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### **WHAT CHRISTIANS NEED TO KNOW AND DO**

Dr. Waverly Nunnally

"Y2K," "Armageddon," "Millennium." These terms have come to stir awe, worry, fear, and curiosity like few others. As we approach the beginning of a new millennium, predictions become more and more bleak with each passing day. TV shows, movies, supermarket tabloids, and even popular songs abound with references to the mass destruction that is soon to come. Hollywood seems to be trying to capitalize on the fear and worry created by "millennium fever." The picture popularized by Hollywood is simply one of despair. Some scripts depict negative forces (politicians, businessmen, criminals, asteroids, and sometimes even aliens) that threaten the very survival of the planet, and if they are not stopped by human heroes, all will be lost.

As Christians, we see the signs of the times: strange weather, floods, volcanic eruptions, mudslides, landslides, brush and forest fires, tornadoes, hurricanes, El Nino, and La Nina. Domestic violence, gang violence, riots in major cities, racially and religiously motivated violence, school shootings, mass murders, bombings and civil wars threaten to return the planet to the times of Noah, when God judged the earth by water (Gen. 6:11). The Christian should know exactly how to respond to such news, since Jesus accurately predicted this very scenario in Matthew 24:2-42. Unfortunately, many well-meaning Christians have been caught up in unfruitful responses which do not reflect the clear teachings of Scripture or the character of the God they serve. These activities take our focus off what the Bible emphasizes concerning the end of the age. **It is therefore the purpose of this article to consider some recent events which have sidetracked**

## **the Church, and then to consider the true message of the Bible to the end-time believer.**

One *inappropriate response* to an awareness of the nearness of the end is to become entrapped by the allurements of *datesetting*. The world has run to the prophecies of the occultic prophet Nostradamus and to the supermarket tabloids to try to get the "inside scoop." Similarly, some in the Church have fallen prey to the wiles of our own "Christian soothsayers." For example we are told by many modern prophecy teachers that although "no one knows the day or hour" (Matt. 24:36), we can know the general time of year and maybe even the specific week when Jesus will come. A few go so far as to identify the feast of Sukkot/Tabernacles as the exact time that Christ will return. Yet it appears they have forgotten that the same Christ who disallowed the setting of specific dates and hours also said, "It is not for you to know the *times* or *seasons* which the Father has fixed by His own authority" (Acts 1:7). As followers of Christ, **we must bring every thought captive to this teaching of our Master and avoid such vain speculation.**

Similarly, there is much speculation on the significance of the *turn of the millennium*. Some teachers have suggested that this is the end of the sixth thousand years after creation. In this scheme, the next thousand-year period corresponds to the seventh day of creation. Representing Sabbath rest, this millennium *must* constitute the beginning of the thousand years of Christ's rule on the earth (Rev. 20:4). Since this cannot occur until the return of Christ, this event must take place in or near the year 2000. There are three related problems.

**First**, while this approach avoids the pronouncement of a specific date, it is still date-setting. **Second**, it is man-centered and man-generated. Who said that the acts of the God of the Universe must be tied to a calendar created by humans? In fact, the calendar we follow today (by which we are led to assume that Jesus was born in the year zero) actually contains a six-to-twelve-year error. All historians recognize that Jesus was born about 6BC, since Herod the Great died in 4 BC (Josephus, *History of the Jewish War* 1:665, *Antiquities of the Jews* 17:190-191). Therefore, the new millennium actually began somewhere between 1988 and 1994! **Third**, the method behind this theory is selective and arbitrary. If those who set dates are going to adopt a Jewish worldview which sees human history as divided up into seven thousand-year days like creation, then they should also adopt the Jewish system of counting the years. The date-setters never do this, however, because according to the Jewish calendar it's the year 5760, which means we've got 240 more years to go before the millennium! And they couldn't get anyone excited about an event that only their great-great-great grandchildren will witness!

