

Acts 1:9-11 – “In Like Manner” (Part 2)

By Ed Stevens -- Then and Now Podcast -- Sept. 25 and Oct. 2, 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 the previous session, we contrasted how futurists and preterists interpret the two phrases, "this same Jesus" and "in like manner," as used here in Acts 1:9-11. We noted that most futurists regard these two phrases as absolute proof that the Parousia would be visible, bodily, and experiential.

In contrast, most preterists understand the similarities between the Ascension and Parousia to be focused only on the "cloud" language, which would not require the actual body of Christ to be visible at the Parousia, since it could easily be hidden in the cloud. As long as the Glory Cloud (the Shekinah) was visible, most preterists believe that is enough to fulfill the "coming in like manner."

However, as we noted in the previous lesson, there are a number of us preterists who do not agree with the invisibility of Christ at the Parousia (hidden in the cloud). In the previous lesson, we compared Acts 1:11 to all the other Ascension and Parousia texts. We noted that the most significant similarity between all the Ascension and Parousia texts was the visible, bodily, and experiential language.

But when some of us preterists agree with the futurists on the visible/bodily meaning of "in like manner," it places an additional burden of proof on us, which futurists and other preterists do not have. It forces us to show from the historical record that such a visible and experiential return of Christ actually occurred. This is because most futurists and preterists are not aware of the historical evidence for a visible, bodily, and experiential return of Christ in AD 70. This assumed lack of evidence for a visible Parousia is used by futurists to prove that the visible Parousia has not occurred, while preterists use it to prove that the Parousia must not have been visible. So here in this lesson, we need to do at least two things:

- (1) Show that the language in Acts 1:9-11 is describing a visible *ascent* of the body of Christ, implying a visible "in like manner" *descent* at His Parousia.
- (2) Provide the historical evidence which shows that Christ indeed did return in a visible/experiential manner at His Parousia.

I. The Phrase “in like manner” Means Visible and Experiential

Most futurists interpret the "lifted up" as referring to *the body of Jesus* being seen going up into the sky to the cloud, at which point the cloud received him out of their sight. This "visible body ascension" interpretation of the "lifted up" is deliberate, since it

supports their contention that the return of Christ will be visible and bodily just like they saw him depart. Their presuppositions about the *visible/bodily* nature of his return demands that his ascension had to be bodily and visible.

Likewise, most preterists interpret the "lifted up" as referring to *the cloud* going up into the sky after it had received him out of their sight. They believe the cloud appeared down near the ground where Jesus was, that it received him out of their sight first, then ascended with him invisible inside. They understand that it was the cloud that the disciples saw ascending, not the body of Jesus. This "invisible ascension in the cloud" interpretation is deliberate, since it supports their contention that the return of Christ will be invisible in the clouds just like his presumed invisible ascent inside the cloud. Thus, just as it is in the case of futurists, their presuppositions about the *invisible* nature of his return demands that his ascension had to be invisible and hidden in the cloud.

So, we see in both cases that it is our presuppositions about the nature of Christ's return that are driving our interpretation of the nature of His ascension. This also shows how important the manner of Christ's ascension really is in this whole debate about the Parousia. When preterists interpret the ascension as being invisible, they are admitting that the manner of his ascension is a critical factor in the debate, otherwise they would not bother to interpret it differently than the futurists. Indeed, it is a critical factor in the debate, as both futurists and preterists have admitted.

How can this difference in interpretation about the manner of His ascension be resolved? Only a Biblical solution would be acceptable, using the two hermeneutical tools of *Analogia Scriptura* (comparing our idea with scripture) and *Analogia Fidei* (comparing our idea with the system of faith). In the previous lesson, we applied the Analogy of Scripture to this issue when we compared the two different lists of texts for the Ascension and the Parousia. In this lesson we will use the Analogy of the Faith. This method of comparing our interpretations to the overall plan of redemption can be extremely helpful.

In regard to the redemptive system of faith, the book of Hebrews affirms Jesus as being our heavenly High Priest. The ascension motif is mentioned in the book of Hebrews in the context of the High Priestly Yom Kippur sacrificial duties. Here in Hebrews, the imagery of the earthly High Priest performing his sacrificial duties on the Day of Atonement is employed as an analogy (typological similarity) of what Christ has done for us in heaven.

This High Priestly typology then becomes a useful analogy with which to interpret both the *ascent* of the High Priest into the cloud-filled temple to perform the Yom Kippur services, as well as His *descent* back out of the temple afterwards. It is extremely helpful when Scripture provides typological analogies like this. We do not have to guess at the interpretation, nor let our presuppositions about the nature of the fulfillment drive our exegesis, since the *type* of the earthly High Priest can be laid alongside the *antitype* of the heavenly High Priest, clearly revealing the nature of fulfillment for us.

Commentary

Acts 1:9 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.

Acts 1:10 And as they were gazing intently into the sky while He was going, behold, two men in white clothing stood beside them.

Acts 1:11 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 1:9] "He was lifted up while they were looking on"

[Acts 1:9] "a cloud received Him out of their sight"

[Acts 1:10] "gazing intently into the sky while He was going"

[Acts 1:11] "why do you stand looking into the sky?"

[Acts 1:11] "This same Jesus"

[Acts 1:11] "taken up from you into heaven"

[Acts 1:11] "come in like manner as you have watched Him go into heaven"

Verse 9 -- "lifted up" (Gk. EPERTHE, aor pass ind of EPAIRO) can be translated with the sense of exalted, or it can be rendered as "lifted up" bodily. There is not much dispute about the fact that Christ was glorified or exalted at the ascension. John 17:5 clearly states that at the ascension Christ would regain the glory with the Father that He had before the foundation of the world. That was one of the purposes of the ascension, to exalt Christ in the eyes of His watching disciples, and to place Him back in heaven again sharing the Father's glory.

But this word EPERTHE is not talking about the exaltation or glorification, since that was something that they could not see with their physical eyes. This text is instead talking about something that occurred literally "before their very eyes." When "lifted up" is used in the immediate context of "while they were **looking** on" and "a cloud received him out of their **sight**," it is clear that Jesus was visually seen to be lifted up to the cloud, which enveloped him and removed him from visibility. So, while Jesus was indeed glorified or exalted on that occasion, that does not seem to be the primary meaning or significance of EPERTHE in this verse. It appears to literally mean "lifted up" bodily to the cloud, which then enveloped him and removed him from their sight. They saw him taken up into the sky to the cloud which received him.

Randall Otto is a good example of a preterist who interprets the word EPERTHE ("lifted up") as a non-visible exaltation, rather than a visible lifting up of the body of Jesus into the sky:

The word translated "lifted up" is EPERTHE... while in its active form this word does describe the physical action of lifting up an object, ...in its passive form its "literal" meaning has a figurative twist to it, since it does not have to do with an active physical lifting up but with a lifting up of someone in stature or dignity. ...As we can plainly here see, the only other similar 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. [Randall E. Otto. *Coming in the Clouds: An Evangelical Case for the Invisibility of Christ at His Second Coming*. Lanham, New York, London: University Press of America, 1994. p. 253]

But this ignores the lexical definitions of EPAIRO which show that both the active and passive forms can be used in either a literal or figurative way.

I suspect the reason why so many fellow preterists take this approach is because (1) they have assumed (like all futurists) that there was no visible and experiential return of Christ in the First Century. (2) Therefore, any text which teaches a visible or experiential parousia can only be interpreted figuratively.

Why do futurists reject the idea of a past Parousia? They make statements like the following: "We know the Second Coming is still future because it is a world-ending event, and since the world is still here, Christ has not come yet." or, "Christ was supposed to raise all the dead bodies out of the grave at His Second Coming, and since all the graves are still occupied, He cannot have come yet." or, "The Second Coming was supposed to be a visible and experiential coming of Christ. Since no one saw Christ return in AD 70 or even knew that He came, then it must not have happened."

Furthermore, it ignores the contextual clues as to its literal meaning.

In verse eleven there are two more contextual clues that "lifted up" can only refer to His body ascending into the sky: (1) "taken up from you into heaven," and (2) "go into heaven." Here is triple confirmation in the context that we are talking about a visible bodily ascent. The idea of exaltation or glorification is certainly one of the results of the ascension, but it is not the meaning of this phrase "lifted up." Notice also that verse nine says Jesus was "lifted up while they were watching," the same as verse eleven which says, "you have watched Him go into heaven." These are certainly parallel phrases, and verse eleven could not be more clear about the visibility of His ascent. The point is not that they saw Him exalted, but rather that they watched Him ascend.

As High Priest, Jesus was ascending to present His blood to the Father in heaven to make final once-for-all atonement, and then be exalted/glorified. The ascension was not that exaltation or glorification. The High Priest had to pass through all the heavens to the highest heaven where the Father was, and then present His blood. That was something which mortal eyes were not allowed to see. But we did see the effect of it one week later when the Holy Spirit was poured out on Pentecost. That was proof that Christ had made atonement, and was crowned, exalted and glorified.

BDAG lists Acts 1:9 under the definition of "lifted up." And none of the 26 translations in my Bible search program translated it as "exalted." That is significant. The translation "lifted up" works better cosmologically and typologically, and fits in with the preponderance of uses of EPAIRO. Furthermore, it appears to me that those who wish to limit the meaning of EPAIRO to exaltation only, are simply obfuscating. They reject the obvious and easy meaning (visible bodily ascent) for a much more complex and less clear understanding of it. Their paradigm does not allow the visible-bodily view, so they have to invent another approach to fit their paradigm. This is nothing less than caving in to "system demands" and eisegesis.

Furthermore, the visible-bodily interpretation has the additional advantage of being in conformity with both cosmology, typology, and actual historical fulfillment. When we talk about cosmology, the visible Theophanies of the Old Testament come to mind. Those were occasions when the SEEN realm interacted with the UNSEEN realm, so that events that were occurring in the UNSEEN realm were allowed to be seen by humans in the SEEN realm. Angelic appearances are another example of cosmology, where the normally UNSEEN realm becomes visible temporarily to give humans insight

into the soteriological and eschatological significance of an event. The ascension is clearly a cosmological event, since it involves an angelic appearance, as well as an ascension of a human being and a removal from the SEEN realm into the UNSEEN realm. Labeling this as an apocalyptic event does not do it justice, since the word apocalyptic implies that Luke is merely using highly figurative language to describe this event, and that the event itself did not actually occur visibly and bodily in the way Luke describes it here. It is no wonder the futurists accuse preterists of hyper-spiritualizing or allegorizing this text!

The event literally occurred the very way Luke describes it. It is not apocalyptic language. However, it is **cosmological** language which reveals an actual **typological** fulfillment. When we talk about *cosmology*, we are referring to the Theophany and angelophany that occurred here. When we talk about *typology*, we are talking about the High Priest typology on the Day of Atonement. This is exactly what the book of Hebrews is alluding to when it talks about the second appearance of the High Priest out of the Holy Place (Heb. 9:28). However, there is not only typological fulfillment here, but also actual fulfillment of several Old Testament and New Testament prophecies and parables, as we will see.

Notice how Weymouth (a Preterist) translated Acts 1:9 --

Acts 1:9 When He had said this, and while they were looking at Him, He was carried up, and a cloud closing beneath Him hid Him from their sight.

That fits well with the normal Jewish *cosmological* idea of **Theophanies** and **Angelophanies** throughout both testaments, where we see a window in the heavens opened up temporarily so that humans can see into the normally UNSEEN spiritual realm. Here in Acts 1, it is both a Theophany and angelophany. Jesus was taken up and received into the UNSEEN heavenly realm. The glory cloud veiled his entrance into the unseen heavenly realm. The cloud received Him out of their sight so that He was no longer visible to them in the unseen realm. When He entered the cloud, his body was changed from a lowly earthly form to a glorious heavenly form (cf. Phil. 2:5-7 and 3:20-21). We see this same kind of cosmological language and imagery used throughout the Old and New Testaments. It is referred to as Theophanies or Angelophanies. The Weymouth translation above does a good job of describing the ascension using this kind of cosmological terminology. Here are some texts which use this same kind of Theophany and Angelophany language:

Matt. 3:16 After being baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, **the heavens were opened**, and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove *and* lighting on Him,

Mark 1:10 Immediately coming up out of the water, **He saw the heavens opening**, and the Spirit like a dove descending upon Him;

Luke 3:21 Now when all the people were baptized, Jesus was also baptized, and while He was praying, **heaven was opened**,

John 1:51 And He said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, **you will see the heavens opened** and the **angels** of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man."

Acts 7:55 But being full of the Holy Spirit, he **gazed intently into heaven** and **saw the glory of God**, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God;

Acts 7:56 and he said, "Behold, **I see the heavens opened up** and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God."

Matt. 16:27 "For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His **angels**, and **WILL THEN REPAY EVERY MAN ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS**."

Matt. 24:31 "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 "But when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the **angels** with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne.

Luke 1:11 And an **angel** of the Lord appeared to him, standing to the right of the altar of incense.

Luke 1:12 Zacharias was troubled when he saw the **angel**, and fear gripped him.

Luke 1:13 But the **angel** said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your petition has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will give him the name John.

Luke 1:18 Zacharias said to the **angel**, "How will I know this for certain? For I am an old man and my wife is advanced in years."

Luke 1:19 The **angel** answered and said to him, "I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news.

Luke 1:26 Now in the sixth month the **angel** Gabriel was sent from God to a city in Galilee called Nazareth,

Luke 1:30 The **angel** said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; for you have found favor with God.

Luke 1:34 Mary said to the **angel**, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?"

Luke 1:35 The **angel** answered and said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy Child shall be called the Son of God.

Luke 2:9 And an **angel** of the Lord suddenly stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them; and they were terribly frightened.

Luke 2:10 But the **angel** said to them, "Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people;

Luke 2:13 And suddenly there appeared with the **angel** a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying,

John 20:12 and she saw two **angels** in white sitting, one at the head and one at the feet, where the body of Jesus had been lying.

Acts 5:19 But during the night an **angel** of the Lord opened the gates of the prison, and taking them out he said,

Acts 8:26 But an **angel** of the Lord spoke to Philip saying, "Get up and go south to the road that descends from Jerusalem to Gaza." (This is a desert road.)

Acts 12:7 And behold, an **angel** of the Lord suddenly appeared and a light shone in the cell; and he struck Peter's side and woke him up, saying, "Get up quickly." And his chains fell off his hands.

