

The Future of Christ's Followers

Raptured into Heaven, or
Gathered Together on Earth?



THE theme of the Return of Christ is clearly revealed in the Bible. It shows that dramatic circumstances will surround this important incident in human history. Jesus Christ is coming to recover the world from the morass of wickedness and evil into which it has so sadly sunk. He will call together his followers from every age and generation, and equip them with power and authority to assist him in bringing the world back to God, and to bestow upon it the blessings promised from the beginning of time. But many people have a mistaken view of what will occur. Some look for a "rapture" in which they will be suddenly jolted out of their environment and whisked into heaven, there to remain with the Lord Jesus amongst the clouds above. The Scriptures teach no such thing. The return of Jesus Christ will fulfil a divine promise given to faithful Abraham, that his true descendants will inherit the earth and rule the world in peace and equity. These principles are examined in this booklet, and we invite the reader to compare our comments with the Bible references quoted. And then send for the free book advertised on the back cover.

HERALD OF THE COMING AGE

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DECLARING THE TRUTH OF THE SCRIPTURES REVEALED FOR THE SALVATION OF THOSE WHO ARE PREPARED TO EXAMINE THE CLAIMS OF HOLY WRIT; AND PRESENTING THE GLORIOUS MESSAGE OF THE SECOND COMING OF JESUS CHRIST AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF GOD'S ETERNAL KINGDOM ON EARTH.

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The Future for Christ's Followers

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TO many people the future is bleak, filled with anxiety and fear. They are unsure of what lies ahead for themselves, family and friends. And well they might! For none of the world's leaders can offer any satisfactory solution to the present problems that face humanity.

Sharing their dilemma, church leaders offer a bewildered public the escapism of a vain hope not found in the Scriptures. They offer a future not based upon reality nor truth. They suggest that at death immortal souls wing their way to heaven, there to enjoy an idyllic existence on clouds without point or purpose. In this, they ignore the clear testimony of the Scriptures, that ***"no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven"*** (John 3:13). Nowhere does the Bible teach that, at death, men and women ascend into the skies. Instead, it affirms that the future of the faithful awaits the day of resurrection when as ***"the Resurrection and the Life"*** (John 11:25) Christ will return to raise from the dead those who are amenable to God's judgment, and to reward with eternal life those whom he deems faithful.

Others paint the graphic picture of what they term a

Rapture in which, at some dramatic moment, the faithful will be jolted out of their normal environment, and drawn up into the clouds, there to “meet the Lord”, leaving behind them a trail of confusion and consternation. One writer penned an account of what he expected at some time in the future. His book, *How the World Will End* (S. Kirban) was a best-seller, with sales of over a quarter of a million copies. It portrays the second coming of Christ as a drama of vanishing Christians; of millions of people suddenly disappearing in the most sensational fashion. He describes it thus:

“When the Rapture (or second coming of Christ) does come, it will not only separate believers from unbelievers, but it will separate husbands from wives, brothers from sisters, and friends from friends.

“In just the twinkling of an eye, you might discover that your wife is no longer there in the kitchen, or you might call your husband’s office and discover that he had suddenly disappeared.

“You might be on a picnic with your children, and in just an instant realise that they have simply vanished.

“You might be driving down the road on a turnpike at 60mph, and suddenly see two or three cars erratically hurtling down the highway, driverless.

“You might be flying in an airplane when suddenly the pilot vanishes and the co-pilot has to take over the controls.

“And quite possible, you might be sitting in church on a Sunday morning and in a congregation of 500 people, suddenly 30, 40 or 50 people simply disappear from the audience and yet you and hundreds of others are still left on earth, including the minister!

“This is the scene that will occur when Christ first comes back to earth to receive His saints unto Himself.

This is most commonly known as the Rapture, or the Second Coming of Christ.”

The idea of such a *Rapture* at the coming of Christ is receiving increasing support throughout the religious world. It is claimed by its exponents, on the basis of Bible teaching, that believers will be snatched away from the earth and taken into heaven when the Lord appears, as a preliminary to the destruction of the world. But we will demonstrate that the

Bible teaches no such thing. It proclaims the coming of Jesus Christ as an event of supreme importance affecting all people, initiating God's final purpose with this earth: that His glory is revealed throughout the entire world (see Numbers 14:21).

