

## Objection Overruled: Keith Mathison on Acts 1:9-11

by Don K. Preston

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**K**EITH MATHISON HAS RECENTLY (2023) posted a lengthy article written in 2004 on Acts 1:9-11 in an attempt to refute Covenant Eschatology, i.e. Full Preterism. He spends a great deal of ink citing liberal and skeptical scholars, causing one to wonder if it is an attempt to “poison the well” against full preterists by tacitly connecting preterists with those skeptics.

He also cites a number of preterists who have addressed Acts 1. Interestingly, he does not mention me or any of my works in which I address the text, even though he is familiar with my works. (He has actually been challenged to meet me in formal debate but has consistently rejected those invitations).

Mathison strives to establish that the apostles actually saw Jesus ascend, as if this point somehow refutes preterism. It does not. Since I do not dispute that the apostles saw Jesus ascend in the cloud, I will not respond to this aspect of Mathison’s article. The question of course, is what did the angel mean by “*in like manner*”?

In his writings, Mathison engages repeatedly in the logical fallacy called the Negative Fallacy. Notice Mathison argues that since Acts 1 contains no time indicator such as found in Matthew 10:23 / 16:27-28 / 24:34, etc., this means Acts 1 cannot be speaking of the same time and events as those texts. In the book, *When Shall These Things Be?* Mathison argues,

The first thing to be observed when we examine this account is that no reference to time is connected with the prediction of the return of Christ. All that is affirmed is that Jesus will come again in the same manner as he went into heaven. The second thing that must be noted is that Luke does not refer to Jesus’ return as ‘the coming of the Son of Man.’<sup>1</sup>

Yet he also states,

The *ascension* of Christ described in Acts 1 is probably connected with the coming of the Son of Man that is described in Daniel 7:13-14, since Daniel speaks of a coming of the Son of Man up to the Ancient of Days to receive his kingdom. But the *return* of Jesus described by the two men in white is not described with the language drawn from Daniel 7. . . Luke has used that language in his account of the Olivet Discourse (see Luke 21:27), so we know that he is familiar with the imagery, *but he does not use it here in Acts 1*. This means that even if such texts as Matthew 10:23; 16:27-28; and 24:30 refer to something that happened in the first

century, we cannot automatically assume that Acts 1 is referring to the same thing.<sup>2</sup>

This is a seriously flawed claim. If, as Mathison claims, Daniel 7 lies behind Acts 1, then it proves that the coming of Acts 1 had to be fulfilled *in the days of the fourth empire*, i.e. Rome. You cannot admit that Acts 1 is connected to Daniel 7 without thereby delimiting the time of Christ's parousia to the days of Rome. More specifically, if Acts 1 does, as Mathison posits, echo Daniel 7, then it must be conflated with the other texts promising the coming of the Son of Man in judgment, in the first century coinciding with the fall of Jerusalem.

My approach in response to Mathison's objection will be exegetical, based on the context of Acts 1—a context that Mathison, in my view, gives insufficient focus, although he wrote a lot of words about it (his article is 50+ pages long). Let's begin now with an examination of Acts 1

### **The Old Testament Prophetic Background for Acts 1– Isaiah 43 “You are My witnesses”**

*But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and Samaria, and as far as the remotest part of the earth.* (Acts 1:8).

One of the most commonly overlooked elements of Acts 1 is the prophetic background and source. When Jesus told the apostles “*you shall be my witnesses*” this is a direct citation from Isaiah 43:10-12 (and probably 44:8):

*“You are My witnesses,” declares the Lord, “And My servant whom I have chosen, So that you may know and believe Me and understand that I am He. Before Me there was no God formed, And there will be none after Me. I, only I, am the Lord, And there is no savior besides Me. It is I who have declared and saved and proclaimed, And there was no strange god among you; So you are My witnesses,” declares the Lord, “And I am God.”*

