

Do I Suffer From Rapture Anxiety? (Part III)

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 a controversial teaching with its basis in one short set of verses in 1 Thessalonians. It is a teaching that has a wide spectrum of interpretations and applications. This teaching tightly unites those who believe in it, and more and more terrifies many who have some association with it. In Parts I and II of our three-part series, we began systematically walking through the scriptures in question. As we have attempted to clearly define each element contained in these scriptures, we have seen many of the contradictions and inconsistencies with this rapture teaching rise to the surface. In Part III, we will closely examine what it means to be *caught up with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air*. Our only objective is to adhere to what the scriptures really teach and walk away from anything else.

The title of our series about rapture anxiety comes from people who say they are experiencing anxiety, depression and even paranoia from this rapture teaching. Adults talk about what it was like growing up in homes where the *Left Behind* book series, dramatizing the rapture, was taught as if it was real.

We found one poignant blog from a man named Dan Foster on medium.com that sums up how many feel. Throughout this episode, we will read a few excerpts from what he wrote about growing up in the 80s and 90s:



“Planes fall from the sky. Doctors disappear in the middle of surgical procedures. Families are torn apart. Economies collapse. The world descends into utter chaos. All those wicked atheists, agnostics, and people of other religions are struck by the daunting realization that they were wrong and are now staring down the barrel of eternal damnation. As children, we were fed these *Left Behind* stories in a steady stream. Although fiction, they were presented as a kind of prophetic story about real future events. From the moment I was old enough to understand, I was taught that the Rapture was something that could happen at any moment. True Christians would be taken up into heaven by Jesus Christ, while the rest of humanity would be left behind to suffer. I was taught to avoid sin because what if the very last thing I did before Jesus returned to Earth was some kind of horrible sin? What if I was caught in the very act? What if I wasn’t forgiven at the moment of Jesus’ arrival?”

We can feel the anxiety coming through the printed word. It is hard to fathom that God’s holy plan could in any way cause such anxiety. Therefore, we are taking the time to thoroughly review this error of the rapture teaching.



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.

In Parts I and II of this series, we went through many of the details in these texts. We will briefly recap those details as we go into the last portion.

recap
recap

The Apostle Paul wrote 1 Thessalonians to encourage the brethren, as they were newer to Christianity. In chapter 3, he expressed his joy in them and encouraged them by teaching about the future life of all the faithful.

In chapter 4, Paul delves into the reuniting process 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 is to encourage hope, not to scare with violence and trauma!

Paul's message has nothing to do with anarchy, the time of trouble or end times. Those in the church at Thessalonica were concerned because some of their members died before Jesus returned. Will those who have died miss out? Paul is saying, no, when Jesus returns, they will be raised to be with Jesus. This was an encouragement to that church, knowing they would be reunited with their loved ones.

This reuniting would take place during the return of Jesus.

1 Thessalonians 4:15: (Rotherham) *For, this, unto you, do we say... - that, we, the living who are left unto the presence of the Lord, shall in nowise get before them who have fallen asleep...*

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.

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

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

All these things do not happen in a moment. It is a process.

Like the sun, the second presence of Jesus is:



1 Thessalonians 4:16: (NASB) For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a shout...

- This word for *shout* means a cry of incitement or a command.
- This command is given upon his return and is focused on gathering up his church.
- It is something Jesus himself described when he spoke about all hearing his voice and coming forth from the grave in [John 5:28-29](#).
- This command is NOT a literal earthly shout; rather, it is a miraculous command to bring the faithful Christians out of death and into spiritual life!

1 Thessalonians 4:16: (NASB) ...with the voice of the archangel...

- This voice of the archangel is similar to the command for the true church to be raised from the dead.
- It is the voice of God's authority coming through Jesus when he returns.
- It is not an earthly voice, but it commands world events to open the door for Israel's reestablishment as a sovereign nation.

This is all taking place in the spiritual realm.

1 Thessalonians 4:16: (NASB) ...and with the trumpet of God..

Israel had the sounding of the Jubilee trumpet every 50th year. It signaled a year of rejoicing and the returning of those things which had been lost from God's original equality amongst the twelve tribes of Israel. This was explained in [Leviticus 25:8-10](#).

This pictures the trumpet sounding to announce the unfolding of the great time of restoration of what was once lost.

This was the Great Jubilee foreshadowed in Leviticus:

[Acts 3:20-21: \(NLT\)](#) 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.

God's kingdom on earth begins to be set up with small pieces - and sometimes unnoticeable details - when the true church has its change as described in 1 Corinthians 15:52.

1 Thessalonians 4:16: (NASB) ...and the dead in Christ will rise first.

This verse does not specify an instantaneous time frame here.

What do we know for sure?



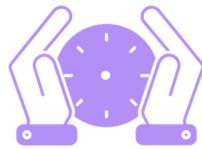
First, in Part II, we spent some time on 1 Corinthians 15:23 talking about the order of the resurrection. First to be resurrected is Christ, then his church (those who died before his return rise first, and thereafter each as they die), and the rest of the world later.

