

ALL THINGS IN CHRIST

In all wisdom and prudence making known to us the mystery of His will according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Him the plan for the fullness of the times

**TO HEAD UP THE ALL THINGS IN THE CHRIST,
the things in the heavens and the things upon the earth, in Him...**

(Ephesians 1:8b-10)

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Article #17

Snatched Away in Clouds, in Air

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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. (1 Thessalonians 4:17 CV)

Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in [the] clouds to meet the Lord in [the] air, and so we shall always be with the Lord. (1 Thessalonians 4:17 NASB)

deinde nos qui vivimus qui relinquimur simul rapiemur cum illis in nubibus obviam Domino in aera et sic semper cum Domino erimus (1 Thessalonians 4:17 LV)

Many Christians have been taught from the above verse that Christ will return unexpectedly in a day and an hour that no one knows, and that when He comes, He will remove His people from the earth and transport them to heaven to meet loved ones at pearly gates and to walk on golden streets, which is their eternal destiny in a place far, far away. The event is called the **rapture**.

However, among those who see a rapture that removes Christians from the earth, not all agree on the timing of it. Many are taught that this is the great escape from a great tribulation that will engulf the nations of the earth that will lead to near destruction of all things on earth. This is called the **pre-tribulation rapture**. Some see it occurring in the middle of tribulation, which is described as the **mid-tribulation rapture**; and some see it occurring at the end of tribulation, which is described as the **post-tribulation rapture**. Yet, there is still another view that is described as the **pre-wrath rapture**, which means that Christians will go through tribulation but will be removed before the final wrath of God is poured out on the earth. Consequently, this view makes a distinction between tribulation and wrath.

Now, there are at least two ways of approaching the subject of rapture. The first is to examine what scripture reveals about the rapture and a believer's destiny. This requires that we answer such questions as: What is the purpose of the rapture? What is the nature of the rapture? Who will participate in the rapture? The second is to examine the timing of the rapture. This requires that we answer such questions as: Does it occur without warning and in the absence of any other events? Or, asking it another way: Does it occur along with other events? Does something occur prior to it?

It is vital to know the purpose and nature of the rapture, so this is where we must begin; however, before doing so, it is needful to look at the word from which so many have derived the word *rapture*.

Harpazō

The word *rapture* is not found in any translation of scripture. As noted at the beginning, the Latin Vulgate uses the word *rapiemur*, which most closely matches the English word *rapture*. However, English translations never use the word but instead use the phrase *snatched away* or *caught up*.

So far, the word *rapture* has been used because it is such a common word among Christians that we would have started off on unfamiliar ground for many. In some respects, the word *rapture* is an acceptable term, even though it is not necessarily biblical. However, it seems that the phrase *snatched away*, is preferable for reasons that will come to light later. By using a more accurate term perhaps we can throw off the baggage that the word *rapture* generally carries with it.

In the Greek, the word from which the phrase *snatched away* or *caught up* is translated is *harpazō*, which means "to seize with a sudden grasp and carry away." The word is found in Matthew 11:12; 13:19; Luke 16:16; John 6:15; 10:12, 28; Acts 8:39; 23:10; 2 Corinthians 12:2, 4; 1 Thessalonians 4:17; Jude 23; and Revelation 12:5. As revealed in these verses, the word is not necessarily employed to refer to movement, such as being moved from point A to point B.

For example, it is used in reference to the enemy stealing the word of the kingdom that has been sown in one's heart, and in reference to saving someone, that is, snatching one out of the fire, which is a reference to one being cast into God's fiery judgment, not for eternal destruction or torture but for *eonian* [age-during] chastisement and for learning God's righteous ways (laws). Paul even used the word in light of his visions and revelations of the Lord. He was snatched away but did not know if it was in the body or apart from it. As far as he knew, it could have been simply a transport *in spirit*, similar to John's experience on the isle of Patmos. Thus, we should not view *harpazō* as if it is a physical movement, for it has far greater implications, as will be pointed out later.

In addition, it is thought that *harpazō* comes from another Greek word *aihreomai*, which means "to take for oneself, that is, to prefer." As will be shown, this truly captures the heart of the meaning and purpose of being snatched away.

Before proceeding to Paul's teaching, there are two other introductory points to be made.

Called, Chosen, Faithful Conquerors

First, what follows is based on the premise that only the elect or conquerors (called and chosen) will be snatched away to the presence of the Lord, meaning not all who have believed on Jesus will be counted worthy to attain to the age to come. According to Jesus, the sons of God, sons of the resurrection (Luke 20:34-36) are the ones who will be considered worthy to

attain to *that age* and the resurrection from the dead as being. *That age* is the coming age of His kingdom that will manifest His reign over the nations of this earth. This is the age in which *the reign of the heavens* comes to this earth, for *the heavens do rule*.

Also, Paul wrote much on the need to be counted worthy, especially to walk in a manner worthy of the God who invites you into His own kingdom and glory (1 Thessalonians 2:12). And, in reference to the fall of mystery Babylon, John reveals that the Lamb will conquer and the King of kings will come with His called, chosen, and faithful.

"These will wage war with the Lamb, and the Lamb will conquer them, because He is Lord of lords and King of kings, and the [ones] with him [are] called and chosen and faithful."
(Revelation 17:14 ALT)

The called, chosen, and faithful are variously described by commentators as the conquerors, the overcomers, the remnant, the sons of Zadok, Gideon's army, the Elijah company, David's mighty men, the 144,000 from the tribes of *spiritual* Israel (not Israel of the flesh), the male child, the sons of God, the sons of glory, the wise virgins, and the wife of the Lambkin.

Simply, all who believe are saved by grace through faith and are promised immortal life, but not all will receive this promise in the next age; some will have to wait until the Great White Throne Judgment to be **saved, yet so as through fire** (1 Corinthians 3:15). Only the conquerors will come into immortality at the end of our present wicked age; a glorious event that will begin the manifestation of the age of the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ.

Traditions of Men

Second, it is unfortunate that the traditions of men have prevailed in much of the teaching on the Second Coming of Christ and the so-called *rapture*, which is seen as the great escape from earth to heaven for believers. Part of the problem is that Paul's epistle to the Thessalonians, the starting point for most when it comes to the rapture, is often viewed in a vacuum, so to speak, as if it should be interpreted literally without regard to any patterns that might be established in scripture, especially in the Old Testament.

However, the Old Testament is where we find answers to most New Testament questions. The patterns, types, and shadows of the old explain the new. They are often presented as literal and physical events, but we need to study them to see what they signify spiritually. This is exactly how we must approach Paul's presentation of the saints being snatched away to meet the Lord in air.

Paul was a Pharisee as to the law (Philippians 3:5), and, as such, he was very knowledgeable of Hebrew scripture and the law as given through Moses. Undoubtedly, he saw the pattern of the saints being snatched away in the account of the Lord descending on Mount Sinai to meet Moses.

Compare Exodus 19 to 1 Thessalonians.

In Exodus 19...

The Lord **descended** upon it (mountain) [vs. 18]

The Lord **came down** to the top of the mountain [vs. 20]

When the sound of the **trumpet** grew louder and louder [vs. 19]

The Lord called Moses to the top of the mountain, and Moses **went up** [vs. 20]

(Why?) To **meet with the Lord**. [vs. 3]

In 1 Thessalonians 4...

For the Lord Himself will **descend** from heaven [vs. 16]

With a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the **trumpet** of God [vs. 16]

Then we who are alive and remain will be **caught up** together with them in clouds [vs. 17]

To **meet the Lord** in air [vs. 17]

Take special note of the movement of the Lord and of Moses. The Lord came down or descended to meet Moses and Moses went up to meet the Lord, and this took place on a mountain, which in scripture often signifies a kingdom. Moses then returned to the plain below the mountain. Also, take note that the sound of a trumpet was involved in both cases.

Studying the entire account of Moses meeting the Lord on the mountain reveals that there are many parallels in the account in Matthew of Jesus being transfigured on the high mountain and in the account in Acts of Jesus with His disciples in the period between His resurrection and final ascension. The following chart is not in chronological order but is a montage of the numerous trips Moses made up the mountain to meet the Lord. By some accounts, he actually went up eight times.

These will be taken up later, but, at this point, let us establish the connection with the pattern given to us in the Old Testament by comparing Old and New Testament verses from Exodus and Matthew as noted in the following chart.

Exodus 24, 25, 32, 34**Matthew 17; Acts 1**

Six days and on the **seventh day**. [24:16]

Moses **went up** to the **mountain**; Moses entered the midst of the cloud as he went up to the mountain (on the **seventh day**).

[vs. 24. 15, 18]

The **cloud** covered the mountain. [24:15]

He **called** to Moses **from the midst of the cloud**. [24:16]

The **glory** of the Lord rested on Mount Sinai. [24:16]

Moses **coming down from the mountain** ... did not know that the skin of his face **shone** (glory; 2 Corinthians 3:7) because of his speaking with Him. [34:29-35]

Then **the Lord spoke to Moses**, saying, "Tell the sons of Israel. [25:1-2a]

Then Moses **went down from the mountain** with the two tablets of the testimony in his hand (**commandments**). [32:15]

Moses was on the mountain **forty days** and forty nights. [24:18]

Moses **entered the midst of the cloud**. [24:18]

The Lord **descended in the cloud** and stood there with him. [34:5]

Six days later (presumably on the **seventh day**). [17:1]

Jesus **led them up** on a high **mountain** (on the **seventh day**). [17:1]

A bright **cloud** overshadowed them.

[17:5]

A voice out of the cloud said, "This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased; listen to Him!" [17:5]

And He was transfigured before them; and His face shone like **the sun**, and His garments became as white as **light**. [17:2]

They (disciples) were **coming down from the mountain**, Jesus **commanded** them. [17:9]

He (Jesus)...appearing to them over **forty days** and speaking things concerning **the Kingdom of God**. **Gathering them together**, He **commanded** them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait. [Acts 1:3-4]

A **cloud received Him** out of their sight. This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you watched Him go into heaven. [Acts 1:9, 11]

Take note of the many references to clouds and entering the midst of the clouds. Also, the seventh day is a clear indication that the pattern points to the coming seventh day, the millennial kingdom, or the Tabernacles Age when the kingdom of Christ takes root among the nations and the conquerors of Christ, the sons of God, are manifested in glory. It is at this time that they begin to reign over the nations and teach the inhabitants of the world righteousness.

Presence of the Lord

Now, let us consider Paul's word to the Thessalonians who were waiting for God's Son from heaven. There are several components to Paul's encouragement to the brethren, so let us look at each one, starting with the presence of the Lord, for it is in this context that Paul brought into light the truth of being snatched away.

(13) 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 [*harpazō*] 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 CV)

We might be tempted to read these verses in sort of a mechanical way, as a series of events, but there is a heart issue woven through this that is far more important. Paul's heart was not so much where one is snatched (i.e., air) or how it occurs or even the timing of the events but to whom one is snatched (i.e., the Lord). It is interesting that so many seem to concentrate on the where and not the who. However, the vital issue in Paul's heart of encouragement to this young ecclesia was the presence of the Lord and always being together with the Lord and that the dead in Christ would be included. We can argue over details, but we must not lose the heart of the meaning of being snatched away. It is being snatched away to the Lord!

Most importantly, the purpose of being snatched away is to literally and experientially be in the presence of the Lord, to meet Him face to face, and, henceforth, to always be with Him and all the brethren.

In his days of humiliation, Paul never lost his heart to come into the presence of the Lord in the day of Christ, which he called *that Day*. At the end of his life, he even encouraged his beloved Timothy.

And now there is waiting for me the victory prize of being put right with God, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give me on that Day-and not only to me, but to all those who wait with love for him to appear. (2 Timothy 4:8 GNB)

This is a paraphrase translation, but it seems to best capture Paul's heart and the heart of the Thessalonians who he encouraged many years prior at the beginning of his ministry. We are to wait with love for our Lord to appear.

The word *appear* comes from the Greek word *epiphaneia*, which means "manifestation." However, the word *presence*, which Paul used seven times in his Thessalonian epistles, comes

from the Greek word *parousia*. Most translations use the word *coming*, to imply a physical movement, that is, the act of coming or going. However, *parousia* means presence in the sense of being alongside or being near. Thus, the word emphasizes being close to someone rather than the process of coming or going to someone. Again, this reinforces the heart of the snatching away, not so much the mechanics of it.

To elaborate on this, there are two ways that the *presence* could be viewed.

The first way is *spiritual*. In the spiritual sense, those of us who believe in this age while we continue to occupy mortal bodies are in His presence. **Christ in you, the hope of glory** (Colossians 1:27). Paul also tells us that we are **seated together with Christ among the celestials** (Ephesians 2:6 CV). These are present realities with a future expectation of glory, when mortality is put off and immortality is put on. But, we do not see Jesus with our eyes literally standing in our presence, unless He chooses to manifest Himself to us in this way.

Consider the temple and its three veils. The present presence of Christ in us is likened to passing through the second veil into the **Holy Place**. This is only a partial presence of Christ as we spiritually grow up by experiencing His life in us and in others. But the Holy Place is not our final stop or experience. We need to pass through the third veil into the **Most Holy Place** to experience the full presence of Christ. In the Most Holy Place, there are no veils to hide the glory of the Lord and all who enter will be glorified as He is glorified. Again, Christ in us, the hope of glory! With Christ in us in the fullest sense, we will always be together with the Lord, which means that wherever we go and wherever we are, Christ is with us, for He is in us in the fullest measure possible. Instead of having an earnest of the spirit, as we do today, we will be full of His spirit, or, another way of stating it, we will be fully spiritual.