*“For I will pour water on the thirsty land and streams on the dry ground; I will pour out My Spirit on your offspring, And My blessing on your descendants; 4 And they will spring up among the grass Like poplars by streams of water. This one will say, ‘I am the Lord’s’; And that one will call on the name of Jacob; And another will write on his hand, ‘Belonging to the Lord,’ And will give himself Israel’s name with honor. This is what the Lord says, He who is the King of Israel and his Redeemer, the Lord of armies: ‘I am the first and I am the last, And there is no God besides Me. Who is like Me? Let him proclaim and declare it; And, let him confront Me Beginning with My establishing of the ancient nation. Then let them declare to them the things that are coming And the events that are going to take place. Do not tremble and do not be afraid; Have I not long since announced it to you and declared it? And **you are My witnesses.** Is there any God besides Me, Or is there any other Rock? I know of none.”* (Isa 44:3-8)

Space limitations prevent an in-depth exegesis of both passages, but pay particular attention to

some of the critical themes of both passages:

- Isaiah 43 is a recognized prophecy of the Second Exodus. The language of verse 2 is very clear:

*When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; And through the rivers, they will not overflow you.*

To say that the theme of the Second Exodus permeates the New Testament, and even Acts 1, is an understatement.<sup>3</sup>

- Notice how Isaiah 44 describes the time of promised redemption (the time of the gathering of God's people, 43:5-6), "*For I will pour water on the thirsty land And streams on the dry ground; I will pour out My Spirit on your offspring*" (v. 3). Likewise, in Acts 1 we find Jesus promising His apostles that as they go witnessing to Him, the Spirit would be poured out: "*You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and Samaria, and as far as the remotest part of the earth.*" Thus, as in Isaiah, the witnessing is linked to the reception of the Spirit (see Isaiah 63:11-3 for more on the connection between the Second Exodus and the outpouring of the Spirit).

So, the promise of the Spirit would have been, to the apostles, a powerful echo of God's promises of the last days redemption. (It is almost certain that they would have been reminded also of Ezekiel 37:12f, the promise of the outpouring of the Spirit to raise Israel from the "grave" of captivity).

- Focus now on the emphasis point of the "witnessing" in both chapter 43 and 44. What were the witnesses to bear witness to? Chapter 43: "*Before Me there was no God formed, And there will be none after Me. I, only I, am the Lord, And there is no savior besides Me.*"<sup>4</sup> Chapter 44:6 continues that: "*This is what the Lord says, He who is the King of Israel and his Redeemer, the Lord of armies: 'I am the first and I am the last, And there is no God besides Me'*"; note verse 8 as well: "*And you are My witnesses. Is there any God besides Me, Or is there any other Rock? I know of none.*"

In other words, YHVH's witnesses were *to bear witness that He is the true God!* That means that in Acts 1 Jesus was sending his apostles out to declare that He is, "King of kings and Lord of lords." *He is God*, just as John 1:1-3 and a host of other passages affirm. He is not, from henceforth, to be seen simply as a man who is to one day descend on a literal cumulus cloud.

Interestingly, Gregory Beale misses a key issue. He acknowledges that Acts 1 draws directly on Isaiah 43 & 44, but claims that in those OT passages, "the role [of the witnesses, DKP] is a fairly general one of witness to God, his reality, his power and ability to announce beforehand what he is going to do; in Acts the witness is more specifically to the career of Jesus and in

particular to his resurrection.”<sup>5</sup> This is almost diversionary, in my estimation.

Look at the citations from Isaiah given just above. The witnessing to be done in those texts is the witnessing to the reality that, “*Before Me there was no God formed, And there will be none after Me. I, only I, am the Lord, And there is no savior besides Me.*” The testimony certainly would include the goodness and the power of YHVH, but the central, the core issue is, “I am God and there is no other!” And we cannot fail to note that the witnessing about Jesus was the testimony that he was “*declared to be the Son of God, with power, by the resurrection out from the dead*” (Romans 1:4). Thus, the witnessing was not some “generic” testimony, but the declaration of the Deity of Christ.

