

*Charts: The Events of the Rapture, The Resurrections*

## PREFACE

In our last session we began examining the events of the Rapture as described in v16 of 1 Thessalonians 4. In this session we will finish by addressing the events in v17. **The chart for this is #4, “The Events of the Rapture.”**

Let’s begin by reading the passage.

**Read 1 Thessalonians 4:15-18.**

## v17: THEN WE WHO ARE ALIVE AND REMAIN...

I have made the point that all these separate events take place in the blink of an eye. My personal hope, however, is that in our resurrected, glorified state, time will become as relative for us as it is for the Godhead. For this will be a glorious, astounding event that the believer will wish to savor. Believers on this fallen earth have spent the last two thousand years longing for the day we will at last see our Lord, as Paul puts it, “face to face” (1 Corinthians 13:12). **Please turn to 1 Corinthians 15.**

In Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians he offers us a detailed treatise on the resurrection process—specifically of the dead, but which also applies to those still alive when Christ comes, because in it he addresses the difference between the earthly bodies with which we are born, and the glorified bodies in which we will spend eternity with the Lord. **I have included a chart for the various resurrections during the Eschaton—beginning with Christ’s, and those that took place in Jerusalem at His resurrection.**

**Sidebar:** We don’t have time to delve deeply into the challenges of the Matthew passage (27:51-53) that speaks of the dead rising at Christ’s resurrection, for it is a controversial text that raises more questions than it answers. Let me just point out that the punctuation is critical to understanding and accepting what is described. The NASB is not bad; the original NIV is worst; the ESV is best in describing **the tombs being broken open at the death of Jesus, but the inhabitants not being raised and emerging from the tombs until He was (first) raised.** In other words, just as with Jesus, the tombs were opened not to let out the dead (immediately), but to let in any witnesses. In its strangeness, however, it is almost a “Melchizedek” moment.

## Read 1 Corinthians 15:40-44.

**Note:** The best way to understand Paul’s use of the Greek *speiro*, translated “sown,” in this context is describing the totality of a life from birth to death.

## Read 1 Corinthians 15:50-53.

No one can say with certainty what he or she will look like after the Rapture. But God’s word tells us that it will be a body made for eternity (“imperishable”), it will possess a new and improved “glory,” and in place of weakness it will possess a new “power.” Instead of being a natural, fleshly body, it will be a “spiritual” body—that is, we are born into this world in a condition *for* this temporal world: natural, sensual, fleshy and fleshly. At the Rapture event we, living or dead, will become something else—*pneumatikon*, of the s/Spirit—that is, we will now be changed into a form suitable not just for eternity (immortal), but suitable for living in the presence of a holy God without being instantly vaporized by His holiness.

## Read Philippians 3:20-21.

Christ in this moment is not yet enthroned over His kingdom; that must await the end of the Tribulation. Nonetheless, during the Rapture event He is already beginning to reveal some of the power He will hold then—“the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself.”

We learn from Jesus Himself the *nature* of our glorified body: from Luke 24 we learn that His body was material and could consume food (vv39-43), yet it was not bound by the laws of nature (vv31, 36-37). (We learn from the road to Emmaus narrative that Jesus was not immediately recognizable to the two disciples, but that their inability to recognize Him had more to do with “their eyes [being] prevented [by God or Jesus] from recognizing Him” than from Christ’s physical appearance.) In John’s gospel we learn that Christ’s body was not “pure spirit,” as an apparition, but still possessed a level of physicality (John 20:26-27).

*M. R. Vincent:* The expression natural body signifies an organism animated by a soul; that phase of the immaterial principle in man which is more nearly allied to the flesh, and which characterizes the man as a mortal creature; while spirit is that phase which looks God-ward, and characterizes him as related to God. ⇨

**Sidebar:** As Vincent points out, although the two are easily confused, I contend that the soul and the spirit are not always synonymous. The human soul is related to the material body, and is often used to refer to the totality of the being, including material (body) and immaterial (spirit) aspects—“a living being” (Genesis 2:7) Paradoxically, however, the soul is also distinct from the body, and can exist without it.

