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Where Do Believers Go after the Rapture? – Remain in the Sky, Descend to Earth, or Ushered into Heaven? – Ep. 8

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\*The following is a transcript so it has not been edited for grammar and spelling.

## Transcription results:

[music]

It's time for the Biblical Prophecy Program with your host, Alan Kurschner of Eschatos Ministries.

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Where do believers go after the rapture? Remain in the sky, descend to Earth or ushered into Heaven? A few weeks ago I did an entire show demonstrating the fact that the Bible explicitly teaches the rapture. The name of that show was, Does the Bible teach the Rapture in Explanation of 1 Thessalonians 4:17 Episode number 4, and you can find that at [alankurschner.com/four](http://alankurschner.com/four). That show is important because there's a growing false voice within the church that says that the Bible does not teach the rapture. And this is an unfortunate trend, because it's part of a larger downgrading movement of eschatology. The downgrading of eschatology in the church today. And there's another reason why I think that this previous show that I did on the establishment of the rapture is important. The new Left Behind movie is coming out soon, and even though I completely disagree with the pre-tribulational theology behind it, they do believe in a future rapture. And let me just qualify that, even though they believe in a future rapture - myself as a prewrather - I completely disagree with their concept of a rapture should be qualified, because in pre-trib theology the future rapture is going to be this secret coming of Christ, it's a misunderstanding of the expression, Thief of the night. And there conception of it is erroneous, and I'll have to do a future show on that. But in contrast, the prewrath believes - no, the rapture is going to be a very loud event and all the accompanying events surrounding that rapture is going to be a very loud event, not some secret rapture where the world is going to wonder what just happened. And of course, another main reason prewrath eschatology disagrees with pre-trib, is that we believe that the church will first of all, face an unprecedented universal persecution in the Antichrist great tribulation, which is distinguished from the day of the Lord's wrath. We will be be raptured before wrath, but the wrath is not the Antichrist wrath. In fact, the very object of the Antichrist is not going to be unbelievers, it's going to be believers. There's a distinction between the Antichrist Great Tribulation and the Day of the Lord's Wrath, whereas pre-trib believes that the rapture can happen at any moment and it's going to happen before the Antichrist. And that's just not the case. I've written an entire book on this entitled, Antichrist Before the Day of the Lord: What Every Christian Needs To Know About The Return of Christ. Even though we do, in theory, agree with pre-tribulation as that there is a future rapture, we disagree on how that's going to play out and the very nature of it.

Getting back to why my previous program on establishing the rapture was important, is because the movie that's coming out, the Left Behind movie that's coming out. There are already ill-informed Christians, unfortunately, who are criticizing the movie by saying that the Bible does not teach the rapture. That's their criticism of the movie, "Well, it's all flawed because there is no rapture. The bible doesn't teach it." But of course, that's completely false. The Bible explicitly teaches the rapture. So episode four in my show a few weeks ago, you can forward that to people who you think are denying a

rapture. We know that the Bible teaches a rapture, but the natural question is then, "Okay, you have the rapture, you have God's people in the air meeting Christ in the clouds - 1 Thessalonians 4:15-18. But where do believers go after the rapture?" That is where is their destination? First of all, I'm going to answer this question biblically. I am going to provide a few passages in the Bible that I believe teach where the destination will happen. And then in the second half of this program, I'm going to respond to a very common but very flawed post-tribulational argument that says, "We will descend immediately--" That's the operative word, "--immediately to the Earth after the rapture." So in the post-tribulational scheme, the rapture happens. And then just immediately, there's a descent back to Earth. And I'm going to respond to their main argument for that. But first, where do believers go after the rapture? Now the last part of verse 17 in 1 Thessalonian 4:17, this passage climaxes with reassurance from Paul. He writes, "And so we will always be with the Lord." So where will we spend eternity? That's the question, right? Okay, we're always going to be with the Lord, but where?

