

How Were Their Expectations Fulfilled?

by Ed Stevens

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IN THE PREVIOUS ISSUE, we listed many biblical statements showing what the pre-70 saints *anxiously expected* to see, hear, and experience at the Parousia. If their vivid expectations were NOT fulfilled in the *experiential* way that they expected, then they should have been venting their disillusionment and outrage after AD 70. But we hear nothing but *deafening silence* coming from those saints after the Parousia.

Furthermore, when we search the historical writings looking for evidence that those expectations were fulfilled, we quickly discover that there were no true Christian writings for almost forty years after AD 70, and that the first true Christian writings to appear in the second century speak of the eschatological events as being still-future. This is bewildering, not only to preterists, but to futurists as well. I have dozens of quotes from patristic scholars who lament that strange period of silence right after AD 70. Email me if you would like to have a PDF copy of those statements.

However, we are not left totally in the dark. We do have some non-Christian (Jewish and Roman) historical writings which indicate that the Parousia, resurrection, bodily change, and rapture did occur, so let's look at some of those sources:

The Parousia

The historians quoted below show that Christ did appear with his angelic armies in the sky above Palestine. This was the beginning of his Parousia, which was NOT just a one-day event, but rather an **extended visit** to reward his saints and punish his enemies:

Now it happened **after [Passover AD 66]** that there was seen from above over the Holy of Holies for the whole 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 quite 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. [Steven B. Bowman, Translator. *Sepher Yosippon*, Chapter 87]

. . . **a certain figure appeared of tremendous size**, which many saw, just as the books of the Jews [Yosippon?] 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. [Roger Pearse (publisher 2005), Wade Blocker (translator), *Pseudo-Hegesippus*, Ch. 44, pp. 391-394 in the Latin critical text edited by Vincente Ussani.]

... a few days after that feast [Passover AD 66], on the **twenty-first day of the month Artemisius** [Jyar], a certain prodigious and incredible phenomenon appeared ... for, **before sunseting, chariots and troops of soldiers** in their armor were seen running about **among the clouds**, and surrounding of cities. [Josephus *Wars* 6.5.3 (6.296-299)]

Prodigies had occurred ... There had been seen [**angelic**] **hosts** joining battle **in the skies**, the fiery gleam of arms. [Tacitus, *The Histories*, Bk 5, Sect 13]

Yosippon mentions that an image of a man's face appeared over the Holy of Holies for a whole night, and *Hegesippus* says that "many people saw" a huge supernatural being (the glorious Son of Man?) about the same time that the angelic armies were seen in the sky. The first century Roman historian *Tacitus* confirms that these things really happened, and *Josephus* gives us the exact **day and hour** when the angelic armies were seen (Matt 24:36).

When R. C. Sproul, Sr. quoted the above passage from Josephus in his book, *The Last Days According to Jesus*, he described it as a "most remarkable record" (pp. 123-127). And in his conference speech, he noted that this story is "corroborated by others" (e.g. Tacitus), and that it "lends credence" to the idea that there was **some kind of coming of Christ** associated with the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 ["Last Days Madness" speech, *Ligonier Ministries National Conference*, Orlando, Florida, 1999].

So, it is easy to see that the Parousia, which was Christ's extended visit to reward His saints and pour out His wrath, began right there in April 66. But that raises another question: What about the *resurrection, bodily change, and rapture*?

Resurrection, Bodily Change, and Rapture

Since the *bodily change* and *rapture* were supposed to occur in tight connection with the *resurrection*, it means that if we can determine when the resurrection occurred, we will also know when the bodily change and rapture occurred.

For decades I examined these historical sources searching for information about the resurrection of the dead out of Hades. After repeated treks through Josephus, I kept coming back to the following eyewitness account from the Jewish priests about what they felt and heard in the Temple on Pentecost (June 66), not long after the Zealot rebellion began:

"... 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 *Wars* 6.5.3 (6.299-300)]

When the holiday of **Shavuoth** [**Pentecost**] came in those days [June 66 AD], **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.**” [Steven B. Bowman, Translator. *Sepher Yosippon*, Chapter 87]

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.”** [Roger Pearse (publisher 2005), Wade Blocker (translator), *Pseudo-Hegesippus*, Ch. 44, pp. 391-394 in the Latin critical text edited by Vincente Ussani.]

It was not just coincidence, or inserted to fill space, that Josephus gave us the exact *day and hour* **when** this event occurred, **where** it occurred, and **who** witnessed it. God’s providence was clearly involved here. But there were *no visuals* – the priests *heard* what was said, but did not *see* those who spoke. That great multitude was *invisible* because they were in the UNSEEN realm.

The probabilities for identifying that “great multitude” are greatly enhanced when we remember **where** they were. What group of people in the unseen realm would be leaving one part of that realm to go to another part of it, and why?

The most reasonable explanation is that it was the *resurrection* of the dead out of Hades (Rev 20:13-15), and the time when the mortal bodies of the living saints were *changed* into immortal bodies, and then *caught up together* with the resurrected saints to be with Christ forever afterwards (1 Cor 15:51-52; Phil 3:21; 1Thes 4:17).

Their Expectations WERE Fulfilled

The above historians show that Jesus and his angels arrived a few days after *Passover* (**April 66**). Jesus said that after his arrival he would send forth his angels to gather together his elect (Mat 24:31; Mk 13:27).

Luke’s account refers to that angelic gathering as their “redemption” (Lk 21:28). And they would know that their *gathering* (redemption, bodily change, and rapture) was “drawing near” when they saw Christ and his angels appear in the sky. So, it was perfect timing for the resurrection, bodily change, and gathering to take place at *Pentecost* about 45 days after they saw the angelic armies appear (**June 66**).

Those living saints were anxiously awaiting His return, groaning within themselves, and 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 that could pass by unnoticed.

And since their *expectations* were fulfilled in the *experiential* way they had expected, it means they would have known that the Parousia occurred. But since their bodies were *changed* and translated into the unseen realm, it explains why no Christians remained alive on earth to mention the fulfillment afterwards. *They were **silent** because they were **absent**.* They were gone – no longer on the earth – taken to heaven. †

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