

THE RAPTURE QUESTION: PART 2

I. THE PURPOSE OF CHRIST'S RETURN.

A. *Final redemption.* Look up...your redemption draweth nigh."

1. *Gathering.* "...gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven." (Mark 13:27).
 - a. Gathering of wheat into barns.
 - b. Gathering all things that are in heaven and in earth.
2. *Resurrection.*
 - a. Man is not man in the earthly sphere without a body that relates him to it--he is an earthling.
 - b. The heavenly sphere has no place or need for a body (hence the believer's existence as spirit there).
 - c. But on this earth there is, and on the new earth there will be, a proper and essential place for the body.
 - d. Thus, we look forward to the resurrection of the body for the life of the world to come.
 - e. It will be a body adapted to the new order of things that lies beyond.
3. *Translation.*

B. *Judgment of the evildoers.*

II. CAUGHT UP.

A. This "catching up" points to the sovereign action of God and the passivity of the believer.

1. "I go to prepare a place for you. And when I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also" (Joh 14:2-3)

B. To meet the Lord...

1. To meet the Lord is literally "to a meeting of the Lord."
2. The word "meet" is used elsewhere in the New Testament in only two places.
 - a. Mat 25:6. The parable of the bridegroom who comes at midnight when the ten virgins are asleep. A cry rings out, "Behold, the bridegroom! Come and to meet (to a meeting) him. Then the virgins who have oil for their lamps are prepared and go "in with him to the marriage feast."
 - b. Acts 28. Some Christian brethren who have invited Paul's company to stay with them in Rome "came as far as the Forum of Appius and Three Taverns to meet (to a meeting) us." (v. 15). Then they accompanied Paul into the city.
3. In both scriptures, the implication of the word "meeting" is that of joining the person (the bridegroom or Paul) on his continuing journey.

4. It seems clear that the meeting with the Lord in the air is to join Him in His continuing descent.
 - a. "The Lord himself will descend from heaven" hardly suggests that the descent will be only to "the air."
 - b. The saints will accompany Him in the final stage of His journey to the earth itself.

III. IN THE AIR.

- A. Air is still in earth's atmosphere.
- B. It is not in outer space. Air only goes so many thousands of feet up from the earth, and it is still considered to be a part of the earth's atmosphere.
- C. The gathering together unto the Lord is within the immediate atmosphere of the earth.

IV. SO SHALL WE EVER BE WITH THE LORD. To ever be with the Lord does not mean an immediate return to heaven, certainly not a long continuance in the air, but includes being with Him in His mission to earth and forever thereafter.

V. THE CLOUDS OF HEAVEN.

- A. Christ will return on the clouds of heaven.
 1. "The sign of the Son of man in heaven
 2. "And they will see the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven." (Mt. 24:30).
 3. "...in clouds." (Mark 13:26).
 4. "...in a cloud." (Lu 21:27)
 5. "...coming with the clouds." (Rev 1:7).
- B. The return will be *from heaven to earth*. It will begin in heaven. The clouds will have heavenly origins.
- C. His coming will be in like manner that he went away.
 1. He went from visibility to invisibility.
 2. It will be in reverse upon His return.
 3. It is apparent that he went and will return in the clouds of heaven.
- D. Clouds symbolic of the manifestation of the glory of God.
 1. The clouds are of the same order as the clouds that are frequently depicted in the Bible as accompanying a divine visitation or action.
 2. At Mount Sinai there is the scene of the Lord coming to the mountain "in a thick cloud."
 3. On another occasion the cloud covered the mountain and God spoke with Moses "out of the midst of the cloud" (ex. 24:15-18).
 4. "The Lord descended in the cloud and stood with him there" (Ex. 34:5).
 5. After Moses' completed the tabernacle - "*Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle* (Ex. 40:34).
 6. When Solomon finished the temple---"*...a cloud filled the house of the Lord.*" (I Kings 8:10).
 7. Ezekiel - "*...he beheld "a great cloud, with brightness round about it, and*

fire flashing forth continually, and in the midst of the fire, as it were gleaming bronze" (Ex 1:4).

8. Peter, James, and John with Jesus - *"...a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him" (mat 17:5).*
9. Therefore, clouds are frequently shown as vehicles of the divine presence and activity.
10. To come on (or with, or in)the clouds means to *return in glory.*
 - a. *"...the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle."*
 - b. Cloud and glory are closely connected.
 - c. Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting, because the cloud abode upon it, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle (Ex. 40:35).
 - d. After Solomon built the temple, a cloud filled the temple. *"...the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud; for the glory of the Lord filled the house of the Lord."* (I Kings 8:11).
 - e. The cloud is the emblem of the glory of God--a glory awesome and majestic.
 - f. When Jesus returns on a cloud, He returns in glory.
 - g. Jesus speaks of *"the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory (Mat 24:30).*
- E. Clouds also represent people.
 1. *"Seeing we are encompassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses..."* refers to a group of select people who were identified as heroes of faith in Heb. 11.
 2. Peter spoke of the ungodly as *"wells without water: and clouds that are carried with a tempest."* (2 Pet 2:17).
 3. Jude referred to these same individuals as *"clouds without water"* (Jude 12).
- F. Earthly clouds are so high above the earth.
 1. If in airplane, could be above clouds.
 2. If Jesus came while you were in the airplane, would you go up to meet Him or down to meet Him?
 3. If people in the U. S. went "up" to meet the Lord, and people in China went "up" to meet the Lord, where would they end up? Up from China is the opposite direction that up from U. S. A.
- G. What would happen if Jesus came on a cloudless day?

VI. SPLITTING THE EASTERN SKY?

- A. *As the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be." (Mat 24:27).*
- B. As the lightning flashes across the whole sky from east to west so that no one can fail to see it, so will the coming of Christ be. It will be wholly visible, a public coming--all will behold it as it happens.

THE VIEW OF IMMINENCE.

- A. Argument to support a pretribulational coming of Christ is that such a coming can occur at any time.
 - 1. If there is yet to be a Great Tribulation, it is futile to proclaim the coming of the Lord as an imminent hope.
 - 2. The New Testament does not teach a return at any moment.
- B. Jesus did declare, "*Watch...for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming.*" (Mat. 24:42).
- C. "*Of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only.*" (Mat 24:36).
- D. Sudden and unexpected.
 - 1. "*Therefore you must also be ready; for the Son of man is coming at an hour you do not expect.*" (Mat 24:44).
 - 2. Like a thief.
 - a. "*You yourselves know well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night*" (1 Thes. 5:2).
 - b. "*The day of the Lord will come like a thief.*" (2 Peter 3:10).
 - c. "*Lo, I am coming like a thief.*" (Rev. 16:15).
 - 3. Just as a thief comes suddenly and unexpectedly, so the Lord Himself will return.
 The same element of suddenness and unexpectedness exists for both; however, the difference lies in the element of surprise.
 Although a thief comes unexpectedly, believers will not be surprised when this occurs.

The sudden and unexpected return of the Lord does not necessarily mean a return at any moment.

The Lord's first coming was "sudden and unexpected." Although there were abundant Old Testament prophecies and signs, Christ came at a moment no one expected.

As the disciples were gathered on one place, "*Suddenly a sound came from heaven like the rush of a mighty wind.*" (Acts 2:2)

The disciples were not surprised--they were faithfully awaiting His coming; but they had not been told the exact time.

We are not to seek to pinpoint the exact time.

- A. Imminency not required for purifying effect.