

SPECIAL EDITION

A defense of the expectation of the body of Christ, Part 3:

THE SNATCHING AWAY

Now we do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who are reposing, lest you may sorrow according as the rest, also, who have no expectation. 14 For, if we are believing that Jesus died and rose, thus also, those who are put to repose, will God, through Jesus, lead forth together with Him. 15 For this we are saying to you by the word of the Lord, that we, the living, who are surviving to the presence of the Lord, should by no means outstrip those who are put to repose, 16 for the Lord Himself will be descending from heaven with a shout of command, with the voice of the Chief Messenger, and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ shall be rising first. 17 Thereupon we, the living who are surviving, shall at

the same time be snatched away together with them in clouds, to meet the Lord in the air. And thus shall we always be together with the Lord. 18 So that, console one another with these words.

—1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

In 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, Paul described an event to the Thessalonian saints that had never before been described. The immediate need was to comfort these residents of Thessalonica concerning their loved ones who had been put to repose. These people were members of the body of Christ (1 Thessalonians 4:16; “dead in Christ”). They were not Circumcision saints (Galatians 2:7). They were a mix of Jews and Greeks who *embraced Paul’s evangel* (1 Thessalonians 2:8-9; 2 Thessalonians 2:1-8; 2:14). Paul was an apostle to the nations (Romans 11:13), nor an apostle to the Circumcision (Galatians 2:7). This same Paul, inspired by the holy spirit, took comforting the Thessalonians to the next level. He not only alleviated the Thessalonians’ worry concerning their reposing loved ones, but unveiled a resurrection secret unheard of in any previous Scripture. In essence, Paul told the saints that not only are the dead in Christ to be raised, but they will be raised ahead of the living (1 Thessalonians 4:16). This was in opposition to the Israel resurrection, where living saints precede the dead into the kingdom by 75 days (see Aaron Welch’s article, “A Response to ‘The Hope of Israel vs. That Blessed Hope’” at the following link, <http://thathappyexpectation.blogspot.com.br/2015/04/a-response-to-hope-of-israel-vs-that.html>). Also see my article, “Romans, Part 56,” page 12, at: <http://martinzender.com/ZWTF/ZWTF4.16.pdf>).

By teaching that 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 applies to Israel (“This is all in agreement with Israel’s hope”)—without a shred of evidence supporting the supposition—our brother Clyde Pilkington has thrown many members of the body of Christ into confusion and doubt. It is my goal to alleviate this distress by showing





that not only does Clyde's position have no Scriptural support, it lacks the logical variety as well. The snatching away is ours, not Israel's, for Paul is an apostle of the nations (Romans 11:13). He is a minister of the gospel of the Uncircumcision (Galatians 2:7), not the Circumcision. That's Peter's job (Galatians 2:8). He wrote to the Thessalonians in this capacity as the minister of his own distinct gospel (2 Thessalonians 2:14). In this interest, I now critique a Clyde Pilkington article from BSN 490 titled, "Rapture or Appearing?"

As we know, the word "Rapture" does not occur in Scripture. What generally is known as the "Rapture" is an event that is described in one of Paul's early epistles: I Thessalonians 4. In this passage let's notice three simple truths:

- (1) "The Lord Himself shall descend from heaven" (:16);
- (2) The participants will be raised or "caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air" (:17);
- (3) The participants will "ever be with the Lord" (:18).

The standard event that this passage is supposed to describe is thus: Believers will be raptured to heaven, ever to be with the Lord. The simple fact is that, after an honest look at the passage, we can see clearly

that it does not even mention anyone going to heaven; not the Lord, nor any of the participants. The idea of being raptured to heaven is read into this passage. What these verses actually reveal is that the Lord is leaving heaven and the participants are caught up to meet Him in the earth's atmosphere ("clouds," "air") on His way down, where the participants will "ever be with" Him as He reigns and rules on the earth. This is all in agreement with Israel's hope.

WHO IS READING INTO THE PASSAGE?

After an honest look at the passage, we can see clearly that it does not mention anyone going to heaven *or* coming to earth. "The idea of being raptured to heaven is read into this passage," says Clyde Pilkington. Is there anyone else who might be reading a different thing into the passage? Listen to what Clyde says next:

What these verses actually reveal is that the Lord is leaving heaven and the participants are caught up to meet Him in the earth's atmosphere ("clouds," "air") on His way down, where the participants will "ever be with" Him as He reigns and rules on the earth.

