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## Does 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 teach a "secret rapture"?

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It does not. Please look carefully at the context of the passage in light of other Biblical evidence.

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 reads:

"But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord."

Some Bible commentaries conclude from the words "shall be caught up... in the clouds," that those in Christ will be secretly transported to heaven, and then later return visibly--together with Christ--to rule the world. Notice, for example, the comments of the Ryrie Study Bible:

"The dead in Christ shall rise first, when the Lord comes for His people (v. 17). Then living believers will be 'caught up.' From the Latin for 'caught up' comes the term 'rapture.' The rapture or catching up of believers described here involves both those who have died and those who are living when the Lord comes. His coming here is 'in the air,' not to the earth, and will occur just prior to the beginning of the tribulation period (see Rev. 3:10). That period will end with His coming to the earth (see

[Matthew] 24:29-30; [Revelation] 19:11-16)."

Not everyone agrees with that explanation. Note the following statements by the New Bible Commentary: Revised:

"To meet the Lord' (Gk. 'eis apantesin tou kyriou'): When a dignitary paid an official visit ... to a city in Hellenistic times, the action of the leading citizens in going out to meet him and escorting him on the final stage of his journey was called the 'apantesis'; it is similarly used in [Matthew] 25:6; Acts 28:15. So the Lord is pictured as escorted to the earth by His people--those newly raised from death and those who have remained alive."

F.F. Bruce's International Bible Commentary agrees: "To meet is used in the papyri of the official reception given to a visiting governor, whom his citizens escort into the city from which they have come to meet him."

The same conclusion is reached by the commentary of Jamieson, Fausset and Brown, where we read:

"together with them"--all together: the raised dead, and changed living, forming one joint body, 'in the clouds'--Greek 'in clouds.' The same honor is conferred on them as on their Lord. As He was taken in a cloud at His ascension (Acts 1:9), so at His return with clouds ([Revelation] 1:7), they shall be caught up in clouds. The clouds are His and their triumphal chariot ([Psalm] 104:3; [Daniel] 7:13)... 'in the air'--rather, 'INTO the air'; caught up INTO the region just above the earth, where the MEETING (cf. [Matthew] 25:1, 6) shall take place between them ascending, and their Lord descending towards the earth. Not that the air is to be the place of their LASTING ABODE with Him... His point being established... he [Paul] leaves undefined here the other events foretold elsewhere (as not being necessary to his discussion), Christ's reign on earth with His saints (1 [Corinthians] 6:2, 3)..."

In an Editorial in Update 243 (May 12, 2006), the following is stated:

"Theologians have felt the need to explain God's mercy and justice by developing the concept of the 'secret rapture.' The assumption is that Jesus will first come secretly for His disciples or saints by 'rapturing' them to heaven where they will be protected during the time of the 'Great Tribulation' which will ravage the earth. According to that theory, Christ will return with His disciples or saints from heaven to this earth after that terrible time of devastation has past. Books and movies have popularized this idea in recent years--known as the 'Left Behind' series.

"However, as 'The Plain Truth' magazine explains in an article, which was published in February of 1963, 'The idea of a secret rapture of the saints was unknown to any Christian body before the sixteenth century. Joseph Ribera, Cardinal Bellarmine and Alcasar, Jesuit Priests of the sixteenth century, were the first Christian authorities to promulgate this idea. Even in their day the idea was unclear, but the basic roots of the doctrine began at this time (sources omitted). Later, around 1825, Samuel R. Maitland, Librarian to the Archbishop of Canterbury, embraced the belief, although its basic tenets were still unclear in his day. It wasn't until 1830 that this belief began to take its modern definition. The Catholic Apostolic Church had its beginning in 1830. It was founded in Britain... by men who claimed divine inspiration. They said the Holy Spirit revealed to them that the last days had come, that the Lord was about to return, that first He would 'rapture' the believers who were ready, at a secret coming... after which [i.e., the great tribulation] Christ would come in manifest power' (sources omitted)."

"The Bible does not teach a secret rapture. Rather, God's Word reveals that Christ will return ONCE, NOT TWICE (Hebrews 9:28). He will come openly, not in secret (Matthew 24:21-31; Revelation 1:7; Acts 1:10-11), and He will END the Great Tribulation at the time of His Coming by establishing the Kingdom of God here on earth (Revelation 11:15-18). Mark 13:24-27 specifically states: "But in those days, AFTER that tribulation, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars of heaven will fall, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. THEN they

will SEE the Son of Man COMING in the clouds with great power and glory. And THEN [not before then] He will send His angels, and GATHER TOGETHER HIS ELECT..."

"Christ will come at the time of the LAST TRUMPET when His elect will be resurrected from the dead or changed to immortality (1 Thessalonians 4:15-17; 1 Corinthians 15:50-52). There can only be ONE last trumpet, which means, there can only be ONE return of Christ."

