

The Second Coming of Christ

PAROUSIA

Matthew 22-25 Supplement

I. Definition

The Greek word *parousia*, employed in Matthew 24:3,27,37, 39 for the "coming" of Christ at the end of the world, possibly referred to also in vs.29-31, and certainly so in 24:35 through 25:46, derives from *pareimi*, *par* + *eimi*, to be beside, present, to become, or to have come; hence, coming, arrival, of advent.

II. HISTORY.

Previous to the New Testament period *parousia* came to be used primarily in a technical sense of the visit of a ruler or high official. In the papyri it is said to be common for the visit of an emperor, and the magnificence of some such occasions are described. The word also came to have sacral uses before the New Testament times. And Molten and Million's Vocabulary of Greek New Testament Illustrated from the Papyri and Other Non-Literary Sources gives an example from A.D. 4 of "swearing in the presence (*parousia*) of the bishops" (not Christian bishops, however, for there were none then).

III. New Testament Examples.

1. Translated "presence"(twice).

a. 2 Corinthians 10:10 -- Paul's "bodily presence."

b. Philippians 2:12 -- "Paul's presence" versus "absence."

2. Translated "coming" 22 times; Christ's in all , but five).

a. Matthew 24:3,27,37,29 (Christ's).

b. 1 Corinthians 15:23 (Christ's); 16:17 (Stephanus' et al.)

c. 2 Corinthians 7:6,7 (Titus').

- d. Philippians 1:26 (Paul's).
- e. 1 Thessalonians 2:19; 3:13; 4:15; 5:23 (Christ's).
- f. 1 Thessalonians 2:1,8 (Christ's), 9 (of man of sin).
- g. James 5:7,8 (Christ's).
- h. 2 Peter 1:16; 3:4 (Christ's), 12 (of the day of God).
- i.. 1 John 2:28 (Christ's).

IV. OBSERVATIONS

1. All the foregoing pertain to persons or events of special importance.
2. Paul, Titus, and Stephanus were all persons of distinction in the New Testament church, as well as their presence (*parousia*) of the occasions referred to above being the result of having come, or, in the case of Philippians 1:26, the result of an anticipated visit.
3. In 2 Peter 1:16, "the coming [*parousia*] of our Lord Jesus Christ" could have reference to his first coming, whereas in 3:4 it has to refer to his coming at the end of the world, also called in 4:12 "the coming [*parousia*] of the day of God."
4. 4, In 2 Thessalonians 2:9, the "coming" (*parousia*) is that of "the man of sin," "the son of perdition," "the lawless one," -- according to "the working of Satan," associated with and resulting in "the falling away" or, literally, "the apostasy" (*he apostasia*) -- evidently an unrivaled one, previously foretold by Paul and would last until brought "to nought by the manifestation of his [Christ's] coming [*parousia*]," which will be in connection with "our gathering together unto him" (v.1) -- evidently referred to previously in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18. (See all of 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12.)
5. 5. In the text of 2 Thessalonians 2:8 we have the expression, "manifestation [*epiphaneia*, 'brightness' in King James Version] of his coming [*parousia*]." That word, *epiphaneia*, occurs six times in the New Testament -- in 1

Timothy 6:14; 2 Timothy 1:10; 4:1,8; Titus 2:13, besides the one already mentioned in 2 Thessalonians 2:8 -- all of them referring to the *epiphaneia* of Christ, and all the other five translated "appearing." In 2 Timothy 1:10 it has reference to his first literal coming, when the Word was made flesh (John 1:1-2, 14) in the other passages it has reference to his second literal coming at the end of the world, when Jesus said his coming would be as when lightning from the east is "seen" (American Standard Version, but "shineth" in the King James Version) "unto the west" (Matthew 24:27).

The word for "seen" (or "shineth") in the latter passage is a form of the verb *phaino*, which in the active voice signifies to shine; in the passive voice, to be brought forth into light, to become evident, to appear. *Epiphaino* is a strengthened form (*epi* signifying upon) and means in the active voice to give light; and in the passive voice, to appear, become visible. It is the noun form of the latter, namely, *epiphaneia*, that is employed in the first six passages cited in the foregoing paragraph, and means literally a shining forth. It was used of the appearance of a god to men, and of an enemy to an army in the field, etc. And in the New Testament it is employed with reference to the appearing of Christ, as already mentioned.

V. PAROUSIA AND ERCHOMAI FOR "COMING "OF CHRIST.

Beside the Greek term, *parousia*, occurring only 24 time in the New Testament and used mostly as a technical term for the personal coming of Christ at the end of the world, a more general word for "coming," namely, *erchomai* (occurring 600 times in the New Testament), is also used of Christ coming, whereas *parousia* is a noun, and is expressive particularly of the result of the completed action -- namely, coming, arrival or presence.

