

THE ARCH OF TITUS, ROME.

# The Sword & The Plow

Newsletter of the Bimillennial Preterist Association

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Vol. XII, No. 4 – April 2009

## “Revelatio pro Stultibus”

(*Latin: Revelation for Dummies*)

*Kurt Simmons*

*Editor’s Note: We recently undertook a commission to write a short, booklet length commentary on Revelation. For fun we have entitled this article “Revelation for Dummies” because the idea is to simplify the message so that even a “dummy” can understand it, but the booklet will probably be entitled “Revelation Explained.” The feeling was that, while comparatively few will undertake the onerous task of reading a full length commentary, almost anyone would probably read a booklet length explanation (45-50 pages) of John’s marvelous book. The following is taken from a first draft of the manuscript. The whole project should be complete and available in a couple months. Our hope and goal is for it to be distributed by the tens of thousands. If everyone who receives this newsletter were to mail out 50-100 copies to members of the church they attend, the number of Preterists, or at least partial Preterists, could easily double almost overnight. We hope you catch the vision and will jump on board as we attempt to push back the borders of futurist darkness and shed the light of Preterism abroad!*

### Chapter Nine – Romans, Zealots, & Idumeans

The imagery of the present chapter is adapted in part from the prophet Joel, who described successive invasions of locusts that devoured the land like fire. Joel appears to have used the imagery both literally to describe an actual drought and plague of locusts (Joel 1:1-10), and figuratively for the armies of the Assyrians and Babylonians (Joel 2:1-11; cf. Jer. 52:27). Moreover, it is clear that Joel’s prophecies had a *plenior sensus* (fuller meaning) that looked to the A.D. 70 destruction of

Jerusalem. Peter cited Joel on the day of Pentecost, saying that the gifts of the Holy Ghost were among the signs that were to occur before the “great and notable day of the Lord” (Acts 2:20). Peter limited the period remaining to the day of the Lord when he said “save yourselves from this untoward generation” (v. 40). “This generation” was the timeframe set by the Lord for the vengeance that would overtake Jerusalem for the blood of the martyrs (Matt. 23:37). He then reiterated this timeframe in his Olivet Discourse, limiting the events described to “this generation” (Matt. 24:30, 34). Jesus

repeated these warnings before the Sanhedrin and to the women of Jerusalem as he was led out to be crucified (Matt. 26:64; Lk. 23:27-31). Stephen made the same predictions and was stoned for it (Acts 6:14). John here portrays the same predictions clothed in poetic language adapted from Joel, signifying the imminent fulfillment of the prophecies.

### Rev. 9:1, 11 – Roman Emperor, Angel of the Bottomless Pit

The last three trumpets are described as three “woes” (Rev. 8:13; 9:12; 11:14). The fifth trumpet introduces the first woe. John sees a star fall from heaven to earth; the star is given the key of the bottomless pit. He opens the pit and great billows of smoke that darken the air boil forth. From the smoke come locusts shaped like “scorpion-centaurs” with the bodies of horses but tails of scorpions. The locusts form a great army. But unlike locusts, which denude the land of vegetation, this army denudes the land of men. Yet not all men, but only those men who have not the seal of God upon their foreheads. They have as king over them the angel (star) of the bottomless pit.

The bottomless pit is Hades Tartarus, the interim abode of the wicked dead. Because the poisonous gases it emitted killed all birds that flew above its mouth, the Greeks and Romans called the entrance to Hades *Avernus* (“birdless”). It is represented by the poets as a crater whose mouth holds a lake that was believed to be the entrance to the underworld.<sup>1</sup> The connection with the present imagery is obvious. The Old Testament contains many passages describing the “pit” as the place to which the defeated armies of the uncircumcised descend (Isa. 14:15, 19; Ezek. 32:18-32). As the saints are citizens of heaven, the Gentiles were citizens of hell. The bottomless pit therefore was to the world *spiritually*, what the distant reaches of the Mediterranean Sea were *geographically*, and stands as a symbol of *heathendom*. Hence, the locust army here represents the forces of heathendom, the Roman army. The key to the bottomless pit represents the governmental authority and power of the empire. The king who holds the key and commands the legions is the Roman emperor, Nero, whose name is given in Greek

<sup>1</sup> A deep, deep cave there was, its mouth enormously gaping,

Shingly, protected by the dark lake and the forest gloom:

Above it, no winged creatures could ever wing their way

With impunity, so lethal was the miasma which

Went fuming up from its black throat to the vault of heaven:

Wherefore the Greeks called it *Avernus*, the Birdless Place.

Virgil, *Aeneid*, lines 236-242; cf. lines 568-571.

“Apollyon” (destroyer), but in Hebrew is “Abaddon” (destruction), the same word used for Sheol and the pit (Job 26:6; Prov. 15:11; 27:20).

