

# Has Bible Prophecy Already Been Fulfilled? Part VI

by Thomas Ice

As I continue our series dealing with preterism (i.e., the belief that prophecy was fulfilled in the past), we are now dealing with why they believe that the Book of Revelation was primarily fulfilled in the first century. I will pick-up with our discussion of the theme verse of Revelation which reads as follows: “Behold, He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him. Even so. Amen” (Rev. 1:7). Preterists believe that this passage supports an A.D. 70 fulfillment of Revelation.

## Cloud Coming in Revelation 1:7

“John states his theme in his introduction at Revelation 1:7,” claims Dr. Gentry, “just after he declares the nearness of the events (1:1,3), a theme that is directly relevant to the first-century circumstances.”<sup>1</sup> Not surprisingly, Dr. Gentry believes that “in its contextual setting verse 7 points to the destruction of Jerusalem and her temple in A.D. 70.”<sup>2</sup> Preterists do not believe that this verse speaks of Christ’s Second Coming as the church has historically understood this passage, instead they see it as another reference to the A.D. 70 destruction. Thus, in usual fashion, preterists turn the perspective of Revelation 1:7 from a global to a local perspective, from a Gentile to a Jewish outlook, and from a future to a past fulfillment. All these are reversals of its actual meaning.

In last month’s article I dealt with all of Revelation 1:7 except the part that deals with Christ coming on the clouds. That will be my topic in this issue. Dr. Gentry attempts a most strained interpretation when he calls this “a providential coming of Christ in *historical judgments upon men*.”<sup>3</sup> He provides the following forced explanation:

**In the Old Testament, clouds are frequently employed as symbols of divine wrath and judgment. Often God is seen 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>4</sup>

Dr. Gentry cites the following passages as examples: 2 Sam. 22:8,10; Ps. 18:7-15; 68:4,33; 97:2-3, 9; 104:3; Isa. 13:9; 19:1; 26:21; 30:27; Joel 2:1,2; Mic. 1:3; Nah. 1:2ff; Zeph. 1:14,15. He then concludes, “The New Testament picks up this apocalyptic judgment imagery when it speaks of Christ’s coming in clouds of judgment *during history*.”<sup>5</sup>

## Refutation of Dr. Gentry’s View

There are many problems with Dr. Gentry’s declaration that Revelation 1:7 is the same as the Old Testament passages he cites. First, he cites no reasons from the context of Revelation 1:7 why it should be understood as a parallel to these Old Testament passages. He just declares them to be similar. Dr. Robert Thomas has made the following insightful observation:

**Gentry interprets a reference to clouds in Revelation 1:7 as a nonpersonal coming of Christ. Christ never returned to earth in A.D. 70 personally, so explaining the fall of Jerusalem as his coming violates the principle of literal interpretation. All contextual indications point to a literal and personal-coming of Christ in that verse. Gentry calls this a “judgment-coming” of Christ, but the**

**criteria of Revelation also connect a deliverance of the faithful with that coming. Preterism nowhere explains the promised deliverance from persecution that is associated with the coming, for example, in 3:10-11. Gentry's interpretation of 1:7 simply does not fulfill the criteria of literal interpretation of the text. The fact is, the church did not escape persecution in A.D. 70, but continued to suffer for Christ's sake long after that.<sup>6</sup>**

Second, some of those Old Testament passages most likely are speaking of Christ's second coming. Dr. Gentry often assumes that because they are in the Old Testament they must have already been fulfilled. Such is often not the case. I believe that Isaiah 26:21; 30:27; Joel 2:1,2 and Zephaniah 1:14-15 are second coming contexts. This means that these passages also look for a future, not a past fulfillment. Nahum 1:2ff, although less clear, could also refer to a future time.