To interject, the Bible speaks about the last trumpet as the SEVENTH trumpet. In the book of Revelation, we read that seven angels will blow seven trumpets, but that at the time of the seventh trumpet--logically the last one--"the kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever" (Revelation 11:15). The seven angels blow the seven last trumpets AFTER the Great Tribulation has begun--in fact, when the seventh angel blows the seventh or last trumpet, the Great Tribulation will have ENDED. Christ returns to shorten the time of the Great Tribulation, lest all human beings on the earth would die (compare Matthew 24:21-22).

To continue with the above-mentioned Editorial:

"However, the Bible reveals that there can be protection from the terrible times to come--but that protection will not be provided in heaven, but on earth. As we explain in our free booklet, 'The Great Tribulation and the Day of the Lord,' beginning on page 58, Christ promises His people, who are worthy, a way to 'escape all these things that will come to pass' (Luke 21:34-36; compare Revelation 3:10; Zephaniah 2:3; Psalm 31:19-20). That 'place of refuge' (Proverbs 14:26) will be on this earth--not in heaven (Revelation 12:14; Isaiah 33:16; Isaiah 26:20-21). Yes, God will have prepared 'a place for us' to protect us from the Great Tribulation. Even though God CAN protect us anywhere He wants, He has decreed that His people will be protected at a certain place here on earth--the place of safety and 'shelter' (Joel 3:14-16). Christ compares the time preceding His coming with the time of Noah (Matthew 24:37-

39), and as God protected Noah and his family in the ark, here on earth, so He will protect His people on this earth in the way that HE has chosen. And He will NOT protect them by 'rapturing' them to heaven!

"The idea of a rapture to heaven--secret or otherwise--is nowhere taught in Scripture. It is an invention by man which can give us no real hope, as it is not based on God's Word. But God does offer us His protection, if we prove ourselves worthy to receive it."

To re-emphasize, the Bible nowhere teaches two comings of Christ--or a secret rapture to heaven. The FACT that Christ's Church will be protected here on EARTH--at a "place of safety" DURING the time of the Great Tribulation--PROVES that His Church will not be at that time in heaven--nor, that it was transferred to heaven before the Great Tribulation by means of a "secret rapture."

But, this does not mean--as some have begun to erroneously teach--that Christ will return before the Great Tribulation and take His Church to a place of safety here on earth, where He will dwell with His Church during the time of the Great Tribulation. This teaching is likewise without any Biblical support; in fact, Christ warns against such teaching, when He says in Matthew 24:26-27: "Therefore if they say to you, 'Look, He is in the desert!' do not go out... For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be." His return will be clear and obvious and visible for all alive. Revelation 1:7 says: "Behold, He is coming with clouds, AND EVERY EYE WILL SEE HIM."

Some have advanced the idea that we will be caught up to meet Christ in the air and then proceed to rule the earth from heaven--either from the sky or from the "third heaven," where God dwells. This concept is likewise without any Biblical merit. We read in Revelation 5:9-10, how the angels praise Jesus Christ for having redeemed His people through His blood: "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seal, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people

and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth" (New International Version).

Another passage alluded to by some, that He will come as a thief in the night (compare 1 Thessalonians 5:1-4), describes the timing of His coming. The world will not expect His return at that time. It does not talk about the manner of His coming (visibly or secretly). Compare also Matthew 24:36-44.

We read in 1 Thessalonians 4:17 that we will meet the returning Christ, at His coming, in the air. This is not referring to the third heaven, but to the atmosphere of our earth, which has air and clouds. We read that we will be with Christ from that time on. We read that Christ will descend on that same day to the Mount of Olives (Zechariah 14:4), and we will be with Him (Zechariah 14:5). As mentioned earlier, Christ's disciples will meet Christ in the air and will accompany Him back to earth. The angels had told the apostles that Christ would come back in the same manner as He had left them. They were on the Mount of Olives, and He left them visibly on a cloud (Acts 1:9-11).

2 Thessalonians 2:1 also talks about the coming of Christ and OUR GATHERING with Him. Remember that Christ GATHERS His elect when He returns VISIBLY (compare again Mark 13:24-27). At that time, He will take care of the "lawless one" (compare verse 8). Again, this is one and the same event--there are no two comings described.

In conclusion, 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 does not introduce a secret rapture, but it describes the resurrection of those who died in Christ and the change to immortality of those true Christians who are alive when Christ returns (compare 1 Corinthians 15:50-52). Christ will return visibly--every eye will see Him. The Bible reveals only ONE return--ONE second coming. When it occurs, the dead in Christ will be resurrected to immortality, and those in Christ who are alive will be changed to immortality. All of this will occur at the time of the LAST or SEVENTH trumpet. Christ will return AFTER the Great Tribulation, not BEFORE then. He will come to shorten those days. The

Bible simply does not ALLOW for a secret rapture, and those who hope and expect to be transferred to heaven will be "left behind" and waiting in vain.

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