

Acts 1:9-11 – “In Like Manner” (Part 1)

By Ed Stevens -- Then and Now Podcast -- Sept. 18, 2011

Acts 1:9-11 And after He had said these things, He was **lifted up** while they were looking on, and a **cloud** received Him out of their sight. And as they were gazing intently into the sky while He was going, behold, **two men in white clothing** stood beside them. They also said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been **taken up from you** into heaven, **will come in like manner as you have watched Him go into heaven.**”

INTRODUCTION:

In this session, as we continue our studies of the book of Acts, we will be looking at a text which is controversial, not only in the debate between futurists and preterists, but also in the intramural discussion between fellow preterists.

Acts 1:9-11 has indeed been a battleground, but I believe the conflict can easily be minimized by looking carefully at the text cosmologically, typologically, grammatically, contextually, and historically, to discover **what it really says** -- not what we think it says, want it to say, need it to say, or what our paradigm forces it to say.

Of course, all the controversy, both inside and outside Preterism is focused on the phrase "in like manner" in Acts 1:11. Because the Ascension was a visible, audible, and experiential event, futurists insist that the Parousia must also be that same kind of event, since the two angels clearly affirmed that "this same Jesus ... shall so come **in like manner** as ye have seen him go into heaven" (KJV).

So the debate revolves around the interpretation of that little phrase, "in like manner." Does it require a visible, audible, and experiential Parousia? Futurists say "yes," while many preterists say "no."

J. S. Russell does not spend a lot of words on this passage, but what he does say is helpful [*Parousia*, 147-148]:

The expression "in like manner" **must not be pressed too far**. There are **obvious points of difference** between the manner of the Ascension and the Parousia. **He departed alone, and without visible splendour; He was to return in glory with His angels.** The words, however, imply that His coming was to be **visible** and **personal**, which would exclude the interpretation which regards it as **providential**, or **spiritual**. The visibility of the Parousia is supported by the uniform teaching of the apostles and the belief of the early Christians: "Every eye shall see him" (Rev 1:7).

Russell affirmed that the Parousia was both VISIBLE and PERSONAL, and contrasts his view with those who believe the Parousia was only *providential* or *spiritual*. He has identified two different hermeneutics that are used within Preterism to interpret the nature of Christ's return (visible/personal versus providential/spiritual). When he says "providential," he is referring to those who believe **the Parousia would only be seen through the destructive work of the Roman armies**, a representative coming in judgment, **not an actual visible experiential coming** of the glorious Christ. When he says "spiritual," he means those who believe the Parousia was **an invisible coming**

that occurred totally within the UNSEEN spiritual realm, unseen and unexperienced by any living humans on earth. Randall Otto might be a good example of a Preterist in our post-modern era who teaches this spiritual and invisible coming idea (see his book, *Coming in the Clouds*, 1994).

Evidently there were some preterists back in Russell's day who took a figurative or spiritualizing approach to the second coming texts. There are many preterists today who take that approach, especially those who follow the Collective Body view of the resurrection and the non-literal figurative rapture idea. However, Russell believed the Parousia was a VISIBLE return of Christ in which the disciples saw, heard, and experienced the PERSONAL visible presence of Christ, and then were taken to heaven in the rapture. He derived the "personal" and "visible" ideas from Acts 1:11 where it uses the two phrases "this same Jesus" (personal) and "in like manner" (visible).

Futurists likewise see the phrase "in like manner" as proof that the Parousia has to be visible and experiential just like the Ascension. They use Acts 1:9-11 against us because they think we have no answer to it. They presume that all preterists take the figurative/spiritualizing approach. They can not imagine how we could teach a visible, personal, or bodily return in this text, since they are not aware of any historical documentation for a visible-experiential fulfillment. But they are ignoring the obvious possibility of a literal rapture, which would easily explain the visible-experiential language, as well as the silence and absence afterwards.

Futurists use the phrase "this same Jesus" (KJV, NKJV, Weymouth, Tyndale, AMP, NET, NIV, Webster) to assert that Jesus will return in the self-same unchanged body, the same in every way as his pre-ascension unglorified resurrection body. But that misses the point about the glorification change at the ascension. They simply do not understand how the same PERSON (Jesus) could retain his self-same BODY, even though that body was changed and glorified. They believe our self-same bodies have to be raised out of the ground and changed into glorified bodies, but they can not allow that same kind of change for the self-same body of Christ at His ascension.

