

Velasques' personal recollections of close encounters

392



By Tom Krattenmaker
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SANTA ANA — The Spanish-language Bible is open to the book of "Ezequiel" — to the passage about a bright whirlwind alighting from the sky.

Jim Velasques is telling two followers seated in his den that the prophet is describing a spaceship.

Earlier this month, the Gabrielino Indian leader claimed that he himself had beheld dozens of such visits over the last four decades. He calls them religious experiences that shaped his views of Earth, heaven and hell.

"I'm only a little ignorant," said one of the chief's followers, William Morales, 66, a Gabrielino Indian from La Habra. "I'm willing to learn because I've got an open mind."

Obdulia Morales, 62, explained in Spanish that something sounded familiar when she read a newspaper account of the chief's beliefs. Her grandfather, she said, taught her about space visitors when she was growing up in Mexico.

Velasques said he does not expect many other people to believe him. The Indian leader figures his version of the truth shakes up too many comfortable beliefs to be accepted readily.

He said people like God the "way they like a landlord: the further away he is, the happier the tenant."

About all Velasques has to back

up his story is a 1959 black-and-white snapshot. The picture was taken by a San Bernardino County sheriff's deputy during a UFO convention at the ceremonial Giant Rock in the Yucca Valley. It reveals a bright column topped by a hazy, white circle.

But Rene Laursen, who owns and runs a photographic processing lab in Irvine, examined a copy of the photo recently and pronounced it a fluke. He said the glare of the sun probably burned the shape into the film, a phenomenon called "halation."

Over the years, Velasques has not bothered collecting other physical evidence of visits, he said, because he doubted he would ever want, or need, to prove they happened.

But, he said, he has been compelled to go public by a formation of rocks now stored in a box at a museum.

The stones, termed an ancient Indian calendar in a recent archaeological report, were dug up about a year ago at an El Toro development site. Velasques is demanding they be returned to the ground in the formation in which they were found.

He said they are a sacred religious work his ancestors made to symbolize the space visits, a vital link between him and the human-like space beings he calls "Ethereans."

Velasques said that in 1947, when he was 19, he was interrupted from his sleep one night at his

grandmother's home in San Jacinto and surrounded by music and voices.

In follow-up contacts, he said, he was told why he was being bothered: "They said, 'We have a message we want you to give to the people on the planet you call Earth.' I said, 'Whoever you are, you picked the wrong guy. I'm not interested in anything like this. Go find a scientist, someone the people will listen to. Find someone who's angelic.' I meant a real goody-two-shoes."

"The voice said, 'We have scoured the surface of your planet, and there is no such animal.'"

The relationship took a new turn in 1959, Velasques said, at the close of the big UFO convention at Giant Rock, site of nearly all of the alleged visits.

Velasques said he was alone there when a craft swooped down and took him aboard.

He described in great detail the ship, its high-tech propulsion, the occupants and the lessons they taught him.

The ship "had a silver, metallic mercury surface. ... It looked like a pearl, a gray pearl." The craft hovered just above the ground, he said, a door opened and several Ethereans emerged and asked him to approach.

"They were human just like us. They were not wearing those spacesuits. (Each wore) a one-piece garment, each one a different color."

They took him aboard, Velasques said, and he observed that males and females shared authority equally. None displayed

any emotion, he said, and they gave him demonstrations of astronomy, pointing out the location of their galaxy and showing a time-lapse replay of the birth of the solar system.

Then, he said, they gave him a graphic illustration of the location of heaven and God.

"A ball appeared, and there were little human figures like mannequins. There was one standing on the top, one standing on the bottom — he was hanging upside down — and there was one standing on each side of the sphere."

"Then (the instructors) said, 'Where is heaven, Jim?' ... They said they were going to have every one of those little beings point to it."

"The little arms went up ... and ... every one was pointing in a different direction. Suddenly, I saw that heaven surrounded the whole planet, that heaven was all around us."

Dozens more visits followed at Giant Rock ceremonies over the years, Velasques said, until he and the Ethereans discontinued the contacts in the early 1980s because of increasing disruptions and harassment from other people around Giant Rock.

UC Berkeley Professor William Simmons finds the concept somewhat unusual for Indian culture. "The idea of guardian spirits is a pretty universal element in Indian religion," Simmons said. But in most lore, he added, the spirits take the form of animals, such as coyotes, eagles or owls, "not spaceships."

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