

THE COMING AGAIN OF THE LORD JESUS (1 THESS. 4. 13-18).

PART 1.

Each Lord's Day we meet to remember our Lord Jesus. And often then we think of the words of the apostle Paul, 'As often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes'.¹

In this article, I want to consider a little of what the Lord has revealed to us about the next great event marked down on God's calendar—namely, the coming of the Lord Jesus for us His people.

SCRIPTURE

But we would not have you ignorant, brethren, concerning them that fall asleep; that ye sorrow not, even as the rest, which have no hope.

For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also that are fallen asleep in Jesus will God bring with him.

For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we that are alive, that are left unto the coming of the Lord, shall in no wise precede them that are fallen asleep.

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: then we that are alive, that are left, shall together with them be caught up in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.

Wherefore comfort one another with these words.

1 Thessalonians 4. 13-18 (*The Revised Version*)

INTRODUCTION

I hardly need tell you that many godly and well-read students of biblical prophecy differ enormously in their views of what is to happen in the future.

Not that there is any shortage of information in your Bible about the subject—far from it. But God has not seen fit to map out in one place any precise and detailed programme of future events. And what teaching scripture does give on the subject is mostly imbedded in very practical settings. It is clear, therefore, that the Lord's concern lies more with affecting the way we live *in the present* than in satisfying our curiosity about what lies *in the future*.

Speaking for myself, in trying to fit the little I know into a meaningful picture of future events, I have long accepted the view that our Lord's coming *for us* will *precede* those events which fall in what, for convenience, are often spoken of as Daniel's 70th week and the Great Tribulation – which events are, if I have it right, themselves to be followed by our Lord's Advent as the awesome warrior King to establish His manifested kingdom here on earth.²

But my views on the subject do not affect much of our present study because I intend to concentrate on the passage above, which most certainly does have to do with our Lord's return.

BACKGROUND

Although 'the church of the Thessalonians'³ was a young church, and the apostle Paul had spent a relatively short time with them, nevertheless he had taught them quite extensively about prophetic matters in general.⁴ Indeed, in this very letter, he refers to such matters towards the close of each chapter.⁵

The Christians at Thessalonica were, therefore, fairly familiar with much of what the Lord had revealed about future events, and Paul pays them tribute in the closing section of chapter 1 that it was public and widespread knowledge that they were 'waiting with patient expectation',⁶ for God's Son to return from heaven.⁷

But we should bear in mind (from Paul's words, 'this we say unto you by the word of the Lord'⁸) that, as yet, they knew *nothing* of that which the apostle now tells them. Indeed, as far as we know, prior to the time of the writing of this epistle no details had been made known concerning our Lord's coming for His people.

From what Paul says in our passage, it seems likely that the Thessalonian believers fully expected that the Lord would come again during their lifetimes, and that they never envisaged that any of their number would die before

then. But clearly that is just what had happened and the remaining saints feared that, somehow, they – the Christians who had died – would therefore be disadvantaged.

Select quotations

'Some apprehension seems to have been felt as to whether the departed saint would participate in the fulfilment of the hope of the Lord's return held out to them in the gospel'.⁹

'There seems to have been *no scepticism about the fact of a resurrection*, as at Corinth (1 Cor. 15. 12), and *no mistake as to the nature of it*, as by Hymenaeus and Philetus (2 Tim. 2. 17, 18). But the point which disturbed them was *the connection of dead believers with the coming kingdom*'.¹⁰

EXPOSITION

Verse 13.

But we would not have you ignorant, brethren.

The apostle knew that there was no need for him to instruct the Thessalonians concerning either sanctification¹¹ or brotherly love.¹² But he knew, too, that it was necessary for him to instruct them concerning the relationship between 'them ... that are fallen asleep' and 'the coming of the Lord' and, thereby, to assure them that death itself could not detract from the blessed hope of the Christian.

Concerning them that fall asleep.¹³

The word 'sleep' is a lovely – and wholly biblical way – to describe believers who have died. We might think, for example, of the following instances:

- (i) 'Our friend Lazarus sleeps' (John 11. 11).
- (ii) Of Stephen it is said, 'he fell asleep' (Acts 7. 60).
- (iii) 'Many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep' (1 Cor 11. 30).
- (iv) 'Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished' (1 Cor. 15. 18).
- (v) 'We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed' (I Cor. 15. 51).

The description may well have been adopted originally, I suspect, on account of the similarity in restful appearance between a sleeping *body* and a dead *body*.¹⁴ I stress '*body*', because, according to scripture, it is only the believer's body which sleeps¹⁵ and not his soul or spirit.

