

# "I will come again"

When this age-abiding promise was first uttered by Jesus to his Apostles, it did not make sense. To the then "natural minded" men who followed Jesus, they assumed that Jesus' next logical move would be to take charge as a King, throw off the yoke of Roman bondage, exalt the Jews and bless the world. Why should he leave now? There was work to be done here. When Jesus spoke of his death and strangely of his leaving, the idea simply did not fit into their expectations. But as they wended their way along the path to Gethsemane, Jesus had assured them, "if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again." John 14:3

Dazed, these words made little impression on his little band. But forty days later on Mount Olivet, huddled together in amazement with eyes turned heavenward, straining to catch the last glimpse of their ascending Lord, this promise came alive, "I will come again!" Yes, their beloved Master would return. The Apostles wove that glorious theme into the fabric of their ministry and their very lives.

Christ's Second Coming is the most frequently discussed doctrine in the New Testament over one third of its writings deal with this momentous event! As Christians our hearts thrill at the hope of being united with the returned Lord Jesus, our heavenly Bridegroom, seeing him as he is, living with him and experiencing his love forevermore and the reality of reigning with him (Revelation 20:5) in a kingdom that extends to the ends of the earth, bringing "peace like a river and the glory of the Gentiles like a flowing stream." Isaiah 66:12

Long have faithful Christians prayed with the Apostle John, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus." Long centuries passed during which, seemingly, nothing happened. But our day is suddenly charged with an atmosphere of great expectancy.

However, in order to appreciate the reasonableness of the Bible's prophetic teaching on this deeply interesting subject, it is necessary that we have clear views of both the object of our Lord's second coming, and of the manner in which he will be revealed.

## **The Manner and Objective of the Second Advent**

As we have observed, the object of his coming is to reconcile "whosoever will" (Rev. 22:17) of the world to God, by a process of ruling, teaching and disciplining. This is called judging and blessing. The manner of our Lord's coming and appearing is of paramount importance, as the student of prophecy strives to determine what manner of time the Holy Spirit does signify for the establishment of God's Kingdom on earth. The Bible Student must hold clearly in mind the object, while studying the manner, of our Lord's return and both of these, when studying the time. This is needful to offset erroneous views, already preoccupying many minds, based on false ideas of the object and manner of our Lord's coming.

Grasp and hold in mind as firmly as possible the fact that God's plan is one harmonious whole, which is being wrought through Christ. Hold in mind that the work of the second advent stands related to the work of the first as effect to cause: That is, that the great work of Restitution at the second advent follows the work of Redemption accomplished at the first advent as a logical sequence according to God's divine plan.

Therefore, the Lord's return is the dawn of hope for the world, the time for bestowing the blessings secured by the redemption. The Gospel Age has been merely a parenthesis, during which the Bride of Christ is selected, to be associated with her Lord in the great work of restitution, which he comes to accomplish.

## **Signs of His Coming**

Few would question that we are living in an era of human history, which is without precedent. Most Bible-believing Christians feel we are living in the very time the Bible says Christ is to return. There is a surge of interest in prophecy—a revival of interest in the second advent. Many speak of the imminent coming of Christ.

Their expectations are based on our Lord's Great Prophecy recorded in Matthew 24, Mark 13, Luke 17 and 21. Many believe that the nearness of Christ's return is indicated by such signs as the following: Israel restored (Matt 24:32; Jer. 16:13-18); knowledge and travel increased (Dan. 12:4); evils exposed as never before (Luke 12:2; 1 Cor. 4:5); infidelity rampant from university to pulpit (Luke 18:8; 2 Tim. 4:1-4); men seeking pleasure, morality rotting (2 Tim. 3:1-5, 13); strikes, walkouts (James 5:1-4); racial strife, riots (Zeph. 1:7-9); juvenile delinquency (2 Tim. 3:2); wars and war preparations intensified (Joel 3:9-11); men crying fearfully for peace (1 Thess. 5:3; Luke 21:26); trouble everywhere (Matt. 24:21,22).

