

The Second Coming of Jesus Christ (1)

Introduction:

The last time we were in 1 Thessalonians 4, which was two weeks ago, we considered the teaching of the paragraph contained in verses 9-12. It reads as follows:

⁹Now concerning brotherly love you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another, ¹⁰for that indeed is what you are doing to all the brothers throughout Macedonia. But we urge you, brothers, to do this more and more, ¹¹and to aspire to live quietly, and to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we instructed you, ¹²so that you may walk properly before outsiders and be dependent on no one.

Here the apostle expressed his desire that the Christians in the church at Thessalonica would grow in their love for one another more and more. For although God Himself had “taught” them to love one another, that is, He produced in each of His people this grace of love for one another when He caused them to be born again, nevertheless, they all needed to grow in the degree and the quality of their love for one another.

We did not address the other instructions that the apostle included with this injunction to love more and more. They include instruction in three areas of life. They were (1) to aspire to live quietly, (2) to mind their own affairs, (3) and to work with their own hands. The Christian life should be a simple, ordered life, one in which the Christian is able to live for the Lord, before the Lord, with a clear conscience and with a credible profession of one’s faith. The Christian is to be diligent in work, which will enhance his witness in the community and will keep him from personal need.

Here are the words of **Matthew Henry** on these instructions:

Observe, 1. The apostle exhorts to these duties: that they should *study to be quiet*. It is the most desirable thing to have a calm and quiet temper, and to be of a peaceable and quiet behaviour. This tends much to our own and others’ happiness; and Christians should study how to be quiet. We should be ambitious and industrious how to be calm and quiet in our minds, in patience to possess our own souls, and to be quiet towards others; or of a meek and mild, a gentle and peaceable disposition, not given to strife, contention, or division. Satan is very busy to disquiet us; and we have that in our own hearts that disposes us to be disquiet; therefore let us study to be quiet. It follows, *Do your own business*. When we go beyond this, we expose ourselves to a great deal of inquietude. Those who are busy-bodies, meddling in other men’s matters, generally have but little quiet in their own minds and cause great disturbances among their neighbours; at least they seldom mind the other exhortation, to be diligent in their own calling, *to work with their own hands*; and yet this was what the apostle commanded them, and what is required of us also. Christianity does not discharge us from the work and duty of our particular callings, but teaches us to be diligent therein.

With verse 13 the apostle began to address a new subject. Perhaps he wrote of this because he had heard (from Timothy?) of their confusion and concern about these matters. Some of these Christians had been distressed concerning those Christians who had already died. Paul explained to them that they would be reunited with their loved ones, that is, with those who had died in the Lord. God will cause them to come with the Lord Jesus at His Second Coming. Those who are yet alive at that time, those who are in Christ, will be caught up to meet them in the air. They will forever be with one another and with their Lord.

Let us read this paragraph of **1 Thessalonians 4:13-18**.

¹³But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. ¹⁴For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁵For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁶For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. ¹⁸Therefore encourage one another with these words. (1 Thess. 4:13-18)

Let us work through these verses in order to understand precisely what is being said.

I. Understanding the details of our passage

In **verse 13** Paul expressed his concern that these Christians were grieving to a degree that was not warranted. He wrote, ***“But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep.”*** These Christians had been uninformed about these matters. Not all Christians in those early days were uninformed in the way that these Christians were. Indeed, the Christians in the church at Corinth had been ignorant, some perhaps even errant, regarding their understanding of their future resurrection from the dead. Paul had to teach them about the reality of the future resurrection of the body. On the other hand, Martha, the sister of Lazarus, who had died, was well informed about the future resurrection of the dead. After Lazarus had died, and Jesus appeared several days afterward. Jesus sought to console Martha. He said to her, “Your brother will rise”, that is, rise again from the dead. Martha responded to Him, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day” (John 11:24). She was knowledgeable and confident regarding the future bodily resurrection of the dead, and that it will occur on “the last day.” But these Christians at Thessalonica were uninformed. However, Paul would not have them remain in this state of ignorance. He would instruct them rightly, for he had a word from the Lord about this matter.

