

No "Pre-Tribulation Rapture" 1 Thessalonians 4.13 Through 5.11

by C. C. Morris

Introductory Remarks

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 is often quoted by most Arminian preachers of prophecy to prove their doctrine of "the rapture" and that "the rapture" will happen before **the great tribulation** begins. This order of events leads them to refer to "*the pre-tribulation rapture*" as contrasted to a "rapture" occurring at any other time.

I do not believe the Bible teaches a "rapture" as it is commonly taught. I propose to show why I do not believe it from the text most often used in support of the "rapture" position and from other supporting scriptures.

Because many churches have preachers or pastors who rarely if ever discuss end-time prophecy, some of our readers might not be familiar with terms like "the tribulation" or "the great tribulation" and "the rapture." I will briefly discuss them here.

A. The Great Tribulation

Some brethren deny there will be any such thing as "the great tribulation." All they see in the word is "tribulation" and its general meaning. One brother has said directly and publicly, something to this effect: "*The Bible nowhere uses the term, 'the great tribulation.'* Christ said, '*In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world (John 16.33).*' All the Lord's people suffer tribulation in this life, " etc

To this I reply:

1. First, the Bible does indeed mention "THE great tribulation" in Revelation 7.14: "And he said to me, These are they which came out of **[the] great tribulation**, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."

True, the King James Version (KJV), for some reason known only to God and the translators, does not include the definite article the in this verse, but "**the**" **great tribulation** is in the original text. In fact, the definite article actually occurs twice in this phrase:

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2. Second, Christ spoke about this time in Matthew 24-25, doubtless the greatest end-time prophecy in the entire Bible. These two chapters are His direct answer to three questions. "And as he sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying, Tell us,

"(1) when shall these things be? and

"(2) what shall be the sign of thy coming, and

"(3) of the end of the world [world = **aion** = **age**]?" (Matthew 24:3)

In that context, part of Jesus' reply was: "For then shall be **great tribulation**, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be."

A. The tribulation of which He spoke is far more than the ordinary tribulations of this life, such as arthritis and toothaches, cancer, financial problems, family feuds, and the like.

B. Although it includes the persecutions the church has always suffered at the hands of her enemies down through the centuries ("*Who*

shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter—Romans 8.35D," it is even far more than martyrdom in general.

C. Some brethren say he is speaking here of the destruction of Jerusalem in A. D. 70. But no; the tribulation of which Christ spoke is far greater than the destruction of Jerusalem in A. D. 70.

Doubtless, the tribulation the city endured was horrible, when, according to history, over a million people died. The Roman siege lasted for over three years. It began during the holy days of Passover and Unleavened Bread, when the city was full of visitors from all over the Roman Empire. The historian Josephus says,

Now the number of those that were carried captive during this whole war was collected to be ninety-seven thousand [97,000]; as was the number of those that perished during the whole siege eleven hundred thousand [1,100,000], the greater part of whom were indeed of the same nation (with the citizens of Jerusalem), but not belonging to the city itself; for they were come up from all the country to the feast of unleavened bread, and were on a sudden shut up by an army, which, at the very first, occasioned so great a straitness among them, that there came a pestilential destruction upon them, and soon afterward such a famine, as destroyed them more suddenly....

History records the fact that hundreds of thousands of starving Jews, in their hopeless desperation, resorted to cannibalism, devouring the remains of friends, relatives, and neighbors who had already starved to death, and parents even cooked and ate their babies. When the Roman army finally breached Jerusalem's walls, they killed the elderly, those infirm with age, and those diseased, in addition to slaughtering all able-bodied men who fought against them. Those captives under seventeen years of age were

taken to be sold as slaves, while many older able-bodied captives were sent to work in mines in Egypt or other "public works" projects.

Of the record of that horrible destruction we forbear, because, as terrible as it was, it did not approach the destruction of European Jews during World War II, and while horrendous enough, A.D. 70, *ipso facto*, was not the tribulation of which Christ spoke, for it was not the greatest, the ultimate tribulation, as He described that final great tribulation, "For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be (Matthew 24:21)."

As bad as it was, Christ said of that final time of great tribulation, "*And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened* (Matthew 24:22)." This last time, which will be shortened for the elect's sake (who are in every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation), I understand to be a worldwide ordeal, embracing not just the nation of Israel, but all of humanity.

The great tribulation will indeed include persecution even to the death, but it includes far more. Christ (in Matthew 24) continued: "And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened." The great tribulation will be so intense that, if it were not for God's predestinated intervention, this distress would destroy not only the Lord's elect people, but also all humanity.

