

Hope of Eternal Life Changes the Way We Live
1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

1 Thessalonians 4:13-14

- Believers do not grieve as unbelievers who don't have hope in eternal life.
- They had been taught about Jesus' Second Coming, but they had expected it to come much sooner.
- They hadn't expected people in their congregation to die before Jesus came back, and they were asking how they fit into the timeline of Jesus' return.
- In His Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24–25; Mark 13; Luke 21), Jesus taught the disciples about the signs of His coming and the end of the age.

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- Jesus described coming on the clouds of heaven with power and glory (Matthew 24:30).
- Daniel had seen this vision hundreds of years before.
- Jesus used the term “son of man,” referring to Himself, to remind them of Daniel’s vision (Daniel 7:13).
- He said the angels would come also, with a loud trumpet call, and gather his elect from the four winds (Matthew 24:31).

1 Thessalonians 4:13-14

- The Thessalonians had heard these teachings, but they were unsure about how their friends who had already died would fit into this process.
- If the elect were “gathered,” would this include those who had already died or only those alive at the time? Would those who had already died rise later? Would that in any way affect their hope in eternal life in heaven?
- Paul answered their questions about the timing of it all in the next talking point, but first, he simply wanted to encourage them that Christians do not need to grieve over death in the same way unbelievers do.

1 Thessalonians 4:13-14

- In the ancient world, among people of all different religions, “fall asleep” was a common euphemism for death.
- But Christians adopted the terminology, with a deeper theological meaning, because they saw death as a “sleep” from which one would “awake” to resurrection life.
- In ancient paganism, death was an eternal sleep from which one never awoke, “one unending night to be slept through,” as the Roman poet Catullus wrote (*Catullus Redivivus* 5.4–6).

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- For much of the pagan world, this life was all there was, and death was just the end.
- According to Greek poet Theocritus, “Hopes are for the living; the dead are without hope” (*Idyllus* 4.42).
- In a second-century letter of condolence to a couple who had lost their son, the writer, who had also lost her son, wrote, “I sorrowed and wept over your dear departed one as I wept over Didymas [her son] ... but really, there is nothing one can do in the face of such things. So, please comfort each other.”

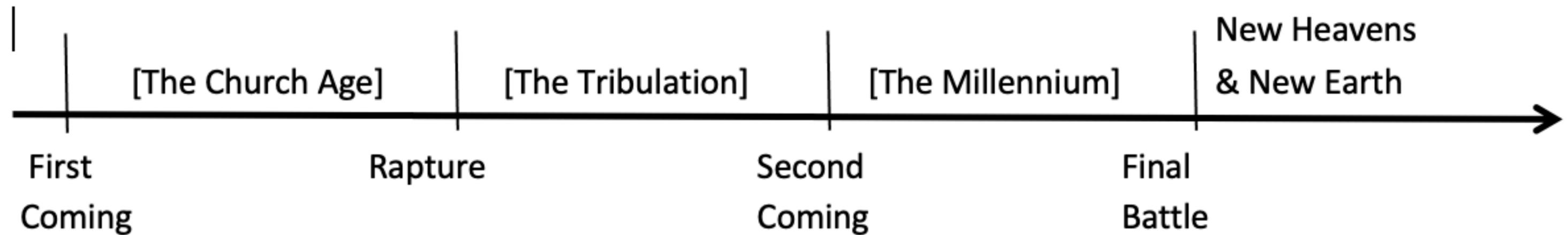
1 Thessalonians 4:13-14

- Not that Christians don't weep about their loved ones' deaths.
- Death is not part of God's original good design. It came into the world as the "wages of sin" (Romans 6:23).
- Paul doesn't say we don't grieve at all, but that we do not grieve as those who have no hope.
- We grieve the loss, but we have hope that our loved ones will be with Christ and that we will see them again in the age to come.

