

THE BOOK OF FIRST THESSALONIANS

"The Rapture Question" (3)

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

Introduction

1. Here is a key passage for the rapture of the church. There is a word signifying the concept of rapture here ("caught up" v. 17). The event concerns those "in Christ" (vv. 14, 16), hence only for those baptized into the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13). The rapture removes ignorance and provides hope (v. 13) and comfort (v. 18).
2. The chronology of events for the rapture is given:
  - a. Descent of Christ (v. 16).
  - b. Sound effects (v. 16).
  - c. Resurrection of dead (v. 16).
  - d. Simultaneous rapture of dead and living (v. 17).
  - e. United with Christ in air (v. 17).
3. As outlined by Scripture, the rapture is an any-moment event. It is secret and imminent. Many object to this stance of the Word of God, but there are good biblical reasons for supporting it. Here are some of those reasons:

1. LINGUISTICAL REASONS

a. Words

The important words for consideration of this imminent rapture include the following: 1) enggus (Matt. 26:45); 2) enggizo (James 5:8); 3) parousia (1 Thess. 2:19); 4) apocalupsis (Rom. 8:19); 5) epihaneia (2 Tim. 4:8).

b. Contexts

A "word" may have several meanings, but a "term" is a word which has a single meaning in a given context. Hence, meaning is determined by context. This is an enormous principle. Imminence for the second coming of our Lord is taught by enggus (Phil. 4:5) and enggizo (Rom. 13:12). While the words used for His second coming may have different meanings, it is

perfectly suitable to the contexts to have the idea of rapture in many instances. These are samples: 1) parousia (1 Thess. 4:15; 5:23); 2) apocalupsis (1 Cor. 1:7; 1 Pet. 1:7, 13); 3) epiphaneia (Tit. 2:13).

### c. Conclusions

While words do not in and of themselves determine a doctrine, this is no reason against their support of a particular truth. The words used for the coming of Christ give more characterization of His coming than categorization. Hence, it becomes clear there is a coming of Christ "for" His saints in the air and another one "with" His saints to the earth (cf. rapture in Rom. 8:19 and advent in 2 Thess. 1:7).

## 2. DISPENSATIONAL REASONS

A dispensation is a way by which God administers His eternal purpose among men. To study the Bible dispensationally means the Bible is taken literally. The customary and normal usage of language is accepted.

### a. Distinctions 1 Cor. 10:32

This is a cornerstone text for dispensationalists. It avers the distinctions between 1) Jews (Israelites) or people born in the line of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. 2) Gentiles (all others outside of Israelites). 3) Church (both Jews and Gentiles baptized by the Holy Spirit into the body of Christ).

### b. Destinations

1) Israel/Gentiles. It is predicted that these will pass through the tribulation period. Key passages for this include Daniel 9:24-27, Matthew 24, 25, and Revelation 6-19.

2) Church. It is promised that the church will not experience the tribulation, although it can expect difficult experiences (cf. John 16:33; Rev. 3:10).

## 3. HERMENEUTICAL REASONS 2 Thess. 2:1-12.

### a. Assumptions

Paul's first visit to Thessalonica had afforded him an opportunity to teach a great deal of eschatology. This is supported by his frequent reference to previous instruction (2 Thess. 2:5, 6; 5:2). Questions concerning the rapture, therefore, are raised by the Thessalonians and these are answered in the second epistle. Some actually taught the Thessalonians that the rapture was not pretribulational. To prove it, they said the tribulation had already begun and that they were in it (vv. 1, 2).

### b. Instructions v. 3.

To counter the false teaching being circulated at Thessalonica, Paul affirmed the tribulation could not come until two specifics were realized:

1) The "falling away." The articular construction here makes the "falling away" definite. Since the best translation for the word is "to depart," it is clear that "the departure" is a reference to the rapture. Hence, the tribulation cannot come until the rapture has taken place (cf. 1 Tim. 4:1 where departure from the faith is noted as a characterization of the last days of the church).

2) The "man of sin." This one will not be revealed until the "hinderer" is taken out of the way. The "hinderer" is the Holy Spirit who is removed at the "departure" for He is in the church (1 Cor. 3:16). It is important to see that the man of sin is revealed after the departure.

Conclusion The rapture is a teaching of the Bible. It is an imminent event. It fits into the dispensational view of Scripture. The signs are for Israel, but the church looks for the Son. There is no reason to question the tribulation being unrelated to the church. Paul quieted the Thessalonians on this point and we should take his revealed counsel. Meanwhile, we are to do two important actions: 1) Look for Christ's coming (1 Cor. 1:7; Tit. 2:13; Phil. 3:20). 2) Direct our lives in the light of His coming (Rom. 13:11-14; James 5:7, 8; 1 John 3:1-3). So be it.