

# THE PAROUSIA OF JESUS

by William M. Wachtel

The grand theme of Scripture is the return of Jesus Christ to rule as King of kings over the whole earth. All prophecy comes to a focus on this climactic event of human history.

“The creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. . . . We know that the whole creation has been groaning in travail together until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies” (Romans 8:19,22,23 RSV). The bodily redemption—the resurrection and immortalization of God’s children—is inseparably linked to the return of the Lifegiver! (Read 1 Corinthians 15:23; Philippians 3:20,21; Colossians 3:3,4.)

The importance of Christ’s return calls for thorough study of this event as it is presented by the inspired writers of Scripture. No stone should be left unturned by the sincere Bible student as he seeks for accurate understanding of this great subject.

## A KEY WORD

One of the key words in the Greek New Testament in reference to the second advent of Christ is the term *parousia*.

This word is found 24 times in all. Sixteen of these occurrences apply directly to his return: Matt. 24:3,27,37,39; 1 Cor. 15:23; 1 Thess. 2:19; 3:13; 4:15; 5:23; 2 Thess. 2:1,8; Jas. 5:7,8; 2 Pet. 1:16; 3:4; 1 Jn 2:28. Two are concerned with related prophetic events: 2 Thess. 2:9; 2 Pet. 3:12. The remaining six are used in non-prophetic contexts: 1 Cor. 16:17; 2 Cor. 7:6,7; 10:10; Phil. 1:26; 2:12.

To understand this word, the student should give careful attention to each passage in which this occurs, as well as searching out the historical background of the term as far as possible.

## NOT ALWAYS “PRESENCE”

The word *parousia* is a noun formed from the verb *pareimi*, which is literally translated “I am alongside, next to.” Thus, a basic idea is “to be present.” *Parousia* therefore may be translated “presence” in some contexts. But the Greek lexicons notice that “presence” is not an adequate rendering of *parousia* in **all** contexts.

Some writers, not realizing this, have insisted on always rendering this word “presence” and have even developed a “**secret** presence” theory of the Lord’s return. According to this view, Christ will come back to the earth secretly and will remain concealed near or on the earth for an extended period of time before his public manifestation to the earth’s inhabitants. The Watchtower Society is an ardent propagator of this doctrine, claiming that Jesus returned secretly in 1914 and that he has been present in secret ever since.

### ANYTHING BUT SECRET!

The chief obstacle to this view is that a *parousia* is anything but secret! An examination of the non-prophetic texts wherein this word occurs, for example, will reveal that in every case a person's *parousia* was his arriving and being with others in a perfectly normal and unconcealed manner. The *parousia* of Stephanas and others made the Apostle Paul glad, for they brought needed supplies with them. (1 Cor. 16:17,18.)

When Paul arrived in Macedonia, he was beset with troubles and discouragements; but the *parousia*—timely arrival—of Titus brought him comfort and relief (2 Cor. 7:6,7). The Emphatic Diaglott incorrectly translates *parousia* here as “presence,” suggesting that Titus was with the apostle all along. But the immediate context and 2 Corinthians 2:13 show that such was not the case. Titus' *parousia* was a personal **arrival** and **subsequent** presence with Paul.

Only in 2 Corinthians 10:10 and Philippians 2:12 does the English word “presence” closely approximate the Greek word, and is properly so rendered in the King James Version there. But even in these texts there is no thought of a **hidden** presence.

### ANCIENT USAGE

In the prophetic texts referring to the second advent of Christ, an important historical and linguistic factor comes into play. In the Graeco-Roman world of New Testament times, the *parousia* of a king or high official was a festive public occasion calling for speeches, processions, and other first-century equivalents of a ticker-tape parade down Fifth Avenue in New York City! “**Parousia** became the official term for a visit of a person of high rank, especially of kings and emperors visiting a province” (Arndt and Gingrich's *Greek-English Lexicon*; compare Deissmann's *Light from the Ancient East*, pp. 368-73).

Likewise, the *parousia* of Christ the King of kings, as described by Paul in 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17, is an event of momentous public display calling for shouting, trumpet blast, the procession of his servants going out to meet him and conduct him to his eternal inheritance and theirs—the earth--accompanied by “all the holy angels” (Matt. 25:31). Truly, no emperor's glorious *parousia* in all history can compare in glory with the triumphal arrival and enthronement of King Jesus!

### A VISIBLE COMING

Jesus' own words about his *parousia* reveal the public nature of this event. In Matthew 24:27, he compares it to lightning coming out of the east and shining unto the west. Whether “lightning” here is taken to mean a bolt of lightning or the spread of sunlight, the meaning of obvious public manifestation is the same. Indeed, in the context he is warning (v.26) against the teaching that he may be secretly present. As in verses 37-39 (where *parousia* is again incorrectly rendered as “presence” in the Diaglott), Christ's *parousia* is a sudden event which catches people unawares while life is going on as usual, bringing swift judgment upon them. (Cp. Vv.40-51 and 1 Thess. 5:1-4.)

### AN ADDITIONAL FACTOR

An additional factor of importance is that the *parousia* of Jesus is mentioned in connection with the Greek words *epiphaneia* and *phaneroo*. (2 Thess. 2:8; 1 Jn. 2:28.) Both these words have to do with **visible** or **open** manifestation, as any lexicon will show, or as can be seen by tracing their use throughout the New Testament. The basic idea inherent in these words totally contradicts any thought of secrecy or concealment. Jesus is **now** concealed from our eyes, to remain in heaven until the times of restitution or restoration (Acts 3:20,21). But when God sends him back, Jesus descends **from** heaven and this marks his *parousia* (1 Thess. 4:15-16). **Then** he is no longer concealed!

### THEREFORE . . .

The *parousia* of Jesus Christ, therefore, is the publicly and gloriously manifested arrival of the King, including his visible presence on the earth subsequent to his arrival. Any view of the *parousia* that makes it a secret presence not known to the inhabitants of the earth violates the meaning of the term Biblically, historically, and linguistically.

May all who “love his appearing” (2 Tim. 4:8) cherish the hope of his *parousia* as the glorious occasion when Christ will be manifested to every eye as King of kings and Lord of lords! (Revelation 1:7 and 19:11-16.)