

ESCHATOLOGY: DOCTRINE OF LAST THINGS

PART 53

RAPTURE PASSAGES, PART 3

Since we have only discussed 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, there is a danger that the context of 1 Thessalonians might be missed. It actually deals with the Rapture in much more depth than just these few verses. Paul also proved that the Rapture must precede the Day of the Lord; it cannot happen while the Church is still on planet earth. The structure of 1 Thessalonians contains eschatological elements throughout. The first three chapters concern Christ's coming for His church: chapter one concerns deliverance, chapter two deals with His presence, and chapter three deals with holy living while waiting for His return. The fourth chapter deals with His actual coming, and the fifth chapter concerns the fact the Church is not destined for wrath but is instead destined for salvation and deliverance.

Paul made it very clear the Church is not appointed to wrath. The Day of the Lord begins with the breaking of the first seal (Rev. 6:1)—not before and not later and which certainly coincides with the signing of the treaty with Israel.

1 Thessalonians 1:10 ¹⁰and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, that is Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath to come.

1 Thessalonians 5:9 ⁹For God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ,

What joy would there be in waiting for the coming of the Lord if believers were to undergo the wrath of God? What blessing would it be to undergo any degree of the wrath of God? How could it be the blessed hope of the Church to have only the hope of the Second Coming after the world and most of its population is destroyed by the wrath of God? Anyone who suggests the Church undergoes any part of the Day of the Lord is not considering the whole counsel of God concerning this issue. The way Paul structured 1 Thessalonians highlights this truth—first the Rapture, then the Day of the Lord.

The first chapter of Thessalonians tells us to “wait for His Son from heaven” in 1:10 which refers to both the Rapture and His coming wrath.

1 Thessalonians 1:10 ¹⁰and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, that is Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath to come.

Chapter two refers to the joy believers will experience at His coming.

1 Thessalonians 2:19–20 ¹⁹For who is our hope or joy or crown of exultation? Is it not even you, in the presence of our Lord Jesus at His coming? ²⁰For you are our glory and joy.

Chapter three relates to holy living in light of His coming. This relates to the doctrine of imminency.

1 Thessalonians 3:13 ¹³so that He may establish your hearts without blame in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all His saints.

“All here is all the saints of the entire church age. This admonishes the believers to be ready to meet Him at any moment (imminency). The church saints should be living a life pleasing to Him at all times. For at any moment the Lord will call His people home, and what was the last thing the believer was doing when raptured.” [David Olander, *The Greatness of the Rapture: The Pre-Day of the Lord Rapture*, p. 103].

Paul also addresses the issue of Christian living in 1 Thessalonians 5:12-23.

1 Thessalonians 5:14–15 ¹⁴We urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with everyone. ¹⁵See that no one repays another with evil for evil, but always seek after that which is good for one another and for all people.

Chapter four identifies the actual Rapture of the Church. Once this happens, there will not be one believer left on planet earth which directly ties into the chapter five and the Day of the Lord. We will discuss the Day of the Lord in depth later.

1 Thessalonians 4:17–18 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.

Chapter 5 begins in such a way that it is clear the Rapture comes first and then the Day of the Lord begins.

1 Thessalonians 5:1, 9-10 ¹Now [δέ] as to the times and the epochs, brethren, you have no need of anything to be written to you... ⁹For God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁰who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep, we will live together with Him.

The word translated “now,” δέ, can mean “and then” as a marker of closely related events. BDAG identifies this word as “one of the most common Gk. particles, used to connect one clause to another, either to express contrast or simple continuation.” It can serve to “introduce something else, whether opposed to what precedes or simply continuative or explanatory.” [Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament*, s.v. “δέ,” p. 399]. The grammatical construction is clearly showing us

that Paul intended to show the Rapture is first and only then followed by the Day of the Lord. The Day of the Lord cannot begin in any way until after the Rapture.