1 Thessalonians 4:15-17

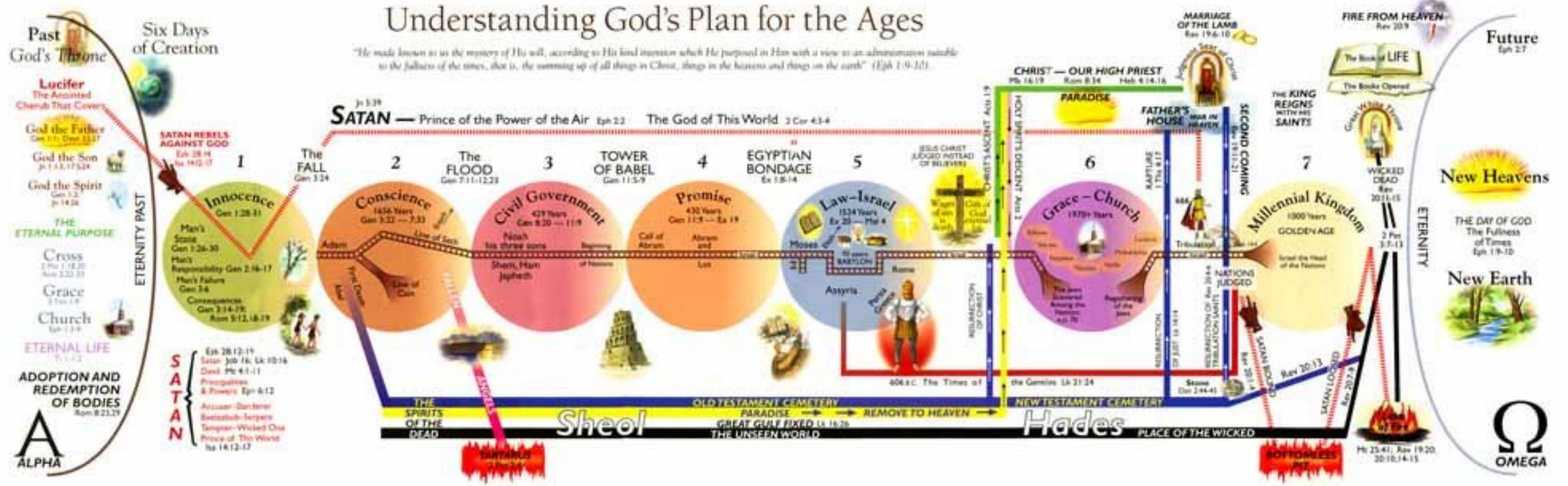
- When Christ returns, we will rise to meet Jesus in the air.
- The Thessalonians were not necessarily worried about the long-term fate of their friends who had already died. They knew they would rise again.
- They were asking questions about how it would all play out in the timeline of the Second Coming and the consummation of the final, completed kingdom of God.
- Theologians and denominations disagree about how this will all play out even today.

1 Thessalonians 4:15-17



Understanding God's Plan for the Ages

"He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him with a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of the times, that is, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth" (Eph 1:9-10).



1 Thessalonians 4:15-17

- This passage in 1 Thessalonians 4 describes the Rapture.
- This is when believers will be called up to meet Him in the air.
- We believe this takes place before the Tribulation.
- This is how Jesus described it: two women will be in the field or grinding at the mill and one will be taken and the other left (Matthew 24:39–41).
- Paul goes into more detail to answer the Thessalonians' question about those who have already died in Christ.

1 Thessalonians 4:15-17

- Jesus said they would rise again “in the last days” (John 6:40; 11:24), but did He mean at the Rapture, at the Second Coming, or at the final battle?
- Paul reassured them that those who have already died in Christ will not be left out of the Rapture.
- Those who are dead in Christ will rise first; those who are still alive will not go before them (4:15–16). Then all of those who are still alive in Christ will be caught up into the clouds together with them to meet the Lord in air.
- All those in Christ will be caught up together to meet Christ in the air (4:17).

1 Thessalonians 4:15-17

- Whether you are alive at the time of the Rapture or die in Christ and will be among the first raised, being “in Christ” means belonging to Him and being hopeful for His return.
- Though we may struggle in our spiritual battles every day here on earth, one day we will be on the winning side, as Christ’s army when He comes in power and glory.