That the body alone is in view is evident from the words of the angel to Daniel concerning "them that *sleep in the dust of the earth*".¹⁶ Before ever *the believer's body is lowered downwards* into the grave, at the moment of death *the believer's spirit*¹⁷ *departs upwards* to 'be with Christ'.¹⁸

Select quotations

'*When death becomes the property of the believer it receives a new name and is called sleep*'.¹⁹

'The apostle refers to the deceased using the euphemistic "them that fall asleep", although he has no reservations about calling them "the dead", verse 16'.²⁰

'The object of the metaphor is to suggest that as the sleeper does not cease to exist while his body sleeps, so the dead person continues to exist despite his absence from the region in which those who remain can communicate with him, and that, *as sleep is known to be temporary, so the death of the body will be found to be [temporary]*. Sleep has its waking, death will have its resurrection'.²¹

'Paul's point in referring to death as merely "sleep" is to remind the Thessalonians that *death is not the end. There is something more*—resurrection life is waiting just as morning waits for the sleepers'.²²

That ye sorrow not ('lest you grieve').

It has been suggested that, in 1 Thessalonians, 'Paul related Christ's return to *salvation* (1 Thess. 1. 9–10), *service* (1 Thess. 2. 19–20) and *stability* (1 Thess. 3. 11–13). In this paragraph (1 Thess. 4. 13–18), he related it to *sorrow*'.²³

We must not misunderstand what Paul is saying.

We can be confident that God will never say to the Christian what He said of old to the prophet Ezekiel, when he faced a sudden and heartbreaking bereavement: '... you shall not mourn or weep, nor shall your tears run down ...'.²⁴

The problem at Thessalonica was that the believers there were sorrowing, not over *their* loss but over the loss which they *supposed* had been sustained by *those who had fallen asleep*.²⁵

Grief over the loss of loved ones (with the inevitable pain of separation and often with the ensuing experience of loneliness) is perfectly consistent with the hope of the Christian.

Indeed, the man who wrote, 'that you sorrow not':

(i) would likely have known, prior to his conversion, that the early Christians at Jerusalem 'made great lamentation' over Stephen, in whose martyrdom he had himself played a part;²⁶ and

(ii) speaks, several years later, of the increased 'sorrow' into which he would have been plunged had the sickness of his fellow worker, Epaphroditus, proved terminal.²⁷

Perhaps more to the point, we know that the Lord Jesus Himself wept in sympathy with the mourners near the tomb of His friend Lazarus.²⁸ Make no mistake; the tears which Jesus shed²⁹ at Bethany serve to authorise and sanctify Christian sorrow in the face of bereavement.

Select quotations

'When the Apostle Paul said this, he did not prohibit sorrow altogether, but only such sorrow as the heathen manifest who have no hope'.³⁰

'We observe that Paul does not forbid us to grieve altogether. Mourning is natural, even for a while emotionally necessary. It would be very unnatural, indeed inhuman, not to mourn when we lose somebody near and dear to us. To be sure, it is appropriate at Christian funerals joyfully to celebrate Christ's decisive victory over death, but we do so only through tears of personal sorrow'.³¹

'The sorrow which the apostle forbids is not our grief over our loss and separation caused by death ... but sorrow about the state and prospects of the departed, a sorrow which was especially felt in the Thessalonian church, and produced by the fear that those who died before the second coming of Christ would be denied participation in its blessedness and triumph.

'Sorrow for ourselves bereaved is different from sorrow about the dark fate of those who are gone, very different from dismay and that utter desolation of heart that fell upon the heathen when friends and relations passed away, and sank, as they thought, into unbroken darkness'.³²

'We imagine him saying: "Weep for yourselves, if you will; that is natural, and God does not wish us to be insensible to the losses and sorrows which are part of His providential government of our lives; but do not weep for them. The believer who has fallen asleep in Christ is not to be lamented; he has lost nothing".³³

'For our loss we mourn, for their gain we rejoice'.³⁴

'When the apostle counsels the Thessalonians not to sorrow as the pagans do, he is not urging them to endure with a deep Stoic calm the buffetings of fortune that they cannot avoid. Nor is he counselling a callous indifference. Rather, he is rejoicing in the complete victory that Christ has won'.³⁵

Even as the rest, who have no hope.

For 'the rest' (the unbelieving world around—'by nature children of wrath'³⁶), death is, as one scholar puts it, a 'one-way street'³⁷, with hope neither of an afterlife nor a resurrection.

We may well apply to the death of an unbeliever the descriptive words of one of the major English Romantic poets of the 19th century: 'black despair, the shadow of a starless night'.³⁸

But for the believer, death is anything but an eternal farewell.

