

1 Thessalonians 4:17

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

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.

Analysis

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—epeita hēmeis hoi zōntes hoi perileipomenoi hama syn autois harpagēsometha en nephelais eis apantēsin tou Kyriou eis aera, kai houtōs pantote syn Kyriō esometha (ἔπειτα ἡμεῖς οἱ ζῶντες οἱ περιλειπόμενοι ἅμα σὺν αὐτοῖς ἀρπαγησόμεθα ἐν νεφέλαις εἰς ἀπάντησιν τοῦ Κυρίου εἰς ἀέρα, καὶ οὕτως πάντοτε σὺν Κυρίῳ ἐσόμεθα). After dead believers rise (v. 16), living believers are harpazō (ἀρπάζω, 'caught up/snatched away')—the Latin rapiro gives us 'rapture.' This instantaneous transformation (1 Cor 15:51-52) grants resurrection bodies without experiencing death.

Together with them in the clouds (hama syn autois en nephelais, ἅμα σὺν αὐτοῖς ἐν νεφέλαις)—the living join resurrected saints, reuniting believers separated by death. Eis apantēsin (εἰς ἀπάντησιν, 'to meet') was used of official delegations going out to meet visiting dignitaries and escort them back; believers meet Christ in the air to accompany Him to earth. **And so shall we ever be with the Lord** (kai houtōs pantote syn Kyriō esometha, καὶ οὕτως πάντοτε σὺν Κυρίῳ ἐσόμεθα)—the goal isn't heaven but eternal presence with Christ, whether in renewed creation or intermediate heaven. The crucial reality is syn Kyriō (σὺν Κυρίῳ, 'with the Lord')—eternal fellowship with Christ.

Historical Context

Paul's rapture teaching became foundational Christian eschatology. Early believers eagerly anticipated Christ's return, viewing death as temporary separation ending at the parousia. The vivid imagery—Lord descending, dead rising, living transformed, all meeting Christ in clouds—provided concrete hope for persecuted churches. Later theological debates (pre-/mid-/post-trib rapture, etc.) sometimes obscure Paul's main point: believers (dead and living) will be reunited and eternally present with Christ. The timing details matter less than the certain reality of resurrection and reunion.

Related Passages

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Psalm 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Study Questions

1. How does the promise of being 'caught up together' (reunited with believing loved ones) comfort you regarding death's separations?
2. What does 'ever be with the Lord' teach about heaven's essence—not location but Christ's presence?
3. How should expectation of Christ's sudden return affect your daily priorities and readiness?

Interlinear Text

ἐπειτα ἡμεῖς τοῦ ζῶντες τοῦ περιλειπόμενοι ἅμα
Then we which are alive which and remain together
G1899 G2249 G3588 G2198 G3588 G4035 G260

σὺν αὐτοῖς ἀρπαγησόμεθα ἐν νεφέλαις εἰς ἀπάντησιν
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G4862 G846 G726 G1722 G3507 G1519 G529

τοῦ κυρίως εἰς ἀέρα· καὶ οὕτως πάντοτε σὺν κυρίῳ
which the Lord in the air and so ever with the Lord
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ἐσόμεθα
be
G2071

Additional Cross-References

1 Corinthians 15:52 (Parallel theme): In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.

Revelation 11:12 (Parallel theme): And they heard a great voice from heaven saying unto them, Come up hither. And they ascended up to heaven in a cloud; and their enemies beheld them.

John 14:3 (Parallel theme): And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.

1 Thessalonians 4:15 (References Lord): For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep.

Revelation 1:7 (Parallel theme): Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, Amen.

Acts 1:9 (Parallel theme): And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight.

Daniel 7:13 (Parallel theme): I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him.

John 17:24 (Parallel theme): Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world.

John 12:26 (Parallel theme): If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be: if any man serve me, him will my Father honour.

Acts 8:39 (References Lord): And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more: and he went on his way rejoicing.