

The Lord's Coming in the Clouds

by Art Katz

The coming of the Lord in clouds represents a necessary step in the knowledge of God, where we must surrender our old concepts and enter into the darkness of sorrow and suffering in order to know Him in righteousness.

Scripture: Exodus 24:15-16, Isaiah 53:3, Jeremiah 30 - 31, Matthew 17:8, Mark 13:24-26, Mark 15:33, Luke 9:34, Luke 23:44-45, John 17:3, Romans 8:18

Topics: "The Coming of the Lord", "Suffering and Revelation"

Description

Art Katz emphasizes the significance of the Lord's coming in the clouds, suggesting that such a revelation is often preceded by clouds of sorrow, bereavement, and suffering. He draws parallels between the darkness at the crucifixion and the necessity of experiencing God's presence through trials, arguing that true faith emerges from confronting the darkest aspects of existence. Katz highlights the importance of understanding God's character beyond our limited perceptions, urging believers to embrace the 'clouds' that accompany divine revelation. He warns against the trivialization of God and calls for a deeper engagement with the suffering of Israel, which reflects God's judgment and mercy. Ultimately, he encourages the Church to prepare for the coming of the Lord by entering into these dark clouds of understanding and compassion.

Transcript

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But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers that are in the heavens will be shaken. And then they will see The Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory (Mk. 13:24-26). Without in any way questioning the literalness of this eschatological glory, I suspect, as is often the case, that it contains an allegorical and spiritual meaning as well perhaps a necessary principle pertaining to the coming of any revelation of the Lord in fullness.

Namely, a 'coming' or revelation of the Lord that must, somehow of necessity, be preceded or accompanied by 'clouds'. But 'clouds' of what kind? Oswald Chambers in his July 29th selection (My

Utmost for His Highest) suggests that except He come in clouds there cannot be a 'coming'. That somehow such a glory requires a shrouding, that "God cannot come near without clouds, He does not come in clear shining." For him the clouds are suggestive of "sorrow, bereavement and suffering" and "If there were no clouds, we should not have [true] faith."

Is this not suggested in the "darkness over the whole land" (Mk. 15:33) at the crucifixion of Jesus? Luke's gospel describes it as "darkness over all the earth...then the sun was darkened" (obscured margin, 23:44-45. See Gen. 28:11 for when "the sun had set" on Jacob!). Indescribably horrible as that pitiable scene was, it was also at the same time an ultimate revelation of God in both judgment and mercy as He in fact is and not as men had supposed Him to be. Therefore a 'coming' in such fullness must necessarily be shrouded in "sorrow, bereavement and suffering."

Is this why Jurgen Moltmann in his book, *The Crucified God*, cites the maxim that "True faith begins where the atheist thinks it should end", i.e., in the mind-boggling contradiction of all we thought to be true about God? Is that not in fact what may have been divinely intended for Israel through the stupefying darkness of her recent Holocaust? Chambers writes, There is a connection between the strange providences of God and what we know of Him...Unless we can look the darkest, blackest fact full in the face without damaging God's character, we do not yet know Him.

That is, something is reserved in the knowledge of Him, that can only be obtained in the 'cloud' of sorrow, bereavement and suffering. But note, not a bereavement or sorrow for the loss of life only, but for the irretrievable loss of one's cherished concept of God, of time-honored religious verities that perish in the furnace of the unthinkable. If so, was God not judging at Auschwitz (and at all previous calamities) the inadequacy of Jewish 'faith' (to whatever degree it in fact authentically existed or could exist independent of the revelation of the Holy One of Israel)? a 'faith' sufficient for Jewish existence perhaps, for its cultural identity and religious need, but falling far short and in opposition to that saving knowledge of Himself forfeited in the rejection of the Crucified Christ?

A pre-Holocaust religious orthodoxy of the kind whose passing Elie Wiesel lamented which having served his youthful idealism collapsed, as it did for Richard Rubenstein (After Auschwitz) as for many (and never to be recovered), with the dark clouds of the Nazi time and in the anguish which followed. Instead of the "clear shining" in which God comes, as it were, through the clouds, Israel (not unlike the Church today) satisfied itself with banal sentimentality, rabbinical constructs or a reformed liberal Judaism of a more rational kind in keeping with the secular temper of the pre-world war bourgeois society (embarrassed as we were by the supernaturalism of the Scriptures!).

'Yiddishkeit', folkloric adages and ethical and moral prescriptions, however endearing to men and hallowed by usage cannot substitute for the knowledge of God in righteousness, a knowledge which alone dispels all those idolatries dear to men which serve their purposes in freeing them from the radical requirements of a living God. "O that they might know Me" is ever the cry of God through the prophets, whom to know is life eternal! Was not Moses required to enter such a cloud and to remain in it for six days (the number of man) before being called up into the very presence of God shrouded until the seventh day?

"Then Moses went up into the mountain, and a cloud covered the mountain. Now the glory of the Lord rested on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it six days. And on the seventh day He called to Moses out of the midst of the cloud."(Ex. 24:15-16). Of the disciples on the mount of Transfiguration, it says of them (Luke 9:34) "and they were fearful as they entered the cloud." Characteristically, Peter, symbolic of the

Church at large, opts to institutionalize the moment in making three booths, "not knowing what he said."

So also with ourselves, I would suggest, full of prattle about God whom we do not know as we ought and often serve mistakenly out of an immaturity and carnal zeal. It is only out of the cloud that came over them, "that they saw no man, [even their own seeing] but Jesus only" glorified (Mt. 17:8). "They feared as they entered the cloud" and rightly so the very fear so conspicuously absent from the contemporary Church that has inevitably trivialized God for the want of it. But how many will balk from entering because of it?

The heart of the matter, I suspect, is the fear not of God, but of that loss of the comfortable 'sense of God' fashioned according to our own measure and contingent upon our view of ourselves, our ministries, our categories, of reality itself as we perceive it and would have it to be understood. How many will not enter the cloud for reasons of that kind and compelling God therefore to bring them involuntarily in to the darker, more ominous clouds of inflicted terror and bewilderment?

How much, for that reason, is that yet Israel's necessary future experience (Jer. 30-31) and equally that of an escapist Church itself? Conclusion For Israel, then, the 'cloud of His Coming' is in their final tribulation. For the Church, is it not the entering into the revelation of God through the stupefying consideration of and identification with Israel's sufferings both her past and yet future Holocaust as being the statement of His mind-numbing judgment--His necessary, justifiable and not at all arbitrary judgment?

Will that not be as transfiguring for us as the cloud on the mount when both the Law and the Prophets, co-joined together in Moses and Elijah, "appeared in glory and spoke of His decease which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem" (Lk. 9:31) and would now speak of Israel's and in the same place? We must not especially as friends of Israel balk at the entering into these 'dark clouds' of dread consideration. The issue of God as God is at stake and the making of Him known as saving God to as many as will before "those days" and "that tribulation" by which alone they will then see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory" (Mk. 13:24,26) to their inexpressible joy and not their dismay.

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