

# Russell Kelfer I Will Appear in the Cloud

**#1123-B**

**Series: Making the Spiritual Switch**

**dtm** DISCIPLESHIP TAPE MINISTRIES, INC.  
INTO HIS LIKENESS RADIO

10602 Mossbank, San Antonio, TX 78230 • (210) 226-0000 / 1-800-375-7778 • [www.dtm.org](http://www.dtm.org) • [dtm@dtm.org](mailto:dtm@dtm.org)

# I Will Appear in the Cloud

It was a cool, calm day at the beach. The Marshall family, after a hectic afternoon, was tired and ready for a break. “I know what we’ll do;” Dad bellowed. “We’ll use our imaginations and see what we can see in the clouds”. The chorus of “Oh, no, not that kindergarten stuff” was followed by “You gotta be kiddin’, Dad.” “I think your Dad was raised in the 18th century,” Timmy, the neighborhood “tagalong” whispered, thinking he could not be heard.

Dad was by choice a little hard of hearing (as dads often are) and thus decided to pretend that the unanimous vote of “no” had never taken place. He and Mom proceeded to “read the cartoons in the clouds” the way they had done as teenagers in their own back yards. That of course was “PT” (Pre-television) when it was still fashionable to just watch God’s handiwork rather than man’s.

At any rate, Mom began. “I think I see a giraffe over there to the left,” she exclaimed. “Over there behind that building”. “There’s the head of a lion,” Dad observed, “just above the car”. “S-h-h-h” replied Eddy, their teenage son, “People will hear you and know you’re loony tunes,” he warned, looking around with the kind of embarrassment only teenagers can display when they’re forced to be seen in public with their parents.

Undaunted, the couple proceeded. “Look”, Dad, almost shrieked; “That one looks like Aunt Muriel.” Little Bonnie giggled. “That I can relate to,” she chimed in. “You mean the giraffe one?”

“Bonnie!” Mom reacted, “That’s not nice; so Muriel is a little thin...” This exercise seemed to be getting nowhere fast, but Dad refused to quit. “Look at that horse head over there” he said, carefully speaking only to his wife, as though the kids were on another planet. He was afraid they would liken the horse head to Uncle Charley and spoil his whole evening. But strangely enough, Freddy chimed in, “I see it; I see it. It *does* look like a horse—look at the ears; look at the eye. Wow!”

Bonnie soon joined in, “There’s a fish over there—look at the fish!” she cried.

Before long the whole family entered in except, of course,

## I Will Appear in the Cloud

for Eddy, who was now burrowing down into the sand trying to appear to be guarding this strange bunch from outer space until the straight jackets arrived.

Freddy saw a cloud that looked just like an airplane. Bonnie found one that had the shape of a tree. Dad's imagination even conjured up a cloud shaped like a T-bone steak, but since he always had food on his mind, the rest of the family just chalked that one up to an overactive appetite. Surprisingly, they were having so much fun "reading the clouds" they lost track of the time, and before long, the sun began to set. Soon its rays had formed a golden glow around the edges of the cloud formations. It was as though a master painter had come along and tinged the entire sky with one final brilliant touch of color (which of course, He had).

Suddenly, Dad realized that one member of the family had been quiet the entire time. "Betsy," Dad exclaimed, as though he had just come back from a visit in a time machine, "What do *you* see in the clouds?" We've found elephants, giraffes, tigers, steaks—even airplanes. *What do you see in the clouds?*" There was a brief silence. Then Betsy answered, "I see God in the clouds. I see God". Suddenly everything came into perspective. They had been looking at the clouds for *material symbols*, but here was a thirteen year old, scanning the heavens with the eyes of her spirit instead. "Tell us *how* you see God," Dad asked quietly.

*"I see His love* when they cover the sun and cool us off" she answered. *"I see His majesty* when thunderheads form. *I see his gentleness* in the way they move across the sky. *I see the uniqueness of His plan* in the fact that no two clouds are just the same, just as no two snowflakes are the same. *I see His sovereignty* in the way He moves them at His will, wherever He chooses."

