

Christ's Second Coming

Its Manner and Purpose

“Wherefore if they shall say unto you, Behold, he is in the desert; go not forth: behold, he is in the secret chambers; believe it not. For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.”
—Matthew 24:26,27

VIEWING THE NEWS OF

the day taking place in the world, we are witnesses to scenes of trouble of all kinds. We see the senseless tragedy of the murders which took place recently in Newtown, Connecticut, where the lives of so many innocent young children, and those who taught them, were lost. We observe our leaders in Washington—unable to come up with truly meaningful legis-

lation to deal with the country's fiscal problems related to taxes, spending, and debt. We see ongoing turmoil in the Middle East, wondering where the next flare-up or all-out war will be. We look at many countries in Europe, also dealing with fiscal

crises, and ask how such conditions can continue much longer without the uprising of the people in general. These, and a multitude of other world, national, and local problems of every kind, assail mankind each day.

It is little wonder that many individuals and groups throughout the world who profess to be followers of Christ are renewing the proclamation of their belief that the Second Coming of Christ is very near. They say that he may arrive any day, and when he does, he will bring the world to an end, and take his own people back to heaven with him. Others, they say, will be left in a hopeless condition, to suffer the consequences of not being “saved” by belief in Jesus. The conclusions of these concerning the nearness of Christ’s coming are based upon their view of the “signs of the times.” They believe that worsening world conditions denote that the Second Advent cannot be very far away.

We agree that world events today are prophetically very significant, and that there are many “signs of the times” that are scripturally based and, therefore, worthy of our consideration. As we do this, however, it is needful to consider what the Bible says concerning both the manner and the purpose of Christ’s Second Coming. We must separate the truths of the Bible from the traditions and teachings of men, many of which have been handed down from generation to generation, and are out of harmony with the testimony of the Scriptures.

To begin to understand the reason for Jesus’ Second Coming, we must know the purpose of his First Advent. At Jesus’ First Advent he came to earth as a human, born of an earthly mother, and

then grew to manhood's estate and performed his ministry, which was consummated by his death on Calvary's cross. The outcome of Jesus' First Advent was not a mistake, or miscalculation, on God's part. Indeed, the divine purpose of the First Advent called for Jesus' death as a human being. He gave his flesh "for the life of the world." (John 6:51) This constituted a ransom, or a corresponding price, for Adam—a perfect human life given as the purchase price for the perfect life forfeited when Adam sinned in Eden. (I Tim. 2:3-6; I Cor. 15:21,22) Jesus was faithful to his First Advent mission, accomplishing God's purpose as the "Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." (John 1:29) Upon Jesus' completion of his First Advent work, the next steps could commence in the unfolding of God's plan for man's salvation.

The first of these steps was the resurrection of Jesus from the dead by the power of his Heavenly Father. Jesus was not raised from death as a human, but as a divine spirit being, invisible to human eyes. (Rom. 8:34; Eph. 1:20-23; Heb. 1:3,4; I Pet. 3:18) True, he showed himself to his disciples a few times in an assumed body of flesh. To them, as humans, this was the best method of proving that he had been raised from the dead. On each appearance he assumed a different body. Once, he appeared as a gardener, and at other times a stranger—each time as a person unfamiliar to them but identifiable through his words or mannerisms. Once, to satisfy the needs of Thomas, Jesus appeared in a body displaying wounds in his hands and feet. John referred to these appearances as "signs."—John 20:30

Previous to his crucifixion, Jesus said to his disciples, “Yet a little while, and the world seeth me no more; but ye see me: because I live, ye shall live also.” (John 14:19) The Bible promises that the true followers of Jesus will, in the resurrection, be made “like him,” and “shall see him as he is,” not as he was while here on earth. (I John 3:1-3) They will be able to see Jesus as he is since his resurrection because they will be like him. As humans this would be impossible, and that is why the world of mankind will not see Jesus during the period of his Second Presence. It is a visit, not of a man, but of a divine being, who is as invisible to human eyes as the great Creator of the universe is invisible.

It is important, therefore, in considering the prophecies of the Bible relative to the Second Advent of Christ to realize that they pertain not to the coming of a human being. Hence, we should not look for fulfillments which would disclose the appearance of a man, but instead the presence of a spirit being. Our opening text reminds us of this. If someone should report that Jesus was in the desert, or in secret chambers, we are not to believe it. We would not find him as we might find a human in such places, because he is no longer human.

