

# Resurrection of the Sleeping Saints



**2 Kings 2:11**

## RESURRECTION OF THE SLEEPING SAINTS

To begin a consideration of the topic “Resurrection of the Sleeping Saints,” we will turn to the Apostle Paul’s first epistle to the Thessalonians.

**“But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope.**

**“For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him.**

**“For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming [presence, Greek *parousia*] of the Lord shall not prevent [precede, Greek *phthano*] them which are asleep.**

**“For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first.” (1 Thess. 4:13-16)**

The Apostle Paul was counseling the flock of God not to be despondent concerning their brethren who had fallen asleep in death. The gates of death would not prevail against these loved ones, for as God had raised Jesus from death to life, so likewise would He deliver the dead and lead them forth with (and in

addition to) His Son. God's purpose was to raise not only Jesus but also the Church. This conclusion was the logical outgrowth of their belief and faith in God and in the resurrection.

Many believe that the Scriptures cited refer to a *physical* rapture of the Church at the close of the Christian or Gospel Age. They assume this passage of Holy Writ implies that both the living and the dead saints will, *at the same time*, be together translated to heavenly glory at the Second Coming and appearing of Jesus Christ. Note, however, that an *order of resurrection* is indicated in Paul's reasoning, the logic of which follows: (1) God will *first* lead forth with His Son those who "*sleep in Jesus.*" (2) As specifically stated, the saints *living* at that time will not precede the dead or sleeping members in resurrection change but *will follow* them because "*the dead in Christ shall rise first.*" Therefore, although both of these resurrections take place at the end of the Gospel Age, they do not coincide in their fulfillments.

**"Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.**

**"Wherefore comfort one another with these words." (1 Thess. 4:17,18)**

The Greek word *epeita*, translated "then," has the significance here of a *subsequent* event and might better have been

translated “afterwards.” It is not necessary for us to hastily conclude that the living saints must be *immediately* caught up following the sleeping members’ change to resurrection likeness of their Lord. This same Greek word is used in 1 Corinthians 15:46,47, where Paul drew a comparison between the two Adams: “Howbeit that was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural; and *afterward* that which is spiritual. The first man is of the earth, earthy: the second man is the Lord from heaven.” The first man, Adam, the natural father of the human race, was “of the earth, earthy,” and the second Adam, the risen Redeemer, was “spiritual,” that is, “from heaven.” Since several millennia elapsed between the appearance of the first Adam and, *afterwards*, the introduction of the second Adam, the possibility arises that a period of time, though in this instance of relatively short duration, could also exist between the resurrection change of the sleeping saints and the translation of the tarrying members of the body of Christ, who are “alive and *remain*” during his Second Presence and “then [*afterwards*] ... shall be caught up together with them in the clouds.”

The word “together,” Greek *hama*, should not always be associated with the thought of concurrent motion or activity but can sometimes be related to the distinctly separate meaning of *place*, irrespective of the element of time. In fact, the lesson taught in 1 Thessalonians 4:17, the passage under consideration, is that

*later* the faithful saints who are alive and remain behind will be caught up together to where the other risen saints already are. Indeed in this very epistle, only eleven verses later, we are informed that Jesus “died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together [*hama*] with him” (1 Thess. 5:10). *Place* and *association* are clearly signified in this verse. Nor would we fail to observe the impropriety of substituting the phrase or thought of “living at the same time” as being the particular point of instruction emphasized here by the Apostle Paul. This statement also holds true with respect to the usage of the word “together” in 1 Thessalonians 4:17.

The apostle laid peculiar stress upon the fact that the living members would by *no means*, should in *no wise*, precede but would follow in resurrection change those who had already fallen asleep in death. Moreover, he declared this truth unto us “by the word of the Lord.” The emphasis would be strange indeed if the resurrection change of these two classes were to occur simultaneously or nearly so. However, if an appreciable interval of time existed between these two events, then surely we can begin to understand why the apostle wanted to accentuate such a distinction; that is, because this development would be surprising and most unanticipated, we would need reassurance that the apostle’s words were indeed the words *of the Lord*. And of this fact, we are specifically informed in no uncertain terms.