Taken together, the imagery is best understood as the Roman invasion of Judea, as seen from the fact that they are charged to kill only those who refused the gospel call when it went through Palestine, sealing the 144,000. The army is given power as scorpions to torment men for five months. John states that in those days men would “seek death, and shall not find it” (v. 5, 6). This may refer to the summer campaign following the fall of Galilee, or look ahead to the siege of Jerusalem, which lasted five months (Nisan 14-Elul 8). Unable to gain Jerusalem’s walls, the Romans shut the inhabitants up within the city to weaken their defenses, while famine devoured the inhabitants.

*“So now all hope of escaping was cut off from the Jews, together with their liberty of going out of the city. Then did the famine widen its progress, and devoured the people by whole houses and families; the upper rooms were full of women and children that were dying by famine; and the lanes of the city were full of the dead bodies of the aged; the children also and the young men wandered about the market-places like shadows, all swelled with famine, and fell down dead Wheresoever their misery seized them. As for burying them, those that were sick themselves were not able to do it; and those that were hearty and well were deterred from doing it by the great multitude of those dead bodies, and by the uncertainty there was how soon they should die themselves; for many died as they were burying others, and many went to their coffins before that fatal hour was come!”*

When the sixth angel sounds, a second invading force appears (v. 15). This may represent the Zealots and Idumeans. After the Romans subdued Galilee, the Zealots and robber bands fled to Jerusalem. However, when they tried to take over the city, they were set upon the high priests and elders of the Jews, and who shut up in the temple like a prison. The Zealots sent to the Idumeans to assist them. The Idumeans responded with an army 20,000 strong under four commanders, perhaps answering the four angels of v. 15. The Jews shut the gates of the city against them. That night, a great storm of preternatural proportions descended, with great winds, continual lightnings, thunderings, and earthquakes. The violence of the storm allowed the Zealots to escape their prison unnoticed and let the Idumeans into the city, who proceeded to make a general slaughter of the citizens, including the high priests, until twenty-thousand were slain:

*But the rage of the Idumeans was not satiated by these slaughters; but they now betook themselves to the city, and plundered every house, and slew*

*everyone they met; and for the multitude, they esteemed it needless to go on with killing them, but they sought for the high priests, and the generality went with the greatest zeal against them; and as soon as they caught them they slew, and then standing upon their dead bodies, in way of jest upbraided Ananus with his kindness to the people, and Jesus with his speech made to them from the wall. Nay, they proceeded to that degree of impiety, as to cast away their bodies without burial, although used to take so much care of the burial of men, that they took down those that were condemned and crucified, and buried them before the going down of the sun. I should not mistake if I said that the death of Ananus the beginning of the destruction of the city, and that from this very day may be dated the overthrow of her wall, and the ruin of her affairs, whereon they saw their high priest, and the procurer of their preservation slain the midst of the city...cast out naked, and see to be the food of dogs and wild beasts<sup>2</sup>.*

Alternatively, it may look ahead to the legions under Titus, which came from Egypt and the surrounding countries, converging on Jerusalem at the height of Passover celebration, shutting up within the city nearly 2 million Christ-denying Jews, most of whom perished in the siege. Titus had for his assistance in the siege four kings, Antiochus king of Commagene, Agrippa II king of Chalcis, Sohemus king of Emesa, and Malchus king of Arabia who may answer the four angels loosed in v. 15.<sup>3</sup>

## Chapter Ten – No More Delay: the Drama Nears its Close

The second woe announced under the sixth trumpet began in Rev. 9:12, 13, but does not conclude until Rev. 11:14. The material inserted in chapter ten and the first fourteen verses of chapter eleven thus stands as something of an interlude or parenthesis. John sees a mighty angel, whose legs are pillars of fire, clothed with a cloud, whose face was as the sun, and a rainbow upon his head. The angel stands with one foot upon the earth and the other upon the sea. His cry is as a lion when it roars, and the seven thunders answer him. The angel's posture suggests dominion over earth; that his voice is like a lion roaring over his prey seems to confirm this. The Seven Thunders remind us of God when he answered Jesus in the gospel of John (Jn. 12:29), suggesting that the angel here is a depiction of Christ. Like Paul who was prohibited to write the things he saw when borne away to paradise (II

Cor. 12:1-4), John is prohibited to write the things uttered by the Seven Thunders – which may have announced the time of Christ's return. Jesus began his ministry stating the “time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand” (Mk. 1:15). Paul later wrote “the time is short” (I Cor. 7:29). James wrote “the coming of the Lord draweth nigh” and was “at the door” (Jm. 5:8, 9). The writer of Hebrews said it was a “very, very little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry” (Heb. 10:37). Now, the angel declares “there shall be no more time” (no more delay), but that in the days when the seventh angel sounds all would be concluded. The seventh and “last trump” therefore is extremely important; it brings in its train the kingdom and resurrection of the dead, which in plainest terms are tied to the fall of Jerusalem.