The second way is *physical*. John wrote that **it has not appeared as yet what we will be**; that is, we don't have a clue what we will look like. However, **we know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is** (1 John 3:2). John used the Greek word *phaneroo*, which means "to render apparent, manifestly declare, shew self." The word *see* has the meaning of "gazing with wide open eyes, as viewing something remarkable." In other words, John points us to the day in which we will literally see Jesus and in seeing Him we will see ourselves as we were always meant to be, in the image of the Son of God. This is more than spiritual sight that we are to have in this day. It is literally coming into glory in every sense of the word.

When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, we will be revealed with Him in glory (Colossians 3:4).

Can you think of anything more desirable than seeing the Lord? When we do, won't our eyes be wide open as we gaze upon His remarkable appearance, and we gaze upon our appearance in His image. No doubt, this was the desire of the heart of Paul, John, Peter, and the others, and it should be our grandest desire as well. Let us not overlook the fact that **the Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, just as a man speaks to his friend** (Exodus 33:1).

So, let us not think of the *parousia* as strictly a spiritual presence, as if we will not gaze upon His lovely face in the next eon, for it is both a **being** and a **seeing**.

Whether the world will see Jesus in the next eon is open for debate. Frankly, I do not believe they will. We know a day will come when every eye will see Him, but this does not necessarily mean that every eye will see Him at the same time or even in the same eon.

Immortality

This leads to the next point. How does one come into the presence of the Lord? How does one come to see the Lord? In his instruction to Timothy, Paul actually gives us the answer without stating so directly.

(14) Keep the commandment without stain or reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, (15) which He will bring about at the proper time—He who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, (16) who alone possesses immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see. (1 Timothy 6:14-16 NASB)

Again, the word *appear* comes from the Greek word *epiphaneia*, which means "manifestation." So, Paul was directing Timothy's heart to the coming of the Lord. But notice that he states that the Lord alone has immortality and that no man has seen Him or can see Him.

This is a rather strange statement to make considering that many years prior to this epistle to Timothy, Paul wrote to the Thessalonians about being in His presence. **If no man can see Him, then what chance does anyone have of ever seeing Him, of course, apart from a vision, dream, or special encounter?**

Well, the answer lies in the word *immortality*. The only way to literally see the Lord who dwells in unapproachable light is to be like Him and to dwell in His light. Dwelling in the light in the next eon is part of the inheritance of the saints. In his Colossians epistle, Paul mentioned **sharing in the inheritance of the saints in light** (Colossians 1:12).

The only way to be like Him and to dwell in His light is to be immortal like Him. Today, He alone possesses immortality, but in the next eon there will be a company of people that will share in His immortality. Praise God!

Death and Resurrection

To literally see the Lord, we need to put off corruption and put on incorruption, and to put off mortality and put on immortality (1 Corinthians 15:53); but how does this come about? It only comes through resurrection and transfiguration. Paul called it **the adoption as sons, the redemption of our body** (Romans 8:23), meaning sonship comes through resurrection of our body, not at the death of our body. Unfortunately, sound teaching on the resurrection and transfiguration has been lost in our day, if it is taught at all. Consider this: Most Christians are taught that when they die, they go to heaven and walk on golden streets forever. Given this, why concern oneself with resurrection?

The point is that many are taught that *in* death they actually live, whether in heaven or in a so-called *hell*. So, no one actually dies. However, it gets even more interesting, for many are also taught that at some point in time, they will dive out of heaven to receive their new bodies (at the *rapture*) so that they can return to heaven for another seven years, after which they may or may not return to earth, depending on whom one listens to. If you try to follow the logic of what is taught on this subject, you will be left in confusion.

I realize that many do not hold this view, but I believe that when you die you are dead, and this applies to all mankind, whether saved or lost. All are in the place of death in which the dead know nothing (Ecclesiastes 9:5). The dead are in the grave, and the only way out of the state of death is through resurrection. We don't need to add or subtract anything from this foundational truth upon which the whole matter of resurrection rests.

Unfortunately, many have believed the lie that the serpent of old gave to Eve in the garden when it said: "**You surely will not die!**" (Genesis 3:4). In fact, more and more I have come to realize that most of humanity, believer and unbeliever alike, hold to the concept of an afterlife after death and without resurrection, that is, *the redemption of our body* (Romans 8:23).

Death likened to Sleep

Death and resurrection are best understood by understanding that death is a sleep from which one must be awakened. David, Jesus, and Paul likened death to sleep (Psalm 13:3; John 11:13; 1 Thessalonians 4:13, 14). Sleep, especially for a believer, is like the sound sleep that we experience when we go to bed at night.

Consider what sleep is to all of us. When we go to sleep, especially a sound sleep, our whole being, including our soul, is unconscious to our surroundings while asleep. We, as a person, are asleep, not just our body. When we wake in the morning, it is as if we had just fallen asleep with no interval between our falling asleep and our waking. Thus, it is the same in death. The sleep of death wipes out the interval between the moment of death and the moment of resurrection. It will seem as if the moment of resurrection immediately follows the moment of death, even if the initial point of death and resurrection are hundreds or thousands of years apart. A day will come, and we pray soon, when the dead in Christ will be the first to be awakened from their sleep of death.

In order to understand death as a sleep, we need to transcend time and space. God is in time and space and He is outside of both as well. As such, a person can die and simultaneously transcend time to appear in either the first or the second resurrection, even if thousands of years pass on earth. After all, consider the visions and dreams of the prophets; obviously, they transcended time to see things that were already occurring thousands of years in their future.

By the way, none of what has been presented so far actually conflicts with "dying and going to heaven"; it adds clarity to it. It is a matter of knowing what heaven truly is and being able to transcend time and space in our understanding of death and resurrection. If transcending time and space is a challenge, then consider death likened to sleep as illustrated by a computer.

An Illustration—the Computer

God is the giver of life. When *Yahweh Elohim* formed man from the soil and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life (Genesis 2:7 TSS), it was as if He turned a light switch to the on position. Prior to *Yahweh Elohim* turning on the switch, Adam knew nothing. In like fashion, when *Yahweh Elohim* takes away the breath of life from man, it is as if He turns off the switch. When the switch is turned off, there is no more life and man knows nothing. When the switch is turned on in the resurrection, life returns and the man regains his knowledge and memory of who he is.

This exact same thing is illustrated in relation to man and his creative ability. Remember, God is the Creator; He is a creative genius beyond anything or anyone we know. However, He also created man with a genius or, we could say, an ability to create things from the things that God spoke into being. It is evident that man has a creative genius that, in some small measure, is in the likeness of his Creator. Just consider the marvels of the industrial revolution, space exploration, the technology and information age, and the countless number of inventions and the most amazing engineering feats that have come about in the last century alone.

One such invention that revolutionized the world is the computer, which is an amazing invention. I use a computer to write what you are now reading, but I have no clue how my computer works. But I do know one thing; I can work on it all day long and at the end of the day shut it off knowing that all I stored in its memory will be there the next day when I turn it on again. All it needs to give me back what I placed in it is power and a flip of its switch. Voila! All that I placed in it the day before is still there for me to edit or to do whatever I want to it. There is a more recent invention that works well with computers that is called a flash drive. Most of them are very small devices (almost like a thick stick of gum) on which I can store all my writings. These devices have no power of their own, but they can store all the information I want on them to transport from computer to computer. The data just sits on these little devices until I call it up. I just plug them into any computer and again, voila, all that I stored there is available to me.

Now, here is the point; if the switch to the computer is turned off, and even if the power cord is pulled from its electrical source, the memory of what was placed in it is not lost. Simply, the computer screen goes dark, and we could say, the computer sleeps. In fact, one of my older computers used to tell me it was going to sleep when I shut it down. On the flip side, when we awaken a computer from its "sleep," it comes back to life with all the memory it had before it went to sleep. The same thing applies to the flash drives, only they have no power source of their own; they must rely on the power given to the computer. We could say they sleep until the computer awakens them.

Do you see the parallel with man being put to sleep (death) by God? If man could create a machine that sleeps and yet retains all its memory, which is a mere reflection of the One who gave man such genius; then do you not think that God could and does do the same thing when His created being called *man* falls asleep? God is spirit, and it is the spirit that gives life. It is like the memory chip of a computer or a flash drive; both require an external power source and when it is activated, they come to life and do exactly what they were designed to do. Nothing is

lost! If man can do such a thing, do we not see that *Yahweh Elohim*, who is far greater than man, can do likewise, even greater things?

When God turns on the switch of life, the person comes back into being as a full human (not simply some ethereal spirit), and the memory and character of who he is returns, to the praise of God; nothing is lost. However, not to be outdone by the creative ability of man, God does something far greater for the believer. When the switch of life is turned on in resurrection, the believer is transfigured into the body of His (Son's) glory, conformed to the image of the Son. Think about it! We will not lose our individuality of who we are (we could say, how God wired us with temperament and the like); we will be changed into what God always intended us to be. Paul has left us an encouraging word on the matter, as presented in several translations.

For at present we are observing by means of a mirror, in an enigma, yet then, face to face. At present I know out of an installment, yet then I shall recognize according as I am recognized also. (1 Corinthians 13:12 CV)

For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known. (1 Corinthians 13:12 KJV)

For the present we see things as if in a mirror, and are puzzled; but then we shall see them face to face. For the present the knowledge I gain is imperfect; but then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. (1 Corinthians 13:12 WNT)

Dear brethren, God knows all of us, that is, each and every one that has ever been created, the unrighteous and the righteous, the lost and the saved, the unbeliever and the believer. Our knowledge is partial, incomplete. We only see through a glass darkly, and what we see leaves us without all the facts; some of it remains a puzzle to us. But God knows all and He knows all of us. Because of this, we can take comfort that our *God is love*, and in the end, when He is *All in all*, love will remain, for it is the greatest of all (1 Corinthians 13:13).

Spiritual DNA

There is one more thought on this matter which is rather intriguing. A few scientists have discovered that if coherent (laser) light is shined on a physical helix of DNA, a copy or image of the very same DNA will appear next to it, only it will appear as light. Further, when the physical DNA is removed, the light DNA remains for up to 30 days. This has led some to conclude that this is actually *spiritual* DNA. In other words, our physical DNA is accompanied by spiritual DNA or, we could say *spirit-light* DNA.

Think about this possibility; when God breathed the spirit of life into us to make us a living soul, He breathed spiritual DNA into us. Likewise, when we die and our spirit returns to **God who is light**, our spiritual DNA returns to God fully intact with all the genetic coding and memory of who we are, waiting to be joined with our out of heaven glorified bodies in the image of Christ.

Adding to this, scientists have also discovered that our soul experiences appear to be recorded in the DNA located in the heart and other organs. Did you know that we have three brains and

one of them is associated with the heart? In some, but not all heart transplants, heart recipients have been known to take on the soul experiences (likes, dislikes) of the donor of the heart. This would indicate that experiences of our soul are recorded in the DNA of our heart muscle. The point is that if our very experiences are recorded and retained in our physical DNA, then these very same things are, perhaps, recorded in our spiritual (spirit-light) DNA as well. Consequently, nothing is lost that needs to be retained for the redemption of our bodies in the resurrection and transfiguration.

Perhaps the Holy Spirit has left us a clue to these amazing discoveries.

Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light.... (Colossians 1:12 KJV)

What did he mean by the saints in light? Could this be a reference to those who have gone before whose spiritual DNA, their light DNA, has returned to God and is waiting for resurrection to be united with a new body, the redemption of the body? Food for thought!

Transfiguration

However, resurrection by itself does not lead to immortality. In the day of Jesus and His disciples, many were resurrected, that is, they were raised from the state of death, but they did not put on immortality. In other words, they were raised up in mortal bodies and later died again. Case in point is Lazarus who Jesus called forth from the tomb after being in it for four days (John 11:39), the point in time at which decomposition has begun. Historical accounts claim that Lazarus later died and was buried.

More must take place than simply being raised from the dead. A change must take place, and this change is **the transfiguration** (or, transformation), which Paul said would take place in the twinkling of an eye.

(51) Listen! I tell you a secret: We indeed will not all sleep [fig., die], but we will all be changed [or, be transformed], (52) in a moment, in a blinking of an eye, in the last trumpet, for it will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible [or, imperishable], and we will be changed [or, transformed]! (53) For it is necessary [for] this corruptible to put on incorruption, and this mortal to put on immortality. (54) Now when this corruptible shall put on incorruption, and this mortal shall put on immortality, then will happen the word, the one having been written, "Death was swallowed up into victory." [Isaiah 25:8] (55) "O Death, where [is] your sting? O realm of the dead [Gr. hades], where [is] your victory?" [Hosea 13:14] (1 Corinthians 15:51-55 ALT)

It appears that these verses are companions to the verses in 1 Thessalonians 4; although each set does not contain the same detail as the other. In this set, Paul reveals a secret. Not everyone will fall asleep in Christ because some will be alive and remain when He comes, but all will be changed, the dead in Christ and the alive in Christ. Putting off corruption applies to the dead in Christ and not the alive in Christ. Their bodies will have undergone decay, which refers to corruption; that is, their bodies perished and underwent decay.

When they are raised, they are first changed from corruption to incorruption; that is, they move beyond death into a state of being that no longer can be corrupted or can perish. But there is apparently another step, and that is to put off mortality (ability to die) and to put on immortality (to be beyond death). Of course, this is an essential step for those that are alive when Christ comes, for they must move beyond death as well. Ultimately, all who Paul had in view will be immortal at the sound of the last trumpet. Death will have been defeated for these immortal ones. We could say that their spiritual DNA, light DNA, guarantees this.

