

Aspects of the Lord's Coming Seen in the Greek New Testament

As life on earth seems more and more precarious with the prospect of environmental disasters looming and the number of problems in human society increasing,¹ some take comfort in the Lord's second coming to solve these problems, judge unrighteousness, and establish His kingdom on earth. The Lord, however, is not coming again simply to solve problems outwardly.

Concerning the Lord's coming, the Lord has come (in His first coming in incarnation as a man), He is here (in His presence, having come as the Spirit of reality), and He will come (in His second coming in the future as a man). In His first coming He came to redeem sinful humanity through His death and to initiate His recovery of mankind inwardly through becoming the life-giving Spirit in resurrection. He continues this recovery by doing an intrinsic (inward, essential) work through dispensing Himself with His life and nature into redeemed humanity to thereby fulfill His original purpose of creating man (Gen. 1:26-27). In His second coming He will first secretly rapture the overcoming saints. He will do this before He comes visibly or outwardly, descending from the heavens, appearing and revealing Himself after approximately two millennia of being hidden from sight. The Lord's second coming will occur when there is a sufficient number of His believers who are mature in His life and nature, built up as His Body (Eph. 4:13-16; Col. 1:28), and thus able corporately both to express Him as His bridal counterpart and to represent Him as His ruling co-kings (Rev. 19:7, 14; 20:6; cf. Gen. 1:26-27). This article explores the meaning of the words in the New Testament associated with the Lord's coming, especially the words that emphasize and confirm the inward, intrinsic, essential aspect of His coming.

The Promised Coming to Recover God's Image and Dominion

From the time of the fall of mankind, God promised that He would come to recover humanity from the effects of the fall and fulfill His original purpose in the creation of humanity, which is for mankind to have His image and likeness, thus expressing Him and having His authority and dominion to represent Him on the earth (Gen. 1:26). He desires a corporate humanity as His counterpart to match Him and be His helper to fight for His interests on earth (2:18-24).² Immediately after the fall of mankind, God

promised that the seed of the woman would bruise the head of the serpent (3:15). The seed of the woman is considered a reference to the incarnation, the coming of God into man—a deified human being, a messianic figure, who expresses God and represents God. This person is also a seed, and, as such, can be sown into humanity to reproduce Himself and reconstitute humanity intrinsically with Himself for His corporate expression and representation. In various places in the Old Testament, there are other prophecies and promises of this coming, which, when seen in the light of the New Testament, refer to two comings, a first and second coming, separated by approximately two thousand years.³

The First and Second Comings of Christ

In His first coming the Lord Jesus prepared the way through incarnation, death, and resurrection to dispense Himself into and reproduce Himself in humanity. The first coming of the promised seed of the woman was prophesied in both Isaiah 7 and 9. Verse 14 of chapter 7 states, "Behold, the virgin will conceive and will bear a son, and she will call his name Immanuel." Verses 6 and 7 of chapter 9 say,

A child is born to us, / A Son is given to us; / And the government / Is upon His shoulder; / And His name will be called / Wonderful Counselor, / Mighty God, / Eternal Father, / Prince of Peace. / To the increase of His government / And to His peace there is no end, / Upon the throne of David / And over His kingdom, / To establish it / And to uphold it / In justice and righteousness / From now to eternity.

These two portions of Scripture indicate that the human seed is joined to and mingled with divinity for God's expression, as shown by the fact that in 7:14 the son of the virgin is called Immanuel (meaning "God with us"). Furthermore, in 9:6 the child born is called the Mighty God, and the Son given is called the Eternal Father. Isaiah 9:6-7 also indicates that this divine-human being will have dominion: His title is *Prince of Peace*, and the passage also refers to His government, His unending peaceful reign, and His eternal just and righteous kingdom.

This first coming was fulfilled by the incarnation of the Lord Jesus (Matt. 1:21-23), which produced a God-man who lived

the human life by the divine life of the Father to express God (John 14:9). He partook of blood and flesh so that through His death on the cross He might destroy (or, bruise the head of) him who has the might of death, that is, the devil (Heb. 2:14; Gen. 3:15). In His resurrection He became the consummated, all-inclusive, life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45b) to be breathed into His believers on the day of resurrection (John 20:22) and to be poured out upon them on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:4) to form the church, which is and will be for eternity the wife of Christ, the counterpart of Christ, who matches Him and expresses Him (Eph. 5:25-32; Rev. 19:7; 21:2), and who is also a warrior, who fights for His interests on earth, wrestling “against the rulers, against the authorities, against the world-rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenlies” (Eph. 6:12), and stands against the stratagems of the devil (vv. 10-11, 13-18).

The second coming of the Lord Jesus also fulfills the promise of Genesis 3:15, which is brought about ultimately when the woman (signifying all of God’s people) brings forth the man-child, the overcoming believers, the stronger part of God’s people; this man-child is always engaged in fighting God’s enemy, executing the sentence on Satan, the devil, and will be raptured, or caught up, to the throne of God in the heavens (Rev. 12:5). As Witness Lee states,

Satan, the enemy of God, was judged by the Lord Jesus on the cross (John 12:31; 16:11). After that, the overcoming believers are needed for the carrying out of that judgment, for the executing of that sentence. The war waged by the overcoming believers against Satan is actually the executing of the Lord’s judgment upon him. Eventually, through their fighting, he is cast out of heaven. (*Recovery Version*, Rev. 12:9, note 1)

In between the first and second comings of Christ, the Lord as the indwelling Spirit of reality, who is already in the believers, is working to dispense His divine life, nature, and essence into all the parts of their being (John 14:17; Rom. 8:9, 11; 1 Cor. 15:45b). This dispensing work brings them through the steps of God’s organic salvation—from regeneration, through transformation, to glorification (Rom. 8:30; 2 Cor. 3:18)—to produce a corporate entity, the church as the Body of Christ, the bride of Christ, and the one new man; in this way they will express and represent Him in the next age and in eternity (1 Cor. 12:27; Eph. 1:22-23; Rev. 22:17; Eph. 2:15).

