

God's Gracious Covenant With Israel: The Foundation For Worldwide National Covenanting #28 (Pt. 16)

Acts 1:9-11
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We have nearly come to the close of the present series, but before concluding, I would like to spend some time in the next several sermons examining more closely the interpretive system of FULL PRETERISM. We previously made a distinction between PARTIAL PRETERISM (which teaches in its most popular form that most of the Book of Revelation was fulfilled by about 70 a.d., i.e. chapters 1-19) and FULL PRETERISM (which teaches that all of the Book of Revelation was fulfilled by 70 a.d., in fact, all prophecy found in Scripture and not only that found in the Book of Revelation was fulfilled by 70 a.d.). Thus, PARTIAL PRETERISM as an interpretive system (though erroneous in its interpretation of prophesied events in Revelation 1-19 as I have submitted in previous sermons) is yet orthodox in maintaining a **future**, visible, bodily second coming of Christ, a **future** bodily resurrection of the just and unjust, and a **future** general judgment of all mankind with the just graciously inheriting an eternal Kingdom of glory and the unjust deservedly enduring everlasting torment in hell with the devil and his angels. However, the same cannot be said for FULL PRETERISM, for FULL PRETERISM **denies** a future, visible, bodily second coming of Christ, **denies** a future bodily resurrection of the just and unjust, and **denies** a future general judgment of all mankind. Why does FULL PRETERISM deny these prophesied events to be yet future? Because the Full Preterist teaches that all of these prophesied events had already occurred by 70 a.d. Thus, dear ones, our firm disagreement with FULL PRETERISM is not simply a small, insignificant issue of TIMING as to WHEN certain prophecies were fulfilled (that is serious enough when it comes to prophesied events like the second coming of Christ, the final

resurrection, and the final judgment), but our adamant disagreement with FULL PRETERISM over the issue of TIMING as to WHEN these prophesied events should be fulfilled leads us to conclude as well that foundationally the very SUBSTANCE as to WHAT the second coming of Christ is, WHAT the final resurrection is, and WHAT the final judgment is, are all redefined by Full Peterists to their own destruction. Thus, the Full Preterist has to give a meaning and interpretation to the second coming of Christ, the final resurrection, and the final judgment that I submit not only undermines the biblical hope of the Christian, but ultimately subverts the biblical truth of the Christian faith as revealed in the Word of God and as confessed by all branches of Christianity for hundreds of years (in regard to the second coming of Christ, the final resurrection, and the final judgment), at least until the eighteenth if not the nineteenth century.

Full Preterism goes by other names as well, as used by either proponents or opponents: Consistent Preterism, Hyper-Preterism, Hymenaeism (which is derived from Hymenaeus who said “that the resurrection is past already” 2 Timothy 2:17,18), or Pantelism (which is from the Greek language and means that “all things have been accomplished”). FULL PRETERISM has interpretive and theological variation among its own proponents, but that which unites those under its umbrella is agreement that all biblical prophecy was fulfilled in the first century (70 a.d.), particularly, Christ’s second coming, the final resurrection, and the final judgment.

In previous sermons, we have considered reasons from internal evidence and from external evidence why the Apostle John did not receive the Revelation of Jesus Christ prior to 70 a.d. This fact alone, I submit, demonstrates the foundation of sand upon which Full Preterism is built.

But in the sermon today, I would like to give a very brief overview of the early history of the Church in regard to prophesied events (like the second coming of Christ, the final resurrection, and the final judgment) in order to understand whether those Christians who lived at the time of 70 a.d. or lived in the next couple generations after 70 a.d. reported that Christ's second coming or the final resurrection or the final judgment had already occurred or whether they viewed these prophesied events as still future; and secondly I would like to briefly consider our text from Acts 1:9-11 in order to demonstrate from just one text (though many texts of Scripture might be expounded) that the second coming of Christ will be a return that is **VISIBLE** to all the world and is **PHYSICAL** in the very body of Christ that was crucified, raised from the dead, and ascended into heaven.

I. A Brief Overview of Early Church History and Full Preterism. This overview is by no means intended to be comprehensive or exhaustive, but rather representative of the testimony that one will find even if one researches all available testimony of the early Church Fathers and the historic creeds of the early Church.