John 14:1-3

John 14:1-3 ¹“Do not let your heart be troubled; believe [πιστεύω] in God, believe [πιστεύω] also in Me. ²“In My Father’s house are many dwelling places [μονή]; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare [ἐτοιμάζω] a place for you. ³“If I go and prepare [ἐτοιμάζω] a place for you, I will come [ἔρχομαι] again and receive [παραλαμβάνω] you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also.

In terms of the chronology of revelation in the biblical record, this is the first revelation of the Rapture of the Church.

The first thing I want to do is dispel the common idea that we are going to live in a mansion as we think of a mansion in contemporary America which is a very large, impressive house. Southern Gospel songs refer to our eternal home that way and you can find pictures with a large Southern plantation style home set in the midst of a beautiful grassy lawn surrounded by trees and so on. That just isn't the reality.

Dwelling place, μονή, means a place where one may remain or dwell; it's a dwelling place, a room, or an abode. The word “mansions” is simply a transliteration of the Latin translation of μονή in the Vulgate, *mansions*. Transliterations are not interpretations; they are simply the act of changing a word from one language into the letters of another language creating a new word in that language. For example, baptize and baptism are simply transliterations of the Greek words into English which carries no meaning in and of itself in the English language. Tyndale so transliterated the Latin word which had been used for μονή and the KJV authors simply followed Tyndale in the use of “mansions.” “The English translation ‘mansions’ can be traced back to Tyndale, but in Middle English the word simply meant ‘a dwelling place’ (not necessarily large or imposing) ...” [NET Bible, note on John 14:1, p. 1941]. I believe, but I'm not certain, that at the time the King James Version was written, in Britain a mansion referred to an apartment and not to a large standalone dwelling for one family. The oldest commentary I could find compiled by an Englishman is *Matthew Henry's Commentary* and he referred to this dwelling as an apartment. He wrote, “There are *mansions* there. Distinct dwellings, an apartment for each.” [*Matthew Henry's Commentary*, (one volume) p. 1589]. Henry penned his commentary in the early eighteenth century.

“The ‘many mansions’ did not refer to palatial residences, but rather to ‘abiding places.’ Perhaps ‘apartments’ would be a better translation. To the modern American the word ‘mansion’ connotes a large house on a broad estate, larger and more luxurious than the ordinary middle class dwelling. In the Orient the sons and daughters of a wealthy patriarch, with their families, often lived under his roof. The one great house contained living quarters for all. By analogy, Jesus intimated that there would be room for all in the Father’s house.” [Merrill C. Tenney, *John: The Gospel of Belief*, p. 213].

“In Jesus’ day, many dwelling units were combined to form an extended household. It was customary for sons to add to their father’s house once married, so the entire estate grew into a large compound (called *insula*) centered around a communal courtyard. The image used by Jesus may also have conjured up notions of luxurious Greco-Roman villas, replete with numerous terraces and buildings, situated among shady gardens with an abundance of trees and flowing water.... Jesus thus conveys to his followers a vision of a future heavenly living that surpasses even that enjoyed by the most exalted ruler or wealthy person of that day.” [Andreas J. Kostenberger, *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: John*, p. 426].

These things may or may not be accurate because the Bible doesn’t go into detail. Tenney is probably correct when he suggests the idea is there will be room for all who belong to the Son in His Father’s house whatever form or fashion that takes.

Prepare, ἐτοιμάζω, means to make ready or to make preparations. It may be used to mean making preparations in advance of someone’s arrival which is how it is used in Philemon 22 when Paul asked Philemon to prepare him a lodging. This word was also used by the Lord when He told the disciples to go and prepare the place where they would partake of the Passover (Mt. 26:19; Mark 14:16; Luke 22:13). John 14 takes place right after the Passover meal; perhaps Jesus is linking the concept of preparation involved in preparing for the Passover with the concept of preparing a place for them after the Rapture. “We may recall how Jesus, the day before (Mark 14:12-16) had sent two of his disciples ahead to secure ‘a large room upstairs’ for the Last Supper. They did not ‘know the way,’ but had to follow the owner. Arriving, they found everything ‘prepared’ as Jesus had said. It looks as if here [John 14:2] Jesus has made the disciples’ journey of the previous day into a parable of ‘eternity’ in which the upper room foreshadows the home of God with its many habitations.” [Jerome H. Neyrey, *The Gospel of John*, p. 141].

