

THE “*PAROUSIA*” AND THE “*EPIPHANY*”

(Their Meanings and Their Usage)

The “*Parousia*” – Its Meaning

(*Parousia*) – This Greek word is found 24 times in the Greek New Testament, and in the King James Version, it is translated “*coming*” 22 times. The other two times, it is translated “*presence*.”

Since most Greek Lexicons leave much to be desired beyond these limited meanings, the translators in the main have failed to capture the full force of what God actually said. Obviously, we trust this inquiry will correct the oversight.

Adolph Deissman in his “Light from the Ancient East” cites many occurrences, prefacing them by saying. “From the Ptolemaic period down to the Second Century A.D. (about 500 years) we are able to trace the word in the East as a technical expression for the arrival or visit of the King or Emperor.” The examples cited by Deissman are indicative of an official visit rather than of a mere arrival or coming. Thus on many occasions, “*Parousia*” coins were struck in commemoration of the ruler’s “personal presence.”

Moulton and Milligan (Vocabulary of the Greek New Testament) quote from the Papyrus, “The repair of what has been swept away by the river requires my ‘*Parousia*’ (personal presence).” As you can see, the owner would need to be there because of who he was and what he would direct to be done.

This is to say, that one may come or even be present, but if it does not have to do with who he is and what he is to do, then it is not a “*Parousia*.” In other words, the “*Parousia*” means a personal *presence* when one is present because of *WHO* he is and *WHAT* he does. Suffice it to say, the Greek word for “coming” is “*erchomai*.”

The “*Parousia*” –Its Usage

All great and complex truths need to be lived with for a long time, so the recipient thereof may be well established.

That the “Rapture” (a translation of the saints) which turns upon the “*Parousia*” translated “coming” (I Thess. 4:15-18) is just such a truth, no serious student of God’s Word would deny. Hence, the reader and the writer both alike should never jump to any hasty conclusions, even though they be ever so popular. In other words, consensus theology, like consensus medicine and the like, limits one’s outlook, and in most cases, closes the door to any added light.

Thus, at the outset, the full-orbed meaning concerning the “*Parousia*” (a personal presence of one because of **who** he is and **what** he has to do) must not be limited to the consensus translation of “coming,” even though some might have it otherwise.

Lest our inquiry become overburdensome with so much detail, may we just direct your attention to the different viewpoints concerning the “Rapture” question. They are that the “Rapture” (with Christ’s Personal Presence):

1. **Precedes** the tribulation.
2. Is in the **middle** of the tribulation.
3. Is at the **conclusion** of the tribulation.

At a glance, all who are familiar with this subject matter will recognize at once the majority opinion; namely, that the “Rapture” precedes the tribulation. In the past, your writer hardly ever entertained any other outlook. At this writing, he is not quite so dogmatic. It follows then that a re-examination of these three positions is in order.

When we realize that the overwhelming majority of sound Pre-Millennial believers embrace the pre-tribulation position, we just naturally expect that the Scripture would be most favorable in support. Strange as it may seem, the opposite is the case.

Obviously, we are at the point of no return, and our Lord’s first usage of the “*Parousia*” sets the tone of inquiry. In like manner, the Holy Spirit must be the Umpire, for after all it is He and He alone who makes the things of Christ come alive.

THE FIRST USAGE: “ *what shall be the sign of Thy ‘Parousia’?*” translated “coming” (Matt. 24:3).

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The Old Testament is full of prophetic references concerning the Personal Presence of Messiah in His millennial reign. Perhaps the second Psalm, along with Isaiah 11:1-5, expresses the character of His role better than any. In any case, His Personal Presence to rule because of *Who* he is and *What* He does is presented forthrightly.

Please bear in mind that the question of Matt. 24:3 concerning the **sign** of the “*Parousia*” was most pertinent, in view of these hopes from Old Testament prophecy. Not only were these hopes valid, but the **sign** they asked for is most pointed, and we quote: “*Immediately after the tribulation – then shall appear the sign –*” (Matt. 24:29-30). The description of the sign, likewise, leaves nothing for speculation, for it is as the “*lightning*” (verse 27). Needless to say, this is no **secret** Rapture. The word “*Parousia*” occurs also in verses 37 and 39, but still within the time period of verses 29 and 30.

In this **context** the conclusion is patent, for without a doubt, the scriptural evidence in this case favors the **conclusion** of the tribulation.

At this point, we turn our attention to the number two position, “*the middle of the tribulation*” (Matt. 24:15; Dan. 9:27; Dan. 12:11).

Some years back, it was my privilege to dine with Dr. Norman Harrison, a godly man, now at home with the Lord. This man was perhaps the foremost theologian of his time to hold the “middle position.” At any rate, you the reader, by means of this writing can now share with me in that fellowship.

Please observe the “*Parousia*” of I Thess. 4:15 coincides with the resurrection of verse 16 and the Rapture of verse 17, and likewise the “*Mystery*” of I Cor. 15:51 has reference to the resurrection **at the last trump** (verse 52). In other words, the Parousia, the Resurrection, and the Rapture are all tied together.

To keep it simple, Dr. Harrison believed that the sounding of the 7th and the last trump in the middle of the tribulation, when God’s Mystery should be finished (Rev. 11:6, 7), was tantamount to the “*Parousia*” of I Thess. 4 and I Cor. 15. Other evidence which he believed would support his position had to do with the “*falling away*” and the revelation of the Man of Sin (II Thess. 2:3). No question about it, it all seems logical in this *context*.