Paul described Christians who had died as ones who were “asleep.” This is a common description of those who have died in the Lord. Specifically, it concerns ***the bodies*** of those who had been redeemed through faith, but then had died. Their bodies are as though they were sleeping in their graves. They were as ones who would one day be awakened from their sleep of death, coming forth unto eternal life.

We emphasize that this description of dead believers being asleep has reference to their ***bodies***, for there are those who teach that this “sleep” is also the state of the ***souls*** of those who are redeemed, not just their bodies. This doctrine is commonly referred to as “soul-sleep.” Seventh Day Adventists believe and teach this false doctrine, as do Jehovah’s Witnesses. They believe that when a Christian dies, it is like when one falls to sleep. The one who is asleep is not mindful of the passing of time until he awakens in the morning, rising to a new day. So, when Christians die, they enter a state of unconsciousness, only to come out of that “soul sleep” on the day of the resurrection. But the Scriptures make it clear that when a Christian dies, his soul is consciously in the presence of the Lord (2 Cor. 5:8), even while his body is “asleep” in the grave. When the thief on his cross next to Jesus said to Him, “Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom”, Jesus responded, “Truly, I say to you, *today you will be with me in Paradise*” (Luke 23:43). The thief died and his body was no doubt buried, but he was with the Lord Jesus in paradise. His body was asleep in the grave until the day of the resurrection, but his soul was consciously with the Lord and His people.

Christians alone may have assurance that when Jesus returns, they will be reunited with their loved ones who died in faith. Christians are not to regard the death of believing loved ones as “others who have no hope.” Those who die in unbelief have no hope of salvation. They have no hope for a happy reunion with loved ones, when Jesus Christ returns at His Second Coming. Unbelievers die in their sins and will face the Lord Jesus in the Day of Judgment at which time He will damn them their sins. But Christians have this glorious hope of reunion with their believing loved ones. Their sound assurance is based upon God’s Word and substantiated by the resurrection of their Lord and Savior from death on that first resurrection Sunday long ago.

Paul was more direct in **verse 14** on how this future event would transpire. ***“For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep.”*** The wording is interesting in the manner that it is expressed. It declares that **God** is bringing with the Lord Jesus and those who are “asleep.” God has decreed that He would accomplish His purposes at the end of the age through Jesus Christ. “Jesus is God’s agent in the final act, commissioned to raise and muster the dead.”¹ The same God that raised Jesus from the dead, will raise from the dead those who are asleep in Jesus.

In **verse 15** Paul said that Christians who are alive at the coming of the Lord Jesus would not be caught up to join Him prior to the gathering of those Christians who have “fallen asleep.” ***“For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep.”*** Paul claims to have been given “a word from the Lord” respecting this matter. The Lord had revealed His will to Paul His apostle. How or when God had given this “word” to Paul is not stated. But Paul declared that all believers will be caught up together, though those who are asleep in Jesus will be summoned first, as we see in **verse 16**: ***“For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God and the dead in Christ will rise first.”***

It is the Lord Jesus who calls His people to meet Him and one another in the air. He does so with a ***“cry of command.”*** He will issue a command, first calling those who belong to Him to come forth from the graves. Those bodies will ascend and be reunited with their souls, which He brings with Him from heaven. And then His command will be given to Christians who are alive all over the world, to be transformed in an instant, their mortal bodies becoming immortal, and they ascending to meet the Lord in the air. Paul wrote of this in 1 Corinthians 15:

Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed--⁵²in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.⁵³For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. (1 Cor. 15:51-53)

Not only does the Lord Jesus come with a “cry of command”, but He also comes ***“with the voice of an archangel.”*** The Bible speaks much about angels, but not much about archangels. Paul speaks here of “the voice of an archangel.” But aside from this reference, the word, “archangel”, is only found in **Jude 9**, which reads, “Yet ***Michael the archangel***, in contending with the devil, when he disputed about the body of Moses, dared not bring against him a reviling accusation, but said, ‘The Lord rebuke you!’” Extra canonical Jewish books of the early Christian era identified others, but the Word of God only identifies Michael as an archangel.² We should probably see an archangel as a leading commander of angels. That the Lord shouts with the voice of an archangel, speaks of His great authority, perhaps even as the Commander, as the Lord of hosts.