It has been well said: 'We have a hope in death, but death is not our hope'.³⁹

Yes, it is most certainly true that 'the sky, not the grave is our goal'.⁴⁰ And yet, thank God, we do 'have a hope in death'!

Select quotations

'The difference between the two groups is not that unbelievers grieve and Christians ought not grieve ... Both Christians and non-Christians rightly express grief at the loss of a loved one. The distinction that is highlighted in verse 13 is that the non-Christian has "no hope".⁴¹

'The contrast between the gloomy despair of the heathen and the triumphant hope of the Christian mourner is nowhere more forcibly brought out than by their monumental inscriptions. The contrast of the tombs, for instance, in the Appian Way, above and below ground, has often been dwelt upon.

'On the one hand, there is *the dreary wail of despair*, the effect of which is only heightened by the pomp of outward splendour from which it issues. On the other, *the exulting psalm of hope*, shining the more brightly in all ill-written, ill-spelt records amidst the darkness of subterranean caverns. This is a more striking illustration than any quotations from literature which could be produced'.⁴²

'As the Christians in Thessalonica faced the death of those whom they loved, they are called not to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. Their *grief should be tempered and informed by the hope* they held, based on the resurrection of Christ and the promise of His coming'.⁴³

'In contemporary paganism death was often viewed as a sleep from which there would be no awaking. The Roman poet Catullus wrote: "The sun can set and rise again but, once our brief light sets, there is one unending night to be slept through".⁴⁴

'Against this deep sorrow of the world, the word "sleep", four times applied in this context to the Christian's death, is an abiding protest'.⁴⁵

'The apostolic church thought more about the Second Coming of Jesus Christ than about death and heaven. The early Christians were looking, not for *a cleft in the ground called a grave* but for *a cleavage in the sky called Glory*. They were watching *not for the undertaker* but *for the uppertaker*'.⁴⁶

At this point, the apostle briefly states the basis of the Christian's hope.

Verse 14.

For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again.

The statement that 'Jesus died and rose again' is an almost verbal echo of the message which Paul had declared on his very first visit to Thessalonica as a Christian missionary: 'it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead'.⁴⁷

These two truths represent the irreducible foundation of the gospel: 'I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He was seen by Cephas ...'.⁴⁸

Select quotation

'The first and third statements (that "Christ died" and "He rose again") are distinguished from the second and fourth (that "He was buried" and "was seen") by (i) the addition of explanatory details ("for our sins" and "the third day") and (ii) the claim to the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy ("according to the Scriptures").

'It was said of the house of Dagon at Gaza that there were "two middle pillars which supported the temple", Judg. 16. 29. So too, metaphorically speaking, the gospel stands on two great central pillars; namely, the death and resurrection of Jesus ...

'*The second and fourth statements* (that He "was buried" and "was seen") function as supporting evidence for the first and third statements. They *both tell us what men did*. Christ *died*, and one of the ways we know that He died is that *men buried Him*. He *rose again*, and one of the ways we know that He rose again is that *men saw Him*'.⁴⁹

'That *Jesus died*' is the supreme *commendation of God's love*⁵⁰ and 'that *Jesus ... rose again*' is the supreme demonstration of God's power.⁵¹

Even so them also that are fallen asleep in ('through') Jesus will God bring with Him'.

For my part, I understand the apostle's expression, 'bring with Him', to be a reference to the return of the Lord Jesus in the glory of His coming manifested kingdom.⁵²

On that occasion, according to verse 13 of the previous chapter, 'our Lord Jesus Christ comes with all His saints' and *not*, as in our chapter, for all His saints. That will be the occasion when He comes 'to be glorified in His saints and admired in all who believe'.⁵³

As I see it, the believers at Thessalonica feared that somehow those who now 'sleep through Jesus' would be deprived of their share in His manifested kingdom and that Paul is at pains to assure them that 'the dead in Christ' will certainly not miss out in any way ... that they will accompany Him when He returns to reign.

Yes, but someone might well wonder, 'How can God possibly bring them with the Lord Jesus if their bodies are lying asleep in the soil of planet earth?' Hence the following three verses,⁵⁴ which explain (on the very *highest* authority, namely, that of the 'word of the Lord') just how this is to be achieved.

That is, the revelation concerning the resurrection of dead saints and their ascending to meet the Lord is needed to explain how they get from the grave for God to bring them with the Lord Jesus at His coming in glory.

It is important to note that the Christian confidence of which Paul wrote was not the result of human or philosophical speculation but was based on a rock-solid and historical foundation, namely, that the Jesus who had died had also risen again. And therein lay the evidence that 'the king of terrors'⁵⁵ really had been conquered.