A. I Clement (authored by Clement, bishop of Rome, 92-101 a.d., according to the testimony of Irenaeus, bishop of Lyon and Dionysius, bishop of Corinth). It is the earliest non-canonical Christian letter that is presently extant and available (written in about 96 a.d.). This makes Clement a contemporary of the Apostle John who you may recall received his inspired vision from Jesus Christ on the Isle of Patmos in about 95 a.d. (you may want to review the internal evidence and external evidence for a late date for Revelation that is presented in previous sermons). Now if the second coming of Christ had come in 70 a.d., or the final resurrection and final resurrection had occurred already when

Clement penned this letter, one would expect that such biblically significant and historically momentous prophesied events would have been noted as having already occurred, particularly if these events were specifically addressed by Clement. Some of these prophesied events are indeed mentioned by Clement, but they are placed yet in the future by Clement and not in the past (per the position of the Full Preterist).

Truly his [i.e. the Father's—GLP] purpose **will be** quickly and suddenly accomplished, just as the Scripture confirms when it says, "**He will come quickly and not delay**, and the Lord will come suddenly to his temple, even the Holy One whom you expect" [Malachi 3:1] (23:5, emphases added).

The coming of the Lord that Clement has in view is not past but is yet in the future, contrary to the view of the Full Preterist.

Let us consider, beloved, how the Master continually points out **that future resurrection which is to be**, of which he made our Lord Jesus Christ the first fruits when he raised him from the dead [cf. 1 Corinthians 15:20] (24:1, emphases added). . . And again Job says, "**And thou shalt raise up this flesh of mine** which has endured all these things" [Job 19:26 paraphrased]" (26:3, emphases added).

The resurrection of the dead is not declared to be in the past by Clement, but is declared to be in the future, contrary to Full Preterism. The resurrection of the dead is a **bodily** resurrection according to Clement as proven by the words of Job, whereas the resurrection of the dead promoted by most Full Preterists is not a resurrection of the same body that was laid in the grave (we'll discuss this more in the next sermon).

B. **Letter to the Trallians** was written by Ignatius (sometime between 107-118 a.d.), bishop of Antioch, during the reign of Emperor Trajan. Eusebius, the Father of Church History, states that Ignatius became bishop of Antioch in 69 a.d. (the year before the destruction of Jerusalem). During Trajan's persecution of the Church, Ignatius was arrested apparently for his testimony for Jesus Christ and was sent to Rome, and there he was martyred. He like Clement of Rome stretches back to the days of the apostles and surely would have known if the

resurrection of the dead had occurred in 70 a.d. For he himself would have lived through it. Yet Ignatius looks forward to the resurrection and not back to the resurrection.

He [i.e. Jesus—GLP] was also truly raised from the dead, when his Father raised him up, **as in similar fashion his Father will raise up in Christ Jesus us who believe in him**—without whom we have no life [cf. Romans 8:11] (9:2, emphases added).

C. **Letter to the Philippians** was written by Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna, who lived from about 69-155 a.d. He also was martyred for his testimony to Jesus Christ. Polycarp was said by his student, Irenaeus, and by Tertullian to have been a disciple of the Apostle John. Because of his connection to the Apostle John, if Christ had come, if the final resurrection or the final judgment had occurred, surely we might expect someone like Polycarp to have known this having been a disciple of John and the bishop of one of the seven Churches to which the Book of Revelation was addressed (in Revelation 2:8-11), but to the contrary, he addresses these prophesied events as in the future rather than in the past.

Believe “him who raised our Lord Jesus Christ from the dead and gave him glory” and a throne at his right hand, to whom were subjected all things in heaven and earth, whom every breathing things serves, **who is coming as judge of the living and the dead**, whose blood God will require of those who disobey him. And “he who raised him” from the dead **will also raise us. . .**” (2:1,2, emphases added).

D. **II Clement** is a homily attributed to Clement of Rome, but its authorship was questioned in the fourth century by Jerome and Eusebius. However, even if the actual author is not known, it is by all accounts a very ancient Christian letter that was likely written sometime between 100-140 a.d. according to scholars. It is likewise clear that (according to II Clement) the second coming of Christ had not come at the destruction

of Jerusalem in 70 a.d., but the time of His coming was unknown and in the future.

