

How Many Lived Until the Parousia?

By Ed Stevens -- *Then and Now Podcast* -- June 2, 2013

INTRODUCTION:

- A. Thank you for joining us here on *Then and Now* for another look at first century history.
- B. Before we begin I want to let our new listeners know that there is a Lesson Outline available for each of these Podcasts: Each of them are in PDF format. Many listeners like to have it open in front of them as they listen. If you don't have the PDF, simply email me and request it. If you are planning on being a regular listener, and would like to receive the PDF as soon as it is ready, without having to request it each time, simply email me and ask to be put on the **PDF List**. The PDF contains all my lesson notes and resource references, so that you do not have to write them down while listening. It is free for the asking. My email address is: [<preterist1@preterist.org>](mailto:preterist1@preterist.org)
- C. Let's pray --
Sovereign Lord God, the Only True God, who sits enthroned above the Cherubim in the unseen realm above. We exalt you and adore you for creating us, and choosing us to be your servants, and especially for regenerating us from our spiritual deadness in our rebellion, disobedience, and unbelief. Be with us here in these studies as we look at how You providentially acted in history to build Your Kingdom. Teach us how to seek your kingdom first in our lives, and live in such a way that we bring much glory and honor to You. It is in the Name of Your Son and our Savior Jesus, that we pray. Amen.
- D. Many thanks to all of you who are sending us questions and comments. It is so encouraging to know that you are listening, and that you are understanding what we are saying. Your feedback helps me see how well I am communicating.
- E. This podcast ministry is devoted to **chasing after the Biblical and Historical Truth**, *wherever it leads, and whatever it takes*. If you are a truth-seeker, this podcast is for you. If you are like me, you are tired of all the confusing voices out there in the religious world, who compromise the truth, and lead people astray. We need certainty and absolutes to anchor our faith, so we are not cast about by every wind of speculation and false doctrine that blows through. We need to go back to the Bible to see what it really says, not what others want us to think it says. We need to be Bereans who search the scriptures daily to see whether the things we have been taught are really true. That is what we are all about here on this podcast. We are fellow-chasers after the Biblical and Historical truth.

- F. In this session we will look at one of the major objections that some fellow-preterists have raised against the first century rapture idea:

Critics of the Literal Rapture view have suggested that the SILENCE of Christians after AD 70 about the occurrence of the Parousia, was merely because they were ALL either killed in the Neronic persecution or fell away into apostasy by the time of the Parousia, so that there were no Christians after AD 70 who understood the fulfillments. We will show from the Biblical expectation statements why this theory simply does not hold up under more careful Biblical and Historical examination.

- G. Before getting into that, however, I want to share some of the feedback we received this week from our listeners. We received email this week from folks in six different foreign countries: **France, Netherlands, India, Canada, Indonesia, and Australia**. Plus, about thirty new listeners joined us this week and requested to be put on the PDF list. I want to share a few of those comments with you, before we get into our lesson:

- One dear sister mentioned that she subscribed to the podcasts on her smartphone. That is a great way to listen to them on the commute to and from work, while we are working around the house, or traveling. I forgot to mention that option. But you will notice that there is a button on the top screen of my podcast page which says "Grab our RSS feed." Click on that and it will guide you through the process of subscribing to our podcasts for your mobile devices, so that you will be notified as soon as the next podcast is posted here. She also requested (and received) all the PDF lesson outlines for the 26 podcasts that we have posted here on BuzzSprout. Now she is going back through all 26 of them to get caught up to the current podcasts! Putting it on her mobile device is an easy way to do that!
- One dear brother wrote: *"Awesome podcast last week, Ed. Thanks for taking the time to so carefully answer your listener questions while affirming the wonderful hope we have in Christ."*
- Another dear preacher in Indonesia wrote, requesting some of the PDF lesson outlines to share with his Christian congregation there in Indonesia. That is so encouraging to see these teachings spreading to other parts of the world.
- And last, but not least, was the following very perceptive question we received: *"I listened to the "Where did all the Christians Go" podcast from May 19, 2013. The question I have is: Were there any writings by non-Christians about the "missing" people after 70 AD? There should have been some writings about those who came back from the dead when Jesus died on the cross also. I know there was no regular "paper" to tell the news and the obituaries like we have now but there should have been something.... I would think it would be a big news story if my son, who died 10 years ago, would show up at my door."*

