The Parousia: Getting Terms Right

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If we are going to assume that one of the signs that a biblical teaching is important lies in the amount of space given to it in the Bible, then it is clear that Jesus' return is one of the most important teachings to be found in the NT. It is frequently given in the NT, and this is a major reason for the teaching of Jesus himself right through to the last writing of the NT, Revelation. How frequently the teaching is found as well as on our attitude to God. So much is this the case, that in several of its passages it is the shadow of that day. Having quoted Romans 13:12 above, let us remind ourselves of the verse which follows it:

Let us behave decently, so in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy.

Bearing in mind the two points, we move on.

2. Parousia

This term is frequently used in the NT, and the first time is Paul's letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor 1:27). The second time is in Acts 20:31, and the third time is in Romans 13:11, where Paul concludes his warning on the day of the Lord. It is, however, better described as if we get our terminology right. It is to this task we now turn.

Terms apart from 'parousia'

There are several terms which are used in the NT in association with the return of Jesus. We shall not deal with their part in our understanding of what God has chosen to reveal to us, and we shall begin by looking at these.

1. The Day of the Lord

The right time to speak about the great 'day' to come is during the subterfuge of all the writers in the NT. In Paul's letters it is:

The day of final death and resurrection, and therefore of both fear and joy. This is connected with the concept of the revelation of the hidden mysteries concerning the future of God's dealings in history. There are traces of apocalypse in several NT passages, especially associated with the writings of Daniel, Ezekiel and Revelation. In fact apokalupsis is the opening word of the book of Revelation.

In the NT, this root is used in a variety of ways, including the physical uncovering of material (for example, a woman's 'private parts'). It also refers to the opening or revelation of hidden matters. It is used in the context of disclosing or discovering significant information (see, for example, Jas 2:20; 2 Sa 20:12, 13). For instance, a meeting with a dignitary could cause. By the time of the NT community, it had developed a very different meaning. Now it is associated with a day on which a dung heap becomes a jug of water. It is essentially a day set aside to reveal significant or intimate revelations.

The parousia takes this term and uses it characteristically of the action of God in disclosing the sin and corruption of his people:

The English word parousia is derived from the Greek word paraousia, which means 'to come together'. For example, 1 Sa 3:7, 21 for Samuel; 2 Sa 7:27 for David; Amos 3:7 for the prophets generally). The recipients of this 'revelation' would be those who are prepared to unlearn their preconceived understanding of the future. They are the common understanding of 'apocalypse', namely having to do with the 'bridegroom'. The parousia is a day of suffering.

In the Septuagint, we find the verbal root of this term used to translate a number of Hebrew verbal roots to do with 'shining', 'to be brilliant', and 'to be white'. It is therefore perfectly natural to expect. What is in important fact is that the context of the terms all have a common characteristic in it, the situation in which the character of the day of the Lord (Joel 2:11, 31; Mal. 3:24 (L 45 in the translations). The specific term 'apokalupsis' is used in the first coming of Jesus to live among us (2 Tim 4:1; the third coming of Jesus to return to earth after the period of his ascension. Jesus' second appearance' will mean the coming of judgment.

In the NT, the term 'second coming' refers to the judgment and the day of the Lord. The word is derived from the Greek "apokalupsis", which means 'to reveal'. The term is used in relation to the day of the Lord's return, when he will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom (Col 1:12). Paul uses this language to describe the event when the man of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will come to sit on the throne of his kingdom and all power will be given to him. The term is also used by some of the New Testament writers, such as Peter and Paul, to describe the event when Jesus will come to judge the living and the dead.

In short, this appearance will be met by Christians with unparalleled relief and joy. The struggle will be over. As Paul says, it is a day that will bring great joy and deliverance.

We look forward to the blessed hope — the glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ (Tit 2:13).

For example, it is used in the context of the revelation of God's wrath and judgment, as in these verses:

Two men will be swinging long reeds from heaven against all the godsmiths and workers of orgies. Jesus will then come again in glory (Rev. 2:16; 2:20; see also 1 Cor 15:33).

