

A Fresh Look at I Thessalonians 4

By [Sam Frost](#)

This paper was originally written in debate form as a response to Ed Stevens' rapture theory. That debate has been cancelled for reasons made known in [another article](#) on this site. This paper has been edited, but the body of the material is the same. Stevens' view is representative and, therefore, is the one targeted the most in this paper. Of course, Stevens is a brother of mine in Christ and my attack on his view means nothing of the sort towards the man himself. I trust the readers understand that. Be that as it is, I do consider the rapture theory to be an erratic teaching that leads to an undermining of preterist soteriology.

I. Historical Considerations

Before we get into this, it must be noted that some preterists, like Ed Stevens, do believe in the flying around of Christians in mid-air. He explicitly states that these Christians disappeared off the face of planet earth. It was not just a few Christians, either, but a whole host. In his book (*Expectations Demands a Rapture*), he briefly mentions Rev. 7 where the saints that "come out of the Great Tribulation" are now seen "in heaven before God". However, this number is "numberless" (7.9). One can almost feel Stevens squirm at this point when reading pages 17-18 with 52-53. Stevens wrote that the number of Christians raptured "might have been less than we think", but then writes, "there was a sizable multitude of Gentiles included in the rapture" (Stevens, 53 *Expectations*). He *does not* attempt to solve this problem. Walt Hibbard, an ardent supporter of Stevens' position, argued that there would not have been that many Christians around at that time. Rev. 7 says that there was "a number in which no one could count" and Stevens is aware of this, too. You cannot have it both ways: there was either a little, or a lot, and if there was a lot (in which no one could count, to speak biblically), then you would have to explain another "silence": the silence of the people who witnessed a "sizable multitude" of their population disappear!

Stevens tries to deal with this by offering a theory of "sleeping" Christians who "came alive" a little later on, after the rapture. Apparently, though, they had selective memory loss, because they "forgot" that Paul had taught a rapture even when they "awakened". In other words, they "heard" Paul teach a rapture, but were not "awake" at that time to "believe" it. The rapture happened, and they "didn't see or even know" it occurred (Stevens, 53 *ibid.*). But, when they finally were "awakened" and born again, they apparently still did not know! But, this is not the damaging part of Stevens' reasoning here. The damaging part is that Stevens wants to think that *no* Christians were around immediately after the rapture, because if they were, *someone* would have written about it: "Surely the Holy Spirit did not allow their memory to get scrambled, or become so disabled mentally that they could not reason logically about what they had just seen and experienced" (Stevens, 42 *ibid.*). No, what the Holy Spirit did allow for, in his view, is for "sleepers" to *hear* Paul preach about a coming rapture, then sleep through the rapture while "a sizable multitude" vanished without a trace all over the world, then "awake" a little later on and forget that Paul ever taught such a thing, or that such a thing had not yet happened! If this is not laboring a point in order to save a theory, then I do not know what is.

I bring up this issue in order to state that the history of Christianity is not so wrecked by the failure to add up A.D. 70 Jerusalem plus parousia equals fulfilled eschatology. I give the history of the church in that time a little more credit. I also take issue with Stevens' portrayal of the second century church. For example, Melito of Sardis (160 A.D.) wrote, "Who will contend against me? Let him stand before me. It is I who delivered the condemned. It is I who gave life to the dead. It is I who raised up the buried. Who will argue with me? It is I, says Christ, who destroyed death. It is I who triumphed over the enemy, and having trod down Hades, and bound the Strong Man, and have snatched mankind up to the heights of heaven." Stevens separates the eschatological from the soteriological (Stevens, 57 *ibid.*). But this is *precisely* the mistake made by the early "fathers"! Rather than seeing the *spiritual significance* in connection with the *eschatological significance*, the early fathers separated the two until the "study of last things" has almost become entirely separated from "important matters" of church theology! In my understanding, the early fathers *did not* miss the *spiritual significance* of Jesus' *coming* (his One Age-Changing Parousia within the transition of Two Ages). They failed to tie the Fall of Jerusalem to the *spiritual significance* of the salvation of God promised in the Hebrew Bible and inaugurated through the Cross and Resurrection of the Son of God. This is a theological and perceptual mistake. *There is no need to have all Christians disappear in order to explain a plausible theory for later theological errors on this issue.*

II. Scholarly Considerations

Nothing prepares us for Paul's supposed teaching of the "rapture" to the Thessalonian Christians. Almost every commentary insists that in this section of the epistle we have "the only place in the New Testament" mentioning the disappearance of the saints at the end of the age (Morris, 145). However, some commentaries note the OT imagery and symbolism, while not applying the way the imagery is used there to here. What I will argue for is that the imagery that Paul uses here is derived from there *and is applied in the same manner as there.*

Findlay notes that "The vein of description, in its vocabulary and colouring, is derived from the Theophanies and Apocalyptic of the Old Testament: see Exod. 19.11, 13, 16ff.; Deut. 23.2; Joel 2.1; Mic. 1.3; Zech. 9.14; Isai. 27.13; Ps. 18.9-11, 47.5" and later adds Exod. 19.17 (Findlay, 100,102). More recently, Ridderbos also noted these passages and adds *Ps* 67 (68).36 and 88 (89).8 (with reference to the LXX) in which these images "sound through" (Ridderbos, 532). Further, he concludes that this passage (4.16-ff) "concentrate[s] in one word, of the salvation of the future of the Lord for his people described in all kinds of grandiose forms and conceptions but still always indescribable" (537). Indeed, Ridderbos agreed with Maurits Sabbe (*Collationes Brugenses et Gandavenses*, IX, "De Paulinische beschrijving van de Paroesie", 1961) and Jacques Dupont ([*SYN CHRISTŌ*] *l'Union avec le Christ suivant Saint Paul*, Louvain-Paris, 1952) who argued that the Sinai Theophany (*Ex* 19.10-18) is behind the imagery here (Ridderbos, 531-536). Ridderbos notes, "It is apparent from this, therefore, how much the parousia of Christ is linked to the coming of Yahweh in judgment according to Old Testament prophecy, *both as regards its substance and its representation*" (531 - italics mine). Further, quoting from G. Vos (*The Pauline Eschatology*, 1930): "In our view it is difficult to debate about the spatial implications of these apocalyptic ideas" (Ridderbos, 535 f. 132). That is, when we make the debate about "air", "heaven", and "up there", we are missing the point of the passage.

