

# *Rapture? or Appearing?*

## Three Simple Truths in I Thessalonians 4



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**A**s we know, the word “Rapture” does not occur in Scripture. What generally is known as the “Rapture” is an event that is described in one of Paul’s early epistles: I Thessalonians 4. In this passage let’s notice three simple truths:

- (1) “*The Lord Himself shall **descend from heaven***” (:16);
- (2) The participants will be raised or “*caught up together with them **in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air***” (:17);
- (3) The participants will “*ever be with the Lord*” (:18).

The standard event that this passage is supposed to describe is thus: Believers will be raptured to heaven, ever to be with the Lord.

The simple fact is that, after an honest look at the passage, we can see clearly that it does not even mention *anyone* going to heaven; not the Lord, nor any of the participants.

The idea of being raptured to heaven is read *into* this passage. What these verses actually reveal is that the Lord is *leaving* heaven and the participants are caught up to meet Him in the *earth’s atmosphere* (“*clouds,*” “*air*”) on His way *down*, where the participants will “*ever be with*” Him as He reigns and rules on the earth. This is all in agreement with Israel’s hope.

We, however, have what was a secret to prophecy, an *earlier* expectation on the timeline (being “pre-expectant in the Christ” – Ephesians 1:12, CV). At an undisclosed time, prior to Christ’s leaving heaven, He will appear with God among the celestials and we will join Him there for glorification with Him (Colossians 4:3). We will at that time receive our immortality<sup>1</sup> and enter our heavenly calling among the celestials (Ephesians 2:4-7; Colossians 3:1-3).<sup>2</sup>

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1. There are three distinct orders (or, classes) in the resurrection. These are listed in I Corinthians 15:23-24 as:

“But every man in his own order: (1) Christ the Firstfruit; (2) afterward they that are Christ’s at His coming. (3) Then cometh the end ...”

- (1) Christ’s resurrection.
- (2) Those who will be raised at Christ’s coming.
- (3) The rest will be resurrected at the end (or, “consummation,” CV).

Where do we fit in all of this?

It is easy to see how many would wrongly assume that we are in the second class – at Christ’s Coming; however, according to the “revelation of the mystery, kept secret from ages past” (Romans 16:25), ours is the prior resurrection.

Paul’s revelation is that we have been made a part of Christ’s death and resurrection (Ephesians 2:5-6; Colossians 2:12-13). We are counted among the Firstfruit; and as members of Christ’s Body, we are counted as “Christ” (“so also is Christ” I Corinthians 12:12).

2. All of these passages look to the future for their fulfillment, as God through Paul is “calling those things which be not as though they were.” Though we may walk according to these truths, one glorious day we will literally live in them, seated in the celestials.

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