

Part Three - Greek: Parousia

By [Donald Hochner](#)

First, this study is based on the belief that the only way a Christian can understand God and the Church is through the Word of God - Sola Scriptura. Second, any tradition of men or teaching of men which can be shown to be contradictory with the Scripture must be rejected, no matter how long the tradition has existed and no matter how many people hold to that teaching. Third, no matter what the creeds say or teach, they are not the final authority. What saith the Scripture? This does not mean I have no value for the creeds. In fact they may be useful or helpful.

This is the third of five articles. We are going to study the Preterist's view on "parousia," the Greek word for "advent, coming, or presence." Interesting, I checked in Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible, and it says, 'Advent (often, return; spec. of Christ to punish Jerusalem, or finally the wicked).' I believe there is only ONE coming of Christ, which is already in the past. I would suggest that you read the article "Does the Bible Teach the 'Rapture'?" in other link at the end of this article. Thus, this destruction of Jerusalem was caused by the providence of God, but it happened through the use of pagan human armies, just as He had done it many times in the OT (the Assyrians, the Babylonians, the Medes, and others). This time, God used the Roman armies as His instrument. There are some historians (Josephus and Tacitus) who recorded when they saw some unusual signs. We will look into that a little later.

One passage says all the tribes of the earth shall see the Son of Man coming with the angels in the clouds and they will mourn over Him because God judged them for their sins (Rev. 1:7). "Earth" (Gk: ge) can be "land" or "region," depending on the context. Young's Literal Translation of the Holy Bible translates it just this way. I do not believe the "earth" means the whole world in Rev. 1:7. This verse comes from Zech. 12:10-14, where the land in question is clearly Israel, the tribes are plainly Jewish, and those who would see the Messiah's coming were "those who pierced Him" - the first century Jews. Read Rev. 1:1, 3; 6:15-17 (c.f. Luke 23:27-31); 11:8.

We will look into the eschatological passages with the word "coming" or "parousia" that is used in the original text. I am going to show you that the first century generation was expecting the parousia of Christ. I am using the NASB.

1. Matt. 24:3 - "And as He was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, 'Tell us, when will be these things be, and what will be the sign of Your coming (parousia), and of the end of the age?' Compare parallel passages in Mark 13:4 and Luke 21:7. The disciples' questions were related to the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the Old Covenant age (Gk: aion) and to nothing else. It is not widely separated in time, as Jesus explained the events that would lead up to His coming in that generation (Matt. 24:34; Mark 13:30; Luke 21:32).

2. Matt. 24:27, 37, 39 - Jesus repeatedly said, "So shall the coming (parousia) of the Son of Man be." The same theme is in this context. I want to point out that some Futurists believe the "double fulfillment" or "type/anti-type fulfillment" theory, a method of interpretation. In other words, the theory says that prophecy may be fulfilled in 70 AD as typical form but will be completely fulfilled, coinciding with the "final" coming of Christ in the future. This kind of approach is a questionable hermeneutic. They must prove that Jesus and the NT writers clearly distinguished between two different comings of Christ. How would the first century Christians living before 70 AD have been able to distinguish between two different comings? I have not seen anyone get around with this

problem. They expected all this to occur in their lifetime. Either we have to say it is all future (and make Jesus a liar for saying any of it would occur in that generation), or make it all fulfilled at 70 AD (and preserve Jesus' integrity).

3. 1 Cor. 15:23-25 - "But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, after that those who are at Christ's at His coming (parousia), then comes the end, when He delivers up the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet." We must understand the Jewish festivals in the OT that are the types in Christ. Christ the first fruits, in other words, Christ and some of the saints rose from the dead or the "first resurrection" (Matt. 27:52, 53). After that, those who were at Christ's coming, the harvest gathered. Then comes the end of the Mosaic age when His enemies (the Jewish nation: Luke 19:27; Rom. 11:28; Phil. 3:18) were put under His feet.

Notice in 1 Cor. 15:24 when it says Christ will deliver up the kingdom to the Father. Remember when the Jews rejected God from being their King and wanted Saul (1 Sam. 8:7). That was not God's choice (though He permitted under the counsel of His will). God had someone picked out for Himself who would bring the kingdom back to Him (1 Sam. 16:1). That was David's dynasty. A "branch" was born and finally brought the kingdom back to God after He put His enemies under His feet. This does not mean Christ quits reigning once He returns the kingdom to the Father. Christ co-reigns with the Father forever (Luke 1:31-33; Rev. 22:3). So, Jesus is our KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS. We as Reformers believe in Lordship Salvation.

