

# Jesus Is Coming Again!

## A Word of Comfort about Deceased Christians at Christ's Return (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18)



“He who testifies  
to these things  
says, ‘Yes, I am  
coming soon.’  
Amen. Come,  
Lord Jesus”

Revelation 22:20

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# INTRODUCTION

## Opening (1:1-10)

## Defensive Function (2:1-3:13)

## Exhortative Function (4:1-5:22)

## Closing (5:23-25)

Letter Opening  
(1:1)

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➤ Comfort concerning deceased  
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Christ's Return  
(vv 3, 10a) ✓

Comfort concerning living  
Christians at Christ's Return  
(5:1-11)

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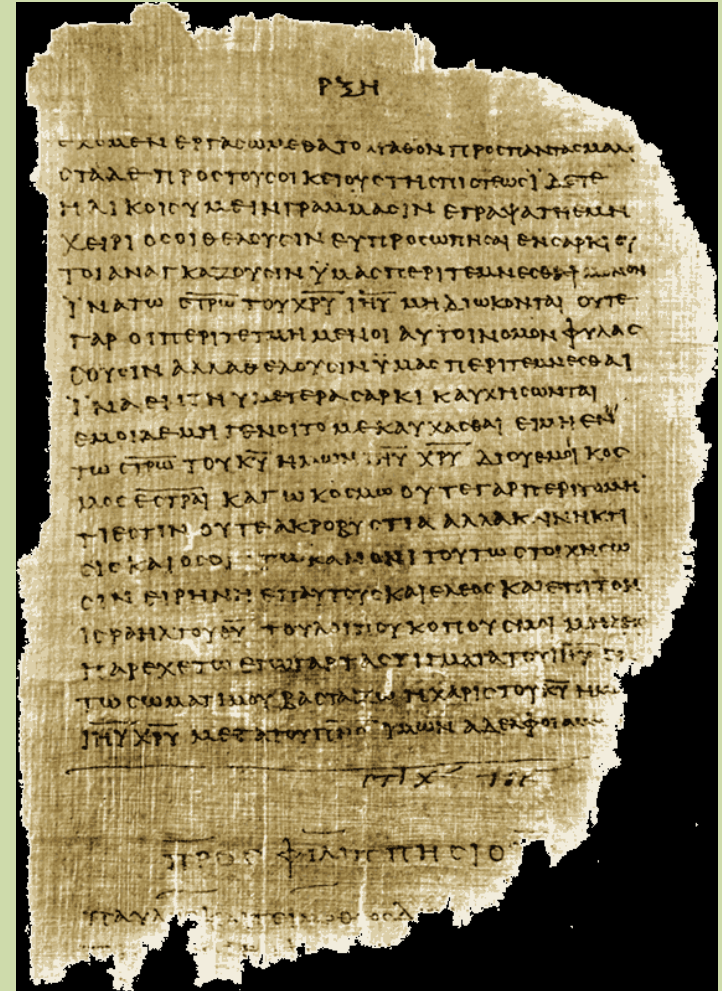
Exhortations on Congrega-  
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# INTRODUCTION

- 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

*“<sup>13</sup>Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. <sup>14</sup>We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him.*

*<sup>15</sup>According to the Lord’s own word, we tell you that we who are still alive who are left till ...*



Chester Beattie Papyrus (P46)  
(Gal 4:10 – Phil 1:1)

# INTRODUCTION

- 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

*“...the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. <sup>16</sup>For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.*

*<sup>17</sup>After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them ...*

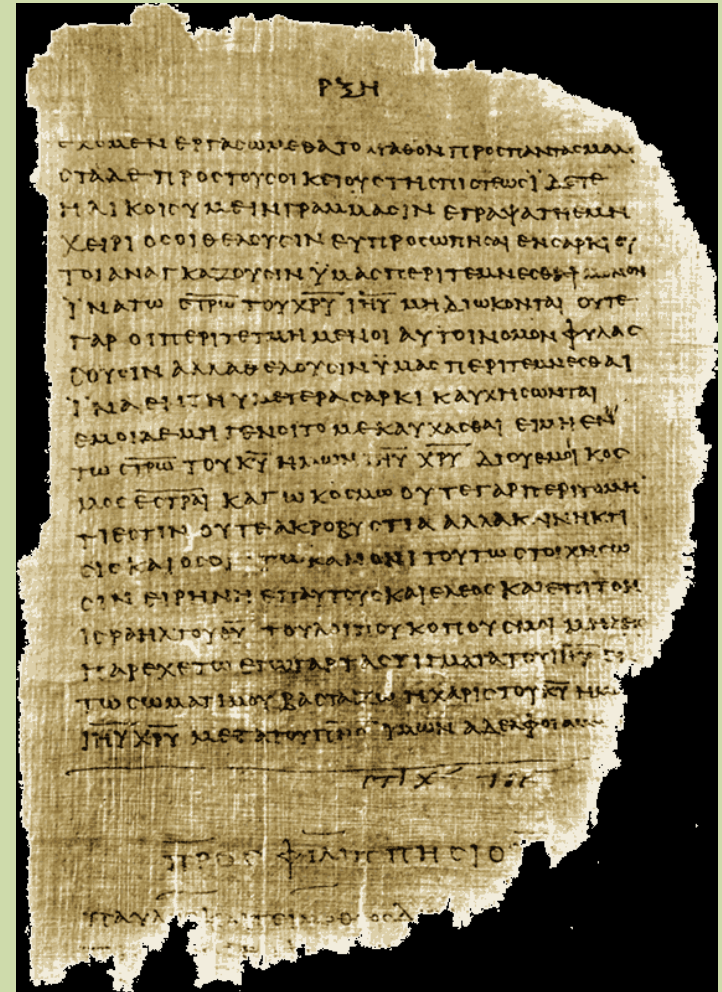


Chester Beattie Papyrus (P46)  
(Gal 4:10 – Phil 1:1)

# INTRODUCTION

- 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

*“...in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. <sup>18</sup>Therefore encourage each other with these words” (NIV 1984)*



Chester Beattie Papyrus (P46)  
(Gal 4:10 – Phil 1:1)

# I. GRAMMATICAL ANALYSIS



# I. GRAMMATICAL ANALYSIS

- Verse 13: “those who are asleep”
  - Three times in this passage Paul refers to those who are “asleep” (vv. 13, 14, 15)
  - Verb κοιμαῶ (*koimaō*) literally means “sleep” (no examples of this in Paul) but figuratively refers to state of being dead (1 Cor 7:39; 11:30; 15:6, 18, 20, 51)
  - Verb “sleep” used as a euphemism for “death”



# I. GRAMMATICAL ANALYSIS

- Verse 13: “those who are asleep”
  - Use of “sleep” as euphemism for “death” found many times in OT and in secular writings of that day
  - No justification, therefore, for finding in this verse support for idea of “soul sleep”
  - This idea further repudiated by NT passages that suggest the conscious existence of believers during intermediate state (Luke 23:43; Phil 1:20-23; Rev 6:9-11)



“Soul Sleep”?