I want to draw your attention to Clyde's statement, "... what these verses *actually* reveal ..." and how he goes on from

there to say that what these verses from 1 Thessalonians 4 “actually” reveal is that “the participants are caught up to meet Him in the earth’s atmosphere, *on His way down*, where the participants will ‘ever be with’ Him *as He reigns and rules on earth*.”

But where do the verses “actually” reveal that? They reveal nothing like it, “actually” or otherwise. I cannot find anything in the verses stating that Jesus Christ is “on His way down” to earth, but only that He will be descending from heaven. Clyde then reads further into the passage, stating that “participants will ‘ever be with’ Him as He reigns and rules on earth.” Yes, participants we will “ever be with Him,” but I see no mention in the passage of “as He reigns and rules on earth.” Clyde Pilkinton, accusing others of reading into this passage, has done the very thing himself.

Clyde finishes with the erroneous, unfounded statement, “This is all in agreement with Israel’s hope.”

It is? How? Where? When are Israelites ever referred to as “the dead in Christ”?

FIRST STEP OF A PROCESS

The snatching away of the body of Christ is the first step of a four-step process that has absolutely nothing to do with Israel’s hope. Israel’s hope is tied to earth; not the air, not heaven. In contrast to this, living members of the body of Christ are:

- 1) snatched away from earth with the formerly dead in Christ to meet the Lord in the air (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18). They are—
- 2) changed from corruptible to incorruption, and from mortal to immortality (1 Corinthians 15:53). They are—
- 3) seated together among the celestials, in Christ (Ephesians 2:6). They are—
- 4) manifested together with Christ in glory (Colossians 3:4).

BACK TO THE ARTICLE

We, however, have what was a secret to prophecy, an earlier expectation on the timeline (being “preexpectant in the Christ” – Ephesians 1:12, CV). At an undisclosed time, prior to Christ’s leaving heaven, He will appear with God among the celestials and we will join Him there for glorification with Him (Colossians 3:4). We will at that time receive our immortality and enter our heavenly calling among the celestials (Ephesians 2:4-7; Colossians 3:1-3).

Clyde assumes here that the appearing with Christ mentioned in Colossians 3:4 is the only “secret to prophecy” associated with our celestial call. Is not the snatching away, described in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, a secret to prophecy? If it isn’t, then someone please show me the prophecy. I have asked repeatedly for evidence from both Stephen Hill and Clyde Pilkington that the snatching away accords with Israelite prophesy and Israelite expectation, but no verse ever comes. I’m not trying to be a pain in the neck, I just think that if you’re going to say amazing things, you ought to have amazing verses to back up the amazing things.

How does Clyde reach the conclusion that our manifestation with Christ (Colossians 3:4) occurs “prior to Christ’s leaving heaven”? Here is yet another loose statement coasting through the air like a wayward bird with no landing place. We want revelation, not speculation. We may be meeting the Lord in the air, but we don’t want unscriptural theories hanging there. Merely saying a thing does not make it so. If a person—especially a teacher—is going to make the fantastic claim that 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 accords with Israelite prophecy rather than being a distinct secret given to Paul (when the heck are Israelites ever referred to as “the dead in Christ”? I know I already asked that, but it bears re-asking), *and* say that we are manifested with Christ *before* He descends from heaven, then I believe that we, the reading public, deserve a Scriptural explanation. Even one verse would be appreciated. If the teacher cannot produce this verse, then he ought to kindly say something like: *here is my idea; I have no verse for this, but it is an interesting thought.*

“ADVANCED EXPECTATION”

If, then, you were roused together with Christ, be seeking that which is above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Be disposed to that which is above, not to that on the earth, for you died, and your life is hid together with Christ in God. Whenever Christ, our Life, should be manifested, then you also shall be manifested together with Him in glory.

—Colossians 3:1-4

This advanced expectation for the Body of Christ has nothing to do with a hope on the earth, and therefore has no earthly signs or timeframes associated with it. It has been the expectation for believers for nearly 2000 years. It may be a reality any day, or after another 2000 years or more – but never let anyone take your hope!

