

THE UPWARD CALL

*Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet;
but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead,
I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God
IN CHRIST JESUS.*

(Philippians 3:13-14 NASB)

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The Clouds

"Behold, a cloud as small as a man's hand is coming up from the sea." (1 Kings 18.44 NASB)

The opening verse comes from the story of Elijah as he crouched on the top of Mount Carmel and told his servant to look toward the sea. On the seventh time, the servant announced that he saw a tiny cloud forming and coming up from the sea. In a short time, the cloud filled the sky and poured forth a heavy shower on the land.

Although the story of Elijah is quite fascinating, this is not the subject of this writing. Rather, I want to use it as a springboard to the subject of clouds as a witness, something that has been brewing in my heart for some time. Although clouds generally refer to something above and external, what has come to me is that clouds, on a spiritual level, start on the inside. You could say that clouds are an inside job that, when matured, manifest externally. After all, it is God who is at work in you.

Dear people, there is a cloud coming from the sea, symbolic of the nations, and it is not what you might think. It is not about the white (or ominously dark) puffy things we see in the sky that pour rain on the earth. And, on a spiritual level, it is not about the Holy Spirit being poured out on all mankind, as so many teach today. The cloud is about what will soon come forth from within a people who are the anointing of the Lord. In other words, the anointing is internal, a present reality, for all His people. The cloud that is coming is a people who set the evidence or the witness to the world of the enthroned and glorified Christ that will lead directly to their being in the Presence of the Lord.

Throughout scripture, clouds come into view in a variety of ways, but of prime importance, they manifest in reference to the Presence of the Lord and His glory. Interestingly, when the Lord is directly involved, it is not clouds or a cloud but *the cloud*. The first mention of the word *cloud* appears right after the Noahic flood had subsided and God spoke to Noah and his sons, making an unconditional covenant with man and every living creature on earth that never again shall the water become a flood to destroy all flesh. As a sign of this covenant, the Lord set His rainbow in the cloud. Later, we discover the cloud appearing at every major stage of the history of ancient Israel. When Moses and the sons of Israel were led out of Egypt, the Lord set the pillar of cloud over them to guide them through their wilderness journey to the promised land. When it stopped, they set up camp. When it moved on, they broke up camp and followed. In the wilderness, the glory of the Lord appeared in the cloud to the sons of Israel. The cloud covered Mount Sinai and the Lord descended in the cloud to deliver the law to Moses. With the advent of the tent of meeting, when Moses entered the tent, the pillar of cloud would descend and stand at the entrance and the Lord would speak to Moses face to face. When ancient Israel was on the land as a kingdom, Solomon built the house of the Lord or the Temple and the cloud appeared as the glory of the Lord filled the house. Finally, with the declension of the Kingdom of Israel, Ezekiel saw the cloud of the glory of the Lord being removed from the Temple, which prophesied of its ultimate destruction.

Coming to the New Testament, we discover that the cloud appeared when Jesus was on the mount and was transfigured in glory as the three disciples looked on. The cloud (a bright one) appeared and overshadowed them, and the voice came out of the cloud: **"This is My Beloved Son, listen to Him!"** When Jesus ascended back to His Father for the last time, as His disciples looked on, a cloud received Him out of their sight. The two messengers standing by the disciples told them that Jesus would return to earth in the same manner (i.e., by the cloud). Jesus Himself had prophesied that the Son of Man would return, coming on (with, in) the clouds of heaven with great power and glory. John declared: **"Behold, He is coming with the clouds."** Finally, in harvesting the earth, the Son of Man sits on a white cloud.