Let us then be on the watch hour by hour for the kingdom of God, in love and in righteousness, **since we do not know the day when the Lord will appear** (12:1, emphases added).

E. **The Didache** (or the Teaching of the Twelve Apostles) is an anonymous manual of Church teaching composed in about 120-180 a.d. Clearly, the author does not look back in the past to the coming of the Lord, but rather looks forward to Christ's coming, exhorting Christians to be vigilant rather than careless.

Watch over your life—do not let your lamps be extinguished, nor your waist be ungirded [cf. Luke 12:35]. **But be ready, for you do not know when our Lord is coming** [see Matthew 24:42,44] (16:1, emphases added).

F. I will stop there, but this is simply representative of all the available writings of the orthodox who lived at the time of the destruction of Jerusalem or who lived in the next couple generations afterwards. And the more one digs and researches, the more one finds that the those who represent the orthodox Church in the first or second centuries speak with one unanimous voice as to the future fulfillment of Christ's second coming, the final resurrection, and the final judgment. In fact, the only contrary evidence from that period of time comes from the Gnostics who were declared to be heretics because they (due to their Hellenistic dualism) believed the resurrection of the body to be nonsense (as was true of the Greek philosophers to whom Paul preached in Acts 17:31,32). But with such a uniform and unanimous voice from the Church of that generation and of the following generations, we need to ask some questions.

1. If the second coming of Christ, the final resurrection of the dead, and the final judgment of all men had occurred by 70 a.d., how

could there be absolutely no recorded traces of these most significant prophecies (second only to the prophecies that predict the first coming of Christ)? It defies explanation. To the contrary, all the documented evidence available states that these prophesied events are all yet future to the writers (all who were writing after 70 a.d.).

2. How could those who even knew some of the apostles and had been taught by the apostles had missed such a prophetic fulfillment?

3. How could all of the Church (in the first and second centuries) throughout various parts of the world at that time have completely misunderstood that Christ's second coming was not really to be a visible coming in which every eye would see Him, but rather an invisible coming with clouds, or that the resurrection was not to be a resurrection of the same body laid in the grave, but a spiritual resurrection (as taught by Full Preterists)? This is unexplicable, for there is not simply silence with regard to the position for Full Preterists, but clear, unequivocal, testimony from the earliest Church witnesses to the contrary. The primary argument Full Preterists often use in order to explain the silence and even the express disagreement that the earliest Church Fathers have with the views of Full Preterism is that error and heresy supplanted the truth from the very time in which these prophesied events occurred. Now this is truly remarkable for according to 1 Corinthians 13:9-12, when "the perfect" is come God's people will not understand the truth less clearly, but will know the truth much more clearly than they have known it previously. And yet there is not a recorded trace of any of the early Church Fathers or writings of the first or second centuries that reveals that the second coming of Christ, the general resurrection of the body of flesh, and the general judgment were realized and fulfilled by 70 a.d.

II. A Brief Study of The Second Coming of Christ and Full Preterism (Acts 1:9-11).

A. The Book of Acts has historically been tied together with the Gospel of Luke as having the same human author, Luke, Paul's missionary partner (compare Luke 1:1-4 with Acts 1:1 where in the prologue to both inspired Books it is written that the immediate recipient was Theophilus, and in Acts 1:1 it is stated that "a former treatise" had been penned by the same author to Theophilus, which refers to the Gospel of Luke). Luke describes in the prologue to the Book of Acts that he is in effect writing a historical sequel to the Gospel of Luke and that what he writes may be confirmed by many infallible proofs of eyewitnesses (not to mention even more significantly that he is writing by inspiration of the Holy Spirit and therefore cannot err). Among the historical events that Luke describes in the first chapter is the ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is a most significant event for the Christian as we shall see. And even though Luke had briefly described Christ's ascension in his Gospel (Luke 24:50,51), he details the ascension with additional information here in Acts 1:9-11.

