

This lesson we begin our examination of 1 Thess.4:13-18. We shall consider its context and the words and phrases used. I appreciate this will not be the traditional fare and at some point readers may feel they are being robbed of something wonderful. Let me assure everyone, the opposite is true. By pushing aside the curtains of tradition a window opens to a glorious new view which will more than compensate for any sense of loss we might feel. And we all want the truth.

Thus far in our lesson we have seen that Scripture opposes the tradition that the Gospel and Acts were the beginning of the new "church" era. We have seen from Scripture that they were the ends of the ages. The return of Christ to the earth was expected in the life of the believers at that time and the Kingdom of Heaven did not mean the Kingdom in Heaven but the rule of Heaven on the earth with Christ dwelling on the Holy Hill of Zion. Pentecost was not the "birthday" of anything. Peter and Paul's messages during Acts spoke of this wonderful return of Christ to redeem Israel and restore the Kingdom. Email if you would like back issues.

The mainstream denominational systems claim 1Thess.4 is the "rapture" of "the church". That is, that Christ will come out of heaven, snatch resurrected and changed believers to the air then take them all back into heaven. But is this what Scripture teaches? Let us examine the passage very carefully verse by verse.

The opening verse shows Paul assuring them regarding those who have died;

[1Th 4:13](#) But I would not have you ignorant, brothers, concerning those who are asleep, that you be not grieved, even as others who have no hope.

Our understanding will grow if we start where Paul starts. Some of the Thessalonians had fallen asleep, they had died, and the living were grieving. Paul comforts them with this wonderful explanation of the hope before them at that time;

[1Th 4:14](#) For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will also bring with Him all those who have fallen asleep through Jesus.

Please note the "even so" in this verse. Just as the Lord Jesus died and rose again, even so in the same way, God will through the Lord Jesus, bring with Him, those who are asleep in Christ. The Lord Jesus died and rose again, believers of that time died and would rise again at the last Trumpet, this is the wonderful assurance Paul is giving here.

In considering 1Thess.4, we have need to discard the false teaching that all dead believers are already in heaven and "coming back with Him to the air". Let us now reconsider Paul's words;

[1Th 4:14](#) For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will also bring with Him all those who have fallen asleep through Jesus.

How will God bring through the Lord Jesus those who are asleep in Christ? The answer is simple, just as Christ died and rose again even so those asleep in Christ will rise again. This is how they will be brought with Him back to the earth. Let's consider the next verse;

[1Th 4:15](#) For we say this to you by the Word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord shall not go before those who are asleep.

The words "go before" should stand out for those who think anyone who has died in Christ has "gone before". No believer gets to be with the Lord before any other believer in 1Thess.4. Paul clearly says we, and that "we" of Scripture does not include you and me today. It included the believers at that time and Paul himself. At that time, Paul said we shall not go before those who are asleep. Tradition fails to "test things differing" and places every believer today in the "we" of a previous administration and contradicts Paul's teaching saying that the dead have already gone before the living. Paul says no one is going before anyone else and I think we should stand with Paul and the Lord who inspired him. Paul continues his exposition about those who are dead that is, asleep in Christ;

[1Th 4:16](#) For the Lord Himself shall descend from Heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ shall rise first.

Notice, the dead will rise first when the Lord descends out of Heaven with a shout, the voice of the archangel and the trumpet of God. This passage is about those who are asleep in Christ, not about the Lord bringing Christians out of heaven. In 1 Cor.15:51-57 Paul tells us that "this mortal shall put on immortality" at the last trumpet. How is it that tradition tells us we are immortal if Paul says we are yet to put it on? In 1Tim.6:16 Paul clearly says "Christ alone has immortality" and if only Christ has immortality then we dare not claim it for ourselves. I think we should accept the Scriptures on this matter don't you?

Paul's assurance for those Thessalonians who were grieving at the loss of loved ones was that the dead will be raised first at the coming of the Lord. He goes on to say;

[1Th 4:17](#) Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air. And so we shall ever be with the Lord.

This is the “rapture” verse and as always with traditions, the focus is on the phrase “caught up together” rather than the reason for the being “caught up together”. The dead believers of that company, who will be raised from the grave, and the living believers who will be changed (1Cor.15:51), will be caught up together TO MEET the Lord in the air. This is where tradition and the Word of God part ways. Tradition says that this body of resurrected and changed believers is snatched back into Heaven. The Word of God does not say this. It says they are caught up together to meet Him as He descends out of Heaven. Look at what the Word says;

1Th 4:16 For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven... KJV, MKJV.