In the light of the foregoing, we are now in a better position to see that there are two raptures of the Church at the end of the age: (1) An *invisible* rapture of the *sleeping* saints as a body took place in AD 1878, and (2) an *invisible* rapture of the *living* saints as a group will occur in the near future. For the experience of individual saints who die in the *interim period between these two events*, namely, between the earlier rapture of the sleeping saints and the later rapture of the living saints, we will read from the Book of Revelation, as follows:

**“And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them.” (Rev. 14:13)**

This verse informs us that individual saints who die in the time period between the two raptures receive an *instantaneous* resurrection change at the moment of death and join in harvest activity beyond the veil (Matt. 13:39). More will be said about that activity as we proceed.

In his epistle to the Thessalonians, Paul said that the living remnant is to be caught up in “clouds,” symbolic of trouble, to meet the Lord in the air. Strictly speaking, this has not been the experience of all faithful Christians who died either before or since 1878. However, a number of Scriptures pertaining to the last

days indicate that the very last members of the Church of Christ will suffer violence and death, thereby being abruptly snatched up from the earthly fold. Not only do the Scriptures state plainly that “flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God,” but also the Scriptures indicate that the experience of the feet members will be comparable to that of Elijah, who was separated from Elisha by a fiery chariot and horses of fire and caught up in an accompanying whirlwind (1 Cor. 15:50; 2 Kings 2:11). The same lessons are shown in other pictures, such as the beheading of John the Baptist, the breaking of the earthly vessels of Gideon and the three hundred, the loosing of the four winds, the vitalization of the image of the beast and the consequent persecution, and the bruising of the heel members of the body of Christ (Matt. 14:6-11; Judg. 7:19,20; Rev. 7:1-3; 13:11-18; Gen. 3:15).

A careful analysis and consideration of these and other Scriptures leads to, we believe, the reasonable conclusion that in the future ages of eternity, no one particular individual will be looked back upon as the last member of The Christ. To have a last member would detract from the preeminence of Jesus as the Head of the Christ company and would violate, to a certain extent, the principles laid down respecting the office of the High Priest. Thus the last members will depart *collectively, as a group*, and the Gospel Age will have a distinct and abrupt ending, even as it had a definite beginning at Pentecost.

And there is another point. If, according to the commonly accepted view, the world were to behold visually a physical rapture of the sleeping dead, this spectacle would hinder the development and the trial of tarrying members of the body of Christ who would die henceforth. It would also prove an obstacle to the purification and trial of the Great Company (or secondary) class of Christians, who are not participants in the first resurrection and who will be dealt with next in the divine arrangement prior to the inauguration of Christ's Kingdom (Rev. 20:6; 7:9,13,14; Matt. 6:10).

Let us consider again a portion of Revelation 14:13, which sheds considerable light on this subject: "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them." The dead here who "die in the Lord" are not those of Adam's race, reckoned dead in their trespasses and sins, who later surrender themselves to the Lord and become converts to Christianity. The reason is obvious, for if we view this dying in the Lord as a consecration to God and His service—that is, as the crucifixion of the flesh and the lusts thereof and the daily endeavor to keep the body under—then we would be forced to conclude that the works which continue with them include works of the flesh that took place prior to conversion. No, blessed are those who *actually die* in Christ—those previously *reckoned* dead



to sin and the world through baptism and consecration into Christ's death who terminate their earthly pilgrimage in *literal* death. Blessed are these dead in Christ, who thus finish their course, for if their death occurs at the time specified and under the conditions of faithfulness implied by the expression "which die in the Lord," they will experience the happy lot indicated by the Holy Spirit as "rest[ing] from their labours; and their works do follow them."

Some agree with us on this point but feel that the fulfillment of Revelation 14:13 began at Pentecost. They claim that ever since this date, as the faithful died and were laid to rest, their wearisome toil and pilgrimage ceased and naught now awaits them but their reward, which will be granted at the last day when they are awakened from the tomb in the first resurrection morn. They further reason that although the deceased are now muted in death, the memory and the example of their lives linger on, and in some instances, the counsel, instruction, and noble works of a few of this number have been preserved and passed down to benefit succeeding generations. However reasonable this thought may seem, however encouraging and edifying one's experience may have been, we take exception to this view, for while, from one standpoint, the dead might be spoken of as resting from their labors since Pentecost, their works did not continue on in the sense required by and declared in the Spirit.

