

## The Greatest Event Ever in the Sky

### The Audible and Visible Gathering Together of the Saints with Jesus Christ and His Angels in the Clouds

#### Introduction

In the premillennial view, the rapture<sup>1</sup> is synonymous with the gathering together of the saints unto Jesus Christ (Fruchtenbaum 566; Walvoord 12, 239). The Apostle Paul timed the gathering together at the Day of Christ (2 Thessalonians 2:1-3) and had described this event earlier in 1 Thessalonians 4:14-17:

For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so *them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him*. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. 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.

In Paul's teaching, "rise" is "*anistēmi*" (Greek), meaning "to rise up, stand up of the dead". "Caught up" in Greek is "*harpazō*", meaning "to snatch out or away". "Caught up together with them" (1 Thessalonians 4:17) is specific to the *harpazō* of the living saints together with them, who are the resurrected saints, whom Christ will "bring with Him" (1 Thessalonians 4:14).

"Gathering together" is "*episynagōgē*" (Greek). It is "a gathering together in one place" of the saints with Christ. The gathering together is chronological (Fruchtenbaum 142-145) and a grouped event of three synchronized step-events. First, Christ and His angels will descend from heaven to the clouds. Second, the resurrected dead saints will ascend to be with Christ. Third, the living saints will be caught up with Christ and the resurrected saints in the clouds, culminating in the aerial assembly.

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<sup>1</sup> Rapture is derived from the Latin word, *rapiemur*, found in the Latin Vulgate Bible.

The gathering together is believed to be sign-less and thus invisible but audible (Walvoord 201, 273; Missler, *Luke* 252). This article contends that the gathering together will have audio-visual signs of Jesus Christ and His angelic hosts, clouds, opened and empty graves and mass disappearance of living saints, all of which climax in the greatest event ever in the sky. Importantly, the gathering together with Christ in the clouds, although visible, remains distinctive in mission and timing from Christ to earth on a white horse, commonly called the Second Coming (Revelation 19:11-21).

### Glorious Appearance of Jesus Christ in the Clouds

It reads in Titus 2:13: “*Looking for* that blessed hope, and the *glorious appearing* of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.” Prophecy scholars concur that the gathering together is the “blessed hope” (Walvoord 74-75, 173; LaHaye and Ice 50, 65, 72; Missler, *Matthew* 231). The blessed hope rests on the future “glorious appearing” of Jesus Christ. “Glorious” is “*doxa*” (Greek), meaning majesty. It is used to describe “the kingly majesty of the Messiah, to which belongs his kingly state, the splendor of his external appearance, the retinue of angels and the like”. “Appearing” is “*epiphaneia*” (Greek), which means appearance. It is “often used by the Greeks of a glorious manifestation of the gods, and esp. of their advent to help”. In Greek, “looking for” is “*prosdechoma*”, meaning “to expect: the fulfilment of promises”.

In another scripture, 1 Timothy 6:14-15 reads: “That thou keep this commandment without spot, unrebukeable, *until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ*. Which in his times *he shall shew*, who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords.” “Shew” is “*deiknyō*” (Greek), meaning “to show, expose to the eyes”. Here, “shew” denotes “spoken of God, as the author of Christ’s visible return”. The scripture, therefore, identifies a visible return of Jesus Christ in the clouds.

After Christ’s ascension, He came back twice and revealed Himself to Paul and John. Christ appeared as “a light from heaven” to Paul (Acts 9:1-9). To John, Christ was a shining light “as the sun shineth in his strength” (Revelation 1:16) and “His eyes were as a flame of fire” (Revelation 1:14).

In summary, the scriptures expect the visual manifestation of Jesus Christ when He will appear for the gathering together. Christ's historical appearances as a light to Paul and John were a preview of His future appearance in the clouds. This glorious aerial appearance will be unique to Christ, differentiating Him from the claims of false messiahs, who are earth-bound humans (Matthew 24:4-5).

### Unique Audio-Visual Signs of Messianic Events

Signs are observable effects of natural or supernatural origin<sup>2</sup>. "Sign" in Greek is "*sēmeion*". The meaning is "sign, mark, token that by which a person or a thing is distinguished from others and is known". For example, the baby Jesus, "wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger", was a natural, visible sign to identify Him from other babies in Bethlehem (Luke 2:11-12).

***Table 1. List of natural and supernatural signs that are audible, visible or both and unique to each Messianic event including the future gathering together in scriptures***

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<sup>2</sup> Natural signs are terrestrial and celestial effects under God's laws of creation. Supernatural signs are direct manifestations of the angels, Holy Spirit, Son of God or Father.

