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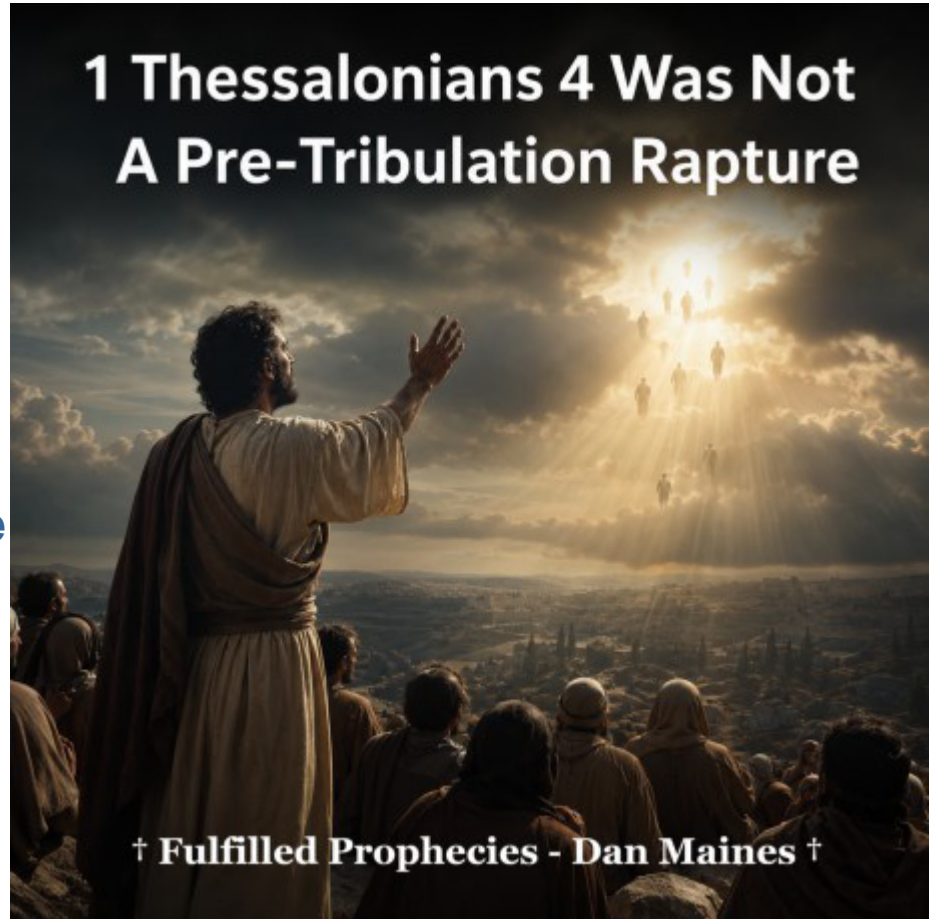
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1 Thessalonians 4 Was Not A Pre-Tribulation Rapture



By Dan Maines

1 Thessalonians 4 Was Not A Pre-Tribulation Rapture

Introduction

† One of the most commonly used passages for a future pre-tribulation rapture is 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17.

† Yet the passage never mentions a seven-year tribulation, and it never says Jesus comes to remove believers from the earth before one.

† Those ideas must be inserted into the text because they aren't found in the text itself.

† When we allow Paul to speak for himself, we discover that he expected these events in the lifetime of his own generation.

1 Thessalonians 4:15-17

For we say this to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who remain, 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.

† Paul repeatedly said we that are alive and remain.

† Paul placed himself among those expecting to witness these events.

† The passage gives no indication of a delay lasting thousands of years.

† Paul was comforting first-century believers concerning fellow Christians who had died. (1 Corinthians 15:51-52)

† The focus is on the coming of Christ and the gathering of His people, not an escape from a future tribulation. (Matthew 24:30-31)

† The language of clouds, trumpets, and gathering comes directly from Old Testament judgment and covenant imagery.

(Isaiah 27:13; Daniel 7:13)

Matthew 24:30-31

And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the SON OF MAN COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF THE SKY with power and great glory. And He will send forth His angels with A GREAT TRUMPET BLAST, and THEY WILL GATHER TOGETHER His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other.

† Jesus connected His coming with clouds, a trumpet, and the gathering of His elect.

† Paul used the same imagery in 1 Thessalonians 4.

† This demonstrates that both passages are describing the same coming of Christ.

† Jesus placed these events within the lifetime of that generation. (Matthew 24:34)

† The gathering of the elect was not separated from Christ's coming by thousands of years.

1 Corinthians 15:51-52

Behold, I am telling you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, 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 will be changed.

† Paul again used first-century language by saying we shall not all sleep.

† He expected some of his audience to remain alive until these events occurred.

† The same trumpet appears here as in 1 Thessalonians 4.

† Paul was discussing the same resurrection hope found throughout his letters.

† There is still no mention of a seven-year tribulation or a removal of believers from the earth.

Isaiah 19:1

The pronouncement concerning Egypt:

Behold, the LORD is riding on a swift cloud and is about to come to Egypt;

The idols of Egypt will tremble at His presence,
And the heart of the Egyptians will melt within them.