While others have taken note of the “cloud motif” as significant, I am unaware of anyone tying this in with Isaiah 43 & 44, and the incredible Christological significance of Jesus’ citation of these texts in saying, “*You are my witnesses.*” Mathison does not touch on this correlation.

This needs to be fleshed out, by an examination of other passages that link Christ’s coming, His parousia, and Christology. By focusing on Jesus’ ascension in the clouds, (more on this below) along with his declaration “*You are my witnesses*” I am convinced that we have direct insight into the true nature of, “*in like manner*” in Acts 1.

#### **Matthew 16:27-28**

One of the most commonly cited prophecies of Jesus, ostensibly predicting his return at the end of human history, and thus a direct parallel with Acts 1:9-11, is Matthew 16:27: “*The Son of Man will come, in the glory of the Father, with his angels, to reward every man.*”

The problem with citing Matthew 16:27 as an “end of human history” event is the fact that it is grammatically linked with verse 28: “*Verily I say unto you there are some standing here that shall not taste of death until they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.*”<sup>6</sup> Mathison actually suggests that v. 27 is the end of time while v. 28 was fulfilled in the first century (2009, 366). This violates the grammar of the text.

The point here is that Jesus said he was going to come “*in the glory of the Father.*” Here is an excerpt from my book *Like Father Like Son, On Clouds of Glory*<sup>7</sup> that helps us understand Jesus’ words<sup>8</sup>:

Heinrich Meyers says, “in the glory of the Father” means, “in the same glory as belongs to God.”<sup>9</sup> Floyd Filson says the phrase means that Christ will come “with the splendor that surrounds the Father in heaven. He will appear as divine judge, and act for the Father.”<sup>10</sup>

R. T. France provides insight into the force of Jesus’ words:

In the Old Testament, judgment is God’s prerogative, and the words from Psalms 62:12 (cf. Prov.24:12) which form the second part of this verse are words about God. Taken together with the ascription of a kingdom to the Son of Man in the next verse, this is quite a remarkable assumption of a

divine role for Jesus in his future glory. His coming will be in the glory of the Father, in the sense that he shares that glory and authority.<sup>11</sup>

These scholars are saying that Jesus was promising that His coming in judgment was to be His coming as *God*. He was promising to come in the same manner as His Father had come so many times. It goes without saying that the Father had never come out of heaven literally, visibly, “physically.” In His sovereignty He had employed one nation to judge another and in so doing He was said to come on the clouds, with the angels, in flaming fire, in the destruction of “heaven and earth” (cf. Isa 19; 24; 34; Ezek 30-32, etc.).

So, we have an apparent conflict concerning the nature of Christ’s parousia. Tradition tells us that in Acts 1 the angel promises that Jesus will come again to be revealed as a man. On the other hand, we have Jesus saying His parousia would be of the same nature as the Father’s comings in the Tanakh. To say the least, those are two radically different concepts of the nature of the parousia. Perhaps it is time to rethink the concept of “*in like manner*” as an expression emphasizing Jesus’ human body.

#### **Matthew 24:30**

*Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.*

This passage is commonly misunderstood, but a proper understanding helps with Acts 1. Mathison recognizes that this text, “is connected in some way to the destruction of Jerusalem.” (2009, 377). He realizes that Jesus was not predicting the appearance of some visible celestial event, but rather: “The Greek text of this verse does not state that the Son of Man will appear in the heavens. Rather, what appears is the *sign* of the Son of Man in heaven. In other words, the destruction of Jerusalem will be the sign that the Son of Man, who prophesied this destruction, is in heaven.”<sup>12</sup> In other words, the fall of Jerusalem was to be a sign of the enthronement of Christ acting as sovereign, “in the glory of the Father.” As the Father had committed all judgment to the Son, the Son would then act in the same way that the Father had always acted, “so that they may know that I am God”<sup>13</sup> (cf. John 5:19f). We thus have another text that speaks of the purpose and nature of Christ’s judgment coming, which in no way can be defined as the manifestation of Jesus coming out of heaven in a physical body, at a proposed end of time.