Erchomai, when used of the coming of Christ, may or may not refer to his *parousia*, depending of context. For example, as indicated by context, *erchomai* is used in Matthew 16: 27 and

25:31 of his *parousia*; yet in 16:28 it is used figuratively as of his "coming" in his kingdom on Pentecost after his death and resurrection, at the time his kingdom "comes" Mark 9:1). It is also used in Matthew 24:30,44. In v.44 it obviously refers to the *parousia*.

But its use in v.30 is controverted -- some holding that it refers to the *parousia*, others that it does not. This is not because of its context otherwise, but primarily because of the use of the word "immediately" and the fact that *parousia* did not occur within the lifetime of Christ's own generation -- and, of course, has not yet.

Note the following contextual examples:

1. When Jesus ascended into heaven, he was received by a cloud, and two men (presumably angels) informed his apostles that "this Jesus, who was received up from you into heaven, shall so come again in like manner as ye behold him going into heaven" (Acts 1:9-11). This would mean he would come back from heaven bodily, visibly, and with a cloud or clouds, and presumably refers to his *parousia*, but is expressed by the Greek word *eleusetai*, a form of *erchomai*.
2. In Revelation 1:7, we read: "Behold, he cometh with the clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they that pierced him; and all the tribes of the earth shall mourn over him." Again, the word for coming is from a form of *erchomai*, namely *erchetai*. And presumably it refers to the same coming as Acts 1:9-11. Those that "pierced" him will be able to see him, because when he comes there will be the resurrection of the just and the unjust. That "coming" is not specifically depicted in Revelation, but the vanishing of heaven and earth and the general resurrection and judgment taking place in connection with it are depicted in 20:11-15, with a new heaven and new earth replacing the old ones and inhabited by the righteous (21:1 - 22:5) -- as in 2 Peter 3:1-13, which does refer to the time of the *parousia* of Christ (v.4) and of the day of God (v.12).

3. In Matthew 24:29-30, "the Son of man coming [a form of *erchomai*] on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory" will be in connection with disturbances in the heavens and the mourning of the tribes of earth -- blending the descriptions in Matthew 16:27; 25:31-46; Acts 1⁹-11; 2 Peter 3:1-13; Revelation 1⁷; 20:11-15 -- all of which seemingly pertain to the *parousia* of Christ at the end of the world.

This pretty well points up the fact that, were it not for the word "immediately" and subsequent history, we would hardly think of having an exegetical problem. But Matthew 24:29-31 does have the word "immediately," and we are therefore challenged to investigate whether its use poses an insuperable difficulty to acceptance of what otherwise would seem the most likely meaning, or whether it and similar expressions may be and sometimes are used in a relative and somewhat flexible sense that does not preclude some delay. Such investigation needs to be done, not to try to substantiate a previous assumption or to refute the assumption of another, but to arrive at a most likely solution if possible -- and if not possible, to know why we have to leave the matter open-ended, as is necessary in some instances.

(This has already been addressed in our paper entitled "Matthew 24:25: Destruction of Jerusalem and *Parousia* of Christ." And the intent of this paper is not to repeat all that is said in that one, but to supplement it. Yet some repetition can hardly be avoided, if there is to be elaboration on any of the points already discussed in a more concise fashion. So the reader's indulgence is especially asked as we now come to the real crux of the problem.)

VI. PROBLEM WITH IMMEDIATELY IF "COMING" (*ERCHOMAI*) OF MATTHEW 24:29-31 IS THE *PAROUSIA* OF CHRIST INSTEAD OF A FIGURATIVE EARLIER COMING.

Actually, we have something of the same problem in the following passage:

1. Luke 18:1-8, our Lord's parable of the Unjust Judge, spoken to his listeners "to the end that they ought to pray, and not to faint," in which he used the words "speedily" (*en tachei*) and "longsuffering" (*makrothumei*) -- which at first thought seem to be contradictory terms -- and seem to require some accommodation and flexibility not to be contradictory in reality.

As indicated in the previous paper, *tachos*, of which *tachei* is a form, is rendered "shortly" four times and "Speedily" twice. "Shortly" (*tachos*, or *en tachei*) corresponds pretty well with "immediately" (*eutheos*) in Matthew 24:29. And *eutheos* is itself translated "shortly," in 3 John 14. Usually we think of what is promised "shortly" or "quickly," or "speedily," or "immediately," as something promised without delay. And that is certainly true in some sense. But what might be considered delay by some persons might not be by others. And what would be considered delay in some instances might not be in others, depending on circumstances -- whether a matter of seconds, minutes, hours, days, years, or longer, consistent with whatever circumstances and considerations may be involved. And likely there are no persons who do not themselves use them with more or less flexibility, depending on context in which employed. So maybe it should not surprise us if in the scriptures there is likewise flexibility or usage, which there seems to be.