Now, while we live in bodies of death, the seed of God (Christ) that has been planted within us (1 John 3:9) is growing up to be a mature, complete man in Christ (Ephesians 4:13; Colossians 1:28), but this obviously takes time. It is a lifelong process for many who are born from above. But, Paul wanted all to know that the transfiguration that follows the resurrection is not like that; it occurs in an instant, as quickly as "the blink of an eye," so to speak. All that are raised up from among the dead will put off the perishable and put on the imperishable, and will put off mortality and put on immortality. This is the hope or expectation for all who believe.

The word *transfigure* comes from the Greek word *metamorphoo*, which means "to transform." This is very similar to the English word *metamorphosis*, which means "a change of form, shape, structure, or substance," "a marked or complete change of character, appearance, condition, etc.," or "the physical transformation, more or less sudden, undergone by various animals during development after the embryonic state." Simply, the word signifies a change in form or nature, and this is the picture we are to receive as we consider our transfiguration into the image of Christ.

An example of transfiguration is seen in the account of Jesus on the high mountain with His three disciples.

And He was transfigured before them; and His face shone like the sun, and His garments became as white as light. (Matthew 17:2 NASB)

Another translation states that **in their presence His form underwent a change** (WNT).

The glory that was hidden within the very nature of Jesus came forth on the mountain, which pointed to His coming kingdom and glory, and the glorification of His saints. There will be a marvelous change in the nature of those counted worthy of the eon (age) to come.

When He comes to be glorified in His saints on that day, and to be marveled at among all who have believed—for our testimony to you was believed. (2 Thessalonians 1:10 NASB)

As already stated, immortality and dwelling in His unapproachable light go hand-in-hand. Glory is often described as light, so transfiguration speaks of entering the unapproachable light or the glory of God that is reserved for all who will become immortal and be glorified.

Before moving on to Paul's teaching on being snatched away, there are two more points to be made, the first of which speaks of why the teaching to the Thessalonians is for the conquerors, and the second of which speaks of the first resurrection.

Endured and Conquered

For years, I have meditated on the heart of the brethren in Thessalonica as revealed by Paul through his two epistles. They are our example of the overcoming or conquering life in a company of believers. They were waiting for His Son to come from heaven (1 Thessalonians 1:10), which means they loved the thought of the appearing of the Lord in that Day, as Paul did (2 Timothy 4:8). They were walking and pleasing God (1 Thessalonians 4:1) with faith and love (1 Thessalonians 3:6). They expressed perseverance and faith in the midst of persecutions and afflictions that they had endured, which was a plain indication that they will be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which indeed they had suffered (2 Thessalonians 1:3-5; Romans 8:16-17).

Sounds like they were true conquerors; ones who deserve to be snatched away into the presence of the Lord! They are our example of ones who endured that they might reign with Christ (2 Timothy 2:12), and this is the reason why Paul wrote to encourage them about being snatched away into the Lord's presence. These brethren had a heart that seems to be lacking among many believers in our day.

Out-Resurrection, the Better

The next point is essential and needs to be underlined in our understanding, for it is here that the process of entering the presence of the Lord commences. The whole matter is contingent on a company of believers, the conquerors, being raised from among the dead and becoming immortal in the image of Christ. This event is what John called the **first** resurrection and Paul called the **out**-resurrection.

There are two major resurrections separated by about 1,000 years. The first one occurs at the end our present wicked eon [age]. This is called the **first** resurrection, the **out**-resurrection, and the **better** resurrection. The second one occurs at the end of the millennial Kingdom Age. This is called the general resurrection, or the resurrection of both the **righteous** and the **wicked**. It is both a resurrection of **life** and a resurrection of **judgment**.

For clarity, the verses for each respective resurrection are listed below.

First Resurrection

(34) Jesus said to them, "The sons of this age marry and are given in marriage, (35) but those who are considered worthy to attain to that age and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry nor are given in marriage; (36) for they cannot even die anymore, because they are like angels, and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection." (Luke 20:34-36 NASB)

If by any means I might arrive at the goal, namely, the *out*-resurrection from among those who are dead. (Philippians 3:11 WAET)

Women received back their dead by resurrection; and others were tortured, not accepting their release, so that they might obtain a better resurrection.... (Hebrews 11:35 NASB)

(4) Then I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was given to them. ... and they came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. (5) The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were completed. This is the first resurrection. (6) Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years. (Revelation 20:4-6 NASB)

General Resurrection

(9) "I kept looking until thrones were set up, and the Ancient of Days took His seat; His vesture was like white snow and the hair of His head like pure wool. His throne was ablaze with flames, its wheels were a burning fire. (10) A river of fire was flowing and coming out from before Him; thousands upon thousands were attending Him, and myriads upon myriads were standing before Him; the court sat, and the books were opened." (Daniel 7:9-10 NASB)

(2) And many of the sleepers in the dusty ground shall awake, these shall be to age-abiding life, but those to reproach and age-abiding abhorrence; (3) and they who make wise shall shine like the shining expanse, and they who bring the many to righteousness like the stars to times age-abiding and beyond (Daniel 12:2-3 REB)

(14) "But this I admit to you, that according to the Way which they call a sect I do serve the God of our fathers, believing everything that is in accordance with the Law and that is written in the Prophets; (15) having a hope in God, which these men cherish themselves, that there shall certainly be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked." (Acts 24:14-15 NASB)

(13) "But when you give a reception, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, (14) and you will be blessed, since they do not have the means to repay you; for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous." (Luke 14:13-14 NASB)

(28) "Do not marvel at this; for an hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs will hear His voice, (29) and will come forth; those who did the good deeds to a resurrection of life, those who committed the evil deeds to a resurrection of judgment." (John 5:28-29 NASB)

(23) Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." (24) Martha said to Him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." (John 11:23-24 NASB)

(11) Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them. (12) And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds. (Revelation 20:11-12 NASB)

Asleep in Jesus

According to Paul, only ones who have fallen asleep in Jesus, that is, have died believing in Jesus, will be part of the out-resurrection. However, also according to Paul, not all who are dead in Christ will be included in the out-resurrection. Some will remain dead in Christ to rise at the end of the millennial Kingdom Age to enter immortality in God's day. They will be **saved, yet so as through fire** (1 Corinthians 3:15). According to John, they will have a part (hurt) in the second death because they did not heed the Lord's word to overcome or conquer (Revelation 2:11). This hurt will not be torture in literal fire; rather, it will be loss as their works are burned in the fiery law of God's judgment as they appear before the Great White Throne (Revelation 20:11-15). They are saved by grace and have the imputed righteousness of Christ because they had believed on Jesus. Their names are recorded in the Book of Life. This alone gives them the promise of immortality in that day, but it does not guarantee that they will receive reward for their works in the day of Christ that precedes the Great White Throne Judgment by 1,000 years.

This is why Paul wrote to the Philippians: **If by any means I might arrive at the goal, namely, the out-resurrection from among those who are dead** (Philippians 3:11 WAET). He continually sought to be counted worthy to attain to the first resurrection, for he knew that by grace he would attain to the general resurrection. He was not assured that he would reach the goal until he was at the end of his life and he could report to Timothy that he had run the race to the finish line (2 Timothy 4:6-8). This also answers why Paul wrote to the Corinthians about running a race to win.

(24) Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win. (25) Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. (26) Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air; (27) but I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified. (1 Corinthians 9:24-27 NASB)

Paul ran to win the race so that he would not be disqualified from attaining to the out-resurrection, that is, the first resurrection. His long wait is about up!

So, as we approach Paul's epistle to the Thessalonians and, in particular, his encouragement to the brethren about the dead in Christ rising and being snatched away, we need to keep in mind the first resurrection. ***Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years.***

The Event

Now, let us turn to the event that Paul describes as being snatched away.

(15) For this we say to you by [the] word of the Lord, that we, the ones living, the ones being left to the Arrival of the Lord, by no means shall precede the ones having fallen asleep [fig., who have died]. (16) Because the Lord Himself with a shout of command, with [the] voice of

an archangel and with [the] trumpet of God, will descend from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first, (17) then we, the ones living, the ones being left, will be caught up together with them in [the] clouds to a meeting of the Lord in [the] air, and so we will always be with the Lord! (1 Thessalonians 4:15-17 ALT)

Paul wanted to assure the brethren that the dead in Christ must be raised from among the dead before any snatching away can occur. In other words, the first event is the out-resurrection of the ones counted worthy to attain to the age as the sons of the resurrection, the sons of God (Luke 20:34-36).

Obviously, at the arrival of the Lord, there will be conquering believers alive on earth that also have to be transfigured, but this will not occur until the resurrection of the dead in Christ has occurred first.

It is safe to state that most people see this as occurring all at once; the shout goes forth, the trumpet of God sounds, the dead in Christ rise and are snatched away, and then those in Christ who are alive and remain are snatched away. But actually, Paul makes no such claim; he simply presents the events without giving any detail as to timing. It could occur instantaneously, or it could occur over a period of days. This is a vital point, for as will be shown later, there is most likely a 22-day period that coincides with the fall feasts, starting with the Feast of Trumpets, which is when the dead in Christ are raised to once again walk on the earth, and ending with the eighth day of the Feast of Tabernacles, which is when the fullness of the Holy Spirit will flow from the innermost being of the glorified saints selected to reign with Christ.

In Clouds

Snatched away together with them in clouds [*nephele*]

Paul tells us that the *snatching away* will be in *clouds*. Some translations add the definite article *the*, but this is not in the Greek. It should read *in clouds*. Most people are taught that this refers to literal clouds, that is, the entire group (the dead in Christ that are resurrected and the alive in Christ when He comes) will be snatched away together in white puffy clouds and transported to heaven. But perhaps, there is another way to view this great hope. What if they are not literal clouds, but a signification of a witness, a "rock mass" of witnesses? What if it is an earthly event, not a heavenly one?

It seems that many of us have been taught to interpret scripture mostly from a literal and physical standpoint. A well-respected commentator of scripture once wrote that we must take everything in scripture first and foremost as literal and physical unless it would be an absurdity to believe otherwise. Is this true in all cases? After all, Paul exhorted the Corinthians to **spiritually appraise all things**. Those taught by the spirit of God are to combine **spiritual with spiritual** (1 Corinthians 2:12-15). Some translations state **spiritual thoughts with spiritual words**; however, the words *thoughts* and *words* are not in the Greek. Another interpretation of spiritual with spiritual is to appraise a matter for what it signifies.

Perhaps, being *snatched away in clouds* is something to be spiritually appraised, something that signifies a spiritual truth beyond literal clouds floating in the sky.

The word *cloud* as used by Paul is from the Greek word *nephele*, which means "cloudiness." It is derived from the word *nephos*, which means "clouds." The word *cloudiness* indicates something other than a few or many single clouds floating in the sky. According to *Vine's Expository Dictionary*, it denotes a cloudy, shapeless mass covering the heavens, which, metaphorically speaking, refers to **a dense multitude**.

With this in mind, there seems to be two related or similar meanings to the clouds. The first meaning refers to the glory of the Lord and His kingdom, and the second meaning refers to a great mass of witnesses, a dense multitude that are invited into His kingdom and glory to reign with Him. In other words, the clouds signify a people in glory who are worthy of His kingdom, and *snatched away in clouds* could mean that the Lord will seize a mass of people into the glory of His kingdom.

Glory of the Lord

During the numerous occasions that Moses was called to go up on Mount Sinai, there was a cloud covering the mountain. The Lord both spoke from the midst of the cloud and called Moses into the cloud. As the sons of Israel stood there watching, mostly in fear for their lives, they saw what was described as the appearance of the glory of the Lord and a consuming fire. The mountain was seen all in smoke as the Lord descended on it in fire; it was likened to the smoke of a furnace (Exodus 19:18). A thick cloud formed on the mountain (Exodus 20:21) that the writer of the Hebrews epistle recounted as **darkness, gloom, and whirlwind** (Hebrews 12:18). It was such an awesome scene that it left them quaking in their sandals as the mountain quaked violently; even Moses was full of fear and trembling.

(15) Then Moses went up to the mountain, and the cloud covered the mountain. (16) The glory of the LORD rested on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it for six days; and on the seventh day He called to Moses from the midst of the cloud. (17) And to the eyes of the sons of Israel the appearance of the glory of the LORD was like a consuming fire on the mountain top. (18) Moses entered the midst of the cloud as he went up to the mountain; and Moses was on the mountain forty days and forty nights. (Exodus 24:15-18 NASB)

In spite of all the drama and fear, Moses was called to enter into the midst of the cloud. But notice that the cloud was seen as glory, which was likened to a consuming fire. Also, take note that the writer of Hebrews concluded chapter 12 with **for our God is a consuming fire**.

So, we could say that the cloud signifies glory as likened to fire, as well as darkness and gloom. From the ground level, the cloud looked like darkness; but within the cloud or above the cloud was the Lord in glory, for later we read of Moses coming down the mountain with His face shining, a sign that he had been in the presence of the glory of the Lord. Moses was on the mountain to receive the law, and the law came with glory (2 Corinthians 3:7), which, by the way, is why the cloud was likened to fire, for fire signifies the spiritual law of God (Deuteronomy 4:36; 33:2; Psalm 29:7; Isaiah 4:4; Jeremiah 23:29; Romans 7:14).

Also, the sons of Israel were so fearful of physical death as they looked on the mountain that they refused to enter into glory; from their perspective, it was hidden by darkness and gloom. Rather than entering the kingdom of glory with the spiritual law written on their hearts, they received the letter of the law written on tablets of stone. Only Moses experienced glory in that day; a fading glory because it was received through the ministry of death (2 Corinthians 3:7).