# I. GRAMMATICAL ANALYSIS

- Verse 13: “that you may not grieve”
  - Verb “to grieve” is given in a form (present tense subjunctive) that emphasizes the **ongoing or continuous nature of the action**
  - Problem that Paul is addressing, therefore, is not a small or minor issue but one that was causing deep and ongoing grief in the church
  - Consequently, primary purpose of Paul in this passage is to give a word of comfort: to *pastor* not to *predict*



# I. GRAMMATICAL ANALYSIS

- Verse 14a: “We believe that ...”
  - Greek literally reads: “**If** we believe that Jesus died and rose again”
  - 1<sup>st</sup> Class Condition: speaker assumes truth of the condition (BDF §372.1)
  - Paul presents the first half of v 14 not as a disputable point (“*If* we believe that ...”) but an accepted fact (“*Since* we believe that ...”)
  - The Thessalonians do, in fact, believe this, since message of Christ’s death and resurrection was passed on by Paul to his converts “as of first importance” (1 Cor 15:3)



# I. GRAMMATICAL ANALYSIS

- Verse 14a: Confession of early church?
  - V 14a is likely a confession of the early church that Paul quotes
  - REASON #1: Introductory phrase “We believe that ...” used elsewhere to introduce creedal formula (Rom 10:9)
  - REASON #2: Use of “Jesus” alone extremely rare for Paul, as he normally has fuller designations “the Lord,” “Lord Jesus,” “Christ Jesus”, etc



# I. GRAMMATICAL ANALYSIS

- Verse 14a: Confession of early church?
  - REASON #3: Verb “rise” ἀνιστήμι, *anistêmi*) rare for Paul (4x—two of which are from OT quotes), as he consistently uses a different verb: ἐγείρω, *egeirô* (33x!)
  - REASON #4: Paul rarely speaks of Jesus rising from death; normally refers to *God* raising Jesus (Rom 4:24, 25; 6:4, 9; 7:4; 1 Cor 6:14; 15:4, 12, 13, 15, 16, 17; Gal 1:1; Eph 1:20; Col 2:12; etc)

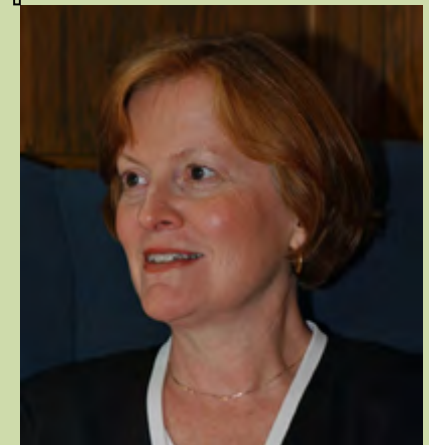
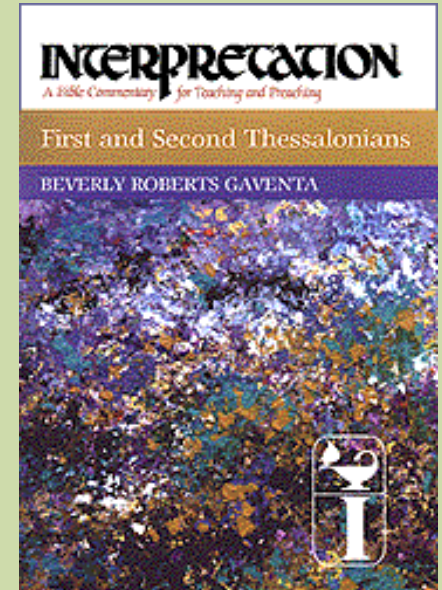


# I. GRAMMATICAL ANALYSIS

- Verse 14a: Confession of early church?

- Beverly R. Gaventa:

“Verse 14a (‘Jesus died and rose again’) may well be a creedal formula. Several features of the statement prompt this conclusion... Paul inherits this formula, perhaps one with which the Thessalonians were already familiar, and employs it here as the basis for an affirmation about Christian hope” (*First and Second Thessalonians* [Louisville: John Knox, 1988] 64)



# I. GRAMMATICAL ANALYSIS

- Verse 14a: Confession of early church?
  - SIGNIFICANCE:
    - Adds authority to Paul's words, since he is not merely giving his own private belief nor even that of just the Thessalonian congregation but instead a truth affirmed by the entire early church
    - This is not merely Paul's personal opinion but a weighty word of the church



# I. GRAMMATICAL ANALYSIS

- Verse 15: “will certainly not precede”
  - Paul uses a double negative in Greek
  - Most emphatic way to negate something in Greek
  - Many translations fail to capture this emphasis: e.g. RSV “will not precede”
- SIGNIFICANCE: Shows that Paul is responding to some who claim that living believers will, in fact, precede deceased believers at Christ’s return and so be at a disadvantage over those who are alive

**Certainly not!**

**Absolutely not!**

**By no means!**

# I. GRAMMATICAL ANALYSIS

- Verse 17: “will be caught up”
  - Verb “caught up” is a translation of the Greek verb ἁρπάζω (*harpazô*)
  - This Greek verb was translated in the Vulgate into Latin as *rapare*—from which we get English word “rapture”
  - The important and complicated issue of whether “the rapture” is a biblical teaching will be taken up later in this study when we also consider two other hermeneutical categories: the historical principle and the theological principle





# I. GRAMMATICAL ANALYSIS

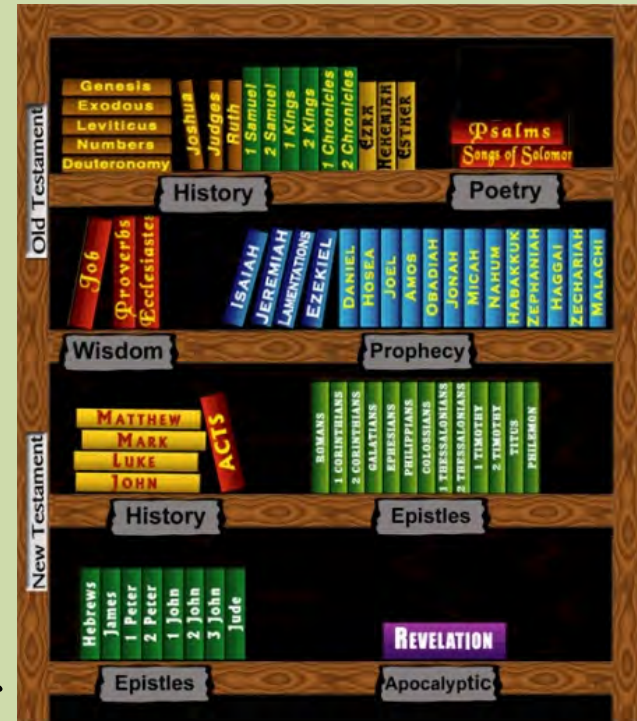
- Verse 18: “encourage one another!”
  - Closing command *parakaleite* literally means “to call alongside”
  - Same word used in John’s Gospel for the Holy Spirit: the *Paraclete* or “Comforter” (John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7)
  - Primary purpose of this passage is not to predict the future but to comfort the church
  - Too many preachers/teachers misuse and abuse this text by either ignoring or distorting this comforting purpose