Then Jesus explained the manner of his coming, and how it would become manifested. He speaks of a “bright shining”—translated “lightning”—which would shine from the east to the west. Failing to understand the manner and purpose of Christ’s return, some have concluded that the use of the word lightning, as found in the *King James Version* of this text, indicates the suddenness with which he would appear to a startled world. The correct

thought, however, is of enlightenment rather than suddenness—an enlightenment that is to eventually encompass the whole world—from the east even unto the west. “His lightnings enlightened the world: the earth saw, and trembled,” wrote the psalmist.—Ps. 97:4

COMING—*PAROUSIA*—PRESENCE

The Greek word *parousia* in our text, which is translated “coming” in the statement, “so shall also the coming of the Son of man be,” literally means “presence.” Again we see that Jesus is describing the effect of his presence, rather than the suddenness of his arrival. Through a misunderstanding of the manner of Christ’s return, theologians have erroneously attached the thought of “coming” to the word *parousia*. Because of this, some Greek dictionaries even give “coming” as a secondary meaning. However, careful Bible students will not be misguided by false meanings which have been attached to words by those who did not understand the truth on this subject.

More important than the opinions of Greek scholars is the inspired use of this word *parousia* in the Bible. In Philippians 2:12, we have an example. Here, the Apostle Paul employs *parousia* to contrast his “presence” with the Philippian brethren with his “absence” from them. The only possible translation of *parousia* in this text is “presence,” and thus here in the *King James Version* we are given the proper rendering of the word.

The first use of the word *parousia* is in Matthew 24:3. The disciples asked Jesus what would be the sign of his *parousia*. It is in response to this that

Jesus gave his detailed prophecy of events that would occur at the end of the age, a period which he described as “the days of the Son of man.” (Luke 17:26) Because *parousia* is mistranslated “coming” in this text (Matt. 24:3), many students of prophecy have been misled, as we have noted, to believe that the various signs which Jesus mentioned would constitute proof that he would come soon. When we realize, however, that *parousia* means presence, we see that the fulfillment of the signs indicates the fact that Christ has already returned and is invisibly “present,” not that he will soon “come.”

In Matthew 24:37, Jesus compares the days of Noah with the days of his Second Presence, or *parousia*. To use the word “coming” in this text, as many translators do, destroys the comparison which the Lord makes. He is not comparing the coming of Noah with his Second Coming, but “the days of Noah” with the days of his own *parousia*, or presence. Luke’s account further establishes this fact. It reads, “As it was in the days of Noe, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man.” (Luke 17:26) There can be no question here as to what is meant. By comparing this statement with Matthew’s account, we find clear evidence that the *parousia* of the “Son of man” does not refer to the moment of his arrival, but covers the entire period of his presence.

EPIPHANEIA—MANIFESTATION

Another Greek word used in the New Testament with respect to Christ’s Second Advent is *epiphaneia*. *Strong’s Greek Dictionary* gives the meaning of this word as “manifestation.” It also has associated with it the thought of brightness, which indicates a

manifestation by means of bright shining. This Greek word is not used in the prophecies of Christ's return and Second Presence to denote a special time period during his presence.

In II Thessalonians 2:8, Paul uses both *parousia* and *epiphaneia*. In this inspired use of the two words in the one text is revealed the manner in which they are related to each other in the prophecies. The apostle speaks of the *epiphaneia* of Christ's *parousia*. In English, this would mean the brightness, or bright shining, of Christ's Second Presence. Thus we see that *parousia* denotes the fact of Christ's presence, while the word *epiphaneia* simply indicates the manner in which his presence is revealed—its brightness. The only manner in which it indirectly indicates time is in the fact that the manifestation—*epiphaneia*—of Christ's presence is progressive. Simply stated, first his presence is manifested to believers who are diligently watching for evidences of his return, and later to the world of mankind in general.

Christ's Second Presence, we believe, became a reality well over a century ago. This is because history has given evidence to the fulfillment of the signs given by Jesus himself as he answered the disciples' question: "What shall be the sign of thy *parousia*?" Consequently, shortly after Christ's Second Presence began, a bright shining forth of scriptural truth began to be unveiled, illuminating the prophecies of the Bible, and manifesting the fact of his *parousia* to his faithful watchers. This *epiphaneia*, or brightness of Christ's presence, has continued and increased since then, manifesting to thousands that he has returned.

