

Expectations of the Pre-70 Saints

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Two years ago in our first seminar here in Garretttsville, I played a couple of video clips from an atheist on YouTube ("Jesus Was Wrong") who accused Jesus of being wrong when He predicted His return in that generation. When some preterists responded to that podcast and said that Jesus actually returned in AD 70 just as He had promised, the atheist asked them for the documentation to back up that claim. When those preterists said that it was only fulfilled in a spiritual or covenantal way, he ridiculed preterists for spiritualizing the fulfillments to avoid providing historical documentation.

The atheist quoted a couple texts and made the claim that the kind of coming Jesus promised was to be visible, audible, and experiential. In other words, Jesus did not promise to return in such a way that they could miss it. Jesus assured his disciples that they would see, hear, and experience His return, and know that it had occurred. The atheist used only two texts to make this point. There are many more texts like this, which we will look at in this session together, but here are the two texts that he pointed to:

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.

The atheist repeatedly stressed the point that the return of Christ was going to be a **recognizable** event. Since he is not aware of anything like that occurring in the first century, he assumes that Christ did not return, and the prophecies failed. He says that Preterists are proven wrong precisely at this point because we cannot provide documentation for a recognizable return of Christ in the first century.

Some of us preterists are quick to explain away the visual, audible, and experiential language here as merely being accomodative, apocalyptic, spiritual, or covenantal language -- *anything but visible, audible, and experiential!* However, the one thing we cannot explain away is the fact that Jesus taught a clearly recognizable return. The first century saints would not miss it. We might quibble over **HOW** the Parousia occurred (its nature of fulfillment), but we cannot negate the **FACT** that they would **KNOW** that it occurred.

Jesus said in Matt 24:25-27 that he was giving them advance warning here so that they would not have to wonder about where to find him at his return. He said not to follow the

false messiahs out into the wilderness, or expect to find him in some inner room behind closed doors. His coming would be so clear and unmistakable that they would not have to search for him. It would be like lightning flashing across the sky. They would not miss it. They would definitely know it when He returned.

The very least we have to admit about these two texts is that the Parousia would be a recognizable event. They would not miss the fact that He had returned. They would at least know when it occurred, and that it HAD occurred. The event would not come and go without their awareness. It would NOT be a "non-event."

They would not be ignorant of it after AD 70. This poses a serious dilemma for preterists. What we see after AD 70 is that there are no Christians after AD 70 affirming that the Parousia occurred, while at the same time there are Christians saying that it is still future. Why didn't those Christians who knew it had occurred speak up and set the record straight? Why didn't they tell the other Christians who were still looking for the return that Christ had already come? Do you see the dilemma here?

1. Jesus said His return would be as recognizable as lightning across the sky, and that they would not miss it.
2. But we have Christians after AD 70 saying that His return is still future, and not a single Christian, who knew the Parousia had occurred, spoke up to set the record straight.
3. This creates some dilemmas for preterists:
 - a. Did those saints miss the Parousia (making Jesus wrong about His prediction of a recognizable return), -OR-
 - b. Did He fail to return, thus explaining their silence about it? -OR-
 - c. Did they know about His return, but chose for some reason not to say anything about it, even though other Christians were saying it was still future (making them guilty of hiding their light under a bushel basket). -OR-
 - d. Is there another option that we have not listed here?

Even that atheist could see that Jesus promised a recognizable return that could not be missed. The atheist made the point that since Christians after AD 70 do not show any awareness of His return, then we have to assume that it did not occur, since Jesus promised that His return would be so recognizable that they would not miss it. If they knew about His return, why didn't they speak up about it when other Christians said it was still future.

It simply 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 all 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 **be aware of 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, spiritual, or metaphysical sense, and then pat ourselves on the back for being so creative.

But that approach is not satisfactory to that atheist on YouTube, nor is it satisfactory to our Futurist brothers who also know that the nature of fulfillment was supposed to be **VISIBLE** and **EXPERIENTIAL**. In the multi-authored book attacking Preterism, edited by Keith Mathison, Dr. Charles Hill presses this very issue, using the early church father writings to make his point. From a historical perspective, Hill argues forcefully and convincingly that it is virtually impossible for a recognizable coming of Christ to have occurred in AD 70 and the saints then remain quiet about it forever afterwards, as if it had not occurred. It was his arguments especially, which forced me to re-examine my concepts of the **NATURE of fulfillment** of the Second Coming.

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

1. Did Jesus actually **promise** them that they would know about it when He returned?
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?