[Ed's Reply] So sorry to hear about your son. In regard to historical documentation for the saints resurrected in Jesus' day, there are the Apocryphal **Acts of Pilate** and the **Gospel of Nicodemus**, which purport to be a report of the reappearance of those saints at the time of Jesus' resurrection. And in regard to the resurrection event at the Parousia, even though it was an event in the UNSEEN realm, it was still noticed by the priests in the temple on Pentecost in AD 66. The priests testified about what they heard and felt and experienced in the temple, all of which occurred in the unseen realm, but with some of its effects heard and felt by the priests. Neither those priests, nor Josephus knew what to make of that event. They simply recorded what they heard and felt, and let everyone explain it as best as they could. I wrote a couple of articles on this for the *Fulfilled Magazine*. If any of our listeners would like to have copies of those articles in PDF format, simply email me and request them. The title of those two articles are: **LET US GO FROM HERE**. Those articles contain all the historical references and quotes from Josephus, Yosippon, Tacitus, Hegesippus, and Eusebius.

We need to note here that this same request for documentation of the AD 70 fulfillments has been asked by our futurist critics, in regard to the Parousia. If we took the word "rapture" out of that question and replaced it with the word "Parousia," notice the historical problem it creates for all preterists:

Were there any writings by non-Christians about the PAROUSIA after 70 AD? There should have been some writings about it. I know there was no regular "paper" to tell the news and the obituaries like we have now, but there should have been something.... I would think it would be a big news story if Christ really returned at that time.

Do you see the problem here? Our fellow-preterists who use the lack of documentation as an argument against the rapture, have just opened the door for the futurists to use that same argument against the Parousia. They have legitimized the argument of our futurist critics who demand historical documentation for the occurrence of the Parousia. They are shooting themselves (and all preterists) in the foot by taking that approach, which plays right into the hands of our futurist critics.

We have seen how the rapture solves the documentation problem for the Parousia, and rescues the preterist view out of its historical dilemma. But we have not looked at the attempts by non-rapture preterists to explain the SILENCE of the post-70 Christians. We need to do that, and we will do that here in this lesson. *How do our fellow preterists, who reject the rapture solution, explain the silence of the saints about the Parousia after AD 70?*

Over the last ten years I have interacted with several fellow-preterists who are critical of the rapture. Their first attempt at refuting it, was to invoke the documentation problem. For instance, one of the critics wondered how **hundreds of thousands of**

Christians could be raptured up into the sky, in plain sight of everyone, leaving their clothes behind, and yet not be mentioned by anyone in the historical record afterwards.

However, we have already noticed that there were not tens of thousands of true Christians left alive on earth after the Neronic persecution. Nor was the rapture anything like what he described. There were no bodies visibly floating up into the air, leaving their clothes behind. So it was not a big spectacle which non-believers would have noticed.

Furthermore, as we have seen, this same documentation problem applies just as much to the Parousia, Resurrection, and Judgment, as it does to the Rapture. If it is valid for our fellow-preterists to use the documentation problem against the rapture, then it is just as valid for the futurists to use the documentation problem against the Parousia. And that is the very dilemma that all of us preterists have to face, not just the rapture preterists.

The futurist critic has a legitimate objection to the preterist view IF the documentation problem is a valid argument. All the futurist needs to do to make his point, is to prove that there was at least one true Christian still alive on earth after the Parousia who failed to let everyone know that it had occurred. If he can prove that there were *several* pre-70 saints still around after AD 70, then his case becomes almost insurmountable. The greater the number of Christians left around after AD 70, the greater the problem of their silence about the Parousia becomes for us. It may be possible to believe that one or two or a few Christians left around might have died before they could say anything about the Parousia. But if there was a significant number of Christians all over the Diaspora left around after AD 70, who failed to document the Parousia, then we preterists indeed have a BIG documentation problem on our hands. And that is the very scenario that we need to look at here in this session.

