

**This is an era of grace,
not “nice.”**

—Martin Zender

Martin Zender's Clanging Gong News

*“If I know all mysteries and all knowledge, but have no love,
I am a clanging gong” --1 Cor. 13:1-2*



Two out of three isn't bad.

The snatching away of the body of Christ



The apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians:

Lo! A secret to you am I telling! We all, indeed, shall not be put to repose, yet we all shall be changed, in an instant, in the twinkle of an eye, at the last trump. For He will be trumpeting, and the dead will be roused incorruptible, and we shall be changed.

—1 Corinthians 15:51-52

He wrote to the Thessalonians:

For 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, 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. 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. So that, console one another with these words.

—1 Thessalonians 4:15-18

“Lo! A secret to you am I telling!” The resurrection of the dead was not a secret. Daniel had prophesied years before

(Daniel 12:1-3) that there would be a resurrection of the dead of the worthies in Israel. Centuries before Paul, God had given Daniel the amazing truth that human bodies, long decayed, would walk from the grave. During our Lord’s sojourn on Earth, we saw this happen when He raised Lazarus and others. Scripture tells us that over 500 walked from the tombs following His resurrection.

Amazing. Yes. But then came Paul.

If Paul’s words are a secret, then this cannot be the same truth Daniel taught—and it isn’t. This is a secret resurrection that will occur *before* the saints of Israel are raised. Again, if this resurrection Paul refers to were the same resurrection Israel looked forward to, then it could not be called a secret.

What we are considering here is a different resurrection of a different people with a different gospel—believers who shall rise from the dead with different bodies to go to a different realm where they will have a different task than Israel’s.

Unbelieving “believers”

I realize how spiritually fashionable it is among many “believers” today to disbelieve these plain passages of Scripture, referenced above. The reason these plain passages of Paul are not believed is because of a wholesale ignorance of the difference between the gospel of the Circumcision and that of the Uncircumcision. It is the ignorance of the presence of a different body of teaching to a different body of people (non-Jews), with a different destiny, for which they will require different bodies.

Christian mythology

The Christian religion states that all who believe in Jesus Christ will fly away to heaven at “the rapture.” This will amount

to about several hundred million people, they say.

Imagine the chaos. Should a Christian be piloting a jetliner during the rapture, his or her sudden absence would bode poorly for all unchurched passengers. With any luck, the co-pilot will be a backslidden Christian who will assume the pilot’s vacated seat and land the plane safely. No one will thank God, however, for they will all be heathen.

No need to imagine any of this, for Christian movie producers have already enacted such scenes and reproduced the trauma on film. See the shock. Feel the pain. Watch the puzzled faces at Rand McNally as mapmakers begin asking one another, “Hey! What happened to Colorado Springs?”



This is why I don’t believe in the “rapture.” But I do believe in the “snatching away.”

It means what it says

I believe the passages I quoted at the beginning of this article. I believe Jesus Christ will descend from heaven, for that’s what 1 Thessalonians, chapter 4, clearly says He will do. I believe the dead in Christ will be rising first. I believe those who are alive at that time

will be snatched away. This is the Scriptural term: “snatched away.” These people will be snatched away, then, not “raptured.”

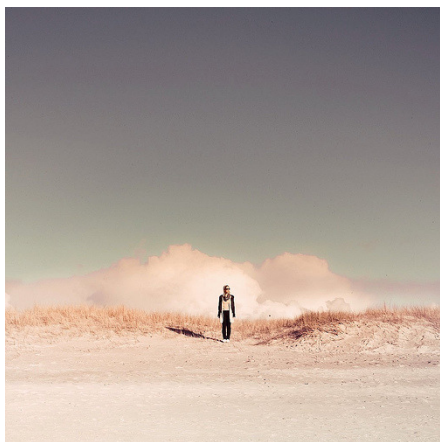
I believe that these people will rise (which means “to go up”) to meet the Lord in the air (which is what we breathe), in clouds (which are “masses of visible vapor”).