We will examine those two phrases Biblically and argue for a visible and personal return just like Russell did. Then we will go beyond the Biblical support to look at some quotes from Josephus which appear to document this very kind of visible and personal return of Christ. Let's begin by looking at the Biblical evidence for a "personal" coming.

"This same Jesus" (KJV)

Futurists insist on Christ returning in the self-same fleshly body that He had at the ascension. They assume that there was no change in His body at the ascension. They believe that the body of Jesus in heaven is still the self-same unchanged "flesh and bones" body that he exhibited in His post-resurrection appearances. They take this position because they think the body of Jesus cannot remain the self-same body if it is changed or glorified. But that misses the point about the glorification change at the ascension. They simply do not understand how the same PERSON (Jesus) could retain his self-same body, even though that body has been changed and glorified at the ascension. The NT writers clearly talk about the glorified Jesus after the Ascension having a new kind of body. It was still the self-same body, but changed or glorified into a kind of body that could inhabit heaven. Let's look at a couple texts which show this:

2Cor. 5:16 Therefore from now on we recognize no one according to the flesh; even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know *Him in this way* no longer.

1John 3:2 Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is.

Notice 2 Cor 5:16. Why does Paul say that they once knew Christ "according to the flesh" but "now knew Him thus no longer?" We know what a body "according to the flesh" means. Yet Paul says they know him in that way no longer. When did his body change, and how did it change? They obviously had known Him according to the flesh during His post-resurrection appearances, so the "change" must have occurred at His ascension, since that is the most likely occasion when a change could have occurred.

The same can be said for 1 John 3:2. Why does John say that he does not know what kind of bodies they would get at the Parousia, but that he does know they will be like the body of Christ. If the body of Christ in heaven was nothing more than the same unchanged "flesh and bones" body that he had during his post-resurrection appearances, then both Paul and John would have known exactly what kind of bodies the saints would get at the Parousia. Yet, both Paul and John admit that they do not know the exact composition or nature of that body. Paul does call it "His glorious body" in Phil. 3:21, and says in 1 Cor 15 that the bodies they would get at the resurrection were spiritual, incorruptible, heavenly, immortal, and glorious bodies like Christ's. The body Christ had in heaven, and in which He would return, was indeed the self-same body that He had before the Cross and after the resurrection. But it was changed and glorified at the ascension. It was still the self-same body, but it was now a different kind of body. It was no longer a "flesh and bones" body which could not have dwelt in the heavenly environment. It was changed, glorified, and suited for heavenly existence. Preston agrees, "...after the ascension, Jesus no longer had the physical body of the Incarnation." (*Like Father, Like Son, on Clouds of Glory*, 235)

This is something which the historic church has failed to understand. However, they are to be commended for zealously defending the necessity of Jesus maintaining His self-same body throughout the earthly and heavenly phases of His work. The doctrines of the Deity of Christ and His substitutionary atonement both depend on His maintaining the self-same body. Jesus had to offer his "flesh and bones" body on the Cross as a sacrifice for our sins. That self-same body had to be raised from the dead to prove that it was sinless and that Satan had no control over it. And that self-same body had to ascend to heaven to prove that His sacrificial body had been accepted. However, there is nothing which would prevent his body from being changed (translated or glorified) when it ascended, and the two texts above show the necessity of that change. In John 17:5, in His high priestly prayer to the Father, Jesus clearly indicated that when He ascended, He would regain the Glory that He laid aside when He came to earth and took on the lowly fleshly body form (Phil. 2:5-7). So the ascension seems to be the point in time when His "flesh and bones" body was changed into a glorious body (Phil. 3:21). It is still the self-same body, but now glorified.

This whole discussion shows why the Acts 1:11 text has been such a fierce battleground for the historic church. All Christians have misunderstood these bodily issues, including us preterists. Our Reformed futurist critics correctly assert that Jesus has to still have His self-same body and reappear in that self-same body at His Parousia. That is definitely correct. But they do not realize that His self-same body was changed and glorified at the ascension. This throws a monkey-wrench in their whole anti-preterist crusade. They believe Jesus will still be in his "flesh and bones" body at the Parousia, because they believe that all the dead will have their self-same fleshly bodies raised out of the graves (like Christ did) and be changed to be like Christ's "flesh and bones" resurrection body. This forces them to assume that Christ's body in heaven now must still be of the same unchanged and unglorified "flesh and bones" nature as his resurrection body. They fail to realize that Christ is the only one who could get his self-same body back, because he was the only one who was sinless. Everyone else has to *get a new body that is like Christ's glorified body* in heaven, not like his "flesh and bones" resurrection body, since that old kind of "flesh and blood" body cannot inherit the heavenly life. They also fail to understand that Christ's self-same resurrection body was changed (glorified) at the ascension.