Another development which threatens to sidetrack the church is the sensation created by books and movies whose promise is that there is **a hidden code in the Bible**, which if properly deciphered, will yield secrets of the end-time not clearly spelled out in Scripture. It doesn't seem to bother such high-tech prognosticators or their followers that God's people have done without this revelation for 4000 years. Thousands of martyrs must have been cheated out of the benefit of revelations which could have provided them comfort and direction! Let's consider these important questions: Is the message of God's revelation now dependent on computers and number crunching software, which are products of fallen, fallible humanity? What does this do to the original intent of the author,

the foundational principle of all Protestant hermeneutics? Doesn't this change the nature of the Bible from a straightforward revelation of the nature and will of God into a primarily symbolic, mystical code? At the end of the 20th century, are we going to return to medieval Jewish mystical principles of interpretation to interpret a Book *characterized by clarity*? **Can we not cling to the time-tested assurances given to the reliability of the Bible, namely, fulfilled prophecy, the consistency of the character of God, the unity of message and lack of contradiction in Scripture, and the historical accuracy of Scripture as confirmed by archeology and comparative studies?**

Likewise, the Church must not be sidetracked by prophetic schemes which make **specific predictions**. The book *88 Reasons Why Jesus Will Come in 1988*, like its revised version *89 Reasons*, came and went, bringing discouragement and disrepute to the Body of Christ. Specific prognostications about eschatological events other than the return of Christ should also be avoided. Many remember the prophecy, "On June 9 [1994], God will rip evil from the earth." Unfortunately, that also did not happen. What did happen was some were confused and disillusioned; those who publicized that false prophecy looked more like the Jehovah's Witnesses with all their failed prophecies about the return of Christ. About a year ago, there was a prophecy that we were "in the closing moment of the age of grace." Given the passage of time, these were also ill-advised words. All such eschatological speculation must be rejected on the authority of Christ's words in Matt. 24:36 and Acts 1:7!

Here's one last example of sidetracks. If we say that we believe in the **imminent** return of Christ, we need to understand what that means. It means that we can accept *NO exceptions*; Jesus said the times and seasons are "in the Father's own power" (Acts 1:7). There can be *no "prerequisites" dependent on human activity*, not even the "evangelization of every man, woman, and child" or the more generalized "until every people-group is reached." Further, there does not *have to be* a world-wide revival in which millions are swept into the kingdom before Christ can return.

Today it seems we spend more time talking about these things than we do about the return of Christ, *our "blessed hope."* We evangelize because the love of God for His creation compels us and because Jesus commanded us to do so. Jesus is not "restrained in the heavenlies" until we convert the entire world, or take over all governmental systems and institute His rule for Him, or any other development dependent on the activity of man.

**There is *nothing* standing in the way of Christ's return** (see Acts 17:6; Rom. 1:8; 10:18; Col. 1:5-6). We must understand that if we accept any prerequisite other than God's sovereign will, we effectively negate our belief in the imminence of the return of Christ. As evangelistic and mission-minded as the early church was, it never abandoned its belief in the imminent return of Christ. This is the model today's Church must follow. Therefore, let the "bride" say what the Scripture calls on her to say - "Come, Lord Jesus!" (Rev. 22:17,20).

If God is not interested in our being able to decipher the identity of the anti-Christ, the meaning of 666, the details of Armageddon, or the day of the return of Christ, **what does**

**He want the believer to focus on?** The Word makes clear what Jesus expects of believers living in the end-time.

\* **Don't worry or be afraid; God is in complete control.** The world will not end by alien invasion, terrorist nukes, or by a conspiracy of the Illuminati. God is the One Who gathers the nations to battle at Armageddon. The nations are still a drop in a bucket compared to Him (Isa. 40:15). It's His plan; He controls history, and He will bring it to an end in His time. He will not hand over this control to any man or men. Our God reigns! He knows the end from the beginning (Isa. 46:10), so none of these ominous events can take Him by surprise.

\* **Have confidence: God's victory is sure.** We can have confidence, because God is in control, and the victory is assured. If we know the message of the Bible, what the future holds is clear to us. It is not uncertain; it is not "up to us;" it is not "up for grabs." God knows what is going to happen because He planned it, and has the power to accomplish it. We should know, however, that this victory is not dependent on the activities of frail humanity. Rather, *He* has promised to get personally involved. He will again enter the pages of human history to defend His honor, His Word and His people (see Rev. 16:19-20; 18:17-18; 19:11-21; 20:8-10). Knowing this, it should be easy to obey the word of Jesus, "But when these things begin to take place, look up, and lift up your heads, for your redemption is drawing near!" (Lk. 21:28; see Rev. 19:7). When everything is said and done, the victory song we sing to Him will go something like this: "The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ and He shall reign forever and ever!" (Rev. 11:15).