John is told to eat a little book in the angel's hands, which turns his belly bitter. The angel tells John that he must “prophesy again before many peoples, and nations, and tongues, and kings” (Rev. 10:11). This signifies that John would survive the events portrayed in Revelation and would preach again amongst much opposition (hence the bitterness). Jesus said some of the disciples would live until his return (Matt. 16:27, 28; cf. I Thess. 4:15), and specifically named John. “If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?” (Jn. 21:21, 22). The present passage confirms Jesus' earlier prediction, and records John's commission to preach the gospel in the years following the eschaton.

## Chapter Eleven – Jerusalem's Fall and the Coming of the Kingdom and Resurrection

This chapter concludes the second vision. The first half describes “two witnesses,” the second half, events under the seventh trumpet.

### Rev. 11:1-14 – The Two Witnesses and the Persecution under Nero

This chapter describes in symbolic terms a similar situation to that in chapter seven where four angels hold back the winds of heaven until the remnant 144,000 Jews are sealed, followed by the outbreak of persecution and war. Here, measuring the temple and those that worship therein takes the place of sealing the 144,000, describing in different terms substantially the same thing. Those “measured” are the church. The outer court, or court of the Gentiles, which was not measured, is apostate Judaism; it nominally worships the Lord, but is to be “cast out” from the covenant relation with God. Jesus thus states, “And I say unto you, That many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven. But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matt. 8:11, 12; cf. Gal. 4:24). John indicates that the holy city will be trodden under foot forty-two months,

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, IV, v, 2; Whiston ed.

<sup>3</sup> Josephus, *Wars*, III, iv, 2.

signifying the Jews' 3 ½ year war with Rome. This is confirmed by the Olivet Discourse, which mirrors the language here. "*And they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations: and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled*" (Lk. 21:24).

The two witnesses, which are called the two candlesticks and olive trees that stand before the God of all the earth, are associated with the temple that John was told to measure, and provide its spiritual light and leadership. In the book of Zechariah, similar imagery pointed in the first instance to Joshua the high priest and Zerubbabel the governor (Zech. 4), although in its messianic context the imagery looked ahead to Christ who descended from the families of Joshua and Zerubbabel (Mary's kinswoman, Elizabeth, was of the daughters of Aaron, Lk. 1:5). Here, the two witnesses probably point to Peter and Paul, who are widely viewed as the two most prominent personalities in the early church. Both Peter and Paul also spoke of their impending martyrdom and thus conform to the overall imagery here (II Tim. 4:6-8; II Pet. 1:14; cf. Jn. 21:18, 19).

The two witnesses are given power to preach for 1,260 days, during which they are protected by the ability to call down plagues upon their adversaries. After they have finished their testimony, the beast that ascends from the bottomless pit will make war upon them and kill them, leaving their bodies lying unburied for 3 ½ days, in "the street of the great city, which is spiritually called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified" (vv 7, 8). This seems to point to the 3 ½ years period beginning when Paul was sent to Rome for trial until the persecution under Nero (A.D. 60-64). The point seems to be that the gospel would continue to have free course for the time signified — a fact to which Luke and Paul both testify (Acts 28:30, 31; Phil. 1:12-18) — but that following this the great eschatological crisis of the end time would break out. The purpose in singling out the martyrdom of Peter and Paul apparently is to mark the beginning of the crisis. The 3 ½ days the bodies of the two witnesses (but by extension, the church in general) lay unburied signifies the 3 ½ year persecution of A.D. 64-68. The "great city"— elsewhere called Babylon the Harlot, but here Sodom and Egypt — is Jerusalem. By extension, she represents all Jewry, for she "sits upon many waters" (Rev. 17:1, 15), signifying apostate Judaism's presence throughout the Roman Empire and its hostility to the gospel. The martyrs do not literally lie in the Jerusalem. Rather, she bears the moral blame and responsibility for the persecution; the martyrs' blood is laid at her feet.

*"Wherefore, behold, I send unto you prophets, and wise men, and scribes: and some of them ye shall kill and crucify; and some of them shall ye scourge in your synagogues, and persecute them from city to city: That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the*

*blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar. Verily I say unto you, All these things shall come upon this generation. O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate."*  
Matt. 23:34-38

In the midst of glorying over the martyrs and sending one another gifts, the martyrs suddenly revive and ascend to heaven in their enemies' sight. The same hour there is a great earthquake and a tenth part of the city falls and 7,000 men perish in the quake. With this, the angel announces that the second woe, begun in Rev. 9:13, is now past. Just as lying in the street of Jerusalem is not literal, the martyrs' ascension is not literal, but describes the reversal of circumstances that suddenly confronted the Jews. The church, which was undergoing persecution, was suddenly released from her trials and gained the upper hand over the Jews. The persecution ended with the death of Nero (June, A.D. 68) in the midst of the war with Rome. Rome lost interest in Christianity, but pursued with great purpose and intensity the annihilation of Jerusalem. It cannot be known for certain what event in the war the quake here depicts. However, the division and infighting that erupted among the competing factions of the Jews answers well the imagery of a divided city and fits the time frame suggested here (cf. Rev. 16:18, 19).