## **Coming or Presence**

Let us take a closer look at our Master's words and see what these signs really prove. "And as he sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming [Greek, parousia], and of the end of the world?" Matthew 24:3

The Greek word here translated "coming" is parousia. It really means "presence." Therefore, if parousia means "presence," then the fulfillment of the signs given by our Lord in His prophecy would not mean that he is coming soon, but that he is already secretly present—as "a thief in the night." Remember, the Scriptures teach that Christ's initial return would be a thief-like, secret presence before "every eye shall see him." (See 1 Thess. 5:2; 2 Pet. 3:10; Rev. 16:15)

Rotherham's Emphasized Bible, Vine's Dictionary of New Testament Words, Young's Analytical Concordance, and many other standard works in fundamentalist and evangelical bookstores confirm this definition of "presence."

## The Bible Definition

However, we are not confined to dictionary definitions. The Lord has graciously provided His people a Scriptural definition for the Greek word parousia thus leaving us in no doubt as to its true meaning. Parousia occurs in Matthew 24:37 where it is mistranslated "coming." The following chart compares its parallel citation in Luke 17:26 and, in so doing, the Bible provides its own definition for parousia.

Matthew 24:37		Luke 17:26
But as the days	=	As it was in the days
of Noah were,		of Noah,
so shall also the	=	so shall it be
parousia of the		in the days of the
Son of man be.		Son of man.

The phrase "parousia of the Son of man" in Matthew 24:37 means the same as the phrase "in the days of the Son of man" in Luke 17:26. The "days of the Son of man" in Luke 17:26 refers to the time that Christ is present, just as the "days of Noah" refers to the time when Noah was present among his wicked generation. Therefore, parousia in Matthew 24:37 should be translated "presence of the Son of man" instead of "coming of the Son of man."

The Scriptural definition of parousia is further confirmed by the Apostle Paul's use of it. The thought of "presence" is plainly shown by the contrast with "absence" in Philippians 2:12. "Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence [Greek, parousia] only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling."

While no doctrine is mentioned more frequently in the New Testament than Christ's second advent, few doctrines have been as greatly fragmented into such diversified concepts. Much of the beauty of this doctrine has been wrested from the grasp of God's people. All secular Greek dictionaries define parousia, "presence." Most Bible dictionaries likewise define parousia, "presence." Most current fundamentalist and evangelical writings on the second advent usually begin by correctly defining parousia, "presence." Then something strange happens. Somehow the word "coming" replaces "presence." Incorrect theology requires parousia to be translated "coming," but Scriptural harmony requires that it be translated "presence."

## The Main Point

If, as we have seen, parousia means "presence," then all the signs that our Lord gave us in Matthew 24, Mark 13 and Luke chapters 17 and 21 do not indicate his imminent coming—they indicate his secret thief-like presence. We see those signs being fulfilled all around us.

The Scriptures show that the first stage of our Lord's parousia, presence, will be secret. "The day of the Lord will arrive [will be here, Greek, hekō—see Strong's, Young's or Vine's] as a thief." (2 Peter 3:10, Rotherham) A thief enters a house quietly, doing a secret work. Consequently, the first works of our returned Lord are during a secret presence. The world will, at first, be unaware that Christ has returned. "But ye brethren are not in darkness that that day should overtake [implies a period of overlapping] you as a thief." 1 Thess. 5:4

Later, his presence will be made manifest to all. The Scriptures use another Greek word, apokalupsis, to describe this revelation to all. "The Lord Jesus shall be REVEALED [apokalupsis] from heaven in flaming fire taking vengeance." 2 Thess. 1:7-8 It is in reference to this revelation to all, that Scriptures like Revelation 1:7 apply; "He cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him." Christians, who are not overcharged with the cares of this life, will experience the joys of discerning the signs of his secret presence (Luke 21:34-36), before they are "caught up together" with him.

### **When Does the "Parousia" Begin?**

A number of Christian writers are publishing works which propose the date of Christ's return. The fulfillment of the "signs" which our Lord gave us indicate that we should be looking for his secret presence now. Space does not permit a complete discussion of Bible time prophecy nor a harmonization of seemingly conflicting scriptures [such as "every eye shall see him"] regarding the second advent. We encourage you to send for the book *The Time Is At Hand* which contains detailed studies of the time prophecies pointing to our Lord's return.