¹ Nicholl, W. Robert, ed. **The Expositor’s Greek Testament**. Moffat, James, ***The First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians*** (Eerdmans, 1951), p. 37.

² With great danger to my academic credibility, I thought to provide you this from Wikipedia: “Michael and Gabriel are recognized as archangels in Judaism, Islam and by most Christians. Protestants recognize Gabriel as an angel but consider Michael to be the only archangel. Rafael—mentioned in the deuterocanonical Book of Tobit -- is also recognized in the Catholic and Orthodox churches. Gabriel, Michael, and Raphael are venerated in the Roman Catholic Church with a feast on September 29 (between 1921 and 1969, March 24 for Gabriel and October 24 for Raphael), and in the Eastern Orthodox Church on November 8 (if the Julian calendar is used, this corresponds to November 21 in the Gregorian). The named archangels in Islam are Gabriel, Michael, Israfil and Azreal. Jewish literature, such as the Book of Enoch, mentions Metatron as an archangel, called the “highest of the angels”, though the acceptance of this angel is not canonical in all branches of the faith. Some branches of the faiths mentioned have identified a group of seven Archangels, but the actual angels vary, depending on the source. Gabriel, Michael, and Raphael are always mentioned; the other archangels vary, but most commonly include Uriel, who is mentioned in 2 Esdras.” <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Archangel>

But the third description of the manner in which He comes is “*with the sound of the trumpet of God.*” Here is the explanation of **William Hendriksen**:

The trumpet-blast, in this connection, is certainly very fitting. In the old dispensation, when God “came down,” as it were, to meet with his people, this meeting was announced by a trumpet blast (e.g., Exo. 19:16, 17: “and the sound of a trumpet was exceeding loud . . . and Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God”; cf. Exo. 19:19). Hence, when the marriage of the Lamb with his bride reaches its culmination (cf. Rev. 19:7), this trumpet-blast is most appropriate. Also, the trumpet was used as a signal of Jehovah’s coming to rescue his people from hostile oppression (Zeph. 1:16; Zech. 9:14). It was the signal for their deliverance. So also those final trumpet-blast, the signal for the dead to arise, for the living to be changed, and for all the elect to be gathered from the four winds (Matt. 24:31) to meet the Lord, may well be interpreted as being also the fulfillment of the trumpet-ordinance found in Leviticus 25, and, accordingly, as proclaiming liberty throughout the universe for all the children of God, their everlasting jubilee!³

The “dead in Christ” will rise first. The Lord causes the bodies of the dead in Christ to come forth from the graves. Paul was only concerned here with the resurrection of believers. He only speaks of “the dead in Christ” rising first. We read elsewhere, however, of the unconverted also rising from their graves. Our Lord Jesus declared in John 5:24, 25:

“Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth-- those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.” (John 5:28f)

The Lord will cause all to come forth from the graves, but they will be separated upon rising from the dead. Those who are in “the resurrection of condemnation” will be separated from those unto “the resurrection of life.” Paul is speaking here only of this group, the resurrection of the righteous.

After the dead in Christ are raised, Paul then declared in **verse 17**, “*Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord*” (verse 17). Paul is not concerned here about declaring what happens to these Christians upon their joining Christ. He does not say that He turned around and returned with His people to heaven, only to return after seven years of tribulation on earth, although many assume that this is what will occur. The point that Paul was stressing was that from this occasion of the rapture, even unto eternity, “*so we will always be with the Lord.*”

This word of our future translation to be with the Lord and with His people is to be an encouragement to Christians. Paul concluded this paragraph by writing in **verse 18**, “*Therefore encourage one another with these words.*”

Now this great prophetic event is commonly referred to as the *rapture*. The word, rapture is not derived from a Greek word, the language of the New Testament. It is actually from the Latin language-- *raptura*--meaning “to catch up” or “take away.” It has been viewed throughout history as one aspect of that great endtime event, the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.