B. Dear ones, the reason why Acts 1:9-11 is such an important passage in regard to the second coming of Christ is because it teaches us the manner or way in which Christ will appear when He comes again. For the two angels that appear to the apostles declare, "This same Jesus [literally, "This Jesus—GLP], which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come IN LIKE MANNER as ye have seen him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11).

a. Now it ought to be obvious that the two angels intended the apostles to reason from the manner of Christ's ascension to the manner of Christ's second coming. In other words, in the manner that Christ ascended, He will also come again. Thus, the apostles were to

determine HOW Christ would come again to the earth from HOW He ascended from the earth.

b. But it seems that the Full Preterist does not begin with the manner of Christ's ascension and reason to the manner of Christ's second coming (as he ought to do), but to the contrary, it appears he begins with the manner of Christ's second coming and reasons back to the manner of Christ's ascension (in other words just the opposite way to the intention of the two angels in Acts 1:11). For when I consider the extent to which Full Preterists must go in order to avoid the plain and clear teaching of the manner in which Christ ascended from the earth to heaven in Acts 1:9-11, it appears to me that the only explanation for having Christ ascend in a vaporous, spiritual body (as held by some Full Preterists), or for having Christ ascend completely enveloped and hidden in a glory cloud so that only the glory cloud is seen by the apostles (as held by some Full Preterists), or for having the ascending Christ seen only by the spiritual and visionary sight of the apostles, but not with their natural eye-sight (as held by some Full Preterists), is that they have first determined the manner of His second coming in 70 a.d. and then have forced and stretched that interpretation upon the manner of Christ's ascension in Acts 1:9-11 (contrary to the order authorized by the two angels in Acts 1:11).

C. Let me briefly explain what Acts 1:9-11 teaches us about the manner in which Christ ascended from the earth into heaven.

1. First, the Holy Spirit teaches in Acts 1:9-11 that Christ **bodily** ascended into the heaven in the same body that was crucified, buried, and resurrected from the dead. Dear ones, it is not optional, but rather is absolutely necessary that we believe that the same material body of Christ that was crucified and laid in the tomb by Joseph of Arimathea (Luke 23:50-56), is the same material body of Christ that was

gloriously raised to new life on the first day of the week as evidenced by the fact that the body that had been laid in the tomb was gone, and the explanation given by the angels was that Christ was risen from the dead (Luke 24:1-5), is the same material body in which Christ appeared to the apostles a number of times within a period of 40 days (Luke 24:36-43; John 20:26-28), is the same material body in which Christ gave the apostles their orders on the day of His ascension (Luke 24:46-49; Acts 1:8-9), and is the same material body in which Christ ascended into heaven (Luke 24:50-51; Acts 1:9-11). There is a continuity and chain that cannot be broken in these historical events as it relates to the material, physical body of Christ that ascended into the heaven. That continuity of Christ's material body from His death to His resurrection to His ascension cannot be broken.

a. Jehovah Witnesses and some Full Preterists deny that the resurrected and ascended body of Christ was the same body that was crucified and laid in the tomb. They teach the damnable heresy that Christ's resurrected and ascended body was a spiritual body, or a vaporous body, but not the same material body that was crucified and buried. And some Full Preterists teach that the reason Christ was not seen by every eye at His second coming in 70 a.d. (contrary to Revelation 1:7) was because He returned invisibly in the vaporous body that He received when He was raised.

b. But dear ones, Paul declares that our very salvation hinges upon the fact that Christ was physically raised from the dead (in Romans 2:24,25 and 1 Corinthians 15:17 which we'll have more to say about in the next sermon). For in His body Christ as the second Adam was crucified and bore the wrath of God for our sin, and in that same body, Christ arose from the dead to prove that redemption and everlasting life were fully accomplished for His elect. Thus, the bodily resurrection and ascension of Christ are absolutely necessary to our justification before a

holy God. Therefore, the first truth taught in Acts 1:9-11 is that Christ's ascension was a **bodily** ascension in the same body that had been crucified (though as a result of the resurrection, it was a glorified body that ascended into the heaven).

