

SEED & BREAD

FOR THE SOWER ISA. 55:10 FOR THE EATER
BRIEF BIBLICAL MESSAGES FROM

THE WORD OF TRUTH MINISTRY

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PUZZLING *PAROUSIA* PASSAGES

In previous studies it has been set forth that the Greek word **parousia** is a technical word that signifies a personal presence when one is present because of who he is and what he does. See Seed and Bread, issues No. **SB023**, **SB024**, **SB025**. Some who have read these articles have requested additional material, especially explanations of certain passages in which this word appears. With this definition fixed in our minds we can make an honest study of the word *parousia*. Permit me to tell of a personal incident which will illustrate this meaning.

Some years ago we were entertaining a dozen or more friends in our home after the close of our meeting on Sunday night. Among those present was a man who by trade was a licensed master plumber. That he was personally present none could deny, but in the true meaning of the Greek noun, his presence could not be called a *parousia*. He was not in our home because of what he was or the work he did.

That night, while we were asleep, a water pipe burst, so I called him early next morning. He came at once and was again personally present in my home, but this time his presence was a **parousia** - he was there because he was a plumber and was going to do what would be expected of one of his ability and status. Many illustrations such as this will probably come to the reader's mind which will help fix the meaning of *parousia*.

Certain scholars such as Deissmann, Moulton, and Milligan have recognized the technical meaning of this word, but they have stultified this by limiting it to official visits of kings and emperors. Kenneth S. Wuest adopts and sums up their findings by saying: "One of the current expressions in the first century was the word *parousia*, used in the East as a technical expression for the visit of a king or emperor. The word means literally 'the being beside,' thus 'the personal presence'." A study of this word in the New Testament will show that it is not limited to the official presence of emperors and kings. Some quite common people have this term used of them concerning their visits to various places. Certain uses of this word are somewhat puzzling, but these will become clear if we learn how this word is used in the New Testament.

The first four occurrences of this word (Matt. 24:3, 27, 37, 39) are all translated as meaning "**coming.**" This is a mistake, and it is perpetuated in the next four occurrences (1 Cor. 15:23; 16:17; 2 Cor. 7:6,7). However, when the translators came to the ninth occurrence, it seems that the context forced them into a partial admission of its true meaning, so they rendered it "**presence**" (2 Cor. 10: 10). In this passage Paul deals with a criticism in which some said: "His letters are weighty and powerful; but his bodily presence is weak and his speech contemptible."

It seems that Paul's detractors said that when Paul was with them as God's apostle, performing the service of an apostle, he lacked the body, that is the physical stature and appearance which they imagined would go with such an office. Greek orators were probably the most accomplished the world has ever known. The Hellenized Jews in Corinth had come to love these superficial displays of greatness, and criticized Paul because he was deficient in these qualities. This was an unfair criticism, but it was typical of men who think according to the flesh.

In 1 Cor.16: 17 Paul declares his gladness that arose from the *parousia* "of **Stephanas and Fortunatus and Achaicus.**" There is proof here that *parousia* is not limited to emperors and kings. These men were an official deputation from the Corinthian ekklesia, and they were personally present with Paul to perform the service for which they had been deputized. They were there because of what they were and the mission they were to perform, and their presence was recognized and glorified by Paul as being a *parousia*.

In 2 Cor.7:6,7 the word *parousia* is found twice, where it is used in connection with Titus. A more accurate translation of this would be helpful. It should read: "**But He who encourages them that are cast down** (brought low) **encouraged us, by the parousia of Titus. Not, however, by his parousia alone, but also by the encouragement wherewith he was encouraged over you.**" At this time Titus was acting as Paul's emissary to the Corinthians, and in turn as The Corinthians' emissary to Paul, so that his presence with either party constituted a *parousia* because of his position and the missions he fulfilled as such.

In Philippians 1:26 Paul speaks of his desire that their rejoicing may be more abundant in Christ Jesus for him "**by my parousia with you again.**" He had been personally present as God's apostle in Philippi before, performing the service that went with his commission. He desires to repeat this if permitted by God to do so.