Of course, all of this speaks forth a pattern of the real thing that will be manifested as our present eon closes and the conquerors experience the Feast of Tabernacles; that is, they receive immortal, glorified, spiritual, celestial bodies in the image of Christ.

Fiery Law, the Saints in His Hand

In light of the picture we are given of the glory and fire on the mountain, Moses has left us an interesting word that links the fiery law of God to His saints.

(2) And he said, The LORD came from Sinai, and rose up from Seir unto them; he shined forth from mount Paran, and he came with ten thousands of saints: from his right hand went a fiery law for them. (3) Yea, he loved the people; all his saints are in thy hand: and they sat down at thy feet; every one shall receive of thy words. (Deuteronomy 33:2-3 KJV)

Note that all His saints are in His hand, but also note that from His right hand goes a fiery law. If the fiery law is in His hand along with the saints, then the logical conclusion is that the ones who will be sent forth with the law of God will be the saints or the conquerors. In essence, **they will be the fiery law of God as they go forth in the glory of God until the whole earth is full of His glory.** How will this be accomplished? It will be done as **the inhabitants of the world learn righteousness** (Isaiah 26:9), which is another way of stating that they will learn His divine law by which to live righteously. The conquerors are the ones who will reign with Christ and teach the world the governance of the kingdom of Christ. They will take God's fiery law to the nations. They are the cloud of glory likened to a consuming fire on the mountain or, in this case, in the kingdom of God.

Jesus on the Mountain

With much less drama, we see the pattern of Moses going up on the mountain repeated and explained as Jesus led three of His disciples up on a high mountain to witness His transfiguration. The heart of the matter is the coming of Christ in His kingdom and glory, along with those He invites into His kingdom and glory.

(1) Six days later Jesus took with Him Peter and James and John his brother, and led them up on a high mountain by themselves. (2) And He was transfigured before them; and His face shone like the sun, and His garments became as white as light. (3) And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him. (4) Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if You wish, I will make three tabernacles here, one for You, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah." (5) While he was still speaking, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and behold, a voice out of the cloud said, "This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased; listen to Him!" (Matthew 17:1-5 NASB)

Jesus took only three of His disciples with Him up on the mountain; obviously, the rest were not invited, which indicates that not all believers will be invited to reign in glory for the age to come. Here we discover a bright cloud overshadowing the disciples on the seventh day, just like it overshadowed Moses and God spoke from the cloud on the seventh day. Jesus stood on the mountain (His kingdom) in glory, and the Father spoke from glory. All of this speaks of the coming seventh day, the Sabbath day (Hebrews 4:4-11).

This should remind us of Paul's heart to see the brethren **walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory** (1 Thessalonians 2:12 NASB). Other translations state it as **live lives worthy of fellowship with God who is inviting you to share His own Kingship and glory** (WNT), and **walking worthily of God, who is calling you to His own reign and glory** (YLT).

We are invited to share in our Lord's Kingship and His glory and to reign with Him for 1,000 years in His kingdom of glory. Of course, those counted worthy of His kingdom will also be in glory, for they will be in His image, in the image of the Celestial One (1 Corinthians 15:49 CV).

Thus, the first point about clouds is that they signify the kingdom and glory.

Great Mass of Witnesses

Now, the epistle to the Hebrews gives us the clue to the second meaning of clouds, and this relates to those who will be snatched away. Simply, the clouds refer to people.

Therefore, since we have so great a cloud [nephelē] of witnesses surrounding [encompassing] us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.... (Hebrews 12:1 NASB [CV])

It is fascinating how often this verse is presented as if living believers (as opposed to the dead in Christ) are in the arena of a big stadium, and all the dead (but alive in death) saints are in the bleachers of this stadium, looking down and cheering them on. This might help to bolster the view that all the dead in Christ go to heaven *in* death, but this is not what the writer of the Hebrews epistle meant, nor is it the teaching of scripture. The witnesses are all those mentioned in the previous chapter of the epistle from Abel on down to the wanderers in the caves. All gained approval through their faith, but not one of them received what was promised. These saints are dead and awaiting the *better resurrection*; none of them is watching from heaven.

The English Sublinear of the Concordant Greek Text has the phrase *about-lying* for the translated word *encompassing* [*surrounding* in the NASB]. A cloud is lying about; meaning they are dead in the grave. The origin of the word *cloud* indicates that it could refer to a mass of rock, signifying a mass of anything. As noted earlier, the Greek word for *cloud* denotes a cloudy, shapeless mass covering the heavens, which, metaphorically speaking, refers to a dense multitude. Thus, we are given the picture of a dense mass.

In this context, a cloud is merely a figure of speech for a mass of witnesses that has gone before us. A witness is one who testifies. Their testimony is the testimony of their lives of faith. This is what encompasses us today. It is the witness of their faith that conquered or, we could say, of their conquering life.

This fits perfectly with the snatching away in clouds. Those who are snatched away are all the conquerors in Christ who hold to the testimony of Jesus. When all are snatched away, they are like a cloud (a mass) of witnesses. Whether actual physical clouds are involved is not the issue. The fact of the matter is that this great mass of people is a witness based on their faith exercised during their lives. The clouds are symbolic of their witness.

The same thing is seen with our Lord Jesus as He was taken up and received in a cloud.

(9) And after He had said these things, He was lifted up while they were looking on, and a cloud [nephela] received Him out of their sight. (10) And as they were gazing intently into the sky while He was going, behold, two men in white clothing stood beside them. (11) They also said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven." (Acts 1:9-11 NASB)

The fact that a cloud received Him indicates something of importance. He is the faithful and true Witness. A cloud signifies this fact.

The Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God... (Revelation 3:14 NASB)

Coming in the Clouds of Heaven

There are two more verses that speak of clouds, both of which are in reference to the coming of the Lord. The first occurred when Jesus was brought before the whole Council as He was about to face the cross (Matthew 26:59). They demanded to know whether He was the Christ, the Son of God, to which He responded: **Thou hast said: nevertheless I say unto you, Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven [ouranos]** (Matthew 26:64 KJV).

This was a rather strange thing to say to the men that accused Him and, ultimately, demanded His death as they rejected Him as the King of Israel. How could they have seen Him coming in the clouds of heaven? After all, Jesus spoke as if in that day they would see Him coming in the clouds of heaven. Shortly after, He would be seated at the right of God the Father, but how would they see this? When these rejecters of Christ stoned Stephen to death, surely they did not see heaven opened up and the Son of Man standing at the right of God (Acts 7:55-57).

In the days that followed, there was only one way for them to see Him coming in the clouds, and that was by seeing the witness of His faithful disciples that had followed Him and that, after Calvary, at Pentecost, had received an earnest of the spirit (2 Corinthians 1:22; 5:5; Ephesians 1:14). The ecclesia in that day was the cloud of witnesses; many were later martyred for their

testimony. Consequently, the ones that rejected Christ saw Him in the dense mass, the cloud of witnesses born from above into His body, the ones that were of the Way and later called *Christians*.

But how did these rejecters of Christ see Him seated at the right hand of power? Again, they saw Him in the faithful cloud of witnesses who were seated together with Christ Jesus among the celestials. In other words, when they looked at Christians, the body of Christ, they saw the Head sitting on the right hand of power. While He walked the earth, Jesus stated in various ways that if anyone saw Him, they saw the Father. In like fashion, in that day, as well as today, if one saw His body, they saw the Lord, the Head of His body.

If we put aside the ones that rejected Christ in that day and fast forward to our day, we discover that there are still a people who claim to be Jews, but they are not (Revelation 2:9), for they too reject Christ. A day is coming, and I believe soon, when these blasphemers will see Christ, the One they reject, come to this earth as His life is manifested in the sons of glory. This will be a prophetic fulfillment of Jesus' words to the Council over 2,000 years ago.

There is more to be gleaned from Jesus' words, for the word *heaven* comes from the Greek word *ouranos*, which is similar to the Greek word *oros*, which means "to rise; a mountain (as lifting itself above the plain)." As already noted, *mountain* often refers to *kingdom*. Consequently, one could say that **He is coming in the glory (clouds) of His kingdom (heaven)**. How will this glory be manifested? The answer lies in another verse about His coming.

Behold, he cometh with [nephela] 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. (Revelation 1:7 KJV)

Most translations state "with the clouds." However, the article *the* is not in the Greek, so it seems that the KJV is a bit more accurate. The Greek word translated *with* is *meta*, which is a preposition that means "accompaniment or amid." Thus, the Lord will come amid clouds. If we take clouds to mean a witness (i.e., a mass of witnesses), then perhaps a better way of stating it is: **Behold, a witness will accompany Him!** Or, yet another way of stating it is: **Behold, He will accompany a witness!** This witness is the company of conquerors that are glorified as He is glorified, the sons of glory (Romans 8:21; Hebrews 2:10).

Well, this pretty much reveals the meaning of the clouds in relation to being snatched away. In summary, there are two main points.

First, it refers to all who are invited into the kingdom and glory; they are the witnesses of Christ, the dense mass of witnesses, the conquerors or overcomers of Christ. Thus, the clouds refer to a people; the people that will reign over the nations on earth for the next 1,000 years. They are His kingdom.

"You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth." (Revelation 5:10 NASB)

Second, it refers to the very nature of these witnesses as they are snatched away. They are the glorified ones; the ones manifesting the glory of Christ; the ones that have been transfigured just as Jesus was transfigured on the mountain. They don't wear glory, for their very being is glory. As Paul reminds us, we are **being transformed into the same image from glory to glory**, which in the present is a **treasure hidden in earthen vessels** (2 Corinthians 3:18; 4:7). Thus, the clouds refer to glory, the glory of the conquerors.

There should be little doubt whatsoever that this great mass, this great cloud will see the Lord Jesus personally as they meet Him face to face, just as Moses met Him face to face, Paul most likely met Him (2 Corinthians 12:2-4), and John most definitely met Him (*The Revelation*). However, it remains to be seen whether the rest of mankind will see Him physically with their natural eyes. One thing is for sure; they will see Him in the face of the cloud that manifests His glory.

To Meet the Lord

This leads to the matter of meeting the Lord. According to Paul, those snatched away will *meet the Lord*. The word *meet* comes from the Greek word *apantêsis*, which refers to a friendly encounter in which a person goes out to meet another and then escorts the person back from whence he came. It does not imply that one meets a person and then returns to that person's place of origin.

This word is used in two other places; the first place is in reference to the ten virgins going out to meet the Bridegroom and escorting Him to the wedding (Matthew 25:6), and the second place is in reference to brethren going out to meet Paul (Acts 28:15) and escorting him to Rome, the seat of power in that day.

But there are other indications that those counted worthy to meet the Lord will escort Him to earth.

In the three accounts of Jesus walking on water, Jesus entered the boat and escorted them to their destination. He did not take them back from whence He had come. Likewise, when Peter got out of the boat and walked on water, Jesus escorted him back to the boat (Matthew 14:22-32; Mark 6:47-52; John 6:16-21).

Further, in reference to receiving His bride, the Son will descend out of heaven having left His Father's house in heaven. He will not take His bride back to His Father's house at that time. Rather, He will continue on with her from whence she came. We see this in type with Adam and Eve.

(23) The man said, "This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man." (24) For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh. (Genesis 2:23-24 NASB)

God is both Father and Mother, and the Son of God shall leave His Father and Mother and cleave with His wife. We see a pattern of the father and mother heart of God in Paul's dealings with the ecclesia (1 Thessalonians 2:7-11). We have a second witness of this truth in Paul's great Ephesians epistle in which he wrote of the great mystery of Christ and the ecclesia (Ephesians 5:22-33).

Consequently, when the Lamb comes for His wife, He will not immediately transport her off the earth. When the Lord comes, His body of conquerors will be *snatched away* to meet Him in air, and then they will escort Him to the earth to establish His kingdom as they take the great commission to the nations and the inhabitants of the world learn righteousness (Isaiah 26:9) according to God's divine law. In part, they will do exactly what Philip the evangelist was compelled to do (Acts 8:38-40), and that is to preach the gospel of the kingdom to the nations in fulfillment of the kingdom commission that must go forth to the consummation of the eon (Matthew 24:14; 28:18-20). Of course, they will do more than preach, for they will be the rulers, administrators, and judges of the kingdom of our Lord as it takes root among the nations. They will be a kingdom and priests (Revelation 5:10; 20:6).

Simply, their job for the next 1,000 years will be to establish **the Kingdom of God** on earth, until **the knowledge of the glory of the Lord fills the earth as the waters cover the sea** (Habakkuk 2:14). As a side note, the conquerors will, most likely, be establishing the kingdom among the celestials as well, for Christ will sum up or head up all things in heaven and on earth (Ephesians 1:10).

Down through the centuries, there have been some who have questioned whether Christ Himself will physically reside on earth for 1,000 years. Again, I do not know the answer to this question. I cannot see Him sitting on some throne in the present city of Jerusalem, for this city has been judged and will fall before the oncoming eon; it has been replaced by **New Jerusalem**, which has always been in the heart of God, for it is **the dwelling of God in spirit** (Ephesians 2:22). New Jerusalem is above (i.e., among the celestials) and will come down (out of) to fill the new earth in **God's Day** (2 Peter 3:12 CV).

However, Christ will be on earth in His people for the 1,000 years. They are in His image, and because of this, the world will see Him in the face of His immortal and glorified people, His body on earth. Consequently, as the mortal earth dwellers see the body of Christ, they will see Christ; for He is the Head of His body and they are one.