"Rapture" is not a Bible word. It is a word in the English language that describes *ecstatic joy or delight* or even *the carrying of a person to another place or sphere of influence*. In its ancient form of Old English, it signifies the *act of carrying off*, and therefore has the meaning *to be caught up and conveyed away* (*Encyclopedia World Dictionary*).

Christ Will Return

Let us establish that Christ will return to the earth *personally* and *visibly*, as when he left it, two thousand years ago. This is important to understand, for Christ is not going to be stationed mysteriously halfway in the air, drawing his believers up to himself! There is absolutely no doubt about this, for the second advent of the Lord is clearly predicted in the Bible, and political and social signs that testify to his imminent re-appearance, are plainly evident today.

Consider *some* of this evidence. We write "some", for Biblical references to the second coming to the earth of the Lord Jesus Christ are innumerable. The Scriptures contain over three hundred references to it, and in fact the Bible cannot be correctly understood if its teaching concerning the return of the Lord is ignored. This subject is so important that if a person does not believe in the second coming of Christ, he does not believe in the most fundamental teaching of the Bible.

The Second Coming is not only expressed in the language of figure, parable or symbol, but is also taught in clear, straightforward statements that cannot be misunderstood.

Here are some such statements:

- The Lord Jesus told his disciples: "***They shall see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory***" (Luke 21:27).

- Angels who were present when Jesus ascended into heaven instructed his disciples: "***This same Jesus which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven***" (Acts 1:11).

- The apostle Peter later preached the gospel to the people

of Jerusalem and declared: ***“Times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord; and He shall send Jesus Christ... whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets, since the world began”*** (Acts 3:19-21).

- The apostle Paul explained the process involved in resurrection from the dead: ***“Every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ’s at his coming”*** (1Corinthians 15:23).

- In the last book of the Bible, the apostle John prophesies concerning the impact Christ’s coming will have upon the nations: ***“Every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him; and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him”*** (Revelation 1:7).

Moreover, these facts reveal that Christ is not only to return, but that we are living in the very epoch when this will occur, and will therefore be personally affected by what will occur.

The present growth of permissiveness in society, violence, crime, and the general repudiation of godly principles, testify to Christ’s warning, that ***“as it was in the days of Noah, and Lot, so it will be in the day when the Son is revealed”*** (Luke 17:26-30). Increasing worldwide tension, and international rivalry shows how true was his prediction that his return would be foreshadowed by a time of ***“distress of nations with perplexity”*** with ***“men’s hearts failing them for fear”*** (Luke 21:25-26).

For What Purpose is Christ Coming?

Is he coming to destroy the earth, as some proclaim? No! Christ is coming to consummate the purpose of God that will involve his reign on earth as king over a world at peace. When the Lord was arraigned before the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate, he was asked: ***“Art thou a king then? Jesus answered, ‘Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice’.***” Clearly he anticipated receiving at a future time his appointment as king over all the earth. But this will not be accomplished without vast political upheavals and

dramatic changes throughout the earth.

Ultimately, all nations will be subjected to his authority and rule. Jerusalem will be rebuilt as a temple-city for universal worship, and will become the metropolis of the world-empire he will control. It will become the centre of his administration from whence his teaching and law shall go out to all the world.

This is taught in such clear and unambiguous testimony as: ***"The God of heaven shall set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these [other] kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever"*** (Daniel 2:44). ***"For he [Christ] must reign till he hath put all enemies under his feet"*** (1Corinthians 15:25). ***"For the nation and the kingdom that will not serve thee shall perish"*** (Isaiah 60:12). ***"The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of His Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever"*** (Revelation 11:15). ***"The Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all the nations"*** (Isaiah 61:11). ***"The Lord God shall give unto him [Christ] the throne of his father David; and he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end"*** (Luke 1:32-33). ***"The Lord of hosts shall reign in Mount Zion, and in Jerusalem, and before his ancients gloriously"*** (Isaiah 24:23). ***"At that time they shall call Jerusalem the throne of the Lord; and all nations shall be gathered unto it, to the name of the Lord, to Jerusalem: neither shall they walk any more after the imagination of their evil heart"*** (Jeremiah 3:17). ***"It shall come to pass, that every one that is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem [for war], shall even go up from year to year to worship the king"*** (Zechariah 14:16). ***"Jerusalem is the city of the great king"*** (Matthew 5:35). ***"For the Lord shall be king over the whole earth"*** (Zechariah 14:9).

