

## Major Rapture Terms and Passages

### OVERVIEW

*What are the major New Testament terms and passages that support the pretribulational rapture? This writer overviews all the New Testament terms relating to the coming of the Lord and shows how they are used. He also examines the major passages that teach the rapture in the New Testament, discovers their meaning, and shows the similarities between the passages. This produces a solid support for the pretribulational rapture as you are im-pacted by the weight of this collection of New Testament passages. Maranatha!*

**B**elievers of every generation have had a longing for Jesus Christ's return. This "coming" of the Lord was considered the blessed anticipation-that Jesus would come back to earth and end all human sorrow. And after a general resurrection and judge-ment, Christ would initiate a new heaven and a new earth, even eternity itself. Though few could explain the details of how the Lord would come back, this second coming was voiced by nearly all Christians.

With the resurgence of the study of Bible prophecy at the begin- fling of the nineteenth century, students of the prophetic Word noticed something about 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18. In this passage the apostle Paul first speaks of a resurrection of those who have died "in Christ" and then of those "caught up together to meet the Lord in the air."

How did this Pauline prophecy fit with Jesus coming back to judge the nations here on earth? Where do the scriptural statements about resurrection and judgment fit? And what about the new heaven and earth? How is this passage reconciled with the idea of a so-called millennium, the possible restoration of the Jews, and the church as the kingdom?

Most of the great amillennial scholars ignored the idea that 1 Thessalonians 4 could be any different from other passages that teach about "the coming" (parousia) of Christ. In fact, to them the word parousia seemed to sum up the doctrine of only one return of Jesus.

Toward the end of the nineteenth century, scholars of prophecy became more keenly aware of studying eschatological passages with greater attention to solid hermeneutics. This led to a better under- standing about: 1) how God providentially worked differently in various ages of biblical history; 2) how the end of history had a larger prophetic scheme of things than originally thought; and, 3) how important a role interpreting by context played in compre- hending the full scope of prophetic truth.

In time it became more clear to some that, by contextual study, the coming of Christ to "rapture" away the church saints was an entirely different event than was His coming to judge sinners and to rule and reign for a thousand years. As well, many of the great Bible teachers of that period were able to see that both events were to be taken as distinct literal, historic comings and could not simply be spiritualized away. Even today it is appropriate to ask

certain questions. How can we be certain of this difference when we read a given prophetic passage that speaks of Christ coming again? How do we know if it is a rapture passage or if the verses are referring to the second coming of our Lord to rule worldwide for a thousand years in Jerusalem?

This chapter will deal with the distinctive of rapture passages, and it will classify the common factors that bind these passages together. There are truths that seem to tie these rapture verses into common units of thinking, though some of the elements may also appear in passages and contexts that deal with the second coming of Christ. Though not all of the similar elements may prove the doctrine of the rapture, there are links that carry strong and convincing arguments that cannot be simply overlooked nor dismissed.

By studying contexts, it can be shown that there are two distinct resurrections. There is the resurrection for "those in Christ," who will be taken to glory before the terrible Tribulation begins. And there is a raising of the Old Testament saints and the Tribulation martyred believers to enjoy the blessings of the Lord's one-thousand-year literal kingdom reign.

Just what are those common factors which act as indicators and pointers that can be discovered in all rapture verses? Below are 11 categories that help classify the key elements in such passages. While other categories may be found by other scholars, we believe these are the most obvious. And of the verses listed, only one has less than five of the common categories! After listing the categories, we will look at them more in depth.

- RESURRECTION. Though the resurrection is mentioned in second coming passages, these verses and sections of verses reveal certain special elements when they prophesy about those who will be coming forth from the grave. 1 Corinthians 15:23-24,51-52; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; 5:1-11.
- HOPE AND COMFORT. These passages tell of a particular hope and comfort, because believers in Christ will be caught away to be at home in heaven with their Lord. John 14:1-3; James 5:7-9; 1 Thessalonians 1:9b-10; 2:17-19; 4:13-18; 5:1-11; 2 Thessalonians 2:1-2; 1 Corinthians 15:23-24; 15:51-52; Philippians 3:20-21; Titus 2:13; 1 John 2:28; 3:2-3.
- THE CHANGE. A new body is given to both those who are resurrected as well as to those who are alive but who will suddenly be transformed so that they can go home to be with the Lord in heaven. 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; 5:1-11; 1 Corinthians 15:51-52; Philippians 3:20-21; 1 John 3:2-3.
- A RETURN TO HEAVEN. John 14:1-3; 1 Thessalonians 1:9b-10; 3:13; 4:13-18; 5:1-11; 2 Thessalonians 2:1; Philippians 3:20.
- TAKEN DIRECTLY BY THE LORD HIMSELF or, INTIMATELY FACING CHRIST AT HIS COMING. John 14:1-3; James 5:7-9; 1 Thessalonians 1:9b-10; 2:17-19; 4:13-18; 5:1-11; 2 Thessalonians 2:1-2; Philippians 3:20-21; Titus 2:13; 1 John 2:28, 3:2-3.
- LIVING GODLY BECAUSE HE IS COMING. James 5:7-9; 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11; 5:23; 1 Timothy 6:14; Titus 2:12-14; 1 John 2:28; 3:2-3.
- THE PRONOUNS WE, YOU, AND US AS A PROOF THAT THE RAPTURE COULD HAVE HAPPENED TO PAUL'S OWN GENERATION. John 14:1-3; James 5:7-9; 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10; 2:17-19; 3:13; 4:13-18; 5:1-11; 5:23; 2 Thessalonians 2:1-2; 1 Timothy 6:14; 1 Corinthians 15:51-52; Philippians 3:20-21; Titus 2:13; 1 John 2:28; 3:2-3.

- THE USE OF THE TECHNICAL TERM PAROUSIA TO DESCRIBE THE RAPTURE. James 5:7-8; 1 Thessalonians 2:17-19; 3:13; 4:13-18; 5:23; 2 Thessalonians 2:1-2; 1 Corinthians 15:23-24; 1 John 2:28; 3:2-3.
- OTHER EXPRESSIONS USED FOR THE COMING. John 14:1-3; James 5:7-9; 1 Thessalonians 4:16; 5:23-24; 2 Thessalonians 2:1-2; Titus 2:13; 1 John 2:8; 3:2-3.
- BEING TAKEN TO THE FATHER. John 14:1-3; 1 Thessalonians 3:13; Titus 2:13.
- THOSE IN CHRIST OR ALLUSIONS TO THE CHURCH. 1 Thessalonians 2:17-19; 4:13-18; 5:1-11; 2 Thessalonians 2:1-2; 1 Corinthians 15:23-24; 15:51-52; Titus 2:13.

## **The Rapture and Resurrection**

### **The Living and the Resurrected Saints Caught Up Together**

What makes the resurrection as mentioned with the rapture any different from the resurrection at Christ's second coming? The resurrection related to the rapture has to do with "the dead in Christ," or "those in Him." This is specifically referring to the church saints, those who have become a part of the spiritual body of Christ in this dispensation.