#### **Rev. 11:15-19 – The Kingdom and Resurrection Come**

Omitting further detail of the destruction of Christ's enemies, the seventh angel sounds, and voices in heaven proclaim "the kingdoms of the world are become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever" (v. 15). With this announcement, the kingdom has now come *in power* (Matt. 16:27, 28; Mk. 9:1) and all enemies have been placed beneath Christ's feet (Ps. 110:1; Heb. 2:8). This does not mean that all temporal opposition has forever ceased, or that other enemies will not rise at later times. It does mean that Christ has "shown who is the only Potentate, King of kings and Lord of lords" (I Tim. 6:15), and that he is firmly established in his kingdom, not merely as a matter of law, but as an indisputable matter of fact. The kingdom is not the church. Rather, the kingdom (dominion) is the world, which Christ rules with an iron rod. For the church, the kingdom means restored spiritual liberty from the dominion of sin and death, and temporal dominion over their enemies through the reign of Christ. The dominion that belonged to the dragon and beast is become Christ's and his saints:

*"And the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given to the saints people of the saints of the most High, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him" (Dan. 7:27).*

### **Resurrection tied to Coming of Kingdom (vv. 17, 18)**

The coming of the kingdom in power was inexorably tied to the resurrection. If the resurrection has not come, neither has the kingdom. Thus, the twenty-four elders join the kingdom and resurrection, saying,

*"We give thee thanks, O Lord God Almighty, which art, and wast, and art to come; because thou hast taken to thee thy great power, and hast reigned. And the nations were angry, and thy wrath is come, **and the time of the dead, that they should be judged**, and that thou shouldest give reward unto the saints, and them that fear thy name, small and great; and shouldest destroy them that destroy the earth."*

Matthew is to the same effect, joining the kingdom and judgment:

*"For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works. Verily I say unto you, There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom" (Matt. 16:27, 28).*

Paul joins them as well:

*"I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom" (II Tim. 4:1).*

### **Resurrection tied to Fall of Jerusalem (vv. 2, 18)**

But if the kingdom and resurrection are tied together by Matthew and Paul, Daniel and John expressly tie the resurrection to the fall of Jerusalem.

#### **Daniel 12: 2, 7**

And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt...when he shall have accomplished to scatter the power of the holy people, all these

#### **Rev. 11:2, 18**

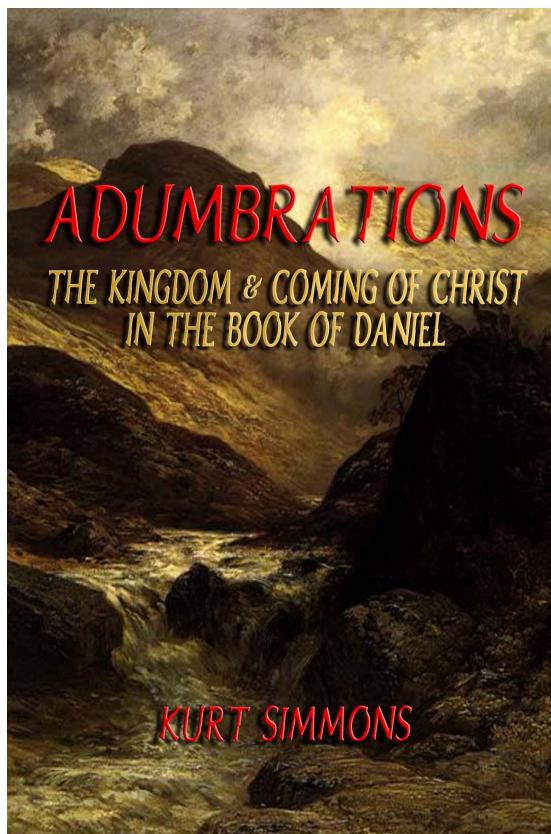
And the holy city shall they tread under foot forty and two months... And the nations were angry, and thy wrath is come, and the time of the dead, that they should be judged.

things shall be finished.

Here is incontrovertible evidence that the eschaton was fulfilled in the events culminating in the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. There is simply no avoiding the force of the argument. The resurrection from Hades marked the destruction of the last enemy. Since the resurrection is expressly tied to the fall of Jerusalem, all is fulfilled. The general resurrection of the accumulated souls in Hades is past. Naturally, judgment continues (Heb. 9:27) as does resurrection. Those on this side of the eschaton are judged at death and go on to our respective rewards at that time. Only Hadean death has been destroyed.