† God was said to come on a cloud against Egypt.

† No one saw God literally riding through the sky on a cloud.

† The language described divine judgment upon a nation.

† This establishes a biblical pattern for understanding cloud-coming language. (Psalm 104:3; Nahum 1:3)

† The prophets repeatedly used cloud imagery to describe God's intervention in history. (Isaiah 13:1-13)

2 Peter 3:10

But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be discovered.

† Peter said the day of the Lord would come like a thief.

† Peter was writing to first-century believers who were awaiting the fulfillment of God's promises.

† The thief imagery emphasizes unexpectedness, not secrecy.

† Nothing in the passage says believers would disappear from the earth before a tribulation.

† Peter expected the fulfillment of these things in connection with his generation's covenant transition. (2 Peter 3:11-13)

Revelation 3:3

So remember what you have received and heard; and keep it, and repent. Then if you are not alert, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come to you.

† Jesus warned a first-century church that He would come like a thief.

† The warning was directed to real believers living at that time.

† The coming was imminent to them, not thousands of years away.

† The language matches other judgment warnings throughout scripture. (Matthew 24:42-44)

† A thief comes unexpectedly, but not secretly. The emphasis is on readiness.

Hebrews 10:37

FOR YET IN A VERY LITTLE WHILE,
HE WHO IS COMING WILL COME, AND WILL NOT DELAY.

† The writer of Hebrews expected Christ's coming in a very little while.

† This statement was written to first-century believers.

† It reinforces the nearness language found throughout the New Testament.

† The audience was not told to expect a delay of thousands of years.

† Scripture consistently presents these events as near to the original recipients.

Matthew 16:28

"Truly I say to you, there are some of those who are standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom."

† Jesus placed His coming within the lifetime of some standing before Him.

† Some of His audience would still be alive when that coming occurred.

† This creates a clear time limitation that cannot be stretched into our future.

† Any interpretation of 1 Thessalonians 4 must agree with the timeframe Jesus gave.

† Christ's coming was not presented as a distant event beyond the lives of His hearers. (Matthew 10:23)

Matthew 24:34

Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place.

† Jesus declared that all the things of the Olivet Discourse would occur before that generation passed away.

† The gathering of the elect was included in those events. (Matthew 24:31)

† The coming of the Son of Man was included in those events. (Matthew 24:30)

† The time statement is simple, direct, and leaves no room for a delay of thousands of years.

† Scripture repeatedly points us back to the first-century fulfillment of these promises.

Historical References

† Eusebius recorded that Christians remembered Jesus' warnings and fled Jerusalem before its destruction in AD 70.

† Eusebius records that the church at Jerusalem fled to Pella before the city's destruction, demonstrating that first-century Christians took Jesus' warnings seriously.

† Josephus documented the unprecedented judgments that fell upon Jerusalem exactly as Jesus foretold.

† Early Christian writers viewed the destruction of Jerusalem as a major fulfillment of Christ's warnings concerning that generation.

How It Applies To Us Today

† We can trust the time statements Jesus and the apostles gave.

† We don't need to reinterpret clear time indicators to fit modern prophetic systems.

† Christ kept His promises exactly when He said He would.

† The kingdom isn't future, it's a present reality.

† We live under the completed reign of Christ and enjoy the blessings of the New Covenant today.

Q & A Appendix

Q: Does 1 Thessalonians 4 mention a seven-year tribulation?

A: No. The passage never mentions a seven-year tribulation. That concept must be added from outside the text. (1 Thessalonians 4:15-17)

Q: Does the phrase like a thief teach a secret rapture?

A: No. The phrase describes unexpectedness, not secrecy. Jesus and the apostles used it in judgment contexts directed toward first-century audiences. (Matthew 24:42-44; Revelation 3:3; 2 Peter 3:10)

Q: Why is Paul's use of we who are alive and remain important?

A: Because Paul included himself among those expecting these events. He presented them as relevant to his own generation. (1 Thessalonians 4:15-17)

Q: Why should Matthew 24:34 affect how we interpret 1 Thessalonians 4?

A: Because Jesus said all those things would occur before that generation passed away. Any interpretation of 1 Thessalonians 4 must agree with Christ's stated timeframe. (Matthew 24:34)

Q: Where does 1 Thessalonians 4 mention a seven-year tribulation?

A: It doesn't. The words seven years, tribulation period, pre-tribulation, mid-tribulation, and post-tribulation never appear in the passage. Those concepts must be supplied from outside the text. (1 Thessalonians 4:15-17)

Q: Why does Paul say we who are alive and remain instead of they who are alive and remain?

A: Because Paul expected these events within the lifetime of his generation and included himself among those who could potentially witness them. (1 Thessalonians 4:15-17)

† This is the fulfilled perspective we proclaim at Fulfilled Prophecies †

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Source Index

† 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17, Matthew 24:30-31, 1 Corinthians 15:51-52, Isaiah 19:1, 2 Peter 3:10, Revelation 3:3, Hebrews 10:37, Matthew 16:28, Matthew 24:34

† Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History; Josephus, Wars of the Jews

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