

The Slippery Slope of Partial-Preterism: Denying the Literal Resurrection of the Dead and the Return of Jesus

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The Hermeneutical Heart: Intertextuality as the Key

At the core of the debate between preterism and futurism lies a critical hermeneutical issue: intertextuality. Specifically, when one compares Daniel 11–12 with Jesus' Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24–25; Mark 13; Luke 21), a powerful pattern emerges. These passages clearly interlink (1) *the great tribulation*, (2) *the Day of the Lord*, (3) *the return of Jesus*, and (4) *the resurrection of the dead*. Far from being isolated events, these themes are tightly braided together, occurring within the same timeframe.

For instance, Daniel 12:1–2 speaks of an unprecedented time of distress, followed immediately by the resurrection of the dead—“many of those who sleep in the dust of the ground will awake” (Daniel 12:2). This corresponds to Jesus' own teaching about the very same tribulation in which He says that “after the tribulation of those days... they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory... and He will send forth His angels... and they will gather together His elect” (Matthew 24:29–31). Paul, too, maintains this same sequence, associating the coming of the Lord with the resurrection and rapture of believers (1 Thessalonians 4:16–17).

To attempt to bifurcate any one of these elements from the others, claiming, for instance, that the tribulation was fulfilled in the first century while the resurrection remains future, is inconsistent and exegetically unacceptable.

The Slippery Slope of Partial Preterism

This internal consistency creates an uncomfortable dilemma for the growing number of partial preterists. Once they recognize the interconnectedness of these events, they face a crucial dilemma: either continue down their current path of preterism to its logical end (i.e., full preterism) or abandon the preterism entirely.

This “slippery slope” is not a theoretical concern. It has become a well-documented trajectory. Prominent figures within the partial preterist movement have gradually edged closer to full preterism over the years. Gary DeMar, a long-time advocate for Christian reconstructionism and partial preterism, has raised concerns within his own circles due to his increasing openness to full preterist interpretations—a development that has not gone

unnoticed by theologians across the eschatological spectrum (cf. DeMar’s recent writings and public exchanges, 2022–2024).

The full preterist position, however, leads to heresy, including a denial of the bodily return of Christ and the future resurrection, doctrines which have been pillars of Christian orthodoxy since the early Church.

The Creedal Consequences: Apostolic Hope vs. Modern Revisions

The idea that Jesus has already returned—albeit invisibly and spiritually—in A.D. 70 stands in stark contrast to the unanimous witness of the early church creeds. The Nicene Creed declares: “*He shall come again in glory to judge the living and the dead; His kingdom shall have no end.*” Similarly, the Apostles’ Creed confesses: “*He will come again to judge the living and the dead.*”

These are not minor doctrinal footnotes but are foundational affirmations of Christian eschatology. Any framework that denies the *future*, *bodily*, and *visible* return of Jesus stands outside the boundaries of historic Christian orthodoxy.

Acts 1:9–11: A Crystal-Clear Promise

Luke’s account of the ascension affirms the literal return of Jesus in the strongest terms:

“He was lifted up while they were looking on, and a cloud received Him out of their sight” (Acts 1:9).

Then, two angels declared:

“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” (Acts 1:11).

This passage speaks of continuity: just as Jesus went up *visibly* and *bodily*, so will He return.

N.T. Wright: Theological Giant or Revisionist?

N.T. Wright has been one of the most influential New Testament scholars of the modern era. Yet in this area, his influence has leaned heavily toward a preterist reading of nearly all New Testament “coming” passages. While Wright does *technically* affirm a future return of Christ, he consistently interprets most (if not all) biblical references to Christ’s return as fulfilled in the events surrounding the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.

Wright belittles the traditional interpretation of Acts 1:11 and related texts with startling dismissiveness:

“The never-ending speculation about future would-be ‘apocalyptic’ figures, such as the supposed ‘heavenly son of man’ who would ‘come’—i.e. ‘return,’ downwards to earth, on a literal cloud. This monstrosity... can be left behind, appropriately enough, in the center of his mythological maze”
—N.T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, p. 341.

He continues elsewhere:

“Nobody supposes that [Paul] imagined [Jesus] would make his appearance flying downward on a cloud”
—Ibid., p. 286.

And again:

“No interpreter ought to imagine that the ‘Son of Man’ can be interpreted ‘literally’ as a human figure floating on a cloud.”
—Ibid., p. 207.

According to Wright, Jesus’ statements in the Olivet Discourse gave the disciples:

“no reason... for it even to occur to them that the true story... might include either the end of the space-time universe, or Jesus... floating down to earth on a cloud”
(*The New Testament and the People of God*, p. 345).

This is not a mere nuance. It is a direct denial of the angelic promise in Acts 1, and of the apostolic hope expressed repeatedly throughout the New Testament.

Vindication or Vanishing?

Wright interprets Daniel 7’s “Son of Man coming with the clouds of heaven” not as a reference to Jesus’ return from heaven, but as Jesus ascending into heaven to receive vindication and authority from the Father. While Daniel 7 indeed pictures the Son of Man coming to the Ancient of Days (Daniel 7:13–14), Jesus *appropriates* this image in the Gospels to describe *His return* (e.g., Matthew 24:30; 26:64), not merely His exaltation.

To argue that all “cloud-coming” language in the New Testament refers to A.D. 70 or spiritual vindication is to nullify the plain and persistent witness of the apostles. And to ridicule the hope of a literal return as a “mythological monstrosity” is, at best, theological arrogance. At worst, it is a step toward heresy.

Hold the Line

The apostolic witness is clear: Jesus Christ will return visibly, bodily, and in glory. This is the blessed hope (Titus 2:13), the centerpiece of Christian eschatology, and a core affirmation of the faith once delivered to the saints.

The growing trend of interpreting the return of Christ as an invisible, first-century judgment event is not simply an alternative theological viewpoint—it skates on the razor’s edge of denying elements of historical, creedal Christianity. It also opens the door to full preterism, a view that dismantles the Gospel hope of resurrection, final judgment, and the renewal of all things.

To follow partial preterism to its logical end is to cross a boundary into Gnosticism. The prophets, the apostles, and the faithful Church throughout history have always affirmed and looked forward to a literal, future, glorious return of the Son of Man and the resurrection of the dead.