



## RENDEZVOUS IN SPACE

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Redbook magazine made a survey of the eight leading seminaries in America and discovered that only one percent of the students believed in the second coming of Jesus. The reason for this astonishing skepticism may be revealed by the experience of D. L. Moody, the great lay evangelist. After explaining that he had been in the church for fifteen years before hearing his first sermon on the subject of Christ's return, he stated, "Now I know why the devil does not want this subject to be preached. Nothing would wake up the church so much as the doctrine that Jesus is coming soon."

Does that also explain why the modern church is so strangely quiet about this glorious future event? Has Satan been successful in throwing a blanket of silence over the one great truth that could revive the Laodicean churches of today? It certainly seems to be the case. Even the evangelists are saying little about this spectacular occurrence which is mentioned 331 times in the New Testament alone.

## Rendezvous in Space

There is no event of the past, present, or future which has a stronger basis for belief. Jesus spoke about it with such unmistakable clarity that no one need be in doubt or confusion. He said, "I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also." John 14:2, 3.

It is biblically clear that God's complete plan for this world will not be fulfilled until we are transferred into that perfect home He is now preparing. The plan of salvation has made infinite provisions for our justification and sanctification, but the restoration of all things will not be accomplished until we are freed forever from the contaminating presence of sin.

When and how will Christ's second entry into earth's history take place? Before answering that question it is very important to understand how it will not happen. Millions have been deceived by an incredible array of false theories which have spread like wildfire among evangelical Christians.

When His disciples approached Him on the Mount of Olives with the anxious question "What shall be the sign of thy coming and the end of the world?" Christ answered, "Take heed that no one deceive you." The implication is clear that there will be an unusual amount of misleading information about His return.

Then Jesus proceeded to outline the major signs that would mark His second coming. Almost the whole of Matthew 24 is mingled with warnings about the endtime program of Satan to delude the whole world on this issue. According to Jesus, the very elect will be assailed and threatened by the cunning impersonations of the evil one. He declared that false Christs and deceiving prophets would appear in the last days working undeniable miracles. "For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect." Matthew 24:24.

Have such bold religious frauds made their appearance? Indeed, they have been announced through the pages of the world's most prestigious newspapers. Highly sophisticated advertising copy has proclaimed the imminent appearance of the divine "Incarnation" who will have the answers to all our problems.

Even though many of the claims of such charlatans are being rejected, the world community is subtly being prepared for a supernatural manifestation of a counterfeit Christ. Because of their lack of biblical knowledge, millions of Christians will be ready to receive the spurious claims of this brazen impostor.

Jesus declared that He would not return to any localized area of the earth. "Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there; believe it not. ... Wherefore if they shall say unto you, Behold, he is in the desert; go not forth: behold, he is in the secret chambers; believe it not." Matthew 24:23-26.

Those who are well-versed in the truths of the Bible cannot be swept by the massive hysteria which will mark Satan's attempt to impersonate the advent of Jesus. When popular television news commentators announce, with great excitement, that Christ has appeared in London, New York or Rome, the vast majority of listeners will believe it is true.

## Satan Impersonates Christ

If you feel you would be insulated from deception, just imagine yourself in the presence of such a personage. Perhaps you have rushed to the scene to expose the crafty pretender, but you are not prepared for the awesome reality facing you. A majestic being, dressed in a glistening robe, towers above all the thousands who try to press in to his side. A tremendous aura of power circulates around the Christ-like figure. He speaks in the same gentle tones that you imagine Jesus used when He was upon the earth. You watch in amazement as he puts forth his hand to touch the blind, lame, and diseased who prostrate before him. Instantly they seem to be healed of every infirmity and weakness. The cry goes up from hundreds of voices, "Jesus has come!" You are strangely affected by the waves of joyful emotion which seem to immerse the adoring multitude who fill the streets.

Then, suppose that this noble benefactor proclaims that he is indeed the Messiah who has returned to resume his work of healing and preaching. How easy would it be to resist the impulse to hail him as the Son of God? The evidence of your physical senses would be overwhelming.

Why could the whole world be captured by such a dazzling demonstration? Because there is a natural response in every human being to the unusual and the spectacular. People will go anywhere at any cost to witness a promised miracle. Satan will exploit this fleshly foible to his own advantage. No wonder the very elect will be in danger of being deceived.

Now that we know how Jesus will not return, let us discover how His coming will actually take place. Our only safety is to understand the truth as it is revealed in the Bible.