These Bible references clearly teach that the Lord Jesus is to reign on earth from the city of Jerusalem. He is to intervene in world affairs in order to fulfil the prophecy uttered by angels at the birth of the Lord: ***"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men"*** (Luke 2:14). The words of

hope expressed in the Lord's prayer will then become a reality: ***"Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven"*** (Matthew 6:10).

The Lord will not reign alone. He will require associates with him in the governing of the nations. The present-day call of the gospel is an invitation to individuals that they should identify with Christ now, in order to reign with him in that day of glory.

Again, in this matter, the teaching of the Bible is explicit: ***"It is a faithful saying... If we suffer, we shall also reign with him"*** (2Timothy 2:11-12). ***"Thou [Christ] wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; and hast made us unto our God, kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth"*** (Revelation 5:9-10). ***"Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection; on such the second death hath no power [because they shall receive eternal life], but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years"*** (ch. 20:6). ***"He that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations; and he shall rule them with a rod of iron"*** (ch. 2:26-27).

The Bible teaches that when the Lord Jesus returns to earth, he will first come to his own followers. Unknown to the world, which at that time will be embroiled in a ***"time of trouble"*** (Daniel 12:1), he will raise from the dead those who have believed on him, and will reward the righteous with life eternal (Romans 2:6-7). They will constitute the immortal aristocracy of the kingdom he will set up on earth. In their company, he will establish his rule in Jerusalem, and command the obedience of all nations (Psalm 2). Some will submit, others will resist. Those who peacefully accept his rulership, will be incorporated as the mortal subjects of the great theocracy of the future; the latter will be compelled by his divine power to submit to his rule, or to suffer punishment. So that ***"whoso will not come up of all the families of the earth unto Jerusalem to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, even upon them shall be no rain. And if the family of Egypt go not up, and come not, that have no rain; there shall be the plague"*** (Zechariah 14:17-18).

Finally ***“all kings shall fall down before him; all nations shall serve him”*** (Psalm 72:11). A state of peace and equity will be established on earth: ***“Many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths; for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more”*** (Isaiah 2:2-4). ***“The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever”*** (Revelation 11:15). ***“The kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom UNDER the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the most High, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him”*** (Daniel 7:27).

Notice that the Scriptures cited define the location of the future divine kingdom to be established as being **ON** earth and **UNDER** heaven. This fact is important in view of current notions concerning the so-called *rapture*.

Vast Changes to Occur

Christ's reign on earth will not be established without vast and dramatic changes in the earth. The nations will not readily submit to his rule, but will be humbled by the outpouring of divine judgments in the wars of Armageddon and its aftermath. The result will be a political earthquake without precedence in history. The present governmental order will be completely overthrown to make way for Christ's New World Order. Current theories will be discarded whether they be communistic, capitalistic, socialistic or democratic, and will be replaced by a new, hitherto untried, system among Gentiles: the *theocratic*. This will comprise a benevolent dictatorship that will elevate God in the considerations of mankind, whilst fully providing for the needs of humanity. It will be established upon the basis of truth, thus bringing the facts concerning divine revelation clearly to the attention of all mankind. By such means, God's purpose in creation will be fulfilled, and

“all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord”
(Numbers 14:21).

But though the establishment of Christ's rule on earth will instigate a dramatic disruption to present conditions, and major, worldwide changes, the so-called *rapture* will not be one of these. As we have noted above, it is not a Biblical word. Why then is it promoted so enthusiastically by a large proportion of Christendom? It is because they have failed to comprehend the basic teaching concerning Christ's second coming as outlined above, and have been led astray by the wrong interpretation of a single passage of Scripture.