In Philippians 2:12 Paul contrasts **parousia** (personal presence) with **apousia** (absence). The prefix *ap* is the contracted form of *apo* which means "from." Thus we have "from-being" contrasted with "with-being." In this passage the translators bowed

to the obvious and dropped the erroneous word "coming" as a rendering of *parousia*. This occurrence, in which the context forces a proper rendering, demonstrates beyond all question that *parousia* does mean a personal presence. True, it may mean more than an actual presence, but it cannot mean less than this.

In 2 Thess. 2:8,9 the word *parousia* is used in connection with the personal presence of one who is designated as "that Wicked," or as it should be more accurately translated, "the lawless one." Of this one it is said that the Lord shall destroy him with the brightness (**epiphaneia**) of His coming (*parousia*). It also states that the *parousia* of this sinister character is after the working of Satan with all power, and signs, false miracles, and every seduction of unrighteousness among those who are being destroyed, because they received not the love of the truth for their salvation. Thus Satan prepares men for the ministry of this one, his emissary, who has his *parousia* just before the Lord Jesus has His.

In 2 Peter 3:12 the word *parousia* is used in connection with the actual presence of the day of God upon the earth, the only occurrence where it is used impersonally or in an inanimate sense. This occurrence shows the error of limiting this word to the official visits of kings and emperors. It should be noted from this verse that when *parousia* is related to an inanimate object it has the meaning of actual presence. There is a problem in this passage as to how we can "hasten" the *parousia* of the day of God. In Classical Greek **speudo**, which is translated "hastening" here, is rendered as meaning "be zealous," "be diligent," and according to the context this is what it means here. In fact two participles are used in this exhortation: "expecting and being diligent for the actual presence of the day of God." It may be that Peter is urging them to take the long range view of the purposes of God. The context seems to indicate this.

What men commonly call "the millennium," the Bible calls the **parousia**. The word "millennium" is a purely human term which puts all the emphasis on the time element. The word *parousia* is a divine term which emphasizes the character and purpose of that long period of time which follows the return of the Lord Jesus Christ to the earth.

The Greek word that means *coming* is **erchomai**, as seen in Matt. 24:30. The distinction between *erchomai* and *parousia* will be seen if we remember that there must be an *erchomai* (coming) before there can be a *parousia* (personal presence).

The translators of the *King James Version* were men who held firmly to the theology that arose out of the reformation, and especially to the later ideas developed by John Calvin, a man who studiously avoided ever coming to grips with the great eschatological problems of Scripture. A very simple doctrine of future events was worked out which was a slight refinement of Roman Catholic doctrine. According to this, there was to come what was called "the day of judgment" and this was equated

with the second coming of Christ, even though it was not held that He returned in person. On this day of judgment all mankind, living and dead, were to be summoned before God to be judged. A great separation was to be made, with all the righteous finding a place forever in heaven, and all the wicked being consigned to live forever in a place of torment called hell. The earth was then to be destroyed by fire, an event that was supported by mistranslating **sunteleias Iou aionos** by "the end of the world."

In view of beliefs such as these there was no place in the thinking of these men for a time to come when Jesus Christ would be personally present upon the earth. So they eliminated the *parousia* by translating it "coming" and making it to be a coming universal judgment.

In the pre-recorded history (prophecies) of the benevolent services which the Lord Jesus Christ will yet perform on behalf of mankind the most important service will be accomplished in his *parousia*. He is to be personally present upon the earth for a thousand years and He will be present because of all that He is and the services to be performed in view of each glory given to Him. The good that will come out of this is beyond comprehension and volumes would not suffice to tell about it. For now, it is enough to say that this thousand year term in God's school of life, when the master teacher is personally present, will produce a people who know God to the fullest extent that He can be known by man.

Since the Lord Jesus Christ is not now upon the earth, a coming will be required in order for Him to be personally present. I believe in the second coming of Christ (Acts 1:11). His coming will result in His *parousia*, and we should not confuse the two.

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