From these considerations of the apocalyptic contours and the "literalness" of this passage, N. T. Wright, I believe, hits the mark when he writes, "Unfortunately, [this passage] is also a highly contentious passage, being used with astonishing literalness in popular fundamentalism and critical scholarship alike to suggest that Paul envisaged Christians flying around in mid-air on clouds. The multiple apocalyptic resonances of the passage on the one hand, and its glorious mixed metaphors on the other, make this interpretation highly unlikely." It is his conclusion that Paul "evokes Daniel 7.13" here (Wright, 215), adding yet another OT passage as a suggested background text.

With the above analysis from these scholars I readily concur. In fact, Paul's understanding is that the coming *parousia* event is *fulfillment* of these prophetic ideas in the OT texts, and it is the soon to come *fulfillment* of such that he wished to inform his readers' ignorance.

We often think, and it is often read, that the Thessalonians were questioning the afterlife and existence in the afterlife. Now, keep in mind that these were Christians whose life-change as the result of the gospel was reported "throughout the world" (1.8). They "eagerly awaited" the son to return from heaven and "rescue" them from the "coming wrath" (1.10). This very "wrath" (*the wrath*) was specifically geared to the rebellious House of Judah as 2.16 makes so obvious. Putting this together, then, Paul taught that Jesus was "in heaven" and that while he was there, they were to "wait" until he "returned" from there. The purpose was to "rescue" them from "the wrath which is coming" (1.10) which also was "the wrath which has come upon" the Jews "at last" (2.16). Preterists assume that this "wrath" in view here is in reference to the catastrophe of the 66-70 C.E. war between Israel and Rome and I agree, so there is no need to elaborate on that point.

It is within this context of "the wrath" and the fulfillment of the promises of "salvation" (5.9) that we find "hope" (4.13) and "the hope of salvation" (5.8). The imagery of 5.1-11 is certainly connected to the preceding material, and certainly alludes to definite OT imagery. In fact, it is descriptive of "the wrath which is coming" in apocalyptic terms. We have, then, three main eschatological ingredients: "hope", "wrath" and "salvation." These three themes are found in abundance in OT.

Taking my cue from the above noted allusions to the OT in this text, I will now explore Paul's language and his immediate context historically speaking. The Thessalonians were right to be somewhat troubled about the coming *fulfillment* of the "the hope of salvation". They were obviously somewhat troubled over some of the events taking place in their day. I get the feeling that they were asking Paul for assurance, or reassurance, that *his* gospel, *his* eschatology was in fact unfolding before their eyes; that *his version* of the events going on around them was the correct one, since *many versions* were going around at that time. I do not believe that they were more or less asking if they would "see" Uncle Joey again, or Grandma Josie. There is much more at stake here than such a question.

III. Exegetical Considerations

Paul established the Thessalonian church in the midst of chaos. *It was formed from a Jewish base* (*Acts* 17.1,2). It was also attacked from Jewish antagonists (17.5-ff). The Jews certainly held to a belief in the "resurrection of the dead" and Paul was proclaiming "the resurrection of Jesus" (17.3). He did so "from the Scriptures" (17.2). Thus, the Gentiles and the majority of Jews that believed Paul, believed that "this Jesus" he proclaimed to them "from the Scriptures" was "the Messiah" prophesied about in those Hebrew Scriptures (17.3). *Gentiles were being taught that "this Jesus" was the Jewish Messiah from Hebrew Scriptures.*

"[T]he general exhortative character of I Thessalonians suggests that one need not infer the introduction of entirely new material, as if the audience were totally unfamiliar with the subject of the resurrection itself. Indeed, it is hard to imagine that Paul talked about the resurrection of believers without talking about the resurrection of believers because Christ's resurrection, for Paul, was the very basis for his belief that the new age had dawned. And in Jewish thinking of the time, the new age was associated with the resurrection of believers" (Smith, *I Thess*, 723). Putting this together means that when Paul discussed "resurrection of the dead", he discussed the *new age* in relationship to *Israel's promises*. Since Jesus came

"to *confirm* the promises made to [Israel's] forefathers" (*Rom* 15.8) and "resurrection of the dead ones" was a cherished doctrine that summed up "the hope of Israel", then we must see if *this* be the background to the passage at hand.

This is in total agreement with Part 1 of my Response in this debate in that Paul taught *nothing beyond* what was written in the Scriptures. Imagine, then, that Paul taught "from the Scriptures" the Thessalonians all of these things concerning "This Jesus", but when asked to "comfort them" about "dead ones", he quotes no Scriptures, alludes to no known passage or Promise of the Scriptures, but comes up with a revelation from God about a "rapture" that no one has ever heard before! This is precisely what Stevens wants us to believe, but as we saw, he could not make a case "from the Scriptures" that Paul used concerning his Proposition: "that all true Christians who "lived and remained until the Parousia" were "caught up together with" the resurrected saints "in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air" at His "descent from heaven" at the Parousia in AD 70, thus ending their physical existence on the planet earth."

However, I will now make a case that Paul *was* teaching and comforting them "from the Scriptures" (the scrolls of the Hebrew, or Aramaic, or the LXX rolls he may have had, or his knowledge of these texts from memory. The synagogue in Thessalonica from which these first converts came certainly had "scrolls" and "Scriptures" at their disposal, and many of the Greek speaking proselytes would have been somewhat familiar with the LXX). Paul's text, as the above scholars have noted, is a conflation of "mixed metaphors" and "apocalyptic imagery" taken directly from a number of OT passages and contexts. Paul is, then, applying these many passages to *his own day* in light of the significance of the coming "hope of salvation". He is, as Ridderbos noted, applying the "cloud coming" image of Yahweh to Jesus, *and this is Paul's point*.