As yet, however, mankind in general is unaware of Christ's return and presence, although it is true that society has been affected by the bright shining. The "lightning" referred to in our opening text, in its east to west shining, has affected the human family to such a degree that there is increasing confusion among men, and the institutions of men, as to what the future holds. It has led, on the one hand, to the desire for greater liberty and more of the good things of life, but, on the other hand, to trouble—indeed, "a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation."—Dan. 12:1

The bright shining of Christ's Second Presence is, to begin with, causing the tribes of the earth to mourn—one of the signs which Jesus said would mark his presence. (Matt. 24:30) While the people see the initial result, and experience the turmoil precipitated by the *epiphaneia* [bright shining] of the *parousia* [presence], they are as yet unaware of the real cause of earth's troubles. Certainly they do not know that this chain of events initiated by the beginning of the brightness of the Master's presence will continue until Satan's empire is completely overturned, and the kingdom of Christ is established, causing the "knowledge of the LORD" to fill the earth "as the waters cover the sea."—Isa. 11:9

The text in II Thessalonians 2:8 adds another dimension: "Then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness [*epiphaneia*] of his coming [*parousia*]." "That Wicked" referred to in the prophecy is the great system of Antichrist described by Paul earlier in the chapter, as "that man of sin." (vs. 3) Paul said that the spirit

of this “wicked” system was beginning to manifest itself even in his day, and that soon there would be a great falling away from “the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.”—Jude 3

Briefly this “faith” was that Christ would return to establish his kingdom on the earth, and that those who faithfully followed in his footsteps of self-sacrifice would then be raised from the dead in the first resurrection and would live and reign with him. (Rev. 20:6) Some, however, even in Paul’s day, seemingly wanted to reign with Christ in this life. (I Cor. 4:8) Following the death of the apostles, this ambitious spirit increased until finally, under the influence of Satan, the organized Christian church succumbed to it, and joined hands with the civil powers to set up what they called Christendom, or Christ’s kingdom.

This false “kingdom of Christ,” which for many centuries claimed much power and authority, did not go unnoticed by God. In due time, the fulfillment of Paul’s words in II Thessalonians 2:8 began to take shape. Note that the prophecy states that first it would be consumed by the Spirit of the Lord’s mouth. This is a reference to the Word of God. We believe that this consuming work began in earnest during the first half of the nineteenth century. It was then that the Bible, having for centuries been almost completely buried in dead languages, began to be published and distributed freely throughout the earth, and in the vernacular languages that the people could read and study. Its wide circulation and more general use during this period furnished a climate conducive to renewed scriptural investigation, and paved the way for the tremendous outpouring

of truth—a bright shining—which would come soon after Christ’s return—during the period of his Second Presence. Paul says that this outpouring of truth from God’s Word would “consume” the errors of the old system.

This was only the beginning. The prophecy further states that this “Wicked” would be destroyed by the brightness [*epiphaneia*] of the Master’s presence, or *parousia*. It has been since the beginning of his *parousia* that the principle of “the divine right of kings,” as a vital factor in world affairs, has been just about completely destroyed. This has come about through the enlightenment of the people, and their resulting dissatisfaction with that system of government. Even so, very few, as yet, have been enlightened concerning the true kingdom of Christ which ultimately is to rule the world in righteousness. This enlightenment will eventually come, however, as the *epiphaneia* of the *parousia* progressively continues.

IN THE CLOUDS

Revelation 1:7 reads, “Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him.” Clouds symbolize trouble, and Christ’s presence is first manifested by trouble. This prophecy states that “every eye shall see him,” that is, discern him. The word translated “eye” in this verse, according to *Thayer’s Greek Dictionary*, means “metaphorically the eyes of the mind, the faculty of knowing.” If Jesus came as a human in literal clouds, no one could see him literally. However, these symbolic clouds reveal the fact

of his presence to the point where eventually “every eye”—the minds of all mankind—will recognize the meaning of the chaotic and distressing events of which they are a part. The plan of God has not yet progressed to this point, but we can discern enough to know that this, too, will take place as yet another feature of the presence of our returned Lord.