Third, I do not think that a single one of the Old Testament passages cited by Dr. Gentry parallels Revelation 1:7. As you examine them, they describe the Lord as "riding" upon a cloud in judgment against the Lord's enemies, much as Dr. Gentry has said. However, when compared to Revelation 1:7, there are too many differences. As Dr. Thomas notes above, Revelation 1:7 speaks of a coming to rescue someone, while those Old Testament references are all descriptive of judgment. Revelation 1:7 provides a different atmosphere than we see in the Old Testament passages. Christ's coming in Revelation 1:7, and in its parallel passage Matthew 24:30, builds upon the Old Testament fact that the Lord established His identity in cloud comings. But, in these passages we have a description of the Lord returning to the earth. This is not found in the Old Testament citations noted by Dr. Gentry. There are too many differences between the two concepts as noted by Philip Edgcumbe Hughes:

**The clouds intended here are not dark storm-clouds which presage divine judgment, . . . but the bright clouds of his transcendental glory. They stand for the *shekinah* glory of God's presence which caused the face of Moses to shine with supernatural brilliance . . . and they are to be identified with the "bright cloud" of Christ's divine glory witnessed by Peter, James, and John on the mount of transfiguration (Mt. 17:5), and with the cloud which received him out of the apostles' sight at his ascension....<sup>7</sup>**

Fourth, the preterist view of Revelation 1:7 confuses a global event for a local event. Dr. Thomas has noted in the following:

**Another hermeneutical shortcoming of preterism relates to the limiting of the promised coming of Christ in 1:7 to Judea. What does a localized judgment hundreds of miles away have to do with the seven churches in Asia? John uses two long chapters in addressing those churches regarding the implications of the coming of Christ for them. For instance, the promise to shield the Philadelphian church from judgment (3:10-11) is meaningless if that judgment occurs far beyond the borders of that city.<sup>8</sup>**

Fifth, even if there were the types of parallels between the cloud comings of the Old Testament and the text of Revelation 1:7, which I do not believe there are as Dr. Gentry has suggested, it would be meaningless because of what happened at Christ's ascension as described in Acts 1:9-11. Notice what it says,

**And after He had said these things, He was lifted up while they were looking on, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And as they were gazing intently into the sky while He was departing, behold, two men in white clothing stood beside them; and they also said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in**

**just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven.”**

The whole focus of Christ's cloud coming after this event is defined by the ascension. The next time Christ comes on the clouds, it is clearly said here to be bodily, personal, and coming with clouds. This is what Matthew 24:30 and Revelation 1:7 refers to. All of the New Testament, because of this event, looks to Christ's return in this way. Thus, any future cloud coming from this point on would have to be seen in light of this glorious promise.

Finally, to take Dr. Gentry's preterist interpretation of Revelation 1:7 creates many more problems with the rest of the Book of Revelation. This has been most clearly noted by Dr. Thomas:

**This preterist view of 1:7 . . . creates several unsolvable interpretive dilemmas within the verse itself, not to mention elsewhere in the book: inconsistency regarding the identity of “those who pierced him,” “the tribes of the earth,” and “the land [or earth].” Are they limited to Jews and their land, or do they include Romans and the rest of the world? A preterist must contradict himself on these issues to have a past fulfillment of 1:7. They cannot limit “those who pierced him” to Jews only and elsewhere include the Romans as objects of Christ's “cloud coming.” They cannot limit “the tribes of the earth [or land]” to Israel only, because in this case Zechariah 12:10ff. would require the mourning to be one of repentance, not of despair (as their interpretation holds). Their acknowledged worldwide scope of Revelation as a whole rules out their limitation of “the land” to Palestine in this verse.<sup>9</sup>**

## **Conclusion**

The preterist interpretation of Revelation 1:7 in relationship to Christ's coming is necessary if their view that Revelation was fulfilled in the first century. However, the torturous interpretation of otherwise plain and clear language must be distorted beyond clear recognition in order to attempt such a devious view. When Revelation 1:7 is combined with Revelation 19:11-21, it is more than clear that such a reference is of a global, future, bodily and literal return of Jesus the Messiah from heaven to planet earth. While the preterist notion that this passage had to be fulfilled in the first century is required of their view, they are not able to provide actual exegetical support for such a position. When examined in the light of letting Scripture interpret Scripture, it becomes most clear that these are yet future events. Events that I and like-minded believers look for. “Come quickly, Lord Jesus! Come!” Maranatha!

## **Endnotes**

1. Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., “A Preterist View of Revelation” in C. Marvin Pate, ed., *Four Views on the Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), p. 46.
2. Ibid.
3. Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *He Shall Have Dominion: A Postmillennial Eschatology* (Tyler, Tex.: 1992), p. 273.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid., p. 274.
6. Robert L. Thomas, “A Classical Dispensationalist View of Revelation” in C. Marvin Pate, ed., *Four Views on the Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), p. 225.
7. Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *The Book of The Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), pp. 20-21.
8. Thomas, p. 225.
9. Thomas, p. 186.