This is, as the apostle Peter makes clear, the very guarantee and pledge of the Christian's hope,⁵⁶ and, as Paul repeatedly affirmed,⁵⁷ it carries with it the assurance of the resurrection to life of all who believe in Jesus. The God who raised Jesus will also raise His people.

For, since we know that death was not the end for Him, we can be confident that death will not be the end for any of His saints. And so, we can rest assured that all those who sleep 'through Jesus', God will bring back 'with Him'.

In our verse, Paul does not mention the believer's resurrection because that was not the point at issue at Thessalonica.

And, separately, we can hardly miss that, although, for His people, 'death has been changed to *sleep* through the work of Jesus',⁵⁸ He Himself experienced the full horror and bitterness of death as *death*. In the words of the writer to the Hebrews, He 'tasted (He 'experienced') *death*'.⁵⁹

Select quotations

'Did you see how Paul connected the first advent to the second advent? Since Jesus died and rose again, and since those who believe upon Christ are in him, though they die, they will be raised again. The first advent (Christ's life, death, and resurrection) provides the basis for the hope of the second advent (when we will be raised from the dead)'.⁶⁰

'The hope that Christians have, that which lifts them from utter distress, is made possible only by the death and resurrection of Jesus. The Christian hope is not merely wishful thinking, but a confident expectation'.⁶¹

'The logical link between the two parts of this verse is clear: the resurrection of Jesus functions as the guarantee of the resurrection of deceased believers such that they will be alive and with Jesus at His return' ... The apostle 'presupposes the resurrection of believers, since obviously these dead Christians have to be restored to life before God can bring them with Jesus at His coming'.⁶²

'Christ's history is our destiny ... I should like to find the tombstone of Lazarus. It would say, 'Died 33 AD', and then underneath, 'Died 63 AD'. ... Easter is about Jesus getting the first instalment of a resurrection body ... and saying 'Watch this spot, this is a preview of coming attractions. That will be that great 'getting up' morning'.⁶³

'The basis of this hope isn't just a line of a creed that says, "I believe in the resurrection of the dead". And it isn't merely a handful of hymns singing about "some glad morning" in the "sweet by-and-by". Nor is it a few moving graveside sermons crafted to soften death's blow with platitudes of "she's in a better place" or "his striving is over". The solid foundation for our hope is a fact of history: "Jesus died and rose again"'.⁶⁴

'When it speaks of the Lord Jesus, Scripture says He died, but of believers it says they sleep'.⁶⁵

Select quotations

'The meaning is probably that it is through what Jesus has done ("through Jesus") that Christians "sleep" only, and do not undergo the horrors of death'.⁶⁶

'It was Jesus who transformed their death into a peaceful slumber'.⁶⁷

In 1 Thess. 3. 13, 'the coming of Jesus is not presented in the act of our gathering together to Him, when we go to meet Him; but in the act of our coming with Him from the Father's house, after having been in His presence. It is that moment which will shew whether we are unblameable'.⁶⁸

'They were laid to sleep by Jesus; and ... God will bring them with Jesus in that day. But how so, since they sleep in death, and He comes from heaven in power and glory? Hereon follows a most enlightening and fresh communication, "in the word of the Lord", which clears up the difficulty by unfolding the order of events, and thus the way by which the sleeping saints are to come with Jesus ... Here we learn how it can be: He first descends for them, and afterwards brings them with Him'.⁶⁹

'The meaning 'is not ... will bring *their souls* from heaven that they may be reunited with their bodies; for to *their souls* there is no allusion, nor could *their souls* be said to be laid asleep through Jesus'.⁷⁰

Verse 15.

For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord.

The apostle made it clear that was not giving his opinion or speaking on his own authority; 'it was not human speculation but divine revelation'.⁷¹

Select quotations

'This formula "by the word of the Lord" marks a new revelation, not just a quotation from some unrecorded saying of our Lord'.⁷²

'Paul refers to a direct revelation, which he had himself received from the Lord'.⁷³

'Is it not a striking proof of the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that we have, on the express authority of His word, a special revelation, the exclusive aim of which is to comfort?

'Jesus knew the terrible sorrow of bereavement; He had stood by the bedside of Jairus' daughter, by the young man's bier at Nain, by Lazarus' tomb ... He knew the dead weight at the heart which never passes away, and the sudden rush of feeling which overpowers the strongest.

'And that all this sorrow might not rest upon His Church unrelieved. He lifted the curtain that we might see with our eyes the strong consolation beyond'.⁷⁴

That we that are alive, that are left ('that remain') unto the coming⁷⁵ of the Lord.