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# Questions from a Reader in New Zealand

Kurt, I would value your thoughts on a few points:

1) The author of Hebrews often speaks of the New Covenant blessings soon to arrive but in 12:22ff he speaks in the present tense of blessings enjoyed by believers - notably their unity with believers in heaven: You HAVE COME to the heavenly Jerusalem... to angels... to God... to the spirits of righteous men made perfect etc. In the preterist system these blessings are not available, and the righteous are not in heaven, until Christ's coming and the Resurrection, which was still several years away at the time of writing.

**Answer:** I think the point the writer of Hebrews is trying to make is that we enjoy restored "face to face" fellowship with the Father now, while on earth, through Christ. This fellowship is through the agency of Jesus. Jesus has direct fellowship with God and we enjoy these blessings through him while still on earth. He says in Ephesians, "he hath raised us up and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus" - That is, we do not actually, spatially or personally sit in heavenly places, but in and through Jesus we do in contemplation of law. We are citizens now and adoptive sons now, but the actual and personal face to face fellowship with God will not truly be ours until we put off these bodies of clay. Also, bear in mind that while standing on the banks of Jordan Moses could say, "Ye have come to the land God promised your fathers," even though they had not actually crossed over yet. The nearness of crossing over allows him to use language of fulfillment. So with Hebrews, although they were on the other side of Jordan, they were shortly to cross over (as it were). Hence, the writer could speak of these things as an accomplished fact.

2) How do you understand the sheep and goats judgment of Mt 25? Is this the judgment of the dead (as in Rev 20)? The basis of judgment, namely their treatment of Christ's distressed disciples, would suggest that those being judged were people of the first century. Yet 'all nations' are apparently gathered for judgment (Mt 25:32), presumably including citizens of Tyre and Sidon (Mt 11:22) and Nineveh (Mt 12:41). Or is the whole thing a parable? Do you know of any website that deals satisfactorily with this?

**Answer:** I see this as a general resurrection passage. The point of the instruction is that we must bear fruit by works of charity for our fellow man/saints if we hope to be saved. If we do not have charity, our faith is void.

3) The parables of the Narrow Door and of Lazarus and the Rich Man (Luke 13 and 16) speak of the exclusion of Israel and the inclusion of believing Gentiles into God's kingdom. But are these speaking of the Jews' exclusion and their anguished response this side of eternity on earth (i.e. their exclusion from the New Jerusalem), or do the parables describe their response and experience in the afterlife in Hades?

**Answer:** I feel that their response is on the other side of eternity—"there" shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth when ye see Abraham etc. When would they see Abraham in the kingdom? When they were dead and on the other side of eternity and realize they were missing out. I think the spiritual blindness of the Jews and other unbelievers this side of eternity rules out their realization that they are destined to miss out, otherwise they would repent and obey the gospel and be included in the (earthly) kingdom.

4) How do you understand Jesus' statement that people of the Kingdom Age do not marry (Lk 20:34-35)?

**Answer:** The word rendered "age" has many meanings. I think the KJV correctly renders it "world" in this place, showing that Jesus is looking to the next life, when men will no longer have corporeal bodies but be like the angels, intangible, immaterial, spiritual, and eternal. Hence, no marriage or procreation after the earthly sort.

5) The persecution under Nero - is there historical evidence for this extending beyond Rome and into Asia and Palestine and further?

**Answer:** Several early historians indicate it did spread further than Rome, but I do not know their primary sources. Gallio refused to try Christian at the Jews instance. But once Nero began actively persecuting them at Rome, the example and authority of the emperor would have been sufficient for a charge anywhere in the empire. There was never any actual written law making Christianity a crime in Trajan's time (AD 110), Christians were subject to accusation in Cappadocia even though there was no law incriminating them. Apparently, the original persecution by Nero was still deemed authoritative, although Pliny wrote Trajan to ask whether he should seek them out or receive anonymous accusations and what to do if they recanted. Revelation speaks of the ten horns assisting in the war against the Lamb/church. These were the provincial governments of the empire, so this too testifies to breadth of the persecution. Rev. 13 also says that all men, races, language peoples were subject to the beast, again showing the persecution extended beyond Rome.

# HOW TO ESTABLISH THE **BIBLICAL MEANINGS OF BIBLICAL TERMS**: *An introduction*

## *Coming in clouds: and Acts 1:9-11*

Morrison St John Lee.

### *Summary.*

*It is a trivial observation that the bible cannot be read like today's newspaper. It was written in a richly imaginative ancient Middle Eastern culture thousands of years before our modern definitions. Bible terms have many meanings. The alternative to making biblical words only physical and concrete is to locate the biblical meaning by the three step process of induction. Here we do not propose conclusions, but our aim rather is to establish a reliable and objective method by which to study the biblical documents.*

### *Explanation vs. Interpretation.*

In this study we do not seek subjective interpretations of the sacred facts, but gather and observe biblical terms (from an exhaustive bible concordance: Cruden's or Strong's) describe their biblical uses, then induce a generalization that explains all of the sacred facts. This three step process of understanding is called '*inductive reasoning*'. (It is the method Copernicus, Bacon, Galileo and Newton used. It was once called the *scientific method*.) The process involves three separate steps:

1. *gather and observe*
2. *describe*
3. *explain the relations between facts.*

In this process Reason plays a subordinate role to Scripture, like a handmaid serving a queen. Here the sacred biblical evidence has the same integrity as does evidence at a crime scene. Reason can only explain the relations *between* the evidence. For example:

Diagram 1.