2. Second, the Holy Spirit teaches in Acts 1:9-11 that Jesus **visibly** ascended into the heaven (i.e. the sky as is the meaning of the word in passages like Acts 2:19; 10:12 [where it speaks of fowl of the air, i.e. heaven]), and Christ was seen by the apostles as He ascended from the earth to the heaven. Some Full Preterists would argue that the cloud mentioned in Acts 1:9 enveloped Christ as He stood before the apostles so that Christ was entirely hidden and not visible to the apostles as the cloud carried Him into heaven. These same Full Preterists would argue that Christ's second coming in 70 a.d. was a non-visible coming in a cloud and that is why every eye did not see Him (contrary to Revelation 1:7). However, it cannot be so that only the cloud was seen ascending and not Christ, for the two angels clearly state that the apostles saw Christ (not the cloud) go into heaven ("as ye have seen **HIM** go into heaven" Acts 1:11, emphasis added). The text clearly states, first, the Lord Jesus "was taken up" (according to Acts 1:9) i.e. He bodily and visibly ascended and was seen by the apostles going up into the heaven or sky; and then after He had reached some point in the heaven or sky above, "a cloud received him out of their sight" (Acts 1:9). What is important is that Christ was not veiled or hidden in His ascension, but was **visibly** seen by the apostles as He bodily ascended into the heaven i.e. the sky.

3. Third, the Holy Spirit teaches in Acts 1:9-11 that the ascending Jesus **was seen with the natural eyes** of the apostles as he ascended into the heaven or the sky. Some Full Preterists would argue that the ascension of Christ was a vision wherein the apostles saw with a spiritual eye of faith the Lord Jesus ascend to the very throne of God. However, in the Book of Acts when the Holy Spirit would have us

understand that a vision is being seen with a spiritual sight, it is clearly stated in both cases where this occurs that heaven was opened, and no cloud is mentioned at all to block the vision (Acts 7:56; Acts 10:11). No, the ascension of Christ into heaven is not a vision seen with a spiritual or supernatural perception by the apostles, but was visibly seen with the natural eye of man. Moreover, if this was a vision, why did the apostles' sight of Christ grow less and less clear the higher He ascended into the heaven or the sky? In visions, even the very throne of God is not outside the clear view of the one beholding the vision (as in the case of Stephen in Acts 7:56), but in the case of the ascension of Christ, the apostles lose sight of Christ when a cloud receives the ascending Christ into the heaven or sky.

4. Fourth, the Holy Spirit teaches in Acts 1:9-11 that Christ will come again **in like manner** as He ascended into the heaven (or the sky). Thus, beginning with the manner of Christ's ascension as was the intention of the two angels and then applying the same manner to Christ's return, I submit there are at least three ways in which the Lord ascended into the heaven or the sky: **bodily** (i.e. Christ ascended in the same body that was crucified, buried and resurrected, Acts 1:1-9); **visibly** (i.e. Christ was seen by the apostles with their natural eye, "as ye have seen him go up" Acts 1:11); and **from the earth** ("this same Jesus, which is taken up **from you** into heaven" [i.e. into the sky, Acts 1:11). Thus, if Christ will come again in like manner as He ascended into heaven, **then He will return bodily** in His glorious resurrected body that was raised from the dead according to 1 Thessalonians 1:10 (and not in a vaporous or spiritual body), **then He will return visibly** and every eye upon earth will see Him personally according to Revelation 1:7 (and not in a cloud that hides Him), **and then He will return to the earth** from which He ascended according to Matthew 25:31 (and not go only as far as the air or clouds in the sky). I submit that if the Full Preterist began (as intended by

the two angels in Acts 1:11) with the clear manner in which Christ ascended from the earth to the heaven and applied those truths as the angels taught the apostles to do, the Full Preterist would have no choice but to reject their various explanations of Christ's coming, the final resurrection, and the final judgment in 70 a.d.

Dear ones, Christ's ascension was the necessary step to Christ's royal coronation at God's right hand (according to Acts 2:29-36). It is because your Prophet, Priest and King is there in heaven for you that you have assurance that your salvation is eternally safe and secure, that you will be heard when you pray and call upon the Lord, that you will be defended and protected from your enemies, that all your needs in this life will be provided, that you will be chastened and disciplined with a fatherly love rather than consumed with everlasting wrath of a holy God, that every grace you need to live the Christian life is yours. Dear ones, it is Christ as your only Mediator who has ascended and is seated at God's right hand that invites you to come to His throne of grace to receive mercy in the time of need. If He died for you, and was resurrected for you, then He ascended and was seated at God's right hand for you. And from that glorious throne He will come a second time for you to raise the dead, judge all men, and usher in His everlasting Kingdom.

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