Four distinct passages link the resurrection of church saints to the rapture. In the most all-inclusive rapture passage, 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, the apostle Paul addresses the issue of "those who have fallen asleep in Jesus" (4:14). He ties together this "catching away" (harpazō), or the rapture of living believers, with the resurrection of church saints, or those "in Christ":

But we do not want you to be uninformed .... about those who are asleep... (v. 13). God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus (v. 14). The Lord Himself will descend... and the dead in Christ shall rise first (v. 16). Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air... (v. 17 NASB).

The Thessalonians church seems to have been concerned about the death of those who had accepted Christ as Savior. "Will they live again?" "When will they be raptured?" These questions had not been answered and they were grieving as the pagans who had no guarantees about an afterlife (v. 13). The Thessalonians are answered as they are informed that those believers who have died will in no way miss out on the blessing of the Lord's coming.

And from the Greek text Paul adds: "In no way, not even, should we proceed the ones who have been put to sleep" (v. 15). The word "proceed" (phthasomen) has with it a double negative that carries the force of an extra emphatic, "We should absolutely not proceed those who have been put to sleep!" This becomes a Greek idiom which effectively takes away any apprehension about the dead in Christ being left.<sup>1</sup> This idiom has the sense of an emphatic future, i.e. "when the time comes this is the sequence of events."<sup>2</sup> The dead in Christ shall rise first (v. 16).

### **Those Awake and Asleep Will Live Together With Christ**

In 1 Thessalonians 5:1-lithe apostle Paul writes about the coming "day of the Lord" (v. 2) or the "wrath" (v. 9) that will fall on the lost who are proclaiming "peace and safety" (v. 3). In verses 2-7 the apostle pictures the "birth pangs" of trouble and pain that fall suddenly on

"them," the lost. They are in [spiritual] darkness, and they will not escape the terror which will overtake them like a thief (vv. 3-4).

In verses 5:9-10 Paul comes back to the issue of the rapture he began writing about in 4:13-17. In verse 10 he summarizes and restates the fact that both those who are asleep (the dead in Christ) and those awake will live together with Jesus:

Whether we are found among the living or the dead when he comes... This was designed to calm their minds in their trials, and to correct an error which seems to have prevailed in the belief that those who were found alive when he should return would have some priority over those who were dead.<sup>3</sup>

From the Greek text, verse 10 would read:

[Christ] died for us, in order that whether we should right now be fully awake or whether we should right now be sleeping, we shall in the future, [and] all at once at the same time, be alive together with Him (author's translation).

The expression "in the future... be alive"<sup>4</sup> prophetically sees the resurrected saints in Christ and those raptured believers together someday living with Him. The force of the verb could also mean "now and forever we shall live with Him."<sup>5</sup> And the expression "all at once at the same time" sheds even more light on this resurrection and the rapture. Actually, this represents two expressions joined together "Together with" (hama) and "with Him" (sun auto). Barnes interprets this: "Those who are alive and those who are dead-meaning that they would be together or would be with the Lord at the same time;"<sup>6</sup> Hendricksen adds: "Those who are awake are those who are alive, the survivors, the ones who according to 4:15 are 'left until the coming of the Lord'."<sup>7</sup>

## Two Resurrections or More?

Even some of the older Bible scholars who would not be accepting of a dispensational rapture see two resurrections in 1 Corinthians 15:23-24. In the full context, Paul promises a resurrection in which "in Christ all shall be made alive" (v. 22). From the Greek text, verses 23-24 might read:

To explain, each [will be resurrected] in his own order: Christ the first fruits, next after that, those [believers] who belong to Christ at His coming, after this, [will come] the consummation whenever [Christ] [in the future] will be handing over the kingdom to the God and Father, [including] whenever He abolishes all rule and all authority and power (author's translation).

"The whole context is governed by" in Christ... made alive.<sup>8</sup> Dispensationally, verse 23 clearly has the church saints in mind and is not describing Jesus' coming to reign over Israel as the Son of Man nor His coming to judge the world. He is returning to take the church. Since the kingdom is unquestionably separated in verse 24 from verse 23, the rapture resurrection is the only explanation for this passage.

Ellicott's Commentary notes:

There is to be a sequence in the resurrection of the dead, and St. Paul explains this by the three groups: 1) Christ Himself, the first fruits; 2) the faithful in Christ [emphasis mine] at His coming; 3) all the rest of mankind at the end, when the final judgment takes place. The interval between these two as to its duration, or where or how it will be spent, is not spoken of here. The only point the Apostle has to treat of is the order of the resurrection.<sup>9</sup>

Alford writes:

... the resurrection of the rest of the dead, here veiled over by the general term to telos [the end]-that resurrection not being in this argument specially treated, but only that of Christians [emphasis mine] .... It ought to be needless to remind the student of the distinction between this parousia [the coming for those in Christ] and the final judgment; it is here peculiarly important to bear in mind.<sup>10</sup>

Robertson and Plummer also believe this passage is open to be interpreted as Christ coming exclusively for His own, the church saints, as separate from another coming in which He raises other dead:

Of these tagamata [each in his own order] there are two, clearly marked, in the present passage; Christ, who has already reached the goal of Resurrection; and Christ's Own [the church], who will reach it when He comes again. Perhaps St. Paul is thinking of a third tagama [order], some time before the End. But throughout the passage, the unbelievers and the wicked are quite in the background, if they are thought of at all.<sup>11</sup>

Christ's own, the church saints who have died, are still waiting for the resurrection.<sup>12</sup> This passage shows a sequence in the unfolding of the final events concerning that resurrection. Since Paul was addressing the church, he was not concerned with detailing all future resurrections. He concentrated instead on the present church saints who are asleep and their place in the scheme of things.

### **Hope and Comfort**

Almost all of the rapture passages speak of the blessing of the Lord's return for His own, or more specifically, the return of Jesus Christ to take His children home to heaven. This is the hope and comfort! And it is a different scenario than that of Jesus coming back to judge the earth, to reign and rule as Messiah. In fact a key to most rapture passages is this "going home" joy and anticipation!

### **Going Home!**

In John 14:1-3, Jesus made a promise to His disciples of going to prepare a place for them. From the Greek text the passage could read.

Let not the heart of each of you be disturbed. All of you together are believing in God, in the same way, all of you continue to trust in Me. In My Father's house are many dwelling places, but if not, I would have told you; because I go to prepare a room for you [to live in]. And if I am going and prepare a room for you, I will be coming again and take you along [to my own home], that where I am, I and you [together]! (author's translation).

The hope and comfort in this passage is stated in a kind of a negative, "Let not the heart be disturbed." The reason: Christ is going to prepare a place for them, and He will come again for them and receive them to Himself. This is a rapture passage because it is implied that His coming could have taken place while they were alive. Though death could overtake them (as it did), their new bodies would be taken home by the resurrection at the time of the rapture.