Christ and his church are both scripturally called *first fruits*. If there are *first fruits*, it implies there are other fruits or "after fruits." Jesus' sacrifice was for all, so there is no need for anxiety over the false teaching of the rapture. The world, the "after fruits," will be blessed later.



Second, we know this does NOT have to be an event of instantaneous raising.

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.



During the last trumpet means *during the process* that this trumpet started.

This implies a period of time rather than a moment in time.



Third, we know this is a miraculous power from God working through Jesus, and is invisible to human perception. The dead in Christ rising first is a wonderful beginning happening behind the scenes, but we are not able to see it with our human eyes and ears.

1 Thessalonians 4:17: (NASB) Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together...

If we read the verse with the traditional rapture thinking in mind, we could conclude that those who slept in Christ were all raised in an instant, and then *we who...remain*, in the next instant, will be snatched up to be with them.

Let's begin with the first word of the verse - the word *then*.

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

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

Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together is NOT showing an immediate time connection but rather it is showing a specific order of events. The word means "afterwards" - not simultaneously - but one after the other.

1 Thessalonians 4:17: (NASB) *Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up...*

This phrase gets confused with other verses that teach different points but may sound similar:

Matthew 24:40: (NASB) *Then <5119> there will be two men in the field; one will be taken <3880> and one will be left.*

This does not connect to what is happening in 1 Thessalonians 4:17 or portray any kind of rapture.

Then: 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

First, **then <5119>** in this verse implies a direct "at that time" thought and not an "afterwards" thought.

Second, the word *taken* here is a different Greek word with a different meaning than the word for *caught up* in 1 Thessalonians 4:17.

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

Taken means to associate, to take with you. *Caught up* means to seize, to carry off by force. These two words are not synonymous or interchangeable. *Caught up* is next on our agenda.

Rapture Reassessment:



Up to this point, it has become apparent that what the Apostle Paul wrote in 1 Thessalonians 4 does not in any way support the rapture teaching. On the contrary, Paul is describing an encouraging message - the uniting of all the faithful in Christ in a spiritual environment. This uniting has nothing to do with any form of instant anarchy for those who are "left behind."

The rapture teaching is complex and unsettling. Thankfully, we have not yet seen any scriptural proof.

Doesn't Paul say that those who are alive will be "caught up together" with those who were raised imply some kind of cataclysmic event?

This certainly is a valid question. The key to its answer is to focus in on what the Apostle Paul is saying without reading preconceived ideas into it. As we have already established the context of this verse, we can now concentrate on what the words mean within that larger context.




Blog quote: "Far too many years later, I realized that my conversion to Christianity had been done under duress. I was pressured. I was emotionally manipulated. I was presented with an impossible choice, and I chose the path that I thought would deliver me from the nightmarish scenario presented to me from the pulpit. I did not love Jesus. I was simply following Jesus to avoid punishment – to escape the flames – and not be left behind."



Jesus said he would make his followers *fishers of men*. This is not what the blog describes. If we are bringing people to Christ through manipulation and fear, we are not living the words or intentions of Jesus.

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.*

There are several elements here to discuss:

 *caught up*

 *together*

 *clouds*

 *air*

Then - afterwards.

We who are alive and remain - all of Jesus' faithful disciples who are living during his return.

We have already established that the return of Jesus begins in “stealth mode” and over time grows in its ability to be perceived. This coupled with *Then*, meaning afterwards, not instantaneously, takes the immediacy of the rapture teaching right out of the verse. The Apostle Paul is NOT saying that we who are alive will meet those who have been dead and both groups will be raised in the same one instant.

Paul wanted to reassure people that during Christ's return, God would reunite believers who remain alive with believers who had died. Those that died in Thessalonica would not be “left behind” in any way, which would have been comforting words. He spoke to their personal experiences and showed them prophetically what would happen. His message was supposed to bring them joy.

Let's focus on *caught up*. In Part II, we alluded to the fact that this word has a specific implication of “immediacy,” but it needs to be taken in its appropriate context.

Caught Up: Strong's Exhaustive Concordance #726 *harpazo*; to seize (in various applications)

King James Version translates this word as: catch (away, up), pluck, pull, take (by force)

Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon: to seize, carry off by force: to seize on, claim for oneself eagerly, Matthew 11:12 to snatch out or away: Matthew 13:19; proverbial, to rescue from the danger of destruction, Jude 23 to seize and carry off speedily, John 6:15; Acts 23:10; used of divine power transferring a person marvelously and swiftly from one place to another, to snatch or catch away: Acts 8:39

Here are two examples:

EXAMPLE

Matthew 13:19: (KJV) *When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away <726> that which was sown in his heart. This is he which received seed by the way side.*





This is the Parable of the Sower who casts seed by the wayside and Satan snatches it up. Satan will quickly and instantaneously steal the gospel away from those who randomly hear it - “grab and run” strategy.



EXAMPLE

Jude 1:23: (KJV) *And others save with fear, **pulling** <726> them out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh.*

Pulling is the same Greek word as *catcheth away* in the previous verse. When someone’s spiritual life is faced with sure tragedy, we run to pull them away from that “fire.” It means we are working to immediately change their environment.