When my fellow-preterist rapture critics realized that there were not hundreds of thousands of Christians left around after the Neronic persecution and the great apostasy, they immediately swung to the opposite extreme (i.e., flip-flopped), and began saying that ALL the true believers who knew about the Parousia were either killed in the **Neronic persecution**, fell away in the **great apostasy**, or became confused by **Hellenistic thinking** immediately after AD 70, so that there was no one left around after AD 70 who still correctly understood the TIME and NATURE of fulfillment of the Parousia. These dear brothers think they have solved the documentation problem. That is their *silver bullet* now. They are breaking their arms patting themselves on the back, thinking that they have come up with the "final solution" to the silence problem. However, the futurist critics are not buying it, and you have seen in the last few podcasts why I am not buying into that idea either.

Theoretically, it may be possible for some to imagine that ALL the true Christians were either killed or apostatized before the Parousia. But that possibility flies in the face of several Biblical texts, as we will see here shortly.

The writers of our New Testament clearly and forcefully indicate that there would be a significant number of true Christians still alive on earth at the time of the Parousia. They were not ALL killed, or apostatized, or confused by Hellenistic thinking before the Parousia. Let's look at a few of the texts which prove this:

Jesus stated clearly in three different gospel texts that "some of them" ("the elect") would remain alive until His return (Matt. 16:28; 24:22; Lk. 18:7-8). And Jesus surely did not kill them at His return, so they would have remained alive on earth after His Parousia unless He took them with Him at His return. And this is exactly what He promised to do: In the parable of the Bridegroom (Matt. 25:1ff), Jesus said He would return for His Bride and take her to be with Him in His Father's House in heaven (cf. the same idea Jn. 14:3). According to the rapture critics, the Bride was nowhere to be found at the coming of the Bridegroom! She had been killed in the persecution or apostatized into Hellenistic thinking. But this parable also shows that not only the Bride was taken at the Parousia, but the faithful five of the ten virgins were taken to the wedding feast at the Father's House as well. That does not sound like ALL the Christians were killed or went into apostasy. The Groom did return and take His Bride in procession to His Father's House. There was a Bride, five faithful virgins, and a company of invited wedding guests who went in procession from the Bride's house on earth, to the Groom's prepared dwelling places in the Father's Heavenly House.

Furthermore, in Matthew 16:28 and its parallels, **Jesus** said that "some of those standing here" (in Judea) would live and remain until the Parousia. How many is "some"? It is certainly more than one! In Matt. 24:21-31, Jesus stated that the great tribulation would be cut short so that His "elect" (chosen ones, a plural number) could be "saved." How many elect ones (plural) survived the Neronic persecution and remained alive to be "saved" at the Parousia? It was certainly more than one. Since the elect were already "in Christ" and "saved" spiritually, what was this additional kind of "salvation" and "gathering" that they would receive at the Parousia? A rapture, perhaps? Who were those "elect" saints that would be "saved" and "gathered" by the angels at the Parousia? Were they Jewish believers only, or did it include Gentile believers also? There are a number of biblical texts which imply that Gentile believers throughout the Diaspora and Roman world were a part of the **elect ones**. For instance: Rom. 8:33, Col. 3:12; 2 Tim. 2:10; Tit. 1:1 (these elect Gentile believers were in Rome, Colossae, Ephesus, and Crete). How many elect ones is that? Certainly more than a few, and certainly in many other areas besides Judea, Palestine and Pella. Do you see what this implies? But wait, there's more.

Jesus is not the only one who taught that some of the pre-70 saints would survive the great tribulation and remain alive until the Parousia. Notice what Apostle Paul said about this:

Paul told the Corinthians that "not all" of the pre-70 saints would "sleep" ("die"), but that some of them would remain alive until the Parousia to experience the bodily change (1 Cor 15:51). In 1 Thess 4:15-17, Paul explicitly says that some of those Thessalonian saints would "live and remain until the Parousia," at which time they would be caught up

to be with Christ, and be **reunited** with their departed loved ones. Jesus would bring their departed loved ones with Him when He descended from heaven, and would snatch up the living saints to be reunited with them in His presence (1 Thess. 4:13-17).

