Understanding the Parousia in Matthew 24: A Study of Christ's Coming and Presence

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Part 1 – Matthew 24:1-3

This study offers an insightful analysis of **Matthew 24**, focusing on Jesus' prophetic discourse concerning the destruction of the Temple and His second coming. The central argument presented is that Jesus' statements in **Matthew 24:1-3** must be interpreted within the context of three specific questions posed by the disciples, rather than being relegated to a distant, future event. By drawing attention to these three questions, this will debunk common dispensationalist interpretations of the passage, emphasizing a more historically grounded understanding of the text.

The Context of Matthew 24

In **Matthew 24:1-3**, the disciples ask Jesus three questions:

> *"And Jesus went out, and departed from the temple: and his disciples came to him for to show him the buildings of the temple. And Jesus said unto them, See ye not all these things? Verily I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down. And as he sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?" (Matthew 24:1-3, KJV)*

These three questions frame the rest of Jesus' discourse:

1. **When shall these things be?** (Referring to the destruction of the Temple)
2. **What shall be the sign of Thy coming?**
3. **And of the end of the world?**

Understanding the context of these questions is critical for interpreting the rest of **Matthew 24** correctly. The disciples are grappling with Jesus' shocking prediction that the Temple, the very heart of Jewish religious life, would be destroyed. Their astonishment, combined with their association of the Temple's destruction with the coming of the Messiah and the end of the age, leads them to ask these pivotal questions.

The Dispersion of Dispensationalist Views

The modern **dispensationalist** interpretations of **Matthew 24:4-44**, which suggest that these events are yet to occur, placing them in the distant future rather than in the immediate historical context of the first century. According to a deep study of God's word, dispensationalists lift these verses out of their context, applying them to events far removed from the destruction of the Temple in **70 A.D.** This interpretation overlooks the clear focus Jesus had on the impending destruction of Jerusalem.

> *"What a lot of Christian Zionists and dispensationalists do is they take Matthew chapter 24 starting at verse 4 and all the way through verse 44 and they kind of lift this out of the scripture…they throw it into the future, the far future."*

By contrast, some advocate for a **preterist interpretation**—that is, seeing much of **Matthew 24** as fulfilled in the destruction of the Temple in **70 A.D.** This perspective, rooted in historical events, emphasizes that Jesus was primarily warning His disciples about the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the Temple-centered Judaism that had been central to Jewish life.

The Three Questions and Separate Events

We need to carefully distinguish between the three questions the disciples asked, which represent **three separate events**:

1. **When shall these things be?**—referring to the destruction of the Temple.
2. **What shall be the sign of Thy coming?**—a future event, but not necessarily the immediate second coming.
3. **And of the end of the world?**—another distinct event.

Combining these questions into one event, as some theologians do, leads to confusion. Instead, recognizing that each question addresses different moments in history helps to clarify Jesus' teaching in **Matthew 24**.

The Sign of His Coming

The second question about "the sign of Thy coming" is carefully dissected. The disciples were not asking when Jesus would return, but rather what **sign** would indicate His coming. The destruction of Jerusalem itself served as the **sign** of Jesus' eventual return. In this way, the **coming** of Jesus is not synonymous with His immediate return in **70 A.D.**, but the destruction of the Temple foreshadows and promises His future coming.

> *"I'm not of the opinion that Jesus came in **70 A.D.**, but that He directed the destruction of Jerusalem in **70 A.D.** And that is just the first sign of His coming."*

Drawing attention to the Greek word **"parousia"** (παρουσία), which means **presence** or **coming**, this term is pivotal in understanding the nature of Jesus' coming, and it implies His eventual presence, even though the destruction of Jerusalem serves as an initial sign. The destruction is a demonstration of God's judgment, but it points forward to the eventual

return of Christ.

The Impact of Misinterpretations

Dispensationalism as a significant factor in the misinterpretation of **Matthew 24**. By isolating verses and reinterpreting them to fit a future timeline, dispensationalists have distorted the original meaning of the text. We need to set aside preconceived notions and approach the passage with an open mind, focused on what the Bible says rather than relying on **man-made traditions** and **speculations**.