Acts 27:23 "For this very night an **angel** of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve stood before me,

2Th. 1:7 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,

As High Priest, Christ had to fulfill the *typology* by "going up" or being "lifted up" to go into the true Holy of Holies in heaven. He was our anti-typical Heavenly High Priest. The earthly High Priests had to ascend the steps up into the outer courtyard of the Temple, then ascend some more steps up into the outer sanctuary, then some more steps up into the Holy of Holies. It is ascension all the way. The Israelites and other priests were able to watch their earthly high priest ascend all of those steps until he vanished into the cloud-filled temple for the purpose of entering the Holy of Holies and making atonement. The cloud of incense filled the temple and "received" the High Priest "out of their sight." They were able to watch him ascend all those steps until he reached the doorway of the outer sanctuary. At that point, he entered into the incense cloud and vanished from their sight. This is the *typology* behind the ascension of Christ in Acts 1:9, and it is the very thing that proves that the ascension was both bodily and visible up to the cloud which received Him out of their sight. No other explanations of this "lifted up" and "received out of sight" language can harmonize with this High Priestly typology which requires bodily visibility of the High Priest until he disappears into the cloud-filled temple. The incense cloud typified the Glory Cloud of God's Presence which filled the temple at its original dedication by Solomon. So, what we are looking at here in this text is nothing short of a Theophany and Angelophany with huge typological significance (both soteriologically and eschatologically).

It simply will not suffice to wave our magic hyper-spiritualizing wand over this language and label it as nothing more than a figurative description of non-visible and non-bodily events.

Verse 10 -- Their "gazing into the sky" further confirms that Jesus was "lifted up" bodily and visually into the air where the cloud was waiting to receive him. If these verses were fixated only on the exaltation of Christ, there would be no point in describing visually how that exaltation occurred. This verse reiterates the ideas of the previous verse, namely that the disciples watched Jesus as He went up into the sky, where the cloud received him out of their sight. The cloud did not envelop him while he was still on earth. The cloud was in the sky, and Jesus was lifted up to the cloud in the sky, and then enveloped by the cloud up in the sky. Although Luke does not say so, it is clear that he intends for us to understand the "two men in white clothing" to be angels. Why only two? We remember that there were two angels who appeared at His resurrection, most likely the same two.

Verse 11 -- The two angels spoke to the twelve disciples and asked them why they were still standing there gazing into the sky, as if Jesus might be coming back out of the cloud immediately. Jesus had just told them to stay in Jerusalem until the Holy Spirit was poured out upon them "not many days from now." Then they would leave Jerusalem to preach the gospel in Judea, Samaria, and to the remotest part of the earth. It should have been clear to them that Jesus was not going to come back out of

the cloud and appear to them again at this time. This is why the two angels make it abundantly clear for them, by reminding them to get on with the task that Jesus had just assigned them. Jesus would indeed return some day "in the same manner" they had watched him leave, but that day was not this day. There was a great commission to accomplish first, and Jesus intended for them to get on with that task immediately.

The controversy of this verse centers around the statement of the two angels that Jesus would return "in like manner" or "in the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven." It is understandable why some preterists wish to spiritualize this language, so they can avoid having to explain why the Parousia in AD 70 was seemingly not "in like manner." There are several reasons for this reluctance of some preterists to affirm a "like manner" return of Christ: (1) They are not aware of any historical testimony affirming that a "like mannered" visible-bodily return ever happened, (2) A visible-bodily cloud-coming Theophany like this would surely have been noticed and recorded, and (3) It does not fit their preconceived paradigm of a non-visible, covenantal-only or positional-only "coming in judgment." Their reasoning goes something like this:

- Since there does not appear to be any historical records of a visible coming like this, and
- Since their concept of theophany does not require a visible coming anyway,
- Therefore the return of Christ does not have to be visible. The phrase "in like manner" must therefore refer to some other aspect of His coming besides the visible aspect.

But, as we shall see, both the major and minor premises of this syllogism are flawed. And the conclusion fails to show that the invisible "cloud-coming" concept of the Parousia is the focus of the similarity. In these three verses (Acts 1:9-11) the visibility of the ascension is mentioned five times ("looking on," "out of their sight," "gazing intently into the sky," "looking into the sky," and "watched him go"). Furthermore, the angels even declare the manner in which they "watched him go into heaven" was the same manner in which he would return. That screams visibility. It flies right off the face of the text. You cannot miss it unless your paradigm demands otherwise. The disciples were still gazing into the sky after seeing the body of Jesus lifted up into the sky and received out of their sight by the cloud. The angels told them that He would return in the same way in which they had seen him go. They had seen Him leave visibly and bodily. There is nothing to prevent the idea that his return would be visible and bodily as well. No matter how much we disagree with that interpretation, it still has the advantage of being the easiest and most natural way of understanding the text.

So, why do so many preterists reject the idea of a visible-experiential Parousia and a literal Rapture? Although some preterists might have a different list, here are the reasons why I originally rejected it. However, I have noticed that many other preterists reject it for one or more of these same reasons:

- (1) *Lack of Historical Documentation for a Visible Return:* We do not think there is any historical documentation for a visible/bodily return of Christ having ever occurred.
- (2) *Visible Return is Simply Too Miraculous to Accept:* Such a visible/bodily return of Christ is a little too supernatural and miraculous for most post-modern Christians to

feel comfortable with anyway. Some preterists think that approach is superstitious, like believing in UFO's. In reality, however, it is no more superstitious than believing in any of the other thousands of miracles that the Bible records.

- (3) *Spiritualizing Approach is More Convenient*: It is too easy to interpret the text in a figurative sense, thinking that this spiritualizing hermeneutic removes the problem. But that is only an "artful dodge" or side-stepping (duck and weave) technique. It is taking the easy way out, rather than honestly facing the tough exegetical issues in the text. It is like waving our magic hyper-spiritualizing wand over the problem and declaring it solved. That is nothing more than the old "emperor's new clothes" idea, pretending that something is there, when there is actually nothing. It is self-deceit and ignoring the problem, and sweeping it under the rug, hoping it will go away without us having to deal with it. Those preterists who follow a collective body interpretation are forced by their paradigm to reject the idea of a visible Parousia. Some of them also tend to see the Parousia as an extended *process* of presence either before or after AD 70, rather than as an *event* at AD 70. But scripture is very clear that the Parousia was a visible event in AD 70, and not an invisible process beforehand or afterwards. In other words, their paradigm demands a spiritualized non-visible interpretation, and forces them to reject the possibility of a visible-experiential return of Christ. They have to twist and distort all the texts about the Parousia to make them fit their preconceived collective body paradigm. But, as we have seen, the hyper-spiritualizing hermeneutic simply can not explain-away the visibility that is clearly taught here in Acts 1:9-11. It fails to honestly face the issue, and attempts instead to redefine it unnaturally in the context. No futurist will ever accept the non-visible spiritualizing approach to Acts 1:11. They see it for what it is: nothing more than very dubious hermeneutical gymnastics at best.
- (4) *The Visible-Bodily Approach is Too Complicated*: Most preterists do not believe the Parousia was fulfilled in a visible-experiential way, because they are not aware of any historical documentation for it. Therefore, they feel obligated to take a non-visible spiritualizing approach to it. They do not think there is another option against the hyper-literalizing extreme of the futurists, except the opposite extreme of spiritualizing. However, when we understand Biblical cosmology correctly, and apply it to first century history in the way that they understood it, we can see a better alternative to both the futurist-literalizing and the preterist-spiritualizing extremes. The Biblical text is clear that the Parousia had to be visible and experiential, and the historical evidence is there to show that the Jews did see and experience some things that cosmologically match the Biblical predictions. The visible-experiential Parousia and Rapture idea easily harmonizes both the Biblical text and the historical record. Furthermore, it challenges futurists on their home turf (i.e., the visible-experiential Parousia), and renders their flagship text (Acts 1:11) useless against the Preterist view. It re-engineers Acts 1:11 into a supporting text *for* Preterism, instead of *against* it. It completely eliminates the need to spiritualize any part of this text. It raises the bid for the literalizing-futurists and throws down the gauntlet for spiritualizing-preterists. This is a much more viable option than either of the other two extremes.

I always struggled with that kind of figurative or spiritualizing approach to this text. It bothered me that we preterists have to twist this text into meaning something that it obviously did not mean to the disciples who heard these words.

The hermeneutical principle of Occam's razor definitely applies here. The simplest and easiest interpretation is usually the correct one. There is nothing in this context which demands that it be interpreted in a figurative way. The disciples do not appear to have understood it figuratively. Luke does not even hint that there might be some deeper spiritual enigma buried in the words of the two angels here.

So is it possible for a preterist to interpret these words "in like manner" as a visible and bodily return of Christ in AD 70? Yes it is, but only if we take the literal rapture view of the Parousia, and only if we notice the historical documentation of the event by Josephus, Yosippon, Eusebius, Hegesippus, and others. When we examine each of the four points above, we will see why the rapture view is the best way for a preterist to interpret Acts 1:11 as a visible/bodily return of Christ:

Whatever else we might want to say about the comparison between the Ascension and the Parousia, there is one thing we feel overwhelmingly compelled to admit: the Ascension had to be a visible, personal, and experiential event for the disciples, and that the Parousia would be like the ascension in at least this visibility aspect. Now maybe we can quibble with the number and composition of the audience who would "see" the Parousia, but I do not see how we can deny that at least several people saw it. We may be able to reconfigure and discount some of the other similarities between the two events, but the visibility is too prominent in both events to be denied. Practically every one of the Parousia texts in our New Testament either explicitly or implicitly teaches the visibility of the Parousia, using the same words that we find in the context of the ascension.

The most persuasive arguments against the preterist interpretation of Acts 1:11 are focused on this visibility issue. Our critics may compromise on some of the other likenesses and differences between the ascension and the Parousia, but the visibility issue is where they draw the line, and with good reason.

HIGH PRIEST -- YOM KIPPUR TYPOLOGY **Temple Typology - High Priest**

Christ's ascension was typological. Jesus is the High Priest. The book of Hebrews refers to His ascension and descension in typological terms. On the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur) early in the Fall of each year, the Temple would be filled with clouds of incense smoke just before the High Priest ascended the steps into the cloud-filled Temple to present the blood in the Holy of Holies. The other priests and faithful Israelites waited outside anxiously for His return, when He would descend back out of the cloud-filled temple to announce that their sacrifice had been accepted. The typological connection is obvious, and the book of Hebrews absolutely confirms this connection in chapters 8-10. The book of Revelation uses the same temple typology, except from the heavenly vantage point, where Christ is seen not so much as the High Priest, but as the sacrifice that is worthy to atone for the sins of His redeemed ones. It should not surprise us that Acts 1:11 is connected with the High Priestly typology. This is not the first time Jesus had used the Yom Kippur typology in reference to Himself and

His work. On at least two other occasions within days of His crucifixion and resurrection, Jesus made statements and performed actions which clearly indicated that He viewed Himself as the High Priest of the True Spiritual Temple in Heaven. A week before the Yom Kippur, the High Priest was separated from his family and all other Israelites (except for a chosen few attendant priests). He could not touch any woman (including His wife) or any other person who might be a source of uncleanness. The only ones who could touch him were a dozen or so priests who had been specially chosen and purified to be his attendants (remember the last supper where Jesus washed His disciples feet and purified them). Remember also when Mary tried to touch Jesus after He was raised, but Jesus refused to let her touch him because He had “not yet ascended.” Some women were later able to touch his feet only, but not the upper body like the twelve disciples were able to do. This is the same kind of thing the High Priest observed on his way to the 7-day seclusion at the temple. Jesus had not yet ascended into the true Holy of Holies in Heaven to present the atoning sacrifice. His attendant disciples could touch Him before His ascension, since they were all “clean” except for one of them (Judas Iscariot). These statements of Jesus clearly connect His ascension with the Yom Kippur typology. And if His ascension was typological, it would not be surprising that His descent was also typologically connected with the consummation of the full and final heavenly atonement. All three of the most difficult second coming texts can now be explained with a fully consistent past fulfillment at AD 70. This leaves partial Preterists nowhere to hide.

Secondly, Rev. 6,7 shows several groups of saints in the heavenly realm before the time of the general resurrection and judgment. But notice the Temple typology that is involved here. The earthly temple was patterned after the heavenly one. The Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur) in the earthly temple merely foreshadowed the work that Christ our true High Priest would accomplish in the “true” heavenly temple (Heb. 9:23-28). Edersheim does a great job of explaining the typology in his book on The Temple. He shows how the High Priest ascends the Temple mount and ascends into the Temple itself and even further on up into the Holy of Holies itself. It is “ascension” language. Before the High Priest can enter the Holy of Holies to perform the blood spattering on the Mercy Seat, he has to first fill the temple with the cloud of incense. Once the cloud of smoke fills the temple (symbolizing the glory cloud Presence of God) he brings the blood of the bull and goat into the Holy of Holies. So, it doesn’t take a rocket scientist to figure out what the ascension in Acts 1 is all about. Christ our true High Priest ascended into the heavenly Holy of Holies to present His sacrificial blood on the Heavenly Mercy Seat to make final atonement for us. Then He (like the earthly High Priest) would come back out of the Holy of Holies (cf. Heb. 9-10, esp. 9:26-28, and 10:37) to announce to His anxiously waiting saints that atonement had been fully and finally accomplished. Notice in the Heb. 10:37 text when this “descent” back out of the Temple was supposed to occur (“in a VERY little while”). He left in clouds of glory, and He returned in the same manner in clouds of glory (cf. Acts 1:11). The saints who died during the transition period (AD 30-70) did not have to go to Hades, but neither could they go into the Holy of Holies until the High Priest finished His work there. They were definitely in an “intermediate state.” Rev. 6,7 shows that they were in the heavenly realm in the outer courts of the heavenly temple waiting for the High Priest to come back out of the Holy of

Holies part of it to signal that atonement was complete and access to God's Presence was fully restored.

Acts 1:11 – The passage is typological about Christ the High Priest ascending the steps into the True Heavenly Holy of Holies to present His blood for final atonement, and then to come back out later and announce that salvation is complete. See Heb. 9:26-28 for the completion of this typology.

He left in clouds, He will return with the clouds (a Theophany). When God brings His redemptive plan to its next stage of development, He sends His prophets and angels to announce what He is doing. And on many of these occasions, the commander of the angelic hosts (God Himself) would make His presence audibly or visibly manifested in some way. For instance, walking in the Garden with Adam, the translation of Enoch, direct communication with Noah and other pre-flood patriarchs, three angels appeared to Abraham, two angels appeared to Lot, smoking oven and torch, Jacob wrestled with the angel of God's presence, Burning Bush, face shown to Egyptians drowned in Red Sea, Pillar of fire by night and Cloud during the day, Moses saw backside of Yahweh and communicated directly with Him, Samuel conversed directly with Yahweh, Elijah and Elisha both "saw" into the heavenly realm, the ascent of Elijah, the fourth person in the fiery furnace, direct communication with Mary, the Incarnation, visible descent of Spirit like a dove, audible voice of God on several occasions in Jesus' life on earth, the transfiguration, the two angels at both the resurrection and the ascension, Stephen sees Jesus in heaven, etc.