The passage is plain enough. What is to keep mature believers from believing it?

“Clouding” the issue

Three things. Because of what the Christian religion has done with this passage, many serious-minded saints simply cannot swallow a literal rendering. Secondly, along this same line, some saints equate “literal” with “unspiritual.” These serious-minded people constantly seek secret, allegorical meanings to plain, literal passages.

For instance, even though clouds are often found in the air, and the same word, *nephele*, is used by Jesus in Luke 12:54 to describe what produces a rainstorm, these allegory-minded people take the clouds of 1 Thessalonians to be



clouds of saints. Hmm ... These do produce rainstorms on occasion, but only during church picnics.

Only once in the New Testament is *nephele* used figuratively. In Hebrews 12:1, we read of a cloud of witnesses. But a rule of thumb for Scriptural interpretation (for those who care for rules) is: literal if possible. As the saints of 1 Thessalonians are rising to meet the Lord in the air, a literal rendering of *nephele*

(clouds) is not only possible, but probable.

Now tell me. How is this not spiritual?

The cloud that led Israel in the wilderness, though physical, was as spiritual as could be. It was spiritual, not in its molecular structure, but in that God employed it for His purposes. This cloud served as a divine guidepost. The clouds of 1 Thessalonians? These hide heavenly doings from the gaze of earthlings. It is as spiritual as can be.

As for rising in the air to meet the Lord, the dead rising first, and the saints always being together with the Lord, I have not been initiated into the “secret, allegorical meanings” of these phrases. Neither have I any idea how one could be disappointed in the literal rendering, or be desirous of a more spiritual chain of events than those listed.

A real door-opener

Thirdly, many believers fail to distinguish the body of Christ from the bride of the Lambkin. That is, they do not appreciate the different destinies of Israel’s saints and proselytes (Israelite “wannabes”)—who embrace the evangel of the Circumcision—and the mix of Greeks and Jews who embrace Paul’s evangel of the Uncircumcision (see Galatians 2:7). Without this key, many doors simply will not open. One of them is the door to the glory of 1 Thessalonians, chapter 4.

Not all living people who believe in Jesus when He descends from heaven will be snatched from Earth’s tribulation to meet Him in the air. (If the number of people who embrace the evangel of Paul today is any indication of how many will embrace it on that day, then the number will be small and the event quiet; the vast majority of believers today are Circumcision saints. So forget, if you can, the pilotless jetliner scenario mentioned earlier.)

Scripture clearly states (in Revelation, chapter 7) that there will be 144,000 out of Israel, sealed on their foreheads, whom God will preserve through (not out of) the day of indignation, otherwise referred to as the tribulation. Concurrently, a “vast throng” (Revelation 7:9) of saints will have attained martyrdom, precluding any possibility of them being snatched from harm’s way.



Now, if one assumes the saints of Revelation, chapter 7, to be the same saints of 1 Thessalonians, chapter 4, one must “spiritualize away” the clear teaching of 1 Thessalonians, to make it fit the clear teaching of Revelation.

May the reader of these lines now realize that these two passages are not meant to fit, but are rather describing the distinct destinies of two distinct, discrete peoples, or groups of believers. Israel is to become “a kingdom and a priesthood for God,” and “they shall be reigning on the Earth” (Revelation 5:10). This is the “bride company,” the “kingdom saints,” the “overcomers,” whatever you want to call them. Those of Christ’s body, however, shall be “displaying the transcendent riches of His grace” among the celestials (Ephesians 2:6-7). This is a different realm altogether.

Everything should now make sense. The saints of Christ’s body are snatched away in the air and transferred to the realm of their ministry. (“For our realm is inherent in the heavens” Philippians 3:20.) It’s practical. Kingdom saints who live through the day of indignation remain on Earth, for Earth becomes their place of business for the eon.

Doesn’t this make sense? Isn’t it practical?

Yes. And it’s also spiritual as all get-out. ■

This article has been excerpted from my upcoming book:

*God’s Radical:
The secret of the apostle Paul,
and why you can’t live like Jesus.*