The Greek word *meta*, when used in conjunction with the genitive case, should be translated by the English equivalent “with,” and where found in relation to the accusative case, it is to be interpreted as “after.” Since the former condition applies in Revelation 14:13, the works of the Christian dead should be thought of as following *with* them. In the King James, the American Revised Standard, and a few other versions of the Bible, this Greek word is left untranslated and thus is omitted from the English text. Hence we are apt to draw our own conclusions as to the sense implied, whereas if the word “with” had been retained and inserted in the text in the proper manner, there would be no room for conjecture on this point. When the Greek *meta* is used in conjunction with the genitive case elsewhere in the King James Version, it is rendered “with” 346 times, and not once is it translated “after.” Revelation 14:13 tells us that the works of “the dead which die in the Lord” follow *with* them, not after them.

The rendering of the phrase “rest from their labours; and their works do follow” is also worthy of consideration. The word “and” is a poor substitute for the Greek word *de*. “And” is used as the equivalent of this word only four times in the New Testament, whereas it is translated as “but” more than two thousand times in our Common Version. Indeed the word “but” would more properly suit the situation in Revelation 14:13. The thought is that

from 1878 on, the blessed ones who die in the Lord rest from their labors, *but* their works continue. The fatiguing aspect of their labors ceases with the acquisition of the new body from above, for then their activities will continue gloriously on, unhampered by vessels of clay. Therefore, this Scripture might be paraphrased thus: “Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, for not only may such now rest from their toil, but also their work of love and joyous service to God accompany them beyond, uninterrupted by the sleep of death.” Under this circumstance, death may be spoken of as a blessing, while elsewhere in the Scriptures, death is consistently pictured as an enemy.

It would be difficult to reconcile this interpretation of activity following death as applying from Pentecost onward, for Christians who died down through the Gospel Age are referred to as being *asleep* in Jesus (1 Thess. 4:14; Acts 7:60). Only when the setting and the fulfillment of this Scripture are thought of as occurring at the *end* of the Gospel Age is the difficulty removed. The time of fulfillment is confirmed by the relationship that exists between John’s *hearing the Spirit* utter the blessing to attend “the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth” and his *looking to the source* whence this information emanated. As John looked, he saw the Son of man seated on a white cloud with a sharp sickle in his hand and a golden crown upon his head.

***“And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them.***

***“And I looked, and behold a white cloud, and upon the cloud one sat like unto the Son of man, having on his head a golden crown, and in his hand a sharp sickle.” (Rev. 14:13,14)***

The setting of this prophecy and its fulfillment occurs during the Second Advent, when the Master Reaper himself, with an attendant *white* cloud of blessing, mercy, and truth, superintends the harvest work foretold to occur at the end of the age. In no sense does the period of time in which this prophecy of Revelation chapter 14 is located apply to the Jewish harvest at the beginning of the Gospel Age; rather, it lies within the Gospel harvest at the *close* of the age, when a *twofold* harvest is indicated in the same vision, namely, the harvest of the wheat of the earth and the harvest of the vine of the earth or Christendom (Rev. 14:15-20). The two end-of-the-age harvests are closely related to each other in time sequence and are pictured as the harvest of the wheat and the tares in Matthew 13:24-30,36-42.

Let us consider the expression “which die in the Lord *from henceforth.*” Notice that the blessing accrues to the dead not *at* such a date but *from a particular point on the stream of time forward.*

As John heard a voice from heaven explain to him the meaning of these things that were to transpire, so the Holy Spirit testified and caused him to bear record that a message from God would descend upon His people during the harvest, informing them of the arrival of the date 1878 and of the significance of events as they would pertain to the faithful Christian dead thereafter. This voice from heaven is similar to the voice in Revelation 18:4, which enjoins God's people to come out of Babylon. In other words, it is the divine message (the sharp sickle of *truth*) that constitutes the separating influence designed to induce God's children to disassociate themselves from nominalism.