Concluding Words: A Call for Clear Biblical Interpretation

The core message of this analysis is that understanding **Matthew 24** requires recognizing its focus on the destruction of the Temple and the unfolding of events in **70 A.D.** This historical perspective offers a grounded understanding of Jesus' prophecy and challenges modern theological systems, particularly **dispensationalism**. The three distinct questions asked by the disciples unlock the rest of the chapter, and careful attention to these details is essential for a correct interpretation of Jesus' discourse.

By grounding the discussion in the actual words of Jesus and avoiding speculative future scenarios, it's important we return to a clear, contextual reading of the Scriptures. As the study progresses, the emphasis will remain on exploring the text honestly, allowing the Bible to speak for itself.

> *"This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled." (**Matthew 24:34**, KJV)*

This verse serves as a reminder that much of what Jesus prophesied was intended for His contemporaries, not distant generations far removed from the historical context of

Jerusalem’s destruction.

Part 2 – Coming of Christ

Continuing from where we left off, the discussion now shifts to a **word study** on the Greek term “parousia,” which refers to the **coming** or **presence** of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Greek word **parousia** is a more comprehensive concept than merely the destruction of Jerusalem. It points to a future event of immense significance, overshadowing the localized catastrophe of **70 A.D.** The “parousia” is seen as the “big story,” much like a major headline in a newspaper that should not be overlooked in favor of minor details.

The Dual Nature of Parousia in Scripture

In the second part of the study, we focused on the use of **parousia** in various places in the New Testament, starting with **Matthew 24:27**:

> *“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 24:27, KJV)*

Here, **Jesus’ parousia** is described in striking terms: it will be **instantaneous**, **bright**, and **unmistakable**, much like lightning that suddenly illuminates the entire sky. This imagery highlights the suddenness and undeniable nature of Jesus’ return. Just as lightning is visible and awe-inspiring, so will the coming of Christ be—there will be no ambiguity or room for doubt.

Next, **Matthew 24:37** offers a further comparison, this time to the **days of Noah**:

> *“But as the days of Noah were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.” (Matthew 24:37, KJV)*

This verse introduces another layer to the **parousia**. During the time of Noah, people lived their lives without concern, ignoring the signs of impending judgment. Similarly, at Christ’s coming, many will be caught unaware, living as if nothing unusual were happening. We can link this to the complacency seen in the world today, warning believers that failing to expect and prepare for Jesus’ return may reflect a deeper spiritual negligence.

The **days of Noah** metaphor also serves as a reminder to the Church: just as the people in Noah’s day saw the ark and the animals boarding it but continued living without repentance, so too might believers today neglect the signs of Christ’s return.

Paul’s Use of Parousia and the Resurrection

Moving from the Gospels to Paul’s epistles, now lets highlight **1 Corinthians 15:23**:

> *“But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ’s at his coming.” (1 Corinthians 15:23, KJV)*

This verse illustrates the **parousia** in the context of the **resurrection**. Paul teaches that the **bodily resurrection** of believers will occur in an orderly sequence: first, **Christ the firstfruits**—meaning Jesus, who was raised from the dead—then, at His **parousia**, those who belong to Him will be raised. This passage emphasizes that the **parousia** is not just an abstract concept but the event that will inaugurate the **resurrection** of the dead, beginning with those who have died in Christ. The resurrection, therefore, serves as a key feature of His

coming, making the **parousia** not just a visible event but also a profound act of divine power.

The resurrection is one of the **earmarks** of the **parousia**—the dead in Christ rising first, followed by those who are alive at His coming, will be transformed. This understanding underlines the finality and universality of the **parousia**, as it will affect both the living and the dead.

Parousia in Human Terms

The word **parousia** also appears in more mundane contexts in Paul's letters, such as in **1 Corinthians 16:17**:

> *"I am glad of the coming of Stephanas and Fortunatus and Achaicus: for that which was lacking on your part they have supplied." (1 Corinthians 16:17, KJV)*

While this verse refers to the arrival of fellow believers, it adds nuance to the understanding of **parousia**. Here, Paul celebrates the **presence** or **coming** of these individuals, which supplied what was lacking for the Corinthians. This interpretation reinforces the idea that **parousia** implies more than just a physical arrival—it signifies the **presence** that fulfills what is needed. Similarly, Christ's **parousia** will supply what is spiritually lacking in the world: the full **presence of God** in human history.