B. The Rapture controversy

The idea of a so-called *rapture* has been perpetuated for around two hundred years by "dispensational" Arminians interested in prophecy. They teach that before the really bad tribulation begins, God's people will be supernaturally removed from its horrors, snatched out of this world in a **pre-tribulation rapture**, receive their glorified bodies, and carried off to heaven

while the great tribulation rages here below. Such is their new doctrine.

And it is a relatively new doctrine. In preparation for the May-June *Remnant* for 2012, I spent most of the preceding year carefully reading David Brown's book, first written in 1846, entitled *Christ's Second Coming, Will It Be Premillennial?* and Horatius Bonar's 1849 book, *The Coming and Kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ*, in which Bonar examined and ably refuted Brown's book.

Brown's book of 499 pages is a mix of amillennialism and postmillennialism, designed to oppose and supposedly refute premillennialism. Bonar's 249-page book is premillennial. (For the record, I believe the premillennial position.) Together these books total 748 pages.

I carefully read all 748 pages, and as I recall, neither book mentioned a "rapture" at all.

If a "rapture" had been part of premillennial doctrine when these two men wrote (1846, 1849), either Mr. Bonar would surely have had occasion to promote the idea, at least in passing, or Mr. Brown would have had said something against it, or both men would have said something about it. Since neither one mentioned a rapture, *pro or con*, we may almost certainly conclude that this omission is strong evidence that ***a rapture was not part of the premillennial doctrine in the 1840s. The rapture theory was developed in more recent times.***

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To prove a "pre-tribulation rapture," one of the favorite proof-texts of modern Arminian prophets is 1 Thessalonians 4.13-18. (Their other favorite text along these lines seems to be 1 Corinthians 15.51-57.)

The best way to refute the Arminians' rapture theory is not to examine their arguments, but to comment on what the verses actually say, which I will next try to do.

1 Thessalonians 4.13-18 Examined

(Verse 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:* The church in Thessalonica, a town in northern Greece, was composed of Jews and many Greeks. The Greeks believed people die like animals die, with no afterlife, and therefore they thought their loved ones, families and friends, who had died, were gone forever and would never be seen again.

These Greek believers thought only saints living at the time of Christ's return would be taken to be with Him. They were trapped into sorrowing about this, even as others (i.e., other Greeks) which have no hope of ever seeing their loved ones again. Paul wrote these words to correct that error.

(Verse 14) *For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him:*

Here, Paul assured believers of these facts:

- a) the resurrection of Christ Jesus,
- b) the departed (deceased) saints are now with Christ,
- c) Jesus will bring the departed saints with Him at His coming,
- d) first, the bodies of these saints will be raised in the glorified state,
- e) then, the saints alive at the time of Christ's return will be caught up with the resurrected saints and be glorified at that time; in other words, all saints, from Adam until that moment, will be glorified, body, soul, and spirit, in the likeness of the resurrected Lord Jesus.

That they are now with Christ is everywhere spoken of in the Old and New Testaments: "... and the LORD my God shall come, and all the saints **with** thee (Zechariah 14:5)." "And Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these, saying, Behold, the Lord cometh **with** ten thousands of his saints...(Jude 1:14)" "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain...For I

am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better (Philippians 1:21-23)." "We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present **with** the Lord. (2 Corinthians 5:8)."

To these Thessalonian believers he had earlier written: "And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love...to the end he may stablish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ **with all his saints** (1 Thessalonians 3:12-13)."

Later Paul virtually closed this letter with these words: "And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and ~~I pray God~~ your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is He that calleth you, who also will do it. (1 Thessalonians 5:23-24)."

The words ~~I pray God~~ are NOT in the original; this is why the KJV translators italicized them. The sanctification and blameless preservation of the Lord's saints do not depend on the prayers of Paul or of anyone else other than Christ Himself interceding in behalf of those for whom He died: "Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them (Hebrews 7:25)." "Who is He that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us (Romans 8:34)."

It is not the prayers of Paul, your mother or father, a godly spouse, or an interested preacher. The efficacious sanctification and preservation of the saints is alone due to the intercessory prayers of our great high priest, the Lord Jesus Christ.

So Paul is given to neatly tie it all together: countless glorified, blameless, body-soul-spirit beings gathered to the Lord Jesus Christ at His

return. "Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it." This text, by the way, also shows it is Christ, not a preacher, who really calls His people. (If it were your preacher who called you, it would be—by this text—your preacher who must also sanctify you wholly and preserve you blameless, etc.)