But there is more, for His body, in part, is actually **New Jerusalem**, and as such, the nations will see New Jerusalem, the dwelling of God *in spirit*, for His immortal company will be a spiritual body on earth that will be able to move between the earthly and the celestial (heavenly) realms. Don't you know that you are the temple of God (2 Corinthians 6:16)? Consequently, the new creation will be manifested on earth in the next eon through the manifestation of the sons of God, the sons of glory.

In Air

Next, Paul tells us that the meeting is in air. The article *the* is not in the Greek, so *in air* is more accurate. Paul never mentions being taken up to the throne or to heaven, but unfortunately, many assume this. Instead, Paul has believers rising and meeting the Lord in air, which is related more to the lower atmosphere of our earth.

In scripture, *air* often refers to the area around us, close to the ground (Acts 22:23; 1 Corinthians 9:26; 1 Corinthians 14:9). It is what we breathe and it is what envelopes our bodies. As we stand on earth, we stand in air. There is also a chief of the jurisdiction of the air, the spirit now working in the sons of stubbornness (Ephesians 2:2).

The question is this: If believers are left on earth, meaning a location in heaven is not their destiny, then where will this meeting take place? The simple answer is that we really do not know the exact location. Scripture is silent on the matter. However, let us consider some examples in scripture, starting with Elijah.

Elijah in a Whirlwind

Some people see Elijah as a type of the conqueror (overcomer) taken up to heaven in the so-called *rapture*. However, on close examination, this may not be the correct conclusion, for he was caught up in a whirlwind, which is a weather phenomenon, an air event.

(1) And it came about when the LORD was about to take up Elijah by a whirlwind to heaven, that Elijah went with Elisha from Gilgal. ... (11) As they were going along and talking, behold, there appeared a chariot of fire and horses of fire which separated the two of them. And Elijah went up by a whirlwind to heaven. (2 Kings 2:1, 11 NASB)

Many assume that heaven in these verses refers to the vast spaces of the universe, but actually it refers to the atmospheric heavens associated with the earth's atmosphere, the heaven in which the birds fly. For example: "**Let birds fly above the earth in the open expanse of the heavens**" (Genesis 1:20). Also, a whirlwind is more of a weather phenomenon, like a violent storm, even a tornado.

One other fact that will help our understanding is that in the Hebrew text, it does not state *into* heaven, for the preposition *into* is not used; *into* has been added by the translators. Thus, the meaning is more in line with the thought that Elijah was removed by a tempest heavenward.

So, where was Elijah taken? We don't know. With his service as a prophet completed, perhaps the Lord removed him to a far distant region for some other service until he died. This was necessary so that Elisha could be placed in service as a prophet.

An interesting observation has been offered by one commentator who states that the letter written by Elijah, as recorded in 2 Chronicles 21:12-15, concerned events that occurred well after (about ten years after) Elijah went up in the tempest. This would prove that Elijah was not taken up to heaven (God's throne among the celestials) but was simply transported through the

air to another location on earth, much like the experience of Philip, which is described using the same word *harpazō*.

Philip Snatched Away

(38) And he ordered the chariot to stop; and they both went down into the water, Philip as well as the eunuch, and he baptized him. (39) When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away [*harpazō*]; and the eunuch no longer saw him, but went on his way rejoicing. (40) But Philip found himself at Azotus, and as he passed through he kept preaching the gospel to all the cities until he came to Caesarea. (Acts 8:38-40 NASB)

It seems that this one account most closely matches the *snatching away* that Paul described to the Thessalonians. After he shared Jesus with the eunuch and baptized him, Philip was *snatched away* (*harpazō*) to another place on earth, Azotus. Presumably, Philip was caught up in air by the spirit of the Lord and transported to another city, or he simply transcended time and space. Either way, he never left the earth. He was snatched away in air.

From the Four Winds

We are given another indication of the nature of the meeting in air through an Old Testament expression that the Lord repeated in His discourse on the sign of His coming and the end of the age (Matthew 24:3). The expression is *the four winds*. Consider the following verses.

"I will bring upon Elam the four winds from the four ends of heaven, and will scatter them to all these winds; and there will be no nation to which the outcasts of Elam will not go." (Jeremiah 49:36 NASB)

"Ho there! Flee from the land of the north," declares the LORD, "for I have dispersed you as the four winds of the heavens," declares the LORD. (Zechariah 2:6 NASB)

Then He said to me, "Prophecy to the breath, prophesy, son of man, and say to the breath, 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these slain, that they come to life.'" (Ezekiel 37:9 NASB)

Jeremiah and Zechariah used the expression to speak of a scattering or a dispersion of God's people throughout the earth. Ezekiel used the expression to speak of the resurrection of God's people. Thus, the four winds speak of air and an event on earth.

Also, in reference to the 144,000 conquerors of the tribes of *spiritual* Israel, we learn that the winds are from the four corners of the earth, which is simply a way to describe all the earth.

After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth, so that no wind would blow on the earth or on the sea or on any tree. (Revelation 7:1 NASB)

However, Jesus reveals the meaning of the four winds in reference to the angels gathering the elect.

"And He will send forth His angels with A GREAT TRUMPET and THEY WILL GATHER TOGETHER His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other." (Matthew 24:31 NASB)

"And then He will send forth the angels, and will gather together His elect from the four winds, from the farthest end of the earth to the farthest end of heaven." (Mark 13:27 NASB)

Notice that this event will occur with the sound of a great trumpet, which is exactly what Paul declares will sound as the cloud of witnesses is snatched away. They will be gathered together from the four winds and from one end of the sky to the other. Also, notice that in Mark the word *heaven* is used, and in Matthew the word *sky* is used, which makes *heaven* and *sky* synonymous. This does not mean that they will be floating in the sky someplace. One commentator has proposed that this refers to gathering astronauts that will be in outer space at the time. This is an interesting proposition, but it cannot be the entire answer. Nevertheless, if one happens to be a conquering believer residing in the space station floating above the earth when the Lord comes, then we can be assured that the person will be gathered together with all the elect.

We need to keep in mind that wind is air moving across the surface of the planet, so it is safe to state that the Lord Jesus was referring to "an air event on earth," not "a gospel-ship event" to the galaxies far, far away. It simply means that the elect will be gathered from the entire earth, from one horizon to the other; no one of the elect company will be left out. This is the Lord's assurance. Whether the meeting is in air as all stand on the terra firma or some number of feet off the ground we are not told, but we are never told that it refers to being transported to the ends of the universe where people think the throne of God is located. We are not told where on earth this will take place.

Before moving off this topic, there are two more thoughts.

Air on Earth

First, part of the elect will be made up of the saints that are resurrected in the first resurrection. Since they are dead in Christ before they are raised, they are not on the surface of the earth, that is, in air. However, when they are raised from among the dead, they will stand on the earth once again and be in the air that envelopes the earth. Thus, they will meet in air.

In Spirit

Second, some who see the male child and the 144,000 as the conquerors might argue that the male child is snatched away to the throne (Revelation 12:5), and then the 144,000 are seen singing before the throne (Revelation 14:1-5). Doesn't this mean that when they are snatched away to meet the Lord in air, they will continue their upward journey to the throne? If we suppose that the throne is trillions of light years away from earth, then it would make sense to

make such a conclusion. But how do we know that the throne is trillions of light years away? What if the throne is right in our midst on earth? What if being before the throne is as simple as walking through the door of a house? What if the throne is simply in another dimension, the spirit realm, in which our earthly realm sits? What if it is not based on time and space? It seems to me that the throne simply signifies kingdom power and authority, and not a physical chair with God sitting on it. Keep in mind that God is spirit.

The throne is in the spirit realm, and this realm is all around us today. The heavens or spirit realm do rule. After all, Jesus has not left us nor forsaken us. How can this be? Because He has not left the earth; He is simply here in spirit. If we could pull back the veil that is between the spirit and the physical realms, we would see Him watching over us.

Also, being before the throne could mean that the 144,000 are in the place of reigning with Christ. Thus, the throne could speak of position and authority rather than time and space.

Dimensional

There is one further thought that is a combination of the above, which, perhaps, is a bit off the wall, but it is offered as food for thought. What if the meeting in air is strictly dimensional and that no one actually leaves the spot they occupy when the trumpet sounds? What I mean is that the immortal ones simply change dimensions to meet the Lord. They are seized from the physical dimension to the spiritual dimension. It is like opening a door and walking into another room; only in this case, the door is a celestial door. Wherever a person is standing in air at that moment in time is where he or she will come face to face with Jesus. Just a thought; you may have to dwell on this one for awhile.

Now, let us move on to another facet of being snatched away, and that is the shout and the trumpet of God that will sound as the Lord descends.

Shout

If we take the order of what Paul presents to us, then it is the shout that comes first that will most likely rouse the dead in Christ, much like the shout given by Jesus to raise Lazarus.

Just think of the Lord simultaneously shouting the name of everyone to be called out of the grave, and the company of resurrected saints coming forth to stand on the earth in air once again. **"Lazarus, come forth!"** (John 11:43). What a joy it will be in that day and what a shock it will be to the world and to other Christians that thought the *rapture* would occur in a different fashion.

Trumpet of God

The next to follow is the trumpet of God, which in scripture is either a call to gather or a call to arms.

As revealed in the comparative charts presented earlier, the account of the Lord descending on Mount Sinai to meet the sons of Israel is a type of the Lord descending from heaven to meet those called to be the sons of God. In both cases, the announcement of the arrival of the Lord and the call to His people to go up to the mountain (enter the kingdom) is the sounding of the trumpet of God.

(18) Now Mount Sinai was all in smoke because the LORD descended upon it in fire; and its smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain quaked violently. (19) When the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke and God answered him with thunder. (20) The LORD came down on Mount Sinai, to the top of the mountain; and the LORD called Moses to the top of the mountain, and Moses went up. (Exodus 19:18-20 NASB)

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 CV)

The imagery of Moses on the mountain is the same as the imagery Paul paints for the saints entering the kingdom. The fact of the matter is that the Lord Jesus Himself confirmed that the gathering together of the elect will be announced by the sounding of the trumpet of God.

"And He will send forth His angels with A GREAT TRUMPET and THEY WILL GATHER TOGETHER His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other." (Matthew 24:31 NASB)

Now, according to Paul, the first to respond to the sounding of the trumpet of God will be the dead in Christ. Again, it needs to be stressed that they are dead and the dead do not know anything (Ecclesiastes 9:5). Death is a cessation of life; it is not life in another realm.

Silver Trumpets

In type, we see another illustration of this in the account of Moses being commanded to make two trumpets of silver for the purpose of gathering together the congregation. When one trumpet was blown, it was a call for the leaders to gather; when both trumpets were blown, it was a call to gather the entire congregation.

(1) The LORD spoke further to Moses, saying, (2) "Make yourself two trumpets of silver, of hammered work you shall make them; and you shall use them for summoning the congregation and for having the camps set out. (4) When both are blown, all the congregation shall gather themselves to you at the doorway of the tent of meeting. (5) Yet if only one is blown, then the leaders, the heads of the divisions of Israel, shall assemble before you." (Numbers 10:1-4 NASB)

Most likely, the sounding of the trumpet of God that Paul referred to is like the blowing of one of Moses' silver trumpets in order to summon the conquerors or overcomers, the leaders of the kingdom of Christ.

As presented earlier, the word *harpazō* comes from another Greek word *aihreomai*, which means "to take for oneself, that is, to prefer." This captures the heart of the meaning and purpose of being snatched away, for the Lord is going to take for Himself those that He prefers. Of course, this speaks of His wife; the conquerors chosen to reign with Him in His kingdom. When He descends out of heaven to commence His reign over the nations, He is going to call forth His kings, lords, judges, administrators, and all that have been trained to rule with Him while they occupied bodies of death. In other words, the leaders of His kingdom will be called forth.

Now, there is one other reference to the sounding of a trumpet, and it is discovered in *The Revelation* as the angel sounds the seventh trumpet.

Seventh Trumpet

(15) And the seventh angel sounded [his] trumpet, and [there] occurred great voices in heaven, saying, "The kingdom of the world became [the kingdom] of our Lord and of His Christ, and He will reign into the ages of the ages [eons of the eons]!" (16) And the twenty-four elders, the ones sitting on their thrones before the throne of God, fell on their faces and prostrated themselves in worship before God, (17) saying, "We give thanks to You, O Lord God, the Almighty, the One being and the One [who] was, because You have taken Your great power and reigned. (18) And the nations were enraged, and Your wrath came, and the time of the dead to be judged [came], and [the time] to give the reward to Your slaves the prophets and to the holy ones and the ones fearing Your name, to the small and to the great, and to destroy the ones utterly destroying the earth." (19) And the temple of God was opened in heaven, and the ark of the covenant of the Lord was seen in His temple, and [there] occurred lightning flashes and voices and peals of thunder and an earthquake and great hail. (Revelation 11:15-19 ALT)

It is significant that with the sounding of the seventh trumpet, the declaration will go forth from heaven announcing that the kingdom of Christ has come, and the time to judge the dead and reward the Lord's people (prophets, holy ones, the small to the great) has come as well. The heavenly temple is also opened. In other words, the seventh trumpet not only signifies the coming of the kingdom but also the manifestation of the sons of God that are the dwelling of God in spirit, the temple of the Holy Spirit. The temple opened in heaven signifies that the heavenly temple is about to come upon the earth in the form of the conquerors of Christ, His body, which is the temple of God, the priests of God and of Christ that will reign with Christ over the nations for 1,000 years. Consequently, the seventh trumpet must be seen in light of the first resurrection that John referred to in Revelation 20:4-6 and not the general resurrection referred to in Revelation 20:11-15. The seventh trumpet sounds the call to those who will reign with Christ for 1,000 years.