II. Understanding this future event

The Greek word most commonly used to refer to the return of Jesus Christ is the word *παρουσία* (*parousia*). It is commonly translated as “coming.” It is in our text, **1 Thessalonians 4:15**, which reads, “For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the *coming*

³ William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary. Exposition of Thessalonians, the Pastorals, and Hebrews* (Baker Academic, 1955), p. 117.

(παρουσία) of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep.” But this word is found in many other places as well. Below are all the verses in the New Testament that uses this Greek word, in which the Second Coming of Jesus Christ is referenced.

Matthew 24:3. “Now as He sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, ‘Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your *coming*, and of the end of the age?’”

Matthew 24:27. “For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so also will the *coming* of the Son of Man be.”

Matthew 24:36-39. “But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only. ³⁷But as the days of Noah were, so also will the *coming* of the Son of Man be. ³⁸For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, ³⁹and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the *coming* of the Son of Man be.”

1 Corinthians 15:23. “But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's at His *coming*.”

1 Thessalonians 2:19. “For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Is it not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His *coming*?”

1 Thessalonians 3:13. “...so that He may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the *coming* of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints.”

1 Thessalonians 4:15. “For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the *coming* of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep.”

1 Thessalonians 5:23. “Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the *coming* of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

2 Thessalonians 2:1. “Now, brethren, concerning the *coming* of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, we ask you, ²not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of Christ had come.”

2 Thessalonians 2:8. “And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His *coming*.”

James 5:7f. “Therefore be patient, brethren, until the *coming* of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain. You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the *coming* of the Lord is at hand.”

2 Peter 1:16. “For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and *coming* of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty.”

2 Peter 3:3-4. “...knowing this first: that scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, ⁴and saying, ‘Where is the promise of His *coming*? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation.’”

2 Peter 3:11. “Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, ¹²looking for and hastening the *coming* of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat?”

1 John 2:28. “And now, little children, abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His *coming*.”

It is quite clear, I would argue, that each of these references to the *παρουσία* (*parousia*) speaks to one event at the end of the age, even the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. From the verses above, we may conclude that when the “coming” of Jesus Christ takes place, the following events will occur:

- (1) When Jesus Christ comes, He will raise His people from the dead, gathering unto Him that they will dwell with Him through eternity.
- (2) “The lawless one” will be destroyed at His coming.
- (3) When the coming of the Lord occurs, He will defeat His enemies and judge all of the inhabitants of the world.
- (4) When the coming of Jesus Christ takes place, this present universe will be dissolved and He will create a new heavens and earth.

The Holy Scriptures, we would argue, set forth the future coming of Jesus Christ is a single, future event that will bring an end to human history in this present world. It will be a day in which He will judge the world, saving His people from their sin and damning all others to their just condemnation. I would argue that the rapture that Paul set forth here in 1 Thessalonians 4:13 is but one aspect of that one Second Coming of the Lord. In asserting this, some would falsely accuse is of “not believing in the rapture.” But this is not true. The Scriptures certainly foretells of the future rapture of those redeemed by Jesus Christ. But the Word of God declares that this rapture is the same event as the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, not a different event that is separate from His Second Coming. Nor is the rapture to be understood as the first stage of the Second Coming, the second stage being seven years later when Jesus returns to the earth. There is one Second Coming of Jesus Christ. It is depicted by this word “appearing”, which is the translation of the Greek word, *παρουσία* (*parousia*).

Now in order for us not to be uniformed about this matter, it is necessary that we address...