2. Revelation 1:1; 22:6-7, speaking of "the things which must shortly (*en tachei*) come to pass" -- some of which seemingly have not come to pass yet (particularly the coming of Christ in 1:7 and attendant events in 20:11-22:7). In Revelation, various comings of Christ are mentioned that could hardly be his *parousia* (as in 2:5; 2:16; 3:3; 3:11 ; 3:20, with the possible exception of 3:11 -- because of either being conditional or shown by text or context to be figurative). But 1:7 is neither represented as conditional, nor does it seem likely to be figurative.

Its description seems to be that of both Acts 1:9-11 and Matthew 24:29-31. And it seems to be referred to in Revelation 22:7, "Behold, I come quickly"; also in 22:12, "And behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to render to each man

according as his work is" – which seems to be associated with the vanished heaven and earth with a new heaven and a new earth (20:11 - 21:1), which occur in connection with the *parousia* of Christ – none of which have yet occurred.

3. 2 Peter 3:1-13. In which the inspired apostle, in old age (1:12-14), foretold with great urgency (v.3) the coming of the scoffers "in the last days" (likely meaning off and on during the Christian age or last dispensation of time, as possibly some were already doing), saying, "Where is the promise of his coming [*parousia*]?" For, from the day that the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation" (v.4).

Peter explained in v.9 that, "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering [same word as used in Luke 18:7 in connection with coming "speedily" in v.8] to youward, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." Then he added in v.10 this certainty: "But the day of the Lord will come as a thief; in which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall be dissolved with fervent heat, and the earth and the works that are therein shall be burned up" – after having prefaced both verses with v.8, as follows; "But forget not this one thing, beloved, that one day with the Lord is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day."

Surely Peter was not saying that the Lord has no sense if time, for the Lord's innumerable references to it make it evident that he has. But his memory remains as vivid and his promises as certain to be fulfilled after a thousand years as if only a day had elapsed. Also, from the perspective of an Eternal Being a thousand years (or any other length of time on earth) is not long – not as long by far as a day would be in comparison with limited life of man on earth.

And why should there have been any interval of time between (a) the destruction of Jerusalem on one hand and (b) the *parousia* of Christ and the day of God on the other? Peter says it was because the Lord is "longsuffering ... not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (v.9) – and again, "account

that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation" (v.15) – that is, for more people evidently. And in one of his earlier sermons, Peter had admonished, saying, "Repent ye, therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out ... and that he [God] may send the Christ who has appointed for you, even Jesus: whom the heaven must receive until times of restoration of all things, whereof God spake by the mouth of his holy prophets that have been from old" (Acts 3:19-21). This sounds as if the time element may depend in some measure upon the accomplishment element.

Also, in 2 Peter 2, after declaring the certainty of the *parousia*, the apostle admonished as follows: "Seeing that these things are all to be dissolved, what manner of person ought ye to be in all holy living and godliness, looking for and earnestly desiring the day of God, by reason of which the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? But, according to his promise, we look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness" (vs.11-13, the text of the American Standard Version). But its margin says, "Or, hastening," instead of "earnestly desiring." And in the part we have underscored above [the expression – looking for and earnestly desiring] the Greek literally reads "awaiting and hastening" the day. This again sounds as if the time element depends in part on the accomplishment element.

VII. CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS.

1. The Writer's Own:

a. If the foregoing observations represent a correct understanding of Acts 3:19-21 and 2 Peter 2:11-13, there was divine necessity of using human language with some degree of accommodation, to let men know the *parousia* would in some sense be soon after the destruction of Jerusalem (or, at least after the tribulation associated with it and following it), to encourage preparedness for it on the part of all after that time, yet without stating precisely how soon afterward for measured by whose standards. Or, if delayed beyond expectation of some, not stating how long – which Christ himself did not know when on earth (and not divinely intended that man

should know). So it was seen by Christ as "immediately after" in the sense of being the only event the disciples asked about that would remain unfulfilled after Jerusalem's destruction, regardless of the precise length of interval between (as discussed on pages 13 and 14 of the paper of which this is a supplement).