Now, this raises another question: Is the seventh trumpet the last trumpet mentioned by Paul in his epistle to the Corinthians?

Last Trumpet

(51) Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, (52) in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. (1 Corinthians 15:51-52 NASB)

Paul wrote to the Corinthians that the change will take place at the last trumpet. But what did he mean by this? A last trumpet would indicate that there are other trumpets that precede it. Is the last trumpet simply the last one of a series of trumpets blown on the same day and hour? If so, then the last trumpet must be associated with the first resurrection. Or, is there a period of time, such as an eon, between trumpet blasts? After all, there are two resurrections, separated by 1,000 years, and if you agree that there will be believers raised at each resurrection, then it would follow that the last trumpet must be the one sounded at the general resurrection, which is the resurrection of the righteous or the resurrection of life for the remaining dead in Christ that were not raised as conquerors to reign with Christ during the millennial kingdom or Tabernacles Age. This can be likened to the blowing of the two silver trumpets of Moses in order to gather the whole congregation.

Perhaps, the last trumpet to be sounded is the one that will raise the remaining dead to appear before the Great White Throne that follows the 1,000-year reign of Christ. This conclusion is based on the spiritual condition of the Corinthians in contrast to the Thessalonians, as well as the context of 1 Corinthians 15.

Consider the spiritual condition of the Thessalonians compared to the Corinthians: the former were truly conquering, and the latter were being conquered; the former were looking for the Son to come from heaven, and the latter were looking to men on earth to follow; the former were growing in Christ, and the latter were still babes in Christ.

Consequently, Paul encouraged the Thessalonians with the thought of coming into the presence of the Lord. They were conquerors; therefore, he could encourage them that they would be with the Lord in the day of Christ, meaning they would rise in the out-resurrection. He did not stress the bodily change, although this is inherent in resurrection.

However, the Corinthians were not conquerors at that time; therefore, Paul did not encourage them with the presence of the Lord. Instead he gave them facts that pertained to the promise for all that believe on Jesus; all will eventually come into immortality. The context of 1 Corinthians 15 supports this thought, for the subject of this great chapter is the resurrection, the kingdom, and the ultimate abolishment of death (vs. 26), which we know takes place during God's Day and not during the coming eon.

Thus, it is very probable that Paul was simply encouraging the Corinthian believers with the ultimate goal for all that believe, and this goal will be accomplished for some at the first resurrection that brings our present eon to a conclusion and for the rest at the resurrection of life, which takes place in conjunction with the Great White Throne Judgment. Given this, Paul had the resurrection of life in view when he wrote 1 Corinthians 15 and not the out-

resurrection; therefore, the last trumpet is not the seventh trumpet of *The Revelation*; it is the very last of all the trumpets to sound in relation to resurrection.

One Taken, One Left

There is one important point that needs to be injected at this point. Many people take Jesus' word about one being taken and one being left to mean that **the one taken** is the believer and **the one left** is the unbeliever (Matthew 24:40-41). In other words, the one taken is taken to heaven. Actually, it is the other way around; the believer is left to reign over (on) the earth.

(37) "For the coming of the Son of Man will be just like the days of Noah. (38) For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, (39) and they did not understand until the flood came and took [airo] them all away; so will the coming of the Son of Man be. (40) Then there will be two men in the field; one will be taken [paralambano] and one will be left. (41) Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one will be left. (42) Therefore be on the alert, for you do not know which day your Lord is coming." (Matthew 24:37-42 NASB)

It is probably safe to state that most who believe in a *pre-tribulation rapture* see the one taken as a believer snatched away, and the one left is an unbeliever. However, this view cannot be correct.

The word *taken* comes from the Greek word *paralambano*, which means "to take along, take aside, accept." For a time, I accepted the thought, as proposed by others, that this word refers to a personal, friendly encounter, and therefore, it has to refer to believers being raptured. However, upon examination of its use in scripture, it is not always used in this fashion. Joseph took Mary to be his wife (Matthew 1:20). Joseph took Jesus and left for Egypt (Matthew 2:14). The devil took Jesus to the pinnacle of the temple in a failed attempt to tempt Him (Matthew 4:5). Jesus took three disciples with Him as He entered into the anguish of His soul (Matthew 26:37). The soldiers took Jesus into the Praetorium to mock and beat Him (Matthew 27:27).

Obviously, these examples represent both good and bad encounters, and as such, it is difficult to determine whether the taking of the one or the taking aside is for a good or bad (evil) purpose.

Notice that the emphasis in the above verses is on the one who is taken. Thus, the key to understanding this matter is not in who is left but in who is taken. If we know who is taken away, then we will know who is left. There are several clues that will lead us to the correct understanding.

First, the subject of the sentence is *they* who lived before the days of the flood, that is, the ones who were eating, drinking, and marrying while Noah was building the ark. They did not know until the flood came, which means that they had no clue that their demise was upon them.

Second, the use of *all* in the phrase *took them all away* seems to indicate that *all* refers to the mass of people and not to Noah and his small family. The word *all* seems inappropriate to

describe eight people compared to the entire population of the world at that time. Besides, *them* must refer back to the ones that did not know until the deluge came. Surely, Noah and his family knew.

Third, the Greek word for *took (takes) away* in verse 39 is different from the word *taken* used in the next verse. The Greek word is not *paralambano* but *airo*, which has several meanings, such as "lift, take away, pick up, away, hoist a sail." At first glance, we might be tempted to conclude that hoisting a sail refers to the ark, but this is not the common use of this word in Greek. The key to answering the question is found in other verses in which *airo* is translated *takes away*. The following are some examples.

"For whoever has, to him more shall be given, and he will have an abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has shall be taken away [*airo*] from him." (Matthew 13:12 NASB)

"Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken away [*airo*] from you and given to a people producing the fruit of it." (Matthew 21:43 NASB)

"Therefore take away [*airo*] the talent from him, and give it to the one who has the ten talents." (Matthew 25:28 NASB)

"For to everyone who has, more shall be given, and he will have an abundance; but from the one who does not have, even what he does have shall be taken away [*airo*]." (Matthew 25:29 NASB; also Mark 4:25; Luke 8:18)

"These are the ones who are beside the road where the word is sown; and when they hear, immediately Satan comes and takes away [*airo*] the word which has been sown in them." (Mark 4:15 NASB)

His disciples came and took away [*airo*] the body [i.e., John the Baptist's body] and buried it; and they went and reported to Jesus. (Matthew 14:12 NASB)

The first five verses refer to an unfavorable outcome in relation to entrance into or exclusion from the coming kingdom of Christ on earth. Even the death of John the Baptist is a kingdom matter, for he proclaimed the kingdom in the spirit of Elijah, and he died for his testimony. Thus, his dead body was taken away.

Finally, there is one other clue discovered through the Hebrew prophet Zechariah, who prophesied of the coming of Christ and the days preceding His arrival. Notice that ones will be cut off and die and a third will be *left* and *will not die*. The third will come through the fire of persecution and refinement and, as His people, be like gold.

(8) And it shall come to pass, that in all the land, saith Jehovah, two parts therein shall be cut off and die; but the third shall be left therein. (9) And I will bring the third part into the fire, and will refine them as silver is refined, and will try them as gold is tried. They shall call on my name, and I will hear them: I will say, It is my people; and they shall say, Jehovah is my God. (Zechariah 13:8-9 ASV)

Given these clues, it seems clear that being taken away is not a good thing, for it will lead to death; death through the flood of Noah's day and through the wrath as described by Zechariah. Being taken away during a time of judgment is unto death, not unto life and not unto leaving this earth.

Who is taken away? The unfaithful, the unrighteous, the apostates, the lawless, the snares, the darnel, the harlots, and the wicked! They are taken away to death in the wrath of God. Those who are taken away will not enter the coming kingdom of Christ on earth, for they will be taken away in death. It is a personal encounter with death. Whether this is physical death or death to their soul as they lose out on kingdom life in some measure is beside the point. What it signifies is far more important. Regardless of how one views it, it is a bad thing to be taken away!

Who is left? The faithful conquerors! They are left and safely brought through the wrath of God, protected by His Sovereign hand. Saved for the kingdom of Christ in accord with the purpose of the oncoming eons! They will be left to enter eonian life and to be enjoyers of an inheritance or allotment in the millennial kingdom. Thus, it is a good thing to be left! **Being left is Life!**

In case there are any lingering doubts, there is precedent in scripture to support what has been presented on the ones taken and the ones left.

(21) For the upright will live in the land and the blameless will remain in it; (22) but the wicked will be cut off from the land and the treacherous will be uprooted from it. (Proverbs 2:21-22 NASB)

Behold, the day of the LORD is coming, Cruel, with fury and burning anger, to make the land a desolation; And He will exterminate its sinners from it. (Isaiah 13:9 NASB)

For evildoers will be cut off, But those who wait for the LORD, they will inherit the land. (Psalm 37:9 NASB)

When?

This leads to the matter of when this all occurs, and to understand this, we need to examine the fall feasts given to Moses and the sons of Israel to celebrate.

It is safe to state that today there are many views on when this glorious event will occur. Many declare that there are no prophetic events to be fulfilled; Christ could come any day at any time, and when He does come, both the resurrection and the snatching away will occur immediately back-to-back in the twinkling of an eye. However, the twinkling of an eye refers to the transfiguration, not to the resurrection.

The concept of Christ coming at any moment, which means that He could have come 1,000 or 100 years ago, or He could come 1,000 or 100 years into the future, is referred to as **the imminent return of Christ**. I recall being taught in my early Christian life that there was nothing else to occur for Christ to return for His bride. I accepted this teaching for a season, until I

realized that it is not true. It must be added that this is a popular view for the ones who believe in the *pre-tribulation rapture*.

There are many counter arguments to the theory of the imminent return of Christ. Unfortunately, this theory completely ignores the fact that after six days, that is, six 1,000-year days, comes the seventh day of the millennial kingdom of Christ. Since there were about 4,000 years from Adam to Christ, and there have been about 2,000 years since Calvary, we cannot have much time left on God's clock. How could Christ have come prior to the completion of 2,000 years? He couldn't have come; therefore, His arrival is based on something other than pure imminency. Time alone has kept Him from coming. Why? Because the Father has fixed the time!

Discerning and Knowing the Times

Besides, Jesus scolded the Pharisees and the Sadducees for their ignorance of the times, especially for not knowing the season of His first arrival.

"And in the morning, 'There will be a storm today, for the sky is red and threatening.' Do you know how to discern the appearance of the sky, but cannot discern the signs of the times?" (Matthew 16:3 NASB)

In his teaching about being snatched away, Paul reminded the brethren that they knew the signs: **Now as to the times and the epochs, brethren, you have no need of anything to be written to you** (1 Thessalonians 5:1). They must have known that times and epochs centered on the feasts as given through Moses to the sons of Israel! The problem was that they had gotten sidetracked in their understanding and lost sight of the facts. Actually, it is quite possible that they knew that the coming of the Lord would be in sync with the fall feasts.

Our curiosity should be aroused to know why the Lord Jesus told His disciples right before He ascended back to His Father that it was not for them **to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority** (Acts 1:7), and yet, Paul, some years later, told the brethren that they knew the times and the epochs. Obviously, the Lord's closest disciples were not to know the exact timing for reasons that were necessary in that day. However, let us not forget that the Lord, over a period of forty days, spoke to them of things concerning the Kingdom of God (Acts 1:3), which obviously had to pertain to His Second Coming.

For some reason, Christians in our day also get sidetracked, but it occurs through Jesus' word to His disciples about not knowing the day and the hour.

"But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone. For the coming of the Son of Man will be just like the days of Noah." (Matthew 24:36-37 NASB)

"Therefore be on the alert, for you do not know which day your Lord is coming." (Matthew 24:42 NASB)

Some might argue that knowing or discerning the times or knowing the times and the epochs is not quite the same as knowing the day and the hour. This is true up to a point. If we are to discern the times and we come to know that the times will be fulfilled in our day, then, at some point, we should be able to get pretty close to knowing the day and the hour without knowing it precisely. I believe that those living at the cusp of the Lord's arrival will have the opportunity to reasonably expect His arrival because there will be a period of time or a window of opportunity, so to speak, in which the day and the hour will occur, without knowing the precise time on the world clock. In other words, they can get pretty close, if they are willing to cast off the tradition of men and pursue the Lord to know *the Day*.

Of course, I continue to hold out that **God in heaven who reveals mysteries** (Daniel 2:28) just might reveal the day and the hour to some, for **surely the Lord GOD does nothing unless He reveals His secret counsel to His servants the prophets** (Amos 3:7).

Besides, in conjunction with the fall feasts as revealed through Moses, a 22-day period begins once the trumpet of God sounds and the dead in Christ are raised. Without doubt, this is our window of opportunity, for those loving His appearing can expect to see Him within this window, most likely, within the last seven to eight days or days 15-22 of the fall feasts. This is close enough for me.

Fall Feasts

Consider this: All the events surrounding Jesus' life and crucifixion coincide precisely with the events prophesied by the Hebrew prophets, as well as the spring feasts celebrated by Israel. Christ was crucified precisely on Passover in 33 AD. The Holy Spirit was given to the ecclesia precisely on Pentecost, fifty days after Christ's resurrection. If these spring feasts were fulfilled by Jesus at His first advent, then it stands to reason that the fall feasts, the Feast of Trumpets and the Feast of the Tabernacles, along with the Day of Atonement, must be fulfilled at His second advent.