Paul is saying that God will justify the Cross and Resurrection of "this Jesus" when he brings about the fulfillment of the great hope: the resurrection of the dead. It is *not* Yahweh acting alone in the great cloud coming. It is *not* Yahweh coming on the clouds as he did in the past. It is *not* just Yahweh, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, coming to "rescue" his people from yet another debacle. Rather, it is "in Christ", "with Jesus", "in Jesus," and *all* "those asleep in Him" that the focus should be upon. Remember, in *Acts* 17, Paul said to the Thessalonians, "*This Jesus is ha Meshiach!*" To believe in *this Jesus*, then, would mean to believe that *this Jesus* would bring about "the hope of salvation" promised for Israel; to raise her from the dead, restore her kingdom under one king and dwell with them forever and ever from that point onward. *This Jesus, Paul's Jesus*, was indeed going to bring this about *in the same manner and nature that Yahweh brought about all the great salvation deliverances of the past!* It is here that Paul "mixes" together various OT allusions and images in his application of them to Jesus...*this Jesus*. It is *this Jesus* and, therefore, *this gospel* that Paul preached to them, that will bring about "the hope of salvation" for Israel and the "resurrection of the dead". This is in keeping with Peter's words, "He must remain in heaven until the time comes for God to restore everything, *as he promised long ago through his holy prophets...anyone who does not listen to him will be completely cut off from among his people*" (*Acts* 3.21,23). Paul is writing to the Thessalonians to remind them that the "restoration of all things" will be consummated *through Jesus*.

When *I Th* 4.16-ff is read in the light of *Ezk* 36 and 37, *Isa* 24-30, and the many *Psalms*, one can begin to see that Paul is doing what Luke records of him while in Thessalonica: *teaching from the Scriptures* (but in Stevens' 42 page Part II, note if you find any OT citations). Before we move further I will translate this passage and then note the many parallels in the "Scriptures" from which, I contend, these words derive their meaning:

Now, we do not want you to be without knowledge, brothers, concerning the sleeping ones, lest you be distressed, indeed, just the many are (the ones not having Hope). For if we believe that, "Jesus died and rose again", so also (we believe that) God will bring with Jesus the ones having slept through Jesus. For this we are speaking to you by word of Yahweh, namely that, we, the ones who are alive, the ones who are remaining unto the parousia of Yahweh, will by no means come first before those who are asleep. This is because the Lord himself will descend from heaven by a shouted command in a voice of an archangel and in a trumpet of God, and the dead ones in Messiah will be resurrected first. Then, we, the ones who are alive, the ones who are remaining, together with the dead ones (them) shall be taken in clouds to a meeting of the Lord in air; and so, always with the Lord we (the dead ones and the remaining ones) will be. Therefore, comfort one another with these very words. Now, concerning the times and the seasons, brothers, it is not necessary to write to you. For you yourselves carefully know that "the day of the Lord" does so come as "a thief at night." Whenever they say, "Peace and safety," then sudden destruction stands over them as "the birth pangs of the pregnant woman." And by no means may they escape. But you, brothers, are not in darkness so that the day should overtake you as a thief. For you are all sons of light and sons of day. We are not of night nor of darkness; therefore, let us not sleep as the many are. Rather, let us "watch and be sober." For the ones who are sleeping, sleep at night, and the ones being drunk, get drunk at night. But we, being of day, let us be sober, "putting on a breastplate of faith and love, and a helmet (which is) a hope of salvation," because God did not appoint us for wrath, but much rather for obtaining of salvation through our Lord, Yeshua ha Meshiach, who died for us in order that whether we watch or we sleep, together with the Lord we may live.

Before making known the parallels contained within this passage with the many verses in the OT, a few notes can be added just from the bare text itself. First, I notice that "the many" are contrasted with those who "have hope." "The many" do not have "hope." Second, "the many" are mentioned again in 5.6 and can be described as "asleep", "drunk", "without hope", "of the night", and are the ones "appointed for wrath" and are to undergo "sudden destruction". These are the ones who will say, "peace and safety" while all around them will fall like a house cards. I cannot but help to define "the many", then, as

the objects of "the wrath which is coming" (2.16). They were the unbelieving and persecuting Jews who were troubling the Thessalonian Christian Jews and Gentiles. As preterists, it should be agreed that Paul has in mind here the events of 66-70 A.D.

These Jews did not have "the hope of salvation" in that they denied the tenet of Paul's gospel: Jesus died and *rose again* into the spiritual world and would also bring about *the restoration of all things* concerning Israel. Third, "salvation" is directly tied to the coming *parousia*. **Salvation** is what is obtained by the dead who would be raised and the saints who would be remaining. Fourth, *already*, the Thessalonians can be called "sons of God" in light of the fact that they had *faith* in the gospel of Paul. This increasing and growing faith would come to fruition and ultimate sanctification "unto the *parousia*" of the Lord, when the true "sons of light" would be distinguished from the false "sons of darkness." One event, the *parousia*, would forever settle the matter that was raised at the Jerusalem Council (*Acts 15*): *is the Gospel a Torah-free fulfillment, or must the Gentiles and Jews maintain strict Torah observance?* In short, is the "gospel" of "the many" here simply "another gospel" or is it "the gospel" announced through *Isaiah*? Whose "gospel" is the correct one? And what about the restoration of Israel and the resurrection of "the dead ones"? Is that happening? Was Paul's Jesus truly bringing that about? *How can we know for sure?* These Thessalonians *did not deny the resurrection of the dead*. Quite the contrary, they affirmed it. What they needed was clarification from Paul concerning his doctrine of the resurrection of the dead, the hope of Israel and would "this Jesus" bring about the restoration and reunion of Israel? They believed in an afterlife (they were Jews and God-fearing Gentiles!), and they believed in resurrection life. The concern centered in on "this Jesus" and the coming "sudden destruction". I will make this plain as we continue.

What they *did know*, as Paul so explicitly assures them, is concerning "the times and the seasons." *Sudden destruction* is predicted. They speak "peace and safety" now, and things may have looked like they were going the way of "the many." But, Paul is reminding them through the prophetic word: "*mark my words, all that the Prophets said would happen to them in the last days will happen to them in the last days. Jesus will vindicate the dead ones, and you, too, who believe in my gospel. He will bring about the restoration of the kingdom to Israel and to all nations, but he will bring about to wrath of God and sudden destruction to "the many" who dare oppose my words.*" Paul is encouraging them to do what it was that they were doing: *hanging on to Paul's doctrine that "in Jesus" the promises of Israel are being and will be fulfilled.* This is over and against the "other gospel" that we find throughout *Acts* and explicitly in the letter to the *Galatians*. Do not doubt the power of this "other gospel" because it persuaded many to "fall away" from Paul's gospel!