The three stages of the Lord’s coming can be seen in Ephesians 5:25-27: First, Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her (v. 25) at the time of His first coming, redeeming her and giving life to her; second, through His coming as the Spirit (in the time between the two comings), she is being sanctified by the washing of the water in the

word (v. 26); and third, at the time of His second coming, He will be able to, through the processes in the first two stages, present the church to Himself glorious, not having spot or wrinkle or any such things, having been made holy and without blemish (v. 27).

Words Used to Indicate the Lord’s Coming

There are several words in the Greek New Testament that convey the notion of the Lord’s coming. The most obvious and common are verbs meaning “to come,” such as ἔρχομαι and ἦκω (both meaning “to come”), καταβαίω (“to come down”), and ἐγγίζω (“to come near”). Another word also translated “coming” is the verbal noun *parousia* (παρουσία, “being alongside” or “presence”), which views the Lord’s coming in a more intrinsic sense—related to the being, essence, or *ousia* of God. This being is reproduced within His corporate people, matching them to Him and enabling them to express Him and to represent Him, that is, to exercise His dominion, authority, or *exousia* (what comes out of His being) over everything rebellious and insubordinate to Him.

The Lord’s coming is also associated with the notions of appearing, or manifestation (ἐπιφάνεια), and revelation (ἀποκάλυψις), indicating the manifesting or revealing of something that is hidden or is otherwise not so obvious, particularly viewed as the result of a process. The believers eagerly await (ἀπεκδέχομαι) His coming from the heavens and the expression out from them of their growth and maturation in His glorification of them (2 Thes. 1:10). Then they can stand before (κατενώπιον) Him in love as His loving bride, the same as He is, or according to Him, in life, nature, and expression; she is thus beautiful in His sight.

Coming

The most common and general word related to the Lord’s coming is the verb ἔρχομαι (“to come”), used by itself or as part of a compound verb. The verb ἔρχομαι is used in the context of the Lord’s first coming and His second coming. The Lord is referred to as ὁ ἐρχόμενος, the Coming One (in a general way referring to both His first and second coming (Matt. 11:3; Heb. 10:37)), the One who is coming (John 1:15), and He who comes from above (3:31). He is the coming Messiah, or the Christ (4:25; 7:27, 31, 41-42; 11:27), the coming Prophet foretold by Moses (6:14; Deut. 18:15, 18), the blessed King of Israel who comes in the name of the Lord (John 12:13), and the coming Ruler who will shepherd His people (Matt. 2:6).

In His first coming He came to His own (i.e., the Israelites), but they did not receive Him (John 1:11). He did not come to be served but to serve and to give up His psuche life as a ransom for many (Matt. 20:28). He came that human beings may have zoe life and have it abundantly (John 10:10),

He came into the world as light, not to judge but to save the world (12:46-47; cf. 1 Tim. 1:15), and He came forth out (ἐξέρχομαι) from and with (παρά) God the Father and came into the world (John 16:27-28). He came to announce peace as the gospel to the Gentiles who were far off and peace to those who were near (Eph. 2:17).

Jesus promised that after His death and resurrection, He would come again to receive the disciples to Himself so that where He is they also may be (John 14:3, 18, 28). For this He would come as the Comforter, the Spirit of reality, to indwell and impart Himself with His life and nature into the believers essentially (15:26). The Spirit of reality, whom the Son sent from and with (παρά) the Father, is the realization of the Father and the Son in Their coming and making an abode with the believers (14:23). The coming Spirit of reality, whom the Lord would send, on the negative side convicts the world concerning sin and concerning righteousness and concerning judgment (16:8). On the positive side the coming Spirit would testify concerning Christ (15:26) and guide the believers into all the reality, not speaking from Himself but speaking what He hears; furthermore, the Spirit would declare the things that are coming (16:13).

The verb ἔρχομαι is also used to refer to the Lord's second coming in the future. The Lord asked Peter, "If I want him [John] to remain until I come, what is that to you?" (21:22). This indicated that He would return, something the disciples expected in their lifetime (v. 23). They observed Him being taken up into heaven in a cloud (Acts 1:9), and He will come in the same way that He ascended into heaven (v. 11), returning on a cloud (Matt. 24:30; 26:64; Rev. 1:7). The Lord's second coming is both secret—to rapture the overcomers before the great tribulation (12:5; 14:1-5; Matt. 24:40-41)—and open—from the clouds after the great tribulation (vv. 27, 30; Rev. 1:7). The Lord's secret coming is on an unknown day and at an unexpected hour, requiring the believers to be watchful and be ready for it (Matt. 24:42, 44). Jesus portrayed Himself as the Master of His slaves whom He has appointed to give food to His household at the appointed time. The slave is blessed whom He finds so doing when He comes as the Son of Man (vv. 45-46). He comes secretly as a thief to steal what is precious (v. 43; Rev. 16:15; 1 Thes. 5:2). Those who are constituted with His life and nature, ripened, and ready to be raptured are considered by the Lord as the coming "Thief" to be precious to Him. In His open coming, He comes as the Son of Man in the glory of His Father with His angels, and He will repay each man according to his doings (Matt. 16:27). The coming of the

Son of Man will be on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory (24:30; Rev. 1:7). He comes to be glorified in His saints and to be marveled at in all those who have believed (2 Thes. 1:10). Jude also records the prophecy of Enoch: "Behold, the Lord came with myriads of His saints to execute judgment against all and to convict all the ungodly concerning all their ungodly works which they have done in ungodliness, and concerning all the hard things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him" (vv. 14-15). This indicates that the Lord's coming is to execute God's governmental judgment in order to deal with the ungodly, and that the Lord's coming will be a corporate matter. The Lord will come accompanied by His saints, His overcomers, His bridal army.