Well in this passage, we're actually not told specifically. Paul's purpose is-- his point in this passage, is to stress that we will be with the Lord, but he does tell us that we will meet Him in the clouds. And from the clouds, then where is our destination? Where will believers go after they are united with Christ in the sky? I mean, again, do they remain in air, do they go straight to the Earth, immediately descend to Earth or will they go to Heaven? Or is there maybe another answer? Well, I believe that we will be in the fullness of fellowship and worship with our Lord eventually on Earth - and that's the operative word - eventually on Earth. The Locusts of Heaven will be the New Jerusalem, and it will descend and establish itself on Earth. You can cross-reference Revelation 21:1 through 22:5. But the question remains then, "Where will the people of God dwell between the time of the rapture and the [?] of the New Jerusalem on Earth?" This period of time before the New Jerusalem descends on the Earth. I think there's four passages that give us the answer. It's going to reveal that the Lord will first escort His people, temporarily, to the heavenly abode into the Father's presence, before we later make our descent to our eternal home on Earth. So in other words, I don't believe that we're going to immediately descend to the Earth, but eventually we will be on Earth, but we will be first of all ushered into the Father's presence in the heavenly abode, up there wherever that is. The first passage I want to point to is 2 Corinthians 4:14. Paul writes, "We do so because we know that the one who raised up Jesus, will also raise us up with Jesus and will bring us with you into His - i.e. the Father's presence." This is in the context, of course, of the resurrection. Paul is saying that when we are raised up, we will be ushered into the Father's presence. John in the Gospel of John, before Jesus - his departure - he promised in John 14, I'll just read verses 2-3, "There are many dwelling places in my Father's house. Otherwise, I would have told you because I'm going away to make ready a place for you. And if I go and make ready a place for you, I will come again and take you to be with me so that where I am, you may be also." That's the second passage.

The third passage is found in Revelation, Revelation 7:13-15. This is between the sixth-- the opening of the sixth and the seventh seal, which I believe that's when the rapture occurs. Not before the sixth seal. Not after the seventh seal. But between the opening of the sixth and seventh seal. In Revelation 7:13 through 15, you have a description of God's people who appear in Heaven - with robes, by the way, that indicates they've been resurrected - and they're, once again, they're ushered into before the Father. This passage reads, "Then one of the elders asked me, 'These dressed in long white robes, who are they and where have they come from?' So I said to Him, 'My Lord, you know the answer.' Then He said to me, 'These are the ones who have come out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. For this reason, they are before the throne of God and they serve Him day and night in his temple. And the one seated on the throne will shelter them.'" So here, they're before the throne of God. It explicitly states, "They're before the throne of God." So, these three passages really demonstrate-- I mean I think all we need is just one of these passages, but all three together form a really cogent argument that after the rapture was - of course, and after then the resurrection - God's people are ushered before the throne. In other words, Jesus is going to present His people, His redeemed people before his Father.

Now there's a fourth passage in Isaiah, although it's not explicit, but it does imply that we are taken

before the throne of the Father, there is this period of time. Let's see here, Isaiah 26:19-21 reads, "Your dead will come back to life. Your corpses will rise up. Wake up and shout joyfully you who live in the ground." This is one of the most explicit resurrection passages in the Old Testament next to Daniel 12:1-3. "For you who grow like plants drenched with the morning dew, and the Earth will bring forth its dead spirits. Go my people, enter your inner rooms. Close your doors behind you, hide for a little while until his angry judgement - i.e. the day of the Lord. - is over. For look, the Lord is coming out of the place where he lives to punish the sin of those who live on the Earth. The Earth will display the blood shed on it. It will no longer cover up its slain." So these passages, they picture the Lord escorting believers into the presence of the Father. And then during that time, the Lord will meet out his eschatological wrath upon the ungodly on Earth. But God's people, they're not going to remain in Heaven or in the sky Heaven forever. Because Heaven - the new Heaven, new Earth - will [?] eventually descending to Earth for the millennium and eternity. So what I will do, is I'll leave a chart in the show notes that will help illustrate this point. And you can go to [alankurschner.com/8](http://alankurschner.com/8) to see this.

I want to respond to the post-tribulationist interpretation that sees an immediate descent after the rapture. So in the sky, once the rapture takes place in the sky, they would see then immediately all of God's people then descend to the Earth, they're not ushered into Heaven, they would argue. In my view, they use this argument to fit their preconceived schema when the rapture happens. In other words, because they're post-tribulationists, right? So post-tribulationists believe that the rapture occurs at the very end of the seven-year period. And they believe that at the end of the seven-year period - the day after the seven-year period, then you have the millennium. And of course, that requires that the rapture has to-- that rapture will happen on that last day of the seven-year period. Then immediately, all of God's people have to descend back to Earth in order to experience enter the millennium. I see this as a kind of a strain in the-- they're approaching 1 Thessalonian 4:17, already with the pre-conceived view that God's people have to be on Earth immediately after the rapture. That's kind of what's going on there. So post-tribulationists, they argue that after God's people are caught up to the clouds to meet Christ in the rapture, they will immediately be, quote, "Escorted immediately." That the church will escort Christ back to Earth. So again, they're not taken to Heaven before the Throne of God. The main argument they use is invested in the Greek term, Apantesis - that's in 1 Thessalonians 4:17 - Apantesis, which is the Greek word Behind Meeting. They claim that this requires an immediate - that's the operative word for them - it's an immediate descent to Earth. Let me read 1 Thessalonians 4:17, it says, "Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up in the clouds, together with them to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will be with the Lord forever."