# II. LITERARY ANALYSIS

## 1. What type of literature is 1 Thess 4:13-18?

- Literary analysis involves several things, one of which is what type of literature (genre) the biblical text consists of
- 1 Thess 4:13-18 clearly is part of a *letter* or an *epistle*
- Thus, knowledge of epistolary formulas or fixed expressions typically used in ancient letters important for proper interpretation of this passage



## II. LITERARY ANALYSIS

### 2. Evidence for start of new passage at 4:13:

- 4:13 Vocative “brothers” (*adelphoi*)
- 4:13 Disclosure formula (“We do not want you to be ignorant that ...”)
- 4:13 “Now about” formula (see also 4:9; 5:1)
- Significant shift in subject matter from the topics of holiness in sexual conduct (4:3-8) and brotherly and sisterly love (4:9-12) to new topic of eschatology—the end times when Jesus comes back

A blue circle containing the text "Where does the new passage START?" in white, sans-serif font. The circle is positioned on the right side of the slide, overlapping the list of evidence.

## II. LITERARY ANALYSIS

### 3. Evidence for end of new passage at 4:18:

- 4:18: “Therefore/So then” (*hôte*) signals end of discussion (see similar closing function of *hôte* in 1 Cor 7:38; 10:12; 11:33; 14:39; 15:58)
- 5:1 Vocative “brothers” (*adelphoi*)
- 5:1 “Now about” formula (see also 4:9; 4:13)
- 5:2 Disclosure formula (“You know ...”)
- Thematic *inclusio* between 4:13 (problem of grieving) and 4:18 (solution of comfort)

Where does  
the new  
passage  
END?

## II. LITERARY ANALYSIS

### 3. Evidence for end of new passage at 4:18:

- Boundaries of passage further marked out as “new” topic versus “previously shared” topic

- **4:1-12 Previously shared topics**

- 4:1 “We instructed ...”
- 4:2 “what instructions we gave you ...”
- 4:6b “as we have already told you ...”
- 4:11b “just as we told you”

- **4:13-18 New topic**

- 4:13 “We do not want you to be ignorant about ...”

- **5:1-11 Previously shared topic**

- 5:1b “we do not need to write to you”
- 5:2 “For you know very well that ...”

Where does  
the new  
passage  
END?

## II. LITERARY ANALYSIS

### 4. Structure (“Mapquest) of 4:13-18:

- Literary analysis also involves question of the structure of a given biblical passage
- Paul (like the other biblical authors) is a gifted writer who, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, thinks carefully not just about the words that he will write but also the structure that his argument will follow
- Paul thinks not just about “*what*” he says (the CONTENT) but also “*how*” he will say it (the FORM in which that content is given)



How does Paul get from the grieving of verse 13 to the comfort of verse 18?

## II. LITERARY ANALYSIS

### 4. Structure (“Mapquest) of 4:13-18:

- V 13: Opening Assertion
- V 14: Causal clause introduced with “for”
  - Deals with what Jesus has *done*, namely, his resurrection
  - Likely a confession of early church
- V 15: Causal clause introduced with “for”
  - Deals with what Jesus has *said*, namely, the “word of the Lord”
  - Vv 16-17 explain the word of the Lord (introduced with a different “for” in Greek)
- V 18: Conclusion introduced with “therefore”



How does Paul get from the grieving of verse 13 to the comfort of verse 18?

## II. LITERARY ANALYSIS

### 4. Structure (“Mapquest) of 4:13-18:

#### Opening Assertion (v 13)

Christians grieve for deceased believers with hope

#### Reason #1 (v 14)

The Weighty Word (Confession) of the Church:

Jesus’ resurrection guarantees deceased believers’ resurrection, such that they will be alive when Jesus comes again and thus able to participate equally in the glory of Christ’s return

#### Reason #2 (vv 15-17)

The Weighty Word of the Lord:

Paul gives not merely his opinion but a “word of the Lord”—a teaching directly from Jesus himself that deceased believers will participate equally in the glory of Christ’s return

#### Conclusion (v 18)

Comfort one another with these words!



# III. HISTORICAL ANALYSIS

## 1. Problem addressed in 4:13-18:

- Q: What is the trouble in the text?
- A: *General answer:* Grieving over fellow deceased believers



What is the  
TROUBLE  
in the text?

# III. HISTORICAL ANALYSIS

## 1. Problem addressed in 4:13-18:

- Q: But *why* were the Thessalonian Christians grieving so intensely over their fellow believers?
- A: *Specific answer:*
  - They feared that their fellow believers who had already died would either miss out on the day of the Lord or be at a disadvantage at Christ's return compared to those believers who will still be alive when Jesus came back

What is the  
TROUBLE  
in the text?

# III. HISTORICAL ANALYSIS

## 1. Problem addressed in 4:13-18:

- EVIDENCE #1: Use of **emphatic future negation** (double negative) in v 15 to assert that those alive at Christ's return "will *certainly* not precede" believers who have died
- No need for Paul to be so emphatic unless there were, in fact, some in the Thessalonian church who wrongly believed that they who were still alive when Jesus comes again would precede their deceased fellow believers

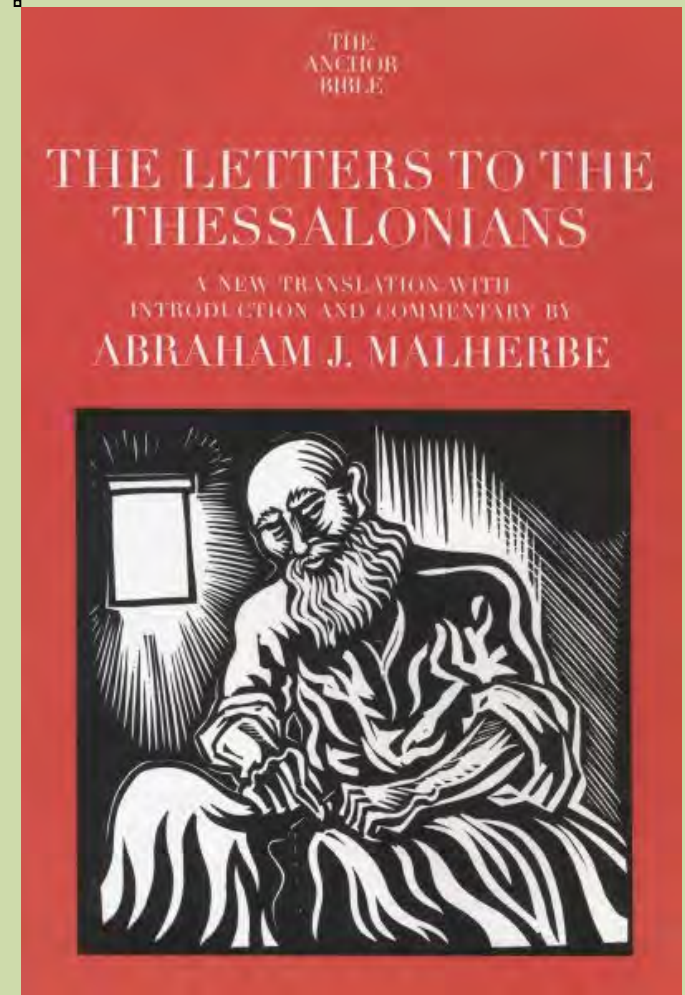
What is the  
TROUBLE  
in the text?