This prophecy divides those who finally recognize the Lord into groups—they “which pierced him,” and “all kindreds of the earth.” Space does not permit us here to discuss in detail the additional prophetic meaning of these words. The main point we are establishing now is that the enlightenment caused by the Master’s presence—going from east to west like the sun—is discernible in the light of the fulfillment of prophecy, not by visible sight. At the same time, however, we realize that the bright shining of Christ’s presence is a gradual process, and the work resulting from that enlightenment will not be fully complete until the end of Christ’s kingdom.

APOKALUPSIS—DISCLOSURE—REVELATION

The inspired writers of the New Testament often used the Greek word *apokalupsis* in their reference to the period of Christ’s presence. *Strong’s* defines this word as “disclosure.” In the *King James Version*, it is frequently translated “revelation.” *Apokalupsis* appears to be more limited in meaning than the word *epiphaneia*, which not only denotes a manifestation, but indicates the manner in which it occurs—that is, by means of a bright shining.

Like the word *epiphaneia*, *apokalupsis* does not relate to time, such as a specific period during the

parousia. Only from the standpoint of the increasing revelation of Christ's presence, first to the church, and then to the world, does the word *apokalupsis* in any sense relate to time. We could say, for example, that the *apokalupsis*, or revelation of Christ's presence to the world is yet future, and thus a future time would be attached to the word in that sense. The word itself, however, is not related to time, nor does it describe a period of time.

It was the bright shining that revealed Christ's presence to the watchers among the Lord's consecrated people soon after it became a reality. It is the bright shining of his presence that will also reveal it to the world at large in the future, until all will become acquainted with the fact that he has returned and is the rightful King of earth. That will be the time when "the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together."—Isa. 40:5

The word *apokalupsis* appears six times in the New Testament with respect to the Second Presence of Christ. One instance is I Corinthians 1:7. This is simply a reference to the waiting of the followers of Jesus for the *apokalupsis* of Jesus Christ, here mistranslated "coming," the *Marginal Translation* correcting this. I Peter 1:7 uses the Greek word *apokalupsis*, and in the *King James Version* it is rendered "appearing." Here Peter explains that to be a follower of Christ, one's trial of faith is very important, because it is through this trial that he is "found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing," or unveiling, of our Lord Jesus.

I Peter 1:13 uses the word *apokalupsis* in an exhortation to soberness and a steadfastness of

hope until “the revelation [*apokalupsis*] of Jesus Christ.” Peter makes another very interesting use of the word. He speaks of the exceeding joy to be experienced by the faithful overcomers when the glory of Christ is “revealed” to the world. (I Pet. 4:13) What is this joy? Turning to Romans 8:19, we find the answer. Here, Paul uses the word *apokalupsis* with reference to a blessing that is coming to mankind during the time of Christ’s kingdom. He says, “The earnest expectation of the creature [*Emphatic Diaglott*: creation] waiteth for the manifestation [*apokalupsis*] of the sons of God.”

Jesus is the chief of these sons of God, and the others are his footstep followers, those who, according to Romans 8:17, suffer and die with him that they might live and reign with him. This text also reveals that when the presence of Jesus is revealed to the world, those who live and reign with him will also be revealed as sharing in his glory. A further confirmation of God’s plan for the church—to share in the glory of Christ when that glory is revealed to the world—is found in II Thessalonians 1:7, which reads, “To you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed [*apokalupsis*] from heaven with his mighty angels [his messengers—faithful followers].”

Jesus mentions this same great event, which occurs during the time of his presence, saying, “When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: And before him shall be gathered all nations.” (Matt. 25:31,32) This is Jesus’ introduction to the parable of the sheep and goats, a judgment day parable. Not until the individual

work of judgment begins will it be the due time for the revealment of Christ's *parousia* to mankind in general. Then his followers, here described as "angels," will be revealed with him.

What a joyful experience it will be when all the faithful followers of Jesus, glorified with him, will be revealed to the world as judges, priests, and kings, to direct the affairs of the people for a thousand years, and to dispense the rich blessings of life and happiness promised by the Heavenly Father, and guaranteed by the shed blood of the Redeemer! Not until this work is entirely complete, including the judgment of each member of mankind "in righ-teousness" (Acts 17:31), will the full scope of the *apokalupsis* of Christ's *parousia* be fully seen and appreciated. Surely every consecrated follower of the Master is earnestly longing for that time to come.

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