I've read a lot of material, a lot of literature, post-tribulationist literature, and they almost placed - not all of their eggs - but most of their eggs in this one basket for their interpretation. It's an argument that they make every time this issue comes up. It's an argument that's used also against pre-tribulationism and the prewrath field as well. That's why I think it's important to address this with this whole issue of - where do we go after the rapture? It's argued that the term Apantesis meeting - in 1 Thessalonians 4:17 - that this was a technical Greek term for a Hellenistic Reception. Where an imperial visitor would visit a country. And the citizens, they would go out of their city. They had meet the dignitary, and then escort them back to their city. It's argued that when Paul uses this term, he intends this schema of a reception. That is - the purpose of the rapture then is for the rapture saints to meet the Lord in the air, so as to immediately escort the Lord back to Earth. But there's a major problem. That's not what this word means. Let me put it this way, it's a mistake in understanding to view this as some technical term. There's actually four reasons why I believe that that is a mistake in interpretation of this term. The first reason, we covered in the first part of this show, where I have shown explicit passages that actually-- that teach, that we are not immediately-- we do not immediately descend back to the Earth, but instead the destination is before the throne of God - in Heaven. So that in itself argues against their interpretation. In fact, post-tribs, the reason why they use this term so much, this argument so much is because they cannot cite, they cannot furnish any passage in the Bible that shows, that depicts God's people returning from the sky, immediately return to the sky to the Earth. So that's the first reason right there - this is what prewrath has going for it - is these explicit passages. That would be the first

reason. The second reason is that Apantesis is not a technical term in Hellenistic Formal Reception descriptions. It's not used as a technical term in Greek Literature. Michael Cosby, who has written and researched this issue in this term thoroughly. He's written a seminar article entitled Hellenistic Formal Receptions and [?] use of Apantesis in Thessalonians 4:17. I will provide a link to that article. Or if I can't find the article online, I'll at least put the bibliography of this article in the show notes.

He writes a computer database search of the literature written during the several centuries surrounding Paul's era. It produced 91 pages of citations or passages that employ this term and its synonyms. Yet only a minority of the uses of these terms describes a formal reception. And just to note other points here, he comments that sometimes it does describe a formal meeting with the dignitary, and sometimes it does not. For example soldiers, meeting with soldiers et cetera. The term and its synonyms occurs about 130 times in the [?] in different context. Is Apantesis or Apantesin - that is the actual expression in 1 Thessalonian 4:17 - that occurs once and the source is provided by Peterson. Peterson is the person he's arguing against. But he says at 60 times is [?] and 3 times in the New Testament, and he says infrequently does the term in the underlining Hebrew ever mean, "To go, to bring back." So Cosby has done a lot of work. He's also searched the five volumes of Biblia Patristica, and he's only found one example from the late 4th century sermon that actually interpreted the Thessalonian passage in a formal reception schema. So this second reason shows that it's not a technical term as it's claimed by post-tribulationists, in fact far from it.