It seems to be more than a bit self-evident that if Jesus is going to leave His people in order to prepare a place for them and take them to Himself, then He has to return for them in order to conform to the truth He just told them. “In conjunction with this conclusion, it is important to note that Jesus did not say that the purpose of this future coming to receive believers is so that He can be where they are—on the earth. Instead, He said that the purpose is so that they can be where He is—in heaven.” [Renald Showers, *Maranatha Our Lord, Come!*, p. 158].

The Lord’s promises of a place to dwell are in perfect alignment with the Jewish wedding ceremony. Christ came and was betrothed to a bride. He is now back at His Father’s house preparing the accommodations to which He will take His bride when He comes for her. In His Father’s house will be ample dwelling places for the Bride of Christ; the Bride will be completely accommodated and cared for. The New Jerusalem of Revelation 21:10-27 describes the eternal abode of the saints. How all this relates to the home of the glorified saints after the Rapture and during the Millennium is unclear to me. It is possible this will be our home during the Millennium while it is still located at the

Father's house and we will "commute," so to speak, to rule and reign with Christ on earth during the Kingdom although I think that is unlikely. It is more likely we will dwell here on earth where the Lord is and where we will be serving Him. It is also possible the Lord was speaking of some temporary housing prepared for the Bride until the return to earth to rule and reign with Him begins. Dwelling place, *μονή*, can carry the concept of a station along a route as a place to stay on the journey. [G. Abbott-Smith, *A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament*; E. A. Sophocles, *Greek Lexicon of the Roman and Byzantine Periods (From B.C. 146 to A.D. 1100)*, s.v. "μονή"]. We could probably make a loose analogy with our system of motels along our highway system in this country. It is possible that the place Jesus went to prepare for the disciples will be a temporary place to stay for the seven plus years from the Rapture to the Second Coming. "Though the term *mone* is capable of bearing a rather wide semantic range of various types of dwelling places, one confirmed sense in classical literature is that of a 'stopping place,' 'a station,' or even 'hut for watching in a field.' Thus, a place for a seven-year stay before the millennium is entirely within the scope of the semantic range for *mone*. If John used *mone* in a sense similar to that found in classical Greek, then he would have Jesus describing the dwelling places in heaven as temporary places of abode where we await Christ's return to earth in power and great glory. Jesus' meaning, then, is simply that there is plenty of room in heaven for all who will believe in Him following His departure from the earth." [George A. Gunn, "Jesus and the Rapture: John 14" in *Evidence for the Rapture: A Biblical Case for Pretribulationism*, p. 112].

John 14:1 is kind of an interpretive nightmare concerning "believe in God, believe also in Me." Without digging into the grammar too much, it can be indicative (descriptive) or imperative (command) or both. The NET Bible believes it is both thus rendering it, "You believe in God; believe also in Me." The word *πιστεύω* means faith/trust/believe. In this context, Jesus is speaking to men who already believe in Him and have justifying faith, but they are about to be tested by means of His crucifixion and by His departure to the Father. This will be a period of turmoil and persecution. He had just finished telling them He was going to be betrayed, He was going to be leaving them, and even Peter was going to deny Him. As a result, they were distressed. He is assuring them that He will come back for them at some point in the future. In my opinion, considering the context, this would have been better rendered, "Trust in God; trust also in Me." Almost no one translates it this way, but I think this would eliminate a lot of confusion. The confusion flows from the soteriological aspect of the word; people want to associate its use with justification salvation and that isn't the context in this verse although almost all commentaries at least somewhat lean to that interpretation. Dr. Tenney erroneously makes this verse entirely about having justifying faith in Christ [Merrill C. Tenney, *John: The Gospel of Belief*, pp. 212-213]. Morris interprets to mean Jesus is encouraging them to continue in the faith which also does not fit the context [Leon Morris, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Gospel According to John*, p. 566]. I did find three translations that translate *πιστεύω* as "trust" and they are the *Complete Jewish Bible*, the *NIV*, and the *New Living Translation*. Jesus is telling them not to be troubled by these things because He will return for them; therefore, they need to trust Him to do that and thereby enjoy the comfort that knowledge should bring to

them in the midst of what is about to come. When they trust that promise, they can be about the work He will be assigning them to do in His absence.