# III. HISTORICAL ANALYSIS

## 1. Problem addressed in 4:13-18:

- Abraham Malherbe:

“[Paul’s denial in 4:15] is so strong that it sounds like a denial of an opinion actually held by some people in Thessalonica” (page 272)



New York: Doubleday, 2000

# III. HISTORICAL ANALYSIS

## 1. Problem addressed in 4:13-18:

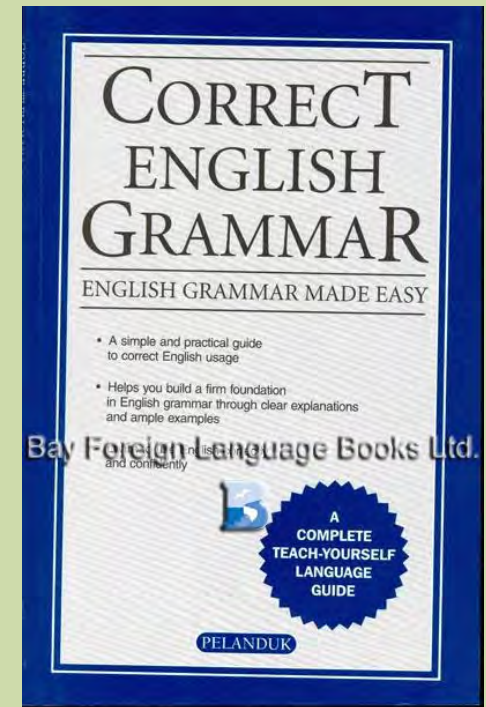
- EVIDENCE #2: Paul **sequences** the eschatological events such that deceased believers will rise “first” (v 16) and only “then” (v 17) will the next event involving living believers occur
- EVIDENCE #3: The equality of deceased believers with those who are alive at Christ’s return emphasized by **addition of word “together”** in v 17: Paul doesn’t merely say “with them” but “*together* with them”

What is the  
TROUBLE  
in the text?

# III. HISTORICAL ANALYSIS

## 1. Problem addressed in 4:13-18:

- EVIDENCE #4: The equality of deceased believers with those who are alive at Christ's return further emphasized by **word order**:



- English: “we who are alive will be caught up *together with them*”  
Greek: “we who are alive, *together with them*, will be caught up”

# III. HISTORICAL ANALYSIS

## 1. Problem addressed in 4:13-18:

### •SUMMARY:

- Trouble in the text involves not merely a general intense grief in the face of death (common problem today)
- Instead, the Thessalonians' confusion over how precisely the resurrection of believers coordinated with the other future events to take place at Christ's return led them to fear that their fellow church members who had already died would either miss out or be at a disadvantage at Jesus' second coming compared to themselves who were still alive (*not* a common problem today)

What is the  
TROUBLE  
in the text?

# III. HISTORICAL ANALYSIS

## 2. “the rest of men who have no hope”:

- Paul asserts that non-Christians have “no hope” in the face of death
- Issue:
  - Is this hyperbole or is Paul right?
  - What is the evidence for a widespread sense of hopelessness in face of death in the Greco-Roman world?



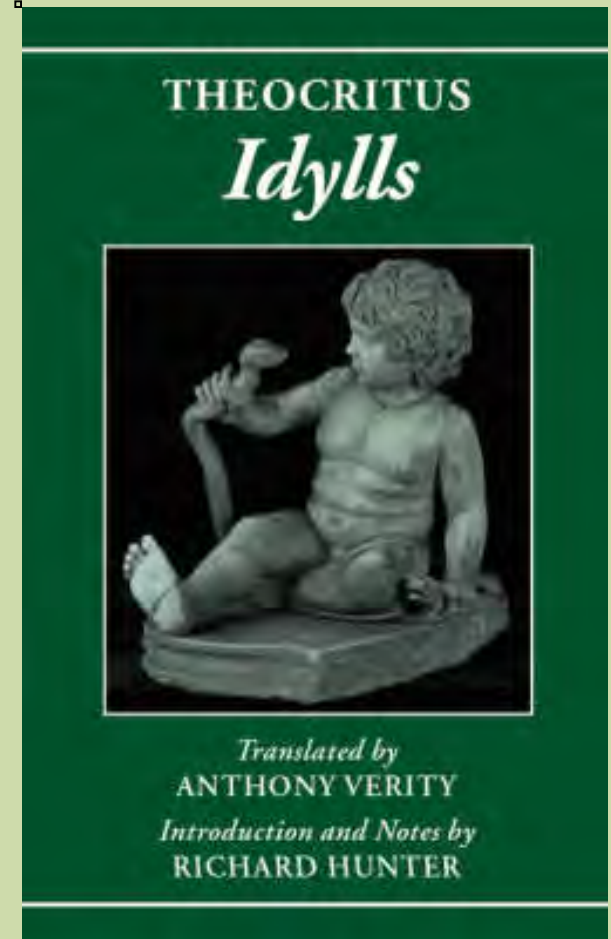


# III. HISTORICAL ANALYSIS

2. “the rest of men who have no hope”:

- Theocritus, writer of ancient Greek bucolic poetry during 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C., wrote:

“Hopes are for the living; without hope are the dead” (*Idyll* 4.42)



# III. HISTORICAL ANALYSIS

2. “the rest of men who have no hope”:

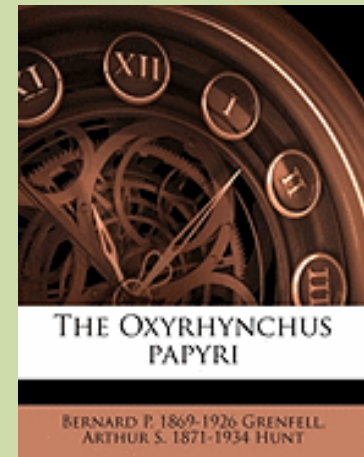
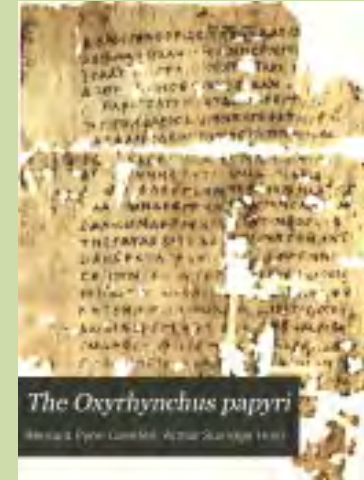
- Popular grave inscription found in both Greek and Latin throughout the ancient world: “*I was not, and I was, I am not, I care not*”
- Inscription so popular that it was often simply abbreviated N F F N S N C (*non fui, fui, non sum, non curo*)



# III. HISTORICAL ANALYSIS

## 2. “the rest of men who have no hope”:

- P.Oxy 115 (2<sup>nd</sup> century AD)
- Letter of consolation written by a woman, Irene, to a couple whose son has just died
- After stating that she and her family have fulfilled the customary duties in this situation, Irene attempts to comfort grieving couple by stating: “*But nevertheless, one is able to do nothing against such things [i.e. death]. Therefore, comfort yourselves*”



# III. HISTORICAL ANALYSIS

## 2. “the rest of men who have no hope”:

- Seneca (ca. 4 BC – 65 AD) was a Roman Stoic philosopher, statesman and advisor to Nero
- Refers to the deification and immortality promised by the mystery religions as “human pipe dreams” (NIDNTT 2.239)

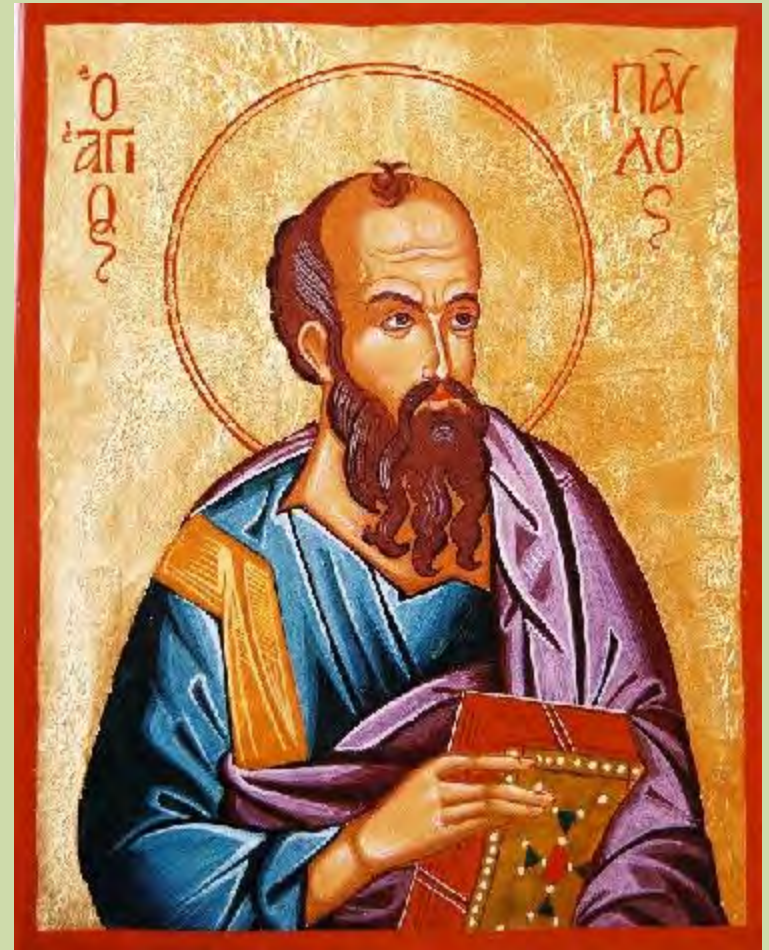


Bust of Seneca, part of double herm.

# III. HISTORICAL ANALYSIS

## 2. “the rest of men who have no hope”:

- Even without the kind of *historical* evidence cited above, Paul has a *theological* reason for asserting that non-Christians have no hope
- Paul believes that non-Christians are “without God in the world” and that they, therefore, are those “having no hope” (Eph 2:12)



Apostle Paul

# III. HISTORICAL ANALYSIS

2. “the rest of men who have no hope”:

- Christians in Thessalonica, however, in sharp contrast to “the rest of men”, *do have hope*—not only for themselves but also for their fellow believers who have fallen asleep



# III. HISTORICAL ANALYSIS

## 3. “the word of the Lord” (vv 15-17):

- Text: *“For this we say to you by the word of the Lord ”*
- Paul has received some revelation from the Lord Jesus Christ
- This raises 3 questions:
  - Q1: Where did Paul receive this “word of the Lord”?
  - Q2: What in following verses constitutes “word of the Lord”?
  - Q3: What is the significance of Paul citing “word of the Lord”?



Jesus teaching his followers

# III. HISTORICAL ANALYSIS

3. “the word of the Lord” (vv 15-17):

- Q1: Where did Paul receive this “word of the Lord”?
- Answer: Several possibilities
  - Agraphon: unknown saying of Jesus not recorded in gospels but passed on to Paul
  - Paul as a prophet feels authorized to speak “a word of the Lord”
  - Paul is summarizing in his own words the general teaching of Jesus about the end times



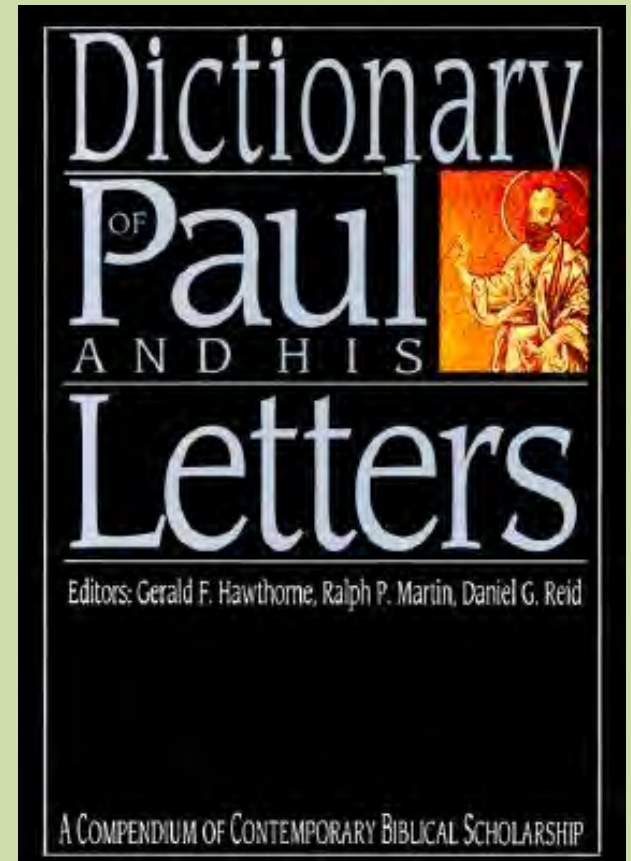
Apostle Paul  
by Rembrandt (1663)