Another verb ἦκω ("come") is also used to indicate the first and second comings of the Lord. In His first coming, Christ came to do God's will, to offer Himself as the unique sacrifice to establish the new testament (Heb. 10:7-10). In 1 John 5:20, John says that the Son of God has also come and has given us an understanding that we might know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ; he concludes, "This is the true God and eternal life." *This* refers to "the God who has come through incarnation and has given us the ability to know Him as the genuine God and be one with Him organically in His Son Jesus Christ. All this is the genuine and real God and eternal life to us" (Lee, *Recovery Version*, v. 20, note 8).

The verb ἦκω more commonly occurs in the future tense referring to Christ's second coming. The Lord as the Master of His slaves (the believers) will come (ἦκω) on a day we do not expect and at an hour we do not know (Matt. 24:50-51; Luke 12:46; cf. Matt. 24:36). He charges the church in Thyatira to hold fast to what they have until He comes (Rev. 2:25). He charges the church in Sardis to watch for His coming; otherwise, He will come as a thief (3:3; cf. 2 Pet. 3:10). At the end of the church age He is coming out of Zion as the Deliverer to save all Israel and to turn away ungodliness from Jacob (Rom. 11:26).

The Aramaic verb *atha* ("to come") is also used once in the New Testament in the expression *Maranatha* (1 Cor. 16:22). This word consists of *Maran* ("Lord") with the perfect tense *atha* ("he has come," or "he comes") or *Marana* ("our Lord") with the imperative *tha* ("come!"), which can be translated, "The Lord has come," "The Lord comes!" or, "Our Lord, come!". The latter is similar to the prayer in Revelation 22:20: "Come, Lord Jesus!" (ἔρχου κύριε Ἰησοῦ).⁴

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Coming Down or Descending

The verb καταβαίνω (“descend”), a compound of κατά (“down”) and βαίνω (“go,” “come”), is also used to indicate the Lord’s first and second comings. He as the Son of Man, who is in heaven, descended out of heaven (John 3:13). This verse refers to His first coming as a man, but it also indicates that according to His divinity, even though He was on earth, He was still in heaven. John 6 shows that He is also the living bread of God that came down (καταβαίνω) out of heaven to give life to the world, that if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever (vv. 33, 41, 51, 58); in this way the Lord constitutes the believers with the heavenly, divine, eternal life. His first coming extended even to Hades; after His death He descended (καταβαίνω) into the abyss, the lower parts of the earth, where the disembodied spirits and souls of the dead are (Luke 23:43; cf. Acts 2:24, 27, 31). Following this, He also ascended to the third heaven so that He might fill all things (Rom. 10:7; Eph. 4:9-10).

The verb καταβαίνω refers one time explicitly to His second coming: “Because the Lord Himself, with a shout of command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, will descend from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are living, who are left remaining, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air; and thus we will be always with the Lord” (1 Thes. 4:16-17). Here καταβαίνω refers specifically to the Lord’s descending from heaven in the context of the rapture (the “catching up”) of the majority of the believers (as the harvest) to the air at the end of the great tribulation at the time of the last trumpet (1 Cor. 15:52; Rev. 14:15).

At the consummation of the ages the holy city, the New Jerusalem, also comes down (καταβαίνω) out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband (21:2, 10; 3:12).

Coming Near or Drawing Near

The notion of coming near or drawing near, indicated either by the verb ἐγγίζω (“draw near”) or the adjective ἐγγύς (“near”), is also associated with the Lord’s coming (παρουσία, as in James 5:8). The Lord is near (ἐγγύς (Phil. 4:5)). The Lord is “near in space and time. With respect to space, the Lord is near us, ready to help. With regard to time, the Lord is at hand, coming soon” (Lee, *Recovery Version*, v. 5, note 3; cf. Heb. 10:37). The day (of the Lord’s second coming) is drawing near (v. 25; cf. 1 Cor. 3:13). The time is near (Rev. 1:3; 22:10). The end of all things “on which the flesh rests” (Lee, *Recovery Version*, 1 Pet. 4:7, note 1) has drawn near.⁵

Parousia—Matched by His Bride— and Exousia—Exercising God’s Dominion

Perhaps the most intrinsically significant Greek word related to the Lord’s coming is the word παρουσία (“being present,” “arrival,” “coming”). It is a compound of the preposition παρά (“alongside,” “from,” “with”) and the noun οὐσία (“being”), which comes from the verb εἶμι (“to be”).⁶ Therefore, it literally means “being alongside” and comes to mean “presence.”

Παρουσία occurs twenty-four times in the New Testament, seventeen times referring to the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ and seven times referring to the coming or presence of various persons.⁷

The first occurrences of παρουσία, usually translated “coming,” refer to the outward characteristics and the situation on earth when the παρουσία occurs. Some of the characteristics of the time of the Lord’s παρουσία are deception, especially regarding His coming (2 Thes. 2:1-3), international conflict, famines, earthquakes, persecution of the Jews, lawlessness, and the preaching of the gospel of the kingdom to all the inhabited earth (Matt. 24:3-26). The sign of the end of the παρουσία is the Lord coming like a flash of lightning coming forth from the east and shining to the west (v. 27). The situation on earth at the time of the παρουσία will be like the days of Noah, when human beings were befuddled with eating, drinking, marrying, and giving in marriage, so that the judgment of the flood caught them unawares (vv. 37-39).

