

# SEED & BREAD

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BRIEF BIBLICAL MESSAGES FROM

## THE WORD OF TRUTH MINISTRY

Otis Q. Sellers, Bible Teacher

### WHAT DOES *PAROUSIA* MEAN?

In the study of things to come there is no word that encompasses any greater truth than the word *parousia*. This is a Greek word that has been brought over into English without any change in its spelling, and it will be found in most dictionaries, even though the definition given is far from accurate. It is a word that should be found in the vocabulary of every diligent Bible student. There is no English word that will accurately express the Greek word *parousia*; therefore, it should be transliterated and a maximum effort should be made to fix in our minds its meaning as used by the Spirit of God in the New Testament.

This word is found twenty-four times in the Greek New Testament and is used in numerous contexts making it possible for us to discover its true meaning from its usage, the only way that any word in any language should ever be defined.

In the *King James Version* it is translated "coming" twenty-two times and "presence" twice. Other translations as a rule have used the words *coming*, *presence*, *arrival*, and *personal presence* to represent the word *parousia*. And at this point it needs to be stated unequivocally that it does not mean coming in any occurrence in the New Testament. To so translate it was an egregious error that is constantly perpetuated by lexicographers and theologians. I do not believe that the definition of "coming" would be given in any lexicon, there being not one shred of evidence to support it, if it had not been for the fact that the *King James Version* translators arbitrarily rendered it this way so that it would not flatly contradict their creedal position. 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 tau 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.

There is no truth to be gained by pointing to 1 Cor. 16: 17 (as many do) as proof that *parousia* means coming, where Paul declares that he was glad for the *parousia* of Stephanas and Fortunatus.. The fact that the word "coming" seems to fit well in this sentence is no proof that this is what it means. The word *health* or *prosperity* would fit just as well, but the fact is that *parousia* does not mean health or prosperity and neither does it mean coming. These men were a deputation from the Corinthian ecclesia to the Apostle Paul. Thus they were there because of who they were and the help they could be to Paul. He was rejoicing in their personal presence, a presence which he exalts and honors by calling it a *parousia*. The importance of this designation will be seen when we get to the actual technical meaning of this word.

The word *parousia* does not mean "arrival" as the occurrence in 2 Cor. 10:10 will clearly show. The weakness of Paul's "bodily presence" was not limited to his arrival. It continued through his entire *parousia* in Corinth. And this word does not mean "presence" or "bodily presence" even though it does contain these two ideas. It means more than "presence" and more than "bodily presence" and to so translate it is to weaken this strong word. It is actually a simple word and should present no problem to the translator as long as he can rise fully above the confusion that was imposed upon it when it was made to mean "coming." It is made up of the word *para* which means "beside," and the participial form of the word "to be," *ousia*, which means "being." The compound word *parousia* means being beside, being with, or

being present. However when all occurrences of this word in the New Testament, in Classical Greek, in the Septuagint, and in the papyrus manuscripts are examined it will be found that this word means more than presence and more even than personal presence. It is used of a certain kind of personal presence, and only such a presence can be properly called a *parousia*.

Adolf Deissmann's pertinent comment that *parousia* is "a technical expression" has been repeated by many commentators, but invariably they leave us without any explanation of the technical (exact) meaning of this word. This is a fault of which I do not wish to be guilty so I will give at once the technical definition of this important term.

The Greek word *parousia* means a personal presence when one is present because of who he is and what he does. Thus, a personal presence may not be a *parousia* if the one present is not there in relationship to his position or office and the service he performs as such.

The word for "personal presence" in the New Testament is *pareimi*, not *parousia*, a fact that is easily established by its many occurrences. (See list on page 594 of the *Englishman's Greek Concordance*.) These occurrences show that *pareimi* always means a personal presence when it is used of men, and an actual presence when it is used of things.

At first glance these two words may seem to be only different inflections of the same word, but usage has established them as two words with distinct meanings. We must not stultify *parousia* by giving it the same meaning as *pareimi*. The distinction between the two is of the utmost importance, so I will give several illustrations of these two words.

If I should go to the courthouse and sit in on a trial, my presence there would most certainly be a personal one, and it could be described by the Greek word *pareimi*, but not by *parousia*. I am not there because of who I am, any position I hold or service I will perform. However, the judge, the prosecutor, the attorneys, and the witnesses are all there because of who they are and the service they will render in view of this. Thus, their personal presence there can be called a *parousia*.

Consider another illustration. A teacher of a class in New Testament Greek begins by calling the roll to which each member responds, "Pareimi"

(present), a word they had learned in the previous lesson. The teacher then says, "Your personal presence, that is, your *pareimi* having been established, I now trust that your *pareimi* will at once become a *parousia*, that you will be here because you are students and, therefore, are here to learn."

The definition of a word can be determined only by an analysis of its usage. This is the method by which dictionaries are compiled. In getting the definition of New Testament words we are primarily interested in the usage made by the Holy Spirit in its pages. Nevertheless, consideration needs to be given to occurrences outside of the Bible.

### CLASSICAL GREEK USAGE

Of special interest is a quotation by Sophocles, cited by Liddell and Scott, where one said, "that we have no friends present (*parousia*) to assist us." This man desired the presence of friends who would be there because they were friends and who would undertake to do what a friend would do under such circumstances.

Adolf Deissmann cites many of these occurrences, prefacing them by saying, "From the Ptolemaic period down to the second century A.D. (about 500 years) we are able to trace the word in the East as a technical expression for the arrival or visit of the king or the emperor." (Light from the Ancient East, Pages 368 to .373.) However, all the examples cited by Deissmann are indicative of an official visit rather than a mere arrival. On the occasion of such visits *parousia* coins were struck and *parousia* taxes were levied. And it will also be seen in every occurrence that these visits were described as *parousias* because they were present because of who they were and were there to perform the duties of their position.

The occurrences in the papyrus are most interesting. These are pointed out by Moulton and Milligan (*Vocabulary of the Greek New Testament*, page 497). In one a man says, "The repair of what has been swept away by the river requires my *parousia*." The owner would need to be there because of who he was and what he would direct to be done.

In another occurrence someone says, "It is no use if a person comes too late for what required his *parousia*." The correctness of the definition that has already been given is evident in this sentence. Another occurrence is quite intriguing, causing us to wonder about the incident that generated it. A

woman declares that her husband, "swore in the *parousia* of the overseers (*episkopon*) and of his own brothers, 'Henceforward I will not hide all my keys from her.'" One can only surmise from this that there was serious trouble between a man and his wife and that the overseers and his brothers were called in to arbitrate the matter. Thus they were there because of their positions and relationship, also the services they were to perform.

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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