1. Christ would return "in the same manner" (cloud coming) as He left (in clouds). Numerous passages affirm that He would come with the clouds. I believe Acts 1:11 is referring to that. Randall Otto's book (Coming In The Clouds) takes this aspect a lot further.

2. The "ascension" language here hints of a typological connection with the "ascent" of the High Priest into the Holy of Holies to perform the Yom Kippur sacrifice. The idea is that His High Priestly ascent will be followed soon by His descent back out of the Holy Place to announce salvation completed. Just like the earthly High Priests ascended into the Temple filled with a cloud of incense, and then descended back out of that cloud again, so Christ would ascend with the clouds and descend with them. See Hebrews 9.

Acts 1:11 and show that it is the ascent of the High Priest up into the Holy of Holies to present the sacrificial blood to make Atonement and then to return back to His anxiously awaiting saints just like Heb. 9 and 10 teach. He left in clouds with the angels, He returned in clouds with His angels.

Acts 1:11 text and shows its typological connection to Jesus' High Priestly ascent up into the true heavenly Holy of Holies to perform the final atonement, and then descend back down to "appear a second time" to His anxiously waiting followers. Both the going away and the return were "cloud comings" (Theophanies) accompanied by angels. He left the same way He was to return (in clouds with the angels) to appear to his anxiously

waiting disciples (“How long, O Lord?” and “O, our Lord, come!”). They expected that return before all of them in that generation died. Some of them were promised to still be alive and remain until His return (Matt. 16:27-28 and John 21:22f).

THEOPHANY AND CLOUD COMINGS:

In further development of the cloud-connection in Acts 1:9-11, it is interesting to read Alfred Edersheim’s account of the High Priest’s ministry on the Day of Atonement (*The Temple, Its Ministry and Services*, pp. 302-329). I will quote just a few statements here to get the point across:

Every eye was strained towards the sanctuary as slowly bearing the censer and the incense, the figure of the white-robed high-priest was **seen to disappear within the Holy Place**. After that nothing further could be seen of his movements. ...In the first Temple the ark of God had stood there with the ‘mercy-seat’ overshadowing it; above it, the visible presence of Jehovah **in the cloud of the Shechinah**... He now most carefully emptied the incense into his hand and threw it on the coals of the censer, as far from himself as possible, and so waited till **the smoke had filled the Most Holy Place**. Then, retreating backwards, he prayed outside the veil... The high-priest was **not to prolong this prayer**, lest his **protracted absence** might fill the people with fears for his safety. While the incense was offering in the Most Holy Place the people withdrew from proximity to it, and worshipped in silence. **At last the people saw the high-priest emerging** from the sanctuary, and they knew that the service had been accepted. Rapidly he took from the attendant, who had kept it stirring, the blood of the bullock. Once more he entered into the Most Holy Place, and sprinkled... Coming out from the Most Holy Place, the high-priest now deposited the bowl with the blood before the veil. Then he killed the goat set apart for Jehovah, and **entering the Most Holy Place a third time, sprinkled as before... taking care that his own dress should never be spotted with the sin-laden blood**. What was left of the blood the high-priest **poured out on the west side of the base of the altar** of burnt-offering. By these expiatory sprinklings the high-priest had cleansed the sanctuary in all its parts from the defilement of the priesthood and the worshippers. The Most Holy Place, the veil, the Holy Place, the altar of incense, and the altar of burnt-offering were now clean alike, so far as the priesthood and as the people were concerned; and in their relationship to the sanctuary both priests and worshippers were **atoned for**. So far as the law could give it, there was now again free access for all; or, to put it otherwise, the continuance of typical sacrificial **communion with God** was once more restored and secured. Had it not been for these services, it would have become impossible for priests and people to offer sacrifices, and so to obtain the forgiveness of sins, or to have **fellowship with God**. ...Most solemn as the services had hitherto been, the worshippers would chiefly think with awe of **the high-priest going into the immediate presence of God, coming out thence alive, and securing for them by the blood the continuance of the Old Testament privileges of sacrifices and of access unto God through them**. What now took place concerned them, if possible, even more nearly. Their own personal guilt and sins were now to be removed from them, and that in a symbolic rite, at one and the same time the most mysterious and

the most significant of all. All this while the 'scapegoat,' with the 'scarlet-tongue,' telling of the guilt it was to bear, had stood looking eastwards, confronting the people, and waiting for the terrible load which it was to carry away 'unto a land not inhabited.' Laying both his hands on the head of this goat, the high-priest now confessed and pleaded... while the prostrate multitude worshipped at the name of Jehovah, the high-priest turned his face towards them as he uttered the last words, 'Ye shall be cleansed!' as if to declare to them the absolution and **remission of their sins**. ...The priests led the sin-burdened goat out through 'Solomon's Porch,' and, as tradition has it, through the eastern gate, which opened upon the Mount of Olives. ...While the scapegoat was being led into the wilderness, the high-priest proceeded to cut up the bullock and the goat with whose blood he had previously 'made atonement,' put the 'inwards' in a vessel which he committed to an attendant, and sent the carcasses to be burnt 'outside the city,' in the place where the Temple ashes were usually deposited. Then, according to tradition, the high-priest, still wearing the linen garments, went into the 'Court of the Women,' and read the passages of Scripture bearing on the Day of Atonement... These prayers ended, the high-priest washed his hands and feet, put off his 'linen,' and put on his 'golden vestments,' and once more washed hands and feet before proceeding to the next ministry. He now appeared again before the people as the Lord's anointed in the golden garments of the bride-chamber. ...offered the festive burnt-offerings of the day... This, properly speaking, finished the services of the day. But the high-priest had yet to offer the ordinary evening sacrifice, after which he washed his hands and his feet, once more put off his 'golden' and put on his 'linen garments,' and again washed his hands and feet. This before entering the Most Holy Place a fourth time on that day, to fetch from it the censer and incense-dish which he had left there. On his return he washed once more hands and feet, put off his linen garments, which were never to be used again, put on his golden vestments, washed hands and feet, burnt the evening incense on the golden altar, lit the lamps on the candlestick for the night, washed his hands and feet, put on his ordinary layman's dress, and was escorted by the people in procession to his own house in Jerusalem. The evening closed with a feast.

On a side note: the two different garments that the High Priest wore on the Day of Atonement are not filler. They typologically represent something which is called investiture (the kind of body the High Priest Jesus would put on during the two phases of his earthly and heavenly ministries).

There is a significant number of usages of "clouds" in reference to the various Theophanies (God appearances) in both Testaments. Even in the NT we see it used often, especially in regard to the transfiguration, ascension and return of Christ, as well as the ascension (or "catching up") of the two witnesses in Rev. 11. What else is extremely interesting is the usage of the Greek word "harpazo" (caught up) in connection with the Parousia (coming) in 1 Thess. 4. In the Pauline usage (as well as Luke-Acts which were closely associated with Paul) the word "harpazo" literally means a snatching from one place to another (cf. Acts 8:39, 2 Cor. 12:2-4). And it is seemingly used by John in reference to Christ's ascension in Rev. 12:5. Elijah was caught up in a whirlwind (cloud) which was also the chariot of God. So, the cloud term is used of both

Jesus' going away (ascension) and His coming again (descension). I suspect that is what Acts 1:11 means when it says His return will be "in the same manner." He left in clouds (the Glory Cloud presence of God) and would return with the clouds (the Glory Cloud -- the Shekinah). Both his ascension and his return were qualified to be considered "Theophanies" on many other grounds, but especially in regard to this "cloud coming" idea. The Theophanies were typical "appearances" of God veiled by the Glory Cloud. His presence in the Tabernacle and the Temple was understood by the visible Glory Cloud. The transfiguration and ascension and return of Christ all make much more sense when understood in this Theophany-Glory Cloud connection. Below are some of the passages which I believe will be helpful in getting a grasp of how the prophets used the "cloud" motif.

Perhaps I should state what my conclusions are: I am convinced that the reference to "clouds" in 1 Thes. 4 is to the Glory Cloud of God's presence where Christ was. In John 14 Jesus promised to go away and prepare a dwelling place for the disciples there, and then return and "receive you to myself, that where I am, there you may be also." Acts 1 shows Him leaving in the Glory Cloud. He had numerous times promised to return in the clouds. In view of the way Paul uses the "awake" versus "asleep" terminology in 1 Thes. 5, it seems to me that the only folks who would be "caught up" into the Glory Cloud presence of Christ where they "shall always be" were those faithful, watchful ones who stayed awake and kept their garments clean and bright, who were the same "wise virgins" who kept their (gospel) lamp burning even during the darkest hour of tribulation (the Jewish persecution). It seems to me that Paul was promising the faithful preachers and teachers and leaders and persecuted saints of that generation who would "live and remain until the Parousia" that they would be "caught up" to be with Christ in the Glory Cloud. It is interesting to note that Josephus, Tacitus, Eusebius and the Talmudic writings all mention the angelic armies and the chariots (of God's presence) being seen running about among the clouds just before the war with Rome began in AD 66. Josephus considered this as a bad omen for the Jews, and as a sign that Jerusalem was about to be destroyed. Was this one of the signs that Jesus predicted to be seen in the sky when the Son of Man comes? (Luke 21:25-32) Did the "catching up in clouds" occur then at that time? I am inclined to think so. Otherwise, we have Paul somewhat confused in his expectation that some of his contemporaries would "live and remain" until that event. Whatever the "catching up" was to be, it was something that would occur "at the Parousia" which was an event closely connected with the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD (see usages of "Parousia" in Matt. 24:3, 27, 37, 39; and 1 Thes. 2:19, 3:13, 4:15, and 5:23). Nowhere does Christ or the apostles distinguish between two or more different returns of Christ separated by thousands of years. J. S. Russell in his book, *THE PAROUSIA*, highly recommended by R. C. Sproul and Gary DeMar, shows that the Parousia occurred in 70 AD when Jerusalem and its Temple complex were destroyed. That was a very visible sign that Christ was present to judge His enemies and establish His Church as His people. He came in flaming fire to destroy all the "elements" of the ceremonial and sacrificial system.

OLD TESTAMENT "CLOUD" PASSAGES (AND RELATED)

Ex. 13:21 The LORD was going before them in a pillar of cloud by day to lead them on the way, and in a pillar of fire by night to give them light, that they might travel by day and by night.

Ex. 13:22 He did not take away the pillar of cloud by day, nor the pillar of fire by night, from before the people.

Ex. 14:19 ¶ The angel of God, who had been going before the camp of Israel, moved and went behind them; and the pillar of cloud moved from before them and stood behind them.

Ex. 14:20 So it came between the camp of Egypt and the camp of Israel; and there was the cloud along with the darkness, yet it gave light at night. Thus the one did not come near the other all night.

Ex. 14:24 At the morning watch, the LORD looked down on the army of the Egyptians through the pillar of fire and cloud and brought the army of the Egyptians into confusion.

Ex. 16:10 It came about as Aaron spoke to the whole congregation of the sons of Israel, that they looked toward the wilderness, and behold, the glory of the LORD appeared in the cloud.

Ex. 19:9 The LORD said to Moses, "Behold, I will come to you in a thick cloud, so that the people may hear when I speak with you and may also believe in you forever." Then Moses told the words of the people to the LORD.

Ex. 19:16 ¶ So it came about on the third day, when it was morning, that there were thunder and lightning flashes and a thick cloud upon the mountain and a very loud trumpet sound, so that all the people who were in the camp trembled.

Ex. 20:21 So the people stood at a distance, while Moses approached the thick cloud where God was.

Ex. 24:15 Then Moses went up to the mountain, and the cloud covered the mountain.

Ex. 24:16 The glory of the LORD rested on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it for six days; and on the seventh day He called to Moses from the midst of the cloud.

Ex. 24:18 Moses entered the midst of the cloud as he went up to the mountain; and Moses was on the mountain forty days and forty nights.

Ex. 33:9 Whenever Moses entered the tent, the pillar of cloud would descend and stand at the entrance of the tent; and the LORD would speak with Moses.

Ex. 34:5 The LORD descended in the cloud and stood there with him as he called upon the name of the LORD.

Ex. 40:34 ¶ Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle.

Ex. 40:35 Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud had settled on it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle.

Ex. 40:36 Throughout all their journeys whenever the cloud was taken up from over the tabernacle, the sons of Israel would set out;

Ex. 40:37 but if the cloud was not taken up, then they did not set out until the day when it was taken up.

Ex. 40:38 For throughout all their journeys, the cloud of the LORD was on the tabernacle by day, and there was fire in it by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel.

Lev. 16:2 The LORD said to Moses:

¶ “Tell your brother Aaron that he shall not enter at any time into the holy place inside the veil, before the mercy seat which is on the ark, or he will die; for I will appear in the cloud over the mercy seat.

Lev. 16:13 “He shall put the incense on the fire before the LORD, that the cloud of incense may cover the mercy seat that is on *the ark of the testimony*, otherwise he will die.

Num. 9:15 ¶ Now on the day that the tabernacle was erected the cloud covered the tabernacle, the tent of the testimony, and in the evening it was like the appearance of fire over the tabernacle, until morning.

Num. 9:16 So it was continuously; the cloud would cover it *by day*, and the appearance of fire by night.

Num. 9:22 Whether it was two days or a month or a year that the cloud lingered over the tabernacle, staying above it, the sons of Israel remained camped and did not set out; but when it was lifted, they did set out.

Num. 11:25 Then the LORD came down in the cloud and spoke to him; and He took of the Spirit who was upon him and placed *Him* upon the seventy elders. And when the Spirit rested upon them, they prophesied. But they did not do *it* again.

Num. 12:5 Then the LORD came down in a pillar of cloud and stood at the doorway of the tent, and He called Aaron and Miriam. When they had both come forward,

Num. 12:10 But when the cloud had withdrawn from over the tent, behold, Miriam was leprous, as *white as snow*. As Aaron turned toward Miriam, behold, she was leprous.

Num. 14:14 and they will tell *it* to the inhabitants of this land. They have heard that You, O LORD, are in the midst of this people, for You, O LORD, are seen eye to eye, while Your cloud stands over them; and You go before them in a pillar of cloud by day and in a pillar of fire by night.

Num. 16:42 It came about, however, when the congregation had assembled against Moses and Aaron, that they turned toward the tent of meeting, and behold, the cloud covered it and the glory of the LORD appeared.