# III. HISTORICAL ANALYSIS

## 3. “the word of the Lord” (vv 15-17):

- Best answer: Paul loosely paraphrases sayings of Jesus found in gospels, likely Matt 24:29-33,40-41
- Seyoon Kim: “the several and clear echoes of Jesus’ sayings in the passage seem to suggest that Paul must be conscious of the material he is using as Jesus material and therefore that with ‘the word of the Lord’ here Paul is referring to the word(s) of the historical Jesus” (“Jesus, Sayings of,” *DPL*, page 476)



Downers Grove, IL:  
InterVarsity Press, 1993

# III. HISTORICAL ANALYSIS

## 3. “the word of the Lord” (vv 15-17):

- Q2: What in following verses constitutes the “word of the Lord”?
- Answer:
  - V 15b: Paul summarizes in his own words the teaching of Jesus that is relevant to Thessalonian situation: “we ... will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep”
  - Vv 16-17a: Paul loosely cites the word of the Lord about the manner of Christ’s return
  - V 17b: Paul adds pastoral conclusion

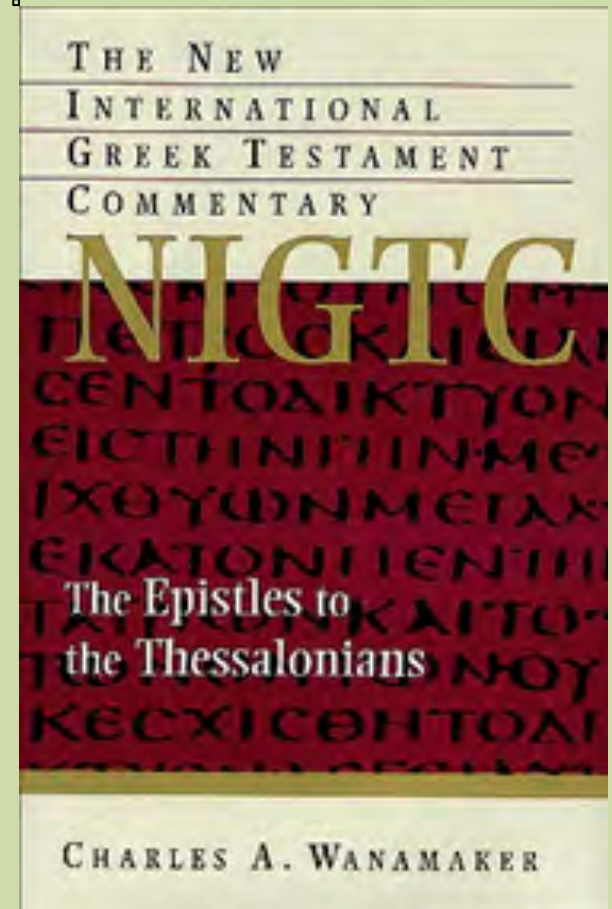


What words are “Jesus’ words” that should be put in red letters?

# III. HISTORICAL ANALYSIS

3. “the word of the Lord” (vv 15-17):

- Q3: What is the significance of Paul citing the “word of the Lord”?
- Answer: Adds weight/authority to Paul’s argument
- Charles Wanamaker: “By placing his assurance that the living would not have precedence over the dead at the coming of the Lord under the rubric ‘a word of the Lord,’ Paul attributed the highest possible authority to his assertion in v. 15b” (page 171)



Grand Rapids: Eerdmans  
1990

# IV. THEOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

1. “that you may not grieve like the rest”:

• Issue:

- Are Christians allowed to grieve for deceased believers?
- Is Paul claiming that in the context of death Christians should not grieve in contrast to believers who do?
- **Theological issue:** What does the rest of the bible say about death and the way in which Christians ought to face death, and how does that compare to Paul’s statement here in 4:13?

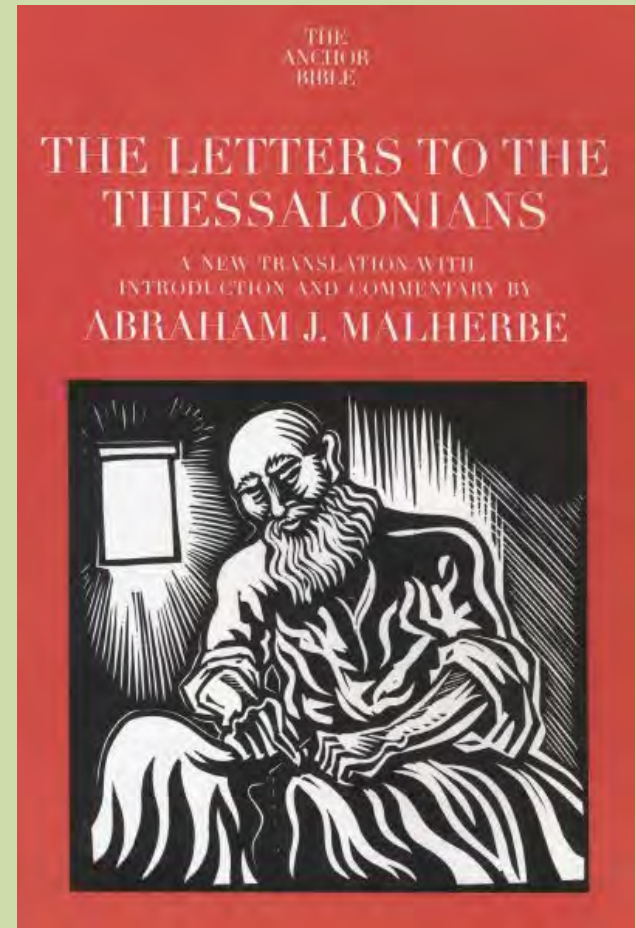


Are Christians allowed to cry in the face of death?

# IV. THEOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

## 1. “that you may not grieve like the rest”:

- Wrong view: No tears allowed!
  - Some commentators argue that Paul here is making an absolute prohibition: Christians are not to grieve at all for deceased believers
  - Abraham Malherbe: *“Paul’s attitude toward this grief is equally straightforward: it is prohibited ... Paul is thus making an absolute prohibition”* (page 264)
  - See also Lightfoot 1904: 63; Milligan 1908: 56; Best 1972: 186



New York: Doubleday, 2000.

# IV. THEOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

1. “that you may not grieve like the rest”:

- Wrong view: No tears allowed!
  - Many contemporary Christians similarly believe that they and other believers ought *not* to grieve in the context of death
  - Such thinking is based not only on 1 Thess 4:13 but on the idea that tears in the face of death is a sign of weak faith and that Christians ought instead to celebrate our victory over death made possible in Christ



Christians don't cry about death!

