

END TIMES



End Times (Student Lesson Five)– Ascension v Rapture Theory /New Heaven and Earth

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Resurrection Ascension – The Church of Thessalonica



(Church Background)

Thessalonica had a mixed population of Greeks and Romans and a small population of Jews. Enough Jews, numbering about twenty thousand, were present to organize a synagogue in the local. Thessalonica was a high-traffic thoroughfare connecting travelers between continents, specifically Italy and the Far East.

The apostle Paul celebrated the citizens of Thessalonica for their enthusiastic response to the gospel. The Church of Thessalonica is an icon for the region, one of the few with a larger population of non-Jews compared to the Church of Philippi, where Paul had less success earlier in his ministry.

The core message in the epistle to the Thessalonian Church connects to the persecution they have suffered for the positive response to the Gospel in opposition to the secular beliefs embedded in their culture. In the way that many Jewish followers of Messiah were punished for their acceptance of the Messiah, Paul references how the Macedonia Church has also suffered. (1Thess. 2:14-16)

He encourages them not to be moved or to change their position of faith in the face of their affliction. (1Thess. 3:3-5)

He warns them against falling back into the patterns of sin, to abstain from fornication, lust, and uncleanness. (1Thess. 4:1-7)

The final subject the Apostle addressed is their hope in the coming of the Lord, the return of the Messiah. The new, non-Jewish believers are faced with the dilemma of rejecting their traditional secular beliefs for security in a newfound faith.

Many family members of the Thessalonians have died while waiting for the return of the Son of God foreign to their homeland and culture. The people who lived during the time Jesus-Messiah on the earth and became His followers also had great expectancy regarding the teachings of the Apostles concerning the Messiah's return.

The pending expectancy caused many errant teachings and false alarms about the reappearance of Jesus-Messiah. The Apostle must encourage them to hold fast without wavering from the truth they chose to embrace.

Resurrection Ascension – I Thessalonians 4:13-17

IThess 4:13 – 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.

IThess 4:14 – For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him.

IThess 4:15 – 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.

Lesson Notes:

(IThess 4:13) – Many Jews and Gentiles alike believed that His return was imminent and that it would occur in their lifetime. The newfound Jewish believers hoped to make amends for their previous rejection of Him, while the Gentile believers relied upon His return to affirm their decision to reject their cultural and secular influences.

He does not want anyone in the Church, Jews or Gentiles, to be ignorant, without accurate knowledge and information, or ill-informed about the Messiah's return.

As a result of the heightened awareness and expectancy of the Lord's return questions have now been raised about believers that have already died before the Lord's return. How shall they benefit from the promise of eternal life?

Those who have family members who followed their influence to believe in the Son of God (God actively present on Earth) are now pondering the validity of their own faith and fate. The hope for the return of the Messiah was questioned because He had not yet returned while many hopeful believers had died awaiting His return.

Paul does not want the hopeful to be ignorant about those that sleep; those that have died before the re-appearing of the Lord. He does not want them to be sorrowful for their loved ones as those who have no hope or belief in life after death.

(IThess 4:14) – The Apostle reiterates the premise of the resurrection of Christ. He physically died and was raised from the dead by the power of God. The God that raised Christ from the dead had the power to raise all those that died with their faith and hope in the Son of God (God actively present on Earth). The Church must find hope in the resurrection of Jesus, Paul explains, all those that **are asleep in Jesus** (faith and belief the Messiah) will accompany Him when He returns.

(I Thess 4:15) – The Apostle unveils this revelation as word received by God; the “*word of Lord*”. He is not offering a mere opinion, but inspired revelation he has received on this issue in the same manner as God has enabled him to teach and preach on many other aspects of the gospel. (Galatians 1:11-12)

In His revelation the recipients of eternal life are divided into two class types: **those that remain alive** and **those that are asleep**. The difference between the class types goes beyond one group being alive and the other dead. Those that are alive will have a greater challenge than those that are dead. The living must remain and be found faithful upon the return of the Messiah, which implies their status is subject to change. The second class type represents believers that died holding fast to faith in the Messiah, their status of being faithful is not subject to change. Those that are alive should use those that have died as an example of remaining faithful to their belief.

Paul further addresses the lack or absence of an impact that those that are alive can have upon those that are asleep in Jesus. The living believers or non-believers cannot prevent the awakening resurrection of those asleep in Jesus.

The English rendering of **prevent** implies that the first class cannot stop the second class from attaining their inheritance. If we look more closely at the Greek word used in the text we learn that the word “*phthano*” means: “*to anticipate before hand or already attain in advance*”. The teaching in the text reveals that those who remain alive and faithful will not *attain* the promise of eternal life in advance or before those that are asleep.

This revelation should bring hope to the believers that are concerned about family and friends that have preceded them in death. Paul gives them assurance that their believing in Jesus/Messiah will not be in vain and those that have died believing in Him will be the first to receive the reward of eternal life.

IThess 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:

(IThess 4:16) – The Apostles' revelation continues with a description of the second coming of the Messiah. The Lord Himself shall descend. Paul certifies that it will be God descending from heaven not an Angelic representative.