4. 1 Thes. 2:19 - "For who is our hope or joy or crown of exultation? Is it not even you, in the presence of our Lord at His coming (parousia)?" Read verses' 14-16. These passages clearly refer to the Jewish people in their generation (Matt. 23:32-36).

5. 1 Thes. 3:13 - "So that He may establish your hearts unblamable in holiness before our God and Father at the coming (parousia) of our Lord with all His saints." Paul was writing to the church of the Thessalonians (1:1) in their time, not to us.

6. 1 Thes. 4:15-17 - "For we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, and remain until the coming (parousia) of the Lord, shall not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and thus we shall always be with the Lord." Notice Paul wrote, "By the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, and remain until the coming of the Lord" in both verses 15 & 17. They were expecting an imminent parousia of Christ in Paul's lifetime. Otherwise Paul was mistaken and not an inspired writer. The Bible is inerrant, infallible, and sufficient.

In verse 16, "With the trumpet of God" is parallel to Matt. 24:31, 1 Cor. 15:52 and Rev. 11:15. It is not difficult to figure it out.

Also, notice "To meet the Lord in the air" in verse 17. The word "air" is another word for heavenly or spiritual realm. Satan was always an opponent of the plan of redemption. He was (but no longer is) the prince of the power of the air (Eph. 2:2). In Rom. 16:20 Paul says that shortly Satan would be crushed. His power to oppose the consummation of redemption is over. Jesus now has taken over that sphere and has ruled in the air with the saints since the destruction of Jerusalem. It means a spiritual congregation in victory and not a physical one. "Thus we shall always be with the Lord." However, James says that we still have our OWN sinful nature to deal with (James 1:13-16). We cannot blame Satan for causing us to sin. Therefore, it is the same theme in the parousia,

trumpet, and the end. Otherwise the NT writers would confuse the believers in the first century if it was not the same theme.

7. 1 Thes. 5:23 - "Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming (parousia) of our Lord Jesus Christ." We have seen the same theme throughout the epistle of Paul about the parousia of Christ. There is no "double-fulfillment" or multi-comings of Christ.

8. 2 Thes. 2:1 - "Now we request you, brethren, with regard to the coming (parousia) of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our gathering together to Him." Again, Paul wrote the same theme regarding to the parousia of Christ. Notice he wrote, "Our gathering together to Him" is parallel to 1 Thes. 4:17 and Matt. 24:31, which happened in the first century generation (Matt. 24:34). It was accomplished when the faithful remnant of Jewish believers with the ingrafted Gentiles were transformed (and transferred) into Christ's new spiritual Israel when the old fleshly-based Israel was taken away in 70 AD. See Rom. 10:18 to 11:33, especially in verses 26-29. The "gathering together" is the heavenly places in Christ - the spiritual kingdom. This closes the case for the futurists' views.

9. 2 Thes. 2:8 - "And then that lawless one will be revealed whom the Lord will slay with the breath of His mouth and bring to an end by the appearance of His coming (parousia)." Read carefully in this context verses 2-12. In verse 2, some believers thought that the day of the Lord had come. Think about it, if they thought that the day of the Lord has come (which they assume would destroy the physical heavens and earth), why would not Paul have said that the literal heavens and earth were not destroyed? Of course they did not think of that way. So Paul explained the day of the Lord would not come unless the apostasy came first, and the man of sin was revealed in the temple of God.

This letter was written around 51 AD, before the great persecution of Nero (63 to 68 AD) which led many into apostasy. The Jewish revolt took the temple of God (66 to 70 AD). Also notice in verses 6 and 7, "And you (believers in Paul's day) know what restrains him now, so that in his time he may be revealed. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only he now restrains will do so until he is taken out of the way" (emphasis mine DWH). The Jewish persecution was already underway when Paul wrote this epistle. The Holy Spirit was restraining its effect until the church reached a mature enough condition to persevere in due time. Therefore, it is a mistake to apply this to our own times.

10. James 5:7 - "Be patient, therefore, brethren until coming (parousia) of the Lord." James was the great leader of Jewish Christians in Jerusalem. Why did he write to his brethren to be patient until the coming of the Lord? Of course they were expecting the coming of the Lord in their generation. James also wrote of the apostate Jews in verses 1-6 of this chapter. The Lord Jesus Christ came in His spiritual kingdom, to judge His enemies and bless His people who waited patiently for Him.

11. James 5:8 - "You too be patient; strengthen your hearts, for the coming (parousia) of the Lord is at hand." Again, James wrote that the coming of the Lord was at hand. It was near to them, only a few years away. Read the next verse, "Behold, the Judge is standing right at the door." Clearly, it was in their generation, not some 2,000 years later.