\* **Be assured: Jesus is coming back!** We can be assured that the crucial moment in this victory will come at the return of Christ. And just because we don't know when He will come, does not mean we cannot have complete assurance that He will. God has not broken one promise yet. His record is perfect in the promise-fulfillment category. We can also trust His timing, because it is always perfect. We may not be able to predict the day/hour/times/seasons, but we know He will come at exactly the right time. This was the case when Jesus came the first time. Paul tells us "When the fullness of time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman" (Gal 4:4). Matthew is even more specific and notes that there were 14 generations from the exile to the birth of Christ (1:17). Here, Matthew is showing his Jewish audience that Jesus is the Messiah. He has pointed out that there is a rhythm to God's redemptive acts. The high points of redemptive history - the call of Abraham, the coronation of King David, the destruction of the temple and exile of Judah were all separated by 14 generations. His argument is simple: count 14 generations from the exile, the last great event in Biblical History, and what great redemptive event took place? The birth of Jesus! Therefore, if Jesus came the first time according to the plan of God at exactly the perfect time, then in the plan of God He will come again at exactly the right time!

\* **Be proactive: there are things to Do.** As we study the teaching of Jesus and the Apostles concerning the en-time, an amazing consistency emerges. Almost every time the end-time and what believers are to do in the light of the end of time is discussed, the same themes appear again and again. The following is an inexhaustive list of positive directives given to the Church on how we are to live in the last days:

- \* Be constantly engaged in witness (Jn. 4:35; 9:4; I Cor. 15:58; Gal. 6:9; Eph. 5:16), emphasizing that the time of His return is near (Mt. 4:17; 2 Cor. 6:2).
- \* Be on guard against the increasing deceivers and deceptions of the end-time (Mt. 24:4-5, 11, 24; I Tim. 4:1; 2 Ptr. 3:17). 3)
- \* Be awake, sober, and alert (Mt. 13:33-37; 24:42-43; 25:13; I Thes. 5:6; I Ptr. 4:7; Rev. 16:15).
- \* Be ready, prepared (Mt. 24:44; 25:10; Lk. 12:35-37; Rev. 19:7).
- \* Be wise (Mt. 25:2; I Ptr. 4:7; 2 Ptr. 3:18).
- \* Be holy in conduct and thought-life (Lk. 21:34; 2 Ptr. 3:11; Rev. 16:15).
- \* Be living "servant" lives filled with the fruit of good deeds (Heb. 10:24-25; I Ptr. 4:8-10).
- \* Be earnestly and expectantly desiring His appearing (Lk. 12:36; 2 Tim. 4:8; 2 Ptr. 3:12; Rev. 22:17,20).

**What a list!** This should keep us busy enough that we don't have time to get caught up in date-setting, worry or fear. None of us should have time for joining end-time apocalyptic or militia groups, or hoarding food and guns. With all the positive commands of the Master and His apostles, heaven help us if we become sidetracked by trying to take over the government or by quitting our jobs and moving to the Mount of Olives.

Finally, it is instructive to observe that although Jesus and the writers of the NT had a lot to say concerning His return, it had more to do with *how we should live today* in light of that return than about dropping hints and juicy sensationalistic details regarding the future! May we adopt the end-time focus of Jesus and the apostles, choosing their message over crowd manipulation; holiness over hysteria; biblical substance over sensationalism. May we, and our hearers, be ready for and earnestly desire His coming. The Spirit and the Bride say "Come!" Let the one who hears say "Come!" **Even so, come Lord Jesus! Article used with permission.**

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## **APPROACHING DARKNESS AND APPROACHING GLORY**

Betty Swinford

In viewing the world scene today, one must conclude that the inhabitants of Planet Earth have gone stark raving mad!

### **A DAY OF PARADOXES**

While some in high places want to legalize marijuana, a teenager gives a friend a Midol for menstrual cramps and is suspended from school; the man who occupies the highest office in the land turns the oval office into a lurid love nest, yet a small boy plants an innocent kiss on the cheek of a little girl and is likewise suspended and the same people who weep over a whale trapped in the ice callously demand that the brains be sucked from their partially born infants.

Incredible? There is more. Kill a kangaroo rat and a stiff fine or jail sentence is in your future. Kill a squirrel, even if you are lost in the woods and starving, and a fine or prison sentence awaits you. Not to mention the land being taken from people in order to protect the fairy shrimp - of which there are billions of the tiny critters! And of course, logging in many parts of the country has shut down, robbing men of the privilege of providing for their families because of the spotted owl.