The earlier second and third century Ante-Nicene church fathers misunderstood much of this because of their over-reliance upon Greek philosophy and their lack of careful consideration of the New Testament writings. However, the later Nicene and Post-Nicene fathers tended to over-react against the Gnostics (the Docetists), and swung back toward the old rabbinical notions of bodies coming out of the graves. They had to have that "fleshly body" language in the creeds in order to excommunicate the Docetists, but the Gnostics can be better refuted by the Biblical truth than by an opposite extreme that is equally wrong.

For more details on these resurrection issues, I would recommend getting my 2011 Kansas City and Garrettsville seminar lessons on the resurrection. They are available in PDF format along with the video and audio presentations. Now let's look at the phrase "in like manner" which is the main focus of all this controversy.

"In Like Manner" (KJV)

Some futurists in the past asserted that "in like manner" means that the Parousia will be exactly like the ascension in every respect, except in reverse order. However, when pressed most of us, both futurists and preterists, will admit that it will not be exactly like the Ascension in every detail. As Preston rightly affirms, "in like manner does not demand identicalness" (*Like Father*, 228). There are some similarities and some differences. Defining those differences and similarities is not always easy, but the futurists have no hesitation affirming that two of the absolutely essential similarities must be visibility and a bodily return.

The best way, and the scriptural way, to see the similarities and differences between the Ascension and the Parousia is to compare all the Ascension texts to all the Parousia texts. It is here that we find a list of all the elements that characterized both the Ascension and the Parousia. By comparing these two lists, we can easily see the similarities and differences between them. Here are the two lists of Ascension and Parousia texts:

**Common elements of the Ascension:
glory, clouds, angels, heaven, and they saw it.**

Mark 16:19 So then, when the Lord Jesus had **spoken to them**, He was **received up into heaven** and sat down at the right hand of God.

Luke 24:51-53 While He was **blessing them**, He parted from them and was **carried up into heaven**. And they, after worshiping Him, returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple praising God.

John 13:1 Now before the Feast of the Passover, Jesus knowing that His hour had come that He would **depart out of this world to the Father**, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end.

Acts 1:9-11 And after **He had said these things**, He was **lifted up** while they were **looking** on, and a **cloud** received Him **out of their sight**. And as they were **gazing** intently into the sky while He was going, behold, **two men in white clothing** stood beside them. They also said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand **looking** into the sky? This Jesus, who has been **taken up from you** into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have **watched Him go into heaven**.”

Acts 2:33-35 “Therefore having been **exalted to the right hand of God**, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured forth this which you both see and hear. For it was not David who **ascended into heaven**, but he himself says: ‘The LORD said to my Lord, **sit at my right hand**, until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.’”

Heb. 4:14 Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has **passed through the heavens**, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession.

1 Pet. 3:22 who is at the right hand of God, **having gone into heaven**, after **angels** and authorities and **powers** had been subjected to Him.

Eph. 4:10 He who descended is Himself also He who **ascended far above all the heavens**, so that He might fill all things.)

1Tim. 3:16 By common confession, great is the mystery of godliness: He who was revealed in the flesh, Was vindicated in the Spirit, Seen by angels, Proclaimed among the nations, Believed on in the world, **Taken up in glory**.

Luke 19:12 So He said, “A nobleman **went to a distant country** to receive a kingdom for himself, and *then* return.

Dan. 7:13-14 “I kept looking in the night visions, and behold, with **the clouds of heaven** One like a Son of Man was coming, and He **came up to the Ancient of Days** and was presented before Him. And to Him was given **dominion, Glory** and a **kingdom**, That all the peoples, nations and men of every language Might serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion which will not pass away; and His kingdom is one which will not be destroyed.