# IV. THEOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

1. “that you may not grieve like the rest”:

- Tears are an expression of great love!
  - That Paul expected believers to grieve in context of death is clear from his other letters
  - Phil 2:27: If Epaphroditus had died from his illness, Paul would have had “*sorrow upon sorrow*”
  - Rom 12:15: Paul commands readers to “*weep with those who weep*”
  - 1 Cor 15:26: Paul refers to death not positively but as “*the last enemy*”

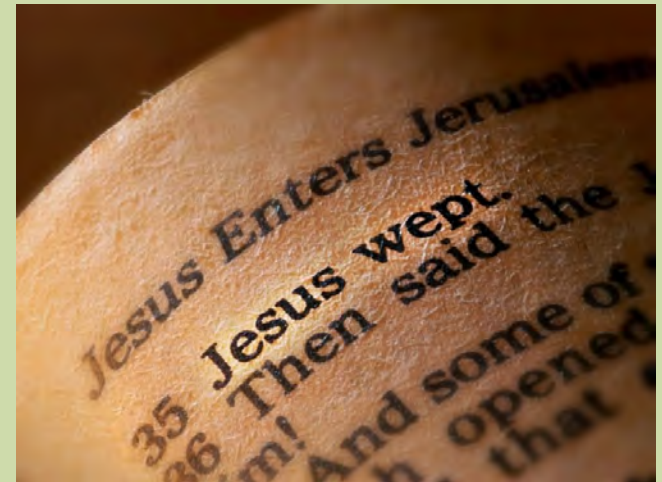


What did Paul say in his other letters?

# IV. THEOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

1. “that you may not grieve like the rest”:

- Tears are an expression of great love!
  - Example of Jesus who wept over death of his friend, Lazarus
  - No justification from 1 Thess 4:13 or elsewhere in bible for Christians to gloss over pain of death or glibly utter pious phrases about the deceased “being in a better place”
  - Tears and other expressions of grief are not a sign of weak faith but only of great love
  - John 11:35 “*Jesus wept. So the Jews said, ‘See how he loved him!’*”





# IV. THEOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

1. “that you may not grieve like the rest”:

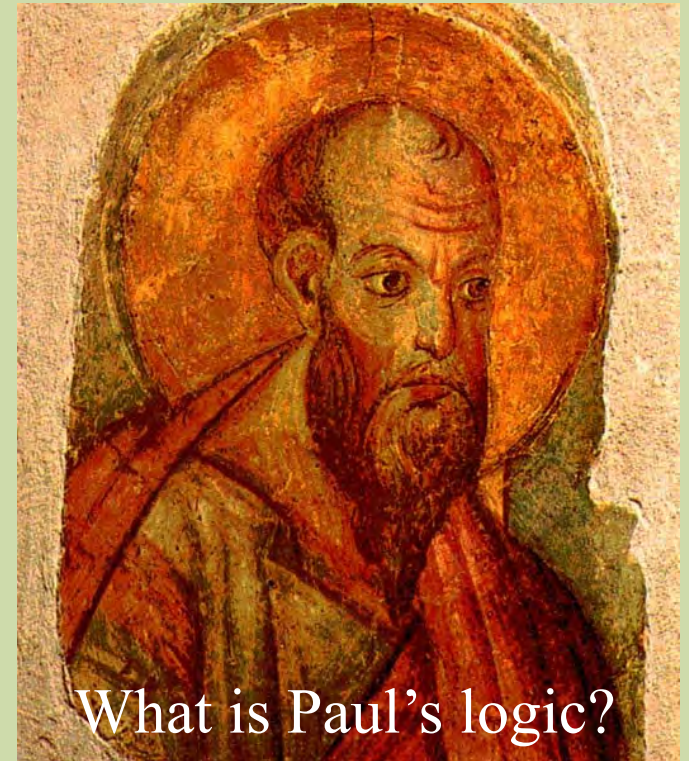
- SUMMARY: Although both non-Christians and Christians grieve at the death of loved ones, there is a critical difference: in contrast to the hopelessness that characterizes those outside the faith, believers grieve *with hope*



# IV. THEOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

## 2. Logic of verse 14:

- Logical link between two halves of this verse not explicitly stated: how does verse 14a (“For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again”) logically lead to verse 14b (“so also God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep”)?
- Paul’s logic, however, is clear from an understanding of his theology found elsewhere in his letters



# IV. THEOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

## 2. Logic of verse 14:

- In Paul's way of thinking (his theology), Christ's resurrection is a guarantee of believers' resurrection
- Rom 8:11 "And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you"
- 1 Cor 6:14 "By his power God raised the Lord from the dead, and he will raise us also [from the dead]"



Jesus' resurrection = guarantee of believers' resurrection

# IV. THEOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

## 2. Logic of verse 14:

- 2 Cor 4:14 “because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus ...”
- Col 1:18 “he [Jesus] is the firstborn from among the dead”
- 1 Cor 15:12-23 “But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? ...For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive”



Jesus' resurrection = guarantee of  
believers' resurrection

# IV. THEOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

## 2. Logic of verse 14:

- 1 Cor 15:20 “But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the *firstfruits* of those who have fallen asleep”

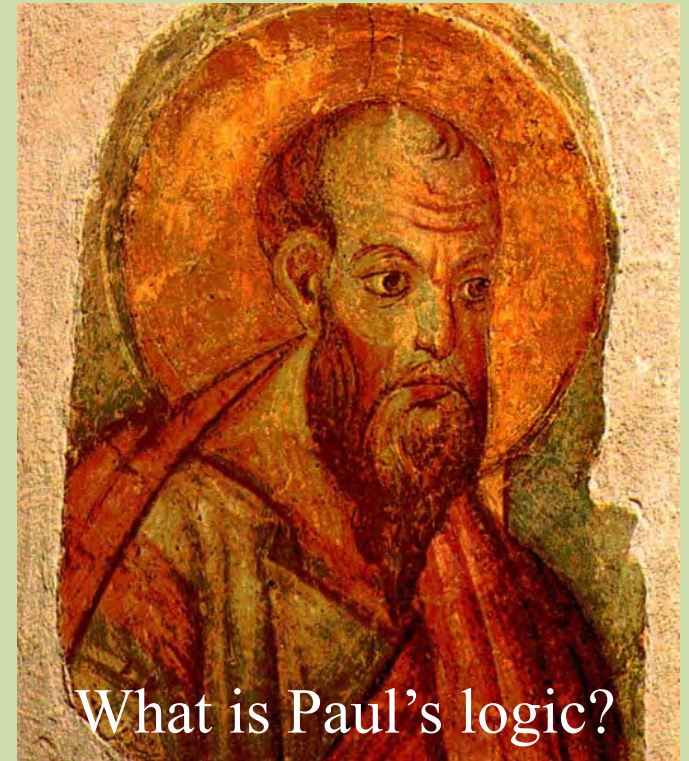


Firstfruits

# IV. THEOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

## 2. Logic of verse 14:

- Paul's logic in verse 14 is now clear
- Christ's resurrection (v 14a) is a "firstfruit" or guarantee of believers' resurrection which means that the Thessalonians' fellow believers who have already died will be raised at Christ's return so that "God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him" (v 14b)
- Deceased believers will not miss out or be at a disadvantage at Christ's return!