We live in the day when they "...worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator." Rom. 1:25

The worst assault of all, however, is that, while pornography and child exploitation are protected on the Internet because of the First Amendment, talk about God in the workplace or on a public mode of transportation is strictly forbidden. For this grave offense you can be: sued, jailed, fined, or put off a bus (even if you are pregnant).

### **WE MUST WATCH THE SIGNS**

I used to travel extensively, and you may be certain that I watched the signs. They told me where I was and how to reach my destination, even though it was in some remote part of the country.

Just so, when the disciples asked Jesus, "...what shall be the sign of they coming...?" Jesus responded by listing a number of signs to watch for. He did not leave us to grope down dark and shadowy corridors of confusion, He gave us signs to go by.

In Matthew 24 Jesus began by speaking of wars and rumors of wars. Were we to attempt listing all the wars being waged at the present time, the theme would occupy this entire article.

He spoke also of kingdom against kingdom, and we know that this refers to ethnic groups within a country. To name but a few of these 'kingdoms': in the Middle East it is the Arabs and the Jews; in Ireland, it is the Catholics and the Protestants; and more recently, of course, it is the Serbs and the Albanians.

So it goes, as hatred and violence in the hearts of men give vent to killing and plundering. Only Christ's love in the human heart can dispel such senseless hatred and bring men into harmony.

### **PERILOUS TIMES SHALL COME**

In verse 7 of this same chapter, Jesus warns that there will be famines, earthquakes, and pestilences. II Timothy opens with: "This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come."

Famines ravage the earth, even though our silos are bursting with grain. Millions die of starvation, their shrunken stomachs crying out for food. Even in our own country, thousands go to bed hungry every night.

Earthquakes are increasing to such an extent that is mindboggling. But there are still some things that man cannot control, and earth movement and freak weather patterns are among them.

No one need use his imagination in recalling the recent devastating earthquakes in Turkey and Taiwan. Following on their heels were the earthquakes in Mexico and the Los Angeles area. Scientists and prognosticators alike are asking how long it will be until the big one hits our country. Sadly, it is doubtful that people truly take such an event seriously. We are, after all, AMERICA, blessed and untouchable from the ravages of such an occurrence. But just because God has favored us throughout history does not mean that He will forever wink at our nation's sins.

On the news last evening, a commentator said that in the past there was one major catastrophe in the world per year; now there is one a month. (In some cases there appear to be three or four a month!)

Webster states that a pestilence is a deadly epidemic or plague. In addition to AIDS, the man-eating virus, and a new outbreak of tuberculosis, strange new sicknesses and viruses abound. And these are not responding to the old types of treatment.

"All these," Jesus said, "Are the beginning of sorrows."

The beginning of sorrows is the time of Jacob's trouble (Jer. 30:7) or the great tribulation; and according to the words of Jesus, we have now entered in to the early stages of the tribulation period.

### **COMING PERSECUTION**

One verse later, Jesus warned of coming persecution, and this is something that we here in America can hardly conceive.

We will hear of missionaries being killed for Christ and of Christians in Sudan being sold into slavery, and we shake our heads and say, "How terrible!" Then we breathe a prayer

for those left behind and for courage for those who are so persecuted and go our merry way without giving the matter another thought.

Yet, slowly and subtly, persecution has begun in our own country, as mentioned before. The closer we get to the change in the world systems, the more intense the persecution will become. Many have already said that the only thing standing in their way are Bible-believing Christians!

There also will be, and is already today, persecution in the home. Matthew writes in 24:10, ". . . many. . . shall betray one another. . ." Mark 13:12 is more explicit and says, "...and children shall rise up against their parents. . . "

Rebellion and hatred to the point of murdering one's parents is more and more evidenced by children today. And when parents discipline their children, they may well call 911 to report the incident and be promptly removed from the home.

Recently in Seattle I learn from a friend that when he applied discipline to one son, the son called "911" and was immediately placed in Child Protective Services. The father was issued a stern warning; discipline the other son and he, too, would be taken from him. The father and the more are totally frustrated. While the second son is into drugs and stays out all hours doing as he pleases, the parents are disallowed by the system to control him.

Many parents are terrified of just such a scenario. They know that discipline is necessary and Biblical, but how to accomplish this without the authorities stepping in is beyond them.