This word *pulling* is used many more times in the New Testament.

Some people who believe in the rapture as the removal of people from earth to heaven cite **Acts 8:39** as support that says in part: *...the spirit of the Lord **snatched** <726> Philip away; and the eunuch no longer saw him...*

Does this text help prove the faithful saints are snatched up to heaven? No. In the next verse, **Acts 8:40** tells us Philip moved to Azotus, about 19 miles away. He was not transported to heaven. It just implies a sudden departure - maybe not even a miraculous one. It might be that through the power of the holy spirit, he perceived he needed to leave immediately.

Some also quote **2 Corinthians 12:2-4** about Paul’s experience of being caught up into the third heaven. We understand it to be a vision and not a physical removal from the earth.



Because *caught up* **DOES** have an immediacy attached to it, what is it referring to in **1 Thessalonians 4:17**? Are all living Christians immediately snatched up in one fell swoop?



It is explained by Paul in the verses we have previously referred to in this study:

1 Corinthians 15:51-52: (NASB) *⁵¹Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep (in the long sleep of death), 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.*

This is a parallel scripture to **1 Thessalonians 4:17**, comparing the long sleep of death to a momentary change. The fact that we shall *not all sleep, but we will all be changed*, indicates a plucking of the faithful ones out of the clutches of the long sleep of death (in the grave for an undisclosed period of time). This is not a plucking of all the living Christians out of the clutches of death simultaneously. Rather, it describes that these faithful ones will not sleep in death as those in the previous 2,000 years did. Neither the 1 Corinthians verses nor the 1 Thessalonians verses allude to this plucking happening all at once to all living Christians. It is an individual “snatching out,” based on personal faithfulness.



The word "CEMETARY" is taken from the Greek word koimeterion - meaning "SLEEPING PLACE."

During the return of Jesus, each faithful person who dies is resurrected as a spirit being. The immediacy part of getting *caught up* is this change to a spirit being at the moment of death - *in the twinkling of an eye*. There are not some church members who do not die - they ALL die like Jesus did.

Revelation 2:10: (KJV) *...be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.*

Continuing:

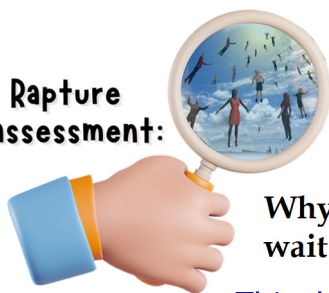
1 Corinthians 15:53-58: (NASB) ⁵³For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality. ⁵⁴But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, *Death is swallowed up in victory.*

This is talking about our perishable lives and putting on the imperishable gift of immortality. It is not possible for fleshly human beings to inherit immortality. This is why there must be a "change." As in Revelation 2:10 above, we have to die - the human life has to end so that the spiritual life can be given immortality. *Death is swallowed up in victory.* "Changing" is not swallowed up. Humanity is not swallowed up; *death is swallowed up* - we have to die.

⁵⁵O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting? ⁵⁶The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law; ⁵⁷but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁵⁸Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord.

Think about this from the perspective of the brethren in the Thessalonian church. They had lost some of their loved ones and were confused and a little concerned. The Apostle Paul tells them not to worry. They who *sleep* (die) will be raised at Jesus' return. Then, all others will be *caught up* (in their own order) to be with the Lord forever. The *sting of death* is no longer there because they will again be made alive! Jesus had to die as a man, and we should expect no less for his faithful followers.

Rapture Reassessment:



Being "caught up" specifically means to be snatched away quickly. The beauty of using these particular words is that they show God's power and attentiveness. He is making a promise to those faithful disciples living at the time of Jesus' return and then die. His promise is to snatch them out of death at the moment of their death. Why? Because their Lord has returned, and there is no need for them to wait in the sleep of death before uniting with him!

This thought of individuals not waiting in the sleep of death is exciting. It shows God's power and the fact that His plan is unfolding.

This is encouraging, but the rapture teaching focuses us on being “caught up together.” Doesn’t “together” change things?

This is a relevant question. The answer once again lies not only in the meaning of the word but also in its usage. Remember how specific we have found the Apostle Paul to be in his description here. All of what he is teaching in these verses is connected to the rest of his letters. We just need to focus on the big picture!



Blog quote: “I arrived at a troubling conclusion: The church’s primary weapon to achieve many of its goals is fear. Fear controls the masses. Fear sells. Right now, there are millions of people across the world who are terrified of an event called ‘The Rapture,’ which they believe will come like a bolt out of the blue, wreaking havoc and leaving immeasurable suffering in its wake. But only for those who are left behind.”

How could someone live with this kind of fear? When we understand God’s plan for all of mankind, we can see this concept is not how God works.



IF YOU HAVE BEEN TROUBLED WITH THIS BELIEF IN YOUR HEART AND MIND, PLEASE LISTEN TO THE THREE-PART SERIES.