Interestingly, some Christians might agree with the Second Coming of Christ being manifested through the fall feasts, but, for the most part, they see it only in light of Israel according to the flesh that has rejected Messiah and broken the covenant. I see it differently, for the Lord will raise up spiritual Israel, which is the company of conquerors destined to reign with Him.

For reference, the following chart of all the feasts of the Lord is presented, which, as you will note, correspond to farming seasons of planting and harvesting.

Farming Season	Western Months	Hebrew Month	Feast
Barley Harvest	March-April	Nisan	Passover Unleavened Bread First fruits
Wheat Harvest	May-June	Sivan	Pentecost (50 days)
Fruit Harvest	June-September	Tammuz, Ab, Elul	(None)
Final Ingathering	September-October	Tishri	New Year Trumpets Day of Atonement Tabernacles

The Feast of Trumpets corresponds with the *bodily* resurrection of the dead. The Day of Atonement corresponds with a call for the ecclesia of Christ to repent for remaining in the wilderness and for their many failings. The Feast of Tabernacles corresponds with the transfiguration of the conquerors in Christ when they receive their spiritual, celestial bodies of glory. The eighth day officially commences the kingdom of our Lord and His reign over the nations as His conquerors are fully manifested and go forth with the gospel of the kingdom.

In what follows, I must be clear that I do not have a full or precise understanding of how events will unfold. I still have questions in this regard, for it seems that scripture does not state it precisely. However, perhaps as we approach this day, the Lord will make it clearer to those who continue to diligently seek Him on the matter. So, I offer some thoughts on which to meditate and study.

The following chart presents the events that relate to the arrival of Christ and the manifestation of the sons of God.

Tishri; 7 th month	Event
Day 1	Feast of Trumpets; Rosh Hashanah
Day 10	Day of Atonement
Day 15	Feast of Tabernacles (Booths)
Day 22	The Last Great Day; Eighth Day

Feast of Trumpets

(23) Again the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, (24) "Speak to the sons of Israel, saying, 'In the seventh month on the first of the month you shall have a rest, a reminder by blowing of trumpets, a holy convocation. (25) You shall not do any laborious work, but you shall present an offering by fire to the LORD.'" (Leviticus 23:23-25 NASB)

The sons of Israel were called to celebrate what are called feast seasons that were based on harvest time. The fall feasts celebrated the end of the harvest season. The Feast of Trumpets fell on the first day of the seventh month of the religious calendar, which is the Hebrew month of **Tishri**. This corresponds to our months of September and October, depending on when the feast fell each year. Tishri is also the first month of the Jewish civil calendar and, as such, is the **Jewish New Year**, also called **Rosh Hashanah**.

The main purpose of the Feast of Trumpets was to announce the arrival of the seventh month. By the way, the number **seven** signifies **completion**. The priests would blow the trumpets announcing the new month when they first spotted the sliver of the new moon in the sky. This also put the people on notice that it was time to prepare for the Day of Atonement.

Since the announcement of a new month and the New Year was dependent on seeing the first sign of the moon in the sky, there were times when they could not see the moon due to clouds. Some commentators state that *"no one knows the day and the hour"* was a common expression in reference to the start of the New Year because there were times when they could not be sure due to the weather. When He said these words, Jesus was repeating something that they all had heard before.

Obviously, the Feast of Trumpets consisted of trumpets. Each new month they would blow trumpets as they observed the new moon, but with the month of Tishri, they blew them all day long and extra loud.

This might have some relevance to being snatched away, for it is possible that, on this particular day, the trumpet of God will continue to sound around the world to call the dead in Christ from their graves that are scattered around the globe. In other words, rather than instantaneously rising, that is, all at once, perhaps the dead in Christ will rise as the sun or the moon moves across the globe. Just a thought!

The point is that in some year on the first day of the month of Tishri, the trumpet will sound and the dead in Christ will rise to stand on earth in air. If we follow the feasts, then we must conclude that they will not be transported at this point. Further, I believe they will not be glorified at this time; they will be incorruptible, since they will be beyond death at this point but not yet glorified in immortal bodies, for this must take place later at the Feast of Tabernacles.

Can you imagine the scene on earth as the inhabitants of the earth see all these people that were once dead walking about, some, without doubt, marveling at how things have changed since their death hundreds or thousands of years ago? Many Christian preachers will be shocked because things are not occurring quite as they had taught and preached to all that would listen to them. Families (some) of the dead will be pleasantly surprised and elated to see their loved ones once again. One can only imagine the questions and, undoubtedly, fear that will prevail in that day. Some Christians might even start to inquire how they are to get ready to meet the Lord, which leads us to the Day of Atonement.

Day of Atonement

(26) The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, (27) "On exactly the tenth day of this seventh month is the day of atonement; it shall be a holy convocation for you, and you shall humble your souls and present an offering by fire to the LORD. (28) You shall not do any work on this same day, for it is a day of atonement, to make atonement on your behalf before the LORD your God. (29) If there is any person who will not humble himself on this same day, he shall be cut off from his people. ... (32) It is to be a sabbath of complete rest to you, and you shall humble your souls; on the ninth of the month at evening, from evening until evening you shall keep your sabbath." (Leviticus 23:26-29, 32 NASB)

On the tenth day of the month, the sons of Israel were to set aside a day of rest to humble their souls. It was a day to make atonement before the Lord. The word *atonement* means "expiation," which means "to make amends for wrongdoing or guilt." It is a time of repentance and forgiveness of one another.

If this day is to be honored prior to the arrival of the Lord, then it would follow that those who did not give their lives fully to the Lord, even though they believed in Him, will be humbled, even repent for their lack.

Ten Virgins

The ten days in between the resurrection and the Day of Atonement may give us a clue to the parable of the ten virgins.

(1) "Then the kingdom of heaven will be comparable to ten virgins, who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. (2) Five of them were foolish, and five were prudent. (3) For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them, (4) but the prudent took oil in flasks along with their lamps. (5) Now while the bridegroom was delaying, they all got drowsy and began to sleep. (6) But at midnight there was a shout, 'Behold, the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.' (7) Then all those virgins rose and trimmed their lamps. (8) The foolish said to the prudent, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' (9) But the prudent answered, 'No, there will not be enough for us and you too; go instead to the dealers and buy some for yourselves. (10) And while they were going away to make the purchase, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding feast; and the door was shut. (11) Later the other virgins also came, saying, 'Lord, lord, open up for us.' (12) But he answered, 'Truly I say to you, I do not know you.' (13) Be on the alert then, for you do not know the day nor the hour." (Matthew 25:1-13 NASB)

Obviously, all ten virgins knew that the bridegroom was soon to arrive. The shout going forth could refer to the shout for all the dead in Christ to rise. With the shout announcing His arrival, it will be obvious that something big has happened and some who know the signs of the time and understand the feasts will proclaim that the Lord's arrival is soon.

Please keep in mind that the ten virgins represent those that are alive and remain when the Lord comes; they do not represent those asleep in Christ.

Those who had not made any preparation to meet the Lord will begin to inquire what they must do to meet Him. After all, they had made no provision. So, they go off to try to get help in order to be prepared, but it will be too late, for they will not be found worthy to be a son of God in the next eon; they will not reign with Christ. Since they are alive on earth when He comes as the new eon commences, they will have *eonian* life (life for the age) but not immortal life (life beyond death). Eonian life will be a good life, but it will not be the best life unless one also has immortal life, for this is the best and ultimate goal for mankind.

They will repent on the Day of Atonement, but what will they do for the next five days until the Feast of Tabernacles? They will try to buy oil, but it will be too late to buy in time and to enter the wedding feast.

I suspect that within this group might be many Christian Zionists that placed Moses on the throne as they tried to wed Christianity to Judaism, as well as those who say they are Jews and are not (Revelation 2:9).

By the way, the number **ten** refers to **the fullness of the law and responsibility**.

Jubilee

There is more to the Day of Atonement, however, for a jubilee was to be called on this day every fifty years. It was a time of release, that is, a forgiveness of debt. Everyone would return to his own land that he might have lost during hard times. Also, take note that a horn or trumpet is sounded on this day as well.

(8) "You are also to count off seven sabbaths of years for yourself, seven times seven years, so that you have the time of the seven sabbaths of years, namely, forty-nine years. (9) You shall then sound a ram's horn abroad on the tenth day of the seventh month; on the day of atonement you shall sound a horn all through your land. (10) You shall thus consecrate the fiftieth year and proclaim a release through the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you, and each of you shall return to his own property, and each of you shall return to his family. (11) You shall have the fiftieth year as a jubilee; you shall not sow, nor reap its aftergrowth, nor gather in from its untrimmed vines. (12) For it is a jubilee; it shall be holy to you. You shall eat its crops out of the field. (13) On this year of jubilee each of you shall return to his own property." (Leviticus 25:8-13 NASB)

In like fashion, the Day of Atonement in the time of the arrival of the Lord could signify a day of forgiveness of all debt to one another, most of all, of all sin since sin is a debt. By the way, this forgiveness is an absolute and permanent release. As a reminder, conquerors (overcomers) are true forgivers. If you want to be an overcomer, then be a forgiver of all debt, holding nothing against anyone at any time.

Feast of Tabernacles

(34) "Speak to the sons of Israel, saying, 'On the fifteenth of this seventh month is the Feast of Booths for seven days to the LORD. (35) On the first day is a holy convocation; you shall do

no laborious work of any kind. (36) For seven days you shall present an offering by fire to the LORD. On the eighth day you shall have a holy convocation and present an offering by fire to the LORD; it is an assembly. You shall do no laborious work. (Leviticus 23:34-36 NASB)

Now, there is much that could be said about this particular feast, but we will only touch upon it. Let us consider a general overview and then look at a possible scenario in relation to Jesus' three appearances to His disciples after His resurrection.

Israel was called to celebrate the Feast of Booths by constructing booths from live trees and to live in them for seven days as a reminder of the forty years in the wilderness during which they lived in booths. However, this was also done as a reminder of entering the Promised Land. If Israel had willingly entered Canaan after they had been delivered out of Egyptian bondage, then they would have come into the fullness of tabernacles. But it was not according to God's plan that they were to enter at that time, and they were disqualified as a people.

The fulfillment of tabernacles awaits the conquerors of Christ in the presence of the Lord, except, they will not be living in booths; but rather, they will take on the image of Christ with glorified, celestial, spiritual bodies. Their booth, so to speak, will be the dwelling from heaven, a house not made with hands (2 Corinthians 5:1-5).

Thus, the Feast of Tabernacles is a time fixed by the Father for a change of bodies or, as Paul called it, **the redemption of our body** (Romans 8:23). Again, this is the secret that he told the Corinthians; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed.

We are given a further indication of the role the Feast of Tabernacles will play in the revealing of the arrival of the Lord and the manifestation of the sons of God in the account of the Lord appearing at the feast.

(10) But when His brothers had gone up to the feast, then He Himself also went up, not publicly, but as if, in secret. (11) So the Jews were seeking Him at the feast and were saying, "Where is He?" (12) There was much grumbling among the crowds concerning Him; some were saying, "He is a good man"; others were saying, "No, on the contrary, He leads the people astray." (13) Yet no one was speaking openly of Him for fear of the Jews. (14) But when it was now the midst of the feast Jesus went up into the temple, and began to teach. (15) The Jews then were astonished, saying, "How has this man become learned, having never been educated?" (John 7:10-15 NASB)

Notice that Jesus appeared at the midpoint of the feast and He started to teach in the temple. Could this refer to Jesus appearing to His body, the temple of God (1 Corinthians 3:17; 6:19), the dwelling of God *in spirit* (Ephesians 2:22), at which time He is glorified in them and begins to instruct them on the ways of His kingdom, writing the laws on their hearts? Could this be when He snatches away His body to meet with Him? Could this be when the saints are transfigured into His image, being transformed with glorified, celestial, spiritual, immortal bodies?

(37) Now on the last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. (38) He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, "From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water." (39) But this He spoke of the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive; for the Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified. (John 7:37-39 NASB)

One thing is for sure, the last day, that is, the eighth day, is the great day of the feast. Jesus poured out water on the ground and cried out about rivers of living water in reference to the spirit of God that many would receive when He was glorified. This did occur at Pentecost, but let us face one fact; we who believe on Jesus have received the spirit only as a pledge or a down payment of a greater filling to come. Today, we only have an earnest of the spirit (2 Corinthians 1:22; 5:5; Ephesians 1:13-14) as we wait to receive the full measure of the spirit of God, which comes when we are made immortal and glorified in the image of Christ.

Could this be when His body is given the full measure of the spirit, a life overflowing, truly *in* spirit? Is this when it could rightly be declared that **we all have attained to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ** (Ephesians 4:13)?

Regardless of the exact timing, it seems apparent that by or on the 22nd day of the feast, which is the eighth day, a company of saints chosen to reign with Christ will be fully equipped to go forth to the nations with the spirit of God flowing out from their very being as they establish the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ upon the earth.

Today, we do not have the capacity to convince the nations of God's righteous ways, but in that day, if we are counted among the worthy ones, we will be righteous and will have every capacity not only to teach the inhabitants of the world righteousness but to display the very life of Christ to all so that they will finally know who He is and His very character of love and mercy. Our present eon has been marked by our many failures, but the next eon will be marked by success, for the life of Christ manifested in fullness never fails. Praise God!

Three Appearances; 153 Fish

With this general overview, let us now consider a possible scenario of how events might transpire during the Feast of Tabernacles in the year fixed by the Father as presented by John at the end of his gospel.

To understand what is being proposed, please keep in mind that according to Leviticus 23:33-43, the first day of the month of **Tishri** is the beginning of the **fall feasts**, starting with the **Feast of Trumpets** (day 1), followed by the **Day of Atonement** (day 10), followed by the **Feast of Booths or Tabernacles** (days 15-21), and concluding with **the great day, the eighth day** (day 22).