*Relation of Thought to biblical fact.*

Fact 1  <-- <i>reason --&gt;</i>   Fact 2  <-- <i>reason --&gt;</i>   Fact 3  <-- <i>reason --&gt;</i>   Fact 4			
<i>explains</i> <i>relations</i>	<i>explains</i> <i>relations</i>	<i>explains</i> <i>relations</i>	

Observe in diagram 1 that Thought operates only *between facts* without touching them: Thought is limited to observation toward explaining the connections between facts, it cannot invent premises, it only asks the questions: *How are the facts related? What is the logical connection between them? How is one fact interconnected to another fact? What is the thinking that binds them? Which explanation best saves the appearances of – looks like - the facts?*

In this process Reason respects the Eternal nature of facts, and aims to explain the *biblical* linkages and ties between one *biblical* term and another. This method is entirely different from “rationalizing away” sacred facts with some sloppy kind of specious reasoning.

#### *The limits of reason.*

Reason cannot and ought not add to biblical facts, and cannot subtract, change, modify nor qualify them with “special rules” (ie. non biblical qualifications.) The following is an example of the objective bible study method using the three step process:

1. *gather and observe bible facts*
2. *describe bible facts*
3. *explain the relations between bible facts*

with reference to the term; *coming in clouds*.

#### *The study of Clouds.*

Literalism says *coming in clouds* means practically that; God is *seen with the naked eye in condensed water vapor*. The literal meaning when applied to the second coming means that Jesus’ *parousia* -second coming- shall be *personal, physical and visible*, as taught in nearly every theological seminary. It means Jesus will literally return on a literal white horse and literally be seen in a cloud by the literal eye. What occurs when we consult the uses of ‘*clouds*’ in scripture?

#### *Gather and observe the biblical uses.*

Compare the way the term ‘*clouds*’ is used in the Old Testament.

<i>His glory seen in clouds</i>	<i>Ex 16:10</i>
<i>Calls out of clouds</i>	<i>Ex 24:16</i>
<i>Seen face to face in clouds</i>	<i>Ex 33:11</i>
<i>Descends in clouds</i>	<i>Ex 34:5</i>
<i>Appears in clouds</i>	<i>Lev 16:2</i>
<i>Dwells in clouds</i>	<i>1 Kgs 8:10-12</i>
<i>Judgment in clouds</i>	<i>Job 22:13</i>
<i>Came down in clouds</i>	<i>Ps 18:9-11</i>
<i>His strength in the clouds</i>	<i>Ps 68:34</i>
<i>His rides on clouds to Egypt</i>	<i>Is 19:1</i>
<i>Clouds are the dust of his feet</i>	<i>Nah 1:3</i>
<i>Voice out of clouds</i>	<i>Mtt 17:5</i>

#### *Describe OT usage.*

Biblically the term *clouds* relates to a knowledge of *God’s attributes and signifies His presence*: eg. *His appearance, His voice, His attributes as: His Glory, Strength, Judgment, Justice etc.* Compare this method with making these terms literal and concrete.

Are terms *always literal*? The bible states: ‘*to gaze upon God is to perish*,’ (Ex 19:21) and ‘*no man may see God and live*,’ (Ex 33:20) yet there is a contradiction, for it also says: God is ‘*Seen face to face in clouds*.’ Ex33:11?? Jacob saw God face to face?? Gen

32:30. So on one hand you cannot look at Him, but the same book says *they saw Him face to face*? Both cannot be literal.

Taking clouds *always literally* results in absurdities. If Ex 33:11 is literal ('*God is seen in clouds*') then it means God may *always* be seen from the window of a 747 Jumbo jet. Likewise if Nah 1:3 is *always literal* ('*clouds are the dust of God's feet*,') then on a cloudless day God is not around. Again, if '*always literal*' is true of Is. 19:1 and '*God rides on clouds*', then we should be able to observe God scooting around the sky riding the latest model White Cumulus. It is easy to see these silly interpretations are hopelessly narrow. *How to resolve this contradiction?* We know from reason that *no two truths can contradict*. If they do, then there must be some other explanation besides an *always literal* one. Let us continue to explain the relations between these ideas of '*clouds*', '*presence*' and '*seeing*' to determine if *clouds as God's presence* explains more and more facts.