Listen to how the teaching dismantles itself when faced with the context and the meaning of what the Apostle Paul is saying, along with the meaning of the Greek words he used.

What about the word *together* - does it mean simultaneously or in association with?

Together: Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance #260 *hama*; a primary particle; properly, at the “same” time, but freely used as a preposition or adverb denoting close association

The King James Version translates this word together as also, and, together, with (-al)

It can mean BOTH.



Well, that’s no help! People who believe in a rapture say it means “at the same time.” In other words, all the faithful Christians - those who died and those still living at the time of Jesus’ return - are all snatched up to heaven all at once. Here you are saying the Greek word for “together” could support “at the same time.”



That would mean that all the followers of Jesus who were still alive when he returned would die in the same instant, and we certainly have not seen that happen.

As the faithful ones die, we believe they are resurrected individually, but what evidence do we have?

There is NO allusion of all the living faithful dying instantaneously ANYWHERE in the Scriptures. Without a careful word study, we can see how those who promote this false teaching conveniently read this meaning into *being caught up together*. But the Bible shows it is an individual walk. *Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life*. Jesus said, *Take up your cross and follow me*. These admonitions are always addressed to the individual who needs to be faithful in their own time.

1 Thessalonians 4:17: (NASB) *¹⁷Then 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.*

We believe that the Apostle Paul used this word *together* in the sense of “close association” and not at the “same time.” Why?

1

Proof: Every time the Apostle Paul uses this word, he uses it in the same way - in “close association.” Let’s look at just two examples:

- **Romans 3:12:** (KJV) *They are all gone out of the way, they are **together <260>** become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one.*


Here it is used as a process of association; they joined *together* in the same thinking and became unprofitable. It is not “at the same time.”

- **Philemon 1:22:** (KJV) *But **withal <260>** prepare me also a lodging: for I trust that through your prayers I shall be given unto you.*

Withal: Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance #260 *hama*; a primary particle; properly, at the “same” time, but freely used as a preposition or adverb denoting close association

Withal is a word we do not hear often. It means, “in addition, as a further factor or consideration.”

We read from the King James Version. In some translations, *withal* is instead translated as *at the same time*, and here we are saying the word does not mean *at the same time*. This could be confusing!

 However, context tells us it does NOT mean instantaneous.

Instead, it means “in close association.” For example, if I say, “At the same time you are here, I’m going to wash the floor, chop vegetables and serve dinner.” It does not mean I will do all of these at the exact same moment like an octopus, but I will do them all in close association of time - I will do them *together* - during the time frame you are visiting.

The Apostle specifically uses this word in these two examples and in the books of Romans, Colossians and Philemon. He uses it in many different contexts but always with the meaning of “in close association.” If we want to understand the way the Apostle Paul thinks, then we need to take heed to how he writes.

2

Proof: The last phrase of the verse clearly lends itself towards the “association” definition:

“...and so we shall always be with the Lord.”

Caught up <726> together <260> - in a close association *so that we shall always be with the Lord* flows as we read it. It helps us to make sense of the sentence.

We can see through scriptural reasoning that this phrase means that after the dead in Christ were raised when Jesus returned, those who are faithful and still alive will have the unique privilege of dying but not having to wait in sleep (in death) for their spiritual life to begin.

As each member of these end-of-the-age faithful ones completes their walk with Jesus, they join those who have gone on before them - not simultaneously - but as each is ready.



Where do they join them?



In the clouds - not literal clouds but symbolic clouds.

The night before Jesus’ crucifixion, he was on trial illegally before the high priest and told the high priest about these clouds:

Matthew 26:63-64: (NASB) ⁶³But Jesus kept silent. And the high priest said to him, I adjure you by the living God, that you tell us whether you are the Christ, the son of God. ⁶⁴Jesus said to him, You have said it yourself; nevertheless I tell you, hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of power, and *coming on the clouds of heaven*. (Quoted from Daniel 7:13 - below)

Jesus told them of his return, how he would have God’s authority, *coming in the clouds of heaven*, symbolizing the spiritual controlling powers over the earth.



Clouds are a clear symbol of trouble in the Bible:

Zephaniah 1:14-15: (NASB) ¹⁴Near is the great day of the LORD, near and coming very quickly; listen, the day of the LORD! In it the warrior cries out bitterly. ¹⁵A day of wrath is that day, a day of trouble and distress, a day of destruction and desolation, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness...

This does not sound very comforting! This is the description people link back to regarding the time of the supposed rapture. No one wants to go through this! We know there will be a time of trouble, a day of wrath in the end times. Let’s address this fear.

As we have stated, in 1 Thessalonians 4, the Apostle Paul was specifically comforting those who had lost their loved ones, telling them how all faithful followers will be reunited with Jesus - even those who died before his return.

Jesus does return during a time of trouble. This is not an instantaneous, momentary thing that happens all at once. When we see a storm coming, it is not bright and sunny, and in the next instant there is a storm on top of us. We see clouds gather, thickening and darkening.

During this time of Jesus' return, those who were asleep in Christ were raised first, then as each individual is faithful, they are raised immediately when they die. The final faithful group is raised before the deepest part of the trouble.