This theme of **presence** continues in **2 Corinthians 7:6**, where Paul writes:

> *"Nevertheless God, that comforteth those that are cast down, comforted us by the coming of Titus." (2 Corinthians 7:6, KJV)*

Again, **parousia** is used to describe the **comforting presence** of a fellow believer, Titus. By emphasizing these human instances of **parousia**, we can have a fuller understanding of the term

when applied to Christ. It is not merely an event of arrival but the **manifestation of presence**—Jesus **being with His people**, much like Titus brought comfort through his **presence** among the Corinthians.

The Meaning of Presence in Parousia

Finally, **2 Corinthians 10:10** adds another dimension to **parousia**:

> *"For his letters, say they, are weighty and powerful; but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible." (2 Corinthians 10:10, KJV)*

Paul uses the word **parousia** to describe the **bodily presence** of a person, albeit in a negative sense here, as critics claim that his physical presence is less impressive than his letters. This serves to highlight the contrast between **appearance** and **substance**. In terms of Christ's **parousia**, however, there will be no such disparity. His **presence** will be powerful and unmistakable, not something that can be overlooked or undervalued.

Concluding Words: Understanding Parousia as the Ultimate Presence

The in-depth word study of **parousia** in both human and divine contexts helps illuminate its profound meaning in relation to **Christ's return**. A vision of **parousia** that is more than just an arrival—it is the full manifestation of **Christ's presence** among His people, bringing comfort, judgment, and the ultimate resurrection of the dead.

While **Matthew 24** certainly includes the **destruction of the Temple in 70 A.D.**, it is clear that this event was only the beginning—a **sign** of the greater **parousia** to come. As believers today, the challenge is to remain watchful, expectant, and

spiritually prepared for that final and definitive **parousia**, when Christ's presence will fill the earth like lightning, and every eye will see Him.

This interpretation pushes back against the **dispensationalist** view, which tends to isolate these events into a distant future. Instead an integrated, historical, and future-facing understanding of **parousia**—one that not only accounts for past events like **70 A.D.** but also anticipates the **final return of Christ** and the resurrection of believers.

> *"For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first." (1 Thessalonians 4:16, KJV)*

This final event, the true **parousia**, will be the culmination of God's plan, bringing the world from **judgment** to **resurrection**, and uniting believers with the **eternal presence** of Christ.

Part 3 – Further Look at Concept of Parousia

Continuing from where part two concluded, we'll look further into the concept of **parousia** and connect it to both Paul's writings and the overall Christian experience. The final section ties together the **parousia** as both a future event and a present reality, emphasizing the presence of Christ through His word and the continuous nature of His relationship with believers.

The Word as a Stand-in for Presence

In Paul's letter to the Corinthians, he makes a profound statement about his **bodily presence**:

> *"For his letters, say they, are weighty and powerful; but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible." (2 Corinthians 10:10, KJV)*

While Paul's physical presence might be lacking or even unimpressive, his **letters** carry his authority and presence in an equally significant way. The parallel here to the **parousia** of Jesus Christ, suggesting that while believers long for the physical manifestation of Christ, they already have His **word**—and this word acts as a form of **presence**. The Bible, as the living word of God, offers believers the **presence of Christ** even in His physical absence.

This argument echoes **John 1:1**, where it is written:

> *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." (John 1:1, KJV)*

Believers are encouraged to recognize that Christ's **word** is His presence, and by studying and embracing Scripture, Christians bring the presence of Christ into their lives. This concept is crucial because while many await Christ's second coming, the Bible provides an **immediate presence**—a foretaste of the **parousia**—through the Word. Thus, the **Word of God** should be cherished as an embodiment of Christ's presence, with His physical return acting as the culmination of His ongoing relationship with His followers.