12. 2 Peter 1:16 - "For we did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming (parousia) of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty." Peter tried to assure the believers there would be the coming of the Lord very soon and he was not making it up.

13. 2 Peter 3:4 - And saying, "Where is the promise of His coming (parousia)? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation." Peter wrote to the Jewish Christians to remember the words spoken by the holy prophets, the commandment of the Lord, and the apostles (vv. 1-2). He knew it was the last days of the Mosaic or Old Covenant age (Heb. 1:2) and many Jewish mockers were saying, "Where is the promise of His coming?"

14. 2 Peter 3:12 - "Looking for and hastening the coming (parousia) of the day of God, on account of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning and the elements will melt with intense heat!" Peter and Christians in their generation were looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God. They were expecting the heavens and earth (the Old Covenant system: Old Jerusalem, the temple, the Jewish nation, the priesthood, the genealogy, etc.) to be destroyed with the conflagration from the Roman armies in 70 AD. Read the context in vv. 3-13. I will explain more about destruction of the Old Covenant system in the next article (Part Four).

15. 1 John 2:28 - "And now, little children, abide in Him, so that when He appears, we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming (parousia)." John was encouraging the believers to be faithful and have confidence when Jesus would appear at His coming. John knew it was the last hour, even many antichrists had come (v. 18). This is one of the clearest passages indicating that these events belonged to the time of writers and original hearers of the NT. If I were a first century Christian reading the books of Matthew, James, 1 & 2 Thessalonians, etc., before the great events of 66-70 AD, I would never get the impression that two or more parousia's separated by different times were being discussed.

Lastly, did anyone in the first century see some strange signs before end of their generation? Of course! The writings of two (maybe more) ancient, non-Christian historians seem to record such an incident. The Jewish historian Josephus wrote before the destruction of Jerusalem (66 AD), "A certain prodigious and incredible phenomenon appeared: I suppose the account of it would seem to be a fable, were it not related by those who saw it of so considerable a nature as to deserve such signals; for, before sun-setting, chariots and troops of soldiers in their armour were seen running about among the clouds, and surrounding the cities. Moreover, at that feast which we call Pentecost, as the priests were going by night into the inner [court of the] temple, as their custom was, to perform their sacred ministrations, they said, that in the first place they felt a quaking, and heard a great noise, and after that they heard a sound of multitude, saying, 'Let us remove hence' (Josephus' Wars of the Jews VI.V.3, read the whole Book VI especially in chapter V).

The Roman historian Tacitus relates a very similar event of the destruction of Jerusalem, "Early in this year [70 AD] Titus Caesar, who had been selected by his father [Vespasian] to complete the subjugation of Judaea, ...At last he encamped near Jerusalem. As I [Tacitus] am about to relate the last days of a famous city, ...Prodigies had occurred, ...There had been seen hosts joining battle in the skies, the fiery gleam of arms, the temple illuminated by a sudden radiance from the clouds. The doors of the inner shrine [temple] were suddenly thrown open, and a voice of more than mortal tone was heard to cry that the gods were departing. At the same instant there was a mighty stir as of departure. Some few put a fearful meaning on these events, but in most there was a firm persuasion, that in the ancient records of their priests was contained a prediction of how at this very time the East was to grow powerful, and rulers, coming from Judaea, were to acquire universal empire" (Tacitus, The Histories, Book V). You decide for yourself what you think about this.

The reason I am showing two historians is that when Jesus Christ went up into the clouds to heaven, the whole world did not see Him going up (Acts 1:9-11). Also when some men went with Saul (Paul) on the way to Damascus, they saw a bright light and heard the sound but did not see or understand when Jesus appeared (Acts 22:6-9). In the OT, Elisha and his servant saw the armies of

angels surround them (2 King 6:15-17). This may be similar to what Josephus and Tacitus saw and heard.

In conclusion, there is nowhere in the NT that mentions two coming of Christ, one in the first century generation and other one in the future. Also there is nowhere that mentions the multi-parousias of Christ like the Dispensationalists claim (the parousia or "rapture" before 7 years tribulation, the parousia of Christ after the great tribulation and the parousia at the end of millennium). This does not make any sense. The Futurists are in a real dilemma, dividing the Word of God. The Preterists have no problem with the eschatological passages. All these passages above must be applied to the first century generation.

Hopefully this will help a lot and cause you to rethink your eschatological view. It is very important because it is God's Word and we ought not to twist the Scripture.

Soli Deo Gloria!

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