At death the soul detaches from the body; the body, the material portion of our being, remains on earth, while that body’s soul goes to be with the Lord (Genesis 35:18). If one has already passed away, prior to the resurrection, the believer is not just brought back to life, but is, as it were, put back together again; the two, body and soul, are reunited in what is now a new and glorified state.

### [WE] WILL BE CAUGHT UP TOGETHER WITH THEM IN THE CLOUDS...

Oh, how I wish that this took longer than the blink of an eye—and why I hope that once we are in our new, glorified bodies, we will gain some of that heavenly perspective on events—in which time can either stand still or leap ahead at will—for I would like to savor this moment. Can you imagine anything sweeter than rising into the air to meet our Savior and Lord?

First, however, we must join the company of the redeemed. Here again, the imagination stumbles in trying to picture this moment. The dead will rise first; those still alive will follow. We assume from the text that the dead emerge from the grave (or from being reconstituted) *already changed*—the apostle writes that “the dead will be raised imperishable”—i.e., below ground, perishable; above ground, imperishable. We also assume that those “*not asleep*” will be changed either immediately or at least prior to rising into the presence of Christ.

We find the Greek for our word “rapture” beneath the phrase “shall be caught up”—the verb *harpagesometha*—meaning to snatch away, take away, seize, followed by the adverb *hama*, translated “together,” meaning at the same time or at once. We take this to mean that all believers, dead or alive at the same time, will rise into the sky and clouds toward our awaiting Lord.

My personal picture of Christ Jesus in this moment is of Him as a symphony conductor. He is orchestrating this entire supernatural phenomenon. I picture the Lord, accompanied by the archangel and whomever is playing the trumpet of God (might it be God the Father Himself?; [I doubt it]), descending to earth’s environs. They position themselves and draw breath; then, at the downbeat of Christ’s shout, He raises His arms to draw out the dead from their tombs, and all believers from all around the globe, up to Him.

## TO MEET THE LORD IN THE AIR,

We have a habit of either spiritualizing certain statements in God's word or interpreting them from a cold, earthly perspective. I love it when portions of God's word are illuminated with fresh light by other portions. [Turn please to the story of the raising of Lazarus from the tomb in John 11.](#)

This event was different from the other resurrections we see in the Eschaton because, while Lazarus was indeed brought back to life, he was raised to the same body in which he died—not a *glorified* body—and he certainly died again subsequently.

Once again we tend to read this passage, beginning with v21, in light of the ultimate salvation we have by faith in Christ Jesus: because we believe, we will have eternal life in Him. There is nothing wrong with that. But as I read this, notice how Martha acknowledges the *general* resurrection of the dead in which most Jews believed, but watch how Jesus clarifies for her that there will be *another* “resurrection” in which some will be dead and some will be alive—i.e., the Rapture.

### Read John 11:21-27.

Martha then said to Jesus, “Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died. Even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You.” Jesus said to her, “Your brother **will** rise again.” Martha said to Him, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.” Jesus said to her, **“I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?”** She said to Him, “Yes, Lord; I have believed that You are the Christ, the Son of God, even He who comes into the world.” (John 11:21–27 [emphasis added])

In that reassuring, victorious statement we can see the immediate moment regarding Martha's dead brother (“he who believes in me will live even if he dies”); we can see the promise of eternal life for all who believe; we can see hints of the Rapture (the dead will live and those who live will never die); but we also see Jesus the Christ revealing His lordship over all (“I am the resurrection and the life”): *This life we are talking about—I am the one making it all possible, and there will come a day when I personally will come to conduct you into that life.*

AND SO WE SHALL ALWAYS BE WITH THE LORD.

Here is the best news of all—and the best part of the Rapture event. The Thessalonian passage ends with v18: “Therefore comfort one another with these words.”

Christians and unbelievers alike commonly speak of “going to heaven,” as if the *place* of our eternity is what is important. But that is not true; it is not the *place*, but the *company*. From the Rapture on, we will “always be with the Lord”; wherever He is, there we will be with Him.

What makes heaven paradise is not the environment, the climate, the gold-paved streets or the accommodations. What makes heaven paradise is that it is the home of the Lord God and His Christ, our Savior.