As we noticed in our last chapter, the only way to understand the
apparent contradiction between the predictions about specific events that
must occur before our Lord Jesus Christ returns to this earth, and the oft-
repeated exhortation to Christian believers to be wide-awake and on the job
because there is no way that they can tell when the Lord is coming, is to
recognize that between His coming for His own followers and His coming to
the earth to destroy all that is evil there must be an interval of several
years.

A great many specific references to the Lord's return speak of His
coming in power and great glory. If our inference as to the distinction
between the two phases is correct, we should expect to have somewhere an
explicit description of His earlier coming for the believers. Nor is this
expectation disappointed. In his very first epistle the Apostle Paul gives
a clear and unmistakable description of this important event.

Paul wrote this letter to the church that he had established at Thess-
salonica. Although it is quite brief, it contains allusions to so many
important Christian doctrines that we can safely conclude that the Apostle
had covered a wide range of Christian teaching during the comparatively
brief time that he had spent at Thessalonica. His purpose in writing was
to correct a misunderstanding about the Lord's return that was bothering
the members of the young church that he had founded.

Let us look at I Thessalonians 4:13-18. It reads as follows:

> 13. But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concern-
> ing them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others
> which have no hope. 14. For if we believe that Jesus died and
> rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God
> bring with him. 15. 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. 16. 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