However, it is not the time of trouble that will bring the world to an irretrievable end. It brings the society, both religious and civil, to an end. These clouds are certainly indicative of gathering trouble, but are also part of the taking down of Satan's kingdom.

Once God's plan begins to unfold these final events, they will not stop. In God's plan, Jesus himself calls the faithful ones as they die, one-by-one. There is trouble, but the rapture believers say this trouble is the end of the world. The world itself does not end, but society and earthly governments are torn down. The trouble is the beginning of something glorious in that it crumbles **what is** so that **what will be** replaces it.

These clouds were prophesied as being a part of the establishment of God's kingdom through Jesus:

Daniel 7:13-14: (NASB) ¹³I kept looking in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven one like a Son of Man was coming, and he came up to the ancient of days and was presented before him. ¹⁴And to him was given dominion, glory and a kingdom, that all the peoples, nations and men of every language might serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion which will not pass away; and his kingdom is one which will not be destroyed.

Why do the people who believe in the rapture not quote these verses?

They talk about clouds and cataclysmic events. But they ignore - *And to him was given dominion, glory and a kingdom, that all the peoples, nations and men of every language might serve him. His dominion is everlasting...* This is glorious! Yes, there is trouble, but it is short in relation to the glory that follows. This is the message we need to hold on to. It is not a message of fear - it is a message of hope on every level.

With all we have examined so thoroughly debunking the rapture, we need to ask the question, where did the rapture teaching come from?

It is important to say that we do not want to get our religion second hand from movies and novels. The word "rapture" is NOT in the Bible or in ancient Greek, and Jesus NEVER spoke of a rapture. *Caught up* comes from the Latin Vulgate translation of the ancient Greek from around 400 AD. In Greek, it is the word *harpázō*. Sources quote various forms of the same Latin verb such as *rapio/rapere* (first person plural passive), *raptura*, *rapturus*, *rapiemur* - all basically meaning to "seize," "abduct," "snatch away" - and so on. The translation goes from ancient Greek to ancient Latin to old English. It is a few degrees of separation from the original Greek.

The Latin Vulgate:

deinde nos qui vivimus qui relinquimur simul **rapiemur** cum illis in nubibus obviam

Domino in aera et sic semper cum Domino erimus

Then we who are alive, who are left, shall be taken up together with them in the clouds to meet Christ, into the air: and so shall we be always with the Lord.



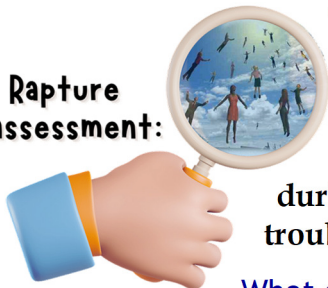
The origin of the teaching is generally credited first to a 19th century theologian named John Nelson Darby, who believed he discovered a new truth. This was picked up by a man named C.I. Scofield, who widely distributed the Scofield Study Bible, 1917 Edition, mostly in England and the United States. He added a short reference note on this phrase *caught up* which was picked up and expanded by others.

The rapture was dramatized in a book interpreting Bible prophecy called, *The Late Great Planet Earth* by Hal Lindsey in 1970 that allegedly outsold the Bible itself during most of that decade. Then came the infamous *Left Behind* books - a series of 16 of them from the 1990s and their movies. The books have sold over 63 million copies, and although it is Christian fiction, it solidified the teaching with a Hollywood spin. More recently, HBO has released a similar series. Perhaps subconsciously, many have formulated their understanding based on fictional dramatizations.



This is a new teaching the early church had no concept of, as it was never taught by Jesus. Did the apostles who wrote the New Testament and Bible scholars completely miss this teaching for 2,000 years? It is simply not written in Scripture unless we either do not look carefully at the words or twist the meaning to fit this belief.

Rapture Reassessment:



The Scriptures show us that being “caught up together” is a statement of assurance that those Christians at the end of the age will not have to sleep in death. Instead, they will - upon death - be immediately resurrected to a spiritual life and a spiritual union with Jesus and all the faithful Christians who have gone before them. This all happens during the early stages of Jesus’ return when the clouds of the time of trouble will cover all aspects of earthly life and existence.

What a glorious future!

Clear scriptural understanding helps us see clear scriptural truth. All we have seen thus far is so contrary to the rapture teaching.

We have covered a lot of ground in this series. Knowing what we know now, how is all of this comforting and not traumatizing?

Here we need to circle back to where we began, which is the Apostle Paul’s reason for writing this letter to the church at Thessalonica - encouragement.

Paul’s letter was NOT a doomsday prophecy for any who were not believers; it was an inspirational message for all who were and are believers.



Blog quote: “So, many choose to ‘follow Christ’ to avoid such a horrible fate. The thing is - a human being will only follow another out of fear for so long before deciding to break free from their puritanical regime. Love, on the other hand, compels a person to follow indefinitely. The problem is that love takes longer to reap a harvest than fear, and the church has never been known for its patience.”