There was a false eschatology that accompanied this other gospel as well. It was an eschatology that favored the city of Jerusalem as the center of God's "last days" restoration. Jesus was preached as the Messiah of Israel who championed the Law of Moses, and it was the duty of his followers to demand strict observance of that Law, even over the Gentile converts. God would come soon and the world would be thrown into upheaval as the faithful "sons of light" battled against the enemies of Israel. He would vindicate his people and glorify his city, the city of David, and the Messiah would rule from that city over all the world according to the Law of Moses. The dead would be raised, Israel would be regathered and they would rule over the nations. Paul's eschatology, however, was quite different. The very city they loved would be the scene of sudden chaos and tribulation, never to rise again. The true "sons of light" would be vindicated by their faith in Jesus, having held on to the word of the Lord according to the Scriptures. It was a true time of testing and sifting, and certainly a time for nerves of steel among those committed to Paul's gospel.

It is with this concern that Paul does not want them to be "without knowledge" concerning Jesus and the end times. They knew the Scriptures well enough, especially about "times and seasons." What they needed to have Paul do is make good the "word" that Jesus would be the vehicle "through" which the resurrection of the dead were raised. He does so by tying in the "cloud-coming" passages of Yahweh with the soon-to-come sudden destruction of Jerusalem and Jesus' *parousia* over that city. The proof of Paul's eschatology, of course, had to *wait* until these things were accomplished. As long as the city stood, and as long as the Jews who opposed Paul grew stronger in opposition, some could easily grow unsettled about staking their whole lives on what Paul was saying. To maintain Paul's eschatology, then, required strong *faith* against a seemingly overwhelming tide of false doctrine.

I must emphasize again the "times and seasons" and the fact that the Thessalonians were made up of Jews and God fearing Gentiles who knew the Scriptures. This is why Paul combines many Hebrew images and passages with the coming *parousia* of Jesus. The "God" who promised the "salvation" and "rescue" of Israel in the "last days" would bring *through Jesus* the fulfillment of these things. *When sudden destruction comes upon "the many" who opposed Paul's gospel, then can it be said that Jesus was vindicated by God.* Further, those who followed Jesus would also be vindicated in their faith. The *parousia* and the coming "wrath" and "sudden destruction" happen at the same time. When this happened, the sons of God were "redeemed" for it would be made known at that time that Paul's gospel (indeed, the gospel of the Twelve Apostles) was the correct gospel. Up until that time, however, no such proof was available except for "the Scriptures". The Thessalonians **knew** they were in the "times and seasons" of the last days, when the resurrection of the dead and the restoration of the kingdom to Israel must occur. What they were perhaps "distressed" about is how Jesus would fit into the picture of the end-times scenario (I translate the word *lupeo* in verse 13 as "distressed" or "sorrowed" or "heavy". It is not a grieving because some among them recently died and, as a result, they feared that they would never see them again. This is the "funeral interpretation" that I reject. The exhortation is in contrast with "the many" who "have no hope". These Thessalonians *had hope*, and Paul reminds them that this hope is rooted in Messiah Jesus who raises the dead).

In light of this analysis, it should become clear that "the sleeping ones" in view here are *not* just Christians who died as is so often thought. In view of the context of "hope" and Israel's resurrection, the "sleeping ones" are those explicitly mentioned in the OT as well. It is plain from all accounts that "the dead ones" and the "sleeping ones" are the same group of people being entertained here. It is equally plain, also, that the Hebrew Scriptures uses this idiom for what happened to "the dead ones" (*Dt* 31.16; *II Sam* 7.12; *I Ki* 1.21, etc.). Especially of interest is *Da* 12.2 which uses *katheudo* (Greek), the same word here in 5.6-10. "The sleeping ones" or "the dead ones" stood in need of "resurrection". This "resurrection" according to *Daniel* would happen during "times and seasons" (*Da* 12.7-13) when "the power of the holy people" Israel would be "broken" (12.7). This is Paul's "sudden destruction" coming over "the many" who opposed his gospel. Daniel states, "*Many (polloi* - Greek here and in Paul) of *the sleeping ones* (present active participle of *katheudo* where Paul uses the synonym in 4.13 with a present active participle form, and then uses this word in 5.6-10) will *arise (anastemi* -Gr. here and in Paul, 4.16) - the ones out of many to eternal life (the word Paul uses for "alive") and the ones out of many to eternal disgrace." I am arguing that *this* is one of the passages on the Thessalonians minds and Paul's.

The many who are singled out for eternal life will be brought "with Jesus" because, as Paul asserted, they fell asleep *through* Jesus. The same Daniel that fell asleep was the one who saw "one like a son of man" coming on "the clouds" (*Da* 7). He *believed* in this future hope of redemption and *salvation*. He would be raised from the dead and "receive" his allotted inheritance (*Da* 12.13) "in the last days". How else, though, for Paul, would Daniel and the OT saints receive their inheritance of salvation and redemption *if not through the death and resurrection of Israel's Messiah?*

Paul's reasoning here is plain: *If* we believe in the death and resurrection of Messiah, *then we must* believe that *through, in* and *with* Messiah "the dead ones" will be raised. Note that the reverse of this argument is true for Paul, too. *If the dead ones* are not raised *in Messiah*, the Messiah has not been raised, either! Paul's doctrine was that "the resurrection of the dead" is "in Jesus" (*Acts* 4.2). It was this connection that Paul does not want his readers to be "ignorant" about. The "sleeping ones" promised eternal life and resurrection would be raised "through" and "in" Jesus according to the Scriptures *when* destruction comes upon the wicked "many" who opposed Paul - when the power of the people of Israel is broken. It is this dimension of the resurrection of Jesus that Paul can make the conclusion that those elected for eternal life *must* be raised in Christ's resurrection just as they *must* die in Christ's death. In order to be raised at all to eternal life, it *must* be through the One who died (*Isa* 53) for their sins and who would be raised to see the light (*Isa* 53) again so that "his seed" after him would prosper (53.11). Paul's doctrine of the resurrection of the dead was once tied to fleshly conceptions of glorified "bodies" and resurrected, glorified "corpses" that would have been raised based upon their righteousness earned through their works according to the Torah. This was his *fleshly* conception. However, because of the resurrection of Jesus' body, all of this changed.