Deut. 1:33 who goes before you on *your way*, to seek out a place for you to encamp, in fire by night and cloud by day, to show you the way in which you should go.

Deut. 4:11 “You came near and stood at the foot of the mountain, and the mountain burned with fire to the *very heart of the heavens*: darkness, cloud and thick gloom.

Deut. 5:22 ¶ “These words the LORD spoke to all your assembly at the mountain from the midst of the fire, *of the cloud and of the thick gloom*, with a great voice, and He added no more. He wrote them on two tablets of stone and gave them to me.

Deut. 31:15 The LORD appeared in the tent in a pillar of cloud, and the pillar of cloud stood at the doorway of the tent.

2Sam. 22:12 “And He made darkness canopies around Him,

A mass of waters, thick clouds of the sky.

1Kings 8:10 It happened that when the priests came from the holy place, the cloud filled the house of the LORD,

1Kings 8:11 so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud, for the glory of the LORD filled the house of the LORD.

1Kings 8:12 ¶ Then Solomon said,

“The LORD has said that He would dwell in the thick cloud.

2Chr. 5:13 in unison when the trumpeters and the singers were to make themselves heard with one voice to praise and to glorify the LORD, and when they lifted up their voice accompanied by trumpets and cymbals and instruments of music, and when they praised the LORD *saying*, “He indeed is good for His lovingkindness is everlasting,” then the house, the house of the LORD, was filled with a cloud,

2Chr. 5:14 so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud, for the glory of the LORD filled the house of God.

2Chr. 6:1 ¶ Then Solomon said,

“The LORD has said that He would dwell in the thick cloud.

Job 3:5 “Let darkness and black gloom claim it;

Let a cloud settle on it;

Let the blackness of the day terrify it.

Job 22:14 ‘Clouds are a hiding place for Him, so that He cannot see;

And He walks on the vault of heaven.’

Psa. 18:11 He made darkness His hiding place, His canopy around Him,

Darkness of waters, thick clouds of the skies.

Psa. 18:12 From the brightness before Him passed His thick clouds,

Hailstones and coals of fire.

Psa. 68:17 The chariots of God are myriads, thousands upon thousands;

The Lord is among them *as at* Sinai, in holiness.

Psa. 68:18 You have ascended on high, You have led captive *Your* captives;

You have received gifts among men,

Even *among* the rebellious also, that the LORD God may dwell *there*.

Psa. 68:33 To Him who rides upon the highest heavens, which are from ancient times;

Behold, He speaks forth with His voice, a mighty voice.

Psa. 68:34 Ascribe strength to God;

His majesty is over Israel

And His strength is in the skies.

Psa. 77:17 The clouds poured out water;

The skies gave forth a sound;

Your arrows flashed here and there.

Psa. 77:18 The sound of Your thunder was in the whirlwind;

The lightnings lit up the world;

The earth trembled and shook.

Psa. 78:14 Then He led them with the cloud by day

And all the night with a light of fire.

Psa. 80:1 ¶ Oh, give ear, Shepherd of Israel,

You who lead Joseph like a flock;

You who are enthroned *above* the cherubim, shine forth!

Psa. 83:15 So pursue them with Your tempest

And terrify them with Your storm.

Psa. 97:2 Clouds and thick darkness surround Him;

Righteousness and justice are the foundation of His throne.

Psa. 99:1 ¶ The LORD reigns, let the peoples tremble;

He is enthroned *above* the cherubim, let the earth shake!

Psa. 99:7 He spoke to them in the pillar of cloud;
They kept His testimonies
And the statute that He gave them.

Psa. 104:3 He lays the beams of His upper chambers in the waters;
He makes the clouds His chariot;
He walks upon the wings of the wind;

Psa. 104:4 He makes the winds His messengers,
Flaming fire His ministers.

Psa. 105:39 He spread a cloud for a covering,
And fire to illumine by night.

Is. 4:5 then the LORD will create over the whole area of Mount Zion and over her assemblies a cloud by day, even smoke, and the brightness of a flaming fire by night; for over all the glory will be a canopy.

Is. 5:30 And it will growl over it in that day like the roaring of the sea.
If one looks to the land, behold, there is darkness *and* distress;
Even the light is darkened by its clouds.

Is. 19:1 ¶ The oracle concerning Egypt.
Behold, the LORD is riding on a swift cloud and is about to come to Egypt;
The idols of Egypt will tremble at His presence,
And the heart of the Egyptians will melt within them.

Is. 30:30 And the LORD will cause His voice of authority to be heard,
And the descending of His arm to be seen in fierce anger,
And *in* the flame of a consuming fire
In cloudburst, downpour and hailstones.

Is. 66:15 For behold, the LORD will come in fire
And His chariots like the whirlwind,
To render His anger with fury,
And His rebuke with flames of fire.

Jer. 4:13 "Behold, he goes up like clouds,
And his chariots like the whirlwind;
His horses are swifter than eagles.
Woe to us, for we are ruined!"

Jer. 23:19 "Behold, the storm of the LORD has gone forth in wrath,
Even a whirling tempest;
It will swirl down on the head of the wicked.

Lam. 2:1 ¶ How the Lord has covered the daughter of Zion
With a cloud in His anger!
He has cast from heaven to earth
The glory of Israel,
And has not remembered His footstool
In the day of His anger.

Lam. 3:44 You have covered Yourself with a cloud
So that no prayer can pass through.

Ezek. 1:4 ¶ As I looked, behold, a storm wind was coming from the north, a great cloud with fire flashing forth continually and a bright light around it, and in its midst something like glowing metal in the midst of the fire.

Ezek. 10:3 ¶ Now the cherubim were standing on the right side of the temple when the man entered, and the cloud filled the inner court.

Ezek. 10:4 Then the glory of the LORD went up from the cherub to the threshold of the temple, and the temple was filled with the cloud and the court was filled with the brightness of the glory of the LORD.

Ezek. 30:3 “For the day is near,
Even the day of the LORD is near;
It will be a day of clouds,
A time *of doom* for the nations.

Ezek. 30:18 “In Tehaphnehes the day will be dark
When I break there the yoke bars of Egypt.
Then the pride of her power will cease in her;
A cloud will cover her,
And her daughters will go into captivity.

Ezek. 32:7 “And when I extinguish you,
I will cover the heavens and darken their stars;
I will cover the sun with a cloud
And the moon will not give its light.

Ezek. 34:12 “As a shepherd cares for his herd in the day when he is among his scattered sheep, so I will care for My sheep and will deliver them from all the places to which they were scattered on a cloudy and gloomy day.

Ezek. 38:9 “You will go up, you will come like a storm; you will be like a cloud covering the land, you and all your troops, and many peoples with you.”

Ezek. 38:16 and you will come up against My people Israel like a cloud to cover the land. It shall come about in the last days that I will bring you against My land, so that the nations may know Me when I am sanctified through you before their eyes, O Gog.”

Dan. 7:13 “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.

Joel 2:2 A day of darkness and gloom,
A day of clouds and thick darkness.
As the dawn is spread over the mountains,
So there is a great and mighty people;
There has never been *anything* like it,
Nor will there be again after it
To the years of many generations.

Nah. 1:3 The LORD is slow to anger and great in power,
And the LORD will by no means leave *the guilty* unpunished.
In whirlwind and storm is His way,
And clouds are the dust beneath His feet.

Hab. 3:8 ¶ Did the LORD rage against the rivers,
Or *was* Your anger against the rivers,
Or *was* Your wrath against the sea,
That You rode on Your horses,

On Your chariots of salvation?

Zeph. 1:15 A day of wrath is that day, a day of trouble and distress, a day of destruction and desolation, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness,

Zech. 7:14 “but I scattered them with a storm wind among all the nations whom they have not known. Thus the land is desolated behind them so that no one went back and forth, for they made the pleasant land desolate.”

Zech. 9:14 Then the LORD will appear over them, and His arrow will go forth like lightning; and the Lord GOD will blow the trumpet, and will march in the storm winds of the south.

NEW TESTAMENT "CLOUD" PASSAGES (AND RELATED)

Matt. 17:5 While he was still speaking, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and behold, a voice out of the cloud said, “This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased; listen to Him!”

Matt. 24:30 “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.

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.”

Acts 1:9 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.

Acts 1:10 And as they were gazing intently into the sky while He was going, behold, two men in white clothing stood beside them.

Acts 1:11 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.”

1Th. 4:17 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.

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.

Rev. 11:12 And they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, “Come up here.” Then they went up into heaven in the cloud, and their enemies watched them.

Rev. 14:14 ¶ Then I looked, and behold, a white cloud, and sitting on the cloud was one like a son of man, having a golden crown on His head and a sharp sickle in His hand.

Four Key Visible Parousia Texts

There are four texts which many preterists have to twist in order to get around the idea that the return of Christ would not be visible, personal, and experiential: Matthew 16:28; 24:30; 26:64; and Revelation 1:7. All four of these texts mention the idea of visibility in connection with the return of Christ. What complicates the issue, is that Ken Gentry and several other partial preterists spiritualize the visibility out of some of these texts so that they can apply them to the supposed non-visible "coming in judgment" in AD 70. Their inconsistency on this has been pointed out by numerous other futurists like Tommy Ice. However, Jesus and the apostles do not teach two different returns of Christ, one of which was non-visible and the other visible. That means there is only one return of Christ, and to be consistent we will have to interpret all of these texts in the same way. We cannot take some of them visibly and the others invisibly. And it is Acts 1:11 which forces the interpretation of these four texts toward the visible. This is the point which both partial and full preterists have missed. We full preterists have leaned on Gentry's inconsistent hermeneutic to buttress our invisible idea, but that is like leaning on a crushed reed (Isa. 36:6):

Is. 36:6 "Behold, you rely on the staff of this **crushed reed**, even on Egypt, on which if a man leans, it will go into his hand and pierce it. So is Pharaoh king of Egypt to all who rely on him.

The more consistent way to respond to the futurist argument on Acts 1:11 is simply to agree with them that the Parousia was visible, personal, and experiential -- but not in the cosmological way they have imagined. We simply need to remember how Josephus records the **VISIBLE** sighting of not only the angelic hosts, but also the "chariots" of God's presence being seen "in the clouds" surrounding Jewish cities just before the war with Rome began. Christ left in clouds with the angels present (Theophany), and He returned with the angels in the clouds of heaven (another Theophany). We just need to study first century history and culture so that we can think like the first century Jewish Christians would have thought, and know what they knew, so that we can interpret scripture the way they would have understood it.

The Spiritualizing Hermeneutic

Unfortunately, some teachers within the Preterist movement have opted to follow a spiritualizing hermeneutic in regard to the return of Christ in the first century.

Our futurist critics have noticed that tendency to explain away all those texts which clearly teach a visible and experiential return of Christ. This is similar to what Russell said about those in his day who advocated the idea of a non-visible spiritual-only return of Christ. Here is what one of our critics (Keith Mathison) said about that:

The hyper-preterist rejection of the traditional interpretation of Acts 1:9–11 has not led to anything even remotely approaching agreement on an alternative interpretation of these three verses. In fact, the wide range of conflicting, and

often contradictory, attempts of hyper-preterists to explain this text in terms of their theology gives the reader the impression of an almost desperate ad hoc type of exegesis, a grasping at straws in order to find something, anything, to offer as an alternative reading. The clarity of what Luke tells us in Acts 1:9–11 is probably the reason why this text is either ignored or else passed over with relatively little detailed discussion in most hyper-preterist literature. (Article, "Acts 1:9-11 and the Hyper-Preterist Debate" by Keith Mathison, found here: <http://www.preteristsite.com/docs/mathisonacts.pdf>)

I might add here that I have read several of the full preterist explanations of Acts 1:11, and have noticed one or two that might fit Mathison's description. However, his charge that we preterists have "either ignored or else passed over with relatively little detailed discussion" is a false one, as he inadvertently admits when he deals with several of our explanations and documents them in his footnotes. The very detailed explanation of Randall Otto is just one example which he mentions. He and I personally exchanged several lengthy detailed emails about Acts 1:11. Plus, the response book, *House Divided*, published by Dave Green and Mike Sullivan, has a significant section dealing with Acts 1:11. So, his ridicule of our lack of "detailed discussion" is disingenuous. And this study that we are doing here will certainly add a little more detail to the discussion.

Providential or Representative Coming Only?

In regard to the "providential" or representative coming idea which Russell mentioned, the explanation of John Lightfoot (one of the Westminster Assemblymen) would be a good example:

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 -- Also found here: http://www.preteristarchive.com/Books/1684_lightfoot-john_works.html)

Not Just Providential or Spiritual Coming

There is no doubt that the destruction of Jerusalem was indeed a visible sign of the invisible presence of Jesus to judge and pour out His wrath upon that perverse and crooked generation, but it was much more than that. As Josephus and Yossippon show, it was also a literal, visible, and personal manifestation of Christ to His disciples and to His enemies, so that His saints were relieved of their tribulation, rescued out of the

persecution, and rewarded for their faithfulness, while His enemies were utterly destroyed. It was a visible and experiential salvation and judgment in both cases.

The spiritualizing approach to the fulfillment is totally unnecessary, since we have the historical documentation to show that it was fulfilled in a literal, visible, and experiential way. *Josephus*, *Yosippon*, *Tacitus*, and *Eusebius* provide more than enough historical information to show that. They have laid out all these events in sequential order with their supporting documentation. We Preterists have been extremely slow and reluctant to dig all this information out of our historical sources, and reluctant to take full advantage of the phenomenal statements that those early historians have provided to us.

This is similar to what happened at the Red Sea crossing. The Egyptians followed the Israelites down into the Red Sea, but "the Angel of God" and Glory Cloud moved into the middle between the Israelites and the Egyptians. Then the Angel of God "looked down on the army of the Egyptians" and brought them into utter confusion. Moses said that not a one of them escaped. (Ex. 14:19-28). This is the same kind of thing that happened at the Parousia. *Yosippon* said that "there was seen from above over the Holy of Holies for the whole night the outline of a man's face ...and his appearance was quite awesome." (*Sepher Yosippon* chapter 87).

In view of the literal historical language used in the Parousia texts, there simply is no good reason to take the "representative coming" or spiritualizing approaches. Plus, the rapture of all the saints easily explains why no Christians after AD 70 mentioned the Parousia.

Some try to say that the destruction of Jerusalem by the Roman armies was the fulfillment of the visible and experiential language that we find in all these "expectation" texts. However, that fails to explain the post-70 saints' failure to recognize the destruction as the "time of His visitation." They should have known that Christ had come. They were promised that they would not only see the signs of His presence (i.e., the angelic armies in the sky), but that they would see, hear, and experience the presence of Christ Himself. It is not sufficient to take this concept of "providential" or representative coming in the Roman armies. It still does not answer the tough question of why there was silence and absence of the pre-70 saints after AD 70. They should have "seen face to face" and "known fully as they were known" if their expectations had been met. They would have set the record straight with all the post-70 Christians who were saying that the Parousia was still future. If they saw the destruction, they should have known that Christ had come. Why did they keep silent about it and let the other Christians keep teaching a future return?

