

STUDY SEVEN – WHAT PAUL SAID ABOUT THE RAPTURE OF THE CHURCH II

INTRODUCTION

“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. 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: 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. Wherefore comfort one another with these words.” (1 Thessalonians 4:15-18)

Continued from last week:

THE VOICE OF THE ARCHANGEL

But in First Thessalonians 4:16, Paul went on to say, *"For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel..."*

This verse says that in addition to Christ's commanding shout, there will also be heard the voice of the archangel. The word "voice" is from the Greek word *phone*, which indeed describes a voice, sound, or noise, but it also means to whirl and depicts the sound of wind, wings, or rushing water. It pictures the sound of a massive multitude or an overwhelming sound. Paul does not tell us if every person on Earth will hear this sound, but God's people and all the hosts of Heaven will hear it. The mighty voice of the archangel will also be a part of the process of rousing all God's troops to full attention and calling them to action!

Paul said this massive voice would come from the "archangel." Although Paul does not say which archangel this is, it is generally believed by scholars to be the archangel Michael, who is referred to in Jude 9, Revelation 12:7, and Daniel 10:13.

Thus, we find that at the time of this event, the voice of a mighty archangel will also be heard and will galvanize Heaven's troops to action; summon the dead bodies of the righteous from their graves; and alert those who are spiritually alive, robust, thriving, vibrant, and vigorous — the remaining remnant of believers who have endured and are still around at the time of this event - that the long-awaited moment has arrived to meet the Lord in the air! This angelic voice will also sound the proclamation that a battle of the ages is about to commence.

THE TRUMP OF GOD — A PROCLAMATION OF WAR AND VICTORY

In First Thessalonians 4:16, Paul added, *"For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God..."*

In the Old Testament, trumpets were used for multiple reasons. First, a trumpet blast was used to call God's people to assemble. Second, it was used as a command for Israel's troops to march forward into full-scale war. There were other purposes for trumpets as well, and we see several of these purposes listed in Numbers 10:1-10. In this passage, God commanded His people to blow the trumpet to call them for the purpose of breaking camp, advancing, assembling, and fighting against an enemy until victory was won. The overpowering sound of such a trumpet blast caused the enemy's heart to shake and tremble, for enemies understood that the blasting of such trumpets meant the onslaught of war was about to commence.

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Paul, therefore, stated that when the trump of God is blasted at the end of the age, it will be God's call for His people to break camp and move onward to gather for a final assembly (which explains Paul's wording about the rapture of the Church in Second Thessalonians 2:1, which we will look at in future study). It will be the signal that war is commencing that will be consummated in complete victory. No army, no power and no force — physical or spiritual — will be capable of withstanding the onslaught of invincible power that will be released in that moment.

If you combine the "shout" — given at the time of Christ's descent — with the mighty voice of the archangel, intended to galvanize Heaven's troops and muster God's forces for the final battle, along with this fearsome trumpet blast, the message is significant. It categorically means that when the resurrection of the dead and the rapture of the Church occurs, it will trigger the moment when Christ makes a pre-war declaration that He is about to wage WAR on His enemies and that His foes are about to be vanquished.

THE RESURRECTION OF THE BODIES OF THOSE WHO DIED IN FAITH

But Paul added in First Thessalonians 4:16, *"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."*

The word "dead" in Greek is the plural form of nekros, which describes lifeless corpses. It refers to all believers who have died in faith and whose bodies are buried in the earth, in the sea, or in other places. According to this verse, the trump of God will summon the dead bodies of the righteous. Paul stated that they "shall rise first." The words "shall rise" are from the Greek word anastesontai, a form of anistemi, which is a word that means to rise, to be resurrected, or to stand again. This word was also used at times to denote the rising of emperors, kings, nobility, and royalty. Thus, when the bodies of those who died in faith are resurrected, they will not only rise and be resurrected, but they will rise to rule as royalty with Christ in His Kingdom.

But Paul wrote that the dead in Christ "shall rise first." The word "first" in Greek is proton, which means in first place or first in order. On this long-awaited glorious day, the first event of the day — the first in order — will be the resurrection of the bodies of those who have died in faith. The rapture of the living — those vibrant in the faith of Jesus — will come next, but chronologically, the dead will be raised first on that day.

FINALLY...THE RAPTURE OF THE CHURCH

In First Thessalonians 4:17, Paul continued, *"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."*

This verse begins with "then." This is a translation of the Greek word epeita, which means precisely upon that moment, exactly at that moment, precisely then, or exactly then.