Before Paul was Paul, he was Saul. His whole theological enterprise was built on interpreting and understanding the Scriptures. His view of the resurrection of the dead has been described already in that it was fleshly conception that would finalize in a fleshly reign of the restored kingdom of Israel and Israel's Son of David. When the resurrected Messiah Jesus confronts him on that fateful road, Paul's whole understanding of the *nature* of the resurrection of the dead changed. *Jesus*, the *risen* Messiah, becomes the Federal Head in and through which "the dead" are to be raised. Just as the life and death of "the one man" Adam was for "all men", so also the life and death of Israel's Head (*rosh* in Hebrew) would be equally for "all men" whom God called. It was this message of Paul, the death and resurrection of Messiah, that the "resurrection of the dead" is directly tied to. It would be this message that would be proven true when "sudden destruction" came upon "the holy people" instead of "salvation" and "restoration."

This "sudden destruction" would signal the fact that in the invisible kingdom of God, the righteous "sleepers" have been raised "in Jesus." The coming "wrath" upon the city of Jerusalem would be through "this Jesus", now invisible, who would come like Yahweh in the OT Scriptures.

By coloring Jesus' coming with the imagery of Yahweh's coming in the Scripture, Paul was effectively making the point that his gospel would be vindicated in the coming wrath against "the many". God was coming to "rescue" followers of his gospel, not followers of the "other gospel." It was noted above that Sabbe and Dupont looked to Hebrew apocalyptic imagery in this passage rather than Greek Hellenistic conceptions. Dupont, Findley, and Ridderbos mention *Ex* 19 where "voice", "clouds", the "coming down" of the Lord and even a "trumpet blast" are present. It is supposed, then, that Paul sees the coming *parousia* as a Mount Sinai event (old covenant) signaling a Mount Zion event (new covenant). I do not doubt the implication here at all. The theophanic comings of Yahweh use the same images in several places, including the "coming" for Adam and Eve (*Gn* 3.8,9 - see Hebrew text).

One of the texts mentioned above by these scholars was *Ps* 18 (*II Sam* 22), which has been seen as one of the oldest psalms we have (see *Studies in Ancient Yahwistic Poetry*). The setting of this psalm spans the life of David as a warrior against the enemies of Israel and Saul. The fantastic description of God saving David from his enemies has become the foundation in many apocalyptic studies. We have, then, two perspectives in our Bibles: the life of David and his wars from a *historical narrative* standpoint (*I* and *II Sam*) and the same life and wars from an *apocalyptic-poetic* standpoint. When we put them side by side, we can see the differences of the perspectives.

For example, we have the story of David's near misses with King Saul. But, look at how this psalm describes each of these occasions:

To the Overseer. -- By a servant of Jehovah, by David, who hath spoken to Jehovah the words of this song in **the day** Jehovah **rescued** him from the hand of all his enemies, and from the hand of Saul, and he saith: -- I love Thee, O Jehovah, my strength. ² Jehovah *is* my rock, and my bulwark, And **my Rescuer**, My God *is* my rock, **I hope** in Him: **My shield, and a horn of my salvation**, My high tower. ³ The 'Praised One' I call Jehovah, And from my enemies **I am saved**. ⁴ Compassed me have cords of death, And streams of the worthless make me afraid. ⁵ Cords of Sheol have surrounded me, Before me have been snares of death. ⁶ In mine adversity I call Jehovah, And unto my God I cry. He heareth from His temple my voice, And My cry before Him cometh into His ears. ⁷ And shake and tremble doth the land, And foundations of hills are troubled, And they shake -- because He hath **wrath**. ⁸ Gone up hath smoke by His nostrils, And fire from His mouth consumeth, Coals have been kindled by it. ⁹ And He inclineth the heavens, and **descends**, And thick darkness *is* under His feet. ¹⁰ And He rideth on a cherub, and doth fly, And He flieth on wings of wind. ¹¹ He maketh darkness His secret place, Round about Him His tabernacle, Darkness of waters, thick **clouds of air**. ¹² From the brightness over-against Him His thick clouds have passed on, Hail and coals of fire. ¹³ And thunder in the heavens doth Jehovah, And the Most High giveth forth **His voice**, Hail and coals of fire. ¹⁴ And He sendeth His arrows and scattereth them, And much lightning, and crusheth them. ¹⁵ And seen are the streams of waters, And revealed are foundations of the earth. From Thy rebuke, O Jehovah, From the breath of the spirit of Thine anger. ¹⁶ He sendeth from above -- **He taketh me, He draweth me** out of many waters. ¹⁷ He **rescued** me from my strong enemy, And from those hating me, **For they have been stronger than I**. ¹⁸ They go before me in a **day of my calamity** And Jehovah is for a support to me. ¹⁹ And He **bringeth** me forth to a large place, He draweth me out, because He delighted in me. ²⁰ Jehovah doth recompense me According to my righteousness, According to the cleanness of my hands, He doth return to me. ²¹ For I have kept the ways of Jehovah, And have not done wickedly against my God. ²² For all His judgments *are* before me, And His statutes I turn not from me. ²³ And **I am blameless with him**, And I keep myself from mine iniquity. ²⁴ And Jehovah doth return to me, According to my righteousness, According to the cleanness of my hands, Over-against his eyes. ²⁵ With the kind Thou showest Thyself kind, With a perfect man showest Thyself perfect. ²⁶ With the pure Thou showest Thyself pure, And with the perverse showest Thyself a wrestler, ²⁷ For Thou a poor people savest, And the eyes of the high causest to fall. ²⁸ For Thou -- **Thou lightest my lamp, Jehovah my God enlighteneth my darkness** (*Young's Literal Translation with textual changes by me*).

Several things must be pointed out here that strikingly match Paul's language in *I Th 4*. First, Paul used the verb *ruomai* ("rescue", "deliver") in *I Th 1:10*: "and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who **delivers** us from the wrath to come (ESV). This is the same word highlighted above in the psalm in the LXX. The so called "rapture" is God "delivering" or "rescuing" his people from "wrath". The word "wrath" is the same word in *Ps 18:7* in verbal form. The same verb for "hope" in 18.2 occurs in 4.13, and also note the "armor" imagery in 18.2 compared with 5.8 (this armor image comes from *Isa 59:17*, which is about the "coming" of the Lord as well).

