

UNDERSTANDING THAT WEIRD BOOK OF REVELATION - Part ten

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WILL THERE BE A SECRET RAPTURE OF THE CHURCH *BEFORE* THE SECOND COMING OF JESUS CHRIST? (Part b)

Revelation 10:5-7 - "And the angel whom I saw standing on the sea and on the land raised his right hand to heaven [6] and swore by him who lives forever and ever, who created heaven and what is in it, the earth and what is in it, and the sea and what is in it, that there would be no more delay, [7] but that *in the days of the trumpet call to be sounded by the seventh angel*, the mystery of God would be fulfilled, just as he announced to his servants the prophets."

Today we're continuing our examination of the events of the "*days of the trumpet call sounded by the seventh angel*" (Rev. 10:7). Remember the emphasis on "*days*" (plural), rather than "*day*" (singular). That's because the sounding of the seventh trumpet *contains* the events of the seven bowls. In other words, it would seem that as the last angel sounds this trumpet a *series* of rapid, catastrophic events quickly unfold.

Then we noted the repetition of this idea of the *sounding of a trumpet* just as Jesus Christ comes again. It is found in other important prophetic passages of Scripture:

Matthew 24:31 - "And he will send out his angels *with a loud trumpet call*, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other."

1 Corinthians 15:52 - "...in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, *at the last trumpet*. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed.

1 Thessalonians 4:15-17 - "For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. [16] For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and *with the sound of the trumpet of God*. And the dead in Christ will rise first. [17] Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord.

It is worthwhile to take note of the events that are *linked together* with the sounding of this trumpet in these passages. It is at the sounding of the trumpet that the *dead in Christ are raised* (1 Corinthians 15:52). It is at the sounding of the trumpet that Jesus Christ comes again (1 Thessalonians 4:16). And, finally, it is at the sounding of this trumpet that the living believers are *gathered or caught up* to be with the Lord at His coming (Matthew 24:31, 1 Thessalonians 4:17).

As I see it, those events are set forth very clearly, in fact, unmistakably as the *key events* of the "*days of the trumpet call to be sounded by the seventh angel*" (Revelation 10:7).

Last week we began examining some of the main prophetic portions of the New Testament as we tied them in with the visions John saw in the book of Revelation. We began by working our way through Jesus' Olivet Discourse as it's recorded in **Matthew 24**. Today we're going to look at the Apostle Paul's teaching on the same subject in **1 Thessalonians 4 and 5**:

1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11 - "But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. [14] For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. [15] For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. [16] For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. [17] Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. [18] Therefore encourage one another with these words....[5:1]....Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers, you have no need to have anything written to you. [2] For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. [3] While people are saying, "There is peace and security," then sudden destruction will come upon them as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. [4] But you are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief. [5] For you are all children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness. [6] So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober. [7] For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, are drunk at night. [8] But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put

on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. [9] For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, [10] who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him. [11] Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.”

First Thessalonians 4 and 5 and 2 Thessalonians 2 are perhaps the two most inclusive and therefore important passages from the Apostle Paul on the end of the age and the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. The most important thing, as we've said all along, is to *fit these important passages together* so each one correlates with the other.

1) THE PURPOSE OF PAUL'S WORDS IN THIS TEXT

1 Thessalonians 4:13 - “But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope.”

There are those who think that Paul writes to these people because they have become discouraged that their deceased Christian friends and loved ones are going to miss out on the rapture of the church and be forced to wait until the Second Coming of Jesus at the close of the Tribulation. I think that is a highly unlikely interpretation of this passage for the following reasons:

- a) If these Christians were addressing Paul because they were concerned their loved ones were going to miss a rapture *before* the great Tribulation and not be resurrected until *after* the Tribulation, it's hard to understand their concern. Were they really that worried about the fate of their loved ones, who we know from Paul's teaching, were already with the Lord? That seems highly unlikely.
- b) The *context* of Paul's response contains the real reason for their concern. Look at **verse 13** very carefully - “But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, *that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope.*”

“...as others do who have no hope...” There's the key. Paul doesn't want these Christians to look forward to the end of the age and the return of the Lord and think of their departed loved ones like the pagan world around them. Paul doesn't want these people to ever forget that Jesus Christ is Lord, not only of the *living*, but also the *dead*.

Apparently, Paul encountered people in the churches he established and visited who embraced many of the *moral teachings* of Jesus, but forgot about the central reality of *resurrection and eternal life*: **1 Corinthians 15:12** - “Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?”

Of course, the teaching of Jesus was wonderful. There were precious truths to guide and help in all of life. But if the resurrection of the dead is lost sight of, then the blessing and benefit of those teachings ends with the grave.

Paul wants to encourage and comfort these Christians *in the face of the death of their departed loved ones*. He would remind these Christians that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus - *not even death!* Paul wants them to remember the reality of the *resurrection of the dead*. These Christian people will be reunited with their departed loved ones in the Lord. All of this will happen when Jesus comes again.

2) IN PAUL'S UNDERSTANDING, THE RESURRECTION OF DEPARTED BELIEVERS TAKES PLACE AT THE SECOND COMING OF JESUS CHRIST

1 Thessalonians 4:14-18 - “For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. [15] For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. [16] For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. [17] Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. [18] Therefore encourage one another with these words.”