Two angels came all the way from heaven to give the clearest declaration on record concerning the manner of Christ's return. The circumstances of that dramatic moment leave no room for quibbling over what they meant: "And when he had spoken these things, while they *beheld*, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their *sight*. And while they *looked* stedfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye *gazing* up into heaven? 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 1:9-11.

Five colorful words in these verses indicate beyond question that the ascension of Jesus was a very real event - beheld, sight, looked, gazing, and seen. This was not some mystical dream or vision. They were literally watching our Lord with their physical eyes as He disappeared into the distant sky. Said the angels, "This same Jesus ... shall so come *in like manner* as ye have seen Him go."

His return will be just as visible and literal as His going away. Since He left in a cloud, He must also come back in a cloud. Do the Scriptures confirm this? John wrote, "Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him." Revelation 1:7.

In a few brief words the Revelator reveals one of the most astounding facts about the advent of Christ. He will be seen by every living soul in the world as He gradually descends through the atmospheric heavens. The good and evil inhabitants of all nations on earth will look up together

and behold the glory of His train filling the sky. Jesus described it this way, "And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory." Matthew 24:30.

### **One Hundred Million Angels**

Man and devils may be able to counterfeit many aspects of His coming, but they will not be able to duplicate the *manner* of His celestial entry into our atmosphere. At no time or place will so much glory and grandeur be exposed to the eyes of man. We are told in Matthew 25:31 that "all the holy angels" will be in attendance when He comes. According to John the Revelator there are many times more than a hundred million angels in heaven and all of them will be with Him as He returns. "And the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands." Revelation 5:11.

On occasion single angels have appeared to human beings in the strength of their heavenly glory and the results have been devastating. One angel smote the Assyrian army during the night and 185,000 were dead the next morning. 2 Kings 19:35. Multiply that kind of glory by a few hundred million and you can imagine the brightness of the Advent.

Will it be visible to every person alive in the world? Jesus said, "For 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." Matthew 24:27. No wonder all tribes and peoples will be audience to that spectacular sight. Just as a vivid flash of lightning on a dark night penetrates to every corner so that no one can hide from it, so will His coming be. The earth will be illuminated from one horizon to the other.

Already we can see that the final events will not be done in a corner somewhere. In addition to being highly visible, there will be some very loud sounds associated with the second coming of Christ. Paul wrote, "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." 1 Thessalonians 4:16.

That mighty demonstration of sight and sound will be such that even the dead will be awakened out of their dusty beds. The shout, the voice, and the trump will be audible to every creature under the sun. I have never played a trumpet, personally, but my two sons tried to learn the art when they were children. I can only say one thing about trumpets with absolute certainty and that is: They are not silent! Trumpets were made to be sounded and to be heard.

Will there be other global phenomena to mark the close of time as we know it? Yes, there will also be a convulsive, world-wide earthquake, more destructive than any ever seen before. "And there were voices, and thunders, and lightnings; and there was a great earthquake, such as was not since men were upon the earth, so mighty an earthquake, and so great. ... And every island fled away, and the mountains were not found." Revelation 16:18-20.

Envision the universal terror which will accompany the shock waves which cause inhabited islands to disappear into the sea. Huge mountain chains will be shattered into fragments, according to the graphic language of the prophet.

As the picture unfolds, it becomes more and more apparent that our Lord's return will be the most cataclysmic event ever to occur. Not one person in the world will be able to hide from it. The wicked, in particular, will be profoundly affected by the approach of those myriads of heavenly

beings, as they escort Jesus toward the earth. John described how they will try to avoid the presence of the One whom they have rejected and denied.

"And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places. And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains; And said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: For the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?" Revelation 6:14-17.

As Christ returns to execute judgment upon the earth, His presence is a consuming fire upon all sin and sinners. The wicked try to escape into the caves of the mountains and pray to be blotted out of existence rather than face a holy God. Intense and awful is their sense of shame and fear.

### **No Two-Phase Coming**

Paul adds to the information about the final fate of those who are not ready for Christ's coming: "And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power; When he shall come to be glorified in his saints." 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10.

At the very same time that the righteous are glorified, the rejecters of His grace will be slain by the brightness of His presence.

This interesting revelation brings us face to face with a massive deception which has misled millions of Christians. Obviously, there will be nothing secret about the rapture of the saints, and the so-called "secret rapture" is only a figment of the imagination. We have just read the clear Bible statement that the wicked are dealt with at the same time the righteous are given immortality.

