



“caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air —” ???

THE RAPTURE?

“Caught up together in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air.” This is a part of our hope that causes some confusion for many. The difficulty is in the use of symbolic language in the Bible, and the meanings of certain words.

The “rapture” as some style it, is a very misleading concept. The word rapture is not from the Bible. The dictionary tells us that it means being carried away in body or spirit, with great joy.

It is true that the servants of God will be taken away at the return of Christ, and that they will also be filled with great joy. (If they are found faithful at the judgment) However, the traditional view of being taken up into the air while the earth is burned up with fire, is not what the Apostle Paul was teaching in 1 Thesalonians 4.

In the AIR

This word “air” has a limited use in scripture. In Acts 22:23, we see one application. Angry individuals took off their clothes and threw dust “into the air.” (See also 1 Cor. 9:26, 1 Cor. 14:9)

This air is the atmosphere surrounding us. It is not heaven. If we accept the literal meaning for the word air (as shown in these references), we would be suspended in air, still in sight, and still subject to the flames of judgment. Fortunately, the Apostle was not referring to our being literally in the air.

Another use of the word “air” is found

in Ephesians 2:2. It speaks of the “ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient.” (NIV)

This use of the word air is symbolic. It is similar to another verse found in Ephesians 6:12:

“For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. (NIV)

IN HEAVENLY REALMS

These rulers of the darkness of this world are in the air, or in heavenly realms. In other words, they are the “higher powers” or the “powers that be” spoken of in Romans 13:1. These are the governments of this world and their leaders. We are instructed to be subject to these powers in the air, until they are replaced by Christ.

The New Government

Christ will establish a new government that will be righteous. His faithful servants will rule with him. (Rev 5:10)

They will be elevated to positions of power in the “air” (high places/governments) of the Kingdom age.

Things Concerning

The Kingdom of God and the Name of Jesus Christ

“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.” (1 Thess 4:17)

WORDS OF COMFORT

The words of the Apostle Paul, quoted above, were intended to be words of comfort for the faithful believers, when one of the members of their congregation “fell asleep”, in death.

This comfort is based on the hope of a resurrection and the elevation of the faithful to their promised positions as kings and priests on the earth. (See Revelation 5:10)

Paul’s words in this chapter have caused some confusion in certain areas, but they also serve to make many Bible facts very clear. For example, the context informs us that:

1. Death is a time of great sorrow, especially if there is no hope of a resurrection in Christ. (This supports the bible teaching that without the resurrection, death is final and that corruption in the grave is the only expected event)
2. Those who die “in Christ” are said to be sleeping. They will be awakened from their sleep at the resurrection in the last day. (See 1 Cor 15:16-18, John 11:23-24)
3. The resurrection occurs at the return of Christ, when he descends from heaven

4. The dead in Christ will be raised first, and then the living believers will be gathered.
5. Although not specifically stated, the purpose for the gathering of both the living and the dead believers is for judgment before Christ. (See 2 Tim 4:1, 2 Cor 5:10)
6. Those who are found faithful at this judgment will be rewarded with immortality and given positions of authority in God’s Kingdom on the earth. (See Dan 7:27, Luke 19:17-19, Rev 5:10)
7. When they are elevated to their position of power, they are said to be “in the air”, that is, they are in high places of authority in the political heavens.

It is essential that we understand the symbolic language that is used in these matters. We address this further on the back cover article. See also the inside articles for the symbolic use of the elements in the heavens



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**“Behold, he cometh with clouds;
and every eye shall see him,”** (Rev 1:7)

IN THE CLOUDS

In our feature article we are told that “we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.” (1 Thess 4:17 NIV)

This verse appears to have a connection with Revelation 1:7 which is quoted in the top box.

We suggest that by combining these verses, we should conclude that if the believers are caught up in the clouds, then Jesus will come with these same clouds, to be seen by everyone.

WHAT ARE CLOUDS

There is nothing unusual about the word cloud. We all are familiar with the natural clouds and we have learned to associate certain types of clouds with weather patterns.