This is now the third time that Jesus was manifested to the disciples, after He was raised from the dead. (John 21:14 NASB)

According to John, Jesus appeared to His disciples three times after He was raised from the dead, and it is within the account of these appearances that we discover how events might unfold. In the following account, we discover Jesus' first appearance on the first day of the week and the second appearance eight days later. The last or third appearance does not have a specific time associated with it, but it obviously follows the eighth day.

(19) So when it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and when the doors were shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them, "Peace be with you." (20) And when He had said this, He showed them both His hands and His side. The disciples then rejoiced when they saw the Lord. (21) So Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you; as the Father has sent Me, I also send you." (22) And when He had said this, He breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. (23) If you forgive the sins of any, their sins have been forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they have been retained." (24) But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came. (25) So the other disciples were saying to him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I see in His hands the imprint of the nails, and put my finger into the place of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe." (26) After eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors having been shut, and stood in their midst and said, "Peace be with you." (27) Then He said to Thomas, "Reach here with your finger, and see My hands; and reach here your hand and put it into My side; and do not be unbelieving, but believing." (28) Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God!" (29) Jesus said to him, "Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed." (John 20:19-29 NASB)

Simon Peter went up and drew the net to land, full of large fish, a hundred and fifty-three; and although there were so many, the net was not torn. (John 21:11 NASB)

(15) So when they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me more than these?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He said to him, "Tend My lambs." (16) He said to him again a second time, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He said to him, "Shepherd My sheep." (17) He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me?" Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, "Do you love Me?" And he said to Him, "Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You." Jesus said to him, "Tend My sheep." (John 21:15-17 NASB)

After His resurrection on the first day of the week, the Lord privately appeared to His disciples and breathed on them so that they received the Holy Spirit, which empowered them to go forth with the good news of His kingdom. Then eight days later, Jesus appeared to them again in the same fashion in order to convince Thomas. Actually, it could be said that Jesus taught Thomas. But what is significant in this encounter is that Jesus proclaimed: **"Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed."**

Carrying the story forward, we discover **seven disciples** fishing because they did not know what else to do. Then, Jesus gathered **153 fish** in a net and **fed His disciples**, and then sent them

forth, especially Peter, who was commanded to tend the lambs and to shepherd and tend the sheep.

Perhaps, this is the pattern of what will transpire some year in the month of Tishri as the Lord appears to His people and sends them forth to the nations to establish His kingdom on earth. On the first day of the month, He will resurrect His chosen and faithful ones just as He, the Faithful One, was resurrected. On the first day of Tabernacles, He will appear to His chosen and faithful ones to breathe the full measure of the Holy Spirit on them.

In John 7, Jesus went up to the feast midweek and taught in the temple. If Jesus breathes the full measure of the spirit into His disciples on the first day of Tabernacles, perhaps He will appear again to His body, which at this point will be the fullness of the dwelling of God in spirit, the temple of God, to teach them, that is, to write His laws on their hearts (Hebrews 8:10). Thomas had to see, but all will need to know.

Then, on the eighth day or the last day, the great day of the feast (John 7:37), He will appear once again to His chosen and faithful to bestow His blessing on all of them, for they had trusted Him, **walking by faith, not by sight** (2 Corinthians 5:7). In that day, **from their innermost being will flow rivers of living water**, which speaks of the full measure of the spirit of God flowing forth from their lives since they will be spiritual in the full sense (John 7:38). The world will begin to see *the* Christ in His body of conquering believers, the manifested sons of God, the New Creation in Christ. They will enter into the Feast of the Lambkin for 1,000 years, and, as they do, they will feed the multitude of the nations. Glory will begin to fill the whole earth.

But there is more to this story, and it is discovered in the number of fish, the number **153**.

Before offering a view of this number in light of Jesus' last miracle as recorded in John, let us consider some thoughts as presented by E.W. Bullinger in his book *Number In Scripture*, Kregel, 1967.

Bullinger makes the point that due to its oddity in scripture, this number has caught the attention of biblical scholars down through the centuries, and he summarizes some of these views, some of which have more merit than others.

One thing he notes is that the number 153 is a factor of 9 times 17. The number **9** can signify **the fruit of the spirit** and the number **17** can signify **victory**. On page 275 of his book, he explains that the expression "**sons of God**" occurs 7 times and by gematria is 153, and the expression "**joint-heirs**" (Romans 8:17) by gematria is 1071, which is a factor of 7 times 153. The expression "**the creation of God**" by gematria is 1224, which is a factor of 8 times 153. Within the miracle of the 153 fish, the word for "**fishes**" is by gematria 1224, which is a factor of 8 times 153, and the word for "**the net**" is 1224, again the factor of 8 times 153. Then on page 276, he writes: "Quite a new thought has recently been given by Lieut.-Col, F. Roberts, who finds that amongst the multitudes who received direct blessing from Christ, there are recorded exactly 153 individual cases."

To add to this, keep in mind that the numbers **7** and **8**, which appear as factors in the above numeric values, refer to **completeness** or **spiritual perfection**, and **new birth** or **new beginning**, respectively.

There is an obvious thread that is woven through all the above meanings that is best summed up in the expression "**the sons of God**," which speaks of those who will be counted worthy to reign with Christ in His coming kingdom. Please note that there were seven disciples in the account of the 153 fish. Thus, the seven men signify spiritual perfection, which speaks of the nature of the sons of God.

Some people believe that 153 fish refers to the salvation of the lost since a net was cast, but this cannot be the meaning. The casting of the net is something beyond initial salvation. It is a gathering of the called and chosen of Christ, the elect company that will rise from among the dead in the first or out-resurrection and be transfigured along with the chosen and faithful in Christ that are alive when Christ snatches away His conquerors to meet Him in air.

In that day, the Son of God Himself will cast the net to gather together His prized possession that will reign on earth and among the celestials as **a kingdom and priests** for 1,000 years (Revelation 5:10; 20:6). They are the **joint heirs with Christ**, the many **sons brought to glory** (Hebrews 2:10), **the sons of God**, or **the sons of the resurrection** (Luke 20:36). They are the ones brought into completeness as the complement of Christ; the born from above ones that have matured into the image of Christ; the ones that will be the first to be part of the new creation, the new beginning for mankind.

Do you see the glory in the number 153? It speaks mightily of the sons of God who will be manifested soon. Praise God!

Personal Testimony

The Lord used an unusual method to make sure I understood that the number 153 signifies the sons of God.

On April 30, 2010, at exactly 1:53 am, I was serenaded by an angelic trumpet playing the tune "*When the Saints Go Marching In*." This is no joke; I believe the Lord sent a trumpeting angel to play this song for my encouragement, and I trust for the encouragement of others. In particular, I sense that this song goes hand-in-hand with the word the Lord gave me for 2010: "**I have come.**"

Oh, when the saints go marching in
Oh, when the saints go marching in
Lord, how I want to be in that number
When the saints go marching in

Oh, when the trumpet sounds its call
Oh, when the trumpet sounds its call
Lord, I want to be in that number

When the trumpet sounds its call

Oh, when the new world is revealed
Oh, when the new world is revealed
Lord, how I want to be in that number
When the new world is revealed

Oh, when the saints go marching in
Oh, when the saints go marching in
Lord, how I want to be in that number
When the saints go marching in

These are part of the lyrics of the American gospel hymn often called "*When the Saints Go Marching In*" that was made into a popular jazz tune by Louis Armstrong in the 1930s. For obvious reasons, it has special meaning to Christians who are longing for the coming of the Lord. I particularly like these verses.

The evening of April 29, my wife and I went out for dinner. We went to a restaurant that serves a fish dish that I especially enjoy. Unfortunately, about half-way through the meal, my stomach did not seem to enjoy it as it had in the past. I didn't get sick but felt sort of a general discomfort that lasted until bedtime. To ease the discomfort that night, I slept in a recliner in our living room.

Sometime close to 1:53 am, I heard a trumpet playing *When the Saints Go Marching In*. I feel like Paul when he was snatched away to Paradise and could not say whether he was in the body or out of the body. I cannot say whether I was awake or not, or how long I had listened to the trumpet sounding. All I remember is hearing this song being played on a trumpet and me stretched out in a recliner as I wondered why someone was outside our house, specifically on the east side, playing this tune. I do recall sitting there with my eyes open as I looked to the eastern part of our living room. I thought it was strange, but it did not panic me nor make me anxious. I sort of enjoyed it. Then, I heard very clearly and demonstrably: "**Look at the clock, NOW!**" So, I did, and it was exactly 1:53 am as recorded on our atomic clock that was a few feet from where I was sitting. I have no doubt that this is significant; the Lord wanted me to know that there is a connection between the song and the numeric value of the time. The clocks in the other rooms of our house might not have been reading the exact atomic time at that moment. He wanted me to know that 153 is a precise number.

The key to understanding the meaning of what I experienced is discovered in the bitter stomach from eating fish, the trumpet, the song, the easterly direction, and the number 153. When all of this is put together, it seems it is about the coming of the Lord Jesus. Let me show you.

First, the bitter stomach is likened to John in spirit on the isle of Patmos: **I took the little book out of the angel's hand and ate it, and in my mouth it was sweet as honey; and when I had eaten it, my stomach was made bitter** (Revelation 10:9-11). The sixth trumpet had already sounded when John was given the book to eat and told that he must prophesy again of the

bitter events to be faced by **many people and nations and tongues and kings** (Revelation 10:11).

Second, John was a fisherman by trade, and my stomach was made bitter by fish, which was sweet in my mouth but bitter in my stomach. But, as we will see, the number 153 also refers to a specific catch of fish that signifies the saints that will go marching in.

Third, after John's stomach settled, the **seventh trumpet** sounded and he heard the loud voices in heaven saying: **"The kingdom of the world has become the Kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ"** (Revelation 11:15). In other words, after eating the book and prophesying further, the kingdom arrived. My bitter stomach was a sign that more is to come, but more importantly, the glorious kingdom is not far behind.

Fourth, I was asleep, at least part of the time, but the trumpet woke me, which refers to the sounding of the trumpet. Those asleep (dead) in Christ will be awakened from their state of sleep by the sound of the trumpet, and they will rise from among the dead in the first resurrection (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; Revelation 20:4-6).

Fifth, the song refers to the saints of the Most High receiving and possessing the kingdom for the ages to come (Daniel 7:18). The kingdom of Christ is the new world of righteousness as administered through His conquering saints.

Sixth, the Lord is coming from the east: **"For just as the lightning comes from the east and flashes even to the west, so will the coming of the Son of Man be"** (Matthew 24:27 NASB).

Seventh, the number 153 refers to the number of fish that were in the net that Jesus told His disciples to cast on the right-hand side of the boat: **Simon Peter went up and drew the net to land, full of large fish, a hundred and fifty-three; and although there were so many, the net was not torn** (John 21:11 NASB). This took place after Jesus' resurrection, right before His last ascension to His Father.

The casting of the net is something beyond initial salvation. It is a gathering of the called and chosen and faithful in Christ, the first fruit anointed, the conquerors (both asleep and alive) who will be the first to experience **Tabernacles** as they are transfigured into the image of Christ and snatched away to meet Him in air. In that day, the Son of God Himself will cast the net to gather together His prized possession that will reign on earth and among the celestials as a **kingdom and priests** for 1,000 years (Revelation 5:10; 20:6). They are the **joint heirs** with Christ (Romans 8:17, 23), the many **sons brought to glory** (Hebrews 2:10), **the sons of God, the sons of the resurrection** (Luke 20:36).

Be encouraged; it won't be long until the manifestation of the sons of God. Oh, when the saints go marching in; Lord, how I want to be in that number!

Summary

Well, there is much more that could be and should be said about this great subject, but we will leave it here and trust that the spirit of God will fill in the details in the days ahead leading up to the great day.

Perhaps, we can expect that in some year during September-October, the last trumpet will sound at the Feast of Trumpets and the dead in Christ will rise. The snatching away will not occur immediately, for the ecclesia must enter into the Day of Atonement ten days later. Five days after this is the Feast of Tabernacles when the saints receive their glorified bodies and the full and overflowing measure of the spirit of God. The snatching away must occur with the Feast of Tabernacles, and Christ must come within this feast, possibly at three different points.

Regardless of how one views the timing of these events, let us not lose sight of the fact that it is the transfiguration into the likeness of Christ that will allow His body to traverse the universe, to move freely back and forth between the physical realm and the spiritual, celestial realm. It is this very change that will allow His prized possession to be *snatched away* to meet Him in air; to enter into His realm, which is spiritual and celestial, and to escort Him to earth. Also, it is this very change that will allow His body, which is His complement, to work with Him in the oncoming eons as He sums up or gathers up all in the heavens and on the earth (Ephesians 1.10). After all, Christ is **Head over all, to the ecclesia which is His body, the complement of the One completing the all in all** (Ephesians 1:22-23 CV).

What should bring great delight to our hearts and encourage us to conquer is that a day is coming when we will be resurrected and transfigured to be like our Lord in glory. When we see Him, we will be like Him. Can you imagine anything more glorious than when our Beloved looks into our eyes and sees a reflection of Himself? This is the very heart of our expectation and of our Lord's as well. Let us hold fast to this hope, and let us wait patiently.

Our hope is to be at home with the Lord, and this comes with the transfiguration, for then we shall be like Him and will always be together with the Lord, wherever He is and whatever He is doing.

Let us dwell on the great expectation that one day we will be in His presence.

Therefore comfort one another with these words.

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