Now, the Greek word for *cloud* is *nephele*, which denotes a cloudy, shapeless mass covering the heavens that, metaphorically speaking, refers to a dense multitude. The origin of the word indicates that it could refer to a mass of rock, signifying a mass of anything. Thus, it conveys the picture of a dense mass. This is further confirmed in Hebrew scripture, where Ezekiel prophesies about Gog coming against Israel: **You (Gog) will come up against My people Israel like a cloud to cover the land** (38.16). [Note that this cloud signifies judgment.] This is a great mass of people, which is also confirmed in Hebrews where it speaks of those who died in faith (and are still dead). **So therefore we also, having so great a cloud of witnesses lying around us** (Hebrews 12.1 LITV). As recounted in Hebrews 11, the ancients who died in faith, looking for a better resurrection, are a great mass lying around. The Greek word for *lying around* is *perikeimai* [G4029], which means "to lie all around."

It is fascinating how often this verse is presented as if the faithful dead are in heaven sitting in the bleachers of a huge stadium, looking down, and literally cheering us on. At best, this is sentimentality. The truth is that this is simply a figure of speech for a mass of witnesses that has gone before us. A witness is one who testifies. Their testimony is the testimony of their lives of faith, holding to the promises but not receiving them during their lives. This is what encompasses us or lies about us today.

There is one more vital set of verses, as given to us by Paul in what is often called *the rapture*. However, a better or more accurate term for the Greek is *snatching away*, *caught away*, or *seized*. Paul wrote to the Thessalonians to remind them of the hope they had as they waited for the Son to come from heaven.

And I do not wish you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, ... because the Lord himself, in a shout, in the voice of a chief-messenger, and in the trump of God, shall come down from heaven, and the dead in Christ shall rise first, then we who are living, who are remaining over, together with them shall be caught away in clouds to meet the Lord in air, and so always with the Lord we shall be; so, then, comfort ye one another in these words. (see 1 Thessalonians 4.13-18 YLT)

Notice that this is about being caught away in clouds to meet the Lord in air. Although most translations insert the article *the* before clouds and air, the Greek has left them out, making this the more accurate translation. By the way, this seems to be more like an atmospheric event, not a heavenly one, at least as far as Paul wrote it. The victors of Christ being snatched or caught away are likened to a cloud (a mass) of witnesses. Whether this speaks of actual clouds or some other physical entity is not the main issue. Like the ancient great cloud of witnesses, those being caught away in clouds are in themselves the clouds, meaning they are (perhaps were in Paul's day) a great witness of *the* faith of Christ during their lives on earth. They are the faithful witnesses and, symbolically, each individual witness represents a cloud, and collectively they are the clouds, even the cloud, meaning there is only one witness and anointing, for there is only one Lord.

Regardless of how views it, Jesus' return is about Him coming with the clouds, meaning He comes with His faithful witnesses, the clouds of heaven, with great power and glory. The clouds are the collective body of Christ that faithfully testified of Him on earth through their lives. It must be this way, for in Revelation 1.5, He is called the **Faithful Witness, the firstborn of the dead**. Prophetically, David tells us **His faithfulness is great to the clouds** (Psalm 57.10). As Elijah prophesied, this cloud comes from the sea, which signifies the nations.

Here is what I believe the Spirit of the Lord keeps speaking to me: As the end of our present age is close at hand, which it is, and the world has become deranged and depraved in its thinking and its actions, which it has, the Lord will have a faithful witness on earth that will manifest *the* Christ, that is, the Anointing that is within them. This anointing is not going to be some sort of sideshow where the flesh of men is shown off as it is in some circles of believers in our day. It is not to parade men and their names before the world with some outward gifting that places them above others. It is not going to be about ministries or pulpits. The flesh will have no part in this; it will be all the Lord's doing, not man's. **It is going to be a manifestation of the life of the Son, the Anointed One within each one that comes forth in a way the world has never seen. Love personified and magnified!** This great anointing will become a great cloud of witnesses to the glory of the life of the Beloved Son whose origin is love that will be in the Presence of the Lord. Jesus will manifest in this cloud! It matters not where the clouds reside or are taken, in air or to the throne; they will be forever with the Lord. **"Behold, He is coming with the clouds."**