The Father's "house" (oikos) could not be the location of the earthly kingdom in which Jesus will reign. Jesus would be going soon, in the historical context of His death, to His Father's house. He will come for His own and take them back to a location He has prepared. Thus it is a specific and personal promise concerning the new dispensation of the church that

would soon replace the dispensation of law. Jesus is not saying that His disciples will simply die and go to the Father's house (though that would be true of their souls if they died before He came for them). Therefore, His coming for them must refer either to the rapture while they are living or the bodily resurrection that takes place simultaneously. "The dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and thus we shall always be with the Lord" (1 Thess. 4:16b- 17 NASB).

## **Waiting Steadfastly**

James 5:7-9 may be one of the earliest references to the rapture, apart from Christ's words in John 14:1-3. Regarding hope and anticipation, verses 7-9 could read from the Greek text:

Be waiting steadfastly then, until the time of the visitation (parousia) arrives. Behold, the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the ground, waiting patiently concerning it, . . . You too, be waiting steadfastly, firmly stabilize your emotions, because the visitation of the Lord has progressively been drawing near (author's translation).

The phrase "be waiting steadfastly" refers to patience and forbearance.<sup>13</sup> In the illustration of the farmer, it is said he also "waits." This verb (ekdechetai) has the idea of "eager expectation."<sup>14</sup> James urges his readers not only to wait eagerly with expectation for the Lord's coming but also to "firmly stabilize your emotions (kardia)."

This rapture passage gives confidence and hope despite persecutions falling on the early church. The farmer waits hopefully for the refreshing rains that herald the coming of new crops. So believers can look for the Lord coming for them. Barnes writes, "In due time, as [the farmer] expects the return of the rain, so you may anticipate deliverance from your trials."<sup>15</sup>

## **Rescued from the Coming Wrath**

First Thessalonians 1:9-10 is a powerful rapture passage that further speaks of an "eagerly waiting" kind of hope. It gives this comfort or hope because it speaks of us being dragged away from the terror of the wrath that is on its way to this world. In regard to this hope the Greek text could read:

You turned . . . to presently be serving a living and true God, and to presently be eagerly waiting for His Son from the heavens, whom [God] raised from the dead, Jesus, who [will be] dragging (rescuing) us [to Him- self] from the wrath which is coming! (author's translation).

The verb "be eagerly waiting" (anamenō) is given intensity with the preposition ana. And, it has a continual or linear idea, "to keep on waiting."<sup>16</sup> On this hopeful anticipation Hendricksen adds:

The force of the verb to wait must not be lost sight of. It means to look forward to with patience and confidence . . . . It implies (both in Greek and in English) being ready for his return . . . . The thought of His coming does not spell terror for the believer . . . . For it is this Jesus who rescues (is rescuing) us from the wrath to come (the coming wrath).<sup>17</sup>

Barnes says:

The hope of his return to our world to raise the dead, and to convey his ransomed to heaven, is the brightest and most cheering prospect that dawns on man, and we should be ready, whenever it occurs, to hail him as our returning Lord, and to rush to his arms as our glorious Redeemer. <sup>18</sup>

## **Our Hope When He Comes**

Paul writes in 1 Thessalonians 2:17-19: "For what is our anticipation or joy or crown of rejoicing? Is it not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming?" (NKJV). This is an unusual way of speaking about hope and comfort. But Paul is telling the believers at Thessalonica how much he rejoices in their stand for the gospel. In fact their suffering and persecution for the name of Christ was almost overwhelming. Thus Paul says that when the rapture occurs, those saints of the Lord will be at that moment his great rejoicing when he stands literally before the face of Jesus. It is with this coming that the Thessalonian believers will be presented as Paul's joy. This is not the coming of Christ to deliver worldwide judgment. This is the Lord taking His own home to be with Himself-clearly the rapture!

## **Comforting One Another**

In the most important central rapture passage (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18) the apostle Paul writes to the Thessalonians church about this great miracle event so that they might "not grieve as do the rest who have no hope" (v. 13). He concludes, "likewise be comforting one another by these words" (v. 18). The word "grieve" should be translated "might [not] be made to grieve." Paul tells believers that if they grieve, it is because they allow grief about their relatives who are asleep to overtake them, thereby acting as the unsaved who look upon death as final destruction. <sup>19</sup> Paul, trying to correct this erroneous thinking, pictures the pagan world as having no hope, and he tells the Christian of the blessed assurance of resurrection to glory with the Lord Jesus Christ.

In verse 18, Paul exhorts the believers to find and give comfort in these words from the Lord about the rapture and the accompanying resurrection. At its root the word "comfort" (parakaleo) can mean to "call alongside" or "counsel." "Likewise, be counseling one another by these words." The present tense and active voice in Greek are used to emphasize that they need to be comforting each other right now and until the Lord comes. This is an exercise in faith in order to recognize the certainty of ultimate triumph.<sup>20</sup>

After writing about the Day of the Lord (5:2) and the wrath to come (5:9), the apostle again concludes with the same command to comfort one another because God will not put His own through these days of horror that will come on the world. From the Greek text, Paul writes in 5:11:

Therefore, be continually comforting one another and building up one another, even as [I know] you presently are doing (author's translation).

Some believers had fallen asleep in Jesus (4:14-15). Some will be alive when the rapture takes place (4:17), and they will assuredly miss the terrible Day of the Lord that is coming on the earth (5:9). Thus, the larger hope is that we will be with our Savior whether by the rapture or by resurrection. Comforting words indeed!

## **The Day of the Lord Has Not Come**

Most believe 2 Thessalonians 2:1 is a reference exclusively referring to the rapture. From the Greek it could read:

Now I am begging you, brothers, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ even [concerning] our gathering together up to Him... (author's translation).

A.T. Robertson sees the entire verse as "referring to the rapture, mentioned in 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17,..."<sup>21</sup> Paul then writes, "that you may not be quickly shaken from your composure..." (2:2). Though the words "hope" or "comfort" are not used here, the apostle is comforting them by saying that the Day of the Lord has not come. He goes on to say that the apostasy must come first and the Antichrist (the man of lawlessness) first be revealed (2:3-4).

Paul gives comfort by using two negatives: "Do not totter or waver" (saleuo) in [your] mind, nor "be terrified" (throeô), to the effect that the Day of the Lord has come (v. 2). As A.T. Robertson has already noted, Paul is indeed referring back to the rapture in 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17 and amplifying the assurance that believers would escape the wrath.

