

## 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18: The Coming Of The Lord

People prepare for all sorts of things in life: marriage, holidays, exams and the arrival of a baby. Sensible people also prepare for the one inevitable in life: death.

Christmas is not far off & we'll all be buying gifts, planning get-togethers, sending cards and putting up decorations. As Christmas approaches, Christians will also reflect upon the second coming of Christ as they reflect on his first coming at Bethlehem.

One of the interesting facts about the return of Christ is that there is more in the Bible about Jesus' second or final coming than about His birth, or first coming. The return of the Lord is referred to over 300 times in Scripture! It must be important!

All of us have questions about God, Jesus, the Bible and Christianity in general. Sometimes we just wonder about something and never express it publicly. Sometimes we might actually ask the question. There's no such thing as a dumb question! Let's look at our passage and ask some questions about Jesus' return:

### 1. What happens to Christians who die before the Lord Jesus returns?

This was a question on the minds of the Thessalonians of Paul's day. They believed that Jesus was coming back as the Judge but were confused about some aspects surrounding his return.

That's why Paul says in verse 13: *we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men who have no hope.*

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The expression *fall asleep* refers to those who have died.

To speak of those who *have no hope* means that they have not repented of their sin and trusted in Jesus' death as the payment for their sin, therefore they have not had their sins forgiven. Therefore they *have no hope* of being in Heaven. They *have no hope*, no confident expectation of Eternal Life.

Mostly, people whose loved ones die, grieve. Most of us will have had that experience. However, for the Christian who has died, there is the confident expectation that they have gone to be with the Lord. This *hope* is not shared by non-Christians, because they are without *hope*, they are without that promise of Eternal Life.

Now, Paul argues that, because we Christians believe that Jesus died and rose again, so we believe that God will *bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in Him*. They will not miss out! Those who are still alive when the Lord returns will *certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep*. He adds: *the dead in Christ will rise first*. The phrase *the dead in Christ* refers to those who, during their life, were *in Christ*. They trusted in Christ as their Saviour and Lord.

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### 2. On what basis and with what authority does Paul make these claims?

In Verse 15 Paul says *according to the Lord's own word*. Paul based what he believed and wrote on what the Lord Jesus had said.

When we turn to the Gospels, we don't find such a statement by the Lord Jesus. But then we are reminded by John at the end of his Gospel (21:25) that *Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written*. This would equally apply to other things that Jesus said.

Paul must here be referring to something that Jesus said which has not been handed down to us.

### 3. How will Jesus return?

Paul seeks to describes the indescribable! *For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God*. Paul writes in similar terms in 2 Thessalonians 1 and 1 Corinthians 15 and Matthew quotes Jesus speaking about it in Matthew Chapter 24.

What we do know from Scripture is that the Lord's return has been promised, it will happen suddenly, the last judgement will take place, Christians will be raised to be with Christ and those who have refused to repent and follow Jesus will be separated from God forever, in hell.

### 4. How long will we Christians be with the Lord?

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Paul doesn't beat around the bush about this. He writes in verse 17 *and so we will be with the Lord forever*. Forever in the presence of the Lord! What an encouragement in the face of doubts, opposition to the Christian faith, failing health and even approaching death. That's why Paul adds in verse 18: *therefore encourage each other with these words*. As brothers and sisters in Christ, here's a great ministry we can have with each other as we urge one another on in the Faith.

You may have many other questions to do with the return of Christ. Some can be answered from the Bible and some will have to wait until he comes.

What we can be sure of is that for the Christian, as well as relating with God now, there is also a great future with the Lord. In the meantime, we need to prepare for his coming by living a life that is pleasing to him and helping others to come to know him too.