

“Not as those who have no hope...”

By Bob Young

What will happen when Jesus returns? We live in a religious world where it may seem that we are “odd man out.” Others go on and on about the rapture, tribulation, and the 1000-year reign of Jesus in an earthly kingdom. What does the Bible say? One does not have to understand every detail of Revelation to know what the Bible says. The Thessalonian letters give clarity about several modern misunderstandings.

Jesus’ return will not be secret. It will be “unmissable.” Our premillennial friends have an extra coming: Coming #2A, a secret coming to rapture away believers. For them, the public visible coming is Coming #2B, leading to final judgment. But Paul mentions things hard to miss: “the cry of a command,” “the voice of an archangel,” and “the trumpet of God” (1 Thess. 4:16). Paul tells the Thessalonians that they will not miss the day of the Lord and Jesus’ return (2 Thess. 2:1-4).

Jesus’ return will be manifest, visible. When Paul writes about “the manifestation of his coming” (2 Thess. 2:8), he is saying that the coming of Jesus will be visible to everyone.

What about the rapture? Despite the popularity of the theory, there is no biblical evidence for a rapture that whisks believers to heaven to escape intense tribulation. The theory depends exclusively on 1 Thess. 4:17, the only verse in the Bible that even hints at the idea. That Christians will be “caught up” was translated into Latin by the word *rapio*. You can probably see the similarity. The Greek word *harpazo* refers to something rapid or unexpected, something forceful.

Paul’s words should be understood in the original context.

→Paul’s point is that believers who die before Jesus returns are not going to miss out. All believers will be with the Lord forever (1 Thess. 4:17; 5:10; 2 Thess. 2:1).

→Paul’s message is not that believers will be miraculously exempted from life’s difficulties. Rather the opposite: difficulties are certain for faithful Christians. The Thessalonians had been oppressed almost from the moment of their conversion (1 Thess. 1:6, 2:2, 13-16). Troubles are inevitable (1 Thess. 3:3-4). Troubles will continue until Jesus returns and evil is conquered once and for all (2 Thess. 1:3-8).

→In Paul’s description of coming events, Jesus easily overcomes every enemy. No need for a great final battle. Justice is exacted with no doubt about the outcome (2 Thess. 1:5-8). Paul’s primary concern is not what will happen to unbelievers, but the certainty of God’s care for believers.

Reminders for your life in this troubled world.

→God’s saving work is past, present, and future: what he has done, what he is doing, what he will do.

→Our goal is this: start, continue faithfully, finish.

→Decide that you will follow Jesus.

→Let God work to transform your life and make you more and more suited for his presence.

→Know that he will rescue us from wrath at the coming of Jesus (1 Thess. 1:10).

Let us accept Bible teaching. Rejecting the rapture does not mean we are somehow missing out. Our hope is not in escaping life’s problems. Our hope is in Jesus, whose victory declares that we can overcome life’s problems. Let us hold on to hope. Never let go!