b. Probably 20 years after what Jesus had foretold, or about A.D. 50, the apostle Paul, in order to prevent new converts from being confused and misled by false reports that the *parousia* was "just at hand" (literally, "is come," or had already come), wrote to settle their minds, and remind them that while with them he had foretold that a great apostasy would occur before the *parousia* of Christ and be brought to nought by it (2 Thessalonians 2:1-12)—which apostasy had not yet come, and he gave no indication as to how long after it had come that the *parousia* of Christ would occur. In fact, he himself did not know, for he had written them only a few months previously, saying: "But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that ought be written unto you. For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night." (1 Thessalonians 5:1-2.)

c. And much later it would seem, between A.D. 65 and 68, the apostle Peter made the explanation above discussed (pages 5 and 6),. Also, likely after Peter's writing by nearly 20 years, in the A.D. 90's, when the Book of Revelation was written, the *parousia* still had not occurred, but seemingly was predicted along with its attendant events of (1) resurrection and final judgment, (2) vanishing of the present earth and its surrounding heavens, and (3) their replacement with new heavens and a new earth – which have not yet taken place – but may occur at any time so far as we can know for certain, yet without our being able to predict when – a thing that Christ himself did not know when on earth, and that has not been revealed to man since with any degree of specificity.

d. Lastly, it must not be forgotten, that, as Luke 21:23-24 describes it, Jesus said in connection with Jerusalem's destruction, "there shall be great distress upon the land [of Judea], and wrath upon this people [the Jews]. And they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led captive into all the nations: and Jerusalem shall be

trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles shall be fulfilled." Hence, if the time Jerusalem is trodden down of the Gentiles should be included in "those days" of Matthew 24:29, we still have no way of knowing precisely how long that will be. Likewise, if the language of Jesus in regard to Jerusalem, that "Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord" (Matthew 23:39), means his *parousia* will not occur until its inhabitants have become favorable toward him, we still do not know when it will occur – only that it will.

So, though we have possible, if not probable, solutions to "immediately after," there are enough "if's" to make dogmatism unwise. And there is a probability that this is divinely intentional – to avoid contributing to human smugness or carelessness, but promote ever-watchful waiting and preparedness.

2. Excerpts from The Expositor's Greek Testament

a. "With that aim in mind [not primarily to instruct, but to comfort anxious spirits] it [the statement of Matthew 24:29-31 and its use of 'immediately after'] naturally places the *Parousia* within the reach of those it is designed to comfort [for it will indeed be effectual to all saints, whether living or dead, as explained in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18]. After the ruin of Israel there is no history [under consideration]; only wind-up. Jerusalem destroyed, the curtain falls [so far as the matters then under consideration were concerned]. [However], Christ's didactic words [that is, words to instruct] suggest another aspect, a delayed *Parousia*."

(The foregoing is given [with explanatory interpolations] because of its general agreement with the writer's conviction that Jesus' explicit answers were *limited* to the events of his disciples' questions in 24:3. Consequently, in his brief preview of the *parousia* in 24:29-31, to place it beyond the time of tribulation associated with and growing out of Jerusalem's destruction and yet hold it in view for explanation more at length later as in 24:35 - 25:46, after the former had been predicted (as at least beginning) within the lifetime of that generation (24:32-34), there was no

history between that tribulation and Christ's *parousia* to be discussed. And without such as part of the perspective he could appropriately speak of the latter as "immediately after" the former, though he did not know how soon afterward. Yet, when speaking more in detail of the *parousia*, he left intimations of the possibility and even the probability of enough delay to invite carelessness and pose a danger of not being, or not remaining, prepared for it, if not counteracted by warnings against certainty.)

b. "Of that day and hour [the passing of heaven and earth, v.36 and therefore the *Parousia*] ... no one knows ... is an intimation that all statements as to the time of the *parousia* must be taken in a qualified sense as referring to the subject on which certain knowledge is not obtainable or even desirable. It looks like Jesus correcting Himself, or using two ways of speaking, one for comfort (it will be soon), and one for caution (it may not be so soon as even I think or you expect). His whole manner of speaking concerning the second advent seems to have two faces; providing on the one hand for the possibility of the Christian era, and on the other hand an accelerated *Parousia*."

(The writer would not say Jesus was correcting himself, but that he did use two ways of speaking, depending on his purpose, without actually being contradictory – paradoxical, yes; but contradictory, no – just as in Matthew 10:37 and Luke 14:26 – and in other examples that could be multiplied).

The forgoing represents the writer's considered viewpoint as this date of his studies of one of the most controversial sections of scripture, but he does not set it forth as infallible. And, while happy to share his views and rationale for them for whatever they may be worth, he does so without attempting to impose them on others. Cecil N. Wright