#### *Explanation of OT terms.*

The alternative explanation to *always literal* is; clouds as *signifying knowledge of His presence*. This notion of *presence/ a knowing* explains how God is '*seen face to face*' in clouds, not literally, but through *knowing*:

<i>Jacob saw God face to face</i>	<i>Gen 32:30</i>
<i>Moses spoke to God face to face</i>	<i>Ex 33:11</i>
<i>Israel saw God eye to eye in cloud</i>	<i>Num 14:14</i>
<i>Gideon saw God's angel face to face</i>	<i>Judg 6:22</i>
<i>Manoah saw God</i>	<i>Judg 13:22</i>
<i>Job saw God face to face</i>	<i>Job 42:5</i>

This explanation covers the facts of passages that use the term clouds in relation to seeing God in a cloud. Is there only one literal meaning? What happens when we consult a concordance and observe the one hundred and sixty-two occurrences (Strong's KJV) of *clouds* in scripture? Is it true there is only one *always literal* meaning for *clouds*?

Close observation of the biblical evidence reveals there are no less than *another twelve meanings besides the literal meaning*. The term *Clouds* can signify:

Meaning	1. <i>A sign</i>	<i>Gen 9:13</i>
	2. <i>Change</i>	<i>1 Kgs 18:24, Lk 12:54</i>
	3. <i>The presence of blessing or evil</i>	<i>1 Kgs 8:10, Lam 2:1</i>
	4. <i>Temporality</i>	<i>Job 30:15, Hos 6:4</i>
	5. <i>Height</i>	<i>Job 35:5</i>
	6. <i>Clothing</i>	<i>Job 38:9</i>
	7. <i>Therefore protection</i>	<i>Ps 121:5-6</i>
	8. <i>Speed</i>	<i>Is 19:1, Is 60:8</i>
	9. <i>A covering or shade</i>	<i>Is 44:22, Is 25:5</i>
	10. <i>Confusion/scattering</i>	<i>Ezek 34:12</i>
	11. <i>innumerable; multitude</i>	<i>Heb 12:1; Job 37:37</i>
	12. <i>The wicked/ empty promises</i>	<i>Jude 12</i>

The richness of ancient Hebrew culture is seen in a language where meaning in nature is transferred parabolically, (Greek *parballo*. *Para beside, ballow I throw*) to the spiritual world.

You can observe this principle again and again in scripture: *the natural and then the spiritual*. This pedagogical principle of the prophets moves from the known and tangible to the unknown and intangible: *first the physical, then the spiritual*. Everywhere the *modus operandi* of the ancient scribes is from the simple to the more abstract. A quick survey shows: Jeremiah's potter's wheel of Man's desire vs. God's will, Ezekiel's parables of: the cow dung denoting uncleanness, sitting silent beside the river Chebar as incalcitrance, the razor which divided a city in three, the hole in the whitewashed wall through which he passed his bags as a type of fleeing, the valley of dry bones as a type of resurrection of Hades, Daniel's *dream of Nebuchadnezzar* as foretelling the remote intangible future, Hosea's wife Gomer as a visible type of the invisible God and Israel, Jesus' agricultural parables of the Sower depicting the nature of principle in the human heart, the tares among the wheat as a type of end of age judgment, leaven as a type of waiting period, (and later as a type of Pharisaical influence) the fisher's net (dragnet) as a type of gathering, a pearl as a type of sacrifice, the laborers in the vineyard as typical of reward, the ten virgins as a type of wise preparation, Paul the seed of the natural body then the spiritual as a type of spiritual life after physical death, the book of James; fruit then Christ as first-fruits and secondly Christians, a mirror and then the word of God, a tongue as a fire which precipitates a state of affairs that is uncontrollable (cf. Hosea, sow the wind; reap the whirlwind.) Peter's literal fire and later 'fire' as period of perfecting trial (spiritual judgment as gold) and Jude's mockers as: animals, hidden reefs, autumn trees without fruit, planets (wandering stars) and clouds without water – everywhere the principle is *first the physical, then the spiritual*. In the example of the term *clouds* we discover this transference of meaning from the physical to the spiritual, from that which is seen and proven by the physical eye, to that which is understood and transferred through the eyes of the heart /mind. (Eph 1:18)

*Gather and observe NT uses of coming in clouds.*

In observing the New Testament evidence we see Jesus nearly always connects *coming in clouds* to His *parousia coming*. *Coming and clouds* occur together eleven times when used to refer to the end time event. Did Jesus say He would come *personally, physically and visibly*? Or did He say *He would come in clouds with power*? Compare:

... coming in the cloud of heaven with power	Mt 24:30
... coming in the clouds of heaven with power	Mt 26:64
... coming in the clouds with great power	Mk 13:26
... coming in the clouds of heaven	Mk 14:62
... Son of man coming in a cloud with power	Lk 21:27
... from heaven clothed with a cloud	Rev 10:1
... they ascended up to heaven in a cloud	11:12
... And I looked and behold a white cloud	14:14
... upon the cloud sat one like unto the	14:14
... voice to him that sat on the cloud	14:15
... he that sat on a cloud thrust in his sickle	14:16