#### **1 Timothy 6:14-16:**

*That you keep this commandment without spot, blameless until our Lord Jesus Christ’s appearing, which He will manifest in His own time, He who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see, to whom be honor and everlasting power. Amen.*

As a direct correlate, take a look at 1 Timothy 1:17: “*Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, to God who alone is wise, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.*”

There is a great deal of controversy about who Paul was calling, “*the King eternal, immortal, invisible, to God who alone is wise, be honor and glory forever and ever.*” Was he speaking of the Father or the Son?<sup>14</sup> Perhaps such questions are out of order.

**Is Jesus not King?**

**Is Jesus not eternal?**

**Is Jesus not immortal?**

**Is Jesus not wise?**

**Is Jesus not worthy of honor and glory for ever and ever?**

Objection is immediately raised by those who insist on an end of time physical return of Christ as a man riding on a cloud, that Paul could not refer to Jesus as “invisible.” But this objection assumes a great deal and, I suggest, ignores the proper answers to the questions above. If Paul was in fact speaking of Jesus in this text, then he was indeed affirming that he is invisible. We have to keep in mind Jesus’ own words in John 5:22-23:

*For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son, **23 that all should honor the Son just as they honor the Father.** He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him [My emphasis].*

Notice carefully that Jesus said the Father had given all judgment authority to Him, that he would judge as He had seen the Father judge, and that the reason and purpose of that was so that “*all should honor the Son just as they honor the Father.*” This is a stunningly powerful, Christological claim. As we have seen, it echoes the statements from the Tanakh in which the Father sovereignly acted in judgment, “*so that they may know that I am God.*” Thus, Jesus was affirming that His judgment actions were to cause men to recognize and honor Him just as they honor the Father, *in recognition that He is God.* And when we look closer at what Paul says later in this epistle, we find confirmation:

*He will manifest in His own time, He who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see, to whom be honor and everlasting power. (1 Tim 6:15-16)*

Note that the apostle says: “*He [Jesus, DKP] will manifest in His own time, He who is the blessed and only Potentate . . .*” Once again, there is a lot of controversy about this. Was Paul saying that at His *epiphany*, Jesus would reveal the Father as the one true God, the King of kings? Or was He saying, as do Matthew 16:27-28 & 24:30, that His parousia would reveal that HE is truly God? (Paul is not affirming that Jesus is the Father, or that the Father is Jesus. He was affirming, in



essence that just as Jesus prayed: “*And now, Father, glorify me with the glory that I had with you before the foundation of the world*” (John 17:5<sup>15</sup>). Jesus’ parousia would reveal that He was now fully One with the Father (1 Cor 15:28). As we will see below, it was the Lord Jesus who was to be revealed as King of kings and Lord of lords. Jesus was not to return to manifest that the Father is Lord, *but that HE is King of kings!*

### **Titus 2:12-13:**

*Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.*

In the Greek, “*the great God and savior*” are both governed by the same article. According to the Granville Sharp Rule of grammar<sup>16</sup> this means that, “they therefore refer to the same person.” In other words, Paul was affirming, very powerfully, that at His *epiphany*, Jesus would be revealed as God. Unfortunately, some translations somewhat mute this point.

The majority of translations render this to have Paul say they were looking for the “*glorious appearing of our Great God and Savior Jesus Christ.*”<sup>17</sup> This means Paul was identifying Jesus as “*the great God*”<sup>18</sup> who was to be manifested at the parousia. So, as the “*great God*” who was to “appear,” as He Himself said, “*in the glory of the Father*” (Matt 16:27) and be manifested as God through the events of the judgment on Jerusalem (Matt 24:30), are we to seriously suppose that Paul—or the angel in Acts 1—had in mind Jesus reappearing as a man, in the body that was “*made a little lower than the angels*”? How would such an appearing manifest him as “*the Great God*”? Jesus was very clear that it was His coming in judgment as the Father had come many times that was the manifestation of His Deity, not His physical body.