(Verse 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:* "Alive" and "asleep" are in contrast. It is the body which "sleeps," never the soul or spirit. Asleep is a euphemism for death. Compare Matthew 27:52: "And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent; And the graves were opened; and **many bodies of the saints which slept** arose, **And came out of the graves** after His resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many (Matthew 27:51-53)."

We which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord: there will be saints alive here on earth when the Lord returns.

shall not prevent them which are asleep: "Prevent" is an old usage of this word, here meaning to precede or hinder. Like someone cutting in front of you in a line at a cash register, preceding you, hindering you from checking out. Living saints will not thus hinder, cut in front of, precede, or go off and leave behind those who have died in the Lord (Revelation 14.13). So far from that, the truth is: the dead in Christ shall rise FIRST; only THEN shall we which are alive and remain be caught up together with them. In that order.

(Verse 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:* The shout is not a gentle wakeup call. It is a battle cry, a war-whoop, the cry of a mighty man charging into battle.

This war cry is at the war of Armageddon and not before. "*Then the*

Lord awaked as one out of sleep, and like a mighty man that shouteth by reason of wine. And he smote his enemies in the hinder parts: he put them to a perpetual reproach (Psalms 78:65-66)." Armageddon occurs at the end of the great tribulation, not at the beginning. THEN *the dead in Christ shall rise first.*

Isaiah gives the order of things as plainly as any prophet in the Bible:

Thy dead men shall live, together with my dead body shall they arise. Awake and sing, ye that dwell in dust: for thy dew is as the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out the dead. Come, my people, enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee: hide thy self as it were for a little moment, until the indignation be overpast. For, behold, the LORD cometh out of his place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity: the earth also shall disclose her blood, and shall no more cover her slain. In that day the LORD with his sore and great and strong sword shall punish leviathan the piercing serpent, even leviathan that crooked serpent; and he shall slay the dragon that is in the sea. (Isaiah 26:19-27:1)

The order is exact:

(1) The dead saints shall live (*Thy dead men shall live...Awake and sing, ye that dwell in dust... the earth shall cast out the dead*). Isaiah knew he would be dead when this happens ("*together with **my dead body** shall they arise*"), and he will be a part of this resurrection.

Job looked forward to the same time, when Christ would return in glory, subdue His enemies, and rule visibly and personally over His creation: "For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that **he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth**: And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet **in my flesh shall I see God**: Whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another; though my reins be consumed within me (Job 19:25-27)." Job concluded that the time of the saints' resurrection

would be Christ's time of battle with the sword (of Christ's mouth— Revelation 1.16; 2.12, 16; 19.15-21): "Be ye afraid of the **sword**: for **wrath** bringeth the **punishments** of the **sword**, that ye may know there is a **judgment** (Job 19:29)."

(2) The saints, as the bride of Christ, will enter the bridal chamber in preparation for her marriage to the Lamb (*Come, my people, enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee*). This answers to Revelation 19.7-9.

(3) Immediately after Christ's bride is removed from the scene of the action, He fights the war of Armageddon. Armageddon will not take long at all. It is the DAY of the Lord, and it will not take Him a day to defeat the armies of this world. (*hide thyself as it were for a little moment, until the indignation be overpast.*)

Christ unleashes God's wrath and indignation on a reprobate world-system (*the LORD cometh out of His place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity: the earth also shall disclose her blood, and shall no more cover her slain.*). This answers to Revelation 19.11-21.

(4) After destroying the United Nations' armies, Christ will bind Satan (*In that day the LORD with His sore and great and strong sword shall punish leviathan the piercing serpent, even leviathan that crooked serpent; and He shall slay the dragon that is in the sea.*) for a millennium, i.e., one thousand years, exactly as He says in Revelation 20.1-3. Not some faked out wimpy binding like the figurative preachers who claim, "Satan is bound now." No, he is *not*; not any more than he was in Eden or in Job's day. He still walks about, as a roaring lion, as he did in Job's day, seeking whom he may devour (1 Peter 5.8). If Charles Manson were bound with such a mere figurative daisy-chain, it would reach from his prison cell in Corcoran, California, to the tip of Florida. That is not "binding."

Satan's binding will be such that "he should (will or shall) deceive the nations no more." Almost everyone thinks that anyone who disagrees with them is deceived. There are brethren who claim, against all scripture and evidence, that Satan is bound now, so he can't deceive the nations now ("*to the same extent*" as before, they say!). Yet these same brethren think premillennials are deceived about prophetic things. If we premills are deceived, and Satan is bound so he cannot deceive us any more (according to the objector's own doctrine), then how could we be deceived?