*Acts 1:9-11 – did Jesus rise in clouds?*

The *always literal* view of the second coming favors a physical interpretation. The evidence for a literal and physical coming turns mainly upon one key passage for proof, Acts 1:9-11. Is Acts 1 evidence of a *personal, physical and visible* second coming? or a *coming in clouds*? Observe:

*And after these things He was lifted up while they were looking on and a cloud received Him out of their sight...behold two men in white clothing stood beside them. They also said: ‘Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus will come in just the same way as you watched Him go into heaven.*

Are the terms '*literal, personal, physical and visible*' observable in Acts 1? (Not one of these three terms occur anywhere in the sixty-six books of the bible) If they didn't come from any divine penman, from whence did they come? The answer is they come from the hand of men: they are a human tradition and are not found in the biblical evidence. Logic can only fail when units of meaning fail, and here there is a failure in the units: '*literal, personal, physical and visible*', therefore the logic must fail also.

But what unit is observable in the scripture? It says expressly: *a cloud received Him out of their sight.. And Jesus will come in just the same way.*

Q. How will he come?

A. **In a cloud.** (Acts 1:9)

Is this accidental? "*In logic,*" says Wittgenstein, the philosopher of language, (Tractatus 2.012) "*nothing is accidental: if a thing can occur in a state of affairs, the possibility of the state of affairs must be written into the thing itself.*"

Notice the usage of *coming in clouds and presence*:

- . is consistent with the Old Testament usage of *clouds as presence /judgment* (Job 22:13, Ps 18:9-11, Ps 68:34, Is 19:1) and
- . is consistent with New Testament usage of *coming in the clouds of Heaven with power*; Mt 24:30, Mt 26:64, Mk 13:26, Mk 14:62, Lk 21:27, I Thess 4:17, Rev 10:1, 11:12, 14:14, 14:14, 14:15, 14:16)

This *coming in clouds* explanation of Acts 1 possesses the following advantages. It:

- . is consistent with observation
- . saves the appearances of the facts
- . is the simplest explanation
- . is consistent with the natural context
- . is consistent with all of Jesus' other statements in the NT
- . is consistent with OT prophetic usage
- . needs no 'special' (unbiblical) rules like: '*personal, physical and visible*' 'comings,' 'no gaps' and no 'delays.'

Thus in Matthew 24:1-2 the sign of Jesus' second coming was a coming in clouds, a Divine Judgment to destroy the apostate generation and the Jerusalem temple as evidence of His Divine Mission. Is this explanation consistent with a first century coming in that generation? Yes. The coming of the son of man was to occur;

- . before they had finished preaching to all the cities of Israel (Mtt 10:23).
- . a coming of the kingdom in the lifetime of some of you standing here (Mk 9:1)
- . a coming on clouds apparent to Caiaphas the high priest (Mtt 26:64) and a
- . coming in the lifetime of that generation (Mtt 23:36; Lk 21:32)
- . a coming seen even by those who pierced Him. (Rev 1:7)
- . “.. coming (parousia) of the Lord is near...” (Jas 5:8) and
- . “..the judge is standing right at the door.” (Jas 5:9)

all spoken, promised and written to people in the first century generation.

### *Conclusion.*

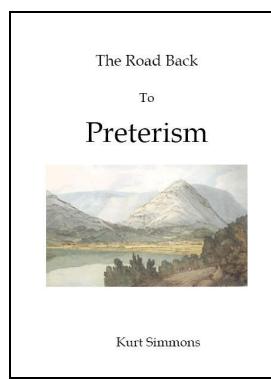
In sum a *Rational* explanation of endtimes uses observation to determine the biblical meanings of each biblical by the three-step method of induction:

1. gather and observe
2. describe
3. explain the relations between facts...

as used by writers of modern dictionaries and linguistic scholars. This method is also called the *critical method*. Terms are located by using an exhaustive bible concordance.

The example used here is *coming in clouds*. It has been shown that the term can be used in thirteen different ways besides the literal meaning. A coming in judgment was a sign of *God's presence* in the ancient Jewish prophets. This is consistent with Jesus' prophecy of a coming in judgment to destroy the temple in AD 70, (Matt 24:1-2) and other passages that speak of a coming in that generation. (Mtt 10:23; Mk 9:1; Mtt 26:64; Mtt 23:36; Lk 21:32; Rev 1:7)

The problem of the Bible is that of a modern mind struggling to understand an ancient text. The way to make sense of the text is not to impose *literal meanings* upon bible ideas, but firstly to understand the *biblical meanings* of the *biblical terms* as used by the *biblical prophets*. To do this we must approach the scripture with an empty mind, and then carefully examine all the uses of a term to determine its range of meanings.



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