God is love:

1 John 4:7-9: (NASB) ⁷Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. ⁸The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love. ⁹By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten son into the world so that we might live through him.

John 3:16-17: (NASB) ¹⁶For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life. ¹⁷For God did not send the son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through him.

The rapture has no basis in Scripture because God does not support it.

1 Thessalonians 4:17-18: (NASB) ¹⁷Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet <529> (a friendly encounter) the Lord in the air <109>, and so we shall always be with the Lord. ¹⁸Therefore comfort one another with these words.

To meet the Lord in the air gives us the sense of a joyous, in-person uniting of Jesus and his faithful disciples. Picture the scene: All those faithful ones who have died and slept in death through the last 2,000 years are there. Then each one who is faithful unto death is raised, and we see that joy all over again! Look here is somebody else (joy all over again)... Oh, there is somebody else (joy)... It is a wonderful, encouraging picture.



We meet him in the air.

Air: Thayer's Greek English Lexicon #109 *aer*; 1) the air, particularly the lower and denser air as distinguished from the higher and rarer air 2) the atmospheric region



Where is this? Is it where God is in heaven?



No, it is the unseen space in our atmosphere. There is a different Greek word translated into English as *air* - The Greek *οὐρανός* has a different meaning when used as *air* than *ἀήρ*. Paul could have used either word but chose the one referring to the lower atmospheric region. The other word, Strong's <3772>, means "heaven," "the abode of God," "the universe," "the starry heavens" - higher than our atmosphere.

SO, IN THE AIR, NOT IN HEAVEN!

Remember, Jesus returned from heaven and his return is for the purpose of taking Satan's rulership away.

He comes like a thief in the night, entering Satan's house without Satan knowing.



Where is Satan's house?



In the air, within earth's atmosphere.

Ephesians 2:1-2: (NASB) ¹And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, ²in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air <109>, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience.



The prince of the power of the air - this is Satan's abode. It is perfectly sensible for the faithful Christians to meet their Lord where he is (in the air - taking Satan's kingdom from him) and to follow him in his work of tearing down evil and restoring that which God originally put in place.

One reason why some may be confused is because of the false doctrine of hellfire. People believe Satan is under the earth and not in the air.




Understanding the error of the hellfire teaching

What is he doing in the air? He is trying to keep hold of his power before Jesus takes full control of the world. This is why we pray *thy kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven*.

Q Is there no scripture that tells us exactly when the faithful enter heaven? Do they enter individually or all together as a group?

At this point, we are only told they are in the atmosphere (the air), not heaven. We presume their first work is to tear down Satan's kingdom to establish God's kingdom, right?

 We know the true church is raised to work at this establishment of God's kingdom. We also know that in Revelation, the church is in heaven for their wedding in the picture of the bride and the bridegroom.

We know they are all together in heaven at that point.

Revelation 19:1,7-8: (NASB) ¹After these things I heard something like a loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, saying, Hallelujah!... ⁷Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and his bride has made herself ready. ⁸It was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.

But this part of their spiritual life in 1 Thessalonians 4 is with the Lord *in the air*, doing the work that needs to be done.

Paul continues *...and so we shall always be with the Lord*. We will not always be there in the air with him, but we will always be with him from that time forward. Paul encourages by showing us how our face-to-face uniting with Jesus will begin. He does not tell us how it continues through the ages to come, only how it begins.

1 Thessalonians 4:18: (NASB) *Therefore comfort one another with these words.*

The word for *comfort* here is the verb form of the word for *advocate*.

This refers to the holy spirit given to Christians:

John 14:15-17: (NIV2011) ¹⁵If you love me, keep my commands. ¹⁶And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another **advocate <3875>** to help you and be with you forever - ¹⁷the spirit of truth...

Advocate: Strong's Exhaustive Concordance #3875 *parakletos*; an intercessor, consoler: - advocate, comforter



The Father sends us an advocate, a comforter. Paul instructs us to comfort one another, using the same word. This beautiful connection gives us inspiration, as there is no fear attached to any of this. We need to hold on to this encouragement - that was Paul's objective.

Jesus gave his disciples this comfort many times, especially at the end of his earthly life.

He gently told us that death would have to come to all of us, and that our faithfulness unto death would result in the privilege of being with him and being honored by God:

John 12:23-26: (NASB) ²³And Jesus answered them, saying, The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. ²⁴Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. ²⁵He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it to life eternal. ²⁶If anyone serves me, he must follow me; *and where I am, there my servant will be also*; if anyone serves me, the Father will honor him.

All the elements are here: the necessity of dying, of then being with Jesus and being honored by the Father. It is a beautiful, comforting encouragement.

The night before his crucifixion, he again told us we would have an eternal home with him:

John 14:1-3: (NASB) ¹Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in me. ²In my Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. ³If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to myself, that where I am, there you may be also.

This is interesting. When we look at these verses, we think that Jesus prepares a place for us and as soon as we are raised we will go to that place. Jesus does *prepare a place for us in heaven - in my Father's house are many dwelling places...* but our place is with him. *If he is doing the work of tearing down the kingdoms of this world and pulling them away from Satan, then we must be with him. Where I am, there you may be also* - what a great comfort! He is showing us that we will be working together to fulfill the will of God.

