

Watch for His Coming

The Lord Jesus said:

Take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day come on you unexpectedly. For it will come as a snare on all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man (Lk 21:34–36).

Jesus is returning and men are to discern the times so that they are not caught unaware (1 Thess 5). John MacArthur writes:

The future “Day of the Lord” which unleashes God’s wrath, falls into two parts: 1) the end of the 7 year tribulation period (cf. Rev. 19:11–21), and 2) the end of the Millennium. These two are actually 1,000 years apart and Peter refers to the end of the 1,000 year period in connection with the final “Day of the Lord” (cf. 2 Pet. 3:10; Rev. 20:7–15). Here, Paul refers to that aspect of the “Day of the Lord,” which concludes the tribulation period. **a thief in the night.** This phrase is never used to refer to the rapture of the church. It is used of Christ’s coming in judgment on the Day of the Lord at the end of the 7 year tribulation which is distinct from the rapture of the church (*see note on 4:15*¹) and it is used of the

¹ **4:15 the word of the Lord.** Was Paul referring to some saying of Jesus found in the gospels? No. There are none exact or even close. The only explicit reference to the Rapture in the gospel is John 14:1–3. Some suggest that Jesus had said the words while on earth, their substance being recorded later in such places as Matt. 24:30, 31 and John 6:39, 40; 11:25, 26. Similarities between this passage in 1 Thess. and the gospel accounts include a trumpet (Matt. 24:31), a resurrection (John 1:26), and a gathering of the elect (Matt. 24:31). Yet dissimilarities between it and the canonical sayings of Christ far outweigh the resemblances. Some of the differences between Matt. 24:30, 31 and vv. 15–17 are as follows: 1) in Matt. the Son of Man is coming on the clouds (but see Mark 13:26; Luke 21:27), in 1 Thess. ascending believers are in them; 2) in the former the angels gather, in the latter Christ does personally; 3) in the former nothing is said about resurrection, while in the latter this is the main theme; and 4) Matthew records nothing about the order of ascent, which is the principal lesson in Thessalonians. On the other hand, did he mean a statement of Jesus that was spoken but not recorded in the gospels (Acts 20:35)? No. There is reason to conclude this since Paul affirmed that he taught the Rapture as a heretofore hidden truth (1 Cor. 15:51), i.e., “mystery.” Apparently, the Thessalonians were informed fully about the Day of the Lord judgment (cf. 5:1, 2), but not the preceding event—the rapture of the church. Until Paul revealed it as the revelation from God to him, it had been a secret, with the only prior mention being Jesus’ teaching in John 14:1–3. This was new revelation of what had previously been an unrevealed mystery. **we who are alive and remain.** This refers to Christians alive at the time of the Rapture, those who live on this earth to see the coming of the Lord for His own. Since Paul didn’t know God’s timing, he lived and spoke as if it could happen in his lifetime. As with all early Christians, he believed the event was near (cf. Rom. 13:11; 1 Cor. 6:14; 10:11; 16:22; Phil. 3:20, 21; 1 Tim. 6:14; Titus 2:13). Those alive at the Rapture will follow those dead who rise first (v. 16).

4:16 the Lord Himself will descend. This fulfills the pledge of John 14:1–3 (cf. Acts 1:11). Until then, He remains in heaven (cf. 1:10; Heb. 1:1–3). **archangel.** Very little is known about the organization or rank of angels (cf. Col. 1:17). While only Michael is named as an archangel (Jude 9), there seems to be more than one in the angelic ranks (Dan. 10:13). Perhaps it is Michael, the archangel, whose voice is heard as he is identified with Israel’s resurrection in Dan. 12:1–3. At that moment (cf. 1 Cor. 15:52, “twinkling of an eye”), the dead rise first. They will not miss the Rapture, but be the first participants. **trumpet of God.** Cf. 1 Cor. 15:52. This trumpet is not the judgment trumpets of Rev. 8–11, but is illustrated by the trumpet of Ex. 19:16–19, which called the people out of the camp to meet God. It will be a trumpet of deliverance (cf. Zeph. 1:16; Zech. 9:14).

4:17 caught up. After the dead come forth, their spirits, already with the Lord (2 Cor. 5:8; Phil. 1:23), now being joined to resurrected new bodies (*see notes on 1 Cor. 15:35–50*), the living Christians will be raptured, lit. snatched away (cf. John 10:28; Acts 8:39). This passage, along with John 14:1–3 and 1 Cor. 15:51, 52, form the biblical basis for “the Rapture” of the church. The time of the Rapture cannot be conclusively determined from this passage alone. However, when other texts such as Rev. 3:10 and John 14:3 are consulted and compared to the texts about Christ’s coming in judgment (Matt. 13:34–50; 24:29–44; Rev. 19:11–21) at the end of a 7 year tribulation, it has to be noted that there is a clear difference between the character of the “Rapture” in that there is no mention of any judgment, while the other texts feature judgment. So then, it is best to understand that the Rapture occurs at a time different from the coming of Christ in judgment. Thus, the Rapture has been described as pretribulational (before the wrath of God unfolded in the judgments of Rev. 6–19). This event includes complete transformation (cf. 1 Cor. 15:51, 52; Phil 3:20, 21) and union with the Lord Jesus Christ that never ends.¹

judgment which concludes the Millennium (2 Pet. 3:10). As a thief comes unexpectedly and without warning, so will the Day of the Lord come in both its final phases.²

The Lord does not come as a thief to his own. He calls his disciples friends (Jn 15:15). They watch for his return (Re 3:3, 16:15). But not all are his friends. He has enemies who have not humbled themselves before him (Lk 19:27). Men must repent before it's too late. He does not guarantee anyone another tomorrow (2 Co 6:2): For man also does not know his time. Like fish taken in a cruel net, like birds caught in a snare, so the sons of men are snared in an evil time when it falls suddenly upon them (Ec 9:12).

The Lord said when he returns it will be as it was in the days of Noah and as it was in the days of Lot. Men gave little thought to the things of God. Jesus said:

And as it was in the days of Noah, so it will be also in the days of the Son of Man: They ate, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all.

Likewise as it was also in the days of Lot: They ate, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they built; but on the day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all. Even so will it be in the day when the Son of Man is revealed (Lk 17:26–30).

Believers wait for the Lord Jesus expectantly (Lk 12:35-40). They should be eager (1 Th 2:19–20, Tt 2:13) and ready for his return (Lk 12:35-48): Blessed are those servants whom the master, when he comes, will find watching (Lk 12:36–37).

² MacArthur, J., Jr. (Ed.). (1997). *The MacArthur Study Bible* (electronic ed., p. 1849). Nashville, TN: Word Pub.