For David, these acts of God are "salvation" in terms of rescuing him from "death" and from "sheol." That is, Saul did not kill him, nor did the Philistines or the Moabites. Continuing with the poem, David paints a picture of grandiose proportions as God "descends" (*katabaino* - here and in *I Th 4:16*) with "a voice" (*phonē*), with "a cloud" (*nephele*) of "air" (*aer*). In fact, 18.11 (LXX) has "clouds of air" (*nephalais aeron*) and this is *the only place in the LXX that this phrase occurs and the only place where aer occurs in the LXX!*

The result, or the actual description of God "rescuing" David from "wrath", is found in 18.16-19. God "descends" and "takes" (*lambanomai*) David from "deep waters" and "brings" (*exago* where Paul uses *ago* in 4.14) to a "large place." The result is that David is found "blameless" (*amomos* in LXX - *amemptos* in *I Th 5:23*), and this matches Paul's encouragement for them to be found blameless "at the *parousia*." The *parousia* is defined, then, as *Ps 18:7-15* and is the single **Greek word** used to describe the **Hebrew** Yahwistic "descent" here and in many other passages. Indeed, that is how Paul used the term in *I Th* when he mentions *parousia*, and then defines it in terms borrowed from OT imagery.

Putting all of this together, when God "rescues" his people from "wrath", he "descends" in "clouds of air" and "takes" his people and "brings" them before his presence as "blameless." The "hope" in his power and arm themselves with armor of victory and salvation. Their "hope" will not be disappointed, but will rather disappoint their enemies, who, though "stronger than I" at the moment, will meet their Maker...and it won't be pretty.

It is quite simple to see, then, that Paul, the Hebrew prophet speaking a "word of the Lord" that involves the "rescuing" of God's people would use the language of his forefathers "from the Scriptures." The *one thing*, in fact, *the only thing*, different from David's language and Paul's is *the name of Jesus*. From this perspective, then, it becomes clear that Paul tying "this Jesus" in with all of the wonderful Yahwistic, theophanic descriptions. *It was paramount that the Thessalonians understand that God would bring with Jesus the resurrection of the dead and present not only the dead (Israel) but "we all" together before the Lord to a "large place" to present them all "blameless".* Paul's point: *it is only through Jesus that God's people will be rescued from the coming wrath and raised from the dead, any other version of Jesus that is not Paul's version is to be immediately shunned.*

My original intent in this was to argue that the application of *Ps* 18 to *I Th* 4-5 is the same. The *nature* of David's deliverances were real and in time. We never "see" God descending from the heavens in the historical narratives. We never see waters drying up and arrows flying out of the sky. We never see David disappearing or being lifted up, and we certainly never see coals of fire and lightning. But this is how David the prophet apocalyptically portrays his deliverance. Now, a question to be asked to Stevens is, if David was truly delivered in the manner that he wrote in *Ps* 18, did he have to disappear in order for it to be a "real" or "actual" deliverance? I ask this because Stevens belittles the "figurative" or "spiritual" approach to *I Th* 4 as if to say that *because* it is *spiritual*, then it cannot *be real*. But, let's apply this to David and see if it works! We know that when the city was destroyed and news of that destruction spread abroad, Jewish persecution of Christians virtually came to an end. The Jews have never been a threat to Christianity ever since then, and they certainly cannot claim the numbers of converts that Christianity has produced all over the world. This is because, on our interpretation, the Jewish Messiah raised true Israel from the dead and brought about salvation to the whole world as a result, according to the Scriptures, having transformed dead Israel who bore the image of Adam into alive Israel who now bears the image of the Heavenly Man.

Fortunately, my analysis does not end here, because Paul's language, in agreement with many scholars, is mixed of several texts. *Isa* 27 particularly comes to mind: "And it hath come to pass, **in that day**, Beat out doth Jehovah from the branch of the river, Unto the stream of Egypt, And ye **are gathered** one by one, **O sons of Israel**.¹³ And it hath come to pass, **in that day, It is blown with a great trumpet**, And **come in** have those perishing in the land of Asshur, And those exiled in the land of Egypt, And have bowed themselves to Jehovah, **In the holy mount -- in Jerusalem**" (YLT).

Gileadi, in his masterful work on *Isaiah* (see Bibl.) notes the parallels between *Isa* 27.13-ff and other "restoration" passages, including "resurrection" passages like 25.8-9; 26.19). That is, *when God restores and raises Israel from the dead a great trumpet will sound and Israel will be "gathered together"* (*sunago* - same word in *I Th* 2.1). They are "brought" into the gates of the New Jerusalem. The description of this Jerusalem is found in *Isa* 26.1-3: "In **that day** sung is this song in the land of **Judah**: 'We have a strong **city, Salvation** He doth make **walls and bulwark**.² Open ye **the gates**, that enter may **a righteous nation**, Preserving steadfastness.³ An imagination supported Thou fortifiest peace -- peace! For in Thee it is confident" (YLT). Stevens imagines that the New Jerusalem is strictly "heaven" up there somewhere, and we only enter into its "gates" when we physically die! But here, the city is clearly defined in *spiritual* terms: the hope of Salvation, the very hope the Thessalonians had, forms the walls of this city. The newly transformed *righteous nation* of God's people, the "blameless" and "sanctified" in Jesus, enter into it by their "steadfastness." Stevens' view postpones this wonderful *spiritual* reality for all Christians who should view these things as *now applicable to their lives*. Stevens cannot apply them now because the world, in his view, is sin sick, evil filled, and woe is me...that is, until we all groan right up until death. It is a much more rewarding Christianity that understands "all of the Promises" as now "yes and amen."

When seen from this light, Paul is encouraging the Thessalonian Jews and Gentiles with the Scriptures. He is commenting on the promises of God to "raise" Israel from the dead (*Da* 12.2) and "bring with Jesus" those who were on earth into "the Holy Mount - Jerusalem!" That is, if the gates and walls of Jerusalem are "salvation" and they were waiting to "obtain salvation" (*I Th* 5.9), then entrance into "salvation" would be the same as entrance into the "gates" of the City whose walls are called, "salvation". What signaled this event was the historical "sudden destruction" of the enemies of God, the sons of darkness. They are "the sleeping ones" who would "awake" to "everlasting contempt". The "sleeping ones in Christ" (the dead) and those who were following Paul's gospel (the "awake" or the "alive in Christ") would be brought into salvation, and because of the destruction of Jerusalem, they would now have certainty of their faith.