The Rapture: A Human Fantasy

It is claimed that the doctrine of the *rapture* is taught in the statement of 1Thessalonians 4:13-18. Paul states: ***“But I would not have you to be ignorant, concerning them which are asleep [i.e. dead believers], that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent [lit. “precede”] them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first; then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words”***.

This statement of the apostle Paul is a blend of literal and figurative expressions which combine, very beautifully, to express the purpose of God toward those who seek to follow His Son. Unfortunately, confusion has resulted in the minds of some, because they have failed to distinguish the literal from the figurative, and therefore they set Scripture against Scripture, and make it artificially contradict itself.

For example, the apostle describes a meeting of the Lord ***“in the air”***, and concludes, ***“so shall we ever be with the Lord.”*** But other passages of Scripture (some of which we have already mentioned) clearly reveal that immortalised believers shall ***“reign on the earth”*** (Revelation 5:10), and not in

heaven (as some interpret the words "*in the air*"). Indeed, it is specifically stated that their dominion and sphere of rule will be "*UNDER the heaven*" (Daniel 7:27).

A Special Voice of Command

Consider some other teachings concerning Paul's words in 1Thessalonians 4:13-18. He declared that the Lord will return from heaven with "*a shout, the voice of the archangel, and the trump of God*", and the dead in Christ shall rise. From this, some imagine that the Lord will return with a literal "shout", so loud and penetrating as to "wake the dead", but this conflicts with other statements that show that he will return "*as a thief*" (Revelation 16:15), and a thief certainly does not loudly announce his presence upon arrival!

The word rendered "shout" in Greek is *keleusma*, which signifies *a call, or summons of authority*, not necessarily audible except in a special way to those to whom it is specifically directed. In *The Septuagint* Greek Old Testament, the same word is used in Proverbs 30:27, "*The locusts... at THE WORD OF COMMAND march in rank.*" The "word of command" (*keleusma*) which the locusts obey, is the voice of *instinct*, and is only "heard" intuitively by those for whom it is intended.

The "shout" of 1Thessalonians 4:16 is a divine *word of command* which will cause dead believers to live again, and, certainly, will not be heard audibly by others for whom it is not intended. An angel's whisper can wake the dead, when breathed by the command of He who is "*the resurrection and the life*". This would be a "great sound" of remarkable power, though inaudible to the natural ears of mankind.

The word really defines the voice of God's spirit acting upon His people who are waiting in the "sleep" of the grave (cp. John 11:11-13). So it was that at the epoch of creation, God spoke, and the earth brought forth to His glory (Psalm 33:6-9); so at this moment of a "new creation", Christ shall speak and those only will "hear", to whom his words of life will be addressed: "*The hour is coming in which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil unto the resurrection of condemnation*" (John 5:28-29). The term "all" as used in this context, is a

relative term describing the whole company of those who are responsible for resurrection (those who know the will of God: see John 12:48), and does not to describe *all* mankind, for, in fact, every individual will not rise (see Isaiah 26:14; Psalm 49:15-20; Psalm 88:5). Resurrection is for the purpose of judgment, so that only those who are amenable to it will rise from the dead (cp. Ephesians 2:11-13).

The term "all", as used in this verse (John 5:28-29), is governed by the word "graves". This is not *hades*, the Greek word commonly used for "grave", but *mnemeion* signifying a special grave: a memorial grave kept in remembrance. They represent the graves into which God's faithful and true servants have been placed. Comparatively few are in such graves that God will remember at Christ's coming, for the majority of humanity answer to the description of Psalm 88:5, ***"the dead... whom Thou rememberest no more."***

The "Sound" of Christ's Coming

The "shout" or "word of command" is also styled by Scripture as ***"the voice of the archangel."*** The only archangel mentioned in Scripture is Michael (Jude 9), and in Daniel 12:1 this name is used symbolically to represent the Lord Jesus, who is there termed "Michael the great." The prophet declares that when Michael the great prince shall be manifested in the earth ***"many (not all) that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to everlasting contempt"*** (Daniel 12:2).

Paul also taught that the Lord will return ***"with the trump of God."*** Here again, he is using the language of symbol, intelligible to those who search the Scriptures for its significance, but not so for those who interpret the terms literally and out of context.