This **reunion** presupposes a rapture of the living saints into the unseen realm to be with Christ and their departed loved ones. Paul said that the prospect of such a reunion with those dead saints would **comfort** and **encourage** them. Only a **real experiential reunion** in the unseen realm would be of any comfort and encouragement to them. If they were still left on earth after AD 70, what kind of reunion would that be? Would that be encouraging and comforting to them? This text not only shows that there would be some Thessalonian saints still left alive at the time of the Parousia, but also that they would be experientially reunited with the resurrected dead saints. There is no indication that the reunion would take place in the SEEN realm on earth, but rather that the living saints would be **changed** into the UNSEEN realm, **reunited** with their departed loved ones, and then **caught up** together with them to be with Christ forever afterwards.

Furthermore, in the next chapter, but still in the same context, Paul again referred to those saints who would be "awake" (living and remaining) at the time of the Parousia:

*For God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, so that whether we are **awake** or asleep [i.e., **alive** or dead at the time of His return], we will live together with Him. Therefore encourage one another and build up one another, just as you also are doing. [1 Thess. 5:9-11, cf. 1 Thess. 4:17, NAS95]*

Notice how the commentaries explain the meaning of the expression, "whether we are awake or asleep," (underline emphasis mine):

Albert Barnes: Whether we are found among the living or the dead when he comes. The object here is to show that the [living] would have no advantage over the [dead]. This was designed to calm their minds in their trials, and to correct an error which seems to have prevailed in the belief that those who were found alive when he should return, would have some priority over those who were dead.

Tyndale: *Whether we are awake or asleep* means 'whether we live or die' (cf. Rom. 14:8); it is physical life and physical death that are in mind, not the ethical use as in verse 6 ... The words are a further reassurance for those experiencing the difficulty treated in 4:13–18. Whatever be our state when Christ comes again, we will live with him.

NIBC: Paul ends as he began the section by assuring the Thessalonians that in whatever their physical condition at the Parousia, whether dead or alive, they will not be disadvantaged. The outcome for all believers will be the same: they will be with Christ.

NET Bible Notes: The phrases *alert or asleep* may be understood ... of physical life and death (whether alive or dead). ... [which refers back] to the point Paul started with in 4:13–18 (no disadvantage for the believing dead).

JFB: "whether we wake or sleep" – whether we be found at Christ's coming awake, that is, alive, or asleep, that is, in our graves. "together" – *all of us together*; the living not preceding the dead in their glorification "with Him" at His coming (1 Thessalonians 4:13).

Thus, it seems clear that Paul consistently throughout the context of both chapters (1 Thess. 4-5) was encouraging the living saints not to grieve for their dead saints, as if the dead saints would miss out on the blessings that would be given to the living saints at the Parousia. Evidently the living saints there at Thessalonica thought that only those who lived and remained to the Parousia would get those blessings at the Parousia, or that the living would get the blessings first. However, Paul reassures them that the dead would be raised first, and reunited with the living saints, **BEFORE** the blessings were given to the whole group of saints (including both the **resurrected** dead and the **changed** living). The living saints would get the same reward "together with" (at the same place and time as) the resurrected dead.

There is a reunion of those living and dead Thessalonian saints, plus a reception of their eternal rewards at the same time at the Parousia. This implies that the living saints would have to be **changed** into their immortal bodies before they were reunited with their resurrected loved ones in the unseen realm. According to 1 Cor. 15:52, this **resurrection** of the dead and **change** of the living occurred "in the blink of an eye" at the last trump. Thus, both the living and the dead got their eternal rewards at the same time and place at the Parousia. There was an experiential **reunion** of the living saints with their departed loved ones, which was extremely encouraging for those Thessalonian saints to contemplate. This **reunion** idea proves that Paul is not referring to two different kinds of reward at the Parousia (one kind for the dead, and another kind for the living), or to two different times of reward (the dead rewarded at the Parousia, but the living later at their physical deaths). Both the living and dead saints were **reunited** **BEFORE** they were "caught up" together to receive their rewards **at the same time and in the same place** (the presence of Christ in the unseen realm). This reunion motif not only shows that some of the Thessalonian saints would still be alive on earth at the time of the Parousia, but also that those same living saints could not be still left on earth after the Parousia, while their resurrected loved ones were already enjoying their heavenly rewards. The reunion of both the living and dead at the Parousia was in the unseen spiritual realm, not on earth in the visible realm. This explains why the living saints had to be **changed** at the Parousia, so that they could be reunited with their departed loved ones in the unseen realm.