Event	Sign	Effect	Audible	Visible	Scripture
Birth	Bright sun and moon clothe woman at birth (Virgo)	Natural	No	Yes	Rev 12:1
Birth	Bright star after birth (conjunction of Jupiter with Venus and Regulus)	Natural	No	Yes	Mat 2:9-10
Birth	Announcement of archangel Gabriel to Mary	Supernatural	Yes	Yes	Luk 1:26-38
Birth	Leap of Baby in the womb upon hearing the blessing of Elizabeth	Supernatural	No	Yes	Luk 1:44
Birth	Announcement of an angel to Joseph	Supernatural	Yes	Yes	Mat 1:20-23
Birth	Announcement of an angel to shepherds	Supernatural	Yes	Yes	Luk 2:8-11
Birth	Baby wrapped in cloths in a manger	Natural	No	Yes	Luk 2:12, 16
Birth	Rejoicing of a company of heavenly hosts	Supernatural	Yes	Yes	Luk 2:13
Birth	Prophecies of Simeon and Anna	Supernatural	Yes	Yes	Luk 2:25-38
Baptism	Open heaven (sky)	Natural	No	Yes	Mat 3:16
Baptism	Decent of the Holy Spirit	Supernatural	No	Yes	Mat 3:16
Baptism	Voice of the Father	Supernatural	Yes	No	Mat 3:17
Transfiguration	Shining face of Jesus like the sun	Supernatural	No	Yes	Mat 17:2
Transfiguration	White garment of Jesus like light	Supernatural	No	Yes	Mat 17:2
Transfiguration	Appearance of Moses and Elijah who talked to Jesus	Supernatural	Yes	Yes	Mat 17:3
Transfiguration	Overshadow of a white cloud	Natural	No	Yes	Mat 17:3
Transfiguration	Voice of the Father	Supernatural	Yes	No	Mat 17:5
Death and burial	Darkness over all the land	Natural	No	Yes	Mat 27:45
Death and burial	Earthquake split the rocks	Natural	Yes	Yes	Mat 27:51
Death and burial	Earthquake torn veil of temple in two	Natural	Yes	Yes	Mat 27:51
Death and burial	Earthquake opened tombs	Natural	Yes	Yes	Mat 27:51
Death and burial	Resurrection of many dead saints at Jesus' death	Supernatural	Yes	Yes	Mat 27:52
Resurrection	Earthquake	Natural	Yes	Yes	Mat 28:2
Resurrection	Angel rolled the stone away	Supernatural	Yes	Yes	Mat 28:2
Resurrection	Resurrection of Jesus	Supernatural	No	No	Mat 28:6, 9-10
Resurrection	Appearance of resurrected saints to many in Jerusalem	Supernatural	No	Yes	Mat 27:53
Resurrection	Angel appeared to the guards	Supernatural	No	Yes	Mat 28:4
Resurrection	Angels spoke to Mary Magdalene and Mary, James' mother	Supernatural	Yes	Yes	Mat 28:5-6
Resurrection	Jesus appeared to many	Supernatural	Yes	Yes	Mat 28:9, 17
Ascension	Appearance of a cloud	Natural	No	Yes	Act 1:9
Ascension	Jesus was lifted and the cloud received Him out of sight	Supernatural	No	Yes	Act 1:9
Ascension	Two angels explained that Christ will return in the cloud the same way	Supernatural	Yes	Yes	Act 1:10
Gathering together	Appearance of clouds	Natural	No	Yes	1 The 4:17
Gathering together	Shout of the archangel	Supernatural	Yes	Yes	1 The 4:16
Gathering together	Trumpet call of God	Supernatural	Yes	Yes	1 The 4:16
Gathering together	Resurrection of the dead in Christ	Supernatural	Yes	Yes	1 The 4:16
Gathering together	Appearance of Christ and resurrected saints in the clouds	Supernatural	No	Yes	1 The 4:13-15
Gathering together	Harpazo of the living in Christ	Supernatural	No	Yes	1 The 4:17

There were 32 signs unique to Christ's birth, baptism, transfiguration, death and burial, resurrection, and ascension as observed and recorded by historical eyewitnesses (Table 1). Every sign, except the resurrection of Jesus inside the sealed tomb, was audible, visible or both to the people present. Such visually distinct, natural and supernatural signs form a consistent messianic motif as a pattern that anticipates the future gathering together to be visible too. In plain text, Christ and His angelic hosts with the shout and trumpet sounds will be unmistakable visible manifestation of the Messiah returning in the clouds.