(Verse 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:* The saints will meet the Lord in the air. The text does not say, "So shall we ever be up in the air." It says, "so shall we ever **be with the Lord**"; wherever He is, His saints will be with Him.

His first stop will be on the Mount of Olives from where He left this earth (Acts 1.11). "And His feet shall stand **in that day** upon the mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem on the east, and the mount of Olives shall cleave in the midst thereof toward the east and toward the west, and there shall be a very great valley; and half of the mountain shall remove toward the north, and half of it toward the south. (Zechariah 14:4)."

(Verse 18) *Wherefore comfort one another with these words:* Arminians have used this text to frighten people into "accepting Christ" or "getting saved before it is too late." Their argument is:

*Christ may come at any moment. If He comes and you are unsaved, * then you will be lost forever. Therefore, "get saved" now, before it is too late.*

* [NOTE: "unsaved" is a word that is not in the Bible!—CCM]

This text is not at all directed to the so-called "unsaved," but to the

believers in the Thessalonian church; and this is not a scary topic. It is a comforting theme.

In closing this passage note these things:

1. The word "rapture" is not a Bible word. The correct term for the resurrection, and the glorification of the saints is **translation**. "By faith Enoch was **translated** that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God (Hebrews 11:5)."

2. There is nothing in this text that tells the **timing** of the saints' translation in relation to the great tribulation—before, in the middle, or at the end. The text does not say when it will be, but Isaiah's text (mentioned above) gives the order: it will happen at the end of the tribulation, immediately before Armageddon.

3. I hear the objection: Isaiah does not use such words as *Armageddon* and *the tribulation*.

Reply: That is readily admitted. But Isaiah describes both Armageddon and the tribulation in the extended passage of Isaiah 24-27. To go into detail on these four chapters, which have been called a "Little Apocalypse," would take us too far afield for this article. If the Lord be pleased to have it so, we might look at those four chapters in another issue of *The Remnant*.

4. Suffice it to say, Paul quotes from this section of Isaiah in 1 Corinthians 15:54: "...then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, **'Death is swallowed up in victory.'**"

"The saying that is written" is directly from Isaiah 25.8, part of the "Little Apocalypse: **'He will swallow up death in victory;** and the Lord

GOD will wipe away tears from off all faces; and the rebuke of His people shall he take away from off **all the earth: for the LORD hath spoken it.**"

1 Corinthians 15:51-55, like 1 Thessalonians, says nothing about the timing of the translation of the saints in relation to the great tribulation.

There, Paul says: "Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, **Death is swallowed up in victory.** O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?"

Isaiah 25:8 addresses not only the resurrection and glorification of the saints, but also the eternal state. Isaiah's "and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from off all faces" is fulfilled in Revelation 21:4: "**And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes;** and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away."

Not only that, but Isaiah 25:8 prophesies the earth's restoration to its original Edenic perfection and purity: "**...the rebuke of his people shall he take away from off all the earth: for the LORD hath spoken it.**" This text anticipates Revelation 21:2f: "And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. 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." Where? On the new earth (verse 1), when God restores all things of the original creation. "And He shall send Jesus Christ, which

before was preached unto you: whom the heaven must receive UNTIL **the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began** (Acts 3:20-21)."

Millions have read Revelation 21, but few have been given the insight into what God says plainly here. The Lord says nothing about the Romish fairy-tales that all the saved will be carried to heaven, there to flit around in the clouds, eating marshmallows and playing harps eternally.

For thus saith the LORD that created the heavens; God Himself that formed the earth and made IT; He hath established IT, He created IT not in vain [Hebrew, *tohu*, "without form"], **He formed IT to be inhabited: I am the LORD; and there is none else** (Isaiah 45:18).

Since God formed the earth to be inhabited, and He put His holy name to it, do you suppose it will *not* be inhabited but will for some reason be destroyed instead, contrary to what He has ***promised***? "Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, **according to his *promise***, look for new heavens and **a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness** (2 Peter 3:12-13)."

This may come as a surprising disappointment to those who have been hoping and expecting all their lives to some day fly into the Great Beyond and eat spiritual cotton-candy forever, but so far from the saints being carried off to heaven to be with God, the exact opposite will come to pass in the eternal state: God says He will come down to His beautiful, perfect, restored earth to be with His people: "And I John saw the holy city, **new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven**, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. 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** (Revelation 21:2-3)."

—CCM

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