The time of our Lord's descent from heaven is among those 'secret things' which 'belong to the Lord our God', which God jealousy guards to Himself.⁷⁶

And it is clear that even the apostle Paul had no inside information on the subject.⁷⁷ For the apostle:

(i) sometimes aligns himself (as he does here) with those who will be alive at the coming of the Lord Jesus and who look forward to having their 'mortal' bodies 'transformed'⁷⁸ and 'changed';⁷⁹ and

(ii) sometimes aligns himself with those who will have fallen asleep⁸⁰ and whose 'corruptible' bodies are to be raised incorruptible.⁸¹

In the epistle to the Philippians, written probably some 10 years later, where his advancing years⁸² and the threatening nature of his circumstances brought before his mind increasingly the possibility that he might die before our Lord's coming, he still spoke of 'heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Saviour'.⁸³

And even in the pastoral epistles, while using language which reveals that he anticipated his speedy execution, he still speaks of 'we ... looking for the blessed hope and appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ'.⁸⁴

What Paul knew (and what we know) is that the full enjoyment of 'our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed'.⁸⁵ And we remember that the apostle said that almost two millennia ago.

If I understand my Bible correctly, our Lord's return to reign in glory with His saints will be preceded by a host of spectacular happenings and signs which shall be witnessed by those then alive.⁸⁶ But I read of no warning events or special signs before His coming to 'catch up' His church.

I read many years ago of one young boy who 'was playing in his grandmother's house near a large grandfather clock. Noontime was approaching, and when both hands of the old timepiece reached twelve, the chimes began to ring. As he always liked to do, the boy counted each gong as it sounded. This time, however, something went wrong with the clock's inner mechanism. Instead of stopping at 12, it kept right on chiming ... 13, 14, 15, 16 times. The boy couldn't believe his ears! He jumped to his feet and ran into the kitchen, shouting, 'Grandma! Grandma! *It's later than it's ever been before!*'⁸⁷

And, without knowing it, that young boy expressed a great (if rather obvious) truth. For it is later than it has ever been before.

And I suggest that we can properly say no more than that. For, like it or not, we today share Paul's uncertainty. We simply do not know when our Lord will come.

Select quotation

'When speaking of the end and envisioning himself in relation to it, Paul normally cast himself in the category of the living since he was alive at the time he wrote, but this was a convention, not a prediction'.⁸⁸

Shall in no wise (an emphatic expression: 'shall by no means'⁸⁹) **precede them that are fallen asleep**'.

Those believers who are alive when the Lord comes will neither forestall nor enjoy any precedence over those who have fallen asleep. Far from it. But details of that must wait for Part 2.⁹⁰

To be concluded.

Endnotes

¹ 1 Cor. 11. 26.

² The manifested kingdom on earth will not be established by our evangelism. As I understand it, the manifested kingdom will be introduced only by our Lord's direct intervention.

If it were true that the world is to be gradually converted first (and if the earth is, therefore, to experience the events foretold in Matthew 24 and Revelation 6-19), then in no meaningful way can the return of our Lord be said to be a present expectation.

Indeed, the event outlined in 1 Thessalonians 4 gives *every* impression of being very different from that spoken of by our Lord Jesus in Matthew 24. True, both events deal with the general subject of our Lord's coming, both refer to the sounding of a trumpet, both refer to a gathering of God's people, and both assume a state of readiness.

But, by way of contrast:

(a) Matthew 24 speaks of the sign of 'the Son of man'; in 1 Thessalonians 4 it is 'the Lord Himself'.

(b) Matthew speaks of signs in the heavens, affecting the sun, moon and stars; Thessalonians makes no mention of signs or portends.

(c) Matthew speaks of judgments, warnings of the Abomination of Desolation, and instructions to flee; Thessalonians makes no mention of any of these.

(d) In Matthew, the tribes of the earth mourn; in Thessalonians, there is no mourning.

(e) in Matthew, the angels gather God's elect; in Thessalonians no mention is made of angels gathering anybody.

(f) The background to Matthew's passage is Deut. 30. 1-6; the background to the Thessalonians passage is John 14. 1-3.

(g) Matthew makes no mention of resurrection; Thessalonians does.

(h) In Matthew, it is a blessing to be left behind when others are taken for judgment; in Thessalonians, the blessing is to be 'caught up'.

³ 1 Thess. 1. 1; 2 Thess. 1. 1.

⁴ 1 Thess. 5. 1-2; 2 Thess. 2. 5.

⁵ 1 Thess. 1. 10; 2. 19; 3. 13; 4. 14-18; 5. 23.

⁶ 'The word carries with it the suggestion of "waiting" with patience and confident expectancy', W. E. Vine, 'An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words', article 'Wait', 5 'ἀναμένω'.

⁷ 1 Thess. 1. 9-10.

Not that 'the church of the Thessalonians' were alone in this. The same was true of the early churches in general.