III. The errant view of the pre-tribulation rapture

1. The beliefs of those who hold to a pretribulation rapture

We are asserting that the Holy Scriptures foretell a single future event of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. Most believers, however, have embraced a different understanding of our passage. They believe that the Second Coming of Jesus Christ will occur in two stages. The first stage of the Second Coming, they believe, is the rapture of the Church. They say that this rapture is an event that is imminent, that it will take place suddenly, that there is no event foretold in the Scriptures that must occur between now and the rapture. They say that Jesus will return at any moment, to rapture His Church to be with Him. They then assert that a period of 7 years of tribulation will occur on the earth, after the Church is removed. Only after this seven years of tribulation, which they say is the fulfillment of the 70th week of Daniel’s prophecy, then the Second Coming of Jesus Christ will take place.

It should be understood that they teach the rapture will not include all people through history who are redeemed through Jesus Christ. In other words, they do not teach that the rapture will include all New Testament believers and Old Testament saints. They teach that the rapture will only include New Testament believers, which they regard as the Church. They believe that the Old Testament believers will not be raised from the dead until seven years after the rapture of the church, at the onset of a future Jewish millennium, which will occur at the second stage of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.

The pretribulation rapture teaching requires multiple future resurrections from the dead. Many would not affirm this, but this is the outcome of their pretribulation rapture belief. (1) They say that only those members of the true Church, those who become Christians between Pentecost and the rapture of the Church, will be resurrected at the rapture. (2) They say that Jewish believers will be raised from the dead seven years later at the Second Coming, who will then populate an earthly Jewish millennium. (3) There will be those who become Christians during the millennium, who die but must then be resurrected throughout the millennium. (4) They say that the unconverted of all of human history will come forth from their graves at the end of the future 1,000 year millennium in order to be judged at the Great White Throne Judgment. They do not believe in a general resurrection of the dead, as our Lord Jesus taught in John 5:28f. They do not believe in a one end time general judgment of all mankind, which is taught in numerous places in the Scriptures. They believe that the Bible teaches a number of future resurrections and a number of future judgments that the Lord Jesus will preside over as Judge.

Below is a typical description of the dispensational view of the pre-tribulation rapture and what follows.

Article XVIII—The Blessed Hope

We believe that, according to the Word of God, the next great event in the fulfillment of prophecy will be the coming of the Lord in the air to receive to Himself into heaven both His own who are alive and remain unto His coming, and also all who have fallen asleep in Jesus, and that this event is the blessed hope set before us in the Scripture, and for this we should be constantly looking (John 14:1-3; 1 Cor. 15:51-52; Phil. 3:20; 1 Thess. 4:13-18; Titus 2:11-14).

Article XIX—The Tribulation

We believe that the translation of the church will be followed by the fulfillment of Israel's seventieth week (Daniel 9:27; Rev. 6:1-19:21) during which the church, the body of Christ, will be in heaven. The whole period of Israel's seventieth week will be a time of judgment on the whole earth, at the end of which the times of the Gentiles will be brought to a close. The latter half of this period will be the time of Jacob's trouble (Jer. 30:7), which our Lord called the great tribulation (Matt. 24:15-21). We believe that universal righteousness will not be realized previous to the second coming of Christ, but that the world is day by day ripening for judgment and that the age will end with a fearful apostasy.

Article XX—The Second Coming of Christ

We believe that the period of great tribulation in the earth will be climaxed by the return of the Lord Jesus Christ to the earth as He went, in person on the clouds of heaven, and with power and great glory to introduce the millennial age, to bind Satan and place him in the abyss, to lift the curse which now rests upon the whole creation, to restore Israel to her own land and to give her the realization of God's covenant promises, and to bring the whole world to the knowledge of God (Deut. 30:1-10; Isa. 11:9; Ezek. 37:21-28; Matt. 24:15-25:46; Acts 15:16-17; Rom. 8:19-23; 11:25-27; 1 Tim. 4:1-3; 2 Tim. 4:1-3; 2 Tim. 3:1-5; Rev. 20:1-3).

