

The Case of the Missing Saints

(A Biblical Investigation into the Mystery of the Rapture)

Rockey Jackson - November 24, 1999

Section 4 of 13

“But I do not want you to be ignorant...”

In First Thessalonians, we are told that we should not be ignorant about the fate of believers who have died and that we should not grieve like those who are without hope. This is one place where we get the concept of the Rapture being the “blessed hope” of the saints. We are also told that the saints who are alive when the Rapture occurs will not precede those saints who have died. The “dead in Christ” will be resurrected first and then the living saints will be caught up together with them in the clouds where we will all meet the Lord in the air.

13 But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope.

14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him.

15 For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep.

16 For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first:

17 Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.

18 Wherefore comfort one another with these words (1 Thess. 4:13-18).

With respect to timing, this passage refers to the Second Coming of the Lord. The trumpet is again alluded to along with a shout and “the voice of the archangel.” Believers who remain alive until that day will be caught up in the clouds with the resurrected believers and our Lord will meet us there in the air. From that point and throughout eternity we will never again be separated from our Lord Jesus Christ.

The passage continues by affirming that the Thessalonians knew the times and the seasons when the Rapture would occur. It reminds them that this event comes like “a thief in the night” and as we saw above they will be taken to be with the Lord. In contrast to this, it warns that when nonbelievers think they are safe, then calamity will fall upon them suddenly and they will have no escape from it.

1 But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you.

2 For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night.

3 For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape (1 Thess. 5:1-3).

We are very fortunate indeed that the Thessalonians received this reminder of a fact they knew perfectly. For here we see that the Rapture occurs when our Lord comes like “a thief in the night.”

This passage wraps up with an exhortation to be prepared for this coming event. The coming of the thief should not surprise us. We are to remain awake and sober because we have hope of salvation and knowledge that the Thief is coming for us. We must avoid loosing our senses by becoming drunk or falling asleep in our faith while we wait for His return. Since we are destined for salvation and not for wrath, we are encouraged to comfort and build each other up in the knowledge of our faith and hope.

4 But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief.

5 Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness.

6 Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober.

7 For they that sleep sleep in the night; and they that be drunken are drunken in the night.

8 But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation.

9 For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ,

10 Who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him.

11 Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do (1 Thess. 5:4-11).

What is the wrath that we have escaped from? Is it some temporal discomfort, a punitive punishment, or is it the ultimate wrath of eternal damnation in the lake of fire? In the context of this passage it is not compared with some temporal grace or blessing but with salvation. Therefore, we should understand that the “wrath” spoken of here refers to eternal damnation. This is the “second death” in the lake of fire that is spoken of in Revelation 20:14,15. It is of course a comfort to know that we have been saved from this second death and will receive instead eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord.

Casebook Notes:

Who? - The Lord Himself, 1 Thess. 4:16.

What? - All believers who remain alive will be caught up in the clouds together with believers who have been resurrected from the dead and meet the Lord in the air, 1 Thess. 4:17.

When? - At the coming of our Lord as “a thief in the night,” 1 Thess. 4:15, 5:2,4.

- At the shout of the Lord, the voice of an archangel, and the trumpet of God, 1 Thess. 4:16.

- Immediately after and joining with the resurrection of the dead in Christ, 1 Thess. 4:15-17.

Why? - Because “God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation,” 1 Thess. 5:9.

How? - By the command of our Lord, 1 Thess. 4:16.