God descending is a literal illustration of God coming to the rescue of man because man cannot ascend to reach God. In many religious interpretations of the Christian faith, there is the errant indication that man can mend his ways and become righteous and pure so that he can ascend into the heavens to live with God. Paul affirms in this revelation that man does not rise or ascend into the Heavens beyond Earth and meet God on equal footing in His domain; instead, God descends from the heavens, making Himself accessible in the clouds in Earth's domain to meet with man.

His appearance will be announced with a shout from an Archangel, the angelic introduction follows the pattern of His first appearance. (Luke 2:8-9,13) The first that will rise to meet with Him are those who died believing in Him. The Messiah will return to the earth on a cloud in the same manner that He departed. (Acts 1:11) He will bring with Him the resurrected dead.

The presence of the resurrected dead offers validation evidence of the true Messiah. Although they will have spiritual bodies that will not reflect the image of former nature, they will have knowledge of their identity and stand as witnesses rescued from death to be made alive forever.

IThess 4:17 – 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.

(IThess 4:17) – Then those that are alive and remain faithful shall be caught up or more accurately they shall “going up, or ascend” together with the resurrected dead in Christ. The appropriate term in Hebrew for *going up or to ascend* is “Aliyah”. The Hebrew term “Aliyah” [ah-lee-ot], is the accurate term that should be used to express “caught up.” As a Biblical term the word illustrates an individual or an entire nation when approaching the presence of God.

Personal ascent -

The Torah service held on every Sabbath required assigned readers to recite pre-selected Torah passages. The final passage that was read in the Torah celebration was assigned to a man seated in the audience. The walk to approach the *bimah* (Jewish altar or pulpit) is called an “Aliyah” [ah-lee-ot], a symbol of the journey to approach the sacred words of God (Torah).

National ascent -

The trek to Jerusalem three times a year to celebrate the High Holy Days was an ascent or “Aliyah” [ah-lee-ot]. All those who lived outside of Jerusalem when making their journey to celebrate the commanded feast had to make a literal ascent when approaching the Holy City because it was elevated higher than any other city in the region.

The Messiah’s return to earth will begin with His descent from the heavens. (4:16)
Those who are alive and remain will ascend alongside those who are resurrected and go up to meet with God. The meeting in the air, among the clouds, illustrates the physical ascent into God’s presence, into the cloud of His glory that has been a signature of His presence throughout scripture. (Exodus 24:18,40:34-35)

Revelation 21:1 – And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea.

Revelation 21:2 – And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

He will establish a New Heaven and Earth:

The first Heaven and Earth, that existed from original creation are said to have “passed away” [parerchomai] a term that means to call forth or beckoned to present, implying to stand before someone greater to be reviewed or judged. The former heaven and earth were both judged during the tribulation period and the judgment concluded with “**no more sea**”; sea is a reference used several times in Revelation referring to mankind. Used here to indicate bringing an end to the age of man. The new heaven and earth will not appear until the first heaven and earth are judged (passed away).

He will present the new holy city, New Jerusalem:

John sees the (new) Jerusalem, the Holy City, coming down out of the New Heaven. The city is a subset of the New Heaven, like Eden was a subset of the Eternal Garden in Genesis. The subset city represents a larger and greater eternal dominion. New Jerusalem, the Holy City, is a microcosm of God's eternal Kingdom (dominion). The Holy City is a symbol of God's ruling authority over all creation.

Note: We tend to consider God's domain as a fixed place; but that observation is incorrect and impossible. God is not limited to space and time and has no singular place to exist. *In the New Testament, Jesus lends a subtle hint wrapped in the mystery of a response He gives to a scribe claiming allegiance to follow Him no matter where he goes. Jesus references that foxes and birds have fixed geographical locations, but the Son of Man does not know where to lay His head. The statement indicates that the creatures of this world all have fixed locations and therefore clear limitations, but the son of Man has no such restrictions because He has "no place". Vs. He gives place and prepares place BUT HAS NO PLACE.

The Holy City is described as a bride adorned and prepared to meet her husband. Wedding garments represent clothing set aside to be worn only when the bride is presented to the Groom-Husband. The ornaments and decor of New Jerusalem are exclusive; the Holy City is the bride to be presented to the Husband-Creator.

Revelation 21:3 – And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God *is* with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, *and be* their God.

Great voice from New Heaven:

A voice from Heaven is heard declaring that "the Tabernacle of God is (now) with men". The Creator (God), who has no fixed place, will now make His abode with man (the Bride: residents of New Jerusalem). God will dwell and abide with man and never separate Himself from man again. This is the first promise and benefit of marriage between God and man.

The groom is generally tasked with establishing a permanent residence for his new bride. The bride is expected to leave behind her existing living quarters and make her estate with her new husband.

The stated eternal pledge declares that the bride will be His people and The Creator-Husband will remain among them to be their God.

1Thess 4:18 – Wherefore comfort one another with these words.

(1Thess 4:18) – The words and revelation of the Apostle were written to comfort the hearts and minds of the Thessalonians. The words were intended to be read repeatedly as needed to encourage the Church and its followers to remain faithful, compelled by hope for the great reward of eternal life.