1Th 4:16 .... the Lord himself will come down from heaven... ISV

1Th 4:16 ... the Lord Himself shall come down from Heaven.. LITV

There is not one word or phrase in this passage which says that the Lord and this company are going back into heaven. Examine carefully please. We might think it says that because of what has been ingrained by tradition but we cannot inject into Scripture what we want it to say. The faithful believer stands on what God says, not what tradition thinks God says.

The hope of that time was that both living and dead believers would be caught up together to “meet” the Lord as He descended from, “out of”, heaven.

The word “meet” (apantesis) only occurs four times in the New Testament. Since this is the word the Holy Ghost teaches, we should look carefully at it and understand fully what it means. It occurs twice in Matt.25 which of course is a Kingdom on the earth setting. Let us examine this first usage of the word “meet”.

Mat 25:1 Then shall the kingdom of Heaven be likened to ten virgins, who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom.

Before we read too quickly, when is the THEN of this first verse? It is in the time when the Lord returns to the earth as He had been describing in the previous chapter. In Matthew 24:29-31 we read of the Lord descending out of Heaven in the clouds and with the Trumpet blast just as we do in 1Thess.4. At that time, when He returns to the earth, THEN the wise virgins will go to MEET him.

Mat 25:6 And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom comes! Go out to meet him.

These virgins are not going away with the bridegroom. In eastern marriage the bridegroom comes to the bride’s home. There the marriage supper is enjoyed. The wise virgins represented those who “watched” (Matt.25:13) and were thus rewarded with a meeting with the Bridegroom as He came to the marriage.

This “meeting” has nothing to do with the Lord “appearing” in the heavenly places. This is the Lord coming back to the earth. We know this from the very context of these first occurrences of this word “meet”;

Mat 25:31 But when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He shall sit on the throne of His glory.

Mat 25:32 And all nations shall be gathered before Him. And He shall separate them from one another, as a shepherd divides the sheep from the goats.

The throne of His Glory is on the earth, the nations are on the earth, see Joel 3. The Lord will come with all His Holy angels with Him and these are the “saints” or “holy ones” of Jude 14 and 1Thess.3:13.

The next occurrence of this word “meet” is in Acts;

Act 28:15 And the brothers from there hearing of us, they came to meet us as far as the market-place of Appius, and Three Taverns. Seeing them, thanking God, Paul took courage.

The brothers from Rome came to “meet” Paul. The brothers from Rome did not jump in a ship and turn around and go back to Jerusalem with Paul. Paul continued on to Rome. Those believers who are “caught up together” go to a meeting in the clouds in the air, then they return to the earth with the Lord.

In every case this word “meet” does not mean continuing on into the place from whence the one being met came. On the contrary, it means to go out and meet the one coming to the place from which those meeting came. In other words, 1Thess.4 is about that company of that time going up from the earth to meet the Lord in the air as He descends to the earth out of heaven.

Let us also note that those caught up to meet the Lord were only caught up to the air. The air being the place of the clouds;

1Th 4:17 Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air. And so we shall ever be with the Lord.

We, the church which is His Body, do not have any inheritance in the air or the clouds. The meeting was in the air, which word is not used for "heaven", see Acts 22:23, 1Cor.9:26, 14:9, Eph.2:2, Rev.9:2 and 16:17. We will not be with the Lord forever in the air. These believers of the Acts period were expecting to go to a meeting in the air as the Lord descended to the earth where the Kingdom of Heaven would be enjoyed and they would judge the world and angels, 1Cor.6:2-3.

The church of 1Thess.4 that goes to meet the Lord in the air is not our company, nor is the meeting in the air our hope today.

It is time for tradition which puts "going back into heaven" in this passage to be exposed for what it is; a falsehood and a deception. I repeat, not one word or phrase in 1Thess.4:13-18 can be found to remotely suggest that anyone, either the Lord or the believers who meet Him, are going back into Heaven.

We are not robbed of hope when we put aside the error of tradition.

We want the hope given us by the Lord through our Apostle Paul after Israel were put aside at Acts 28. The hope before us today is Ephesians 2:4-7 which is realized when Col.3:1-4 takes place. Col.3:1-4 takes place before 1 Thess.4, as we shall see in later studies.

We are looking for the "appearing" of the Lord. The appearing takes place in heavenly places where Christ is seated at the right hand of God which is certainly not in the air. The appearing takes place before the trumpet and before the Lord descends out of Heaven to the earth. But we shall have to leave the appearing for a future lesson.

We must "distinguish things that differ", Phils.1:9-110 MKJV.