By now the rest of the family was silent, even Eddy. They settled down as the sun continued to lay its head on the pillows God had formed for it in the heavens and they began to play the game again; only *this time* they used the eyes of their hearts. This time they began to see *what they could learn about God from the clouds*.

It's a good game to play but it's not really a game. It's a Scriptural reality. The clouds *like everything else God made*, were painted into His universe with a dual purpose: to meet actual

## I Will Appear in the Cloud

physical needs—to provide shade and rain, for instance—as well as to portray images of the God who made them. The Marshall family was at first looking into the heavens much the way most of us do, and the deeper significance was passing them by, a message that often passes us by, as well.

Therefore, let's join them in the spiritual switch by using the Scriptures as our binoculars to focus on God's message found in clouds.

### THROUGH SPIRITUAL BINOCULARS

The word “cloud” appears in virtually every book in the Bible. It speaks concerning not only physical benefits to man such as being a heat shield or covering for him, demonstrating God's mercy (Psalm 105:39), but concerning characteristics of God's attitudes and actions such as His resting quietly, watching events from His dwelling place “*like a cloud of dew in the heat of harvest*” (Psalm 18:4).

Clouds are a warning of an impending storm, speaking of God's protection (I Kings 18:44). Clouds, in the context of the rainbow and God's covenant, remind us of his faithfulness (Genesis 9:13). At times of man's rebellion and transgressions God is seen as covering or wrapping Himself in clouds so that no prayer can get through, reminding us of His omniscience and justice (Lamentations 3:44). Clouds are also portrayed as a vehicle used by God to hide His face from man, reminding us of His holiness (Ezekiel 32:7). And so it goes.

### WHAT CLOUDS SAY ABOUT GOD

There are three particular truths on which to focus the spiritual binoculars which will show not only the *nature of God*, but *how God relates His nature to us*.

#### His Presence

The most obvious use God made for clouds in Scripture was to *demonstrate His presence*. God created the cloud, not only as a covering for the Heavens, but also as a covering for Himself. It is to protect man from the awesomeness of His Holiness while at the same time revealing to finite man that an invisible God Is, indeed, with Him. Man seems to have a problem with the invisible. We do not like what we cannot see. Because the entire spirit world is invisible, we tend to deify *the works of God*, rather than *God Himself*. We worship miracles because miraculous results can be

## I Will Appear in the Cloud

seen. We like numbers because numbers can be used to measure. We determine growth by external signs rather than by internal transformation because we cannot see internal transformation. God works in just the opposite way. He specifically warned us of that fact.

...for the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart.  
(1 Samuel 16:7)

God has x-ray vision. He sees beneath the pettiness and the hypocrisy of that which is externally visible. He looks into the recesses of the spirit of man to see the real person who lives in that body, and he determines who we are not based on what we do, *but on what we would do were there no restraints and no consequences*. That's how God views us.

The question with the Israelites was *how would they view God?* They did not yet have His Spirit indwelling them. They could see His works, but when the works ceased, they assumed He had gone on a long vacation, or had fallen asleep. So God needed to make Himself known to assure them of His omnipresence while at the same time protecting them from His holiness. Knowing this in eternity past, He created something wonderful called "clouds".

The Israelites were familiar with clouds. The clouds were the resting place for the rainbow, God's great visual promise to man, in Genesis 9:13-16. They were, as well, the vehicles of God's merciful showers, His gentle covering from the scorching desert heat, and His quiet compass that moved across the sky displaying the movements of the silent wind. Clouds had already become a mysterious evidence of the sovereignty of God, but God was going to *personalize the clouds* in a still more wonderful way.

We might begin by looking at Leviticus 16:2. In that passage, Aaron's two sons had died, and God called Moses to Himself and gave Him a wonderful promise, coupled with a serious warning.