Paul therein declared that in the moment when the dead in Christ are raised, then, exactly and precisely after that, *"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."* Once again, we see the words "alive and remain" that were used earlier in verse 15.

As a matter of fact, this is the same phrase Paul used in verse 15, which means that what he was stating here was so important he repeated it verbatim in the Greek. Now, in verse 17, for the second time, Paul described those who are spiritually living, spiritually robust, spiritually thriving, spiritually vibrant, and spiritually vigorous — the remaining remnant of vibrant believers who will have endured and survived every storm and will be alive and present at that time.

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Paul thus alluded that there may only be a remnant of spiritually vibrant Christians left at the time Christ returns for the Church. Then Paul elucidated what happens next to this fully alive Church when He wrote that after the dead bodies of the righteous are raised, precisely in that moment or exactly then is when the remaining remnant *"shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in their..."*

The words "caught up" are translated from a form of the Greek word *harpadzo*, which undeniably means to catch, to seize, to take away, or to snatch suddenly. It pictures snatching someone out of danger just in the nick of time. This insinuates that the rapture of the Church will occur in a moment when things look ominously dark — but suddenly, just in the nick of time, Christ will come to snatch His Church out of danger. Not only will they who remain be snatched out of a dark spiritual climate, but they will be snatched just in the nick of time before divine wrath is poured out on the evil in the earth (see 1 Thessalonians 1:10).

A MEETING IN THE LOWER ATMOSPHERE

In First Thessalonians 4:17, Paul added, *"Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the cloud..."*

The word "clouds" simply means clouds — thus we find that Christ will not physically touch the earth until He returns in His visible Second Coming (or Second Advent) at the end of the Tribulation. But at the time of the resurrection of those who died in faith and of the rapture of the Church, Christ will descend into the clouds - and He will do it to suddenly and supernaturally seize, snatch, and transport the Church from imminent danger as God's prophetic timetable continues to unfold.

THE DARKNESS OF THE HOUR AT THE TIME OF OUR DELIVERANCE IS UNDENIABLE

Before I close this study today, I need to say that I am a firm believer in a pre-Tribulation rapture. But because the word *harpadzo* means to snatch out of danger in the nick of time, it strongly implies that it will be so dark before the rapture of the Church that it might feel as if the Tribulation has started. However, experiencing hardship is emphatically not on the same level as God's wrath being aggressively poured out on the earth during the seven-year period of the Tribulation.

But because *harpadzo* describes a rescue operation, it indeed alerts us that the world may become very dark before the Rapture actually occurs. And just when it seems things could not get darker, that is when the Lord will descend to spectacularly snatch the Church out of imminent danger, and He will do it just in the nick of time. It will be a divine rescue operation to transport us into His glorious presence!

WE WILL 'MEET' THE LORD IN THE AIR!

In First Thessalonians 4:17, Paul added something else in connection with our being transported into the air. He stated, *"Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air..."*

The word "meet" is interpreted from a form of the Greek word *apantesis*, which pictures a grand encounter or a royal or VIP reception. It is a word that specially describes the reception of a newly arrived official or newly arrived royalty. In history, when such individuals arrived, the red carpet was rolled out, and they were given a VIP reception.

Paul understood the usage of this word when he used it here to tell us that when we meet Jesus in the air, Christ is going to roll out the red carpet to give us a grand and glorious VIP reception!

Then Paul wrote in First Thessalonians 4:17, *"...And so shall we ever be with the Lord."* The words "ever be" are a translation of the Greek word *pantote*, which means at all times, all the time, always,

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continually, or perpetually. In this moment, when we are suddenly and supernaturally snatched into Heaven, we will find ourselves at the Marriage Feast of the Lamb. And over the course of the next seven years, each believer will stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ to be rewarded for his faithfulness to obey God's plan for his life, a very eternally important future event that we will cover in a later study.

Friend, this is indisputably the New Testament teaching about the rapture of the Church. In the next study, we will look further at First Corinthians 15:51-53 to see what Paul wrote in that passage about the resurrection of the dead bodies of the righteous and the Rapture. We will see what Paul wrote about the supernatural transformation of the physical bodies of true believers that will occur at the time of this amazing event. In "the twinkling of an eye," we who have been faithful in Christ Jesus will be gloriously changed.