The next mention of παρουσία, by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:23, is more intrinsic and organic.⁸ Christ is presented as the firstfruits of resurrection, and His resurrection will be followed by the resurrection of those who are Christ’s at His coming. The language of firstfruits portrays resurrection as a crop maturing to be ready for harvest. The believers living on the earth need to ripen as firstfruits if they are to be ready to be raptured in the secret aspect of His second coming (Rev. 14:4).⁹

According to 1 Thessalonians 4:15, the believers who are living, who are left remaining unto the coming of the Lord, shall by no means precede those who have fallen asleep. This verse indicates that the majority of believers will be raptured to the air in the open aspect of the Lord’s coming and that the dead believers will be resurrected and raptured before the living believers. The believers are the hope or joy or crown of boasting of the apostles “before [ἔμπροσθεν] our Lord Jesus at His coming” (2:19), especially if the believers grow and mature in love, life, holiness, and righteousness. This is according to the two prayers of the apostle Paul in 1 Thessalonians. The first prayer is that the Lord would cause the Thessalonian believers to increase and abound in love to one another and to all so that

the Lord may establish their “hearts blameless in holiness before [ἐμπροσθεν]” their God and Father at the coming of the Lord Jesus with all His saints (3:12-13). Paul also prayed that the God of peace Himself would sanctify the Thessalonian believers wholly and that their spirit and soul and body would be preserved complete, without blame, at the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ (5:23). In his second Epistle to the Thessalonians, Paul tries to correct a misconception concerning the Lord’s coming and the believers’ gathering together to Him (2:1). The Lord’s coming will not occur until after the manifestation of the man of lawlessness, who will sit in the rebuilt temple of God and whom the Lord will slay by the breath of His mouth and by the manifestation of His coming (vv. 3-4, 8).

James likens God to a farmer eagerly awaiting precious fruit from the earth, being long-suffering (James 5:7). God is “awaiting with patience our maturity in life as the first-fruits and harvest of His field (Rev. 14:4, 14-15). Our maturing in life can shorten the period of our long-suffering and His patience” (Lee, *Recovery Version*, James 5:8, note 1). In this vein James charges the believers in James 5:7-8 to be long-suffering until the coming of the Lord and to establish their hearts, because the coming of the Lord has drawn near (ἐγγιζω).

Peter mentions παρουσία three times. First, he mentions being an eyewitness of the transfiguration of the Lord as a figure of His second coming (2 Pet. 1:16) and a type of the coming millennial kingdom (Matt. 16:28), for the coming of which the Lord instructed us to pray (6:10). At His second coming the believers will be transfigured; their body will be glorified, saturated with God as life. Second, Peter mentions mockers who were questioning the promise of the Lord’s coming (2 Pet. 3:4). Third, he states that we can expect and hasten the coming of the day of God “while we live a transformed life in a holy and godly manner” (Lee, *Recovery Version*, v. 12, note 1).

John charges the believers to abide in the Lord so that if He is manifested, they may have boldness and not be put to shame from Him at His coming (1 John 2:28).¹⁰

While the compound word παρουσία looks toward the Lord’s coming as the Bridegroom, being alongside (παρά) and in οὐσία, matching His bride, who is the same as He is, expressing Him in life and nature (1 John 3:2), ἐξουσία (another word containing the same root οὐσία, meaning “authority” and being a compound of ἐκ- or ἐξ- (“out of”) and οὐσία (“being”)), indicates that true authority comes out of

a proper being and ultimately comes from God, who, as the self-existing and ever-existing One, alone has “being” in the universe.¹¹ The word ἐξουσία also indicates that the church’s authority comes from the reconstituted being of the believers, which will be exercised fully when and after the Lord comes, when the church together with Christ represents God in His authority to have dominion over Satan and the satanic chaos on earth, thus fulfilling Genesis 1:26-28 and 3:15.

Appearing

The word root φαίν- (“appear”) is also used to indicate the Lord’s coming, especially with the prefix ἐπι- (“upon”), from which derives the English word *epiphany*, meaning “an appearance or manifestation especially of a divine being” (“epiphany,” def. 2) or “a usually sudden manifestation or perception of the essential nature or meaning of something” (“epiphany,” def. 3.a.1). The noun ἐπιφάνεια refers both to the Lord’s first coming and His second coming. In

His first coming—“the appearing [ἐπιφάνεια] of our Savior Christ Jesus”—He nullified death and brought eternal life to us, enabling God’s grace to be manifested to us (2 Tim. 1:10). God’s grace also appeared (the verb ἐπεφάνη) in His first coming, bringing salvation to all men, both Jews and Gentiles (Titus 2:11). The kindness and love to man of our Savior God also appeared (ἐπεφάνη), causing Him

to save us through the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Spirit (3:4-5).

Paul uses the Lord’s second coming to charge Timothy to keep the commandment spotless, without reproach, until the appearing (ἐπιφάνεια) of our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Tim. 6:14).¹² Paul also solemnly charges Timothy before God and Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing (ἐπιφάνεια) and His kingdom: “Proclaim the word; be ready in season and out of season; convict, rebuke, exhort with all long-suffering and teaching...Be sober in all things, suffer evil, do the work of an evangelist, fully accomplish your ministry” (2 Tim. 4:1-2, 5).

In his life and work, Paul took the Lord’s appearing and His kingdom as the incentive and goal. The Lord’s appearing will be for judgment, to reward each one of us (Matt. 16:27; Rev. 22:12), and His kingdom will be for His reigning with His overcomers (Rev. 20:4, 6). The apostle not only took these two matters as the incentive and goal for himself but also by these two matters charged Timothy, who was under his leading, to faithfully fulfill his

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ministry of the word. (Lee, *Recovery Version*, 2 Tim. 4:1, note 2)

Paul's solemn charge to Timothy to both love and look forward to the Lord's appearing is also an admonition, encouragement, and incentive to us to fulfill our ministry; it is in this way that we would obtain the crown of righteousness, with which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will recompense us in the day of the Lord's second coming (v. 8). We are also awaiting the blessed hope, even the appearing (ἐπιφάνεια) of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ (Titus 2:13).