The third reason is that there's a lack of correspondents between Paul's description and Hellenistic Formal Reception. And I'm going to make a few points here. And these are actually points that I found in Cosby's very helpful article. So for example, the Hellenistic scheme or in the Hellenistic scheme, it is the citizens who are the active agents. Who will bring the dignitary back to the city. But in Paul's description, is the opposite. The Lord Himself acts upon the faithful believers and takes them up to the air or through their agent of the angels. Another point Cosby makes of this lack of correspondence, is that one of the most conspicuous images in Paul's description is the cry of the command - the archangel, the trumpet call - which functions to summon, not to greet. These motifs are absent in Hellenistic Formal Reception. Another point, even if there were a few similar images - which one would expect by the way, given that Christ's second coming is a formal event - it would be a fallacy to make the leap that Paul assumed that his readers would be aware of all the trappings that accompanies a Hellenistic Formal Reception. Particularly the notion of an immediate escort back to Earth. Let me just repeat that last point. Because post-tribs, they read so much, thinking that Paul had to have his readers assume that this term meant some immediate escort back to Earth. That's just really stretching the text. Another point is that-- well, let me just expand on this latter point. So in other words, the post-trib admits, they admit that Paul does not say anywhere here that there is an escort back to Earth. They have to admit that. But they would try to say, "Well, since Paul is relying on a particular meaning of the Hellenistic term - Apantesis, it entails that his Thessalonian readers would assume that Christ is escorted back to Earth by the church." Do you see that? A couple more points here, two more points on this third reason. The Hellenistic Formal Reception model, it does not account for Paul's language. So all these main features of a Hellenistic Receptions are absent from 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17. And thus, it's unwarranted - Cosby says that - to read this Hellenistic framework back into 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17. And then Cosby rightly asserts, he says, "Even if one assumes that Paul understood Apantesis in this way, the evidence demonstrates that he did not read such a meaning wholesale into his description of the [?]." The fourth reason, is that Paul's description resembles not Hellenistic reception language or imagery. Instead, Paul's description resembles the Old Testament, Jewish Apocalyptic language. And of course, Jesus's imagery in Matthew 24. For example, when you look at 1 Thessalonians 24, and you compare it to the Sinai Theophany in Exodus 19:10-18, you see this striking parallels that Paul is drawing from.

Let me just highlight some of these. So in Exodus 19:10-19 is the famous Sinai Theophany and it reads, "And the Lord said to Moses, go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow, have them wash their clothes, " Interesting the parallel of resurrection, "and be ready by third day because on that day, the Lord will come down on Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people. Put limits for the people

around the mountain and tell them be careful that you do not go up the mountain or touch the foot of it. Whoever touches the mountain shall surely be put to death, he shall surely be stoned or shot with arrows. Not a hand is to be laid on him, whether man or animal, he shall be permitted to leave only when the ram's horn sounds a long blast, may they go up to the mountain [chuckles]." It's amazing that these striking parallels. Let's continue, verse 14, "After Moses had gone down to the mountain, to the people, he consecrated them and they washed their clothes. Then he said to the people, 'Prepare yourselves for the third day. Abstain from sexual relations.' On the morning of the third day, there was thunder and lightening with a thick cloud over the mountain. And a very loud trumpet blast, everyone in the camp trembled. Then Moses led the people out of the camp to meet with God. And they stood at the foot of mountain. Mount Sinai was covered with smoke because the Lord ascended on it from fire. The smoke billowed up from it, like smoke from a furnace. The whole mountain trembled violently and the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder. Then Moses spoke and the voice of God answered him." These motifs are the Sinaite and not Theophany. They don't exhaust all the counter parts to the Thessalonian texts. But these motifs, they're underscored by-- also, there's Jewish apocalyptic description such as 1 Enoch 1:3-9.

The Sinai parallels also are underscored by Matthew 24. When you read 1 Thessalonians 4 and Mathew 24, and the striking parallels. In fact in my book, Antichrist Before the Day of the Lord, in appendix 2, I have listed 30 parallels between Jesus's teaching on His Second Coming and Paul's teaching on the Second Coming. Of course, Paul's drawn from Jesus's teaching. Of course as we seen, there are parallels that is most likely drawn also from the Sinai account. So you look at all this and you see all this mountain of evidence where Paul is actually drawing this material from, and then you have come along and say, "No, no, no, forget all that. He is actually drawing from Hellenistic Formal Receptions because of this one single word - No." I'm sorry, that does not work. In fact it doesn't work so much, that even the most well known post-tribulational interpreter, Douglas Moo, has said, "This is not a good argument." In fact he says in the book by [?], Three Views on the Rapture, in the first edition, page 181, he says "However, this argument can be give little weight. The Word does not have to bear this technical meaning nor is it certain that the return to the point of origin must be immediate." So he grants that this is not a good argument, and this is coming from a very well known post-tribulational interpreter. So these four reasons, they show that the text, it does not teach an immediate descent back to the Earth. Rather, we actually have explicit passages that teach that there will be an escort not back to Earth immediately, but immediate escort to the throne of the Father in Heaven. And then of course, eventually, we will descend to the Earth after the day of the Lord's judgement, to dwell with our Lord forever.