The Angels' Words Were Relevant Only to the Watching Disciples

I have only seen one preterist writer notice the time indicator that is built into this text. In his unpublished article entitled, "Acts 1:9-11 and Matthew 24:1-34 Regarding the Coming Back of Jesus," Roy Lee Scott observes that the two angels asked the disciples why they were standing there gazing into the sky. He points out something significant in the question that the angels asked. It has to do with *audience relevance* and the time of the return of Christ. His argument is that some of those disciples who saw Jesus ascend are the very ones who would witness His return. This is a very interesting argument that I have not seen any other Preterist make:

We have **people looking towards the sky above them after a person that is very close to them suddenly vanishes into a cloud**. This was a very shocking thing to witness, thus it is no wonder that they would be staring into the sky where Jesus just vanished into a cloud. **It was a dramatic event** to those that witnessed it, and it was an event that was **very personal to them**, that is, **it left a very powerful personal impression upon their minds and eyes**. This was an experience that they were **feeling very strongly and were intimately involved with personally**. To use a slang expression, staring into the sky where a very close loved one had just vanished was "where they were at".

That moment of awe and most certainly some sadness was at the forefront of their thinking at the time. It is what was consuming them at the time. So at this all consuming moment, what happens? 2 men in white speak to them. It is not known who they were, angels or otherwise, suffice to say that they would be perceived to be of God. And what do these 2 men in white say? They ask the people who were all consumed with staring into the sky where Jesus had vanished into a cloud, **why they were doing** what they were doing. The 2 men in white were **"addressing" what the people were doing**.

This concept of "addressing" is so very important here. The 2 men in white did NOT just tell the people, "This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven". Instead of just doing that, the 2 men in white started out by **"addressing" what the people were doing** at the time, staring into the sky where Jesus vanished into a cloud. Why did the 2 men in white bother to "address" what the people were doing at the time? There is only one possible logical explanation as to why the 2 men in white "addressed" and dealt with what the people were doing. It is **because what the 2 men in white were about to say dealt with them personally**.

What the 2 men in white were about to say **dealt with the people that were staring into the sky**. If the future coming that is spoken of by the 2 men in white referred to a future coming that was in our present day future, and was far beyond the lifespan of those being spoken to, (it has been around 2,000 years now since they were spoken to), then that **future coming would not have the personal significance to those staring into the sky** at the time to warrant the 2 men in white "addressing" what they were doing at the time, that being staring into the sky where Jesus vanished into a cloud. This is so obvious once one looks at the facts honestly. It simply can not be denied or overlooked.

Here is Scott's point: It was they who had seen Him depart, and the two angels imply that it would be those same "men of Galilee" who would see Him return "in like manner" to the way they saw Him go. Since they who saw him ascend were the only ones who could recognize a like mannered return, there is a strong implication here that the like mannered return would occur to the same folks who saw Him leave. Those of us today who did not see Him leave, simply have no clear idea of how He left. We quibble over every little nuance of the Greek text. But there was no doubt in the minds of those disciples about what "in like manner" meant. They knew exactly what the angels were talking about, and they were in the best position of all to be able to recognize his "like

mannered" return. So the angels were saying in net effect: "Why are you still standing here looking up into the sky? This same Jesus whom you have seen ascend, will come back to you in the same way you have watched Him go away. You are not going to miss it. You will see this same Jesus, whom you know personally, return to you in the same manner you have watched him go. So get on with the task that he has assigned to you." Only they would be able to recognize "this same Jesus." And only they could recognize his return "in the same manner" as they had seen him go. There are two factors here which point exclusively to those "men of Galilee" as being the ones to whom Christ would return. They were the only ones who could easily recognize "this same Jesus" and "the same manner" in which he had ascended.

II. Historical Evidence for a Visible and Experiential Parousia

Did They Fail To Recognize His Parousia?

Now, taking that idea one step further, it means that those disciples who remained alive at the time of Christ's return, would have "seen" Christ at His "like mannered" return and recognized Him as "this same Jesus" that they had personally known (and seen ascend) thirty-six years previously. This means that if they remained alive on earth after the Parousia, they would have been keenly aware that the Parousia had occurred, because they had personally "seen" this same Jesus return "in the same manner they had watched him leave." Therefore, they could not have been ignorant of His return. They would have been very much aware of it, because they had personally seen it and experienced it. This makes their silence afterwards all the more puzzling. Notice what Don Preston says about this:

Stevens is correct to say that we have no [patristic] authors who point to AD 70 as the time of Christ's final coming, the judgment and resurrection of the dead. This silence is indeed perplexing ... for which we have no easy answer. ...how in the name of reason did they fail to see that the Parousia had indeed occurred? ...Are we to suppose that the post 70 saints were so ignorant that they could not see that connection? [*We Shall Meet*, pp. 286, 287, 291, 299].

Perplexing indeed! In fact, this is the very problem which our futurist critics (like Dr. Charles Hill) have relentlessly pressed upon us. How can it be that these twelve disciples (the "men of Galilee" to whom the two angels addressed their remarks) "failed to see that the Parousia had indeed occurred" as Preston admits? Did the two angels overestimate the abilities of those twelve men to recognize the "like mannered" return of "this same Jesus" when they "saw" it? How credible is that?

Their failure "to recognize the time of His visitation" is exacerbated further when we see post-70 writers like *Papias*, *Polycarp*, and *Ignatius* teaching a yet future return and claiming that they got that idea from some of Apostle John's "hearers" (disciples). All three of these guys were supposedly alive in the latter decades of the first century, at the very time when all those "living and remaining disciples" would have still been alive after AD 70. Think about the implications of this.

At the Parousia, the Perfect would have arrived, so that the living and remaining disciples would have "known fully as they had been known." This means that they would be keenly aware of the occurrence of the Parousia, the Resurrection, and the Judgment. They would have "fully known" about it, and understood all things. This means that Apostle John would have seen the fulfillment of all the things he had written in the book of Revelation, and would have fully understood all of it. How then could he have failed to teach his "hearers" (disciples) about these fulfillments?

And if John was still alive in the last decade of the first century, and living in Ephesus as tradition claims, he would have known about Papias and Polycarp, since Hierapolis and Smyrna are in the same region of western Turkey where Ephesus is. This really impugns the integrity of John and his "hearers" who supposedly taught Papias and Polycarp. How can it be that Apostle John failed to inform his "hearers" about the AD 70 Parousia? Was he ashamed of Christ's Parousia? Was he afraid of being persecuted? Was he unaware of the fulfillment of his own book of Revelation? The plot thickens.

In 1 John 2:28, John commands his readers "not to shrink away from Him in shame at His Parousia." This implies that not only John, but even his readers, would see Christ appear at the Parousia, and would draw near to Him (and not shrink away in shame). How could they draw near to Him and avoid shrinking away from Him if they did not even see Him appear and did not even know He was present with them? This is a HUGE dilemma that all preterists face. It will not suffice to sweep it under the rug and pretend that it does not exist. Nor does it solve anything when we preterists wave our magic spiritualizing wand over the problem and declare it fulfilled in a spiritual way only. As Sproul says, we need to feel the full weight of this problem!

There are numerous "expectation statements" like this throughout the New Testament which tell what the pre-70 apostles and saints were expecting to see, hear, and experience at the Parousia. For instance, see 2 Thess 1:4-10 and 2:1 [boldface mine] --

...therefore, we ourselves speak proudly of you among the churches of God for your perseverance and faith in the midst of all your **persecutions and afflictions** which you endure. This is a plain indication of God's righteous judgment so that you will be considered **worthy of the kingdom of God, for which indeed you are suffering**. For after all it is only just for God to **repay with affliction** those who afflict you, 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 ... [at] the Parousia of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him.**

Do you see what Paul was promising those Thessalonian saints? They were under heavy persecution. In fact, as we learn from the first epistle to them, some of their members had died in the persecution. Paul tells them that this was a plain indication

that they were considered worthy to enter the Kingdom when it arrived at the Parousia. Paul says that Christ would "repay with affliction" those who had persecuted the saints, and would "give relief to them all" when Jesus was revealed from heaven. Those wicked persecutors would be cast "away from the presence of the Lord" at His coming, while the saints would be "gathered together to Him" (2 Thess 2:1). Those gathered saints ("all who had believed") would be a glory to Christ on that day, and they would "marvel at Him" in the company of all the believers who had been gathered together to Him. Does it sound like those saints would see, hear, and experience anything at His Parousia? Does it seem at all like they would miss His Parousia, and not even be aware of it afterwards?

Paul's words here are crystal clear. The Thessalonian saints would have been counting on that "relief" to come at the Parousia, when they would be gathered together to Him and marvel at Him in the presence of all who believed. They would not have missed it for the world. They would have been anxiously waiting for it, and longing for his return. The only way they could have missed it is if it did not occur. But non-occurrence is not an option for us preterists.

If any of those saints who experienced the *relief* and *gathering* and *marveling* were still around after the Parousia, they could not have stopped their "marveling" about it -- especially when they heard Papias, Polycarp, Ignatius, or any other post-70 Christian teach that the Parousia was still future! They would have spoken up and set the record straight. To shrink away in silence would have been unpardonable. Apostle John commanded them NOT to do that (1 Jn. 2:28). Jesus constantly told them that if they would not confess Him before men, neither would He confess them before His Father. So how do we account for their silence?

How Do We Explain Their Silence?

Non-occurrence is not an option, since that would make Jesus a false prophet, and utterly falsify Christianity. The Parousia must have occurred, and they must have seen, heard, and experienced it just like they expected to, otherwise Paul's predictions and promises were mistaken (and uninspired). Their SILENCE afterwards can only be explained by their ABSENCE -- i.e., either they all died shortly after the Parousia, or they were raptured. No other option seems credible for a preterist. And no other option can explain why they did not speak up and set the record straight about the AD 70 Parousia.

Do you see how a clear understanding of Scripture forces a reinterpretation of history? When there is a conflict between Scripture and historical tradition, we have to examine both our interpretations of Scripture and the claims of history to see where the problem lies. Either the tradition is mistaken, or our interpretation of the Bible is mistaken, or both. But we Preterists know that our interpretation of these "expectation statements" are correct. So the problem has to be with the traditions. This means that we need to closely examine all the traditions about the pre-70 saints who supposedly lived through and beyond AD 70 into the late first and early second centuries. Do we have reliable testimony at the mouth of two or three first century eyewitnesses to back up these traditions, or are they merely hearsay stories?

This is where the literal rapture view really excels. It easily explains both the silence and absence of the pre-70 saints, as well as the confusion of the later church fathers. The historical traditions simply do not hold up under scrutiny. Numerous church historians have noted the untrustworthy nature of the patristic writers and their fanciful traditions.

The net effect of all this upon our study of Acts 1:9-11 comes down to this. With the rapture view, we preterists now have a way to agree with the futurists on the fact of a visible and experiential return of Christ. There is no need to engage in exegetical gymnastics to explain away the clear language in Acts 1:9-11. There are numerous other "expectation statements" which show that the pre-70 saints expected to see, hear, and experience some things at the Parousia. As we have seen, Acts 1:9-11 is not the only text which teaches that visible and personal return of Christ. So there is no justifiable reason for preterists to deny it.

The futurists are incorrect on their timing of the Parousia, but at least they understand Acts 1:9-11 correctly as an experiential return of Christ. However, our agreement on the visibility of the Parousia comes with a significant burden of proof on two issues:

- (1) That the traditions about the pre-70 saints living beyond AD 70 are mistaken
- (2) That there is reliable historical documentation to support a visible and experiential first-century Parousia.

The first of these two items lies mostly outside the scope of this paper. It has been substantially dealt with already in another paper entitled, "Did John Live Beyond AD 70?" That PDF document is available free by email request (preterist1@preterist.org).

The second issue deserves some treatment here, since it directly relates to our claim that a visible and experiential Parousia actually occurred in the first century. If no significant historical evidence for an AD 70 Parousia can be found, then the claim of first century fulfillment is brought into question, at least on historical grounds. That is where we will focus next (historical evidence for a first century return of Christ).

Evidence for an Experiential Parousia

We all need to remember that history can never trump Scripture. Neither silence, nor all the evidence in the world, can overturn Scripture. If Scripture clearly and unambiguously teaches that something was going to happen at a certain time, then it must have happened, regardless of the lack of historical confirmation of it. Otherwise, the Christian faith and the integrity of Christ Himself is at stake.

The following evidence does not, and can not, prove anything. Only Scripture can do that. So, the purpose of this evidence is to help us understand HOW Scripture was fulfilled, not to prove that it WAS fulfilled. The Biblical prophecies do not need any historical proof for their *time* of fulfillment. But the evidence can help us understand the *nature* of that fulfillment, and that is why it is worthwhile to look at it.

And this is precisely where futurists and preterists find their most significant differences. The *time* of fulfillment is easy to reckon with, once the *nature* of fulfillment is

known. And conversely, if the *time* of fulfillment is known, it makes it easier to determine the nature of fulfillment, especially if we see some historical events which clearly fit that nature of fulfillment. Almost all futurists think of the Second Coming as the end of human history, whereas all preterists see it as merely the end of one age and the beginning of another.

These two radically different concepts of the *nature* of fulfillment shape every facet of our respective futurist and preterist paradigms. The futurist sees ongoing human history as absolute proof that Christ has NOT returned, whereas the preterist sees the destruction of Jerusalem as absolute proof that He MUST have returned. The difference turns on our respective concepts of the *nature* of fulfillment. That is where historical documentation can help us to understand the nature of fulfillment.

The Bible tells us the *time*, so we know where to look. When the Bible predicts that certain events will happen within a certain timeframe, after that time passes we can look back at history to see HOW those events occurred. The historical record can not prove that it did or did not occur, but it can help us understand the nature of fulfillment, and that is how we will be using it here.

The most obvious primary sources for first century evidence have to be Josephus and the Apostolic Father writings. Additional testimony can also be obtained from Tacitus, Yosippon, Eusebius, Talmud, Midrash, Philo, Dead Sea Scrolls, Pseudepigrapha, and other late first and early second century writings. In this paper, we will focus exclusively on one small section of Josephus (*The Wars*, Book 6, Chapter 5, Section 3). For more this kind of evidence, the reader is referred to the book, *First Century Events*, by Ed Stevens (available from www.preterist.org).