### **Christ's Resurrection Gives Hope**

In the larger context of 1 Corinthians 15, Paul argues that we have no hope if Jesus was not raised from the dead. "Those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished, if we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied" (15:18-19 NASB). The apostle then gives the great assurance to church saints: "in Christ all shall be made alive" (v. 22 NASB). And following Christ's resurrection comes the resurrection of the believers at the rapture, "after that [the resurrection of Jesus] those who are Christ's at His coming" (v. 23 NASB). "As He promised (John 14:2-3) Christ will return for those who compose the church and the dead in Christ will be raised" (1 Thess. 4:16).<sup>22</sup>

In 15:49, Paul continues his anthem of hope in regard to the resurrection, "as we have borne the image of the earthly, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly." He follows this with the hopeful declaration: "Behold, I am telling you something not before revealed, we shall not all be put to sleep, however, we shall all be changed, in a moment, at a blink of an eye, with the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead ones will be raised imperishable, and we shall all be changed" (15:51-52, author's translation).

These verses truly express a hope and comfort. Saying "behold," the apostle uses a forceful exclamatory to point the reader's attention to a "momentous revelation... to which he calls our earnest attention."<sup>23</sup> This is an "emphatic introduction of information of great moment."<sup>24</sup> Paul twice says "we shall be changed" (allassô) at some point in the future. This word has the force of "to alter," or in other contexts, "change the customs."<sup>25</sup> As well, "to take a new position, one thing for another, to alternate."<sup>26</sup>

Because of the unique dispensation of the church, and the fact that living believers in Christ will be changed and translated before the coming wrath, Paul proclaims with great joy this blessed "new" revelation. "That [Paul] did not refer only to those whom he was then addressing, is apparent from the whole discussion. The argument relates to Christians-to the church at large."<sup>27</sup>

### **A New Citizenship**

One of Paul's most hopeful proclamations is found in the Greek of Philippians 3:20-21: "For our citizenship really exists in heaven, out of which we are waiting expectantly [to



welcome] a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will alter the configuration of our body [that has] a limitation" (author's translation).

Here Paul declares our heavenly citizenship and the future transformation of our humble (abased, limited) body. He adds: "we are waiting expectantly (apekdechomai) for a Savior." This word can mean "receive, welcome."<sup>28</sup> Paul includes himself in that anticipation. Alford puts it this way: "We wait for, expect, till the event arrives...."<sup>29</sup> "Paul's heart is in heaven. We wait for.... vividly pictures Paul's eagerness for the... coming of Christ as the normal attitude of the Christian colonist whose home is heaven."<sup>30</sup>

## **Great Expectations!**

Paul almost shouts his excitement about the possibility of the rapture in Titus 2:13. From Greek the passage can read: "[We are] excitedly expecting continually, the joyous prospect, even [the] glorious appearance of our great God, even [our] Savior, Christ Jesus!" (author's translation).

"Excitedly expecting continually" is often translated simply "looking for" (,prosdechomai) in some versions. And indeed, the present tense makes this "expecting" a continual hope. "This expectation [is] an abiding state and posture."<sup>31</sup> But the word also has the force of "welcome, wait for, expect."<sup>32</sup> The "blessed hope" might be translated "the joyous anticipation." There is no question about this "expectation." It is going to come about, and it produces within a great joyousness that looks forward to ultimate redemption. "This describes the great expectancy which is the ruling and prevailing thought in the lives of men looking for their Lord's return."<sup>33</sup>

## **Having Confidence When He Comes**

Christ could reveal Himself by the rapture at any time. The apostle John continues the thoughts of Paul in his personal love letter, 1 John. In two different contexts he speaks of "confidence" and hope in regard to Jesus' coming. From the Greek text he writes:

However, now [I want you to specifically] keep on sticking with Him, so that whenever He should be revealed, we might have confidence, and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming (2:28). We shall be like-ones with Him, because we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who is having this anticipation on Him, is purifying himself, as that One is [existing as] pure! (3:2b).

Sometimes "confidence" (parousia) can be translated "joyousness," "courage," or "boldness."<sup>34</sup> By using "we" John implies that even he himself may be alive when Jesus comes and that his generation of believers may not have to die. He also encourages them to live the Christian experience close to Jesus, lest they are ashamed at His appearance. John is not referring to a post-resurrection experience but something that could happen while he is alive

In 3:2, John declares that when a believer "anticipates" or "hopes" for the Lord's return it produces a purifying effect within. "One who sets his hope by faith on the Son of God experiences an inward purification that is as complete as Christ's own purity."<sup>35</sup>

## **The Change**

When the rapture takes place, believers will instantly receive a new, glorified body like Christ's, and the resurrection of those asleep in Jesus takes place. This "change" really affects both the living and the dead, in order that they may be brought into the very presence of the living God and His Son. By implication Paul first addresses this in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18.

### **Meeting the Lord In the Air**

It is clear the dead in Christ could not be raised (4:16) and that we who are alive could not "be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air" (4:17 NASB) unless we had glorified bodies. The apostle seals this issue with his conclusion, "Thus we shall always be with the Lord" (v. 17 NASB).

### **We May Live Together with Him**

Since believers in Christ are not destined for the wrath (5:9) but are to obtain salvation through His sacrifice, they are raptured to "live together with Him" (5: 10b NASB). This thought continues the fact that Christians must be changed in order to exist with the Lord.

### **Those Who Belong to Christ**

After thoroughly explaining the need for the resurrection (1 Cor. 15:12-21), Paul summarizes by saying that "in Christ all shall be made alive" (v. 22 NASB). He then adds (Greek): "To explain, each [will be resurrected] in his own order: Christ the first fruits, next after that, those [resurrected] who belong to Christ at His coming" (v. 23). Again, the change is specifically the resurrection. But in 15:51-54, it also includes a transformation physically of the living believers in Christ:

We shall not all sleep [physically die], but we shall all be changed .... The dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality (vv. 51b, 52b-53 NASB).

In Greek the word "change" (allasso) can mean "to take a new position, one thing for another, to alternate."<sup>36</sup>

### **Conforming Our Body**

From the Greek, Philippians 3:21 forcefully explains this needed and dramatic change to our bodies: "[Christ] will alter the configuration of our body [that has] a limitation, into a together-forming with the body of His glory." He does this by the "energizing of His power, even [the ability] to subject all things to Himself."

The word "alter," often translated "transform" (metaschamatzö) can literally mean to "alter the schematics." Jesus will "turn about" our present body into something new! The word can mean to "change the form of a person or thing, to be changed in form, change configuration, change of position or posture."<sup>37</sup> "Limitation" is often translated "humble state" (tapeinoseos). The word can mean "to lower, reduce, to humble, abase, a lessening."<sup>38</sup> Paul is speaking about a body that is now less than "the body of His glory." It is earthly, natural, fleshly, perishable (1 Cor. 15). Sin controls, condemns, and brings about a groaning for

release. Thus, we groan "within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body" (Rom. 8:23 NASB).