The symbology is taken from the Law of Moses, God's Law which was given to the nation of Israel. It instructed that a national and yearly *Day of Atonement* was to be preceded by a memorial "blowing of trumpets" (Leviticus 25:9; 23:24). This called the people together to make an offering to the Lord, and to receive forgiveness of sins. It prefigured the future great Day of Atonement for believers, when the responsible dead of all past ages will be resurrected, and together with living believers, will be assembled for judgment and reward.

In 1Thessalonians 4:13–18, therefore, Paul is using symbolic language to give added meaning and illustration to the literal doctrine of resurrection and judgment. Christ will not return with a shout so loud as to startle all mankind and arouse even the dead; he will not sound a literal trumpet to announce that the time of the judgment has come — but the effect will be the same.

Being “in the Air”

If we accept literally the teaching of Paul in the place cited, we would be led to believe that at the Lord's return, believers will be bodily conveyed into the “air” above, “to ever be with the Lord.” According to this interpretation, their everlasting place of abode will be “in the air” – but not even in heaven! In this case the word “air” is made to relate to the firmament and cloud formations between heaven and earth— which would provide a most uninviting place of abode in which to dwell for eternity!

Of course, those who believe in what they call *The Rapture* claim that believers either ascend into heaven, or descend again to the earth, in order to enjoy eternity; but Paul clearly teaches, in the reference before us, they shall “ever be” where they meet the Lord, that is, “in the air.”

However, other Scriptures show that the phrase “in the air” when treated symbolically, literally signifies elevation of status and position, not a physical elevation to great heights. Believers will form the ruling class of the future, and will be incorporated into a government that will be set over the nations so as to direct all people into ways of righteousness.

The True Meaning of Paul's Statement

Does that mean that we set aside the statement of 1Thessalonians 4:17? Absolutely not. Read it carefully again:

“Then we which are alive and remain [at the return of Christ] shall be caught up together with them [the resurrected dead] in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air; and so shall we ever be with the Lord”.

Like all Scripture, these words must be correctly interpreted in the light of the context. Here, Paul is using the vivid, picturesque, language of symbolism, frequently used in the Bible.

It is common, in Scripture, for the government or rulers of

a nation to be referred to as its “heavens”, whereas the subjects, or people, are described as “the earth.” In this symbolic language, the *sun* represents the *civil authority*; the *moon* depicts *ecclesiastical systems* deriving their power from the government; the *stars* portray prominent *statesmen* or *princes*; the *clouds* stand for the *associates* of the rulers; the *air* represents the *constitution* of the government; the *earth, waters, seas* symbolically speak of the *subjects and society* over whom the sun and moon exercise authority.

Understanding this principle it will be seen that, in the reference quoted above, Paul taught that following the resurrection, believers would be permanently elevated into ruling positions with Christ: **“and so shall we ever be with the Lord”**. Rather than teaching a literal, physical ascent from the earth to some undefined area suspended “in the air”, the apostles used the language of symbol to describe the exalted position of administration in the Age to come that the redeemed will enjoy in company with their Lord.

Symbolic Heavens

Frequently, throughout Scripture, “heavens” and “earth” are used in this symbolic or political sense.

Thus Isaiah, proclaiming the message to the rulers and the ruled of Israel, declared: **“Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth... Hear the word of the Lord, ye rulers; give ear unto the law of our God, ye people”** (Isaiah 1:2,10). His message was for both princes and people, and so he addressed them in language with which they were familiar. It was the language in which Moses addressed the nation: **“Give ear, O heavens, and I will speak; and hear, O earth, the words of my mouth”** (Deuteronomy 32:1). The prophet Jeremiah used similar expressions when he indicted the nation for **“changing their glory for that which doth not profit”** and declared: **“Be astonished, O ye heavens at this, and be ye horribly afraid, ye desolate, saith the Lord”** (Jeremiah 2:12). In this picturesque symbolic language, the prophet condemned the rulers for the evil condition of the nation. Later he referred to the “earth mourning”, and the “heavens above” being black, for the light of their rule (the king) would become extinguished (taken into captivity – ch. 4:28).