—Clyde Pilkington, BSN 488

To Clyde, the passage quoted from Colossians 3:1-4 (specifically verse four) is our “advanced expectation.” No argument from me there. At least a verse is presented. Yes, we will be manifested with Christ at some future date, appearing with Him among the celestials at a time, I believe, when the body of Christ is presented complete to the Universe. But this advanced expectation proceeds logically and spiritually from another advanced expectation, namely, the snatching away of the body of Christ (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18).

LET ME GET THIS STRAIGHT

Let me get this straight. Clyde admits in the above quote that this manifestation in glory with Christ “may be a reality any day.” It could happen today, then. So let me get this straight. (I like saying that.) I could be standing in line at the grocery store today, and then suddenly I will be manifested together with Christ in glory. From the perspective of other shoppers, I will disappear from sight; it will be a “now you see him, now you don’t” sort of affair for them. What will have happened to me? According to Clyde, I will have been—*somehow*—taken away from the grocery store to be manifested together with Christ in glory. Hmm. Kind of sounds like I’m being—oh, I don’t know—*snatched away*, perhaps?



If only there were a passage of Scripture giving me a detailed description of how one second I could be standing in line at a grocery store (“it may be a reality any day now”) and the next second be manifested together with Christ in glory. Wait. For those without an “Acts 28” pre-disposition that forces them to turn exclusive body-of-Christ truths written before Paul’s imprisonment into pre-revealed Israelite expectations, there *is* such a detailed description: 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18.

Paul’s got our bases covered.

BEAUTIFUL LINK

Here is a verse that beautifully links our specific celestial expectation as members of Christ’s body (Ephesians 2:6; Colossians 3:4) with the means of our removal to that realm (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18). It is Philippians 3:20-21:

For our realm is inherent in the heavens, out of which we are awaiting a Saviour also, the Lord, Jesus Christ, Who will transfigure the body of our humiliation, to conform it to the body of His glory, in accord with the operation which enables Him even to subject all to Himself.

WATCH THIS MAKE SENSE *AND* BE SCRIPTURAL, ALL AT THE SAME TIME

Our realm is inherent among the celestials; that’s where we belong. (This is not Israel’s expectation.) But we are not where we belong, are we? No, we are on earth. We need to be transferred to heaven. We have a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. Where is He? We know that He is now in heaven (Acts 1:9-10), for He is descending *from* heaven to get us (1 Thessalonians 4:16). He is the only One now immortal (1 Timothy 6:16). But we, too, are to be made immortal (1 Corinthians 15:53). Not only are we awaiting immortality, but we are awaiting our Savior (Philippians 3:20) Who is God’s Son (1 Thessalonians 1:10). He is the key to our immortality, because He is the One Who is going to “transfigure the body of our humiliation, to conform it to the body of His glory” (Philippians 3:21). How will this happen? “The Lord Himself will descend from heaven

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with a shout of command” (1 Thessalonians 4:16), “the dead in Christ will rise first” (1 Thessalonians 4:16), then we will be “snatched away with them in clouds” (1 Thessalonians 4:16) to meet the Lord in the air (1 Thessalonians 4:17), and our bodies shall be changed (1 Corinthians 15:51) into immortal bodies (1 Corinthians 15:54).

This agrees perfectly with Paul’s statement in Philip-

pians 3:20, “For our realm is inherent in the heavens, *out of which we are awaiting a Saviour*.” Why are we are awaiting this Savior *out* of heaven? Because that’s where He’s coming from. This does away with Clydes’ unfounded idea that our manifestation in glory occurs “prior to Christ’s leaving heaven.” Impossible. Christ is leaving heaven *in order* to accomplish these spiritual marvels for the members of His body. Nothing happens *until* Christ descends from heaven. In all of these verses, it’s what we are waiting for. In all of these verses, it’s what He has promised to do. The Thessalonians themselves were “waiting for His Son out of the heavens” (1 Thessalonians 1:10). This was an appropriate pastime for those to whom Paul revealed the secret that Christ would descend from heaven with a shout of command to raise the dead (*their* dead!) in Christ first and then snatch away both living and dead into the air (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17) as a prelude to change (1 Corinthians 15:51) and celestial glory (Ephesians 2:6; Colossians 3:4).