Article XXI—The Eternal State

We believe that at death the spirits and souls of those who have trusted in the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation pass immediately into His presence and there remain in conscious bliss until the resurrection of the glorified body when Christ comes for His own, whereupon soul and body reunited shall be associated with Him forever in glory; but the spirits and souls of the unbelieving remain after death conscious of condemnation and in misery until the final judgment of the great white throne at the close of the millennium, when soul and body reunited shall be cast into the lake of fire, not to be annihilated, but to

be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of His power (Luke 16:19-26; 23:42; 2 Cor. 5:8; Phil. 1:23; 2 Thess. 1:7-9; Jude 6-7; Rev. 20:11-15).⁴

There are a number of errant positions presented in the above statement. It advocates the Second Coming of Jesus Christ is in two stages, separated by a seven-year tribulation period. It promotes a 1,000 year Jewish millennium on earth. It denies a general judgment of mankind, separating the judgment of believers from that of unbelievers by over 1,000 years. It advocates two separate identities for the church and the state of Israel and that they have two different destinies in God's program.

In contrast to the above view, we advocate the following: *The Bible foretells a single Second Coming of Jesus Christ, at which time He will bring all mankind into a general judgment. He will then separate the redeemed from the damned. The redeemed will be granted entrance into the new heavens and new earth, even the New Jerusalem, in which they will dwell with their Lord for eternity. The damned will be consigned to eternal punishment.*

2. Consider two errant arguments of those who hold to a pretribulation rapture that occurs seven years before the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. There are many others, but we will just look at these two today.

(1) "One will be taken, and one will be left"

In our Lord's Olivet Discourse He described His future judgment.⁵

⁴⁰Then two men will be in the field; one will be taken and one left. ⁴¹Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one left. ⁴²Therefore, stay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming.

Some see this as describing His judgment upon Jerusalem by the Romans in AD 70. Others see this as a reference to the Second Coming of Jesus Christ when the Lord will separate the righteous from the unrighteous. Dispensationalists teach that this is a prophecy of *the pre-tribulation rapture of the church* before a future tribulation period. Those who hold this latter position is the majority of today's evangelical Christians. The very popular 12 volume fiction series, "Left Behind", written by **Tim LaHaye** and **Jerry Jenkins**, is entitled "Left Behind" based on these verses in Matthew 24:40f, or so it appears to me, but I could be mistaken about this. This belief they espouse is a common misunderstanding of these words of our Lord. They teach that those "taken away" are the ones the Lord is taking with them to heaven. But those who believe this ignore the context and they misapply these verses to be a prophecy of a pre-tribulation rapture, that is not taught in Scripture, in my opinion. We can see their misunderstanding of these verses clearly, if we consider what our Lord was saying to His disciples. He was warning them to be prepared for His coming, for His coming would take place in the same manner as the flood of Noah's day came upon the unexpected world. But the ones who were "left behind" in our Lord's words were not those who drowned in the flood, but rather the ones left behind were Noah and his family. The ones who were swept away by the flood are parallel with those Lord described as being "taken away." Do you understand what we are saying? In the context of our Lord's Words, the ones "left behind" were the saved ones, whereas LaHaye and Jenkins and all others who believe the pre-tribulation rapture is discussed here, believe the ones "left behind" were the unsaved.

⁴ This is a selection from the statement of faith of the Dallas Theological Seminary.

⁵ Some see this as describing His judgment upon Jerusalem by the Romans in AD 70. Others see this as a reference to the Second Coming when the Lord will separate the righteous from the unrighteous. Dispensationalists teach that this describes the rapture of the church before a future tribulation period.

But in addition to this, it is clear in my opinion that our Lord was speaking of His “coming” to judge Jerusalem and Judah in the destruction by the Romans in AD 70. But we will speak of this another time.

(2) “Christ is coming as a thief in the night”

Our Lord used a metaphor of a householder, who should be prepared for *the thief* that may show up at a time the householder may not expect him. In giving this metaphor, our Lord pressed upon His disciples the importance of being ready for His second coming.