There is absolutely no scriptural indication that the return of Christ takes place in two phases. The popular concept that Jesus comes secretly seven years before the end of the world to snatch away the good people has no Bible support whatsoever. The wicked do not continue living in the earth for seven years after the mythical rapture of the righteous. They are slain, Paul says, "When he (Jesus) shall come to be glorified in his saints."

Recently, there came to my desk a mockup of a newspaper which was supposed to represent the typical news flashes on the day after the rapture occurs. It was filled with horror stories and pictures

beyond description. Terrible accidents were reported to have occurred simultaneously around

the world, killing thousands of people. As millions of Christians suddenly vanished without a trace, driverless cars and pilotless planes careened out of control. The paper carried many articles about little children who had apparently disappeared into thin air while on their way to school. Only the spiritually careless and uncommitted were left behind to pick up the pieces of a shattered society.

What a perversion of truth! The wicked will also see Christ when He comes. Paul says He shall "appear the second time," and Peter declared, "When the chief Shepherd shall appear." Hebrews 9:28; 1 Peter 5:4. If His coming were secret or invisible, it should be written that He will not appear. When Paul and his companions suffered a storm at sea and the clouds were dark and lowering, he described it as "when neither sun nor stars in many days appeared." Acts 27:20. To appear is to be seen. Will Jesus appear or not when He comes? Many verses say He will appear. Can we trust the Bible, or should we put some strange, twisted meaning to that word "appear" in order to support what we want to believe?

### **Coming As a Thief**

I am convinced that the confusion has been largely the result of misinterpreting two phrases which Jesus used in describing His coming. And the interesting thing is that He gave such a clear explanation of the phrases that hardly an unprejudiced mind could be misled.

Now let us take a close look, in context, at the two expressions of our Lord which have been used to support a secret rapture - "*as a thief in the night*," and "*one taken and the other left*." If we are willing to accept the Bible definition of terms, there can be no ambiguity about what Jesus said.

What did He mean when He said His coming would be like a thief in the night? He carefully explained in Matthew 24:42-44: "Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come. But know this, that if the goodman of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up. Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh."

There it is! So simple that a child can understand it. It will be unexpected. The advent will take the world by surprise. His coming will burst upon this earth when people least expect it. They will be just as unprepared for it as they would for a midnight thief. These words do not convey the least idea that our Lord will come sneaking around like some common criminal. He was just using a striking illustration of the unexpectedness of His return. Jesus reinforced the point He was making in verse 50, "The lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for him, and in an hour that he is not aware of."

Peter used exactly the same words in describing the coming of Christ. He said, "But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat." 2 Peter 3:10. This verse alone contains all the evidence we could ever desire about the meaning of the disputed term. When Jesus comes as a thief, Peter says, the heavens will pass away with a great noise. Could that be secret? Does this portray the silent snatching away of millions of people while others are totally unaware of

what is taking place? It is the very opposite of that. That great noise corresponds to the shout and trumpet of Paul's epistle - a sound so intense that even the dead are awakened.

### **One Taken and One Left**

The amazing thing is how people have taken such obvious verses and twisted them out of context to support a doctrine which does not even appear in the Bible. The same thing has been done with the illustration of two women grinding together. Jesus did say, "The one shall be taken and the other left," but what does the context tell us about the meaning of those words? Is there any indication whatsoever that Jesus was teaching a secret rapture of the saints?

The words in question are found in Luke 17:24-27, but let's read the verses before and after in order to get the full picture. Beginning in verse 26 Jesus likened His coming to the days of Noah: "And as it was in the days of Noe, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man. They did eat, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, and the flood came, and destroyed them all."

The similarity is beyond question. Before the flood some were taken and some were left. The ones taken were taken into the ark and saved. The ones who were left were all destroyed by the raging water.

Christ continued His discourse with another illustration. "Likewise also as it was in the days of Lot; they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded; But the same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all. Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed." Verses 28-30.

Again, the parallel is obvious. Some were taken out of the city to safety and some were left. What happened to those who were left? They were all destroyed by the fire.

Now we come to verses 34-36: "I tell you, in that night there shall be two men in one bed; the one shall be taken, and the other left. Two women shall be grinding together; the one shall be taken, and the other left. Two men shall be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left."

Please keep the continuity of Christ's previous illustration in mind as you consider these words. In every case there had been a separation of the good from the bad, and then the wicked were slain. If the context teaches us anything at all, we must conclude that the one who is left will be left dead, just as it was in Noah and Lot's days. And when we read the next verse, there can be no doubt that this is exactly what Jesus was saying. "And they answered and said unto him, Where Lord? And he said unto them, Wheresoever the body is, thither will the eagles be gathered together." Verse 37.