In Stevens' conception we have a weird set up. The promises of salvation are given through Christ, but only a few will "get the benefits" as he says. They will go to heaven (heaven is the benefit). Then, in the "age to come" after the *parousia*, most Christians have to live on earth, not in the new heavens and new earth, but a still sin sick, evil filled, woe is me earth. Earth now becomes some sort of limbo land; a catch-between betwixt heaven and hell. But this is not at all how the prophets view the age to come. Rather, the new Jerusalem comes down out of heaven, dwells on earth, and the peoples are gathered into it "through out all generations". It is an ever expanding "tent" (*Isa* 54) or "sheepfold" (*Mic* 2.12,13). *One enters the gates of Salvation while on earth*, but in Stevens' imagery one cannot enter into the gates of heaven/Jerusalem/salvation until they physically die! Stevens tries to downplay this in saying that he believes that "spiritually" or "positionally" we are in the New Jerusalem, but he must also add that we are not *actually* or *physically* there yet. This, for me, is the most damaging result of Stevens' rapture theory. It leaves us with yet another "wait until we all get to heaven" pie in the sky theology, the very thing God defeated in Christ. God wants to *dwell with men on the earth he created!* Through Christ, "thy kingdom came, thy will was done *on earth* as is it *in heaven*." ***The goal of the redemptive work of Christ was to bring the fullness of the Godhead to the good earth God made in order to dwell in holiness with the new Man he made in the image of Christ his Son. Stevens' view completely defeats this purpose.***

Again, following the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead as taught "from the Scriptures" we come to *Ezk* 37, where the "whole house of Israel" is raised and restored as "one nation" (37.22). The promise is that God will "gather together" and "bring" (*eisago*) them back into a restored kingdom where he will dwell with them forever. The "nations" are converted when these things take place. This will be the time when God makes Israel "holy" (or "sanctifies" them 37.28) and is the same thing Paul prays for the Thessalonians (5.23). For Paul this was time for God making his people "holy."

One of the more puzzling aspects of Paul's mentioning of the "dead" for those who do not have the covenantal-scriptural background for this text at hand is his comment that the "dead ones" must arise "first." When, however, seen from the scriptural view of the prophets, the "dead" must clearly "rise first". In *Ezk* and all other like passages, the "dead" rise first, *then* "the nations will know that I am the Lord who makes Israel holy" (37.28). This is the same as saying "to the Jew first, then the Gentile." The "dead", if seen as "the sleeping ones" in *Da* 12.2 or *Ezk* 37, etc., must have first priority in the scheme of God's plan for redeeming the world. We find this very same pattern in Paul's words found in *Rom* 11.12-15. The rejection of *part* of Israel brought some riches of salvation to the world, so, "what will *greater riches* will their *fullness* bring"? Of course, the "riches" here are the riches of the inheritance the prophets foresaw coming with Israel's glorification (*Isa* 60.1-ff), which in turn was greater blessings for the world. This "fullness" Paul equates with "life from the dead" (*Rom* 11.15) and this occurs "when the Deliverer is come" (11.26), quoting from *Isa* 27.9 and 59.20,21! Paul gives "the dead ones" historical priority and covenantal priority in keeping with the Scriptures and in this way he is not "anti-Jew". His gospel is *pro-Jew*. Jesus is bringing about the transformation of *Israel* and the decimation of the enemies of God's people. It is this that Paul wants his readers most informed about. Paul has not exchanged the transforming power of the Spirit to those "alive and remaining" as a substitute for the resurrection and restoration of Israel. Rather, the Spirit's transforming work *guaranteed* the "inheritance" to come, the "allotted inheritance" to be received when "the dead" are raised (*Da* 12.13). *In order for the full blessings to come upon the whole world and the nations, the dead must be raised first - Israel must first be restored and gathered together under one King into one nation as one body and one new man, as one "stick" having one Lord and one faith.* Paul affirmed to the Thessalonians that Jesus was bringing this very thing about.

Much more can be said about this, and hopefully much more will be said, but in the interest of time I want to continue to move through this passage hitting the highlights which further confirm that my overall analysis is the correct path to tread. There are no "flying" bodies here; no "when we all get to heaven" hymns; and no "pie is only in the sky" promise. As I move through the material, this becomes more and more confirmed.

Paul talks about "times and dates" as something they "carefully knew" already. They must have gotten this information from the Scriptures, and the scriptural allusions continue to fly at us as we move through this passage. The phrase "day of the Lord" is familiar to anyone studying the OT and one can easily find many references to it using a concordance. *Zech* 14, for example, envisages it as a day when the "Lord" descends from heaven and Jerusalem is destroyed. However, a new Jerusalem is created and afterwards *the people on earth* either worship this new Lord and King, or are accursed.

I will now argue that one of the passages in the mind of Paul here is *Hosea* 6.1-7.1 only because of the remarkable similarity between the two passages:

In their affliction they will rise early to me: Come, and let us return to the Lord. ² For he **hath taken us**, and he will heal us: he will strike, and he will cure us. ³ He will revive us after two days: on the third day he will **raise us up**, and we **shall live in his sight**. We shall know, and we shall follow on, that we may know the Lord. His going forth is prepared as the **morning light**, and he will come to us as **the early and the latter rain** to the earth. ⁴ What shall I do to thee, O Ephraim? what shall I do to thee, O Juda? your mercy is as a morning cloud, and as the dew that goeth away in the morning. ⁵ For this reason have I hewed them by the prophets, I have slain them by the words of my mouth: and thy judgments shall go forth as **the light**. ⁶ For I desired mercy, and not sacrifice: and the knowledge of God more than holocausts. ⁷ But they, like Adam, have transgressed the covenant, there have they dealt treacherously against me. ⁸ Galaad is a city of workers of idols, supplanted with blood. ⁹ And like the jaws of highway robbers, they conspire with the priests who murder in the way those that pass out of Sichem: for they have wrought wickedness. ¹⁰ I have seen a horrible thing in the house of Israel: the fornications of Ephraim there: Israel is defiled. ¹¹ And thou also, O Juda, set thee a harvest, when I shall **bring back** the captivity of my people.

7:1 When I would have **healed Israel**, the iniquity of Ephraim was revealed, and the wickedness of Samaria, for they have committed falsehood, and **the thief is come** in to steal, the robber is without (DRA)

This passage has to do with the "times and seasons" of Judah and Israel and the "restoration" of the two Houses. This "restoration" is called a "resurrection" (same word here as in Paul). We know of the allusion and quote of *Hos* 6.3 (*I Co* 15.3) and *Hos* 13.14 (*I Co* 15.54), respectively, when Paul dealt there with the "resurrection of the dead." The imagery of "light" is also found here and in our Thessalonian passage. What is striking, though, is that *harpazo* (Greek) is found in 6.1. This is the word translated as "caught up" in *I Th* 4.16 - the famous "rapture" word! In the LXX the idea is that God has "taken" Israel in order to "heal" Israel. This word is often associated with lions who "take" and "tear" their prey. It is also associated with thieves who "take" their plunder (the word is sometimes translated as "plunder" - that which is taken). Here, then, we have *harpazo* and *anistemi* (resurrection) together as we do in *I Th* 4.