In that same context of 1 Thess. 4-5, Paul prayed that the "spirit, soul, and **BODY**" of some of those saints in Thessalonica "would be preserved complete, without blame, at the Parousia" (1 Thess 5:23). This is obviously referring to some living saints who would still be in their bodies on earth at the time of the Parousia, showing once again

that there was a significant group of saints who remained alive until the Parousia, and therefore would have still been around afterwards to testify about what they saw, heard and experienced at the Parousia, unless they were raptured out of there.

In his second epistle to the Thessalonians, **Paul** again indicated that those LIVING saints who would be suffering in the persecution at the time of the Parousia, would receive "relief" from those tribulations (2 Thess. 1:7-10). That certainly implies that there would be some saints in Thessalonica still alive at the time of the Parousia (i.e., more than one, for sure). The number of living and remaining saints is growing bigger with each text that we look at.

Jesus charged the faithful living saints at Thyatira to "hold fast until I come" (Rev. 2:25). This also allows for the possibility that there were some faithful saints at Thyatira who remained alive until the Parousia. **Apostle Peter** wrote to Jewish Christians scattered throughout Turkey, and urged those living saints to "prepare your minds for action, keep sober in spirit, fix your hope completely on the grace **to be brought to you** at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 1:13). This statement allows for the possibility that some of those saints in Turkey remained alive until the Parousia, at which time they received the grace that would be brought to them. Did they receive that grace? Did they know they received it? Did they experience that grace in any cognitive way? If so, why didn't they talk about it afterwards, if they were still on earth?

Moreover, **Paul, John** and **Jude** mentioned in several texts that those who remained alive at the time of the Parousia would be **presented to Christ**, and would stand in His presence right along with the resurrected dead (2 Cor. 4:14; 1 Thess. 2:19; 2 Thess. 1:7-10; Col 3:4; 1 Jn. 2:28; Jude 24). In Philippians 3:20-21, Paul reminds the saints in Philippi about the bodily transformation that would happen to all those saints who were still alive at the time of the Parousia, thus implying that Paul believed some of the saints there at Philippi would live and remain until the Parousia, at which time their mortal bodies would be transformed into glorious immortal bodies like Christ's.

There are dozens more "expectation statements" like these scattered throughout all of the epistles in our New Testament, all of which point to the clear and unmistakable conclusion that there would be quite a number of "elect ones" (both Jewish and Gentile Christians) who would survive the Neronic persecution and remain alive until the Parousia. If you would like to see more examples of these expectation statements, simply request my two PDFs entitled: **Expectations of Pre-70 Saints**, and **How Would He Return**.

Just look at all the various places scattered around the Roman empire where there would have been elect ones who remained alive until the Parousia: Judea, Palestine, Pella, Rome, Corinth, Ephesus, Crete, Colossae, Philippi, Thessalonica, and all the churches of Asia and Turkey. Those living elect saints in all those locations inside and outside Palestine were certainly not killed at the Parousia when Jesus "saved" and "gathered" and "rescued" and "relieved" and "rewarded" them, so they should have **still been around after AD 70** unless they were raptured out of there.

That is more than a few saints, scattered all over the Diaspora, including Asia Minor (Turkey) where **Papias and Polycarp** showed up a few decades later saying that the Parousia was still future. Some of those younger saints (like Timothy) could easily have lived until the first decades of the second century. If they were not raptured out of there, some of them would have lived long enough after AD 70 to have heard what Papias and Polycarp were teaching, and would have set the record straight. But we hear nothing from any of them after AD 70.