# V. EXEGETICAL ISSUE: The Rapture

- 4:16-17 *“For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet call of God. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air”*
- Q: Is the rapture a biblical teaching or mistaken idea?
- A: Answer must come from examining these key verses grammatically, historically and theologically



# V. EXEGETICAL ISSUE: The Rapture

(Soft) Evidence #1: The public nature of Christ's coming

- Three prepositional phrases point not to a secret coming in which Christians will suddenly and quietly vanish but a public return of Christ which *all* people—both believers and unbelievers alike—will witness

*With a loud command*

*With the voice of the archangel*

*With the trumpet call of God*



# V. EXEGETICAL ISSUE: The Rapture

(Soft) Evidence #2: “will be caught up”

- Greek verb *harpazo* used by many ancient writers to refer to people being “snatched away” from life to death
- Plutarch: uses verb *harpazo* and its compounds to refer to those who die an early death such that they are “snatched away” from “the advantages of life, such as marriage, education, manhood, citizenship and public office” (*A Letter of Condolence to Apolloinius* 113C; see also 111D, 117B-D)



# V. EXEGETICAL ISSUE: The Rapture

(Soft) Evidence #2: “will be caught up”

- Funeral inscriptions speak of how Fate has “snatched away” the living to the place of Hades (*IG* 2.1062a.3; 11477.9; 4.620.2; 5.733.12)
- Lucian uses a synonym of *harpazo* in the speech of a grieving father who cries out to his deceased son: “Dearest child, you are gone from me, dead, snatched away before your time” (*Funerals* 13)



# V. EXEGETICAL ISSUE: The Rapture

(Soft) Evidence #2: “will be caught up”

- Paul, therefore, may have chosen the word *harpazo* not to describe a literal snatching away or “rapture” but rather to make a clever pun or inversion on the common use of this word
- Rather than the expected picture of people being “snatched away” from *life to death*, Christians will be “snatched away” from *life to life* such that they do not face death



# V. EXEGETICAL ISSUE: The Rapture

(Rock hard!) Evidence #3: “to meet”

- Greek noun ἀπαντήσις (*apantêsis*) does not refer generically to any kind of meeting but is a *technical term* referring to the specific custom in Paul’s day of sending a delegation of leading citizens—a reception party—outside the city “to meet” a visiting dignitary and then escort that person on the final part of their journey into the city

ἀπαντήσις

=

“reception”

# V. EXEGETICAL ISSUE: The Rapture

(Rock hard!) Evidence #3: “to meet”

- These formal “receptions” typically involved the following elements:
  - Prominent citizens were chosen to be members of the delegation or reception party
  - City leaders adopt a formal resolution to pay tribute to visiting dignitary and host formal reception in his honor
  - These citizens would dress in their finest clothes (often white) and with laurel wreaths on their heads as they left the city to meet the visiting dignitary

ἀπαντήσις

=

“reception”

# V. EXEGETICAL ISSUE: The Rapture

## (Rock hard!) Evidence #3: “to meet”

- After meeting and greeting the visiting dignitary, reception part would escort this person the rest of his way into their city
- Sometimes the visiting dignitary would pronounce judgment on select prisoners, liberating some but sentencing others to execution
- Greek word *apantêsis* has this technical meaning not only in secular writings but also in its three NT occurrences:

ἀπαντήσις

=

“reception”

# V. EXEGETICAL ISSUE: The Rapture

- Occurrence #1 of key word *apantêsis*: Matthew 25:6 (Parable of Wise & Foolish Virgins)



Hieronimus  
Francken II  
(1578-1623)

# V. EXEGETICAL ISSUE: The Rapture

- Occurrence #2 of key word *apantêsis* : Acts 28:15 (Paul's arrival in Rome)





# V. EXEGETICAL ISSUE: The Rapture

- Occurrence #3 of key word *apantêsis* :  
1 Thess 4:17
- “to meet the Lord in the air” means that the persecuted church plays the privileged role of being the delegation party that meets the descending Christ in the air and then, rather than go with Jesus to heaven for seven years (so Dispensationalists), *escorts him to earth* where Christ rules over the restored creation



# V. EXEGETICAL ISSUE: The Rapture

“Interpret scripture w/scripture”:

Matthew 24:37-41

“<sup>37</sup>As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. <sup>38</sup>For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; <sup>39</sup>and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and *took them all away*. That is how it will be ...”



“As it was in the days of Noah ...”

# V. EXEGETICAL ISSUE: The Rapture

“Interpret scripture w/scripture”:

“... at the coming of the Son of Man. <sup>40</sup>Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. <sup>41</sup>Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left.”

(Parallel version: Luke 17:26-35)



“As it was in the days of Noah ...”

# V. EXEGETICAL ISSUE: The Rapture

Context is king!

In Noah's day:

Those taken away (i.e. "raptured")  
= unbelievers who perish in flood

Those who remain (i.e. not "raptured")  
= Noah & his family who live

Conclusion: *I want to be 'left behind'!*



"The Flood"  
Jan Bruegel, the Elder  
(1568-1625)

# V. EXEGETICAL ISSUE: The Rapture

Context is king!

In the coming of Son of Man:

“That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. Two men will be in the field; one will be taken [*away in judgment like unbelievers in Noah’s day*] and the other left [*behind to live like Noah and his family*]. Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken [*away in judgment*] and the other left [*behind to live*]”



“Two women will be grinding with a hand mill ...”

# V. EXEGETICAL ISSUE: The Rapture

Q: The Rapture: A Biblical Truth or Mistaken Teaching?

A: **Yes**, the bible teaches that the church will be joined or “raptured” to Christ at his return such that there is a separation between believers and unbelievers

**No**, the bible does not teach that there will be a sudden disappearance or “rapture” of the church to heaven for seven years after which it returns to earth with Christ to participate in his 1000 year millennial reign



# **Sermon Outline:**

## **Jesus is Coming Again!**

**1 Thessalonians 4:13-18**

Introduction: The CERTAINTY of Christ's Return

I. The CONFUSION about Christ's Return (v 13)

II. The CLARIFICATION of Christ's Return (vv 14-17)

1. Appeal to what Christ has done: Jesus' Resurrection (v 14)

2. Appeal to what Christ has said: "Word of the Lord" (vv 15-17)

III. The COMFORT of Christ's Return (v. 18)

Conclusion: The CHALLENGE of Christ's Return