

# A Study of 1 Thessalonians



Paul's final instructions began in 4:1-12 where he urged the Thessalonian Christians to live in a way that would please God. Much of his emphasis in these verses was to call Christians to a holy life where there is no place for any kind of sexual immorality. Paul's teaching was counter-cultural for anyone living in the first century Greek world, but Christians are to live to please God and not self. Along with a holy lifestyle the brothers are instructed to keep quiet and to work so that they might gain the respect of non-Christians and provide for their own needs.

The new topic of the Second Coming is introduced in 4:13-18 to correct some of misunderstandings the the young Christians held concerning the Lord's return.

## **The Second Coming of Christ (4:13-18)**

Evidently some within the church had died since Paul had been with them and the believers did not know the state of their loved ones.<sup>1</sup> Paul wrote to provide information and comfort.

1. What is the difference between grieving with hope and grieving without hope?
2. What event gives Christians hope for life after death? (vs. 14)
3. Why is the word "asleep" used as a metaphor for death?

Verse 14 tells us that when Jesus returns to earth God will send those Christians who have died back with him. For them to come back with Jesus, they clearly are already with him in the present.

Paul reiterates that this teaching comes "by a word from the Lord." This is not Paul's opinion, this is a truth revealed by God. Though the Thessalonian Christians were concerned about their departed loved ones, Paul teaches that those who died in Christ are not disadvantaged in any way. Those who are still alive when Jesus returns will not receive their new bodies prior to those who have already died.



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<sup>1</sup> Asleep is a metaphor for death.

We learn these facts about the Second Coming in verses 16-17:

First, At the Second Coming the Lord himself will descend from heaven. We know that Jesus is currently at the right hand of the Father.<sup>2</sup>

Second, Jesus will come “with a cry of command.” The word which translates “cry of command” means a word of command; a mutual cheer; an arousing outcry.<sup>3</sup> With a commanding cry Jesus will return. We are not told if the Lord himself will issue this command or if it is from the voice of the archangel. Likewise we are not told the content of the commanding cry; perhaps it is for the dead to rise.

Third, the voice of the archangel will sound. What the archangel will say is also unknown. Maybe he will be heralding the return of Christ Jesus.

#### 4. Who is called an archangel in Jude 1:9?<sup>4</sup>



Fourth, the sound of the trumpet of God will sound. Throughout the Old Testament great events were heralded with the sound of trumpet. 1 Corinthians 15:52 speaks of the trumpet call

associated with the Second Coming and the raising of the dead to an imperishable body.

The Second Coming will not sneak up on anyone. There will be a cry of command, the voice of the archangel, and the trumpet of God. These amazing and powerful sounds will audibly announce the Lord's return. It is difficult to imagine the grandeur of the powerful image of the majestic and triumphant Lord returning in the clouds with a myriad of the faithful. The sights and sounds that we will see are astounding beyond words.

<sup>2</sup> Acts 2:33.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.teknia.com/greek-dictionary/keleusma>

<sup>4</sup> This is the passage that Jehovah's Witnesses use to try to prove that Jesus and the archangel Michael are one and that Jesus is not God. This passage does not teach this nor is this false teaching found anywhere in Scripture. The archangel Michael is mentioned only in Daniel 10:13, 21; 12:1; Jude 9; Rev. 12:7 and none of these passages show him to be identified as Jesus. The Hebrew writer clearly states that Jesus is greater than any angel (Heb. 1:5-13). For further study see: <http://www.apologeticspress.org/apcontent.aspx?category=10&article=1473>.

#### What Happens to a Christian When They Die?

1. Christians go to be with the Lord after physical death. (1 Thess. 3:13; 2 Cor. 5:8; Phil 1:21-24; Luke 16:22; Acts 7:59; Rev. 6:9-11; Luke 23:42-43)
2. The Christian is conscious after physical death. (Luke 16:19-31)
3. The Christian goes to a place of comfort and peace. (2 Cor. 5:8; Phil 1:21-23; Luke 16:22)
4. The place where Christians are located prior to the final judgment is called Abraham's bosom meaning near or with Abraham (Luke 16:23), Paradise (Luke 23:43), at home with the Lord (2 Cor. 5:8), and at least for martyrs "under the heavenly altar."
5. The Christian is bodiless until the Second Coming because their bodies will rise from the grave at the Second Coming. (1 Thess. 4:16; 1 Cor. 15:52-56)
6. The change from an earthly body to a body suited for heaven will be instantaneous. (1 Cor. 15:51-52)
7. Judgment will see Christians separated from non-Christians and ushered into eternal heaven. (Rev. 20:10-15; John 14:1-3; Rev. 21)

This dramatic visual and audible display of the Second Coming will be witnessed across the globe and will bring about the end of time on this earth, the final judgment, and our eternal life. This amazing imagery is hard to reconcile with those who believe in a “secret rapture” where Christians will be taken away while the rest of the world seems oblivious and life on earth continues.

The bodies we now inhabit are designed for life on earth. The bodies Christians will have in eternity are designed for heaven. The bodies we have on earth are perishable. The new body we will gain will be imperishable. Our current bodies we are mortal, but the body Christians will be given is described as immortal.<sup>5</sup>

**5. What do we learn about our resurrection bodies in the following passages: 1 Corinthians 15:42-44; Rev. 21:4; 1 Thessalonians 4:17?**

Fifth, the dead in Christ will gain their new bodies prior to those currently still alive when the Lord returns.

Sixth, those Christians who are still alive when Jesus returns will join those who have already died with Jesus in the air. The word translated in verse 17 as “caught up” means to “snatch, plunder,” or “take by force.”<sup>6</sup> The Lord will suddenly and swiftly carry living saints into the clouds.



**6. What will it be like to meet the Lord and all the departed saints in the air?**

Seventh, this is will bring the believer in the presence of the Lord where he will remain forever.

**7. Describe the meaning of “forever” or “eternity.”**

Eighth, the promise of Christ’s Second Coming, our new bodies, and eternity with him should be used to encourage one another.

**8. What are some ways in which Christians can carry out the directive to encourage one another with the teaching of the return of Jesus?**

The Thessalonian Christians found themselves in a world of persecution, cut off from the Apostle Paul who had brought them the gospel, and now seeing some of their beloved friends and family members passing from this life.

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<sup>5</sup> 1 Cor. 15:50-56.

<sup>6</sup> ESV Greek Tools.

The young believers seemed to have assumed that all believers would be alive when the Lord returned, but some have already died. They must have wondered what this meant for those who had died so Paul provides them words of strength and comfort.

Those who have died in the Lord are not disadvantaged from those Christians who are still alive. Those who have passed from this life are presently with the Lord. While they have not yet received their resurrection bodies we should not be concerned because they are in a place of comfort and peace in the presence of the Lord.

At some point in the future, the Lord Jesus will return with a shout, with the sound of a trumpet, and with all those faithful who have passed from life on earth. The scene is dramatic and amazing as the dead in Christ are raised and instantaneously receive their new and eternal bodies. Those who are still living will likewise be given a new body and will be caught up to meet the Lord and their Christian loved ones together in the air.

These words should be used often within the church to provide encouragement and strength to carry us through any difficult days that we may face.