I note, by way of example:

(i) 'You are not lacking in any spiritual gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ' (1 Cor. 1. 7);

(ii) 'As often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes' (1 Cor. 11. 26);

(iii) 'Our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ' (Phil. 3. 20);

(iv) 'Waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ' (Tit. 2. 13);

(v) 'Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time' (Heb. 9. 28);

(vi) 'We know that when He appears we shall be like Him' (1 John 3. 2).

We may well contrast what is said of the Feast of the Passover: 'you shall keep it as a feast to Lord; *throughout your generations* you shall keep it as an ordinance *for ever*', Exod. 12. 14, 17; cf. Exod. 12. 42. That is, from the time of its institution, the expectation was that the Passover would continue indefinitely. In contrast, from the outset, there was the expectation that the time would come when the Supper would no longer be needed.

⁸ 1 Thess. 4. 15.

⁹ C. F. Hogg and W. E. Vine, 'The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Thessalonians', page 127.

¹⁰ John Eadie, 'Commentary on the Greek Text of the Epistles of Paul to the Thessalonians', page 146.

¹¹ 1 Thess. 4. 1-2.

¹² 1 Thess. 4. 9.

¹³ 'The word translated fall asleep: 'is present and continuous in tense denoting them who are falling asleep rather than them which are asleep. The participle gives the idea of repetition, of what is presently going on; from time to time a believer falls asleep', T. E. Wilson, 'Thessalonians (What the Bible Teaches)', page 44.

¹⁴ 'Sleeping-place' ('κοιμητήριον'), is the root of the English word 'cemetery'.

¹⁵ The 'unclothed' ('naked') state of the believer who dies is not final (2 Cor. 5. 3-4), because a man is incomplete without a body.

¹⁶ Dan. 12. 2. Cf. the words of the apostle Paul concerning David, who 'fell asleep, and was laid with his fathers, and saw corruption', Acts 13. 36.

¹⁷ 'As they were stoning Stephen, he called out, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit"', Acts 7. 59; cf. Luke 23. 46.

¹⁸ Phil. 1. 23; cf. 'at home with the Lord', 2 Cor. 5. 8; 'with me in paradise', Luke 23. 43.