Clouds are a visible mass of condensed water vapor in the air. We learn from Hebrews 12:1 that the natural clouds represent a multitude of people. (In this case, they are the saints who have died in their faith as witnesses for God.)

These same sleeping saints that are referred to as a “cloud of witnesses” will be resurrected first when Christ returns. (as stated in 1 Thess 4:16) The living saints will then be joined together with them as a part of this multitude of clouds, and together with the Lord, they will execute judgment and establish power over the nations.

STORM CLOUDS

There can be no question about the characteristic of these clouds. They will be storm clouds, to pour out the wrath of God on an earth that is filled with corruption and immorality. (See 2 Thess. 1:7-10)

TYPICAL CLOUDS

The idea of a cloud or multitude of people as an army is not a new concept in Scripture. For example, the prophet Ezekiel tells us of another cloud that will play a role in the fulfillment of latter day prophecy.

Ezekiel tells about a great northern army with a leader called “Gog.” Israel will be invaded in the same time period as when Christ returns with clouds to judge the earth. We read:

“ And thou shalt come from thy place out of the north parts, thou, and many people with thee, all of them riding upon horses, a great company, and a mighty army: And thou shalt come up against my people of Israel, as a cloud to cover the land; it shall be in the latter days, and I will bring thee against my land, that the heathen may know me, when I shall be sanctified in thee, O Gog, before their eyes.” (Ezekiel 38:15-16. See this entire chapter)

A northern army coming as a cloud will be destroyed by God on the mountains of Israel, so that another great cloud of people, with Christ, may prepare the earth for the Kingdom of God.

AFTER THE STORM

After the storm clouds have established their authority in the political heavens of the Kingdom age, the work of Christ and this multitude of clouds will rain blessings of righteousness on the nations that submit to his rule. “He shall come down like rain upon the mown grass: as showers that water the earth. In his days shall the righteous flourish; and abundance of peace so long as the moon endureth. He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth. (Psa. 72:6-8, Acts 3:19-21))

“Hear, O heavens! Listen, O earth! For the LORD has spoken: “I reared children and brought them up, but they have rebelled against me.” (Isaiah 1:2 NIV)

HEAVENS

The prophet Isaiah spoke to the children of Judah using symbolic terms that were apparently familiar to the people.

The “heavens” in Isaiah’s prophecy represented the rulers of Judah, and the “earth” referred to the people. (See Isa. 1:10)

SYMBOLIC UNDERSTANDING

Even in the Book of Genesis, there are indications that people understood that the natural heavens, (with the sun, moon and stars, that would rule over the day and the night), were typical of the way that man himself would be ruled over by elevated leaders. Some of these rulers were good, and many were evil. They all had their “place in the sun”, until God chose to replace them in the development of His purposes for this earth. (See Daniel 4:17)

SUN, MOON & 11 STARS

Joseph was a man of God who had things revealed to him by dreams when he was young. One dream was that the sun, the moon and the 11 stars would bow down to him. (See Gen 37:9-11)

Jacob, his father, understood the dream to mean that he as the sun, Rachel his wife as the moon, and his eleven brothers (the stars), would one day bow down to Joseph.

In this account we see that even the family structure was set up like a government, and that symbolic terms taken from the natural heavens were applied to the family in their respective positions.

THE NEW HEAVENS

With this background, it follows that when Jesus and his faithful followers rule on the earth in the coming Kingdom period, they will be the “new heavens, and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.” (See 2nd Peter 3:13)

Peter actually spoke of 3 periods of heavens and earths. The first one was the ruling powers and the people who perished in the flood. The second system is the powers that be today, and the third (and final) system, will be the righteous rule of Christ and the saints in God’s coming Kingdom on this earth

THE RIGHTEOUS SHINE

There are many examples using this symbolic language including: “Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever.” (Dan 12:3 NIV)

“Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear. (Matt 13:43 NIV)

“And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.” (Eph 2:6-7 NIV)

“But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings....” (Mal 4:2-3 NIV).