### Visible Opened and Empty Graves after the Resurrection

Paul described the physical change from mortal into immortal form (1 Corinthians 15:51-53). This "change" will happen "in a moment" which is qualified by "twinkling of an eye". "Change" is "*allassō*" (Greek), meaning "to transform". In the transformation, an immortal body will be formed and

filled with life, and then will rise from the grave. While “change” is very fast, it excludes the time of the catching-up from earth to sky, time between the catching-up of the resurrected and the living saints, and time of the assembly of both groups of saints in the clouds.

When Christ was ascending to heaven, He was visible to His disciples for an unspecified time until “a cloud received him out of their sight” (Acts 1:9). The time between the catching-up and assembly in the clouds will allow the gathering together to be spectacular visuals. Furthermore, the mass resurrection will leave trails of opened and empty graves around the world. The world will see such breaking news spread rapidly through the internet.

### Visible Chaos on Earth after the Catching-up

The catching-up of the living saints to Christ, presumably over Israel, will occur across the other 23 time zones of the world (Missler, *Luke* 208). In Luke 17:30-36, Jesus narrated the daily cycle of activities, suggesting different time zones during the simultaneous catching-up. The sudden disappearance of millions at a global scale will be collaborated by those who knew them but were left behind.

Around the world, saints who are piloting aircrafts, steering boats, driving vehicles, manning machines, operating patients, and working in various jobs will be first transformed and then caught up. Many unmanned activities may end in chaos or come to a standstill. There will be massive traffic jams. The confusion after the global catching-up will draw the world’s attention to the glory of Jesus Christ in the clouds, countering the delusion of alien abduction.

### Public Nature of the Jewish Wedding Procession

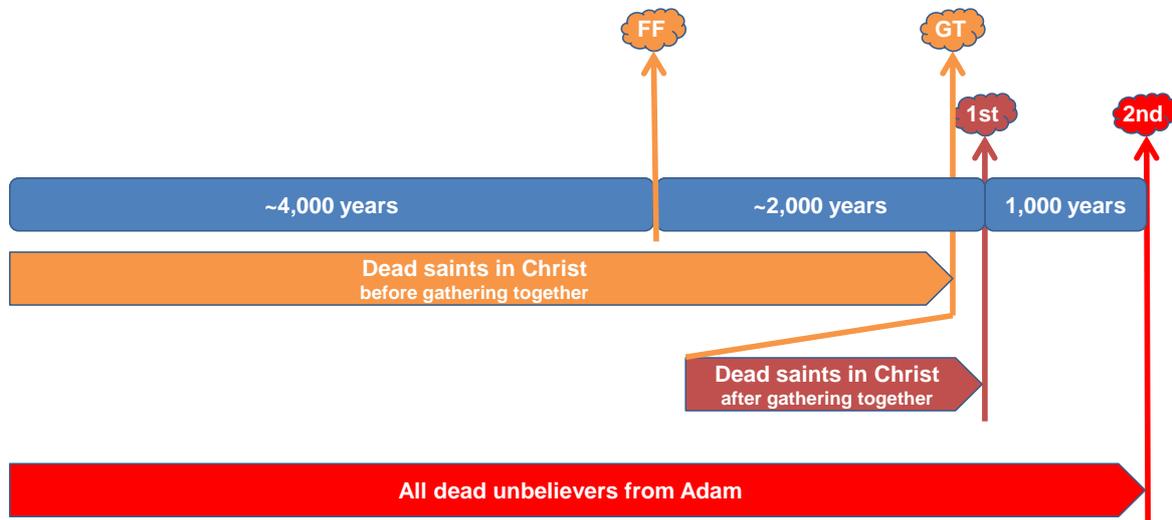
The Jewish wedding is a marriage covenant of the groom and the bride under legal obligation in the presence of witnesses. Paul applied the marriage covenant to Christ and the church as chaste virgins betrothed to Him (Ephesians 5:23-27 2 Corinthians 11:2). As the bride of Christ, the chaste virgins set their blessed hope on His promised return. After a period

of separation, Christ will honor His promise by returning for them (John 14:1-3).

Like the Jewish wedding procession, the gathering together will route from the earth to the Father’s house as described in the parable of the ten virgins (Matthew 25:1-13). Fruchtenbaum described it as “the fetching of the bride” after the extensions in the Father’s house have been completed (161). “The wedding took place in the evening, when the bride was brought to the groom’s house in a festive torchlight procession” (Vamosh 59). After the series of trumpet sounds (1 Corinthians 15:51), this joyous and awesome meeting of the chaste virgins with Christ in the air will witness to the world the fulfillment of Christ’s legal obligation to His bride.