To put this another way, when attention is focused on the “tissue issue” of the physical body of Jesus in the term “*in like manner*” this is a diversion to the key point: Jesus enthroned in the heavens. The promise of His return was the promise that He would “come” as the Father had come, to judge as the Father had judged, to be revealed as King of kings and Lord of lords. The nature of the body of Jesus is not the focus, just as the nature of the “form of God” was never the focus in the many Days of the Lord in the Tanakh. The revelation of Jesus as God is the focus.

### **Revelation 1:12-16**

*Then I turned to see the voice that spoke with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands, and in the midst of the seven lampstands One like the Son of Man, clothed with a garment down to the feet and girded about the chest with a golden band. His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and His eyes like a flame of fire; His feet were like fine brass, as if refined in a furnace, and His voice as the sound of many waters; He had in His right*

*hand seven stars, out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword, and His countenance was like the sun shining in its strength.*

A great deal could be said of this passage but since I want to look at Revelation 19, I will forego a lengthy discussion of this text.

John's vision of Christ certainly raises questions about the nature of "*in like manner*" of Acts 1, since John is seeing the vision of Christ on the Day of the Lord (1:10).<sup>19</sup> It is clear that he is seeing Jesus as "*one like the Son of Man,*" a direct echo of Daniel 7:13f. Is the description of Jesus given by John a description of Jesus in his "body of flesh and blood," fitting the traditional claims about Acts 1, or is the description radically different from that? Was he seeing Jesus manifested as God, or as man? The identity that Jesus Himself gave is definitive: "*I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End,*" says the Lord, "*who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.*"

These terms are taken directly from the Tanakh and the self-descriptions of the Father (Isaiah 43-46). Again, Jesus is not claiming to be the Father, but *to be one with the Father*.

### **Revelation 19:11-16**

*Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war. His eyes were like a flame of fire, and on His head were many crowns. He had a name written that no one knew except Himself. He was clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God. And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed Him on white horses. Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations. And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron. He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. And He has on His robe and on His thigh a name written: **KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.***

Remember, Paul said in his epistle to Timothy (a text normally assigned to the "end of time") that at His *epiphany*, Jesus would show who is King of kings and Lord of lords. Here, in Revelation, *it is Jesus being manifested as King of kings!* And that Revelation / epiphany is at the judgment of Babylon, the city "*where the Lord was crucified*" (Rev 11:8).

Revelation 19 is an expanded look at Revelation 1:12-16. This passage elucidates Matthew 16:27f / Matthew 24:30 / 1 Timothy 6. It is Christ coming in judgment, manifested as the "*first and the last,*" "the *pantokrator*" (the *Almighty* of chapter 1), the Alpha and Omega, i.e., "*the beginning and the end*"—*the King of kings!* It is safe to say that this vision of Christ's return bears no visual similarity to Mathison's proposed meaning of "*in like manner.*"<sup>20</sup>

All of the evidence adduced above proves that Christ's parousia was not to manifest Him again as a biological man. His Incarnation proved that "God became flesh and dwelt among



men.” It proved that He truly was God in the flesh. His parousia on the other hand, was to reveal Him, not as a man, but as *God*. This understanding, it seems to me, forces us to re-examine the presuppositions underlying “*in like manner*” as proposed by Mathison and the traditional church.

Let me pose what I think is a severe problem for the traditional view of “*in like manner*.” Jesus’ post-resurrection, pre-Ascension body was not his immortal, incorruptible, transformed and glorified body (i.e. it was patently not identical to his Transfiguration vision or that in Revelation 1 & 19). This is, of course, controversial, but I think demonstrably true.<sup>21</sup> Jesus ate and drank, (he was hungry!), He still possessed His cross wounds, He challenged Thomas to touch Him to prove that He was not a spirit, etc., all of which support my claim. With this in mind, then, do the proponents of the “*in like manner*” term, meaning in the same body as you see him going, accept the idea that Jesus must come back in a mortal, untransformed physical body? No, they do not. Yet they insist that “*in like manner*” demands in the same body that you have seen taken from you. Thus, for the traditional view to be sustained it must be proven beyond any doubt that Jesus’ post-resurrection, pre-Ascension body was in fact His transformed, immortal, incorruptible body, but for that, there is no evidence.