The word "together-forming," often translated "conformity" (summorphon), can literally mean "together-formed." Homer Kent writes:

The present body is described literally as "the body of lowliness"... , a description calling attention to its weakness and susceptibility to persecution, disease, sinful appetites, and death. At Christ's coming, however, the earthly, transient appearance will be changed, whether by resurrection of those dead or by rapture of the living, and believers will be transformed and will receive glorified bodies that will more adequately display their essential character... as children of God and sharers of divine life in Christ.<sup>39</sup>

## **Being Like Jesus**

Though it is hard to fully fathom, John says, "We know with certainty that, whenever He should be revealed, we shall be like ones with Him, because we shall see Him as He is" (1 John 3:2b, □Greek). "Whenever' sounds uncertain but the grammar construction implies certainty."<sup>40</sup> The Greek grammar literally says "like ones with Him we shall be." We shall have a body and constitution just like Him! "It is clearly implied here that there will be an influence in beholding the Savior as he is, which will tend to make us like him, or to transform us into his likeness."<sup>41</sup>

## **A Return to Heaven**

Many of the rapture passages imply or speak directly of a return to heaven. In fact, seven specific contexts let us know our destiny is above. These "catching away" passages are rapture verses.

## **To My Father's House**

Jesus said to His disciples: "In My Father's house are many dwelling places. I go to prepare a room for you [to live in]. I will be coming again..., where I am, I and you [together]!" (John 14:2-3, Greek). Christ actually said, "Again I am coming." By context, this should be taken as a future present. "I will be coming again."<sup>42</sup> This event "is regarded as so certain that in thought it may be contemplated as already coming to pass."<sup>43</sup>

## **Rescued From the Father**

In 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10, Paul says we wait for God's Son from heaven, who will deliver us from the wrath to come. The implication is that we are taken up so that "we shall always be with the Lord" (4:17 NASB ). This has to mean we are taken to heaven. Again, this is not the Son of Man coming to reign on earth but to deliver us out of the way when God afflicts earth's inhabitants with an unparalleled series of physical torments.

## **Taken Before the Father**

In 1 Thessalonians 3:13 the apostle further argues that our hearts be established unbiambable in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints. As in 2:19 (the presence of our Lord Jesus at his coming), "before" is used as a face-to-face encounter! Note the parallel: "Before (the presence of) our Lord Jesus"-2:19, and "before (the presence of) our God and Father"-3:13. This has to be in heaven.

### **Always With the Lord**

Few would argue that when Paul says "thus we shall always be with the Lord" (1 Thess. 4:17 NASB), he must be referring to heaven. Bible scholars of all prophetic persuasions have always held this means going home to heaven. The passage in Greek even more strongly suggests this: "We shall be snatched (raptured) into the clouds into the meeting place of the Lord in the air. Thus, altogether we shall ourselves be together with the Lord." Also, Bible teachers concur that Paul is alluding to heaven when he writes: "whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with Him" (5:10).

### **Gathered to Him**

Many believe when the apostle writes of "the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, even our gathering together to Him," he is still speaking of our going home to heaven (2 Thess. 2:1). Some have called this the muster of the saints to heaven! In fact, the phrase "to him" can be translated "up to him."<sup>44</sup>

### **Our Citizenship in Heaven**

There is no question about what Paul is saying in Philippians 3:20. Christians, while living on earth, have their citizenship else- where-in heaven. This contrasts with those who set their minds on earthly things (3:19). "Their mind [the world's] is on earth; our country is in heaven, and to it our affections cling, even during our earthly pilgrimage."<sup>45</sup>

### **Taken Directly to the Lord Himself or Intimately Facing Christ at His Coming**

This "taking" is not before Jesus as the King of Israel, the Messiah when He begins His earthly rule. All the contexts of the rapture passages either explicitly state or imply "going home to be with the Lord in heaven." But they also indicate believers will see Jesus instantly by the dynamic rapture and change upon those living or by the resurrection of the church saints. The purpose for this "catching away" of the living is so that the wrath may fall on the earth. When He comes to reign in His second coming, church saints return with Him.

### **Where Jesus Is, We Are**

In John 14:3 Christ states it clearly: "I will be coming again and take you along [to my own home], that where I am, I and you [together]" (author's translation). The Lord's disciples could have been raptured while living, but they died and their souls were taken to heaven. So Christ's coming back with their souls will bring about the bodily resurrection whereby their

souls will be joined to their bodies. The disciples will then receive their new bodies. But they could have been snatched away while living and suddenly have met Him in the air.

## **Waiting for God's Son**

Believers are to be eagerly waiting for the return of the resurrected Jesus, God's Son from heaven (1 Thess. 1:10). They will see Him face-to-face! The Greek word "wait" (anamenö) could be translated "to keep on waiting up for His Son." Hendricksen notes:

The force of the verb to wait must not be lost sight of. It means to look forward to with patience and confidence,... being ready for his return .... The thought of his coming does not spell terror for the believer.<sup>46</sup>

## **The Judge Is Approaching**

When the apostle James writes of Christ as an approaching Judge (James 5:9), he is not referring to a judgment of our eternal destiny but of the bēma judgment for works. "For we must all appear before the judgment seat (bēmatos) of Christ, that each one may be recompensed for his deeds..." (2 Cor. 5:10). From the Greek text James actually says: "The coming of the Lord has progressively been approaching, coming nearer, drawing nearer [at hand]" (5:8). Thus, Christ our Judge is "brought near," He is "at the point of" appearing.<sup>47</sup>

## **Jesus Who Drags Us Away**

Paul writes of "Jesus, who delivers us from the wrath coming" (1 Thess. 1:10). The deponent Greek word ruomai has the idea "to deliver, rescue."<sup>48</sup> In some contexts it is translated "saved from the jaws of the lion" (2 Tim. 4:17) and "delivered from the power of darkness" (Col. 1:13). Being a participle, some see this as a descriptive of Christ's office, "Our Deliverer."<sup>49</sup> Also, it could be a timeless substantive denoting one of Jesus' characteristics, "Jesus who will return as rescuer."<sup>50</sup> In classical Greek the word (erruö) can be translated "drag" or "draw away."<sup>51</sup> Vincent translates ruomai with the force of the middle voice, "to draw to one's self" with the specification from evil or danger.<sup>52</sup> The word can also have the force of a prophetic future, "The One who will drag us away [to Himself]" from the wrath which is coming.

## **Snatched Away**

First Thessalonians 4:17 reads from the Greek text: "We shall be snatched into the clouds into the meeting place of the Lord in the air." The word "rapture" comes from the Greek harpazö which indicates being suddenly swooped away by a force that cannot be opposed.<sup>53</sup> Believers are going to meet the Lord in an appointed place in the air. The term "meeting place" (apantesin) has a technical meaning in the Hellenistic world in relation to the visits of dignitaries. Visitors would be formally met by the citizens, or a deputation of them, who had gone out from the town for this purpose. The dignitary would then be ceremonially escorted back into the city. In the rapture, Christ will rescue us (1:10) and snatch us away to the meeting place in the sky, before the wrath of God falls on the earth (5:1-9).