1 Thessalonians 4:18

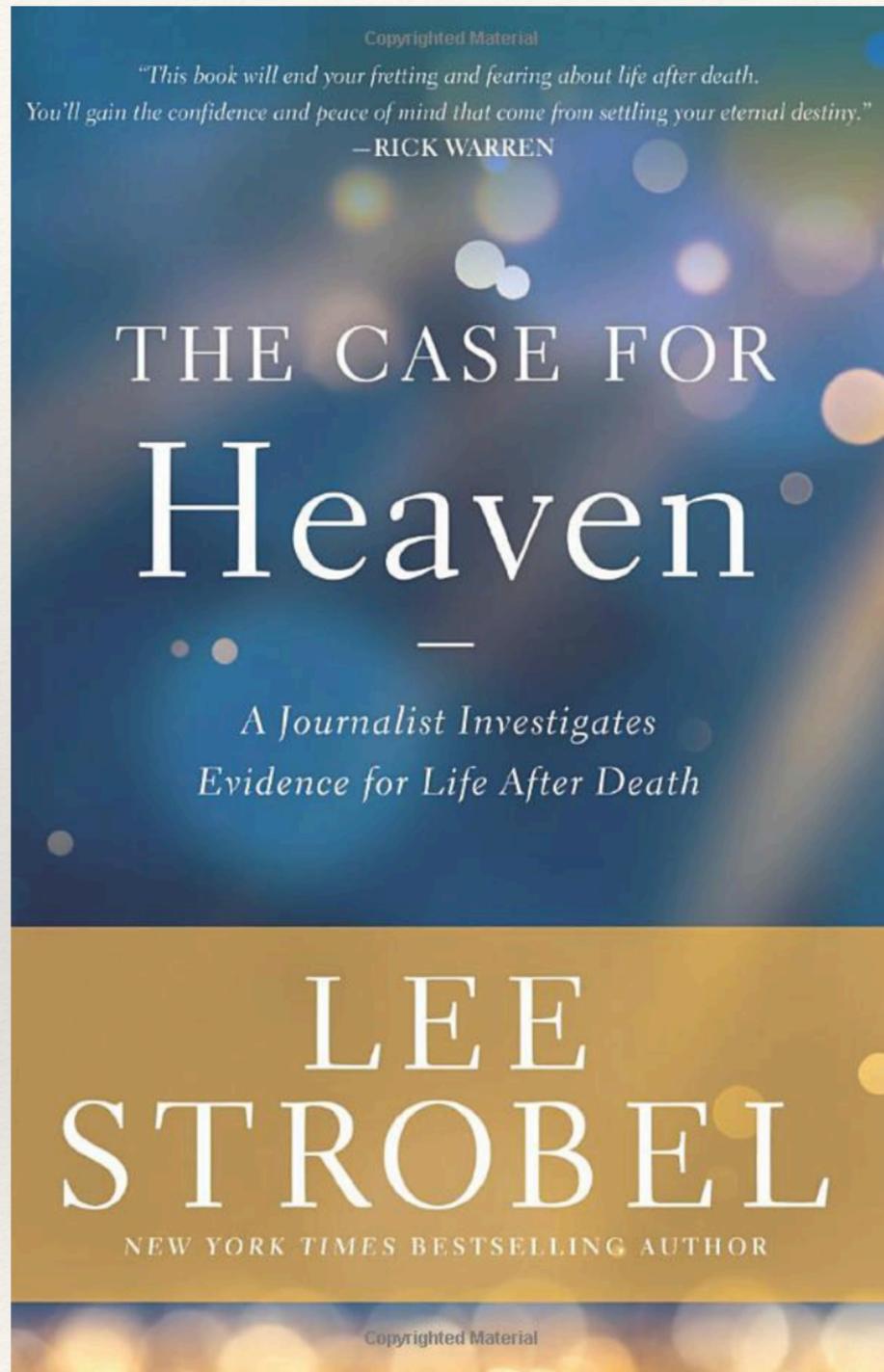
- We can encourage each other with hope of our eternal life with Jesus.
- The Thessalonians were being persecuted for their faith, and even though they were staying strong in faith, they needed encouragement. They also had questions and needed a word to ease their hearts and minds.
- Paul assured them they needn't worry about those who had died in Christ.
- They needn't grieve the way unbelievers grieved the deaths of family and friends because they had a unique hope in the promise of their future resurrection.

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- Those who die before Christ returns have the exact same hope as those who are still alive when He comes again. All believers – both those who have died in Christ and those who are still alive at the Rapture – will always be with Christ (4:17). In Scripture, this is the phrase of ultimate blessedness—being with God. In the New Testament, being with Christ, because Christ is God.
- From the beginning of the nation of Israel, the daily blessing the priests said over the people was, “The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make His face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up His countenance upon you and give you peace” (Numbers 6:24–26).