To buttress what I have presented, let me focus now on an aspect of Acts 1 that some preterists have noticed (e.g., Ed Stevens<sup>22</sup>) that Mathison mentions but rejects, and that is, Luke tell us, “a cloud received him out of their sight.” This a theologically charged observation that no Jew of the time would have missed.

To those immersed in a literalistic paradigm and hermeneutic, the term “cloud” demands, well, a literal cumulus cloud. (I am not denying that there were literal clouds in Acts 1). But such an approach overlooks how incredibly significant the concept of coming on the clouds was to the ancient Jewish mind set. There were several concepts linked with riding on the clouds:

### **Psalm 18:9-12**

*He bowed the heavens also, and came down With darkness under His feet. And He rode upon a cherub, and flew; He flew upon the wings of the wind. He made darkness His secret place; His canopy around Him was dark waters And thick clouds of the skies. From the brightness before Him, His thick clouds passed with hailstones and coals of fire.*

### **Psalm 68:1-4**

*Let God arise, Let His enemies be scattered; Let those also who hate Him flee before Him. As smoke is driven away, So drive them away; As wax melts before the fire, So let the wicked perish at the presence of God. But let the righteous be glad; Let them rejoice before God; Yes, let them rejoice exceedingly. Sing to God, sing praises to His name; Extol Him who rides on the clouds, By His name YAH, And rejoice before Him.*

### **Psalm 104:1-4**

*Bless the Lord, O my soul! O Lord my God, You are very great: You are clothed with honor and majesty, Who cover Yourself with light as with a garment, Who stretch out the heavens like a curtain. He lays the beams of His upper chambers in the waters, Who makes the clouds His chariot, Who walks on the wings of the wind, Who makes His angels spirits, His ministers a flame of fire.*

### **Daniel 7:13-14**

*I was watching in the night visions, And behold, One like the Son of Man, Coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days, And they brought Him near before Him.*

So, *God rode on the clouds*. In these passages, the Lord's riding on the clouds not only conveyed the idea of His majesty and Deity, but *His coming in judgment*. That is, of course, one of the constituent elements of his coming "*in like manner*," is it not? Does anyone deny that the "*in like manner*" coming promise of Acts 1 is linked with his judgement of the "living and the dead"? As Kenneth Gentry notes:

In the Old Testament, clouds are frequently employed as symbols of divine wrath and judgment. Often God is seen as surrounded with foreboding clouds which express His *unapproachable* holiness and righteousness. Thus, God is poetically portrayed in certain judgment scenes as coming in the clouds to wreak historical vengeance upon His enemies.<sup>23</sup>

One has the right to ask, since the standard, normal use of "*coming on the clouds*" was never a reference to a literal, visible, descent of God out of heaven on literal clouds, but rather an "exhibition" of His Deity, how is it justified to claim that when we come to the New Testament, and specifically in Acts 1, we must think of literal clouds, a visible coming of the Lord for Him to be manifested as a man? Take a look at some key New Testament prophecies of Christ coming on the clouds:

### **Matthew 24:30 / Luke 21:27**

*They shall see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory*

Mathison and the majority of partial preterists agree that these texts do not speak of a literal coming of Christ on cumulus clouds. Rather, it is admitted that the visual events of the fall of Jerusalem would prove that Christ was enthroned in the heavens, acting with the judgment prerogative vested in Him by the Father—to prove that He is worthy of praise just as the Father is worthy.<sup>24</sup>

### **Matthew 26:64**

*Jesus said to him, 'It is as you said. Nevertheless, I say to you, hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven.'*

Generally speaking, partial preterists, including Mathison, (2009, 382) do not see here a prediction of a future physical end of time coming of Christ.