Other passages speak of that face-to-face encounter "(in the presence of)" with the Lord (1 Thess. 2:19). And, "we shall always be with the Lord" (4:17 NASB). Other like

phrases make it clear that when the rapture comes, we are indeed to be with Him! "Whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with Him" (5:10). "Our gathering together to Him" (2 Thess. 2:1). "We eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ" (Phil. 3:20). "Looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus" (Titus 2:13). Stay with Him, "so that when He appears, we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him [from His face]<sup>54</sup> in shame at His coming" (1 John 2:28). "We shall see Him just as He is" (3:2).

### **Living Godly Because He Is Coming**

In six distinct passages, godly living is tied to the rapture hope. Critics of the rapture often claim this doctrine is but an escape for those who teach it. But the apostles James and Paul both make it an incentive for living because He could appear to take us to Himself at any moment.

### **Do Not Complain Against Another**

James pleads: "Do not complain, brethren, against one another, that you yourselves may not be judged; behold the judge is standing right at the door" (James. 5:9 NASB). James further warns against swearing and being flippant or profane. The Lord could come at any moment: "Above all .... do not swear,.. . let your yes be yes, and your no, no; so that you may not fall under judgment [when the judge comes]" (5:12 NASB).

### **Do Not Sleep, Be Sober**

After Paul's great teaching on the rapture and the accompanying resurrection of church saints, he reminds believers in Christ they are not "destined for wrath" (1 Thess. 5:9). The saints will escape the "day of the Lord" (5:2) which will fall with sudden destruction on "them," those who have not trusted in Christ and who are in darkness (5:3-7). But with this reminder, Paul wants the believers to live a godly life. He writes: "We are of the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet, the hope of salvation" (5:8 NASB). The apostle says we are sons of light and are not to sleep. We must be sober (5:5-6). Paul clearly is talking about how we are to live in the light of His any-moment return for those in Christ.

Paul further prays that God will sanctify the whole person so that we may be preserved morally intact and undiminished because of Christ's return:

Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ (5:23 NASB).

The word "entirely" could read "quite complete" or "through and through."<sup>55</sup> "To concentrate, to separate from things profane .... Here alone in the New Testament it means the whole of each of you, every part of you 'through and through' (Luther) qualitatively rather than quantitatively."<sup>56</sup>

### **Living Without Stain**

Paul urges those in Christ to "keep the commandment without stain or reproach until the appearing (epiphaneias) of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Tim. 6:14). The word "stain" can refer to a hidden reef or a soiled blemish.<sup>57</sup> The word "reproach" carries the idea of "irreproachable conduct."<sup>58</sup> In the context, the apostle seems to be referring to the issues of money and wealth. Quite clearly he has in view proper moral living, in regard to the proper use of material things, in order to stand spiritually tall when Jesus comes for us.

### **The Blessed Hope and Christian Living**

The grace of God and its accompanying salvation should cause us to be instructed and to be looking "for the blessed hope ..... (Titus 2:12-13). This salvation should assist us in denying ungodliness and worldly desires and help us "live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age." And it should produce a welcoming and an expectation of the Lord's soon return. On the two participles "instructing" (v. 12) and "looking" (v. 13): together they would read "The grace of God has appeared... instructing us [that we might live sensibly]... [as we are] looking for the blessed hope..."

### **Do Not Shrink Back**

Like Paul, the apostle John urges believers to "have confidence" and "not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming" (1 John 2:28). As with us, it may have been easy for the early church Christians to forget their Savior. For many, their lives must have been imperfect. John (and Paul) tie the believer's life to the hope of the rapture, so that they might not "shrink away from His face" with guilt when He arrives.<sup>59</sup>

John adds that just fixing our hope on Jesus' return has a purifying effect on the child of God: "Everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself . ... One who sets his hope by faith on the Son of God experiences an inward purification that is as complete as Christ's own purity."<sup>60</sup>

### **The Pronouns We, You, Us as a Proof That the Rapture Could Have Happened to Paul's Own Generation**

Without doubt, the early church and the apostles hoped for Christ's soon return. As with some engagements, a wedding date may not have been set, or it may even be uncertain as to the when. Yet the bride and groom long for and anticipate their coming union. So the disciples had this longing but were given no hint as to the time of the rapture. Since it did not come upon them, we do not question their hope nor the Lord's revelation about the doctrine itself. It simply means that it is yet to come. We could be that generation!

The phrases and verses below (author's translations) demonstrate this great and eager "going home" taught by the apostles. Sometimes the we, you, and us may not be directly translated in all versions. But it is understood in the Greek grammar.

John 14:1-3

Let not your heart be troubled.  
I go to prepare a place for you.  
And if I prepare a place for you.  
I will receive you to Myself.

Where I am, there you may be also.

James 5:7-9

You be patient, therefore, brethren, until the coming of the Lord.

[You] behold, the farmer waits for the produce of the soil.

You too be patient.

[You] strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand.

[You] do not complain,... that you be not judged.

[You] behold, the judge is standing right at the door.

1 Thessalonians 1:9-10

You wait for His Son from heaven.

Jesus, who delivers us from the wrath to come.

1 Thessalonians 2:17-19

You [our hope], in the presence of our Lord Jesus at His coming.

1 Thessalonians 3:13

That [He may] establish your hearts... before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all His saints.

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

We do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep.

That you may not grieve.

If we believe that Jesus died .. even so God will bring with Him [Jesus] those who have fallen asleep in Jesus.

We say to you by the word of the Lord.

That we who are alive, and remain until the coming of the Lord, shall not precede those who have fallen asleep.

The dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.

We shall always be with the Lord.

[You] comfort one another with these words.

1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

You, brethren, are not in darkness, that the day [of the Lord] should overtake you like a thief.

You are all sons of light and sons of day. We are not of night nor of darkness. But since we are of the day, let us be sober.

God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.

[Christ] who died for us, that whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with Him.

[You] encourage one another, and [you] build up one another.

1 Thessalonians 5:23

May the Lord sanctify you... without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

2 Thessalonians 2:1-2

With regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him.

[You] be not quickly shaken... to the effect that the day of the Lord has come.

1 Timothy 6:14

You keep the commandment without stain or reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ.



1 Corinthians 15:51-52

We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye.

The dead in Christ will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed.

Philippians 3:20-21

Our citizenship is in heaven.

We eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

[Christ] will transform the body of our humble state.

Titus 2:13

[We are] looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus.

1 John 2:28

We may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming.

1 John 3:2-3

We know that, when He appears, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is.

Everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.

## **The Use of the Technical Term Parousia (the Coming) to Specifically Describe the Rapture**

It is not the purpose of this section to give a complete study on the word parousia except to simply say that the word can be applied to the rapture of the church or to the coming of Christ to establish the millennial kingdom. Context is the key issue in determining which coming is in view. It is also important to note that the word does not mean simply "a coming." It may, by context, mean "a presence," "an arrival," "a situation," or simply the coming of a dignitary for an official "visit."<sup>61</sup>

Thus, when the word parousia is used in rapture passages, it in no way has to be understood as a "coming to stay." Nor does the word automatically have to relate to the second coming of Christ; that is, His coming to earth to reign on the throne of David. By context then, it may just be translated the "event," the "appearance," or the "visit." In light of this, the passages below are translated from the Greek text (author's translations).