⁴³But know this, that if the master of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. ⁴⁴Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect. (Mat 24:36-44)

Here again is one of the sources for an expression that is commonly used, but without scriptural warrant, to a future pre-tribulation rapture of the church. They say when the Lord comes for His church, He will come *secretly* and *quietly*, “*as a thief in the night.*” Christ will slip in and snatch His people from the earth and return to heaven with them, to leave the people on the earth wondering what happened and how so many people are suddenly missing. Here is how some, who hold to a pretribulation rapture, speak of this event:

“His appearance in the clouds will be veiled to the human eye and NO ONE WILL SEE HIM. He will slip in, slip out; move in to get His jewels and slip out under the cover of night.”⁶

“Quickly and INVISIBLY, unperceived by the world, the Lord will come as a thief in the night and catch away His waiting saints.”⁷

“[The rapture] will be a SECRET appearing, and only the believers will know about it.”⁸

“In the Rapture, only the Christians see Him--it’s a mystery, a SECRET.”⁹

“It will be a SECRET rapture--QUIET, NOISELESS, suddenly as the step of the thief in the night. All that the world will know will be that multitudes at once have gone.”¹⁰

But this is to misapply the verse and expression to an event never prophesied, but further, it misunderstands the meaning that our Lord intended by the metaphor of the “thief.” Our Lord was not intending to say that His coming would be as a thief in the way that a thief comes *quietly* and *unnoticed*. But rather, the idea is that as a thief comes unexpectedly. In the same way the Lord Jesus would return at His second coming unexpected by those who were not prepared and looking for His coming.

One passage that clearly dispels this idea that the Lord will come *secretly* and *quietly* like a thief is **2 Peter 3:10**,

“But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then *the heavens will pass away with a roar*, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.”

⁶ All of these quotes were taken from Ralph Woodrow, **Great Prophecies of the Bible** (Ralph Woodrow Evangelistic Association, 1989), pp. 2f. However, for reference purposes I have included his footnotes for these quotes. This first of the five is from M. R. DeHaan, **Thirty-Five Simple Studies on the Major Themes in Revelation** (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1946), p. 111.

⁷ Oswald J. Smith, **Tribulation or Rapture--Which?** (London: The Sovereign Grace Advent testimony), pp. 3, 10.

⁸ Finis Jennings Dake, **Dake’s Annotated Reference Bible** (Atlanta: Dake Bible Sales, Inc., 1963), p. 227.

⁹ George B. Fletcher, **Will the Second Coming of Christ be in Two Stages?** p. 2.

¹⁰ Herschel W. Ford, **Seven Simple Sermons on the Second Coming** (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1946), p. 44.

He is coming like a thief comes, not in the sense that He will be quiet or unnoticed, but that He will come when *unexpected* by His enemies.

Those who hold to a pretribulation rapture and a future Jewish millennium of 1,000 years' duration teach that after the millennium this world will be renovated by fire and a new heaven and new earth will be created suited for eternity. But if you look at 2 Peter 3:10, Peter wrote that the renovation of the heavens and earth will take place at the Second Coming of Christ, not 1,000 years after the second coming, as taught by premillennialists. Premillennialists have to put a 1,000 years in this verse between the words "come like a thief" and "then the heavens will pass away with a roar."

Now, the second coming of Christ "as a thief" describes how unbelievers will be unprepared and caught unaware at His coming. In contrast, the Lord's coming will not overtake His people as a thief surprises his prey. We read in 1 Thessalonians

¹Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers, you have no need to have anything written to you. ²***For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night.*** ³While people are saying, "There is peace and security," then sudden destruction will come upon them as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. ⁴***But you are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief.*** ⁵For you are all children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness. ⁶So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober. ⁷For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, are drunk at night. ⁸But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. ⁹For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁰who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him. ¹¹Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing. (1 Thess. 5:1-11)

We will address this passage next Lord's Day, Lord willing.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God,
and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen. (2 Cor. 13:14)