### **1 Thessalonians 4:17**

*Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.*

Notice the emphatic, three-fold use of the term *Lord* in Paul's prediction as he discussed the Lord's coming in the clouds. In the Tanakh, "Lord" (Heb. *adon*) was the most common word to describe YHVH. Thus, once again, the cloud coming is associated with the Deity of Christ, not His physical body. Needless to say, this has profound implications since the vast majority of commentators believe that Acts 1 and 1 Thessalonians 4 speak of the same parousia of Christ. (Mathison posits Matthew 24:29-31 as referent to AD 70. He fails to note that every constituent element of the discourse is found in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, which Mathison claims is an "end of time" event! Thus, we have two texts, using the same language, the same constituent elements, containing the same temporal context, yet Mathison applies them to two radically different times and events).

### **Revelation 1:7-8**

*Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him. Even so, Amen.*

As he does with Matthew 24 / Matthew 26, Mathison posits Revelation 1:7-8 as a prediction of Christ's coming in AD 70.

### **Revelation 14:14-16**

*Then I looked, and behold, a white cloud, and on the cloud sat One like the Son of Man, having on His head a golden crown, and in His hand a sharp sickle. 15 And another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to Him who sat on the cloud, "Thrust in Your sickle and reap, for the time has come for You to reap, for the harvest of the earth is ripe." So, He who sat on the cloud thrust in His sickle on the earth, and the earth was reaped.*

Strangely, after positing the coming of Christ on the clouds in Revelation 1:7 as AD 70, Mathison then claims that the coming of the Lord on the clouds in chapter 19—in the judgment of Babylon—is referent to His coming in the judgment of Rome (2009, 680). This is a radical change from his earlier position when he said: "Chapter 14 [of Revelation, DKP] is a vision of the fall of

Jerusalem, referred to as “Babylon the great’ (14:8). As we will see in chapter 17-18, the evidence that ‘Babylon’ is a symbolic description of Jerusalem is compelling.”<sup>25</sup>

I have shown that when we consider the prophetic background and source of Acts 1, along with the Christological significance of the cloud coming of Christ there is strong reason for rejecting the traditional understanding of “*in like manner*.” No ancient Jew would read of Christ ascending in the clouds and simply think, “Were those cumulus or cirrus clouds?” And they assuredly would not think of a physical man coming back on those clouds.

The theological significance of the ascension on the clouds, coupled with the promise that He would come “*in like manner*,” demands that we see that promise in the context of what the cloud ascension was communicating. While Mathison and others focus on “this same Jesus” as referent to the Incarnate body of Jesus, the true focus should be on the meaning of that cloud ascension, that declared: “Jesus is King of kings and Lord of lords.” He will come again “*in the glory of the Father*,” judging as the Father had judged many times. That means that the woodenly literalistic approach to “*in like manner*” as posited by Mathison and all futurists, is completely misplaced. Thus, Mathison’s objection is Overruled! ✚

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<sup>1</sup> Keith Mathison, *When Shall These Things Be? A Reformed Response to Hyper-Preterism* (Phillipsburg, NJ; P&R Publishing, 2004), 185.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 185.

<sup>3</sup> For an excellent study of the Second Exodus in Acts see, David Pao, *Acts and the Isaianic New Exodus*, (Grand Rapids, Baker, 2000).

<sup>4</sup> Note that in Acts 4:12, Peter and John, *witnessing* to the Sanhedrin, said of Jesus, “Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” This is a direct echo of Isaiah 43.

<sup>5</sup> Gregory Beale, *Commentary on the NT Use of the OT*, (Grand Rapids, Baker, Apollos, 2017), 528.

<sup>6</sup> See my *Can You Believe Jesus Said This?* for a discussion of the grammar of these verses that falsifies any attempt to posit verse 27 as an end of time, while positing verse 28 as a first-century event, something that Mathison suggests in his *Age To Age*, (2009, 366).

<sup>7</sup> This book is an in-depth analysis of the nature of Christ’s parousia and has been called “groundbreaking.” It is available on my websites, Amazon, Kindle and other retailers.