How much more glorious and inspirational can we get than being united with Jesus in the clouds of trouble, wresting the kingdoms of this world from Satan so that God's kingdom can reign forever on earth? Amen.



Check out our CQ Kids videos:
WHEN WILL GOD'S KINGDOM BE HERE?
christianquestions.com/youtube



God's plan is big enough to include every man, woman and child - no one is left behind!

jesus
loves
you

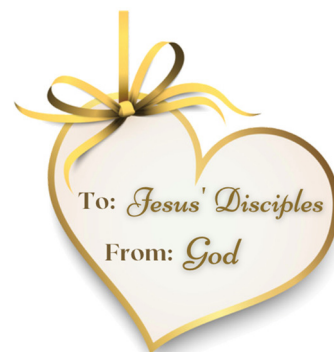


Later that night when he prayed in Gethsemane, he spoke to the Father on our behalf about giving us the opportunity of heaven and his desire for us to be with him there:

John 17:22-24: (NASB) ²²The glory which You have given me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as we are one; ²³I in them and You in me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent me, and loved them, even as You have loved me. ²⁴Father, I desire that they also, whom You have given me, be with me where I am, so that they may see my glory which You have given me, for You loved me before the foundation of the world.

What Jesus promised would come to his disciples as a **gift from God**, Paul accentuates in his letter to the Thessalonians and to us.

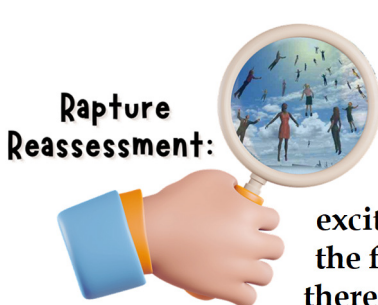
We do not know what it looks like in heaven, but think about watching Jesus carrying out the will of God! Think of him assigning parts of that work in the spiritual realm to all those faithful Christians. Think of the glory and the power they will witness as God's kingdom plans are revealed and being part of reigning forever and ever. That is what these scriptures are pointing us to.



As James honors God in his epistle, he references the role of the faithful which exists as a result of God's will and word:

James 1:17-18: (NASB) ¹⁷Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with Whom there is no variation or shifting shadow. ¹⁸In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we would be a kind of first fruits among His creatures.

As was said earlier, if there are first fruits, there are after fruits. James is telling us that by God's will, He brought us forth in truth to be the beginning of the glory of His kingdom. The rapture teaching does not address this at all - it is left out of the doctrine. This leaves out the goodness of God and tries to create a God who is angry and vengeful. That God does not exist. Yes, He can get angry at unrighteousness, but that anger is for the good of mankind, not for their detriment. God is love.



As we conclude, it is obvious that the rapture teaching has no biblical foundation whatsoever. Its sole basis is the minds of men who took specific verses out of their clear context and applied erroneous meanings to them. The truth we see in those misapplied verses shines a light of encouragement and excitement regarding God's plan for all. Jesus' faithful disciples are the first fruits of the invisible stages of Jesus' return, and are therefore the first fruits of his glorious kingdom! Now THAT is an encouraging message!

The teaching of the rapture does not have a basis in Scripture. Wrong conclusions can be drawn from some of the words if a careful word study is not undertaken. We see a clear-cut teaching that this gathering together is individual and in its own time, not simultaneously. It unfolds God's kingdom on earth for every man, woman and child who ever lived. This is encouragement!

*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 January 9, 2023
Ep. 1263: Does My Life Have a Motivating Vision?

Bonus Material and Study Questions

Word Study: *Caught up:*

Strong's Exhaustive Concordance #726 *harpazo*; to seize (in various applications)

King James Version translates this as: catch (away, up), pluck, pull, take (by force)

Thayer's Greek English Lexicon #726 *harpazoo*; to seize, carry off by force: to seize on, claim for oneself eagerly: Matthew 11:12 to snatch out or away: Matthew 13:19; proverbial, to rescue from the danger of destruction, Jude 23 to seize and carry off speedily, John 6:15; Acts 23:10; used of divine power transferring a person marvelously and swiftly from one place to another, to snatch or catch away: Acts 8:39; passive, Revelation 12:5

Matthew 11:12: (KJV) *And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent **take <726>** it by **force <726>**.*

Matthew 13:19: (KJV) *When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked one, and **catcheth away <726>** that which was sown in his heart. This is he which received seed by the way side.*

John 6:15: (KJV) *When Jesus therefore perceived that they would come and **take <726>** him by **force <726>**, to make him a king, he departed again into a mountain himself alone.*

John 10:12: (KJV) *But he that is an hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth: and the wolf **catcheth <726>** them, and scattereth the sheep.*

John 10:28: (KJV) *And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man **pluck <726>** them out of my hand.*

John 10:29: (KJV) *My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to **pluck <726>** them out of my Father's hand.*