And the LORD said unto Moses, Speak unto Aaron thy brother, that he come not at all times into the holy place within the veil before the mercy seat, which is upon the ark; that he die not: for I will appear in the cloud upon the mercy seat.  
(Leviticus 16:2)

"I will appear in the cloud," God said. My presence will be designated by the presence of an awesome, brilliant, cloud. It will announce where I AM, and it will cover Me so you cannot see

## I Will Appear in the Cloud

more of My Holiness, than you, in your sinfulness, can tolerate without dying.”

Aaron was to be allowed into the holy place at certain times, provided He brought the proper offering for sin, and provided He was clothed in garments of holiness, as described in the next few verses.

Another illustration is found in Exodus 16. There, you may remember, the children of Israel were murmuring against Moses, and God needed to set the record straight. So we read,

And Moses spake unto Aaron, Say unto all the congregation of the children of Israel, Come near before the LORD: for he hath heard your murmurings.

And it came to pass, as Aaron spake unto the whole congregation of the children of Israel, that they looked toward the wilderness, and, behold, the glory of the LORD appeared in the cloud. (Exodus 16:9,10)

The next verse goes on,

And The LORD spake unto Moses, saying, (Exodus 16:11a)

God communicated to His servant one-to-one, but he demonstrated His presence to the whole of the congregation by covering Himself with a glowing, magnificent cloud. God explained the mystery of His presence to Moses in Exodus 33 when Moses asked to see God.

And he said, I will make all my goodness [His character] pass before thee; and I will proclaim the name of the LORD (the evidences of His character) before thee;...

Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live. (Exodus 33:19,20b)

God needed to demonstrate His presence to man, but he needed to guard man from that very presence in all its splendor, so He clothed Himself in a cloud and descended before the people. They knew He was there, but they were not exposed to more of His purity than they could bear. God explained it further in Exodus 19,

And the LORD said unto Moses, Lo, I come unto thee in a thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak with thee, and believe thee forever.

The first lesson we can learn about clouds from this passage is the lesson of God’s *omnipresence*. I AM is. He is here right now.

## I Will Appear in the Cloud

He is there right now. He is everywhere right now. I AM is. Never will there be a time or place on planet earth where God is not. For Him *to be God*, He must be always present. That's why the Psalmist so beautifully summed it up in Psalm 139,

Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence?

If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there.

If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea;

Even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me; (Psalm 139:7-10)

If loneliness is enveloping you, or fear of the future is encompassing you, I would advise you to go outside and gaze awhile at the clouds. They are there for many reasons, not the least of which is to remind you of the presence of God. I AM is. The clouds are our picture book, depicting that fact, lest we be tempted to forget.

### His Leading

But the message of God written in the clouds goes far beyond their reminder of His presence. Once the children of Israel had learned to recognize Him clothed in the majesty of a cloud as He descended, God began to teach them *to follow that cloud* as He took them, step by step, minute by minute, towards the land of promise. The story is so familiar to you that it may seem redundant to mention it, but the principle behind it must be reviewed. Perhaps Numbers, chapter nine, is an appropriate passage to consider. There we read of the mystery of God's presence relating to the tabernacle.

So it was alway: the cloud covered it by day, and the appearance of fire by night.

And when the cloud was taken up from the tabernacle, then after that the children of Israel journeyed: and in the place where the cloud abode, there the children of Israel pitched their tents.

At the commandment of the LORD the children of Israel journeyed, and at the commandment of the LORD they pitched: as long as the cloud abode upon the tabernacle they rested in their tents.

And when the cloud tarried long upon the tabernacle many

## I Will Appear in the Cloud

days, then the children of Israel kept the charge of the LORD, and journeyed not.

And so it was, when the cloud was a few days upon the tabernacle; according to the commandment of the LORD they abode in their tents, and according to the commandment of the LORD they journeyed.

And so it was, when the cloud abode from even unto the morning, and that the cloud was taken up in the morning, then they journeyed: whether it was by day or by night that the cloud was taken up, they journeyed.

