the order of resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15:22-23? Who is in each group? Are all of these groups resurrected at nearly the same time?
8. What is traditional rapture teaching? How does the Greek word identified in Strong's Exhaustive Concordance as #1899 and translated into English as "then" show us Christ does not snatch all the faithful living Christians into the air with him instantaneously at his return? How does this contrast with the use of the word "then" identified as Strong's #5119? (See Galatians 1:17-18, 1 Corinthians 15:4-6,52, Colossians 3:2-4, Matthew 16:27)
9. Explain Matthew 24:38-42 and Luke 17:34-37. In what kind of environment do these two scenarios take place? What does the word "taken" mean? What does the grinding mill represent? What does the field represent? To where are the people taken? Revelation 18:4 advises true Christians to do what? (See John 4:23, 17:17)
10. Recap the pieces of the 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 prophecy covered over the last two podcast episodes. How does this beautiful prophecy stimulate and encourage your Christian walk?