The "healing" of Ephraim would bring about "the revelation" (*apokalupto*) of their "iniquity". This "healing" coincides with the "return from exile" or "restoration/resurrection" on the "third day." Jesus, of course, was raised on the "third day" and for Paul, Jesus' resurrection *set into motion* the "resurrection of the dead." The dead are raised in Christ since Christ is the Resurrection. It is in this fashion that Paul can speak the dead "who are being raised" (present indicative) and also as "will be raised" in the consummation of what *has already begun*. Because of their sin, "the thief comes" to steal (take away, plunder). In a play with these words in the LXX, I believe Paul is repeating what he had previously taught to the

Thessalonians: Jesus will come again to raise the dead and restore (heal) Israel, revealing the sin of Israel and coming like a thief to plunder and "snatch away" Israel's possessions: the people of God. The result is that those "snatched away" will live "in the light" before the presence of God in the "latter rain" of the "times and seasons" of God's redemptive work. There was a time of "repentance" that Paul awaited for in his own day concerning those still hardened among Israel, and the coming of this repentance would mean the "fullness of Israel" and "greater riches for the world."

I can continue to make notes to the OT background of Paul's material that continues in chapter 5 of this letter. The "Day of the Lord" is the *parousia* of the Lord Jesus, and therefore, *all* of the OT references to this eschatological event in Israel's redemptive history are now seen as fulfilled in something that Jesus, the Son of God, will bring to fruition.

As for "peace and safety" announced by "the many" in those days, we have a direct parallel in *Jer* 4.10-20 where "peace" is announced in the face of God "coming in the clouds" and destroying the city of Jerusalem "in a flash, in an instant" (suddenly - same word). *Jer* 6.14 speaks of the false prophets saying "peace, peace" when there was no peace (also 8.11). *Jer* 14.13 tells of the false notion of "assuredness and peace" to a people on the brink of judgment.

The theme of "labor pains" is not foreign to Israel's announced eschatology in the "last days", either. In *Isa* 26.17-19, as passage already considered, we read: When a **pregnant woman cometh near to the birth, She is pained -- she crieth in her pangs, So we have been from Thy face, O Jehovah.**¹⁸ We have conceived, we have been pained. We have brought forth as it were wind, **Salvation** we do not work in the earth, Nor do the inhabitants of the world fall.¹⁹ **Thy dead shall live -- My dead body they shall rise. Awake and sing, ye dwellers in the dust,** For the dew of herbs *is* thy dew, And the land of Rephaim thou causest to fall" (YLT). Again, we have matching vocabulary between Isaiah and Paul. The connection here is that "salvation" and "resurrection" are equivalent. *The resurrection of the dead and the time of awaking is the time of salvation.* It is also "in that day" of Israel's "dead body" arising (note the singular *dead body*, not *bodies*!) that "the great trumpet" will sound (27.13). It is also in that Day that renewed Israel, the *people of God*, the risen *dead body*, will "take root and bud and blossom and fill whole world" (27.6)! Dear readers, honestly ask if a renewed People of God can *take root* on the earth and *fill the world* when God has just taken them *out of the earth* (so they can't take root) and out of the world (so they can't fill it!) according to Stevens' rapture theory. *The resurrection of the dead, parousia, and alive and remaining believers would "all" be made into "one new man" (together) so that this One New Man would "take root" and "fill the whole world" bringing "healing to the nations" through the everlasting Gospel.* This would be *impossible* in Stevens' view because there is no continuity between the church that was renewed and raptured and the *brand new* church that would have to start again after the first church was raptured! The prophets foretell nothing of the kind. Even Walt Hibbard, another advocate for this view, stated that the "rapture" cannot be found in the OT! Does it not strike the reader as strange that *all* of this imagery can be found in the OT *except for this one pet doctrine of Stevens*?

As we continue, Paul affirms that the Day of the Lord will not come to them "as a thief." They are the ones being "taken" or "stolen" out of the rebellious House. They will know it because they, from the Scriptures, "carefully know" the "times and seasons." They were slightly "ignorant" about the role Jesus played in the resurrection of the "sleeping ones", and this Paul clarifies. They are now encouraged with being "sons" of God (which was proleptically true, and would be made true at the *parousia*).

Paul then does something interesting. "The sleepers" in the previous material referred to the "dead ones". Here, "sleepers" takes on a more metaphorical sense of being *spiritually asleep*. We must explore this. Paul can clearly jump back and forth with terms like "sleepers" and "death". One can be physically alive, yet "dead" in their sins and "asleep." One can be spiritually made alive, but physically "dead" and "asleep in Christ" until the *parousia*. By understanding the *covenantal meaning* and the *physical meaning* of these terms, we can unravel much of Paul's thoughts.

Conclusion:

It is in the death and resurrection of Christ that those called and elect "in Christ" also die and are raised. If Jesus is "the Resurrection and the Life," then, obviously, those who had faith in God must come to life "in" and "through" Christ. The saints of Israel's past, who have "slept with their fathers" (to use the Hebrew idiom), like David and Abraham, must be raised "in Christ" and "through Christ". They will be "brought" before the presence of God and presented as holy and blameless "in the last days" according to the many passages of the Prophets. The grand ceremony is not only for them, however, as Paul made clear. Jesus is "bringing" in the dead before the Father, but he is also taking out of fleshly Israel and the world a people who will remain on the earth. When the dead are raised in or around the time of the "sudden destruction" of the temple in Jerusalem, those who remain on earth would be rest assured with divine proof from heaven that they, too, along with the glorified dead saints, stand in the *same* glory and blessedness as they now do. The historical fulfillment of the destruction of Jerusalem would have been the time to shout "thy dead live! Thy dead has been restored unto you forever! Your body has been raised! And we, as members of that same body, have been caught up together with them in Jesus Christ to live with the Lord forever and ever! Let us proclaim to the whole world: the kingdoms of the world have become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ and in him shall all things live! Come! Drink of the living waters!" Praise the Lord, indeed!