God’s indictment upon the ancient and warlike nation of

Edom was proclaimed in similar terms. The prophet Isaiah (in ch. 34:4-6) declared: ***"All the host of heaven shall be rolled together as a scroll, their hosts shall fall down"*** This would be a literal impossibility. How could all the stars of heaven (each one of which governs a universe in its own right) be rolled together, and flung in a heap upon the earth? It could not be done! But if the terms are used figuratively, and the "stars" represent *luminaries* in the political heavens, such as prominent statesmen (and that is how the same symbology is used in Daniel 12:3), the prophecy is understandable. So the prophecy of God continues: ***"For My sword shall be bathed in heaven; it shall come down upon Idumea, upon the people of my curse, to judgment"***.

The same interpretation applies to Christ's prophecy: ***"there shall be signs in the sun [rulers], the moon [ecclesiasticism], and stars [prominent statesmen], and upon earth [common people], distress of nations, with perplexity, the sea and waves roaring [the nations in a state of turmoil]"*** (Luke 21:25). Current international tension, and domestic political agitation, witness to the veracity of Christ's prophecy.

In the Book of Revelation, reference is made to a war in heaven (ch. 12:7), and because some have failed to comprehend the symbolic import of the phrase, they have set forth the impossible and blasphemous idea of a battle raging in heaven among the angels of God! How incongruous, especially in the light of Christ's prayer: ***"Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, in earth, as it is in heaven"***! If heaven was the scene of bitter, prolonged and violent warfare, what sort of a prayer is that! The interpretation contradicts other parts of the Scripture which teach that God cannot look upon sin (Habakkuk 1:13).

But if the passage is understood symbolically, there is no conflict of ideas. This is shown beyond all doubt by Revelation 12:1-4. For there another "sign in heaven" is given, of a woman giving birth to a son, whilst a dragon makes ready to devour it! Is it conceivable that this literally took place in heaven? The idea is preposterous! In ch. 12:9-10, "the dragon" is represented as a political power, showing that the "heaven" in question, relates to the higher echelons of world politics, and not to the literal abode of God.

New Heavens: the Political Air of the Future

The Israelitish "heaven", which was addressed by Moses, Isaiah and Jeremiah, proved disobedient to God. So disobedient, indeed, that He declared that He would cause an eclipse of the sun (government), so as to darken the light of the political heavens. He proclaimed that ***"the sun shall go down over the prophets, and the day shall be dark over them"*** (Micah 3:6). Nevertheless, in accordance with His promise and His purpose, God declared His intention to re-establish His rule on earth, under the jurisdiction of Christ and the immortal rulers He will appoint.

In the language of symbolism, this will constitute ***"a new heavens and a new earth, in which will dwell righteousness"*** (2Peter 3:13).

After indicting the old "heavens and earth" with words of rebuke, Isaiah revealed that God would overthrow them to make way for a new order to be set up under Christ. He declared: ***"Behold, I create new heavens, and a new earth; and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind; but be ye glad and rejoice for ever in that which I create; for, behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy"*** (Isaiah 65:18).

God is not going to destroy the earth, but to beautify it (Numbers 14:21). The Bible teaches that it will remain for ever (Ecclesiastes 1:4; Psalm 148:6), as the inheritance of the faithful (see Genesis 13:15). For what purpose should God destroy the heavens (as is often taught) seeing that they ***"declare the glory of God"*** (Psalm 19:1)? There would be no sense or reason in doing so, and only a false interpretation of Scripture requires it.

The terms are used politically. The new political "heavens and earth" that God will set up, will see Jerusalem as the metropolis of a world government, the Lord Jesus Christ as its king, his immortalised followers as his associates, and the nations of the earth as the happy and contented subjects of his New World Order.

In conformity with this symbolism, Christ is styled the ***"sun of righteousness"***; the universal worship he shall establish on earth is likened to the moon which derives its light from the sun; his immortal associate rulers are described

as "**stars shining for ever and ever**" (Daniel 12:3; 1Corinthians 15:40). As Christ's coming is likened to the rising of the "sun of righteousness" (Malachi 4:2), dispelling the darkness of Gentile rule, so it is predicted: "**Gentiles shall come to the brightness of thy rising**" (Isaiah 60:1-3). It is quite appropriate to the symbolism, therefore, to speak of those who will be associated with him in the ruling of the nations, as being taken figuratively "**into the air, and so ever being with the Lord**" (see also 2Samuel 23:4).