Several thoughts here:

- a) ***Those who have died do not miss any of the great end-time events - 1 Thessalonians 4:14-15 - "For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. [15] For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep."***

How gracious of our Lord! The very **first** thing that happens as the events of the Second Coming unfold is the **resurrection of the dead in Christ**. Many departed saints had hoped and prayed and longed for this event all their Christian lives. They sang about it in churches. They read about it in their Bibles. Many departed saints prayed their families and loved ones into the kingdom. **How sad it would be if they never actually saw it happen!**

But Paul says God will make sure they **will** see it. They may have been dead for a thousand years. But they will take part in it all just as much as those who are still alive when Jesus returns.

- b) ***The resurrection of departed saints, the rapture (or "catching up" - this is the only place in the New Testament where a form of that word is actually used), and the coming of Jesus Christ all take place at the sounding of a great trumpet:***

1 Thessalonians 4:16-18 - "For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. [17] Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. [18] Therefore encourage one another with these words."

Paul tells us he didn't just make these end time events up in his own mind. He says he received these teachings from the Lord Jesus, Himself:

1 Thessalonians 4:15 - "For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep."

This makes perfect sense when the similarities between Paul's teaching and Jesus' teaching are noted. And right at the center of them both is this final **sounding of a great trumpet**:

Matthew 24:30-31 - "Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. [31] And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other."

1 Thessalonians 4:16 - "For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first."

Paul and Jesus both teach the same thing. The first listeners to Jesus' words were Jews. Most of the people listening to Paul were Gentile Christians. But the very same thing is said to both. When Jesus comes again the trumpet will sound. Jesus clearly places this event **after** the Great Tribulation:

Matthew 24:29-31 - "Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. [30] Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. [31] And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other."

When we put together the teaching of **both** Jesus and Paul we learn that this is the moment when the dead are raised and the living saints are transformed and raptured. In other words, there is no way to bring a **division** or **separation** of those events into the teaching of either Jesus or Paul. These things are always **linked tightly together**. Jesus comes again. But He never comes **again** and again. There is no **third** coming of Jesus in the

Scriptures.

3) HOW THE DAY OF THE LORD COMES LIKE A THIEF

1 Thessalonians 5:1-3 - "Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers, you have no need to have anything written to you. [2] For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. [3] While people are saying, "There is peace and security," then sudden destruction will come upon them as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape."

"There it is, Pastor Don, the secret rapture of the church, sneaking up on us like a thief in the night (remember the Billy Graham film?). How do you explain that?"

There are two important things to notice in response:

- a) ***As Paul makes clear in the very next verse, a surprise rapture is exactly what is not described in these verses: 1 Thessalonians 5:4-5 - "But you are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief. [5] For you are all children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness."***

In other words, the Day of the Lord (we'll consider that phrase in just a minute) will only come like a thief for ***careless unbelievers***. Paul's whole point in this passage, and the point is made in many other passages in the New Testament as well, is that Christians (at least ***watchful*** Christians) should ***not*** be surprised by the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. Far from surprised, they should be ***expecting*** it. They should ***see it coming in advance***.

Do you remember how Jesus said the very same thing? **Matthew 24:28,32-33** - "Wherever the corpse is, there the vultures will gather....**32-33**....From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts out its leaves, you know that summer is near. [33] So also, when you see all these things, you know that he is near, at the very gates."

- b) ***The second important thing to notice in these verses is the way Paul uses the phrase, "the day of the Lord" - 1 Thessalonians 5:2 - "For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night."***

The reason I want you to take note of this important phrase is because this is not the only time Paul uses it. At the risk of getting ahead of myself, take a quick look at next week's text from **2 Thessalonians chapter 2**:

2 Thessalonians 2:1-3 - "Now concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to him, we ask you, brothers, [2] not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by a spirit or a spoken word, or a letter seeming to be from us, to the effect that *the day of the Lord* has come. [3] Let no one deceive you in any way. For that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction...."

We can't launch into our study of this chapter today, but it's enough just to notice that Paul tells these Christians that the day of the Lord won't come until the ***man of lawlessness is revealed*** (**2 Thessalonians 2:3**). And that isn't going to happen, no matter what school of Bible prophecy you adopt, until well into the Great Tribulation.

4) THE KIND OF CHRISTIANS WE OUGHT TO BE RIGHT NOW IN THE LIGHT OF THE SECOND COMING

1 Thessalonians 5:6-11 - "So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober. [7] For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, are drunk at night. [8] But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. [9] For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, [10] who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him. [11] Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing."

Very quickly:

- a) ***Verses 6 and 7 warn against being distracted and caught up in the allurements of this world.*** That's what those

pictures of drunkenness and carousing are all about. Stay away from anything that breeds *carelessness*. Avoid attachments that will hinder you from loving and being drawn to Jesus Christ.

- b) ***Verses 8 and 9 encourage us to maintain faith, hope and love as cherished realities in our hearts.*** If you and I forget, even momentarily, that we are on our way *out* of this world and *into* another, we will not thrive spiritually. People without forgiveness and a certain future with Christ Jesus will soon sense the hopelessness of life in this world.
- c) ***Verses 10-11 encourage us to cherish the hope of future relationship with those who die in the Lord.*** We're not only to *rejoice* in this hope for ourselves. There are people who hurt and grieve. They need the *gift* of hope and courage from people of faith.

More on Paul's teaching next week.