At the appearing or manifestation (ἐπιφάνεια) of the Lord's second coming (παρουσία), He will also slay the lawless one, the man of sin, the Antichrist, and bring him to nothing by the breath of His mouth (2 Thes. 2:8). The παρουσία occurs over a longer period of time, while the ἐπιφάνεια occurs at a short point in time. The manifestation will be a point in time at the end of the longer period of time of His coming; therefore 2 Thessalonians speaks of the ἐπιφάνεια of His παρουσία.

Another verb translated "appearing," the passive form of the verb ὁράω ("to see"), is used to refer to the Lord's second coming: "Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear [ὀφθήσεται, future passive of ὁράω] a second time to those who eagerly await Him, apart from sin, unto salvation" (Heb. 9:28). In His first appearing Christ put away sin (v. 26; 1 John 3:5). Therefore, His second appearing will have nothing to do with sin; rather, it will accomplish salvation, the redemption of our body, delivering us from the vanity and the slavery of corruption of the old creation into the freedom of the glory of the children of God (Rom. 8:18-21).

Revealing and Unveiling

The word ἀποκάλυψις ("revelation," "unveiling") is also used a few times to refer to the Lord's coming. Paul comforted the afflicted Thessalonian believers by telling them that they would rest with the apostles at the revelation of the Lord Jesus from heaven (2 Thes. 1:7). He also encouraged the Corinthian believers by saying, "You do not lack in any gift, eagerly awaiting the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 1:7).

Related to the revelation of Jesus Christ at His coming, there is the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God (Rom. 2:5), and there is the revelation of the sons of God, which the anxious watching of the creation eagerly awaits (8:19). The fact that we are sons of God is veiled; that is, it is not outwardly obvious or recognized by others and, hence, not yet fully revealed. At the Lord's second coming we, the sons of God, will be glorified, and our

bodies will be fully redeemed; the veil will thus be removed. The creation is eagerly awaiting this.

Peter speaks of exulting in the salvation to be revealed at the last time. Despite the sufferings of the present age, the proving of our faith will be found unto praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ (1 Pet. 1:5-7). Witness Lee notes that in this salvation

our body will be freed from the slavery of corruption of the old creation into the freedom of the glory of God's new creation (Rom. 8:21), and our soul will be delivered out of the realm of trials and sufferings ([1 Pet. 1:]6; 4:12; 3:14; 5:9) into a new realm, one that is full of glory (4:13; 5:10), and will share in and enjoy all that the Triune God is, has, and has accomplished, attained, and obtained. This is the salvation of our souls, the salvation that is ready to be revealed to us at the last time, the grace to be brought to us at the revelation of Christ in glory ([1:]13; Matt. 16:27; 25:31). This is the end of our faith. The power of God is able to guard us unto this that we may obtain it ([1 Pet. 1:]9). We should eagerly expect such a marvelous salvation (Rom. 8:23) and prepare ourselves for its splendid revelation (Rom. 8:19). (*Recovery Version*, 1 Pet. 1:5, note 5)

"At the revelation of Jesus Christ" we should set our hope perfectly on the grace being brought to us at that time (v. 13). The Lord's coming is also a "revelation of His glory" (4:13). We rejoice as we share in Christ's sufferings so that we may rejoice exultingly at the revelation of His glory.

Both the notions of appearing and unveiling, when referring to the Lord's second coming, refer mostly to His open coming.

Eagerly Awaiting, Standing before Him

Two other words that also hint at a more intrinsic sense of the Lord's coming, but from the perspective of His work in the believers and their experience, are ἀπεκδέχομαι ("to eagerly expect") and κατενώπιον ("before," "before the eyes").

The word ἀπεκδέχομαι, a compound of ἀπό ("from"), ἐκ ("out of"), and δέχομαι ("to receive"), occurs eight times in the New Testament—seven times related to eagerly awaiting the Lord's second coming and what will transpire in the believers at that time.¹³ The anxious watching of the creation "eagerly awaits" the revelation of the sons of God (Rom. 8:19), and we ourselves also, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan in ourselves, "eagerly awaiting" sonship, the redemption of our body (v. 23). We "eagerly await" what we hope for, which is unseen, through endurance (v. 25); we are "eagerly awaiting" the revelation of our Lord Jesus

Christ (1 Cor. 1:7); we by the Spirit out of faith “eagerly await” Christ as the hope of righteousness (Gal. 5:5); we “eagerly await” a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ from the heavens (Phil. 3:20); and Christ will appear a second time to those who “eagerly await” Him, apart from sin, unto salvation (Heb. 9:28). The literal sense of the two prepositions από and εκ combined with the verb δέχομαι can illustrate the spatial aspects of the Lord’s coming. We receive (δέχομαι) Christ coming from (ἀπό) the heavens (cf. Phil. 3:20), and Christ receives His glorious bride out of (ἐκ) whom He is expressed. At the Lord’s coming the Christ coming from the heavens meets the Christ who has matured in us. This is the final stage of God’s organic salvation, in which we are revealed as sons of God, and we attain full sonship, the redemption of our body, which has been glorified.