- ¹⁹ William Arnot, comment on Acts 7. 60; quoted in Augustus Strong, 'Systematic Theology', page 659.
- ²⁰ G. L. Greene, 'The Letters to the Thessalonians: Pillar New Testament Commentary', comment on 1 Thess. 4. 14.
- ²¹ C. F. Hogg and W. E. Vine, 'The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Thessalonians', page 128.
- ²² N. K. Gupta, '1-2 Thessalonians: A New Covenant Commentary', page 92.
- ²³ W. Wiersbe, 'Wiersbe Bible Commentary: New Testament', page 720.
- ²⁴ Ezek. 24. 15-18.
- ²⁵ 'To be sure, they have been awaiting Jesus' coming from heaven (1 Thess. 1. 10) ... yet they are wondering whether they will see their fallen comrades again at that coming', Gary S. Shogren, '1 & 2 Thessalonians (Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament)', comment on 1 Thess. 4. 13.
- ²⁶ Acts 8. 2.
- ²⁷ Phil. 2. 27.
- ²⁸ John 11. 33-35.
- ²⁹ The word used in John 11. 35 (*δακρῦω*) means, 'to shed tears'. The International Standard Version renders the word, 'burst into tears'.
- ³⁰ Augustine of Hippo, 'Letter 263', Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Volume 1, page 592.
- 'Paul wrote 1 Thess. 4. 13-18, not so that the Thessalonian Christians would stop grieving *per se*, but rather so that they would stop grieving in the same manner that the hopeless Gentiles did', Colin R. Nicholl, 'From Hope to Despair', page 25.
- ³¹ John Stott, 'The Message of 1 & 2 Thessalonians: The Bible Speaks Today', page 94.
- ³² John Eadie, 'Commentary on the Greek Text of the Epistles of Paul to the Thessalonians', pages 148-149.
- ³³ James Denney, 'The Epistles to the Thessalonians', pages 171-172.
- ³⁴ C. F. Hogg and W. E. Vine, *ibid.*, page 130.
- ³⁵ Leon Morris, 'The Epistles of Paul to the Thessalonians: The New London Commentary', page 138.
- ³⁶ Eph. 2. 3.
- ³⁷ N. T. Wright, 'The Resurrection of the Son of God', page 81.
- ³⁸ Percy Bysshe Shelley, 'The Revolution of the Golden City: A Vision of the Nineteenth Century', stanza 6 of the Introduction.
- ³⁹ J. N. Darby, 'What death is to the Christian', Collected Writings, Volume 26, page 367.
- ⁴⁰ These words are quoted from a verse added (by some person unknown) to Horatio Spafford's timeless hymn, 'It is well with my soul'.
- The following line of the verse badly misquotes 1 Thess. 4. 16. In place of Paul's expressions, 'voice of the archangel' and 'trump of God', the verse substitutes, 'trump of the angel' and 'voice of the Lord'. There is no way that such a spiritual giant as Mr Spafford would have been guilty of such muddled thinking!
- Needless to say, the verse did not form part of the handwritten original version of the hymn, a copy of which is set out below – at Endnote 90. Nor did the verse appear in the version of his hymn which Mr Spafford himself published as part of his collection of poems entitled, 'Waiting for the Morning'.
- ⁴¹ D. Michael Martin, *ibid.*, comment on 1 Thess. 4. 13.
- ⁴² J. B. Lightfoot, 'Notes on Epistles of St. Paul', page 63. See too A. Plummer, 'A Commentary on St. Paul's First Epistle to the Thessalonians', page 71.
- ⁴³ G. L. Greene, *ibid.*, comment on 1 Thess. 4. 13.
- ⁴⁴ F. F. Bruce, '1 & 2 Thessalonians (Word Biblical Commentary)', page 96.
- ⁴⁵ G. G. Findlay, 'The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Thessalonians: Cambridge Greek Testament', page 96.
- ⁴⁶ Alexander Maclaren, quoted in 'W. E. Vine's New Testament Word Pictures: Romans to Revelation', page 607.
- ⁴⁷ Acts 17. 3.
- ⁴⁸ 1 Cor. 15. 3-4.
- ⁴⁹ 'Studies in First Corinthians (Precious Seed Publications)', page 235.
- ⁵⁰ Rom. 5. 8.
- ⁵¹ Eph. 1. 19-20.
- ⁵² 'With the Lord Jesus in the manifested glory of His Kingdom; cf. Col. 3. 4', C. F. Hogg and W. E. Vine, *ibid.*, page 137.
- ⁵³ 2 Thess. 1. 10.
- ⁵⁴ 1 Thess. 4. 15-17.
- ⁵⁵ Job 18. 14.
- ⁵⁶ 'God, who raised Him up from the dead, and gave Him glory; that your faith and hope might be in God', 1 Pet. 1. 21; cf. v. 3.
- ⁵⁷ See:
- (i) 'He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you', Rom. 8. 11;.
- (ii) 'God both raised up the Lord and will also raise us up by His power', 1 Cor. 6. 14;
- (iii) 'Now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive', 1 Cor. 15. 20-22;
- (iv) 'He who raised up the Lord Jesus will also raise us up with Jesus', 2 Cor. 4. 14..
- ⁵⁸ C. C. Ryrie, 'First and Second Thessalonians: Everyman's Bible Commentary', comment on 1 Thess. 4. 13-14.
- ⁵⁹ Heb. 2. 9.

Although our Lord is said to be 'the firstfruits of them that have fallen asleep', 1 Cor. 15. 20, He is never spoken of as 'sleeping' in death.

⁶⁰ James H. Grant Jr., '1-2 Thessalonians: The Hope of Salvation', comment on 1 Thess. 4. 13.

⁶¹ Gary S. Shogren, *ibid.*, comment on 1 Thess. 4. 14.

⁶² J. A. D. Weima, '1-2 Thessalonians: Baker Exegetical Commentary', comments on 1 Thess. 4. 14.

⁶³ Ben Witherington III, 'Seven Minute Seminary: Easter': audio accessed at - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RIPlz8J8dVk&index=53&list=PL1CBE0DD656B9BC0F>.

⁶⁴ C. R. Swindoll, '1 & 2 Thessalonians: Living Insights Commentary', comment on 1 Thess. 4. 13-14.

⁶⁵ T. E. Wilson, *ibid.*, page 44.

⁶⁶ Leon Morris, 'The Epistles of Paul to the Thessalonians: The New London Commentary', page 140.

⁶⁷ J. B. Lightfoot, *ibid.*, page 65.

⁶⁸ J. N. Darby, 'Notes on the Epistles to the Thessalonians: Collected Writings', volume 27, page 297. Compare, 'He earnestly desires their growth in holiness, and prays for them that they might "increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men, even as we do toward you: to the end he may stablish your hearts unblameable in holiness"'.⁶⁸ And the manner in which this is connected with the coming of Christ here is very noticeable. He supposes it to be flowing out of love, and going on in holiness, proceeding unbroken, until the saint finds himself at last in the display of glory; not when Christ comes to take us up, but when God brings us with Him', William Kelly, 'Introductory Lectures on the Epistles of Paul (Part 2) – 1 Thessalonians'.