“I will come,” ἔρχομαι, is a present tense verb, but it represents a future coming with no time indication, it could be near or far. This suggests the doctrine of imminency which supports the Rapture of the Church in these verses. The Lord's return for the Church could happen at any moment and that has been the case since His ascension. This is a futuristic usage of the present tense. “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.... While the present is thus used ‘in appearance for the future,’ it in reality retains its own temporal and essential force, being employed to denote a future action ‘either because it is already firmly resolved upon or because it follows because of some unalterable law.’” [Dana and Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament*, p. 185 and Robert G. Gromacki, “The Imminent Return of Jesus Christ” in *Grace Journal* 6, no. 3 (Fall 1965): 11-22]. Moulton wrote, “We may define the futural present as differing from the future tense mainly in the tone of assurance which is imparted.” [James Hope Moulton, *A Grammar of New Testament Greek*]. The use of the present tense to refer to future events differs from using the future tense in the sense that it is an assurance the future event will happen.

For example, when Jesus Christ said He will be handed over to be crucified (Mt. 26:2), He used a present tense verb for an event still in the future. Jesus used the same word with the same futuristic connotation in John 21:22 when He said to Peter, “If I want him to remain until I come, what is that to you?” This is also a confirmation of imminency. It also rules out the possibility that the Lord was referring to His post resurrection appearances prior to His Ascension. Shortly after He said these words to Peter, He returned to the Father. This is important because some theologians who deny that John 14:1-3 is about the Rapture of the Church, claim Jesus' promise to come again refers only to His appearances after His Resurrection and prior to His Ascension.

“[W]e can conclude that Jesus purposely used the present tense of the verb to make the promise of His future coming a confident assertion—an assurance or guarantee to the apostles that His future coming was certain.” [Renald Showers, *Maranatha Our Lord, Come!*, p. 156].

Receive, παραλαμβάνω, means to take into close association, take (to oneself), or to take with/along [BDAG. s.v. “παραλαμβάνω”]. There is an element of receiving something from another person [Liddell and Scott's *Greek-English Lexicon*, s.v. “παραλαμβάνω”]. When Christ left, he placed those who belong to Him in the care of the Comforter, or Holy Spirit, and He told them this just a few moments later. The assumption then is the Lord is telling them that He will return to once again care directly for them by taking them with Him back to the place prepared for them at the Father's house. It is also interesting to note that παραλαμβάνω was used in Matthew 1:20, 24 to refer to taking a wife in reference to Joseph and Mary. Jesus is coming back for the Bride of Christ to take her to her wedding ceremony with Him. Once again, the analogy of Jewish wedding procedures is alluded to.

Considering the order of the Passover Seder, it is likely that just before Jesus began telling them these things, they had finished singing the Hallel Psalm 118. Psalm 118:26 reads in part, "Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord." This is the Messianic cry Jesus said the Jewish people must call out as a request for Him to return and deliver them in Matthew 23:39. "If we remember that Jesus and the disciples had just finished singing Psalm 118, it would be a reasonable assumption that the present tense ('I come') actually reflects 'the one who comes' of Psalm 118:26. Jesus would therefore have been saying something like, 'I, the blessed One who is coming in the name of the Lord, will receive you to Myself.... Assuming that 'come' refers to Psalm 118:26 also helps to explain the adverb 'again' in John 14:3. Psalm 118 ultimately looks to a fulfillment in the day of the Lord and the millennial kingdom. Jesus had come to Israel *offering* the kingdom. The disciples had believed that Jesus was the 'coming one,' but Jesus had not *delivered* the kingdom. Having come once, Jesus now says that He will come *again*. It is at this next coming that the day of the Lord will be ushered in and the kingdom will surely be set up without delay.... Psalm 118 has in view the entire 'day of the Lord' scenario, including both the tribulation period (vv. 10-13) and the millennium (vv. 14-24). His 'coming' in this psalm is a coming both to judge (tribulation period) and to deliver (millennium). In John 14, Jesus expands the concept of His 'coming' to include a coming for His disciples to bring them to the Father's house, not into the millennial kingdom. In keeping with the mystery character of the rapture, Psalm 118 does not see this particular deliverance, but Jesus reveals it in the context of Psalm 118." [George A. Gunn, "Jesus and the Rapture: John 14" in *Evidence for the Rapture: A Biblical Case for Pretribulationism*, pp. 116; 121, n. 61).