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?
Matt. 16:28; 24:34; <u>1 Cor. 15:51; 1 Thess. 4:15;</u> <u>Matt 24:22-24; 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; Rev. 6:10;</u> <u>2 Tim. 4:8; 1 Pet. 1:13;</u> Phil. 3:20f; Heb. 9:28; Jude 21; 1 Thess 1:10; Rom 8:19-25; 2 Cor. 5:2; Matt. 9:15; Lk. 12:35-40; Lk. 21:36; 1 Cor. 1:7; 1 Pet. 4:13; 2 Pet. 3:12-13; 1 Jn. 2:28; Rev. 22:20	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? Especially when some fellow Christians started saying it was still future? And if it did not occur, why don't we see disillusionment and bitter complaints over the non-fulfillment?
<u>2 Thess. 1:6-10;</u> <u>Rom. 8:17-25;</u> Matt. 19:28; 2 Pet. 2:9; 3:13-14; 1 Thess. 1:10; 2 Tim. 4:8; 1 Pet. 1:4-9, 13; 5:4, 6, 16; 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, exaltation, crowns, thrones, be revealed as sons of God, 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? Why didn't they set the record straight?
<u>2 Thess 1:6-10; Matt 16:28;</u> <u>1 Jn 2:28--3:2; 1 Thes 2:19;</u> <u>1 Pet. 4:13; 5:1-4; Lk 21:36;</u> <u>Rom 8:18-25; 2 Cor 4:14;</u> <u>1 Thess 4:17; 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> Jn 14:1-3; <u>Matt 24:31; 2 Thess 2:1</u> Phil 3:14;	Caught up and reunited 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; Phil 3:21;</u> <u>1 Cor 15:51-54; 15:37-38;</u>	Their bodies would be changed , transformed, to	What was this bodily transformation, change?

1 Jn 3:2; Rom. 8:17-23; 1 Thess. 4:16-17; 5:23;	be like Christ	Put on immortality? Redemption of the body?
1 John 2:28; Heb 10:38-39	Would see Him appear , and would not shrink away from him at his Parousia	Did they see him appear? Did they shrink away from Him at His Parousia?

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 the Atheist 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 next generation after AD 70, especially in their continued belief that the Parousia was still future. All the folks who had seen it and experienced it were gone.

Now you can only imagine how stunned I was. I did not like the idea of a rapture at all, but there was no other reasonable explanation for their silence after experiencing the Parousia in the way these texts indicated that they would.

Jesus promised, and the first century saints expected, a **recognizable Parousia**. It would not be missed. The New Testament has dozens of texts cataloging their expectations of an **audible, visible, and experiential Parousia**.

A rapture is the only way to explain how they could experience the Parousia and yet not say a word about it afterwards to later Christians who thought it was still future. They could not set the record straight because they were no longer on earth to do it. Their **silence** was because of their **absence**, NOT because of a **non-occurrence** or a **non-awareness** of the Parousia.

Conclusion

Now you can understand why I titled my rapture book the way I did:

Expectations Demand a First Century Rapture

There are dozens of texts in the New Testament which tell us clearly what the first century saints expected to experience at the Parousia. We call these texts, "**expectation statements**." We have looked at a few of them. There is no wiggle room. Jesus promised (and they expected) a very experiential Parousia. And the rapture provides a more than adequate explanation of why there is no documentation for the Parousia, even though Jesus promised that they would experience it and not miss it.

It is the silence about the fulfillment of the Parousia which is so troublesome to preterists. The atheist pointed to this silence (or lack of historical documentation) as the fatal flaw in the preterist view. Only the rapture can rescue us from that dilemma.

And so it is these **expectation statements** which force us to the conclusion that the Parousia had to have been an experienced event. They were aware that it occurred. They did not miss it. And they could not have been silent about it if they were still on earth afterwards. Their expectations beforehand were too intense. The only sound conclusion a preterist can draw from the fact of their silence is that they were raptured out of there, and were no longer around to testify about what they had seen, heard and experienced at the Parousia.

Just like the TIME statements help us nail down the TIME of fulfillment, it is the EXPECTATION statements which help us understand the NATURE of fulfillment.

When we see Jesus promise that they would not miss His Parousia, and we read their fever pitch EXPECTATIONS about what they would experience at the Parousia, we are left with no other option than to admit that they must have known that it occurred at AD 70. And their silence would heap shame upon them for not setting the record straight in view of later Christians who mistakenly thought the Parousia was still future.

The rapture is the only thing which can rescue the Preterist view from the jaws of the atheists and other futurist critics. And we have seen in these texts that the rapture is exactly what the first century saints expected to occur.

Our next lesson, tomorrow morning will seek to demonstrate how the rapture idea is perfectly in sync with the cosmological worldview of the Bible.