After Jesus said one would be taken and the other left, the disciples asked where they would be left. His answer clearly reveals that all who were left would be dead. Their bodies would be food for the eagles to devour. This is in perfect harmony with what the rest of the Bible says on the subject.

There is not the slightest hint that this final separation of the saved and lost will be done in any secretive manner. Yet, this connotation has been applied by those who are desperately trying to find inspired support for an empty tradition. The unscriptural two-phase coming has been repeated so often and so persistently that millions believe it must be true. There is probably no more dangerous doctrinal distortion in the world than this, because it could delude the majority of professed Christians into being lost. No wonder Jesus warned: "Take heed that no man deceive you."

## **The Rapture Rooted in Catholicism**

The foundation of the rapture theory was laid over 400 years ago upon the specific orders of the Catholic Church. Every Christian needs to understand how this fabrication of error was designed to neutralize the great Protestant Reformation. If the facts of history were known by Protestants today who defend with such great emotion the rapture theory and the futurist antichrist doctrine, they would be horrified.

Luther and his fellow reformers boldly identified the pope as the "man of sin," and labeled the Catholic Church as the antichrist of prophecy. In response to those charges, the hierarchy assigned two Jesuit priests to develop counter-interpretations which would turn the onus away from the Catholic Church. In spite of the fact that the two men founded opposing schools of interpretation, their theories have survived to form the basis of most modern Protestant theology today. Not only did they effectively blunt Luther's assessment of the papacy as the antichrist, but they cleverly divided and diluted the "protest" of all the churches which grew out of the Reformation movement.

Modern religious observers were astounded in January, 1984, when men like Billy Graham and Jerry Falwell meekly accepted and defended the establishment of United States political ties with the Vatican. Why could those famous Protestant spokesmen see no danger in being allied with the Church of Rome? Because they are deceived, along with millions of others, by the Catholic-contrived theories of those two priests which have almost eclipsed the historic, biblical position of the Reformers. If the spiritual descendants of Luther and Wesley now had the same doctrine which they taught, not a single Lutheran or Methodist would favor any kind of alliance with the papacy today.

Now let's take a look at these two Spanish priests who flooded the sixteenth century with their counter-Reformation propaganda.

Alcazar of Seville applied all the beast prophecies to Antiochus Epiphanes, who lived long before the popes began to rule in Rome. His system of interpretation came to be known as the Preterist School of prophecy.

On the other hand, Jesuit Francisco Rivera invented a system known as the Futurist School of interpretation. He taught that the antichrist was to be some future superman who would appear near the end of time and continue in power for three and a half years. It is his clever,



unscriptural theory which has been resurrected by modern evangelical Protestant Christians. And today millions of Baptists, Methodists, Pentecostals, etc., hold this anti-Protestant concoction of the Jesuits as some kind of infallible doctrine. Yet, those same denominations claim to be faithful supporters of Protestant theology. Luther and other stalwart protestors against Catholic errors would be astounded if they were suddenly resurrected to hear what is being taught in the name of Protestantism.

In the early 1800s the futurist view of Jesuit Ribera passed through certain refinements and additions, including the seven-year tribulation and the snatching away of the saints. For the first time, it was espoused by Protestant teachers who were seeking ways of reconciliation with Rome. Through the influence and writings of John Nelson Darby of the Plymouth Brethren Church in England, the new doctrine spread to the United States. During the middle and latter nineteenth century, it received its biggest boost from Cyrus Scofield, who incorporated it into the notes of his Scofield Reference Bible published in 1909.

### **Rescue and Reward**

Now we turn to the most exciting aspect of this subject. Why will Jesus come back to this earth the second time? John was inspired to write the answer in the exact words of our Lord: "And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be." Revelation 22:12.

After long, oppressive millenniums of suffering, God's people will finally be delivered from the bondage of Satan's evil influence. The mark of his power is etched upon the cemeteries of the land and on the war memorials of the dead. The cries and tears of the saints have filtered through all the years of every generation since Adam sinned. What a day it will be when the curse of transgression is lifted, and the most dreaded of all human enemies is eternally banished.

Paul described it in these words: "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." 1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17.

The reward which Christ brings with Him has so many facets that no language on earth could ever adequately portray it, but the resurrection of the righteous dead will be the grand focus of that moment. Some who have been sleeping for centuries will awake as from a night of dreamless slumber. For others it will be the first moment in memory free from the searing throb of pain. The eyes of the blind will be opened to gaze in rapture upon the immortal faces of loved ones who have been recognized before only by touch or sound.