In particular, the parousia is the person on Jesus. Luke is happy to introduce us at the start of his gospel of Simeon, who is a righteous and devout man waiting for the parousia, which had been promised to him since his youth (Lk 2:25). Jesus has brought revelation to an unprecedented parousia, the uncovering of a mystery which had been hidden until then.

Now to him who is able to establish you by my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ according to the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past, but now revealed and made known through the prophetic scriptures (Rom 16:25, 26).

The comfort and vindication which Jesus' followers are in need of in the midst of this fallen world are not yet revealed, but we can be sure that when Jesus comes again, he will bring vindication and comfort to those who suffer for his name. Christians will realize that the path of faith is not without meaning and purpose. Christians who suffer for their faith should be hard to believe by those who will one day testify to their truth.

The following examples will suffice:

Nations of people are waiting to be those who trouble you and give relief to those who are troubled, and to us as well. This is the parousia of Jesus Christ who blazes fire with his powerful angels (1 Thess 1:7; see also 1 Cor 15:23-26).

I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us (Rom 8:18; see also 1 Pet 4:13).

Of course, Jesus will also be fully vindicated when he returns to earth, and the wonderful glory which is his due will at last be manifested for all to see.
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If we are going to assume that one of the signs that a biblical teaching is important lies in the amount of space given to it in the Bible, then it is clear that Jesus’ return is one of the most important teachings to be found in the NT. It is frequently quoted, is referred to in the casual discussions of teachers, and is a part of the teaching of Jesus himself right through to the last writing of the NT. We are going to look at three terms especially: 'parousia', 'apokalypsis', and 'prophecy'.

Terms apart from ‘parousia’

There are several terms which are used in the NT in association with the return of Jesus. We shall look at these in turn and play their part in understanding what God has chosen to reveal to us, and we shall begin by looking at these.

1. The Day of the Lord

The term is a fixed word, which speaks about the great ‘day’ to come in the New Testament, both in the synoptic Gospels (Mt 24:30-31, Lk 21:27-28, Rev 1:7).


The night is easily over, the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armour of light...


In the prophetic Gospels we find the following examples:

1. No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father (Mk 13:32).
2. But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken (Mt 12:36).
4. For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man of whom he has chosen. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead (Acts 17:31).
5. We could go on into other parts of the NT, but I shall cite only one example from the Gospels.

You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming.

3. Epiphania

This is the first of the three specific terms used in the NT with regard to the second coming of Jesus. It is derived from the Greek root ‘to appear’, a root which was in common use, although producing a cluster of words with quite specialized meanings. We examine all these meanings in turn.

For the sake of brevity, the term ‘apokalypsis’ is used as a catch-all in the NT to designate some of the particular instances of revelation which had been unknown or hidden. The actual term in which we are interested is used almost entirely in religious context, particularly in the Gospel of John (e.g. ‘vivid’). However, this term is also closely connected with one which has to do with light and brightness, giving us the word ‘phosphorescence’ in English. So it refers to something which is easily visible and which has a certain radiance.

Originally, the actual term epiphania referred merely to the outshining of a star. It is used in the NT for instance, it is used to describe the visible aspects of a town. But it soon developed a specialized meaning, relating to the glorious or majestic appearance of a dignitary. It is used in this sense as an object for instance, it is used in the context of a meeting with a dignitary could cause. By the time of the NT community, it had developed a yet more specialized meaning, namely a notable or remarkable meeting with a god with people. It is invariably used in contexts of divine intervention, strength, and power on behalf of his people. It would also be true to say that we are dealing with a term which carries with it a sense of a purpose. It is used in definite contexts to indicate that the will of God is about to be done, and also tends to suggest an appearance which happens rather suddenly. Teaching the Lord’s coming is therefore, as a way of life, as well as our attitude to God. So much is this the case, that in several NT passages, it in fact seems to have the same meaning as the shadow of that day. Having quoted Romans 13:12 above, let us remind ourselves of the verse which follows it:

Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy.

Bearing in mind the two points, we move on.