PUZZLE PIECES

No, there is nothing in 1 Thessalonians chapter four telling us that we will be taken to heaven. But neither is there anything there telling us that we are coming to earth to rule with Christ. What is needed here is the recognition that this Scripture to the body of Christ needs pieced together with other Scriptures to the body of Christ until the entire, beautiful, body-of-Christ resurrection program emerges. Here it is, then:

1. **Our realm is inherent in the heavens**
(**Philippians 3:20**).
2. **Thus, we are awaiting God’s Son out of the heavens**
(**1 Thessalonians 1:10**).
3. **Christ is coming to change our bodies**
(**1 Corinthians 15:51**).
4. **Christ descends out of heaven to meet us in the air, to prepare us for the change of our bodies**
(**1 Thessalonians 4:16-17**).
5. **Both living and dead will be changed**
(**1 Thessalonians 4:14-17**).
6. **The living are changed from mortal to immortality** (**1 Corinthians 15:53**); **the dead are changed from corruptible to incorruption** (**1 Corinthians 15:53**);
7. **We will be seated together among the celestials**
(**Ephesians 2:6**).
8. **We will be manifested together with Christ in glory**
(**Colossians 3:4**).

ZENDER SUPERVERSE

Based on all of the above, I would like to write a Superverse, yes, with a capital “S.” This will not be the pure Word of God (sorry if that disappoints anyone), but it will be close to it because I’m patching together spirit-inspired statements concerning resurrection from all parts of Paul’s letters—early and late—to the body of Christ.

This will be, without question, a feat of great derring-do. Ladies and gentlemen, do *not* attempt this at home. I am a trained professional and a seasoned writer; after all, I have *actually* been published in the *Turtle Mountain Star* of Rolla, North Dakota. Having said this, even I, Martin Zender, the World’s Most Outspoken Bible Scholar, am experiencing a case of butterflies. But fear not, because I, Martin Zender, have decided to fear not. Here then is the Superverse of the Resurrection Program of the Body of Christ. In the spirit of Paul, I display the Superverse as a run-on sentence void of punctuation:

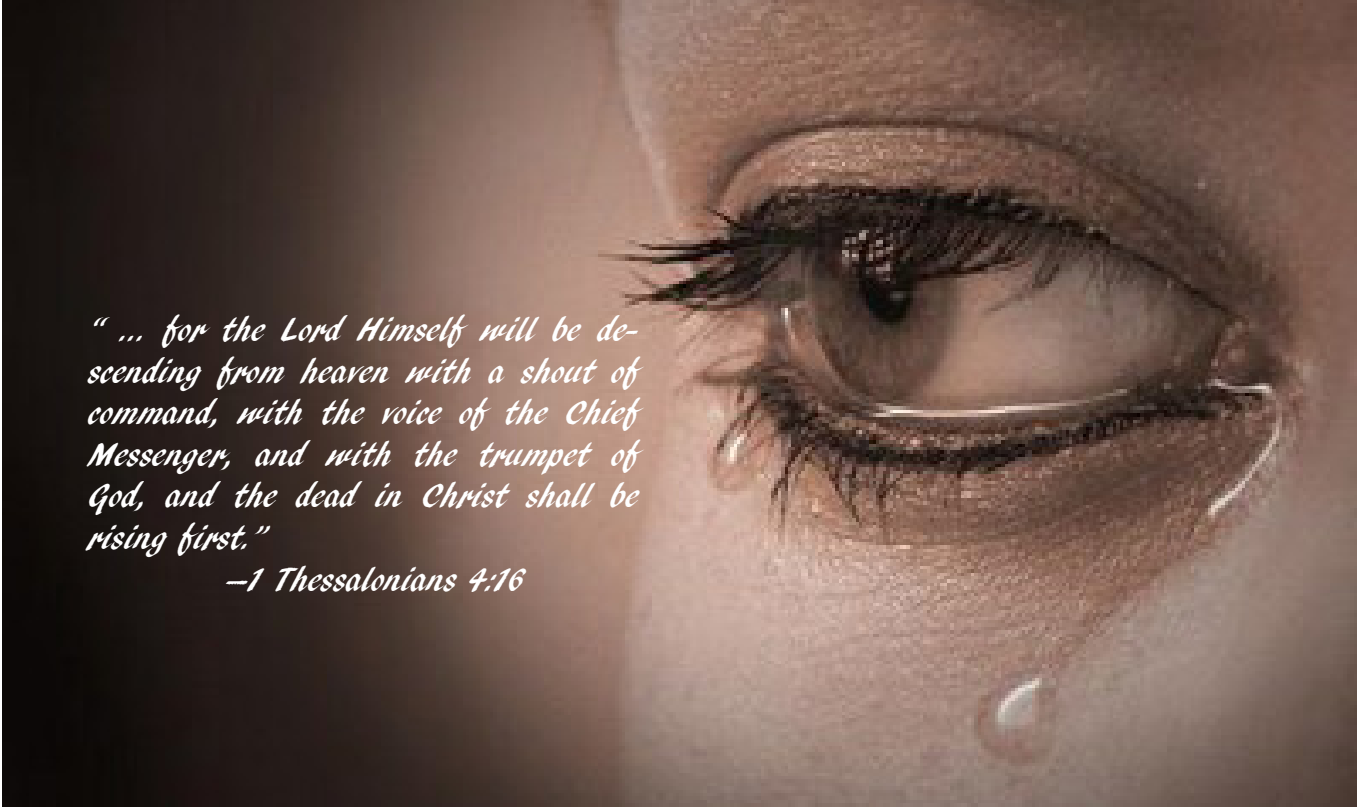


Our realm is inherent in the heavens out of which we are awaiting God’s Son out of the heavens Who will transfigure our mortal bodies of humiliation to conform them to the immortal body of His glory when He descends out of heaven to meet us in the air along with the dead in Christ to seat us together among the celestials and manifest us together with Christ in glory.

Thank you. I must now rest for the remainder of the afternoon.

PERFECT TAPESTRY

What a perfect tapestry. In order to see the whole picture, we must take all these Pauline revelations into consideration. Only then will the whole truth and nothing but the truth emerge. 1 Thessalonians is not trying to say what Colossians 3:4 says; Colossians 3:4 is not trying to say what Philippians 3:20 says, and so forth. Each revelation is a separate piece. It all belongs to the body of Christ, not Israel. We are snatched away to meet the Lord in the air— not so that we will return to earth, but so that we can be *then* taken to our inherent realm, manifested with Christ and seated among the celestials.



"... for the Lord Himself will be descending from heaven with a shout of command, with the voice of the Chief Messenger, and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ shall be rising first."

—1 Thessalonians 4:16

COMFORT CONCERNING THE DEAD

The dead are in their graves, on earth. We, too, are on earth. This is why Paul originally wrote the famous 1 Thessalonians 4 passage, to comfort the saints concerning their relatives who had died in Christ. He comforts them by disclosing a secret: the living have no advantage over the dead; the dead will rise first. Paul is not trying to lay out the whole picture of resurrection and glorification in one passage. He's dealing here with the living and the dead, and with a real-world situation/problem awaiting the hour of His return: 1) some saints in the body of Christ have already died, 2) some saints will be alive on the day Christ returns to change and glorify the members of His body. In 1 Thessalonians 4, Paul painstakingly explains how this real-world situation/problem is resolved. To construe this into a been-there/done-that Israelite expectation explains nothing and leads nowhere. Not only that (small detail here), but there is no supportive evidence.

GET IT TOGETHER

We *will* be manifested with Christ in glory (Colossians 3:4), but this is only part of the picture. Why allow ourselves to be robbed of the *whole* picture by embracing *this* puzzle piece at the expense of other puzzle pieces writ-

ten to the body of Christ? Were this the only verse in our possession, then where would be the comfort concerning the dead? If the only "new revelation" Clyde allows for the body of Christ concerning resurrection is Colossians 3:4, then we're robbed. Without Colossians 3:4's sister passage—1 Thessalonians 4:13-18—the dead in Christ have no specific verse explaining their prior expectation (Ephesians 1:12). The dead don't care, but the living do. Clyde offers us no comfort here, specifically, concerning dead members of Christ's body; *when* will they be roused? *How* will they be roused? Paul is not so careless. In 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, Paul presents pre-Israel-resurrection promises for both the living and the dead. What a guy.

Please. Let us refrain from the unnecessary exegetical gymnastics required to rob dead Body saints of a sure and certain expectation and the living of associated comfort—all for the sake of an unsupported theological theory. Instead, let's simply let Paul speak.

After all, he is our apostle (Romans 11:13), not Israel's. —MZ