Acts 8:39: (KJV) *And when they were come up out of the water, the spirit of the Lord **caught away <726>** Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more: and he went on his way rejoicing.*



Acts 23:10: (KJV) *And when there arose a great dissension, the chief captain, fearing lest Paul should have been pulled in pieces of them, commanded the soldiers to go down, and to take <726> him by force <726> from among them, and to bring him into the castle.*

2 Corinthians 12:2: (KJV) *I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago, (whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) such an one caught up <726> to the third heaven.*

2 Corinthians 12:4: (KJV) *How that he was caught up <726> into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter.*

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

Jude 1:23: (KJV) *And others save with fear, pulling <726> them out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh.*

Revelation 12:5: (KJV) *And she brought forth a man child, who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron: and her child was caught up <726> unto God, and to his throne.*

Word study: Together - does it mean “simultaneously” or “also”?

Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance #260 *hama*; a primary particle; properly, at the “same” time, but freely used as a preposition or adverb denoting close association

King James Version translates this as: also, and, together, with (-al)

Thayer’s Greek English Lexicon #260 *hama*; same 1. an adverb, at the same time, at once, together: Acts 24:26 2. preposition together with, with the dative: Matthew 13:29

Matthew 13:29: (KJV) *But he said, Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with <260> them.*

Matthew 20:1: (KJV) *For the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which went out early in the morning <260> to hire labourers into his vineyard.*

Acts 24:26: (NASB) *He hoped also <260> that money should have been given him of Paul, that he might loose him: wherefore he sent for him the oftener, and communed with him.*

Acts 27:40: (KJV) *And when they had taken up the anchors, they committed themselves unto the sea, and <260> loosed the rudder bands, and hoisted up the mainsail to the wind, and made toward shore.*

Romans 3:12: (KJV) *They are all gone out of the way, they are together <260> become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one.*

Colossians 4:3: (KJV) *Withal <260> praying also for us, that God would open unto us a door of utterance, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in bonds:*

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

1 Thessalonians 5:10: (KJV) *Who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together <260> with him.*

1 Timothy 5:13: (KJV) *And withal <260> they learn to be idle, wandering about from house to house; and not only idle, but tattlers also and busybodies, speaking things which they ought not.*



Philemon 1:22: (KJV) But **withal <260>** prepare me also a lodging: for I trust that through your prayers I shall be given unto you.

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Study QUESTIONS

Ep. 1262: Do I Suffer From Rapture Anxiety? (Part III)

<https://christianquestions.com/doctrine/1262-rapture-anxiety-3/>

See:  CQ Rewind
SHOW NOTES

1. Using the first blog post, describe what Dan Foster was taught about the rapture as he grew up. What is the motivation to follow Christ of some of those who believe in this teaching?
2. Why did the Apostle Paul write this letter to the Thessalonians? How was this an encouragement to them? (See 1 Thessalonians 4:15-18)
3. Thoroughly explain the process of Jesus' return. How is it like a sunrise? Describe the symbols (the shout, the voice of the archangel, the trumpet) in 1 Thessalonians 4:16. What three things do we know about "the dead in Christ" rising? (See John 5:28-29, Leviticus 25:8-10, Acts 3:20-21, 1 Corinthians 15:52)
4. Does 1 Thessalonians 4:17 indicate that all Christians, dead or alive, will be "caught up together" in an instant? What is the import of the word "then"? How is this scripture confused with Matthew 24:40? What are the differences between the meanings of "caught up" and "taken"?
5. Who are the "we who are alive and remain"? What is their fate compared to those believers who died before Jesus' return? Why would Paul's words bring the Thessalonians "joy"? How can we explain the "caught up" or "snatched" in Acts 8:39-40 and 2 Corinthians 12:2-4? How do the parallel scriptures of 1 Corinthians 15:51-52 help us understand "caught up"?
6. What is the symbolic meaning of "clouds" in 1 Thessalonians 4:17? What will the clouds bring to the world? How does the rapture belief differ from Scripture in the understanding of clouds? What does Daniel 7:13-14 tell us that those who believe in a rapture might overlook? (See Matthew 26:64, Zephaniah 1:14-15)
7. Where did the rapture teaching originate? How has it continued? Was this teaching well-known in the early church and to the apostles? Why is love a better motivator than fear? Why is love more appropriate? (See 1 John 4:7-9, John 3:16-17)
8. Does 1 Thessalonians 4:17-18 say believers are going to heaven? What does "to meet the Lord in the air" indicate as far as what is happening and where it happens? What will resurrected faithful followers of Jesus be doing to help him? What is Satan doing? When do we know the faithful church as a group is for sure in heaven? (See Ephesians 2:1-2, Revelation 19:1,7-8)
9. How are 1 Thessalonians 4:18 and John 14:15-17 related? Why should this give us comfort? What gift from God did Jesus promise us the night before his crucifixion? (See John 12:23-26, 14:1-3, 17:22-24)
10. What is the difference between the God of the rapture teaching and the God of Scripture?
11. How does James 1:17-18 negate the rapture teaching? How do these verses inspire you?