### **DAY OF DECEPTION**

In Matthew 24:11, Jesus said, "And many false prophets shall arise and shall deceive many." Joined with this is the following verse which states that because iniquity abounds, the love of many will grow cold. Paul puts it this way in II Thess. 2:3; "...for that day shall not come except there come the falling away first...."

The false prophets of our day lie to the people and fleece the sheep for their own insatiable greed. Leonard Ravenhill said, "Their creed is greed and their god is gold."

So much stock is placed in the modern day prophets that one minister wrote, "It's not so much faith in Jesus Christ as it is in how you treat the latter day apostles and prophets."

Instead of measuring all things by the word of God, people are drawn into doctrines that are pure heresy. Fixing their star-glazed eyes upon the newest leader promising riches and prosperity, Christians are by the multiplied thousands drawn into deception: for most assuredly this is the day of deception, and men run after man instead of God.

If Christians would only stop long enough to read passages of Scripture like I Timothy 6! What about Hebrews 13:5? "Let your manner of life be without covetousness, and be

content with such things as you have; for He has said, I will never leave you nor forsake you." (emphasis mine)

People get into trouble when they covet material possessions and are no longer satisfied with Jesus alone. That illusive 'something more' will never bring true contentment.

We live in a day of itching ears, the titillating new doctrines that only leave one spiritually bankrupt. Strange new doctrines are constantly emerging to accommodate such individuals. Though they are persuasive, beguiling and promising, they cannot deliver.

One such exercise requires that one sits with his hands on his knees, palms up and his feet flat on the floor. This position is supposed to give one better admittance to the throne of God: however, if it reminds you of the lotus position in Yoga, you are correct. Nothing in the word of God instructs an individual to be in some special position to pray.

Another occultic practice designed to deceive and tickle the ears is to go into the woods, lie flat on your back and let your spirit rise to meet your personal angel.

What clever deception and a clear New Age tactic. If a Christian were prompted to meet his spirit guide, he would be immediately alert. Ah, but an angel? It sounds so. . .spiritual. Except it isn't: it smacks of astral projection and is designed by the New Agers to lead stray gullible Christians and introduce him to a demon spirit.

Beware all the new and enticing doctrines and experiences that are not Bible-orientated. Check all things by the word of God and hold fast to that which is truth.

Watchman Nee said, "Before the day of the coming of the Lord, there shall arise great deception and error. The form of godliness will be increased due to false beliefs engendered by Satan and the love of the world. . . . These wicked spirits will do their best to mislead and oppress God's people. They will attack our bodies, suppress our wills and deaden our thoughts. Having found our spirits tired, our thoughts dull and our wills drowsy, such darkness and such atmosphere we must resolutely resist."

### **SATANISM ON THE RISE**

Satanism is sharply on the rise. "666" is the most popular number combination on earth and the Satanic Bible is the number 2 best seller among teenagers. Satanic symbols and the numbers "666" are shaved onto heads, worn on clothing and tattooed on bodies. The other day in Phoenix, a high school was covered with all sorts of Satanic symbols. These symbols were spray-painted on walls, steps and even on the few cars in the parking lot.

Cats are mutilated in Satanic rituals. This is a constant threat in Phoenix and made the news again recently. Even in the tiny Indiana community where I was born, a woman who lives next door to a cemetery was awakened at midnight by the chilling sound of chanting. Going to the window, she saw a Satanic ritual taking place around a grave marker, complete with human bones, black candles and hooded figures in black robes.

In Flagstaff, Arizona, a few miles from where I live, a man I spoke with had gone into the forest to empty ashes from his barbecue. When his truck refused to start, he began walking for help and was attracted to sound coming from deep within the forest. Thinking a group of teenagers were having a party, he went to ask for assistance.

What he saw, deep in a ravine, was a 50' cross burning on the ground. Standing around the cross chanting were more than a hundred people of all ages with their hands clasped. Realizing he had come upon a cult and suddenly aware of armed guards in the forest, he dropped to his stomach and crawled from the scene.

Are we are that Satanists, witches and warlocks come to church every Sunday? They may look like us and talk like us, but their motive is to infiltrate and destroy.

One such case occurred in our Christian and Missionary Alliance church years ago. A couple entered our fellowship and expressed a desire to teach classes. They were immediately put to work; but in a short time they were inviting church folk to their home in the foothills where they were carefully instructed in some strange doctrine by a professor from the University.

Because one couple grew wary, went to the pastor and the case was investigated, the new couple was dismissed from teaching and subsequently left the church. From that time on our pastor set a three month test period for every new member who wanted to be put to work.