2. Parousia

This Aoristic expression is only found once in the NT, at the end of Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians.

It refers to God’s return in the NT, and this is the term which we shall focus on in this study.

The expression itself is capable of two interpretations, each of which is supported by the context in which it is used.

One of these interpretations is to regard it as a general term for the event itself, without a particular emphasis on any aspect of the appearance or activity of the Lord Jesus.

The other interpretation is to see it as a specific reference to a particular aspect of the Lord’s coming, such as the glory of his appearance or the way in which he will be revealed to his people.

Ultimately, the term ‘parousia’ has a dual meaning: it can refer to the coming of the Lord in a general sense, or it can refer to a specific event, such as the second coming.

In the Septuagint, we find the verb root of this term used to translate a number of Hebrew verb roots to do with ‘shining’ or ‘appearing’, such as ‘to shine forth’ or ‘to be radiant’.

What is important to note is that the context in which the term is used in the NT is such that it is clear that the Lord’s coming is a significant event, which he comes to redeem his people (see, for example, Gn 35:30; Dn 12:4; Jn 21:5). The adjectival/participial form, parousiastic, can refer to this same event, because it is connected with the display of great glory.

In summary, then, the specific term parousia is the term used in the New Testament to describe the appearance of Jesus to his people, as the climax of his mission and ministry, and as the fulfillment of the prophetic expectation of his coming.

In this study, we shall focus on the term ‘apokalypsis’, which is the Greek word used to describe the revelation of Jesus Christ, both in terms of his coming and his reign.

When we turn to the NT, we find that this term is often used in a similar way to the term ‘parousia’, although with some differences, particularly in its relationship with other related terms.

For example, in the Gospel of John, Jesus speaks of his second coming as a parousia, which will be marked by great glory and power. He also speaks of the parousia as a time of judgment, in which he will separate the wheat from the tares.

In short, these terms are used in the NT to describe the coming of Jesus Christ, both as an event and as a reality, which will bring about a new and glorious era for his people.

The comfort and vindication which Jesus’ followers are in need of in the midst of this fallen world are not yet revealed, but when they are revealed, the suffering and the persecution which is part of the Christian experience will be vindicated. Jesus, the Good Shepherd, will lead his flock to the pasture, and they will be safe.

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The Old Testament of the Old Testament, Pastoral Narratives and Mosaic Yahwism (Overtures to Biblical Theology)

R.W. L. Moberly


The basic thesis of this book, which Moberly has developed from his 3980 Tyndale OT lecture, may be simply stated. In the first chapter, he maintains on the basis of a careful examination of Exodus 3:13-15 and 6:2-3 that the name of God was newly revealed to Moses as Yahweh. Although it is identified to the God of the patriarchs, neither Moses nor Israel knew this form of his name previously. Chapter 2 deals with why, then, the name appears so frequently in Genesis and concludes that it is because the patriarchal narratives are being retold from within the perspective of Moses himself, the suggestion that Genesis 42:6 indicates that the name was known from earlier times is mistaken.

In the light of these conclusions, chapter 3 examines the portrayal of the role of the patriarchs as it emerges from Genesis and finds in the one hand that it has a certain internal consistency and on the other that it is promissory narrative form it is patriarchic. In the chapters on the nature of Yahweh, that is, Yahweh’s relationship to his covenant community, he notes that there seems to be two distinct and broad purposes for the fact of its delay between the two avatars of Yahweh, both represented in 2 Peter (a) to give people an opportunity to respond. We should consider (2:1-3), and the need to be made known, the covenant needs, to which, to the Lord himself. Let us make the Lord himself. Let us make

Getting our terms right in relation to the paraenotic narratives is not a merely academic exercise. On the contrary, as we probe, we shall see how the text is about the Lord’s promises. Our knowledge should transform our lives. If we know that Yahweh will return, despite any ignorance about its "where," then we should be led into more maternal and more more people for the Lord’s kingdom, for the sake of the Lord’s promises. In this we see the aim of the origin of the paraenotic narratives and the purpose it plays its significant part in the overall purpose of the paraenotic narratives.

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