

How Was Acts 1:11 Fulfilled in AD 70?

By [Kenneth J. Davies](#)

Acts 1:11, says, "This same Jesus, who was taken from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven." Randall E. Otto, in his book *Coming in the Clouds: An Evangelical Case for the Invisibility of Christ at His Second Coming* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1994), examines this passage (along with Luke 24:48-49) on pp. 252ff. Otto points out that Luke's gospel describes the ascension using the word *eperthe* (Gr. *ephrqh*). aorist passive of *epairo* (Gr. *epairw*). This word "does not have to do with an active physical lifting up but with a lifting up of someone in stature or divinity" (p. 253). The "use of this word does not denote a literal and physical elevation of the person, but rather describes in figurative terms the elevation of the person in honor and dignity, i.e., exaltation" (ibid.).

The similarity to Elijah's ascension is noted:

As Norman H. Snaith says [The Interpreter's Bible, 2 Kings] of Elisha's beholding of Elijah's theophanic chariot, "It was not every man who could see this heavenly chariotry (6:17). The youth needed to have his eyes opened in order that he might see them." Special spiritual insight was necessary in order to "see" the ascension of Elijah as he was enwrapped by the stormcloud which then arose to heaven. That special spiritual insight was also the privilege of the disciples as they now looked for Jesus to usher in the kingdom in its fullness. This accent on the centrality of spiritual insight further attests to the impossibility of a universal beholding of Christ at his parousia. Faith is required to see the theophanic exaltation of God's chosen mediators in their vanishing amidst a stormcloud (p. 256).

"The cloud, of course, symbolizes the Divine Glory of God, which, as always, must be hidden from men (even of faith), due to their incapacity to see it in its unveiled splendor" (ibid.).

[T]he cloud (a) manifests by symbolic and representational means the presence of the Divine Glory, (b) veils that glory from men, who cannot behold it, (c) exalts the one enveloped by the intimacy of the association with the Divine Glory, and (d) signals by its physical and visible rise into the heavens the spiritual and invisible nature of the exaltation of the one hidden by and enveloped within the cloud (P. 257).

"[W]e must emphasize that the Lord himself is invisible and is only made visible by the symbolic and representational cloud, which reveals the presence of his Divine Glory by hiding it" (ibid.).

While [Acts 1:10-11] is generally cited to prove that the glorified Jesus will himself be personally visible at his second coming, it is in fact the case that the glorified Jesus cannot be seen by any man because his glorified person is veiled, hidden, and enveloped within the cloud of God's presence. ...Just as the disciples had not seen Christ going up to heaven, but rather the cloud which veiled him and his Divine Glory, so in the same manner, i.e... hidden within the cloud, he would return (ibid.). 'Some will probably

be wondering at this point about the reference in Rev. 1:7 to "every eye" seeing Him and how this fits in with this interpretation. It should be noted that the word for "see" is often used not of sight, but of perception. For example, in John 14:19, Jesus says, "He that has seen Me has seen the Father." Or, "every one that sees the Son and believes in Him shall have everlasting life" (John 6:40). Now, if you use the same interpretation here as most do in Rev. 1:7, only those who saw Jesus with their literal eyes could be saved! We use the word "see" in the same manner today, sometimes with literal intent: "I see clouds in the sky," and with figurative intent at other times: "I see!" As Paul wrote to the Ephesians, "May the eyes of your understanding be enlightened" (Eph. 1:18).

Some have said that the judgment of AD 70 didn't sound like the "glorious appearing" of Christ mentioned in Titus 2:13. This is likely the case with most who hold to futurist views of the second coming. Having read the fabulously imaginative descriptions of what Christ's parousia (second coming) should be like in the popular prophetic paperbacks, we have been conditioned to expect certain phenomena. We have been led to believe that the return of Christ must be more spectacular than any of Hollywood's most fantastic special effects. And since the reading of history has virtually become a thing of the past, ignorance of the events surrounding the fall of Israel in AD 66-70 abounds. Even those that have attempted some study of the first century must admit that reading about the events isn't nearly as spectacular as watching an exciting movie on the big screen. Perhaps one day a movie will be made, and the special effects wizards will dazzle us with the wonders that took place during that fateful war. For now, however, we must be content to read the eyewitness accounts recorded by Jewish and Roman historians such as Josephus and Tacitus, and use our imaginations.

Picture the disconcerting sight of a comet, shaped like a sword, hanging over the city of Jerusalem for an entire year: the massive Eastern Gate opening by itself, unearthly light emanating from the temple, and the voice of God thundering, "Let us depart from this place!": and the terrifying spectacle of angelic hosts in glittering battle array surrounding the capital city and fighting against it (see Josephus' Wars of the Jews 6:5:3: and Tacitus' Histories 5:13). Witness the hand of God striking those that rejected His covenant, first with madness, then with starvation and death (Wars 5:1:4-5: 6:3:3), and finally selling them into slavery in Egypt (Wars 6:8:2: 6:9:2-4). This may all seem ho-hum to those of us raised with TV and movie theaters, but to those who witnessed these things in the first century, they were indeed spectacular, and none could deny that they had seen the glorious return of the righteous Judge. As John Lightfoot said:

Then shall the Son of man give proof of himself whom they would not before acknowledge: a proof, indeed, not in any visible figure, but in vengeance and judgment so visible, that all the tribes of the earth shall be forced to acknowledge him the avenger. The Jews would not know him: now they shall know him, whether they will or no, Isa. 26:11. Many times they asked of him a sign: now a sign shall appear, that this is the true Messiah, whom they despised, derided, and crucified, namely, his signal vengeance and fury, such as never any nation felt from the first foundations of the world. (A Commentary on the New Testament from the Talmud and Hebraica. 4 vols. Oxford University Press, 1859: reprinted by Hendrickson, Peabody, Mass., 1979. Vol 2, p. 320)