Avoiding the Obsession with Prophetic Events

A cautionary word about an unhealthy obsession with **end-time**

prophecies and the exclusive focus on the physical return of Christ. This warning addresses those who, in their desire to know the specific timing of Christ's return, miss the **fullness of the Christian life**. The metaphor of a letter from a loved one, where the reader fixates only on a specific date of arrival, illustrates this well. Just as one might miss the deeper content of the letter, believers can overlook the richness of the Christian life by focusing solely on the details of prophetic events.

> *"There are many people today who are prophecy fanboys…They're so focused on the end times…but they'll hold these Jewish feasts and they'll wear beanies and they'll do all these other things…and they miss all the information and all the rest of the instructions and all the rest of the letter."*

This critique highlights the danger of missing the fullness of Christ's teachings by obsessing over eschatology. Instead of being overly fixated on when Christ will return, believers need to live as though Christ's **presence is already here**—to work out their salvation with the expectation that Christ is already walking alongside them.

> *"Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." (Philippians 2:12, KJV)*

This verse reinforces the point that the absence of Christ's physical presence does not exempt believers from living according to His will. **Paul's message to the Philippians** emphasizes personal responsibility in faith, which applies equally to Christians today. The **parousia**, then, is not just something to wait for; it calls for **faithful living** now, in the active presence of His word.

Parousia and Joyful Expectation

The discussion then moves to **1 Thessalonians 2:19**, where Paul speaks of the **joyful anticipation** of Christ's return:

> *"For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming?" (1 Thessalonians 2:19, KJV)*

This verse, though brief, is rich in meaning, **believers are already in the presence of Christ** through their relationship with Him, even before His physical return. This is not merely a future hope, but a **present reality**. Paul emphasizes that those who are in Christ are already living in His presence, which will only be fully realized at His coming. This understanding reframes the **parousia** not as an event to anxiously wait for, but as an ongoing **reality** that transforms life now.

Believers need to take joy in the fact that they are **already in Christ**, experiencing His presence through the Holy Spirit, and to look forward to the ultimate consummation of this presence when Christ returns. Thus, the **parousia** is not only a moment in the distant future but an **active presence** that believers participate in even today.

Living in the Presence of Christ Now

The conclusion of the message brings all the pieces together, emphasizing that while the **parousia** will ultimately culminate in Christ's return, believers are already living in His presence. Christ's **physical manifestation** is assured, but Christians should live as if they are already walking side by side with Him. This **present reality** of Christ's presence calls for a life of **holiness, vigilance, and joy**.

> *"We're in His presence now. It's as if He's already returned. That's our hope. That's our joy. That's our crown of*

rejoicing."

By living in the presence of Christ today, believers are called to faithful, **Christ-centered living** that is not dependent on the timing of His return but is rooted in the reality of His **spiritual presence**. The **parousia** is not just a future event to be passively awaited, but an ongoing experience of Christ's reign and presence through the Word and the Holy Spirit.

Conclusion: The Full Meaning of Parousia

As the essay draws to a close, it has successfully expanded the understanding of **parousia** beyond a singular focus on the **second coming**. Instead, **parousia** is understood as the **continuous presence of Christ** through His word, His Spirit, and His promise to return. Christians, therefore, are not merely waiting for an event but are **living in the presence of Christ** every day, participating in His **spiritual reign**.

A warning against the pitfalls of **over-fixation on end-time prophecies**, but to urge believers to focus on the **whole counsel of God**. By living in the present reality of Christ's presence, believers can experience the joy, hope, and rejoicing that come from walking in His presence now, even as they anticipate the final **parousia**.

In closing, we need encouragement to **study the Word of God** and engage with Scripture which is a central message: that the **Word** is the **presence of Christ**, and through it, believers can encounter the living God while awaiting His glorious return.

"He is the manifestation of His word. And until His physical manifestation takes place, we have His promise."

This dual focus on the **present presence** of Christ through His word and the future **parousia** offers a balanced approach to

Christian eschatology, one that emphasizes both the **immediacy of Christ’s presence** and the **anticipation of His return**.