### Awesome Aerial Display of Over Seven Billion Saints

The Apostle Paul outlined the order of the resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15:22-23: “For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: *Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming*” (Figure 1). At the last trumpet call in the gathering together, “the dead in Christ” in 1 Thessalonians 4:16 includes all saints died in faith from Adam to Christ.



Four resurrections  
 FF = Christ as first fruits; GT = gathering together;  
 1st = first resurrection; 2nd = second resurrection

**Fig. 1. Resurrection at the gathering together is the second of the four resurrections.**

Figure 1 is a model<sup>3</sup> to simulate the magnitude of the gathering together as of December 2014 with historical and current population sizes and their religious adherence (Haub; “Population”; “Religion”). Dead evangelical Christians add up to 11.6 billion<sup>4</sup>. The number of living evangelical Christians of today’s population is estimated at 0.8 billion<sup>5</sup>. Therefore, the total number of evangelical Christians at the gathering together unto him is around  $11.6+0.8 = 12.4$  billion, which is about 11% of the total population.

The gathering together is likely at the altitude of 6 km, the typical height of the cumulus clouds<sup>6</sup> (“Clouds”) and vultures<sup>7</sup> (Slifkin). The assembly of 12.4 billion saints will cover some 5,728 km<sup>2</sup> in the sky assuming the standard personal space as defined by the International Building Code<sup>8</sup>. This is eight times the area of Singapore at 710 km<sup>2</sup>. At the eye altitude of 6-12 km, the map on paper covers only a part of southwestern Singapore (“Singapore”, Figure 2). If the gathering together is above Bethany (Luke 24:50-51) where Jesus ascended (Acts 1:11), this colossal array of suspended saints 6 km above will be evident to people in the Middle-East, south-eastern Europe and north-eastern Africa. Such awesome aerial display of Christ will bear witness to the Messiah whom the unbelieving Jews and gentiles have denied.

### Conclusion

The future gathering together unto Jesus Christ shares a consistent messianic motif with the historical messianic events, namely, His birth,

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<sup>3</sup> This model estimates the number of dead evangelical Christians from Adam to the end of 2014, number of living evangelical Christians at the end of 2014, individual standing space, and most likely altitude of the gathering together based on the cloud type.

<sup>4</sup> The number of people ever lived from Adam to 2011 is 108 billion (Haub). At the end of 2014, the world population was 7 billion. It follows that the number of dead people from Adam to 2014 was roughly  $108-7 = 101$  billion. The dead evangelical Christians are  $101 \text{ billion} * 0.31 \text{ “Christians”} * 0.37 \text{ “evangelicals”} = 11.6$  billion.

<sup>5</sup> The number of living evangelical Christians are  $7 \text{ billion} * 0.31 \text{ “Christians”} * 0.37 \text{ “evangelicals”} = 0.8$  billion.

<sup>6</sup> High-level column clouds are visible at an altitude of 6-12 km (see pillar of cloud in Exodus 13:20-22).

<sup>7</sup> Jesus used vultures gathering around the body as the metaphor for the gathering together (Luke 17:37). The routine flying altitude of griffon vultures, the highest flying bird, is 3-6 km.

<sup>8</sup> The standing personal space is dependent on body shape and size. The international code for a person’s standing space is  $0.68*0.68 \text{ m}^2$  (International Building Code).

baptism, transfiguration, death and burial, resurrection, and ascension. In this motif, unique to the Messiah are the natural and supernatural signs in full panoramic view. In chronological order, the gathering together is the glorious appearance of Jesus Christ with His angels in the clouds, meeting of the resurrected saints with Christ, and catching-up of the living saints with Christ. Trails of evidence never seen before on earth will testify the resurrection and catching-up of the saints.



Fig. 2. Singapore Island is entirely visible at the eye altitude of 50 km. When zoomed in to the eye altitudes of 12 and 6 km, only a small part of the island is visible. At 6 km above in the clouds, the gathering together will be a colossal spectacle.

The terminal assembly of the saints with Christ and His angels will be awesome in the sky. This wedding procession of Jesus Christ will be the greatest event ever to bear witness to the glory of the Messiah, the Son of God. To the unbelieving Jews and world left behind, the wrath of God is still to come. To the participating saints from Adam, this is the blessing they had patiently waited for. To the present church, it is a forward-looking reminder to live as chaste virgins, readying and keeping watch for the audio-visual signs of the glorious appearance of Christ and His angels.  
*Maranatha!*



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