Just Before the War Broke Out...

The events that Josephus records below, happened at the time of Passover and Pentecost in the Spring and early Summer of AD 66 (late April until early June). That was only a few months before the Zealot rebellion began (August 66). For almost two years before the war (AD 64-66), the Neronic persecution had been raging, killing most of the remaining Christians throughout the Roman empire. For over a year before the war, tensions had been building between the Jews and their Roman overlords. Things were now approaching the breaking point. Signs and omens had been seen in Judea, portending bad things to come. Josephus says, "There was a star in the shape of a sword and a comet which stood above Jerusalem for a whole year before the war" [*Wars* 6.289 (6.5.3)].

Armed bands of robbers and assassins were ruthlessly plundering the Judean countryside with no hindrance from the Roman authorities. The Zealots were openly pushing for war, and harassing any Judeans who refused to help them. Things were no longer safe. Josephus said that many Judeans fled the country at this time [*Wars* 2.279 (2.14.2)]. Many more joined the Zealot cause.

Violence had erupted in Caesarea when a Greek had sacrificed some birds on top of an earthenware jar right in front of a synagogue on the Sabbath day. Tensions were building. The Roman Governor (Gessius Florus) raised the temperature to the boiling point by attempting to seize all the remaining imageless gold from the Temple. One of the young brash priests (Eleazar b. Ananias) blew the shofar and rallied

Jerusalem citizens to block that attempt. Josephus says that this was a turning point. [Wars 2.315 (2.15.2)]

About this same time, one week before Passover (AD 66), just as the pilgrims had begun to arrive in preparation for the festival, they saw a "bright light around the altar and the Temple like daylight for half an hour." Josephus even gives the exact "day and hour" of this event (8th day of Xanthicus, at the ninth hour of the night). [Wars 6.290 (6.5.3)] "At the same festival also, a heifer, as she was led by the high priest to be sacrificed, brought forth a lamb in the midst of the temple" and "the eastern gate of the inner temple [i.e., Nicanor gate] ...was seen to be opened of its own accord about the sixth hour of the night." [Wars 6.292-296 (6.5.3); Tacitus; and Talmud Yoma 39b].

Then a few days after Passover, "on the twenty-first day of the month Artemisius...before sunsetting" (notice he again gives the exact calendar day and hour), Josephus says:

...a certain prodigious and incredible phenomenon appeared; I suppose the account of it would seem to be a fable, were it not related by those that saw it, and were not the events that followed it of so considerable a nature as to deserve such signals; for, before sunsetting, **chariots and troops of soldiers in their armor were seen running about among the clouds,** and surrounding of cities. Moreover at that feast which we call Pentecost, as the priests were going by night into the inner [court of the] temple, as their custom was, to perform their sacred ministrations, they said that, in the first place, **they felt a quaking, and heard a great noise, and after that they heard a sound as of a great multitude, saying, "Let us remove hence."** [Josephus. *Complete Works*. Translated by William Whiston. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Kregel Publications, 1971. Wars 6:296-300 (6.5.3)]

...there appeared a miraculous phenomenon, passing belief. Indeed, what I am about to relate would, I imagine, have been deemed a fable, were it not for the narratives of eyewitnesses and for the subsequent calamities which deserved to be so signalized. For before sunset throughout all parts of the country **chariots were seen in the air and armed battalions hurtling through the clouds** and encompassing the cities. Moreover, at the feast which is called Pentecost, the priests on entering the inner court of the temple by night, as their custom was in the discharge of their ministrations, reported that **they were conscious, first of a commotion and a din, and after that of a voice as of a host, "We are departing hence."** [Josephus in *Nine Volumes. Volume 3. The Jewish War, Books 4-7*, with an English translation by H. St. J. Thackeray. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, and London: William Heinemann Ltd, 1928 originally, reprinted 1968. Wars 6:296-300 (6.5.3)]

I have provided both *Whiston* and *Thackeray* translations above. They each state it a little differently. Josephus gave the exact calendar "day and hour" when the angelic armies appeared in the sky above Judea. Josephus mentions multiple eyewitnesses who saw this event and reported it ("at the mouth of two or more witnesses").

I believe this is exactly what Jesus was talking about in Matthew 24:29-31 when He predicted the sign of His coming to appear in the sky. This was visible proof that He had come for judgment upon the Jewish nation. Jesus said that at His coming He would send forth His angels to gather together His elect (i.e., the resurrection and rapture).

In the last sentence of both translations above, Josephus mentions the priests hearing some things at night in the temple on the day of Pentecost. This is an extremely interesting statement. To help in my analysis, I sent the Greek text of this section to several Greek scholars and Textual critics, asking them to give me a better rendering of that last sentence. Compare the results of their evaluation (below), with Whiston and Thackeray above:

[Dr. Larry Hurtado in England, a very well-known textual critic, was satisfied with the translation of Thackeray given above]

"At night during the feast which is called Pentecost, as the priests entered [aor. ptc] the inner court of the Temple, as was their custom in order to perform their duties, they said that at first they were **overtaken by a shaking and by a loud noise, and after that by a voice that cried out in unison, 'We are leaving this place.'** " [Prof. David H. Warren, Turner School of Theology, Amridge University, Montgomery AL 36117]

"And during the feast which is called "Pentecost" the priests, after passing along into the temple's inner court (even as [this is] a custom with the temple services), said they **experienced an agitating motion, also [there was] a loud noise, and after these things, a collective voice [saying], 'We are departing from this place!'** " [Parker Voll, M.A. Rochester, NY]

Furthermore, at the feast called Pentecost, as the priests were going inside the temple to [perform] their customary services, they said at first they **noticed a movement and a loud noise, and after these things a voice of a multitude [in unison shouting], 'Let us depart from here.'** " [my resultant understanding of it -- Ed Stevens]

This is clearly talking about an event which occurred in the UNSEEN realm, but which was heard, felt, and experienced by the priests at night in the temple on Pentecost (AD 66). They did not SEE these things, but they heard it and felt it. Think about this carefully. Christ was already present. The visible sign of His arrival and ongoing presence to pour out his wrath upon the Jews was given a few weeks earlier right after Passover. Now here at Pentecost, we find some souls in the UNSEEN realm leaving the temple and going somewhere else. The priests did not know what to make of it, so they reported the facts as they experienced them: (1) They noticed/felt a shaking/movement/stirring, (2) They heard a loud noise or commotion, and finally (3) They heard a collective/united/unified/unison voice of a multitude saying, "Let us depart from here."

The Psalms mention this nightly service of the priests in the Temple. They "proclaimed...their faithfulness **at night** to the music of the ten-stringed lyre and the

melody of the harp" (Psalm 92:2-3). Those who "minister by night in the house of the Lord," were to "lift up their hands in the sanctuary and praise the Lord" (Psalm 134). The observance of a night service in the Temple is further attested by 1 Chron. 9:33 and 23:30 where Levite singers were appointed for it. [Edersheim, Alfred. *The Temple: Its Ministry and Services as they were at the Time of Jesus Christ*. Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1997. p. 100]

What was this movement and loud commotion that the priests experienced? Who were these folks in the unseen realm? Where did they come from. How did they get there? Where were they going? We are not left totally to guesswork. Four more writers (Eusebius, Yosippon, Hegesippus, and Tacitus,) have recorded these same events:

5 And not many days after the [Passover] feast, on the twenty-first of the month Artemisium, **a certain marvelous vision was seen which passes belief**. The prodigy might seem fabulous were it not related by those who saw it, and were not the calamities which followed deserving of such signs. For before the setting of the sun **chariots and armed troops were seen throughout the whole region in mid-air, wheeling through the clouds and encircling the cities**. 6 And at the feast which is called **Pentecost**, when **the priests** entered the temple at night, as was their custom, to perform the services, **they said that at first they perceived a movement and a noise, and afterward a voice as of a great multitude, saying, 'Let us go hence.'** [Eusebius. *Ecclesiastical History*. Book 3 Chapter 8 Sections 1-6. Translated by Arthur Cushman McGiffert. From *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series*, Vol. 1. Edited by Philip Schaff and Henry Wace. (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1890.) Revised and edited for New Advent by Kevin Knight. Found here: <<http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/250103.htm> >.]

And after the feast, not many days later, on the twenty-first of May, **a demonic phantom appeared of incredible size**, and what will be related would have seemed a fairy-tale had it not been told by those who saw it, and been attended by suffering worthy of the portent. For before sunset there appeared in the air over the whole country **chariots and armed troops coursing through the clouds and surrounding the cities**. And at the feast called Pentecost the priests passed into the temple at night, as was their custom, for their services, and said that **they first perceived movement and noise and after that a sudden cry, "We go hence."** [Eusebius. *The Ecclesiastical History with an English Translation by Kirsopp Lake*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, and London: William Heinemann Ltd, 1926 originally, reprinted 1980. Book 3, Chapter 8, Sections 5-6.]

But not many days after the feast, on the twenty-first of the month of Artemisium (May), **a wonderful spectre was seen, which surpasses all belief**. And indeed, that which I am about to tell would appear a prodigy, were it not related by those who had seen it, and unless the subsequent miseries had corresponded to the signs. For before the setting of the sun there were seen **chariots and armed troops on high, wheeling through the clouds around the whole**

region, and surrounding the cities. And at the festival called Pentecost, the priests entering the temple at night according to their custom, to perform the service, said **they first perceived a motion and noise, and after this a confused voice saying, "Let us go hence."** [Eusebius. *The Ecclesiastical History of Eusebius Pamphilus*. Translated by Christian Frederick Cruse. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1971. Book 3, Chapter 8, Sections 5-6]

Now it happened after this that **there was seen over the Holy of Holies from above for the entire night the outline of a man's face, the like of whose beauty had never been seen in all the land, and his appearance was very awesome.** Moreover, in those days were seen **chariots of fire and horsemen, a great force flying across the sky near to the ground coming against Jerusalem and all the land of Judah, all of them horses of fire and riders of fire.** When the holiday of **Shavu'oth [Pentecost]** came in those days, during the night **the priests heard within the Temple something like the sound of men going and the sound of men marching in a multitude going into the Temple, and a terrible and mighty voice was heard speaking: "Let's go and leave this House.** [*Sepher Yosippon: A Mediaeval History of Ancient Israel*. Translated from the Hebrew critical text of David Flusser by Steven B. Bowman. Excerpts from Chapter 87 "Burning of the Temple"]

Also after many days **a certain figure appeared of tremendous size, which many saw, just as the books of the Jews have disclosed,** and before the setting of the sun there were suddenly **seen in the clouds chariots and armed battle arrays,** by which the cities of all Judaea and its territories were invaded. Moreover in the celebration itself of the **Pentecost** the priests entering the interior of the temple at night time, that they might celebrate the usual sacrifices, asserted themselves at first to have felt a certain **movement** and a **sound** given forth, afterwards even to have heard shouted in a **sudden voice: "we cross over from here."** [*Pseudo-Hegesippus*, online text, public domain, translated from the Latin into English by Wade Blocker, made available online by Roger Pearse in 2005. This excerpt taken from Chapter 44, corresponding to pages 391-394 in the Latin critical text edited by Vincente Ussani entitled, *Hegesippi qui dicitur historiae libri V*, found in the *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum* series, volume 66, Vienna: Hölder-Pichler-Tempsky (1932).]

Prodigies had occurred, which this nation, prone to superstition, but hating all religious rites, did not deem it lawful to expiate by offering and sacrifice. There had been seen **hosts joining battle in the skies, the fiery gleam of arms,** the temple illuminated by a sudden radiance from the clouds. The doors of the inner shrine were suddenly thrown open, and **a voice of more than mortal tone was heard to cry that the gods were departing. At the same instant there was a mighty stir as of departure.** [Tacitus. *The Histories: A New Translation by Kenneth Wellesley*. London: Cox & Wyman Ltd, and Penguin Books Ltd, 1972. Book 5, Section 13.]

The first event mentioned by most of these writers was some kind of apparition that stood above the Holy of Holies for an entire night. Then right after Passover in AD 66, they saw the angelic chariots and armies in the clouds preparing for and engaging in battle. Six weeks later at Pentecost, the priests noticed a movement, noise, and the united voice of a great multitude in the unseen realm saying that they were leaving that place.

This great multitude of people who were heard coming into the temple and then departing from it, were obviously in the unseen realm, the same place where Christ and the angels were at that time. What is the eschatological significance of this event in the unseen realm? The priests did not know what it meant, nor did Josephus, Yosippon, Hegesippus, Tacitus, or Eusebius. They simply record it as the priests reported it. But when we compare their statements to the New Testament predictions of the Parousia, resurrection, rapture, and judgment, the significance of these events is clearly seen.

Key Questions about this Event

This event which the priests witnessed in the temple at Pentecost in AD 66, raises lots of questions: (1) Who were these folks whom the priests heard? (angels, demons, Shekinah, or resurrected dead ones?) (2) Where had they come from before they came into the temple? (3) Why did they come into the temple first before making their departure? (4) Why were they departing? (5) Where were they going? (6) Why were they going there? (7) What would happen to them when they went there?

The persons who came into the temple and departed from it were definitely people, and not the Shekinah, or angelic/demonic beings. Those are the other two theories about the identity of these folks who were in the unseen realm. Tacitus, a pagan non-Christian Roman historian naturally interpreted them as being "gods" (supernatural beings in the unseen realm). This is where some writers get the idea that it may have been the Shekinah leaving the temple. But this can not be correct, since he is the only one who takes that position, and it is coming from his anti-Christian and anti-Jewish perspective. That is the only way it would make sense in his pagan idolatrous worldview. But notice that the Jewish writer Yosippon understands it as, "**men** going and the sound of **men** marching in a multitude going into the Temple." Josephus, Eusebius, and Hegesippus agree with this idea that it was people in the unseen realm.

[Yosippon] "Marching into the Temple" -- One possible explanation for this language of Yosippon might be that the martyrs mentioned in Rev. 6:9-11 were under the altar in the heavenly temple in the unseen realm, which overlapped or was co-terminus with the earthly temple, so that when the resurrection occurred, the resurrected saints joined with the changed living saints and the martyrs under the altar, and then marched together as one group into the temple, from which they were caught up to be with Christ. We see this kind of conjunction and overlay of the earthly and heavenly temples in Isaiah 6, where Isaiah was allowed to peer into the normally unseen spiritual realm and see the Lord high and lifted up enthroned above the Mercy Seat in the Holy of Holies. The books of Hebrews and Revelation use similar cosmological language describing what is happening in the unseen realm in the first century.