The verb προσδέχομαι (“wait,” “accept,” “receive,” “welcome”), from πρὸς (“toward”) and δέχομαι (“receive”), is also used to refer to the Lord’s coming or matters associated with it: Simeon awaited the consolation of Israel (Luke 2:25), Anna waited for the redemption of Jerusalem (v. 38), and Joseph of Arimathea awaited and expected the kingdom of God (Mark 15:43; Luke 23:51). We are looking toward, or are awaiting, the blessed hope, even the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ (Titus 2:13), and we should keep ourselves in the love of God, awaiting the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life (Jude 21).

Another verb translated “wait” is ἀναμένω (a compound of ἀνά (“up”) and μένω (“to remain,” “abide”)). Ἀναμένω occurs one time, referring to the believers’ awaiting the Son of God from the heavens (1 Thes. 1:10). We remain, looking up toward the heavens, awaiting the Lord’s coming. “Our life declares that we have no hope on this earth and no positive destiny in this age, and that our hope is the coming Lord, who is our destiny forever. This governs, holds, and keeps our Christian life for the church life” (Lee, *Recovery Version*, v. 10, note 1).

The preposition κατενώπιον (“before”), which is a compound of κατά (“according to”) and ἔνώπιον (“in the eye” or “in the sight”—i.e., ἐν (“in”) with -ώπιον, from ὤψ, ὀπός (“eye,” “face,” “countenance”), occurs three times in the New Testament, all of which are related to the Lord’s coming.¹⁴ Interestingly, κατενώπιον does not occur in secular authors, but only in the Septuagint and New Testament. We were chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and without blemish before Him in love

(Eph. 1:4). The phrase *before Him in love* points toward the church as a spotless bride standing before (κατενώπιον) Christ as the Bridegroom. This is further confirmed by Christ presenting (παρίστημι, a compound of παρά (“alongside”) and ἵστημι (“stand,” “set”)) the church to Himself glorious, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she would be holy and without blemish (5:27), and by Paul betrothing the believers to one husband in order to present (παρίστημι) them as a pure virgin to Christ (2 Cor. 11:2). Christ (as the fullness of God) also reconciled us in the body of His flesh through death, to present (παρίστημι) us holy and without blemish and without reproach before (κατενώπιον) Him (Col. 1:22). Jude ends with this prayer: “To Him who is able to guard you from stumbling and to set you before [κατενώπιον] His glory without blemish in exultation” (v. 24). These verses point to the Lord’s coming back when the church is ready to be presented to Him, having become the same as, or according to (κατά), Him in life (pure—without blemish, spot, or wrinkle—and righteous—without reproach), in nature (holy), and in expression (glorious) and beautiful in His sight (ἔνώπιον).

AT THE LORD’S COMING
THE CHRIST COMING FROM
THE HEAVENS MEETS THE CHRIST
WHO HAS MATURED IN US.
THIS IS THE FINAL STAGE
OF GOD’S ORGANIC SALVATION.

Conclusion

The Lord’s coming is connected to the person of God’s anointed One, Christ, the Messiah, the seed of the woman. He is the person who restores and recovers humanity to fulfill God’s purpose of expressing God and representing God corporately (cf. Gen.

1:26-28). The incarnation of Christ produced a God-man who redeemed humanity through His death and who became the life-giving Spirit through His resurrection to impart, or dispense, Himself with His life and nature into humanity. This dispensing changes humanity intrinsically, and through the growth of Christ in the believers He constitutes them to be the same as He is in life and nature, to be His counterpart, His bride, the wife of the Lamb. This reconstitution of “being” causes a reaction in the heart of Christ. Adam, in his reaction to Eve, typifies Christ; when he met Eve, after having named so many animals, Adam said, “This time this is bone of my bones / And flesh of my flesh” (2:23). Because of His reconstituted bride, Christ can come to be matched with her, His long-awaited counterpart, who has the same image as He does (2 Cor. 3:18; 1 John 3:2); He will present (παρίστημι) her to Himself, causing her to stand beside (παρά) Him and before (κατενώπιον) Him in love. This counterpart is also His Body, who can exercise the authority of Himself as the Head, bringing the kingdom of God to the earth in order to exercise His dominion, ultimately fulfilling Genesis 1:26-28 and 3:15.

by Roger Good

Notes

¹For example, the Science and Security Board of the website *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, for its “2023 Doomsday Clock Statement,” considers the present time to be “a time of unprecedented danger”—that “it is 90 seconds to midnight.” The Doomsday Clock’s setting is based on perceived danger of four major threats to the planet: nuclear risk, climate change, biological threats, and disruptive technologies.

²The latter is implied in Genesis 2 when Jehovah God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper as his counterpart” (v. 18). It was not good for the man just then created in God’s image and likeness to be alone; it was also not good for the Creator God to be alone. In His economy He desires to be the Husband living together with humanity as His corporate wife. “Adam here typifies God in Christ as the real, universal Husband, who is seeking a wife for Himself (Rom. 5:14; cf. Isa. 54:5; John 3:29; 2 Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:31-32; Rev. 19:7; 21:9). Adam’s need for a wife typifies and portrays God’s need, in His economy, to have a wife as His complement” (Lee, *Recovery Version*, Gen. 2:18, note 1). The phrase translated “helper as his counterpart or complement” (“help meet” in KJV, “helpmate” in Darby) is *’ezer k’negdo* in Hebrew, literally “helper as his opposite.” These two aspects, “complement” and “helper,” correspond to the notions of image and dominion in the previous chapter. “Complement,” or “opposite,” corresponds to God’s image; that is, humanity matches God. “Helper” corresponds to dominion; that is, humanity helps God by representing Him and fighting for His interests on earth.