Paul describes the split-second change which will forever place the saints beyond the range of pain or death: "Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality." 1 Corinthians 15:51-53.

As the resurrected ones rise to meet Jesus in the air, all the living righteous are instantly translated into the same body of immortal youth. Jesus' feet will not touch the earth at that time, but all the redeemed will be caught up to meet Him as He descends.

That rendezvous in space will surely be the most ecstatic and emotional moment in the long history of planet earth. It is no wonder that so much of the Bible is laced with glowing descriptions of that climactic event in time.

Do most Christians truly understand the nature of Christ's coming and how it will affect the inhabitants of the earth? Let the facts speak for themselves. Most churches have accepted the claims of the rapturists, who have rejected the historical view in favor of these recent revisionist errors. As a result, millions of contemporary church members are looking for events that will never take place.

For countless others, our Lord's return is a subject of great fear and consternation. The nominal Christian (which is the majority) holds very mixed feelings about the event, largely because they lack the personal assurance of being ready to meet him.

### **Stolen Sweets**

It is this lack of preparation which has created such a confused attitude toward our Lord's return. Many do not know whether they want to see Him or not. What a sad commentary on the state of the modern church! Why should we not be eager to see the One we love - the One who died for us? Every true Christian should be excited about His coming. We should talk it, sing it, and preach it! As Paul said, we should love His appearing. It is the blessed hope of every child of God.

My mother was a wonderful cook, and without question she made the best chocolate cake that ever was baked. As a child I would watch her put the layers together, and then apply the delicious icing to the top and sides. The high point came when mother let me lick the pan, or clean out all the icing that was left sticking to the pan.

Sometimes, unfortunately, there wouldn't be very much left, but I always managed to scrape up at least a spoonful. Then I would look longingly at all that delectable icing on the cake as it slowly settled into place. Often it would be so heavy on the sides that the icing would droop and accumulate on the plate. It was always the most terrible temptation for me to clean up all that excess icing on my finger, but Mother had given very specific instruction not to do it.

My real test came on the day Mother left me alone at the house with a big, beautiful cake sitting right in the middle of the table. It was freshly decorated, and I watched in fascination as the thick chocolate icing oozed almost imperceptibly toward the bottom of the cake. Finally, it seemed almost ready to spill over the edge of the plate, and I could resist no longer. Carefully and cleanly, I slid my finger around the rim of the plate accumulating a gob of the forbidden frosting.

Then, suddenly, I heard footsteps on the porch, and before I could dispose of the evidence, Mother was in the room. Without any reservation I can assure you that I did not want to see my mother come at that moment. And I believe this is the reason so many are afraid to see Jesus come - their hands are filled with the stolen treats of this world.

Make no mistake about it. There will be some dramatic changes when He appears. The old familiar places will disappear and nothing we know now will be unaffected by that event. Some people fear the changes, but those fears are ungrounded. Everything will be better and more wonderful than we have ever known or imagined. One moment in the presence of Jesus will compensate for all the suffering and self-denial of a lifetime on earth.

### **Back to Paradise**

God will return the human family to the sinless ideal which He designed from the beginning. All four of God's original gifts to man will be restored, including the perfect conditions of the Eden paradise. But there will be one tremendous difference between the quality of life in the new Eden and the old. Adam received only a conditional grant of immortality, whereas the redeemed will be given an absolute and unconditional access to the life of God. And even though the power of choice will remain, not one of those immortalized saints will ever choose to disobey God again. Because of the demonstration of God's character and Satan's character, as revealed in the age-long controversy, the universe will be secure from any further rebellion or disobedience. Every created being will see the results of such a course, and none will choose to repeat the painful experiment.

It is this prospect of eternal security which makes the coming of Jesus such a glorious doctrine. The world is sick of fractured peace plans, broken treaties, and disappointed hopes. Mankind longs for a peace where fear and uncertainty will be entirely eliminated. Christ's coming will bring an end to everything which could produce human anxiety. Poverty, disease, war, and death are the most common sources of stress, and those conditions will cease to exist when He returns.

But the most exciting prospect of all is to know that we will see the face of Jesus and dwell in His presence for all eternity. Surely that moment will be the climax of all the fondest hopes and dreams we have ever cherished. May the preparation for it be the focus of all our thoughts and actions. And God forbid that any day should pass in which we do not pray with longing desire for our Lord to come soon.