The temple supposedly was the place on earth where heaven and earth met. According to Jewish tradition, the dome of the rock upon which the Temple stood, was the capstone of the Hadean realm under the earth (in the unseen realm). They considered the temple as not only the gateway to Heaven, but also the place where the gates of Hades were located. This means that when the dead were raised out of Hades, they would have come out of the gates of Hades right there at the temple, the very location where they could ascend into heaven to be with Christ.

The stone on which the temple was built was supposedly the foundation stone for the whole world. It was thought to be the center of the world, and the place where heaven (the unseen realm) and earth (the visible realm) were connected. The rock upon which the temple was built was considered the lid or cover of sheol. This implies that all those who would be raised out of sheol would come out at that very place and then ascend from there into heaven to be with God.

I believe this event that those priests witnessed and experienced in the temple at Pentecost (AD 66) was the resurrection of the dead out of Hades and their rapture to be with Christ.

This event is not referring to the coming of Christ, but rather to the resurrection and rapture. And even though these events occurred in the unseen realm, they were still felt and heard by the priests in the temple. So there were audible and experiential signs of the invisible events.

So how does this fulfill the idea of visibility for the coming of Christ "in like manner" that Acts 1:9-11 is talking about? Simple. The sighting of the angelic armies in the sky running about among the clouds and surround the Jewish cities was the clear visible sign (in the clouds, in the sky) that Christ had returned. Before that sign appeared, all of the above historians mention an apparition of immense size, beautiful in appearance, but very scary and threatening. This apparition, according to Yosippon, "was seen over the Holy of Holies from above for the entire night." This was probably the very thing that Jesus had predicted at His trial before the Sanhedrin (Matt 26:64), where He told them that some of them would live to see the Son of Man return.

Furthermore, those disciples who had witnessed the ascension, were promised that they would see "this same Jesus" return "in the same manner" they had watched Him go into heaven. I believe that is what happened at Pentecost. The priests heard the combined voices of the resurrected dead and the changed living saints saying that they were departing the earthly seen realm and going into the heavenly unseen realm to be with Christ forever afterwards. The living and remaining saints literally saw Christ at the time of their "change" and gathering by the angels. This change and rapture occurred at the same time as the resurrection of the dead out of Hades. The combined group of saints (resurrected dead and changed living) were gathered together there at the temple, and then departed from the temple and ascended (were caught up) together to be with Christ forever afterwards.

Cosmology: Gateway to Heaven

Beale compares the miracle of hearing in different languages on the day of Pentecost to the confusion of languages that occurred at the Tower of Babel in Genesis 11:1-9. The Tower of Babel was the scattering of the 70 nations over the surface of the

earth, while the Day of Pentecost was the regathering of those nations to hear the gospel in their own language. Here is what Beale has to say about these two events and their typological and cosmological connections:

That the events of Pentecost likely took place in the Jerusalem temple is appropriate (cf. Acts 2:1-2, 46). The judgment at Babel occurred as a result of the people uniting to **build a temple tower** in order to force God to come down from heaven in blessing. Such cultic towers were typical of the time in ancient Mesopotamia. Their purpose was to serve as a **gateway between heaven and earth** whereby the god could come down and even refresh himself on the way to the earthly temple. Like Babel's temple tower, the Jerusalem temple was intended to be the **link between heaven and earth**. Because of Israel's sin, however, their earthly temple was about to be judged, as we have already seen prophesied by Jesus in the Gospels. Israel believed their temple to be the emblem that they were God's chosen people. In fact, however, **God's presence had long since appeared to have departed from the temple** because of their rebellion, idolatry and apostasy (Ezek. 11:22-25, *Tg. Isaiah* 5:5; *Midrash Rabbah Numbers* 15:10; *Midrash Rabbah Lamentations*, Proem 24; and *b. Yoma* 21b may point to this, though Matt. 23:21; *Sirach* 24:8-34; Josephus, *War* 6.299, *m. Sukkah* 5:4, and *Midrash Rabbah Exodus* 2:2 could point in the other direction; on which, see Davies 1991: 32-36). As we will see, Stephen reiterates this judgment, and like Jesus, he is also killed for it (Acts 6:11-15; 7:48-50). The Gospels also affirm that Jesus himself began to **replace the old temple** during his ministry and more climactically at his resurrection (John 2:19-22; Matt. 26:61; 27:40; Mark 14:58; 15:29). [G. K. Beale. *The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God*. Downers Grove, Illinois USA: Intervarsity Press, orig. 2004. Reprinted 2005. p. 203.]

Now let's look at some of the things Beale says here (boldfaced material above). When did God's presence depart from the Temple? There are a number of conjectures on this, which can be resolved by looking at the typology:

1. Babylonian captivity. The Ark of Covenant never returned, therefore the Presence of the Shekinah never resided in the temple after that.
2. The Herodian temple was never really dedicated with the Shekinah coming to rest upon it or inside it, like it did during the Temple of Solomon.
3. The Essenes stayed aloof from the Temple, because they believed it was corrupt and did not have the presence of God dwelling therein.
4. Jesus seemed to recognize the earthly temple as legitimate, and called it His Father's House. However, at the Cross, the veil of the temple was torn from top to bottom, indicating that the Shekinah might have left at that time, only to come down to rest upon the apostles and the church fifty days later at Pentecost. This was a clear sign that the physical temple was no longer the place where God would dwell. He would now dwell in His new temple, the church, from Pentecost onwards.
5. The Talmudic writings say that the lot for the goat ("for the Lord") no longer came up into the right hand of the High Priest on Yom Kippur, nor did the scarlet cloth tied to

the horns of the scapegoat turn white any more, during the forty years before the temple was destroyed. That speaks volumes about the fact that if the Shekinah was still there in the physical temple, He was not pleased with what was going on. He was not accepting those sacrifices any longer.

6. God's presence (the Shekinah) may no longer have been there in the Temple after the Cross. Notice in Matthew 23, as Jesus was leaving the temple for his last time, he said that "your house is being left to you desolate." When they killed the Son, the Father rent His garments (the veil of the temple torn from top to bottom), and His Presence (the Shekinah) vacated the temple. It seems very likely that the Shekinah must have taken His exit when the veil was torn at the crucifixion. The Shekinah may have remained in Jerusalem or moved over to the Mount of Olives for the Ascension, and then back to Jerusalem for the Day of Pentecost when He would be poured out upon His Church, which was the New Temple that was under construction. The Holy Spirit (or Shekinah) was a down payment, earnest, or pledge of what they would receive when the New Temple was finished building and the Shekinah would come to dwell in them fully and finally.

Comments from Various Commentaries

Barnes Notes:

It is remarkable that when the *return* of the Saviour is mentioned, it is uniformly said that he will return *in the clouds*, Acts 1:11; Matt. 24:30; 26:64; Mark 13:26; Rev. 1:7; Dan. 7:13.

BK COMMENTARY:

He will come back in a **cloud**, bodily, in view of people (Rev. 1:7), and to the Mount of Olives (Zech. 14:4)— **the same way** the apostles saw **Him go**.

[FROM ED] Here is how Weymouth (a Rapture Preterist) rendered Acts 1:9 --

Acts 1:9 When He had said this, and while they were looking at Him, He was carried up, and a cloud closing beneath Him hid Him from their sight.

That fits with the normal Jewish cosmological idea of a window in the heavenly (normally unseen) realm opening up temporarily so that Jesus was admitted into the heavenly realm. The clouds rolled back to make an opening for him to pass through, then rolled closed again to conceal Him in the unseen heavenly realm. We see this same kind of cosmological language used throughout the Old and New Testaments. This Weymouth translation pretty well fits with my understanding of Jewish cosmology and how I believe Luke is describing the ascension event.

Christ had to "go up" or be "lifted up" in order to go into heaven. He was High Priest. The High Priest has to ascend the steps up into the Temple courtyard, then ascend some more steps up into the outer sanctuary, then some more steps up into the Holy of

Holies. The Israelites were able to watch him ascend all of those steps except the last one into the Holy of Holies. The incense cloud-filled temple veiled the High Priest from their sight. But they watched him ascend up to the doorway of the outer sanctuary. This is the typology behind the ascension of Christ in Acts 1:9.

HOW was Jesus supposed to Return? (visible or invisible)

In Acts 1:11 the angels tell the disciples that Jesus will return “in like manner” as they saw him go (visibly, audibly, experientially). Preterists who take the non-visible approach to redefine and re-explain every Theophany and angelophany in the Bible to justify their hyper-spiritualizing metaphysical allegorical approach to cosmology.

It boils down to the same anti-supernatural bias that characterizes Post-modernism, rationalism, and skepticism. They make fun of Pentecostals and Charismatics for believing in modern day miracles and works of God. They explain away all the miraculous and supernatural events in the Bible and try to attach some symbolic or figurative-only meaning to the audible, visual, and experiential language that is found in those texts.

That is why atheists laugh at the preterist view (as it is explained to them by the non-literal rapture and collective body resurrection advocates). Even the atheist can see that the Parousia was supposed to be an audible, visible, and experiential event. But those preterists who follow the spiritualizing hermeneutic know that if they ever admit the Bible teaches an experiential Parousia, their goose is cooked. It opens the door to an experiential resurrection, judgment, and (gasp!) rapture. Their metaphysical explanation of the Parousia (resurrection and rapture) will not be sustainable over the long haul. It is propped up only by their hyper-spiritualizing hermeneutic which simply cannot satisfactorily and convincingly explain away all the supernatural and experiential language found in the expectation texts. Nor can they explain the deafening silence and utter confusion and doctrinal deviations that occurred in the generation right after AD 70. If those folks were still around, they should have been proclaiming their victories and dancing in the streets and shouting from the roof tops.

Only those who interpret the eschatological texts in the EXPERIENTIAL way the first century saints EXPECTED it to happen will ever be able to refute and confound the atheists, skeptics, and liberal critics, as well as satisfactorily convince any Premils to embrace the Preterist view. The hope of ever penetrating the conservative Premil crowd with Preterism sits precisely on this very point. Our fellow evangelical conservatives KNOW (beyond a shadow of doubt) that the Parousia was supposed to be an audible, visual, and experiential event. No one could ever convince them otherwise. So when they hear some of us preterists saying it is all just symbolic language and not to be taken literally when it says they would SEE, and HEAR, and EXPERIENCE some things at the Parousia, the Premils simply back away in disgust. They could never accept a view of eschatology which explains away the miraculous and experiential language of the Bible.

The NATURE of fulfillment is extremely important.

In fact, as we shall see, I believe this is the issue where the Preterist view runs the most risk of being rejected by our fellow Christians. It is easy for Futurists to grasp the TIMING issue, but they immediately want to know HOW this was fulfilled in the first century, and they want to see the documentation for that fulfillment.

The skeptics want to see the historical documentation for the experiential fulfillments that were supposed to occur in the first century. They do not accept the spiritualizing approach that some preterists use to get around the difficulty of non-fulfillment.

Here are two of the texts they use to make their point about the experiential nature of the Parousia (Matt. 24:25-27 and Matt. 24:30):

Matt. 24:25-27 “Behold, I have told you in advance. So if they say to you, ‘Behold, He is in the wilderness,’ do not go out, *or*, ‘Behold, He is in the inner rooms,’ do not believe *them*. For **just as the lightning comes from the east and flashes even to the west, so will the coming of the Son of Man be.**

Matt. 24:30 “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.

In these two texts Jesus promised that His return would be so easy to **SEE** that they could not miss it. They would not have to go out into the wilderness, or into an upper room to find Him. They would **SEE** him coming on the clouds with power and great glory, just as the lightning flashes across the sky.

Skeptics repeatedly stress the point that the return of Christ was going to be a **VISIBLE** event, and therefore an **experienced** event. Since they are not aware of anything like that occurring in the first century, they assume that Christ did not return, and that the prophecies failed. They say that Preterists are proven wrong precisely at this point because we cannot show a visible and experiential return of Christ in the first century.

I agree that it is not enough to affirm that the **TIME of fulfillment** was in the first century. Deut. 18:22 demands that there be a recognizable fulfillment of those prophecies before we can claim that it has come true. The first century Christians (at least) should have been aware of the occurrence of the Parousia. They were told that they would **SEE** it. Since the post-70 church did not acknowledge Christ’s return as having occurred in AD 70, it puts a huge burden of proof upon the Preterist.

This is a serious problem that Preterists have been very reluctant to deal with. We usually just wave our magic spiritualizing wand over the prophecy and claim it was fulfilled in a covenantal or spiritual or metaphysical sense, and then pat ourselves on the back for being so creative.

But that approach is not satisfactory to the skeptics, nor is it satisfactory to our Futurist brothers who also know that the fulfillment has to be **VISIBLE** and **EXPERIENTIAL**. It was this very problem which forced me (kicking and screaming) to re-examine my concepts of the **NATURE of fulfillment**.

My first step was to re-read the whole New Testament asking these three questions:

1. Did Jesus actually **promise** them that they would see, hear, and experience anything at His coming?
2. Do the NT writers make any statements which tell us what their **expectations** were? Did they expect to see, hear, or experience anything at His coming?
3. Or does Jesus indicate that it would be a **non-experiential** event, which they would not see with their eyes, nor hear with their ears, nor experience in any cognitive way?