Daniel teaches that those who will reign with Christ in the age to come shall "**shine as the brightness of the firmament, as the stars for ever and ever**" (Daniel 12:3).

Caught Up In Clouds

The statement of 1Thessalonians 4:17 that believers shall be "caught up in the clouds" is not an accurate rendition of the original. There is no definite article in the Greek, so the phrase should be rendered "**caught away in clouds.**" The verb *harpazo* rendered *caught up* merely signifies *to be snatched away* without defining the particular direction. In Acts 8:39 it is used of the way in which Philip was "caught away" to the city of Azotus. Elsewhere, it is rendered *catch* (John 10:12), *pluck* (John 10:28), *pull* (Jude 23), and so forth. The idea is that of being conveyed from one place to another, with no reference to direction.

Therefore to be "snatched away in clouds," signify no more than being assembled together in groups. In Hebrews 12:1, believers are styled a "**cloud of witnesses,**" so that to be associated with such, could be described as being caught up in clouds.

The beauty of this language is very instructive. For example, in the Bible, seas and rivers are sometimes used to represent the nations (see Isaiah 57:20; Revelation 17:15), and as clouds are formed by the sun's action of evaporation, so the "clouds" of the millennial heavens (the "**cloud of witnesses**" of Hebrews 12:1, and the "**clouds**" of 1Thessalonians 4:17) are formed by the action of the "**sun of righteousness**" in drawing to himself a portion of the "**waters**" or peoples of the earth. These will form the political "**clouds**" of the age to come, who shall empty their life-giving rain upon the earth (figuratively the people — see Psalm 72:6). Thus Scripture speaks of the doctrine of truth as "**the rain... the small**

rain upon the tender herb, and as showers upon the grass" (Deuteronomy 32:2).

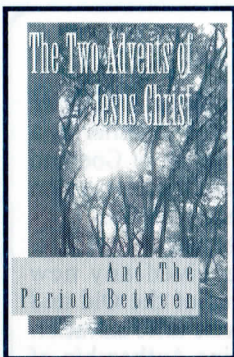
The "rain" with which these "clouds" will be charged, comprise the life-giving message of Christ, which shall revive humanity in the Age to come, after it has been blighted and scorched with the fires of Armageddon.

It is in these terms that 1Thessalonians 4:17 must be understood. Thus, Paul teaches that Christ will return to raise dead believers from the graves, to grant unto the righteous eternal life, and to elevate them into positions of authority and glory. God's purpose is to fill the earth with His glory (Numbers 14:21), and this will be the means whereby it will be achieved.

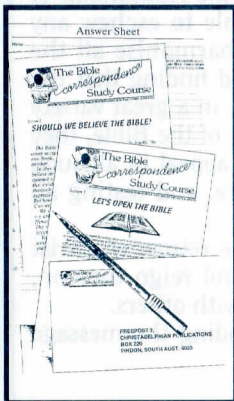
Paul urged his readers to ***"comfort one another with these words"***. There is infinite comfort in the fact that God has a purpose with the earth; that Christ is coming to bring about great changes therein. But true comfort is only applicable if we identify ourselves with Christ now, that we might be honored by him when he comes. Christ comes to be ***"glorified in his saints"*** (2Thessalonians 1:10); he returns to punish those who ***"obey not the gospel"*** (v. 8), and to change conditions upon the earth. ***"For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem"*** (Isaiah 2:3). There, in Jerusalem, the Lord will dwell, and with him, on earth, the faithful will ***"ever be with the Lord"*** as his honored co-rulers.

We urge the reader to carefully compare Scripture with Scripture, seeking a sound understanding of the Truth, and thus be equipped to experience true comfort and peace in the present age of conflict; and beyond the present, to enjoy the hope of the grand purpose that Almighty God will certainly bring to fruition upon the earth, to His everlasting glory.

Questions and comments are invited, which should be addressed to
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