Or whether it were two days, or a month, or a year, that the cloud tarried upon the tabernacle, remaining thereon, the children of Israel abode in their tents, and journeyed not: but when it was taken up, they journeyed.

At the commandment of the LORD they rested in the tents, and at the commandment of the LORD they journeyed: they kept the charge of the LORD, at the commandment of the LORD by the hand of Moses. (Numbers 9:16-23)

The second great message wrapped in a blanket of clouds is the message of the *leading* of God. Jehovah, clothed in a cloud to project and yet protect, now began to *move the cloud at will*. Their job was not to *question* when or where or how that cloud went; they were simply to keep their eyes upon it, and follow it. If it moved daily, they moved daily. If it stopped, they stopped. “Whether two days, a month, or even *a year*,” the passage states, so long as the cloud stood still, they stood still.

Don't you wish you could learn that lesson? You may be saying, “Okay, if God would give me a cloud and a pillar of fire to follow, I'd follow.” I doubt it. If we're not following the *known will of God* in key areas of our lives, what makes us think we would follow Him without question were He to descend in a billowy cloud and begin to move? You and I have a whole book filled with absolutes the Israelites didn't have, but we stand around and cry, “If only God would lead me!” The problem isn't with the leader, Beloved. The problem is with the follower. Your God and mine desires to take us by the hand and guide us through this vast experience we call life on planet earth. The problem is usually that either *we don't agree with the plan*, or *we won't sit still long enough to find the plan*. In either case, we're the losers.

Many of us are willing to follow the leading of the Lord into new places more readily than we are to stay put and be content

## I Will Appear in the Cloud

where we are. I doubt that the children of Israel had as much trouble moving as they did staying, and staying, and staying. I can visualize them awakening every morning, looking at that cloud and wondering, “when is that thing gonna move?” *It takes much more faith to wait than it does to follow.* Waiting involves boredom. Waiting creates anxiety. Waiting develops presumption. Ah, but *waiting develops character.*

So there were times when the cloud settled on the tabernacle, and nothing happened. Day after day would come and go and life would go on with no fresh movement of God’s spirit. They *knew He was there*, but they did not know where He would take them next; and the insecurity of not knowing caused them, on many occasions, to flee the will of God. So it was while Moses was atop the mount receiving the Word of God. The people *just got tired of waiting.* They figured if God was leading, He’d be moving, or demonstrating, or acting. It never dawned on them that God does His greatest work when He appears to be doing nothing. It never dawned on them. It seldom dawns on us. So when the heavens are silent, and the days drag into months, and the months into years, *before you go and try to make something happen*, try going outside and studying the clouds. Clouds speak of the leading of God. Clouds speak of the cloud of His Shekinah Glory that led His children by day and by night; and clouds speak eloquently of the times He led them by not leading them at all—the times the cloud of His Presence simply refused to budge—lest the people miss the blessing of the hours they were called to remain in their tents and...wait.

### His Coming

Perhaps the greatest message of all etched in those beautiful snowlike formations is the natural outgrowth of the first two. Clouds speak of the presence of God who appeared to His people in a cloud of glory. Clouds speak of the leading of God who directed His people at the moving of the cloud, teaching them when and how to face the unknown of new challenges and also when and how to face the uncomfortable prospect of remaining in place.

But they speak of much more than that. I believe the greatest message spoken by the clouds is the message that Jesus is coming again. There is no better reason in the world to keep your eye upon the clouds than that. Do you want your heart to burn once again with a passion for His return? Then read and reread Acts 1.

## I Will Appear in the Cloud

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 steadfastly 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)

“A cloud received Him... and *this same Jesus shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go.*” Jesus is coming again! This is not fiction; this is fact! He is coming *just as surely as He came the first time, and He is coming in a cloud.*

Probably no passage in Scripture breathes more hope into troubled hearts than Luke 21. It is the ultimate cloud message:

And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring;

Men’s hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken.