The Bible says, "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but test the spirits whether they be of God." (I John 4:1). Again, "...know them who labor among you..." (I Thess. 5:12).

## **SIGNS AND WONDERS**

In addition to all this, Jesus predicted that false Christs would arise who would perform great signs and wonders.

Anyone who can promise miracles will have people beating a path to his door. Never mind that it might not be God, miracles are always supposed to point to the Great Benefactor. But this is not always so, and we must be careful, yes diligent, to check out the person who is supposedly doling out miracles. Who is he? Does he speak truth? Is he truly walking with God or exalting himself and consumed with his own self-interests? Is he genuine or is it some faade he wears to gain your confidence, your following and your money?

False Christs have come and gone. We have had Rev. Moon, Jim Jones, David Koresh and Father Divine. These type of men exhibit such charisma that people literally worship them.

A lady who was to be introduced to Father Divine vowed that she could not be swayed by him; yet when she entered his presence she stooped at once to kiss the top of his head.

Such is the power and magnetism that such men display. One must wonder if much of their charisma that so attracts people is not sheer mind control or mass hypnosis.

Of some false Christs, the Bible says that, "They went out from us, but they were not of us. . ." (I John 2:19). Again in Acts 20:30 we read, "Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them."

By no means are all the false Christs from any type of religious backgrounds, however. The New Age is also in on the act.

When in Seattle a few years ago I saw on television a New Age channeler conducting what appeared to be a prayer line. When she laid her hands on people they broke into tears and fell backwards as if they had been slain in the Spirit.

### **HOW MUCH WILL WE ENDURE?**

Darkness is upon the horizon and overspreading the sky. Just how much will we be called upon to endure as the tribulation period draws ever nearer? I honestly do not know, and the speculations are too numerous to contemplate in this brief article.

We do know this, however; since the signs are all around us, certainly the coming of the Lord cannot be far away.

Jesus said in Matthew 24:32-24 that when the fig tree puts forth her leaves that it is near, even at the door, and that the generation who sees these signs will be the generation that sees the coming of Christ for His Church. A generation is about 40 years.

We are aware that the fig tree represents Israel, but there is a difference of opinion as to when she put forth her leaves. Some think this occurred in 1948 when she again became a nation. Others believe, according to Daniel 9:24, the generation began in 1967 when Jerusalem was again Israel's possession. This thought would place the Rapture somewhere beyond year 2000.

Mark 13:32 states, "But of that day and hour knows no man. . ." Still, the prognosticators insist on setting dates as to the time of His arrival.

We probably all recall the book, "88 Reasons Why Jesus Will Come in '88". The truth is, we are only admonished to watch for His return, for the Father alone knows when His Son will return for His Bride.

Here we must cross swords with those who promote the Kingdom Age doctrine and insist that there is no Rapture of the Church. They preach that they will take over the world by their own power and then invite Jesus to come and be King over the kingdom they have established for Him.

Bishop Earl Paulk scorns those Christians who are "...standing foolishly gazing into the heavens waiting for some dramatic escape from earth".

But we must take another look at I Thess. 4:17, "Those who 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."

The words 'caught up' or 'catch' (as in catching away) come from the Greek word *harpazo*, which means 'to snatch away' or 'force suddenly exercised'. It is the same word applied in Acts 8:30 when Phillip was caught away after baptizing the Ethiopian eunuch. It is also the word used when the Apostle Paul was caught up to the third heaven in II Cor. 12:2, and in Rev. 12:5 when the male child (Jesus) was caught up to God.

There is a beautiful analogy that comes from the culture of Jesus' day regarding the coming of the Lord for His Bride.

When a young couple was betrothed - as in the case of Mary and Joseph - that betrothal was legal and binding, but it was not yet the actual marriage.

After the betrothal the bridegroom went away to build a house for his bride. He did not know when he would go for her. Indeed, there was a saying among the people that no one knew the day or the hour.

The father of the groom came periodically to inspect the house, and only when he said, "Son, go get your bride" did the groom move toward that final commitment. All along the bridal route the cry went out, "Behold, the bridegroom cometh!" (Matt. 25:6).

We were betrothed to Christ the moment we received Him as our Saviour, and He has gone away to build us a house. (John 14:2,3). Only the Father knows when He will return for His Bride, but one day He will descend with a shout that the Bridegroom is Coming! We, too, will be caught up to be with Him forever!

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