<sup>8</sup> Don K. Preston, *Like Father, Like Son, On Clouds of Glory*, (JaDon Productions, LLC), 1.

<sup>9</sup> Heinrich Wilhelm August Meyers, *Meyers Commentary on the New Testament* (New York; Funk and Wagnalls, 1884), 304.

<sup>10</sup> Floyd Filson, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, (London; Adam and Charles Black Publishers, 1971), 190.

<sup>11</sup> R. T. France, *Matthew*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, (Leicester, England; Inter-Varsity, 1985), 261.

<sup>12</sup> Keith Mathison, *Postmillennialism: An Eschatology of Hope*, (Phillipsburg, NJ; P&R Publishing, 1999), 114.

<sup>13</sup> Throughout the Tanakh, God sovereignly used one nation to judge another. When He did that, He said it was done “so that they may know that I am God.” This is stated over 80 times in the book of Ezekiel alone. Thus, for Jesus to act as the Father had acted was *so that man can know that he is God*.

<sup>14</sup> See William Mounce, *Word Biblical Commentary, Vol. 46, Pastoral Epistles*, (Nashville, Thomas Nelson, 2000), 60.

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<sup>15</sup> This text needs fleshing out, but space forbids expansion. In essence, prior to His Incarnation, Jesus was “face to face” on an equality with the Father (John 1:1-3). He was “in the form of God” and did not think that equality a “thing to be grasped” (Philippians 2:5ff). But He laid off, divested, Himself of that “form of God” to become a man, “a little lower than the angels.” It was that former glory that He was praying to be restored to in John 17.

<sup>16</sup> See William Mounce, *Word Biblical Commentary, Pastoral Epistles, Vol. #46* (Nashville, Thomas Nelson, 2000), 426, for an explanation of the Granville Sharp rule.

<sup>17</sup> Some translations render it as *waiting for the appearing of the glory* of our Great God (my emphasis). But this is dismissive of the Granville Sharp rule.

<sup>18</sup> See also Romans 9:5 where Paul said, “according to the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, the eternally blessed God. Amen” (cf. John 1:14).

<sup>19</sup> Some, including early church writers, took John’s reference to “Lord’s Day” as a reference to Sunday. I think this is untenable, and believe that John was saying that through the Spirit he was taken to witness the Lord’s coming. I think Revelation 19 confirms that view.

<sup>20</sup> Compare also Matthew 17 and the Transfiguration vision, which was a vision of Christ’s parousia according to 2 Peter 1:16ff. Jesus’ Incarnate body was *radically* transformed and he was manifested in his divine glory. That Transfiguration vision of the parousia, just like Revelation 1 & 19, powerfully challenges the traditional view of “in like manner” espoused by Mathison. Space forbids expansion of this incredible topic and its implications for Acts 1. See my book, *Like Father Like Son, On Clouds of Glory* for a fuller discussion.

<sup>21</sup> See my book, *Like Father Like Son, On Clouds of Glory*, for a discussion of this subject. The book is available from my websites, Amazon, Kindle, and other retailers.

<sup>22</sup> Stevens suggests, with good merit, it seems to me, that Acts 1 is a vision of Christ as High Priest fulfilling the typological praxis of Yom Kippur. In this scenario, the cloud represented the “Shekinah” glory cloud of the Day of Atonement. I am not overtly rejecting that view, but believe it needs to be conflated with more of an emphasis on the Deity of Christ suggested by the cloud ascension.

<sup>23</sup> Kenneth Gentry, *He Shall Have Dominion*, (Tyler, Tx.; Institute for Christian Economics, 1992), 273ff.

<sup>24</sup> See my Youtube Video #828 on the Olivet Discourse, entitled *The Sign of the Son—Enthroned* for a fuller discussion of this: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nDjqaozOcbQ>

<sup>25</sup> Keith Mathison, *Postmillennialism: An Eschatology of Hope* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey; P & R Publishing, 1999), 152.