James 5:7-9

Be waiting steadfastly then, until the time of the visitation arrives.

Be waiting steadfastly .... because the visitation of the Lord has progressively been drawing near.

1 Thessalonians 2:17-19

Are not you in fact [our joy] when we face our Lord Jesus at [the time of] His appearance.

1 Thessalonians 3:13

That [He may] firm up the hearts of you faultless,... in the [very] presence of the God and Father of us with the arrival of our Lord Jesus.

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

We, the ones living and remaining until the coming of the Lord.

1 Thessalonians 5:23

May He preserve your spirit and soul and body with the arrival of our Lord Jesus Christ.

2 Thessalonians 2:1-2

Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ even [concerning] our gathering together up to Him.

1 Corinthians 15:23-24

Christ the first fruits [resurrected], next after that, those who belong to Christ at His visitation.

1 John 2:28

So that when He appears, we may... not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming.

## **Other Expressions Used for the Coming**

Besides parousia, other words and phrases describe the idea of Christ's rapture return to catch His own away. These words add weight and confirm this doctrine.

### **I Will Return**

Jesus said, "I will come again, and receive you to Myself" (John 14:3). Actually it reads, "Again I am coming" (palm erchomai). By context and because of the "again," this should be taken as a future present. "I will be coming again." This should be taken as a definite promise.<sup>62</sup> "This use of the present tense denotes an event which has not yet occurred, but which is regarded as so certain that in thought it may be contemplated as already coming to pass."<sup>63</sup> Christ makes it clear He is coming back for His own. Since He was addressing the apostles, this return could have even taken place while these disciples were alive.

### **The Lord's Coming Is Imminent**

Besides using the word parousia, James adds this coming "is at hand" (James 5:8). From the Greek the expression "is at hand" (engiza) could read, "The coming of the Lord has progressively been approaching, coming nearer, drawing nearer. The word has the idea 'to be imminent' and can be translated 'to be at the point of.'"<sup>64</sup> The word engizo is related to the noun that has the idea of "in the vicinity of, close by."<sup>65</sup>

James further sees Jesus the Judge standing right at the door (5:9). Christ "has come right up to the door." By the perfect tense, the apostle is saying, "He is, as it were, even now approaching the door."<sup>66</sup>

### **The Lord Descends From Heaven**

In 1 Thessalonians 4:16, the Greek word "descends" means "to come down" (katabainō). "He will (future tense) come down from heaven." The result is that the dead in Christ shall rise first, then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up. But notice, He does not stay here on earth. In fact, we, along with the resurrected, are taken up to Him. This is one of the most important characteristics of the rapture concept.

### **Gathering Together Up to Him**

In 2 Thessalonians 2:1, though the apostle Paul uses the word *parousia* to describe the rapture coming of Christ, he then adds "and our gathering together to him." Several Greek scholars feel the "coming" and the "gathering" are the same event and thus the passage should read "the coming, even the gathering together." Ellicott sees this "gathering" the same as the "taking up" in 1 Thessalonians 4:14-17.<sup>67</sup> A.T. Robertson adds: "Paul is referring to the rapture, mentioned in 1 Thess. 4:15-17, and the being forever with the Lord thereafter."<sup>68</sup>

### **The Blessed Hope and Appearing**

Though the noun "appearing" (*epiphaneia*) can refer to the second coming of Jesus (2 Thess. 2:8), twice it refers to the rapture coming of our Lord (1 Tim. 6:14; Titus 2:13). As a verb, "to appear" is used twice in I John to refer to the rapture (2:28; 3:2), "when He appears."

In Titus 2:13 Paul says "we" (us) are looking for this "appearing" of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ. "The glory" is a descriptive genitive, translated as an adjective.<sup>69</sup> Thus, "the glorious appearance." The "and" between the two phrases "is explanatory, introducing the definition of the character of the thing hoped for. Looking for the object of hope, even the appearing" of the glory.<sup>70</sup> "The Greek connects 'the blessed hope and glorious appearing' under one article, suggesting that the reference is to one event viewed from two aspects."<sup>71</sup> The reference to the Lord should read, "the great God even Savior, Christ Jesus."<sup>72</sup>

### **Being Taken to the Father**

Three main passages refer directly to our being raptured to the Father. The first is John 14:1-3. "In My Father's house are many dwelling places;... I go to prepare a place for you." This house could not be the location of the earthly kingdom in which Christ will reign. Jesus is going now, in the historical context of this passage, and in reference to the near event of His death, to His Father's house. He will come for His own and take them back to a location in heaven He has prepared.

Thus, this is a specific and personal promise concerning the new dispensation of the church. Jesus is not saying His disciples will simply die and go to the Father's house. (Though that would be true of their souls if they perished before He came for them. And indeed, this is what happened.) Thus, His coming for them would either be the bodily resurrection, or the bodily rapture while they would still be alive. We know now, of course, that they died. They now await the resurrection of their new bodies and the joining of their souls to those bodies.

First Thessalonians 3:13 pictures believers in Christ as kept "in holiness before (in the very presence of) our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints." Paul is arguing for the believer's maturity, spiritually and morally, so that he may stand before God uncensored by the way he lived.

In a powerful passage on the Trinity and the deity of Christ, Paul writes about the "appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:13). Though the Father and the Son are separate Persons in the Godhead, they share the same essence and attributes. We are raptured by God the Son and taken to the very presence of God the Father. In this same epistle, Paul says, "God [is] our Savior" (3:4) and "Christ [is] our Savior" (3:6).

## Those in Christ or Allusions to the Church

The rapture has to do with the dispensation of the church or those "in Christ." The church age is a unique period with special promises. Those with Him now by faith will not face the coming wrath (1 Thess. 5:9). There was nothing like the rapture for Old Testament saints, and there will be nothing similar for Tribulation believers.

Most of the rapture passages mention the believer's relationship to Jesus. Paul speaks of "our Lord Jesus at His coming" (1 Thess. 2:19) and of the dead as those "who have fallen asleep in Jesus" (4:14), who are now called "the dead in Christ" and who will rise first (4:17). The reason for the rapture, Paul says, is so we might escape the coming wrath and obtain salvation "through our Lord Jesus Christ" (5:9). Awake or asleep we will live together "with Him" (5:10). The apostle continues to punctuate this relationship with our Redeemer when he reminds the confused Thessalonians of this "coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him" (2 Thess. 2:1).

In Paul's great resurrection and rapture section, 1 Corinthians 15:12-28, both events are tightly tied to our spiritual position in Christ. "In Christ all shall be made alive," he says (15:21). Jesus is the first fruits of the resurrection and then those who are Christ's "at His coming" (15:23). And following the apostle's great description of our "change" at the rapture and the resurrection of the dead, he concludes with this triumphant statement, "thanks be to God, who gives us the victory because of our Lord Jesus Christ" (15:57).