³The Old Testament believers thought that the Messiah, the Christ, the anointed One of Jehovah, would come just once, consummating in the time of the restoration of Israel. Sections of the Old Testament, such as Isaiah 40 through 66, speak much about Christ’s coming. Actually, the Lord’s coming can be likened to “two peaks of a mountain range...look[ing] like one peak from a distance, but when you come near them, you can see that there are two peaks with a big valley, a big plain, between them” (Lee, *Life-study of Isaiah* 443). The first coming began the age of grace, the church age, which occupies the “valley” between the peaks, and the second coming begins the age of restoration, the age of the kingdom.

⁴Anthony C. Thiselton provides a thorough presentation on the possible ways to understand the meaning of *Maranatha* (1347-1352). Both translations of the verb *atha* (“come”) as a perfect or a future imperative in the expression *Maranatha* accord with the revelation of the Bible. The Lord’s coming can be viewed from the perspective of “already, but not yet.” Already the Lord has come (through

His coming as a man in incarnation and as the Spirit in resurrection), and He has not yet come, but He will come (as the Husband to receive the church as His bride (who will be the bridal army) and as the Head to be matched with His built-up Body). We can even say that the Lord came (as a man), He has come and is still here (as the Spirit), and He will come again (as a man). Viewing the Lord’s coming as past, present, and future (particularly in terms of His παρουσία (presence)—see note 6 below) corresponds with the meaning of the name Jehovah: the “I AM,” which means literally, “He will be, He is, and He was,” the self-existing and ever-existing in the past, present, and future; and the title of the God in Revelation *ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος* (“He who is and who was and who is coming” (1:4, 8)) and *ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος* (“He who was and who is and who is coming” (4:8)). See my article, “The Purpose of God in the Name of Jehovah,” especially pages 63-64.

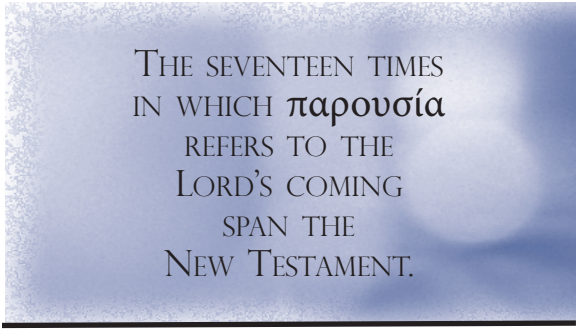
⁵While people frequently refer to the Lord’s second coming as His coming back or His return, interestingly *to come back* and *to return* are not used in the New Testament to refer to the Lord’s second coming, except in parables told about certain people who signify the Lord Jesus. For example, the Samaritan said he would repay the innkeeper when he returned (*ἐπανερχομαι*, a compound consisting of *ἐπί* (“upon”), *ἀνά* (“up,” “again,”) and *ἔρχομαι* (“to come”) in Luke 10:35). Also, a certain man of noble birth charged his slaves to do business while he went to a distant country to receive a kingdom and then return (*ἐπανερχομαι*, in 19:12, 15). In the Old Testament Jehovah promised to return (*shuv*) to Zion and “will dwell within Jerusalem; and Jerusalem will be called the City of Truth, and the mountain of Jehovah of hosts, the Holy Mountain” (Zech. 8:3). This refers to the situation of Jerusalem in the restoration of Israel during the millennial kingdom. It is not wrong to talk about the Lord’s coming back or His return, since this emphasizes His return to this earth as a man, but the New Testament also indicates that He is still with the believers, though in another form, as the Spirit (John 14:3, 18; Matt. 28:20).

⁶Παρουσία can also be derived from the feminine singular participle *παρούσα* (*παροντ-* with the formative suffix *-ία*, indicating quality or sometimes action), which is from the verb *πάρεμι*, meaning “to be present,” “to arrive” (cf. Oepke 859, Hay 2). However, *πάρεμι* itself is a compound of *παρά* with *εἰμί*. *Πάρεμι* occurs twenty-four times in the New Testament and almost always means “to be present” (e.g., 1 Cor. 5:3; Gal. 4:18; Rev. 17:8). Similarly, *οὐσία* can be derived from the feminine singular participle *οὔσα* of the verb meaning “to be.” *Οὐσία* occurs by itself two times in the New Testament and is translated “estate,” referring to the essential substance of the portion of the inheritance due to the prodigal son (Luke 15:12-13).

Outside of the New Testament οὐσία became important theologically. This word is used to refer to God's being or essence in the controversies concerning the being of Christ. According to the Nicene Creed and the Symbol of Chalcedon, Christ is of *one* and *the same* (ὁμός) substance, essence, and being (οὐσία) as God the Father (ὁμοούσια)—consubstantial, or coessential. This contrasts with the position of the Arian party at Nicaea (A.D. 325), which considered Christ of *like* (ὅμοιος) substance, essence, and being with the Father (ὁμοιούσια). The word οὐσία occurs one time, in Philippians 2:12, as ἀπουσία (“absence”), a compound of ἀπό (“from”) with οὐσία (“being”), and over one hundred times in the compound ἐξουσία (“authority”).

⁷The seventeen times in which παρουσία refers to the Lord's coming span the New Testament (Matt. 24:3, 27, 37, 39; 1 Cor. 15:23; 1 Thes. 2:19; 3:13; 4:15; 5:23; 2 Thes. 2:1, 8; James 5:7-8; 2 Pet. 1:16; 3:4, 12; 1 John 2:28). Six times in the New Testament παρουσία refers to the coming of Paul and his co-workers, such as Stephanus, Fortunatus, and Achaicus (1 Cor. 16:17), Titus (2 Cor. 7:6-7), and Paul (10:10; Phil. 1:26; 2:12). One time it refers negatively to the coming presence of Antichrist, the lawless one (2 Thes. 2:9).