⁶⁹ William Kelly, 'The Epistles of Paul to the Thessalonians', page 49.

⁷⁰ John Eadie, 'Commentary on Paul's Epistles to the Thessalonians', page 153.

⁷¹ D. Michael Martin, '1, 2 Thessalonians (New American Commentary)', comment on 1 Thess. 4. 15.

⁷² T. E. Wilson, *ibid.*, page 46.

⁷³ J. B. Lightfoot, *ibid.*, page 65.

⁷⁴ James Denney, *ibid.*, page 181.

⁷⁵ The '*parousia*' (παρουσία). It seems that, when it is used prophetically, '*parousia*' refers to a period beginning with the descent of the Lord from heaven into the air (as in 1 Thess. 4. 15), and ending with His revelation and manifestation to the world. The word '*parousia*' literally signifies 'a being with', 'a presence'.

'It signifies, not merely His momentary "coming" for His saints, but His presence with them from that moment until His revelation and manifestation to the world', W. E. Vine, 'Expository Dictionary of the New Testament', article 'Coming (Noun), 3'.

'It thus denotes a state, not an action ... Paul tells the Philippian converts of his confidence that he will be with them "for their progress and joy in the faith, that their glorying may abound in Christ Jesus in him through his presence (his *parousia*), with them again". Further, he exhorts them as they have been obedient during his presence, (his *parousia*) so much more in his absence, to work out their own salvation with fear and trembling (Phil. 1. 26; 2. 12). In a Greek document of almost the same period as that in which the New Testament was written, a person states that attention to her property necessitates her *parousia* in a certain city.

'These examples suffice to show that, while of course the initial act of arrival is essential to a *parousia*, the word signifies the more or less prolonged period following the arrival', W. E. Vine, 'Touching the Coming of the Lord', chapter 5.

⁷⁶ 'They asked Him, saying, "Lord ... at this time ...?" He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority', Acts 1. 6-7.

⁷⁷ Which, given the words of Jesus during the days of His flesh (Matt. 24. 36; Mark 13. 32) is hardly surprising!

Calvin *ingeniously* suggests: 'By speaking in the first person he makes himself, as it were, one of the number of those who will live until the last day: he means by this to arouse the Thessalonians to wait for it, nay more, to hold all believers in suspense ... for, granting that it was *by a special revelation that he knew that Christ would come at a somewhat later time*, it was nevertheless necessary ... that believers might be prepared at all times', John Calvin, 'Commentary on Thessalonians', comment on 1 Thess. 4. 15. Enough said!

⁷⁸ Phil. 3. 21.

⁷⁹ 1 Cor. 15. 52c.

⁸⁰ 1 Cor. 6. 14; 2 Cor. 4. 14.

⁸¹ 1 Cor. 15. 52b.

⁸² See Philemon 9.

⁸³ Phil. 3. 20.

⁸⁴ Titus 2. 13.

⁸⁵ Rom. 13. 11.

⁸⁶ Matthew 24. 14-31; Luke 21. 24-31. In contrast to his teaching concerning the coming of the Lord for His saints, Paul taught that *certain events must precede the day of the Lord*. 'That day will not be', he says, 'except the falling away [lit., the apostasy] come first, and the man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself against all that is called God or that is worshipped; so that he sits in the temple of God, exhibiting himself as God', 2 Thess. 2. 3-5.

⁸⁷ 'Our Daily Bread', 26 August 1996.

⁸⁸ D. Michael Martin, *ibid.*, comment on 1 Thess. 4. 15.

⁸⁹ 'Those alive when the Lord comes will certainly not (emphatic negative, found in Paul, outside quotations from the Greek Old Testament, only in 1 Thess. 5. 3; 1 Cor. 8. 13; Gal. 5. 16) precede those who have fallen asleep', Leon Morris, '1 and 2 Thessalonians: An introduction and Commentary (Tyndale New Testament Commentary)', page 90.



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Chicago, _____ 187

When foes like a storm, attendeth my way,
When cannon like sea-bellows, rattle -
I bated my sail, I bled - but taught me to know
It is well, it is well with my soul -

Though Satan should buffet, - though trials should come -
Let this blast of a conscience control, -
That Christ both regards my helpless estate,
And hath shed his own blood for my soul -

My sin - oh the bliss of this glorious thought! -
My sin, it is not in fact but the guilt, -
I have sinned to the cross, & I hear it no more -
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, Oh my soul -

And say, back to the bay when the faith shall be sight -
The clouds be rolled back as a scroll, -
The trump shall resound, & the Lord shall descend, -
- A ray in the night, Oh my soul!

Oh my heart, at the way, my soul