Study the chart on the next page to see what Jesus actually promised, and what the NT writers say they were expecting to see, hear, and experience at the Parousia:

Here is what I discovered when I read back through the whole New Testament:

What Did Jesus Promise? <i>What Did They Expect?</i>		
Biblical Text	Expectation	How Fulfilled?
<u>Matt. 16:28</u> ; 24:34; <u>1 Cor. 15:51</u> ; <u>1 Thess. 4:15</u> ; <u>Matt 24:22-24</u> ; <u>Lk 18:7-8</u> ; 1 Thess. 5:23; 2 Tim. 1:18; Jude 21; Rev. 2:25;	Some saints would still be alive at the time of His return. But it would not be a huge number. Many would perish in the tribulation.	Some of the original disciples indeed remained alive until AD 66. Not all of the saints died in the tribulation.
<u>1 Cor. 16:22</u> ; <u>Rev. 6:10</u> ; <u>2 Tim. 4:8</u> ; <u>1 Pet. 1:13</u> ; Phil. 3:20f; Heb. 9:28; Jude 21; 1 Thess 1:10; Rom 8:18-25; 2 Cor. 5:2; Matt. 9:15; Lk. 12:35-40; 1 Cor. 1:7; 2 Pet. 3:12-13	They were eagerly waiting and longing for His return. They “ loved his appearing” and “ fixed their hope completely ” on it.	Was that intense longing fulfilled? Could they have kept silent about it after being so pumped up about it beforehand?
<u>2 Thess. 1:6-10</u> ; <u>Rom. 8:17-25</u> ; 2 Pet. 2:9; 3:13-14; 1 Thess. 1:10; 2 Tim. 4:8; 1 Pet. 1:4-9, 13; 5:4; 5:6; Rev. 11:18; 2 Jn. 1:8; Heb. 10:35; Lk. 21:34-36; Rev. 3:10; Lk. 21:28	They were promised rescue, relief, reward, glory, adoption, salvation, redemption, and grace at the return of Christ.	Did they get these things? Did they know they got it? Did they see it and experience it in any way? Why didn't they say something about it later?
<u>2 Thess 1:6-10</u> ; <u>Matt 16:28</u> ; <u>1 Jn 2:28--3:2</u> ; <u>1 Thes 2:19</u> ; <u>1 Pet. 4:13</u> ; <u>5:1-4</u> ; <u>Lk 21:36</u> ; <u>Rom 8:18-25</u> ; <u>2 Cor 4:14</u> ; <u>1 Thess 4:17</u> ; <u>Col 3:4</u> ; 1 Pet 1:7-13; 2:12; 2 Pet 3:12ff; Jude 24; Matt 25:1,6,21,23; Phil 2:16 1 Jn. 4:17; Col 1:22; 1 Cor 13:12; Matt. 25:6-10;	They would actually know about His return, and SEE Him revealed, MEET with Him at His coming, GLORIFY Him, STAND before Him, and have GREAT JOY in His PRESENCE at His return.	Did they experience these things? Why didn't they say something about it later? How could they experience all this and then go on with their lives as if nothing ever happened? This would have been a life-changing experience. Life would never be the same.
<u>1 Thess 4:15-17</u> ; <u>Jn 14:1-3</u> ; <u>Matt 24:31</u> ; <u>2 Thess 2:1</u> Phil 3:14;	Reunited and caught up together with their departed loved ones, received to Him; gathered, upward call	What was this gathering by the angels, the catching up, the being received to be with Jesus where He was?
<u>2 Cor 5:1-4</u> ; Phil 3:21; <u>1 Cor 15:51-54</u> 1 Jn 3:2	Their bodies would be changed , transformed, to be like Christ	What was this bodily transformation, change?
<u>1 John 2:28</u> ; Heb 10:38-39	Would see Him appear , and would not shrink away	Did they see him appear? Did they shrink away?

We need to seriously ask ourselves what these Biblical texts would have meant to the first century saints. How would they have understood these things?

My awareness of these promises and expectations of an experiential return of Christ created another problem for me. Since I now knew that the Parousia must have been seen, heard, witnessed, and experienced by the first century saints, I was baffled by the **lack of documentation** for it. This is the same problem that Skeptics and our Futurist brothers have. They know it was supposed to be seen and experienced. Why don't we hear something afterwards from those saints who saw it and experienced it?

Then it hit me like a ton of bricks. What if they were raptured out of there just like these expectation statements suggest? That would explain why we do not have any statements from them afterwards about what it was like to **SEE** Him at His coming, and **GLORIFY** Him on that day, and **MARVEL** at Him in the presence of all who had believed. They were gone! Jesus took His bride with Him when He came! And it would explain why the church fathers were so confused later, and why they fell into so many doctrinal deviations in the second century.

Now you can only imagine how stunned I was at this idea. I did not like the idea of a rapture at all, but there was no other reasonable explanation for their silence after the Parousia. Below is more information about the expectations of the first century saints, then my final conclusions about those expectations.

Great Expectations

Many of us come from a branch of Futurism (typically Amillennialism) which is strongly biased against the rapture, and have brought these anti-rapture sentiments with us into Preterism. Because a healthy Berean approach to the various interpretations of the rapture will lead us to search the Scriptures to see *whether these things are so*, this study consists primarily of Scripture.

Due to space limitations I did not give the full context of each passage and therefore urge you to examine each context on your own. I also highly recommend the three books listed at the end of this article, which examine these things in greater detail. There is a detailed, phrase-by-phrase analysis of the primary rapture text (1 Thess 4:15-17) in my book, *Expectations Demand A First Century Rapture*. We urge you to get that book and read the section on pages 91-134, to see how we interpret that text. If you are unable to get the book, but wish to read its explanation of 1 Thessalonians 4, please email me (preterist1@preterist.org) requesting the eText version, and I will send it as an email attachment.

The following six questions focus on some of the central issues regarding the rapture. As you read each question and study the related verses, try to imagine how the first-century Christians who remained alive until the Parousia would have responded. We know that the dead saints were raised out of Hades and given their new immortal bodies at the Parousia, but what about the saints who were still alive at Christ's return? *What does Scripture say they would see, hear, and experience at the Second Coming?*

Read each question and search the following Scriptures and their contexts to find the answers (all Scriptures NASB95, except where otherwise noted):

1. What did Jesus say the living saints would see, hear, and experience at His return?

Matt 16:28 . . . some of those who are standing here who *will not taste death* until they see *the Son of Man coming*

Matt 24:30-31 . . . 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*

Luke 21:36 . . . that you may have strength to *escape* all these things that are about to take place, and to *stand before the Son of Man*.

John 14:3 . . . I will come again and *receive you to Myself*, that *where I am, there you may be also*.

2. What did the Apostles say the living saints would see, hear, and experience at His return?

1 Thess 5:23 . . . may your *whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved* blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. (NKJV)

Rom 8:18-25 . . . the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with *the glory* that is about to be [Gk. mello] *revealed to us*. For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for *the revealing* of the sons of God . . . for our *adoption as sons, the redemption of our body*

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

2 Thess 1:7, 10 . . . the Lord Jesus will be *revealed* from heaven with His mighty angels . . . when He comes to be glorified in His saints on that day, and to be *marveled at among all who have believed*

1 Cor 15:51-53 . . . we will not all sleep [die before the Parousia], but *we will all be changed*, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the *trumpet will sound*, and the dead [Gk. is plural] will be raised imperishable, and *we will be changed*. . . . *put on the imperishable . . . put on immortality*.

1 Thess 4:16-17 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*.

3. What rewards did Christ and the Apostles say that the living saints would receive at His return?

Matt 19:28-29 . . . 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*. And everyone who has [forfeited property

or relationships] for My name's sake, *will receive many times as much, and will inherit eternal life.*

Jude 1:21 . . . waiting anxiously for . . . *eternal life.*

1 Thess 1:10 ...wait for His Son from heaven ...who *rescues us* from the wrath to come.

1 Thess 5:9-10 . . . God has not appointed us to wrath, but for *obtaining salvation* . . . and to await His Son from Heaven . . . the One *delivering us from the coming wrath.*

2 Thess 1:7-10 . . . *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. . . . when He comes to be *glorified in His saints* on that day, and *to be marveled at among all who have believed*

1 Pet 1:7 . . . so that the proof of your faith . . . may be found to *result in praise and glory and honor* at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

1 Pet 5:1, 4, 6 . . . partaker also of *the glory that is about to be* [Gk. mello] *revealed* . . . when the Chief Shepherd appears you will *receive the unfading crown of glory* . . . *exalt you* at the proper time

Rom 8:17-23 . . . if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be *glorified with Him.* For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with *the glory that is about to be* [Gk. mello] *revealed to us.* . . . *the revealing of the sons of God.* . . . creation itself also will be *set free from its slavery to corruption* into the *freedom of the glory of the children of God.* . . . we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our *adoption as sons, the redemption of our body.*

2 Tim 4:8 ...in the future there is laid up for me the *crown of righteousness,* which the Lord ... will *award to* ... all who have loved His appearing.

Rev 3:10-11 . . . I also will *keep you from the hour of testing,* that hour which is about to come upon the whole world . . . hold fast what you have, so that no one will take *your crown.*

4. How intense were the expectations and emotions of the living saints?

Heb 9:28 [Christ] . . . will appear a second time . . . to those who *eagerly await* Him.

Rev 6:10 . . . **How long, O Lord,** holy and true, will You refrain from judging and avenging

1 Cor 16:22 . . . **Maranatha** [Aramaic expression meaning, *Our Lord, Come!*].

Rev 22:20 He who testifies to these things says, "Yes, I am coming quickly." *Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!*

Rom 8:19-25 For the *anxious longing* of the creation *waits eagerly* for the revealing of the sons of God . . . we ourselves *groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly*

- for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body . . . we *hope* for what we do not see, with perseverance we *wait eagerly* for it.
- 2 Cor 5:2-4 For indeed in this house *we groan, longing to be clothed* with our dwelling from heaven . . . while we are in this tent, *we groan, being burdened*
- 2 Tim 4:8 . . . the crown of righteousness, which the Lord . . . will award to . . . all who have *loved His appearing*.
- Jude 1:21 . . . *waiting anxiously* for . . . eternal life.
- 1 Cor 1:7 . . . *awaiting eagerly* the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ.
- Luke 21:36 But *keep on the alert* at all times, *praying* that you may have strength to escape . . . and to stand before the Son of Man.
- 2 Pet 3:12-14 . . . *looking for and hastening* the coming of the day of God . . . according to His promise *we are looking for* new heavens and a new earth . . . since *you look for these things*, be *diligent* to be *found by Him* in peace, spotless and blameless
- 1 Pet 1:13 Therefore, *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 4:13 . . . but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, *keep on rejoicing*, so that also at the revelation of His glory *you may rejoice with exultation*.
- 1 John 2:28 . . . abide in Him so that *when He appears* we may *have confidence* and *not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming*

5. What was supposed to happen to the bodies of the living saints at the Parousia?

- 1 Cor 15:37-38 . . . that which you sow [the seed], *you do not sow the body which is to be* . . . But *God gives it* [the seed] *a body* just as He wished, and *to each of the seeds a body of its own*. [note the plural number of bodies here, not one collective body]
- 1 Cor 15:51-53 . . . we will *not all sleep* [die], but *we will all be changed* . . . the dead ones [plural] will be raised incorruptible, and *we will be changed*. . . . *put on incorruption* . . . *put on immortality*. [Correct translation of the Greek—note the plural number of dead ones, and the distinction between living and dead saints. The dead saints are raised, but the living saints are changed. So the resurrection is not of a collective body of both living and dead saints. The resurrection applies only to the dead saints.]
- 1 John 3:2 . . . We know that when He appears, *we will be like Him*
- Phil 3:20-21 . . . eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will *transform our lowly [mortal] body* that it may be *conformed to His glorious body* (NKJV)

2 Cor 5:2-4 . . . *in this house* we groan, longing to be *clothed with our dwelling from heaven*, inasmuch as we, having *put it on*, will not be found naked [disembodied]. . . . *in this tent*, we groan, being burdened, because we do not want to be *unclothed* [disembodied by death] but *to be [clothed upon with our immortal bodies]*, so that what is *mortal will be swallowed up by life*. (cf. Weymouth and NIV)

Rom 8:17-23 . . . if indeed we *suffer* with Him so that we may also be *glorified* with Him. For I consider that the *sufferings* of this present time are not worthy to be compared with *the glory* that is about to be [Gk. *mello*] revealed to us. . . . the revealing of the sons of God. . . . creation itself also will be *set free from its slavery to corruption* into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. . . . we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the *redemption of our body*.

1 Thess 5:23 . . . may your *whole spirit, soul, and body* be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. [NKJV]

1 Thess 4:16-17 For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven . . . 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*

[Note that the catching up is something that happens to living people while they are still alive, not after they die. The dead are raised and caught up, but the living are changed and caught up. The bodies of the living saints had to be changed, since flesh and blood bodies cannot dwell in the spiritual realm (1 Cor. 15:50-52). This bodily change enabled them to avoid physical death, and then they were caught up in their new immortal bodies along with the resurrected dead to be with Christ forever.]

6. Where was Christ, and where were the living saints at the time of the Parousia?

Matt 19:28 And Jesus said to [the twelve] . . . 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.

Luke 22:30 that you may eat and drink *at My table in My kingdom*, and you will *sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel*. [cf. Matt 8:11; Luke 13:28-29; 14:15; and Enoch 62:14]

Matt 24:30-31 . . . they will see the Son of Man coming *on the clouds of heaven* . . . And He will send forth His angels with a great trumpet and they will *gather together His elect* . . . from one end of the heavens to the other.

2 Thess 2:1 . . . the coming [Gk. *Parousia*] of our Lord Jesus Christ and *our gathering together to Him*

John 14:3 I will come again and *receive you to Myself*, that *where I am, there you may be also*.

2 Thess 1:7-10 . . . the Lord Jesus will be *revealed from heaven* with His mighty angels in flaming fire . . . when He comes to be *glorified in His saints* on that day, and to be *marveled at among all who have believed*

Col 3:4 When Christ, who is our life, is *revealed*, then you also will be *revealed with Him in glory*.

Luke 21:36 . . . *stand before the Son of Man*.

Jude 24 . . . *stand in the presence of His glory* blameless with *great joy*

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

2 Cor 4:14 . . . knowing that He who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and *will present us with you*.

1 Thess 2:19 . . . *in the presence* of our Lord Jesus *at His Parousia*

1 Thess 4:16-17 For the Lord Himself will *descend from heaven* . . . caught up together with them in the clouds to *meet the Lord in the air*. And so *we will always be with the Lord*.

Conclusion

From the above, it is apparent that the saints living at the time of the Parousia were anxiously awaiting His return, groaning within themselves, longing to be clothed with their immortal bodies. They were looking for and hastening the day. They had fixed their hope completely upon it. It was not something they would let pass by unnoticed.

They were told they would not only be consciously aware of Christ's return, but they would see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven, and Christ would send His angels to gather them. He told the apostles that all twelve of them (including those still alive) would be received to Him and sit on twelve thrones and dwell in the places He had prepared for them in His Father's house (heaven).

Before the saints could be caught up into the spiritual realm where Christ and the angels were, their lowly (mortal) bodies had to be changed (transformed) from mortal to immortal to be like Christ's glorious body. The dead were raised first, then the living were changed, and together as one group they were caught up to be with Christ.

They would not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming, but would draw near and glorify him on that day and marvel at Him in the presence of all who had been gathered. They would rejoice with exultation when they stood before the Son of Man in the presence of His glory at His Parousia, and from that time forward they would always be with the Lord.

These were their great expectations, and if they were not realized in the experiential way these Scriptures indicate, then they would not only have been disappointed, but outraged. These expectations were given to them by Christ and the apostles. What the *time statements* do for the *time* of fulfillment, the *expectation statements* do for the *nature* of fulfillment. It is not enough to affirm that the *time* of Christ's return was fulfilled accurately. The *nature* of that coming (as defined by these expectation statements) must also be fulfilled exactly the way Christ and the apostles promised it would, or the credibility of the Christian faith is forfeited. The *expectation statements* demand our attention just as much as the *time statements*.