In Titus, Paul calls the Lord "our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ" (2:13). He "gave Himself for us," and thus redeems and purifies "a people for His own possession" (2:14).

These statements are important because they reveal the unique position the church now has with its Savior that spares it from the coming wrath. Thomas writes:

When God vents his anger against earth dwellers (Rev. 6:16, 17), the body of Christ will be in heaven as the result of the series of happenings outlined in [1 Thess.] 4:14-17 (cf. 3:13). This is God's purpose.<sup>73</sup>

Kent concludes:

At Christ's coming... the earthly, transient appearance will be changed, whether by resurrection of those dead or by rapture of the living, and believers will be transformed and will receive glorified bodies that will more adequately display their essential character... as children of God and sharers of divine life in Christ.<sup>74</sup>

## Conclusion

These rapture passages form webs of related themes that can be identified and cataloged. Key verses interface with each other and give patterns that are undeniable. All the accumulated rapture data strengthens the doctrine and gives believers assurance. These verses spell out that the living believers in Christ will be changed and taken home by the Lord before the terrible period of the wrath begins, and they reveal that the dead in Christ will be resurrected to receive a new, eternal body. Together we go home with the Lord and are presented to God our Father.

Too often the rapture is dismissed as an imaginary creation of fanatical dispensationalists. But the patterns defined here reinforce this doctrine. As this author examined various amillennial and post-millennial grammatical commentaries for this study, he found most of the scholars in these persuasions true to the grammar observed in the

rapture passages. But too often they were not able to rise above their preconception of the second coming of Christ only. They assumed that all the verses about the return of our Lord fell into just the one category. It is hoped that this overview and correlation of most of the rapture verses will help us see more clearly the full revelation of end-time events. (For those interested in a detailed grammatical analysis of the rapture passages, they may write for the booklet *The Rapture Passages*, T'yndale Seminary, 6800 Brentwood Stair, Suite 100, Fort Worth, TX 76112.)

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<sup>1</sup> Marvin R. Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament*, vol. 4 (McLean, VA: MacDonald Publishing Co., 1888), 41.

<sup>2</sup> Fritz Reinecker, Cleon Rogers, *Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1980), 599.

<sup>3</sup> Albert Barnes, *Notes on the New Testament*, vol. 12 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1983), 56.

<sup>4</sup> H. B. Dana, Julius R. Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1957), 172.

<sup>5</sup> A. I. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, vol. 4 (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1931), 36.

<sup>6</sup> William F. Arndt, F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*. 4th ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959), 41.

<sup>7</sup> William Hendricksen, I Thessalonians, *New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1990), 128.

<sup>8</sup> Alfred Plummer, Arch Robertson, I Corinthians, *The International Critical Commentary* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1911), 354.

<sup>9</sup> Charles John Ellicott, ed., *Ellicott's Commentary on the Whole Bible*, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1959), 348.

<sup>10</sup> Henry Alford, *Alford's Greek Testament*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: Guardian Press, 1976), 609.

<sup>11</sup> Plummer, Robertson, 354.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures*, vol. 4, 60.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 61.

<sup>15</sup> Albert Barnes, *Notes*, vol. 13, 88.

<sup>16</sup> Robertson, *Word Pictures*, vol. 4, 14.

<sup>17</sup> Hendricksen, 57.

<sup>18</sup> Barnes, *Notes*, vol. 12, 18.

<sup>19</sup> John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries*, vol. 21 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1989), 279.

<sup>20</sup> Leon Morris, *The First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1979), 146.

<sup>21</sup> Robertson, *Word Pictures*, vol. 4, 47.

<sup>22</sup> John Walvoord, Roy Zuck, eds., *New Testament, The Bible Knowledge Commentary* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1984), 543-44.

<sup>23</sup> W. Robertson Nicoll, ed., *The Expositor's Greek Testament*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1988), 940.

<sup>24</sup> Plummer, Robertson, 376.

<sup>25</sup> Arndt, Gingrich, 38.

<sup>26</sup> Henry George Liddell, Robert Scott, comps. *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1968), 68.

<sup>27</sup> Barnes, *Notes*, vol. 11, 319-20.

<sup>28</sup> Arndt, Gingrich, 176.

<sup>29</sup> Alford, 186.

<sup>30</sup> Robertson, 547.

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- <sup>31</sup> Alford, 419.
- <sup>32</sup> Arndt, *Gingrich*, 176.
- <sup>33</sup> Nicoll, vol. 4, 195.
- <sup>34</sup> Arndt, *Gingrich*, 636.
- <sup>35</sup> Walvoord, Zuck, 893.
- <sup>36</sup> Liddell, Scott, 68.
- <sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 1117.
- <sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 1757.
- <sup>39</sup> Frank Gaebelein, ed., *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 11 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 14.8.
- <sup>40</sup> Dana, Mantey, 246.
- <sup>41</sup> Barnes, Notes, vol. 13, 312.
- <sup>42</sup> Robertson, *Word Pictures*, vol. 5, 249.
- <sup>43</sup> Dana, Mantey, 185.
- <sup>44</sup> Alford, 288.
- <sup>45</sup> Ellicott, 84.
- <sup>46</sup> Hendricksen, 57.
- <sup>47</sup> Liddell, Scott, 467.
- <sup>48</sup> Arndt, *Gingrich*, 744.
- <sup>49</sup> Alford, 253.
- <sup>50</sup> Gaebelein, 248.
- <sup>51</sup> Liddell, Scott, 693.
- <sup>52</sup> Marvin R. Vincent, *Word Studies*, vol. 4, 20.
- <sup>53</sup> Morris, 145.
- <sup>54</sup> Robertson, *Word Pictures*, vol. 6, 219.
- <sup>55</sup> Arndt, *Gingrich*, 657.
- <sup>56</sup> Robertson, *Word Pictures*, vol. 4, 38.
- <sup>57</sup> Arndt, *Gingrich*, 770.
- <sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.
- <sup>59</sup> Robertson, *Word Pictures*, vol. 6, 219.
- <sup>60</sup> Walvoord, Zuck, 893.
- <sup>61</sup> Adolf Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East* (New York: Doran, 1927), 368.
- <sup>62</sup> Robertson, *Word Pictures*, vol. 5, 249.
- <sup>63</sup> Dana, Mantey, 185.
- <sup>64</sup> Liddell, Scott, 467.
- <sup>65</sup> Gerhard Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1987), 330.
- <sup>66</sup> Barnes, Notes, vol. 13, 89.
- <sup>67</sup> Ellicott, *Commentary*, vol. 8, 154.
- <sup>68</sup> Robertson, *Word Pictures*, vol. 5, 47.
- <sup>69</sup> Dana, Mantey, 115.
- <sup>70</sup> Vincent, vol. 4, 345.
- <sup>71</sup> Gaebelein, ed., 440-41.
- <sup>72</sup> Dana, Mantey, 147.
- <sup>73</sup> Gaebelein, 285.
- <sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 148.