Having observed the scriptural ground for positions 3 and 2, in that reverse order, it naturally follows that we are at the point of addressing ourselves to the Number 1 position: “*that the Rapture precedes the tribulation.*”

“*For this we say unto you by the Word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the ‘Coming’ (Parousia) of the Lord, shall not prevent (precede) them which are asleep. For the Lord shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first; then we which are alive and remain, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air, and so shall we ever be with the Lord.*” (I Thess. 4:15-17)

That there is to be a meeting in the air, a translation of the saints (the Rapture) along with the resurrection of the dead at the personal presence of the Lord, is not in question. The questions, which do remain, however, are threefold. The *first* has to do with **time** – the *second* concerns whether or not the Rapture is **secret** – and the *third* has to do with the **number**.

The things which follow demonstrate some things which are alike and some things which appear to differ, in the several positions of the “*Parousia*.”

1. Things which are alike:

- A. The Trumpet (Matt. 24:31; I Thess. 4:16; Rev. 10:7). The Greek text of Rev. 10:7 has the word “trumpet” in it even though the King James translation omits it.
- B. A gathering together of the Saints (Matt. 24:31; I Thess. 4:16, 17).
- C. The Rapture (Matt. 24:39-41; I Thess. 4:15-17) The Greek word in Matthew translated “taken” (Matt. 24:41) is “*Paralambanitai*,” meaning “to receive,” such as in Matt. 1:20. Certainly there is no thought of judgment, but rather it is taken to one’s side, in peace and for blessing.

2. Things which differ.

- A. Deliverance from the wrath (I Thess. 5:9), whereas Matt. 24:29-31 follows after the tribulation.
- B. That the “*Parousia*” (Matt. 24) is no secret happening, whereas it may be in I Thess. 4.

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C. The sign of Matt. 24:27, 29, 30 is as lightning and after the tribulation, whereas the sign of I Thess. 5:3 speaks of “*Peace and Safety*” prior to the coming wrath, etc. Obviously, the things which differ have to do with the time element, even though the happenings are similar.

Since the “*Parousia*,” His Personal Presence, is present throughout the whole of the millennial era, it naturally follows that the “*Parousia*,” which makes possible the Rapture, is not confined to the limits of any single event.

Hence, the pros and cons of the several viewpoints could be reconciled in a Rapture at all three points of time. To say the least, no one should be dogmatic over this since there seems to be scriptural evidence to substantiate all three positions.

Perhaps our word study of the “*Epiphany*,” which is to follow, may enhance our understanding. In any case, that is the challenge to which we address ourselves at this time.

The “*Epiphany*” – Its Meaning

Epiphany – It is a word which is found six times in the New Testament and only in the Pauline writings. On five of these occasions, it is rendered “appearing,” the other time, “appearance of His coming.”

In our humble opinion, there is much to be desired here since the larger truth to be proffered is completely hidden in these translations. Mr. Thayer in his Greek-English Lexicon stated, “It was used by the Greeks of a glorious manifestation of the gods and *especially* of the advent *to help*.” Moulton and Milligan (Vocabulary of the Greek New Testament) advised “It was used by the Greeks to denote any conspicuous *intervention* on the part of the higher powers.” Bishop Trench (Synonyms of the New Testament) said, “This grand word was constantly employed to set forth the gracious appearances of the higher powers *in aid to men*.”

As you can see, the translators have completely missed the mark; namely, that “*Epiphany*” means, in the Biblical sense, “A Divine intervention to aid the called-out of God.” The actual word for “Appear” is the Greek “*Phano*.”

The “*Epiphany*” – Its Usage

“*Looking for that blessed hope, and (even) the glorious appearing (Epiphany) – [Divine intervention] - of the great God, and (even) our Saviour Jesus Christ.*” (Titus 2:13).

We have taken the liberty of changing the “ands” in this verse to “even” which is perfectly proper because in both instances the “ands” are qualifying words. This is to say that the “*Epiphany*” of our text is the **blessed hope**, just as the great God is our Saviour Jesus Christ.

The assurance of a truth is given upon believing and not before. “*He that cometh to God must believe that He is*” (Heb. 11:6). The man who comes to God believing that He is, will certainly receive the assurance of the fact, but it is not man’s place to presume that he will attempt to come to God, he must first assure himself that He is. Just so, the glorious Blessed Hope (God’s divine intervention on our behalf – the *Epiphany*) is a truth which must be acknowledged before the full assurance of understanding is given. If, however, one regards this truth just as a possibility—a matter for discussion – then the chances are that he will tread an endless circle, ever returning to the same point, never going on into the fullness of blessing.

To make it just as simple as possible, it is your writer’s belief that the “*Epiphany*” of our text (Titus 2:13) is a **new hope** concerning the body of Christ.

In order that the reader may appreciate the distinctiveness of this present hope when compared with the hope of the “*Parousia*,” a few remarks about dispensational changes will be necessary.

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To begin with, the hope of all the letters written **prior** to the historical ending of *The Acts*, was the hope of prophetic fulfillment - namely, “The Parousia” (the coming Personal Presence of Christ). Hence, Paul could say as late as Acts 26:6: “...*I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise of God unto our fathers,*” and again in Acts 26:22, “...*saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say...*” Not only so, but the weight of this theme is ever present throughout the whole of Acts. Meditate upon this statement in the last chapter: “*for the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain*” (Acts 28:20).

In point of time it is just here that the dispensational change took place, and the hopes of Israel were placed in abeyance, that is, after Paul had preached from morning until evening (Acts 28:23). Please observe the verdict of heaven: “*Be is known therefore unto you (the elders of Israel) that the salvation of God is sent [has been authorized] unto the Gentiles [nations], and that they will hear it*” Acts 28:28).

The first epistle written after the Acts period, plus all the other epistles of that prison ministry, confirm this authorized dispensational change, as it is written: “*I, Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles*” (Eph. 3:1). **Never again** in any of the latter epistles does he even mention “The Parousia,” the hope of Israel. Thus, the testimony of silence stands out like a clear day.



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