And then they shall see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.

And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh. (Luke 21:25-28)

Coming in the clouds, oh what glory  
Coming to complete redemption’s story  
Coming to rule and to reign at last  
Oh, blessed Jesus, please come fast!

But, of course, before He comes, we go. And so Paul wrote in I Thessalonians 4,

For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet 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.

(I Thessalonians 4:16,17)

## I Will Appear in the Cloud

Caught up together, oh, what bliss  
What greater promise can God give than this  
Swept to the heavens, it could be today—  
He'll come in a cloud, and He'll take us away.

This is our hope. This is our joy. This is our victory. Jesus will one day sweep us into His arms in a magnificent cloud, and then He will return with us in a cloud of great glory to set up His Kingdom. How can you *ever* go outside and look up into the sky and see those precious pillows of white floating across the horizon without asking yourself, “Could this be the day?”

How could you ever again watch the thunderheads form against a blackening sky without shouting triumphantly “HE IS COMING!” My beloved friend, if you are a believer, He is coming for you. He has engraved for you an incredible promise in the heavens themselves. He has taken His paintbrush of hope and fashioned the skies with three dimensional portraits of His presence, His leading, and His coming. He called them “clouds”. He created them so that *every time we see a cloud*, we might be reminded that He will never leave us or forsake us; that He will always guide us and deliver us; and, most of all, that *He is coming back to receive us*.

Doesn't that make you want to do what the Marshall family did? Aren't you ready to go sit outside this evening, and just watch the clouds as they fill the skies with their beauty, and as you watch them, begin singing that grand old hymn “Jesus is Coming!”? It goes like this:

*The saints will be with Him, O heavenly bliss  
How tearful the parting from faces we miss!  
But clouds are descending and we who remain  
Are caught up to meet them with Jesus again!*

*O hearts that are weary and sinful and sad  
We carry the tidings that make us so glad:  
We publish the Saviour o'er mountain and plain,  
The LORD who redeemed us is coming again!*

(James M. Gray, J.C. Trowbridge, The Broadman Hymnal ©1940)

He is! He said, “I will appear in the cloud!” and He did!

He has said, “I will come again in the clouds...” and He will!

And every time a cloud rolls by, it sighs, “Amen”!

## I Will Appear in the Cloud

### A Challenge to Further Study and Application

1- Read Leviticus 16:2, Exodus 16:9,10, Exodus 19:9, and Numbers 9:16-23 again. Try to answer, *using those verses as your point of reference*, the following questions:

- a- Why do you think God always appeared in a cloud?
- b- Why would God appear to the whole nation that way?
- c- Why did God allow the people to see the cloud move?
- d- What was God teaching when the cloud stayed still?

2- Read Acts 1:9-11 again. Try to visualize that moment. Why would God take Him up in a cloud? How do you think Luke 21:25-28 teaches us about how Jesus will come again? What does I Thessalonians 4:16,17 teach us about what will happen first? Why do the clouds play such an important part in both events?

3- Read the references to clouds—Psalm 105:39, Isaiah 18:4, I Kings 18:44, Genesis 9:13, Lamentations 3:44, and Ezekiel 32:7—found in this chapter. Using a concordance, look up other references. Make a chart showing what kinds of things God is teaching us from the clouds. Spend time at least one day this week worshipping Him for the lessons you are learning from the clouds.

4- Thank God this week that He reveals *just as much of His nature to us as we can handle*. Ask Him to increase your capacity for truth as you meditate on His word day and night.

5- Spend some time this week contemplating the rapture of the church and the second coming of Christ. Find verses to meditate on. Worship and praise Him.

Memorize: Acts 1:9-11

**dtm** DISCIPLESHIP TAPE MINISTRIES, INC.

10602 Mossbank, San Antonio, TX 78230

210-226-0000 or 1-800-375-7778

www.dtm.org • dtm@dtm.org • © Russell Kelfer