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Series: [The Resurrections](#)

The Resurrections (13)

What Happens to Christians Who Die?

[\(1 Thessalonians 4:13-18\)](#)

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[Matthew 28:1-10](#)

(Continuation from [06-27-10](#))

The Doctrine of the Resurrections

[\(1 Thessalonians 4:13-18\)](#)

The Thessalonians' *ignorance about the Rapture* caused them to grieve.

It was to give them hope and to comfort them that Paul discussed that momentous event, giving a **fourfold description of it: 1) its pillars, 2) participants, 3) plan, and 4) profit (the benefits).**

1. The Pillars of the Rapture

The marvelous truth that the Lord Jesus Christ will return to gather believers to Himself is **based on three unshakeable pillars: 1) the death of Christ, 2) the resurrection of Christ, and 3) the revelation of Christ.**

1. The death of Christ
2. The Resurrection of Christ

In the most detailed passage on the resurrection in Scripture, Paul wrote that “**Christ [is] the first fruits, after that those who are Christ's at His coming**” ([1 Corinthians 15:23](#)).

Earlier in that same epistle, he stated plainly, “Now God has not only raised the Lord, but will also raise us up through His power” ([1 Corinthians 6:14](#)).

In his second inspired letter to the Corinthians, Paul wrote, “**He who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus**” ([2 Corinthians 4:14](#)).

[1 Thessalonians 4:14b \(NASB\)](#)

14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus.

To further assuage their fears, Paul reassured believers that **God will bring with Him [Jesus]** those who have fallen asleep in Jesus.

Their fellow believers who died will not miss out on the **Rapture** but will return with Christ in glory.

Some interpret the phrase **God will bring** to mean that the spirits of dead believers will come from heaven with Christ to meet their resurrected bodies. Others see in it the truth that at the **Rapture**, God will bring all believers, living and dead, back to heaven

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with Christ. While the first view is certainly true, the second one seems to be the emphasis of this passage.

What the passage does not teach is that the spirits of dead believers immediately return to earth with Christ for the establishing of the millennial kingdom.

That view places the **Rapture** at the end of the **Tribulation** and essentially equates it with the **Second Coming**. This view trivializes the **Rapture** into a meaningless sideshow that serves no purpose.

Commenting on the pointlessness of a **post-tribulational Rapture**, **Thomas R. Edgar** asks,

“What can be the purpose for keeping a remnant alive through the tribulation so that some of the church survive and then take them out of their situation and make them the same as those who did not survive? Why keep them for this? [The] explanation that they provide an escort for Jesus does not hold up. Raptured living saints will be exactly the same as resurrected dead saints. Why cannot the dead believers fulfill this purpose? Why keep a remnant alive [through the Tribulation], then Rapture them and accomplish no more than by letting them die? There is no purpose or accomplishment in [such] a Rapture.....”

With all the saints of all the ages past and the armies [of angels] in heaven available as escorts and the fact that [raptured] saints provide no different escort than if they had been killed, why permit the church to suffer immensely, most believers [to] be killed, and spare a few for a Rapture which has no apparent purpose, immediately before the [Tribulation] period ends?... Is this the promise? You will suffer, be killed, but I will keep a few alive, and take them out just before the good times come. Such reasoning, of course, calls for some explanation of the apparent lack of purpose for a post-tribulational Rapture of any sort.”

We can note the following:

- (1) -An unusual, portentous, one-time event such as the Rapture must have a specific purpose. God has purposes for his actions. This purpose must be one that can be accomplished only by such an unusual event as a Rapture of living saints.
- (2) -This purpose must agree with God’s general principles of operation.
- (3) -There is little or no apparent reason to Rapture believers when the Lord returns and just prior to setting up the long-awaited kingdom with all of its joyful prospects.
- (4) -There is good reason to deliver all who are already believers from the tribulation, where they would be special targets of persecution.
- (5) -To deliver from a period of universal trial and physical destruction such as the tribulation requires a removal from the earth by death or Rapture. Death is not appropriate as a promise in [Revelation 3:10](#).
- (6) -Deliverance from the tribulation before it starts agrees with God’s previous dealings with Noah and Lot and is directly stated as a principle of God’s action toward believers in [2 Peter 2:9](#). (“**Robert H. Gundry and [Revelation 3:10](#)**,” *Grace Theological Journal* 3 [Spring 1982], 43-44)