This was a very strange silence at the very critical time when the Gnostics, Judaizers, and other heretics were flourishing. We have all kinds of written documents from the heretics and futurists about all kinds of lesser important things, but not one word about this greatest of all eschatological events being fulfilled at AD 70. If those saints were still around after experiencing the Parousia, their silence in the face of all this false teaching is incriminating and discrediting. It means that they fumbled the ball at the very time they should have been scoring points against the heretics and futurists – unless they were no longer on earth after the Parousia!

The rapture easily explains their silence afterwards about the occurrence of the Parousia. They were **silent** because they were **absent!** But the non-rapture preterists do not have that excuse for the silence. According to their theory, those elect saints were still around after AD 70, and even though they were in a position to easily refute the false teachers and correct the futurists, they chose instead to remain silent. Do you see how that would discredit them from being true "elect" Christians? They were faithful "elect" Christians **AT the Parousia**. Why weren't they still faithful "elect ones" **AFTER the Parousia**? What happened to their faithfulness after the Parousia?

That is a deeply troubling question in view of Apostle Paul's statement that at the Parousia those saints would "**see face to face**" and "**know fully** as they had been known" (1 Cor 13:8-12). So, if those "elect ones" (i.e., true Christians) were still around afterwards, their experience of the Parousia would have **fully enlightened them**, and they would be in a good position to set the record straight about what had just happened in AD 70. But we see none of that. They are totally silent, at the very time they should have been shouting from the rooftops and dancing in the streets! If the Parousia had not "saved" them and "gathered" them and "relieved" them and "rewarded" them **as they were expecting**, then they would have been **disillusioned**, and would have been **complaining** about the non-fulfillment of their expectations. But we do not hear either of those things (exultation or complaint). All we have is silence. Do you catch the power of that?

None of the eighty individuals, mentioned in the pages of our New Testament before AD 70, ever reappear afterwards. They vanish without a trace, never to be heard from again. No more missionary trips, no more epistles, and no correction and refutation of the heretics and futurists. No claims of fulfillment of the Parousia. Historians have noticed this strange silence, and have wondered about it. They label that generation

right after AD 70 as the "dark" or "obscure" period. John A. T. Robinson calls it the "tunnel period."

So, even though the vast majority of living Christians were killed in the Neronian persecution, the above texts still indicate that a significant number of saints scattered all over the Diaspora (i.e., more than a few), remained alive until the Parousia, at which time they were **rescued** out of the great tribulation, **gathered** into Christ's presence in the unseen realm, and **given the rewards** that Christ had promised.

Once again, we have to turn thumbs down on the suggestion by our critics, that ALL the true Christians were either killed in the Neronian persecution, fell away in the great apostasy, or became disillusioned by Hellenistic thinking immediately after experiencing the Parousia, so that there were no true Christians left around to claim the fulfillments and set the record straight. The New Testament texts that we have just looked at, soundly refute such a notion, and show that there had to be a significant number of faithful elect who lived and remained until the Parousia. Too many, in fact, to allow for their complete silence after experiencing the Parousia. Yet the silence is there, screaming at us. Where did all those living and remaining saints go at the Parousia?

Our critics have to spiritualize all these Parousia texts, because they know their goose is cooked if those texts are talking about a rapture of individual saints. And if there was a rapture, then the resurrection texts absolutely cannot be talking about a collective body (the church) being raised out of covenantal death. Even though that is a valid concept, it is NOT what these Parousia texts are talking about. But our critics just wave their magic hyper-spiritualizing wand over those texts, and declare them fulfilled in some kind of mystical, figurative, allegorical, symbolic, apocalyptic, covenantal, or spiritual sense. They cannot interpret those texts individually, literally, or experientially, because that would not fit their collective body resurrection view.

So, it is only the rapture view which can reasonably explain the SILENCE and the ABSENCE of the pre-70 saints after the Parousia. The rapture critics simply do not have the silver bullet that they think they have. They are merely grasping at straws, desperately trying to avoid the inevitable demise of their collective body view.

That will wrap it up for this time. If any of our listeners have questions or comments about what we looked at here in this session, do not hesitate to email me. Please send me some feedback, positive or negative. I would love to hear from you. My email address is: **preterist1@preterist.org**

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