⁸Donald Guthrie relates the παρουσία to the transformation of the believers, looking at three Pauline passages 1 Corinthians 15:50-58, 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, and Philippians 3:20-21. He focuses on the παρουσία bringing about a change in the believers rather than the change in the believers that brings about the παρουσία. “In the context of the after-life...[transformation denotes] a radical change which nevertheless preserves sufficient continuity to ensure that there is no disintegration of personality” (39). At the time of the παρουσία there will be a radical change of the believers' corruptible physical body of humiliation to that of an incorruptible spiritual body of glory, regardless whether they are living or dead (1 Cor. 15:44, 51, 53-54; Phil. 3:21), a change similar to that of the Lord's body when He was transfigured (Matt. 17:2) and after His resurrection (Luke 24:39; John 20:19-20). When He is manifested, we will be like Him because we will see Him even as He is (1 John 3:2). Guthrie considers Paul's “three expressions ‘moment’, ‘twinkling of an eye’ and ‘sounding of the last trumpet’ to show that he is not thinking of a gradual change. The ‘moment’ is a particular point in history, i.e. the moment of the parousia” (45). However, Guthrie also indicates that transformation is a process (Rom. 12:2; 2 Cor. 3:18), not simply a singular event.



⁹As Witness Lee notes,

These early overcomers will be the first-ripe ones in God's field. Hence, they will be reaped before the harvest as firstfruits to God and to the Lamb. The harvest will be reaped later, in [Rev. 14:14-16]. This means that the overcomers will be raptured to the heavens before the harvest, just as the firstfruits of the good land were reaped and brought into the temple of God before the harvest (Lev. 23:10-11; Exo. 23:19). The events recorded in [Rev. 14:]6-13, all of which will take place during the great tribulation (Matt. 24:21), indicate clearly and prove strongly that the first overcomers, the firstfruits in [Rev. 14:]1-5, will be raptured before the great tribulation, and that the harvest in vv. 14-16, composed of the majority of the believers, will be raptured at the end of the great tribulation. (*Recovery Version*, v. 4, note 2)

¹⁰Abiding in the Lord is the prerequisite for Him to abide in us (John 15:4) so that He may increase and spread into the faculties of our soul, making His home in our hearts (Eph. 3:17).

¹¹There is no authority except from God (Rom. 13:1), and it belongs to the only God our Savior (Jude 25) and to whom-ever He gives it. He has given all authority in heaven and on earth to Christ the Son (Matt. 28:18), who exercised His authority to cast out unclean spirits on earth (Luke 4:36). Christ as the Head

of the church transmits His authority to His Body, which, by holding the Head, grows with the growth of God and grows up into Him in all things; then out from the Head all the Body causes the growth of the Body, and all the members function unto the building up of the Body in love (Col. 2:19; Eph. 4:15-16). Authority is given to deputy authorities who exist on earth, ordained (or arranged) by God (Rom. 13:1-2), and to the overcomers, whose rapture brings in the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of His Christ to cast Satan, the accuser of the brothers (Rev. 12:10), down from heaven in the initial stages of the Lord's coming to the earth at the end of the age.

¹²The commandment refers to what was mentioned in verses 11-12, i.e., to “flee these things [mentioned in verses 3-10], and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, meekness,” “fight the good fight of the faith,” and “lay hold on the eternal life.”

¹³The eighth occurrence of ἀπεκδέχομαι refers to the long-suffering of God eagerly awaiting the preparation of the

ark in the days of Noah (1 Pet. 3:20). The preparation of the ark is a type of the building up of the church, a prerequisite for the Lord's second coming; so even this example of ἀπεκδέχομαι is typologically related to the Lord's second coming.

¹⁴Another compound preposition ἔμπροσθεν (meaning "before" and composed of ἐν ("in"), πρὸς ("towards"), and θεν (a suffix meaning "from")) is used a few times related to the Lord's coming but not exclusively: The believers are the hope or joy or crown of boasting of the apostles before our Lord Jesus (1 Thes. 2:19), and Paul prays that the Lord may establish the believers' hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father (3:13). This preposition implies motion toward, indicated by πρὸς, but also in union with, indicated by ἐν (we are in Christ, the blameless, holy One), and acknowledging a source out from God (who dispenses into us His righteous life and holy nature), thus enabling and preparing us to be in the presence of God.

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The Second Coming of Christ

The second coming of Christ is a great subject. His first coming was in His incarnation, the incarnation of God. His second coming will bring His kingdom to the earth.

This word [parousia] was used for the coming (presence) of a dignified person. Before the Lord Jesus ascended, He promised that He would come again. Christ's second coming will be His presence with His people. The promised parousia is Christ's complete presence with His believers.

Even today we enjoy the Lord's presence, but it is not His complete presence. Today His presence is just in the Spirit, not physical. One day He will be with us not only in the Spirit but also physically. Today we can sense the Lord's presence, but we cannot see Him physically (1 Pet. 1:8). But one day we will see Him physically in resurrection. His second coming will be His complete presence with us. In Matthew 28:20 the Lord promised that He would be with us all the days. The Lord is with us today, but the unbelievers do not believe this, because His presence with us is unseen. The day will come, however, when Christ will come openly to the earth, and all will see Him because His presence with us will be visible.

Christ's second coming, His parousia, begins from the rapture of the man-child and the firstfruits to the heavens (Rev. 12:5; 14:1-4) and ends with His appearing on the earth with His saints. His parousia will probably last about three and a half years.

This parousia of the Lord will end with Christ's appearing on the earth...First, His parousia will be secret and hidden in the heavens...The manifestation, or appearing, of the Lord's coming will be with a kind of shining. The appearing of Christ's coming is the shining of His parousia...Then this parousia will be brought to the air on the way. Eventually, His parousia will have an appearing, and that shining appearing will bring Antichrist to nothing.

From *The Apostles' Teaching* by Witness Lee, pp. 105-107