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- Revelation describes the new heaven and new earth as being with God, in His presence, with no barriers at all (Revelation 21:1–4).
- Only then will there be no more death, mourning, sorrow or pain. Because we are with God. That is what makes our future so wonderful.
- This is the source of all hope in times of suffering – that God is with us now in this world through Christ, bringing us peace during the storm and that one day we will be completely with God, where there will be no more storms. We can encourage each other with this hope.



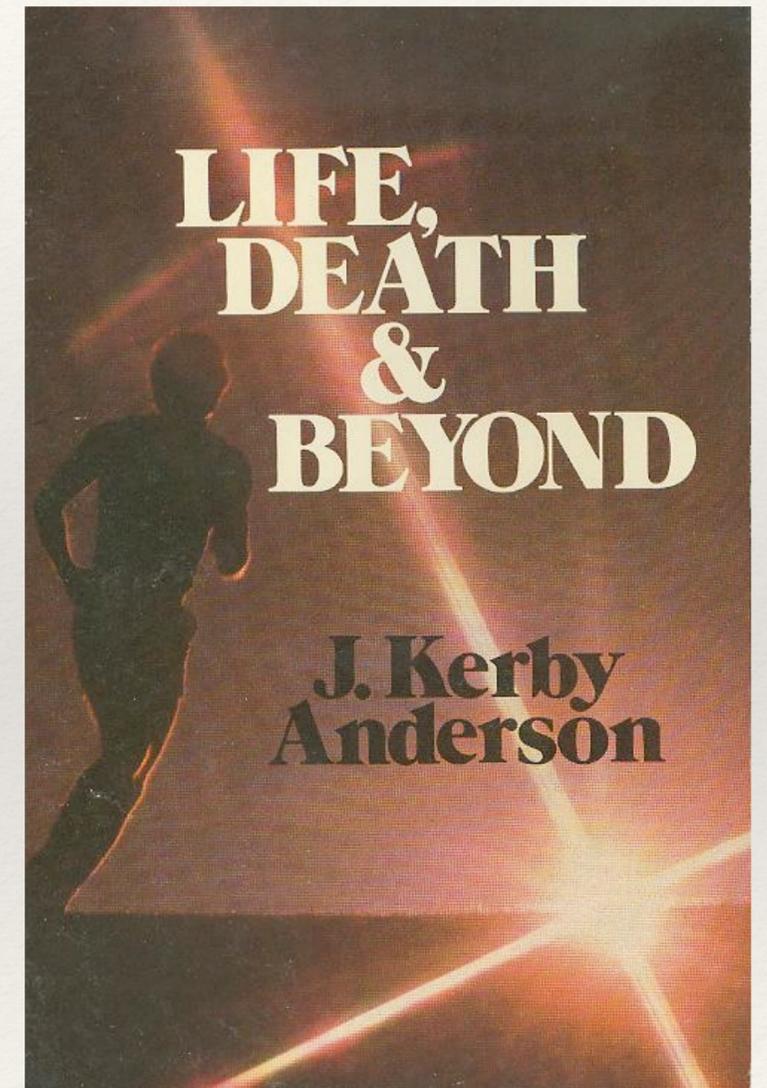
- Lee Strobel's 300 page book also includes 60 pages of Scripture references, endnotes, and a discussion guide.
- The 10 chapters deal with near-death encounters, discussion of heaven, discussion of hell, reincarnation, and interviews with scientists, philosophers, theologians, and evangelists.

Interviews

- Clay Butler Jones, DMin
- Sharon Dirckz, PhD
- John Burke
- Chad Meister
- Scot McKnight, PhD
- Paul Copan, PhD
- Douglas Groothuis, PhD
- Luis Palau

Stories

- John Burke's book, *What's After Life?* - single mom, Memorial Hospital in London - page 52-54
- Researcher Kimberly Clark Sharp - describes the out-of-body experiences of a heart-attack patient names Maria - page 66
- Stories reported by J.P. Moreland and Gary Habermas - pages 68-69



Seven on Heaven

- Question #1: Will there be pets in heaven?
- Question #2: Will there be marriage in heaven?
- Question #3: Will there be rewards in heaven?
- Question #4: Is purgatory biblical?
- Question #5: Should Christians be cremated?
- Question #6: What about children who die?
- Question #7: Who will be in heaven?