**Common elements of the Parousia:
glory, clouds, angels, heaven, power, and they will see it.**

- *Matt. 16:27-28** For the Son of man shall come in the **glory** of his Father with his **angels**; and then he shall **reward** every man according to his works. Verily I say unto you, There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they **see** the Son of man coming in his **kingdom**.
- Matt. 19:28** And Jesus said to them, "Truly I say to you, that you who have followed Me, in the regeneration when the Son of Man will sit on **His glorious throne**, you also shall **sit upon twelve thrones**, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.
- *Matt. 24:29-31** "But immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from the sky, and the **powers** of the **heavens** will be shaken. And then the sign of the Son of Man will **appear** in the **sky**, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will **see** the Son of Man coming on the **clouds** of the **sky** with **power** and great **glory**. And He will send forth His **angels** with a great trumpet and they will **gather** together His elect from the four winds, from one end of the **sky** to the other.
- Matt. 25:31-32** "But when the Son of Man comes in His **glory**, and all the **angels** with Him, then He will sit on His **glorious** throne. All the nations will be **gathered** before Him; and He will separate them from one another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats;
- *Matt. 26:64** Jesus said to him, " You have said it yourself; nevertheless I tell you, hereafter you will **see** the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of **power**, and coming on the **clouds of heaven**."
- Mark 13:26** "Then they will **see** the Son of Man coming in **clouds** with great **power** and **glory**."
- Mark 14:62** And Jesus said, "I am; and you shall **see** the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of **power**, and coming with the **clouds of heaven**."
- Luke 9:27** "But I say to you truthfully, there are some of those standing here who will not taste death until they **see** the kingdom of God."
- Luke 12:8** "And I say to you, everyone who confesses Me before men, the Son of Man will confess him also **before the angels of God**;
- Luke 21:25-27** "There will be **signs** in sun and moon and stars, and on the earth dismay among nations, in perplexity at the roaring of the sea and the waves, men fainting from fear and the **expectation** of the things which are coming upon the world; for the **powers** of the heavens will be shaken. Then they will **see** the Son of Man coming in a **cloud** with **power** and great **glory**."
- *1 Thess. 4:15-17** For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that **we who are alive and remain** until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from **heaven** with a **shout**, with the **voice** of the **archangel** and with the **trumpet** of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are **alive and remain** will be **caught up together** with them in the **clouds** to **meet** the Lord **in the air**, and so we shall **always be with the Lord**.

***2 Thess. 1:7-10** and to give relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well when the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, when He comes to be glorified in His saints on that day, and to be marveled at among all who have believed — for our testimony to you was believed.

2 Thess. 2:1 Now we request you, brethren, with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him,

2 Thess. 2:8 Then that lawless one will be revealed whom the Lord will slay with the breath of His mouth and bring to an end by the appearance of His coming;

***Rom. 8:18** For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

***Heb. 9:24-28** For Christ did not enter a holy place made with hands, a mere copy of the true one, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us ...but now once at the consummation of the ages He has been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment, so Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time for salvation without reference to sin, to those who eagerly await Him.

***1 John 2:28** Now, little children, abide in Him, so that when He appears [phanerothe], we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming.

***Rev. 1:7** behold, He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him. So it is to be. Amen.

Conclusion:

After comparing these two groups of texts, we find that the most common elements found in both lists are: **glory, clouds, angels, heaven and visibility (including the personal or experiential element)**. These are the things that are the most similar, and therefore help us define the phrase "in like manner."

Notice that the ideas of **visibility** and **experientiality** are prominent features of both lists. They are inescapable. Russell noted this fact as well, and the Futurists constantly stress it, citing the same texts that we have listed above. The **visibility** of the Parousia is no more troublesome to the Preterist view than is the visibility of the angels at the birth of Jesus, the Transfiguration, the Ascension, Christ appearing to Stephen at his martyrdom, or the angel appearing to Peter in prison, etc. We accept all those other Angelophanies and Theophanies, so why is it so hard to accept the visibility of the Parousia? For me, it was the lack of documentation for a visible coming, and my failure to grasp the visible and experiential implications of a literal rapture. Once I got over those two hurdles, Acts 1:0-11 was easy to explain.

Notice that it is "this same Jesus" who would return in the **glory** of His Father with the **angels** in the **clouds** of **heaven**, and that these parousia texts constantly stress the idea that the saints would **see** Him at His coming. The Parousia was an experiential event for both the Christians and the unbelieving Israelites. It was a personal, visible, and rewarding manifestation of His presence to His disciples, and a visible, destructive and judgmental manifestation to His enemies. The enemies who saw Him were all killed in the destruction of Jerusalem. They did not live to talk about it. And the rapture of all the saints explains why no Christians mentioned it afterwards either.

We will look further at the meaning of the phrase "in like manner" next time.