

**4:13** The Apostle now addresses a matter he evidently had not heretofore discussed at length with his Thessalonian brethren. This was the state of departed believers, their resurrection, the Rapture, and heaven itself. Apparently, there was some confusion and perhaps recent deaths of some in the church.

Therefore, Paul writes, **But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep.** The word translated as **asleep** (κοιμῶ *koimao*) indeed literally means sleep. However, it is clear that the Apostle here used the word as a euphemism for death. Quite evidently, someone in the church, dear to all, had died. Paul dealt with the matter in a delicate fashion wishing that they not be ignorant (i.e., lacking understanding thereof). His point was **that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope.** Here is an important distinction for a Christian. When a loved one dies and goes to heaven, there indeed is sorrow. However, because of our blessed hope of eternal life, we need not sorrow as others which have no hope. There is sorrow. But for a Christian, it is not the degree of sorrow which the world has. For them, death at best is the end. At worst, it is the entrance to hell.

**4:14** He posits a condition of the first class (a premise understood to be true). **For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again.** (We know, understand, and believe that.) Therefore, based upon that wonderful truth, **even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him.**

Two important matters beg comment. (1) Reference is again made to those “asleep in Jesus.” The Apostle is not suggesting some sort of ‘soul sleep’ for departed Christians. It clearly is an euphemism for death. The

distinction is of the peace and blessedness of rest in comparison to the torment of hell. See Revelation 14:13. The clear contextual position of the New Testament is that born again believers upon death are absent from the body and present with the Lord, II Corinthians 5:8. Moreover, Revelation 4,5,6,7 et al., all refer to departed saints being alive, conscious, and present with the Lord in heaven prior to His return. (2) Paul also refers to God bringing these with Him when He comes. Clearly, it is Jesus who will return. Here, He is called God indicating His Deity. Also, when He returns, those dead in Christ will be with Him.

**4:15** The sacred writer delves deeper into the matter. **For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive *and* remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep.** Two words bear comment. (1) The word translated as **coming** (*παρουσία parousia*) is the word often used for the return of our Lord. (2) The word translated as **prevent** (*φθάνω phthano*) has the sense to ‘come before’ or to ‘precede.’ Moreover, this statement is backed by the authority of the “word of the Lord.” We who survive those dead in Christ (at His coming) will not precede them in the resurrection. Here is why.

**4:16 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.** The return of Christ at the Rapture is thus described in detail found nowhere else in the Bible. Come that day, He will descend from heaven with a **shout**. The word so translated (*κελευσμα keleusma*) has the sense of an order (or command) as a commander might order his

troops. Though not herein specified, that command might be “Come up hither” (Revelation 4:1). This is in conjunction with “the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God.” The picture is this: the commander-in-chief shouts forth his order to come up hither. It is repeated word-for-word by His chief aide, the archangel, and then signaled by a trumpeter to the troops in the field (i.e., the church on earth). Such custom has been a common practice in military maneuvers since the beginning of time. A similar practice remains a common custom on the command-bridge of ships, both military and civilian.

At that instant, “the dead in Christ shall rise first.” The greater thrust of this passage is dealing with what will happen to the dead in Christ. Here, Paul makes clear when the Lord returns, the dead in Christ will be resurrected first. Their souls and spirits in heaven, present with the Lord, will come with Jesus at His coming. Meanwhile, their bodies have long been in their graves. At that moment (at the trump signaling their resurrection), the bodies of those dead in Christ will be miraculously and instantaneously resurrected from their graves. Their souls and spirits will then be reunited with their now glorified bodies to ever live with the Lord. This is otherwise called the First Resurrection. See Revelation 20:5-6 and I Corinthians 15:51-53.

**4:17** Though the focus to this point has been upon the dead in Christ, the thought now shifts to **we which are alive and remain** (i.e., the church in the world). At that day and at that instant, we **shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air.** The word translated as **caught up** (‘αρπαζω *harpadzo*)

has the sense to be ‘seized’ or ‘snatched out.’ Though the word ‘rapture’ does not appear in the Bible as such, the concept thereof is based upon this word and its meaning. The place unto which we will be caught up unto to meet the Lord is “in the clouds.” It is in the air of the atmospheric heavens. From thence **shall we ever be with the Lord**. Thus, for all who are in Christ, both those already departed as well as those alive and remaining, the day is coming when we will ever be with the Lord. The eternality of heaven is thus clearly implied.

**4:18** The Apostle thus urged his readers, **Wherefore comfort one another with these words**. One whom they had loved apparently had died. He thus on that occasion wrote to not only enlighten them on the resurrection, but also to so encourage them in this matter.