The various prophecies pertaining to the Second Advent would be difficult to reconcile if they were all to be considered and understood from a purely literal or physical standpoint. And the complexity is further increased if all are thought to converge and to meet their fulfillment in a single stupendous event occurring at the moment of the Lord's arrival. Among the prophecies, Messiah is pictured as coming with a shout, a sword in his mouth, and a sword upon his thigh; as having in his hand a trumpet, a sickle, a key, and a chain; and as coming seated on a white cloud, on a white horse, and on the right hand of the power of God (1 Thess. 4:16; Rev. 14:14; 19:11,15; 20:1; Psa. 45:3; Matt. 26:64). The multiple prophecies marking the Second Advent, the character of which is portrayed in figurative and spiritual

symbolisms, do not all occur on one single occasion but depict various activities and events taking place *during the period* of the Second Advent. However, our purpose at hand is not to attempt a reconciliation of these events but, rather, to note that a *distinct time interval or period of inspection* is indicated by those prophecies, which touch upon the first features of the Master's presence and the work associated with his return.

Jesus will "sit as a refiner and purifier of ... gold and silver" (Mal. 3:3). His posture is more suggestive of a *period of testing and trial* than of immediate judgment, for the Christian is under judgment *in the present life*. This prophecy is especially true in our day, as the setting begins in the latter days with the Master Refiner's return. Surely no mock trial or refining work will be found necessary for footstep followers of the Redeemer in life beyond the veil (1 Pet. 2:21). There, instead, commendation and *proportionate* reward for having done good — that is, honor and lesser honor — await those deemed worthy of life. Those who are enlightened by the Holy Spirit in the present life, tasting the good Word of God and the powers of the age to come, are responsible for the light they have received (Heb. 6:4-6). Of this class, therefore, those who are subsequently proven unfit for life — and thus worthy of Second Death — will have no part in the resurrection (Rev. 20:6). Sentence will be pronounced, remanding them to the abyss or eternal sleep of death.

Thus the trial, testing, and refining of the spiritual seed class take place down here on earth prior to either their reception to honor and glory in heaven or their loss of life altogether. *Time* is an important factor. Since this judging work is not instantaneously concluded, the Master is shown *seated* on a white cloud while he is employed in harvesting work (Rev. 14:14). The Parable of the Dragnet, in which the gospel net is being drawn to shore, shows the Lord's messengers or fishers of men seated, doing a sorting work (Matt. 13:47,48). Our Lord is described as standing at the door in these latter days, knocking and awaiting a response from the faithful few, who are rewarded with food in due season (Rev. 3:20; Matt. 24:45). The door through which the Master comes to his people is not the portal of death but the portal of the *heart*, which, when opened unto him in these days of the seventh or last (Laodicean) epoch of the Church's experience, will be filled with bounties new and old accompanied, in a special sense, with a confirmation of the blessedness of his presence (Matt. 13:52; Rev. 3:14-22).

These are but a few of the many Scriptures that provide insight into the nature of the present judgment, which has begun with the "house of God" (1 Pet. 4:17). Suffice it to say that a period of trial for Jesus' professed people while they are tabernacling in the flesh is indicated during the harvest at the end of the age, the time in which we are living. The risen saints are now,

and have been since 1878, with the Lord in the air, awaiting the completion of the body members, and they are presently fully engaged in training for and being acquainted with their duties and responsibilities in the judgment of men and angels as well as their position in the chain of command in the soon-to-come Kingdom reign of Christ and his Bride (1 Cor. 6:2,3). In addition, we understand the Scriptures to teach that the Church will be introduced to the Heavenly Father as a class or *completed company*, notwithstanding any individual honors or recognition to be later extended. This formal presentation is a much-anticipated event yet future.

As pants the hart for water brooks,  
So pants my soul for Thee.  
Oh, when shall I behold Thy face,  
When wilt Thou call for me?  
How oft at night I turn my eyes  
Towards my heav'nly home,  
And long for that blest time, when Thou,  
My Lord, shalt bid me "Come!"

And yet I know that only those  
Thy blessed face shall see,  
Whose hearts from ev'ry stain of sin  
Are purified and free.  
And oh, my Master and my Lord,  
I know I'm far from meet  
With all Thy blessed saints in light  
To hold communion sweet.



I know that those who share Thy throne  
Must in Thy likeness be,  
And all the Spirit's precious fruits  
In them the Father see.  
Lord, grant me grace, more patiently  
To strive with my poor heart,  
And bide Thy time to be with Thee  
And see Thee as Thou art!

Frank Shallieu

**For more information on the date 1878 and end-time prophecy,  
see the book *The Keys of Revelation*.**