It is a serious exegetical error to neglect, change, or marginalize the Old Testament references to the Day of the Lord and the Kingdom because the truth of the Lord's coming becomes obscured or factually changed in order to meet predetermined theological conclusions. The allusion to Psalm 118 is an example. It is a part of the Passover Seder and as such it has important significance. It seems reasonable to conclude that Dr. Gunn has recognized that significance in connection with the Rapture of the Church.

Those who are not premillennial dispensationalists have to come up with alternate ways to explain John 14:1-3 in order to justify their theology.

One popular theory is that Jesus comes to each believer upon his/her death to take them to Heaven with Him. This view means the Lord returns for His saints each and every time one dies which is not what this Scripture says. In context, this says He will return for His disciples, but considering all the Rapture texts together, we know He will return once and take His Bride back to His Father's house all at one time. The only specific text in the New Testament that speaks about believers being accompanied to their abode was Luke 16:22 where the poor man, Lazarus, was transported to Abraham's bosom by angels. But even this text is out of date, because Abraham's bosom is closed and deceased believer's in this age go directly to the presence of the Lord in whatever intermediate state in which they exist.

Another view wants people to believe that Jesus was speaking about post-Resurrection, pre-Ascension appearances to the disciples. We've already disproved this by the Lord's

use of ἔρχομαι, "I come" in John 21:22. At that point in time, He is almost ready to depart to the Father and He refers to His future coming. The problem for this view is the Lord is referring to going away and then coming back for His people. This view instead thinks the Lord is coming to appear immediately after His Resurrection to His people and then leave without taking them to be where He is.

There is also a theory that claims the Lord is talking about the coming of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. One problem with this view is that the Lord hadn't yet even told them about the coming of the Spirit. He will do so in short order, but He hadn't done it yet so they wouldn't understand what He was saying. This view destroys any semblance of meaning in terms of communication; it denies the plain truth of the Lord's words. When the Holy Spirit came, believers did not leave earth to be with the Lord. Jesus did not return on Pentecost as He said He was going to do when coming for believers. Jesus said He was going to receive the believers to Himself; at Pentecost, the believers do the receiving when they receive the Holy Spirit. Even John Calvin said, "This *return* must not be understood as referring to the Holy Spirit, as if Christ had manifested to the disciples some new presence of himself by the Spirit." [John Calvin and William Pringle, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, p. 83].

Many theologians think the Lord was referring to His return at the Second Coming but we will see there are numerous differences between the Lord coming for His Bride and coming in judgment at the end of the Tribulation.

Some theologians resort to spiritualizing this text in order to support their theology. Posttribulationist Gundry used this trick to support his theology. "In order to console the disciples concerning His going away, Jesus tells them that His leaving will work to their advantage. He is going to prepare for them *spiritual abodes within His own Person*. Dwelling in these abiding places, they will belong to God's household.... Thus, the rapture will not have the purpose of taking them to heaven. It rather follows from their being in Christ, in whom each believer already has an abode." [Robert H. Gundry, *The Church and the Tribulation*, p. 154]. This assertion is simply ridiculous. No one reading that Scripture could come away from reading it thinking this is what it means.

Dennis Waltemeyer
Fredericksburg Bible Church