

Matthew 24

The Gospel of Matthew, although probably written in the AD 60's, was set in an Old Testament prophetic time context. It was written with a Jewish audience in mind from a Jewish perspective by a converted Jewish tax collector, the Apostle Matthew (Levi).¹ It was probably written originally in Hebrew and later written in Greek.² The Hebrew word for *coming* used in Matthew 24 is *bow*, meaning, “to go or come, bring.” Although different forms of this word are used in Matthew 24, the same meaning is applied to all usages.³ However, the usage in verse 30, “the Son of Man *coming* on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory,” is a specific reference back to Daniel 7:13, which was written in Aramaic. The Aramaic word *athah*, meaning, “to arrive: come, bring”⁴ was used by Daniel in that verse. The word used for *athah*, in the Septuagint, is *erchomenos* (a form of *erchomai*).⁵ This Hebraic text and usage of the word will be compared to the Greek text where two separate words are used (*parousia* and *erchomai*). Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21 are considered to be Jesus' Apocalyptic or Olivet Discourse regarding the End Times. However, *parousia* is only used by Matthew in his account and then only in certain places, as compared to *erchomai*. The theory that *parousia* is uniquely used to

¹Elwell and Yarbrough, 78-85.

²Papias, *Fragments of Papias* 6 (ANF 1:154-5); Eusebius, *The Church History of Eusebius* 3.24.6, n. 5 (NPNF 1:152-3); and 3.39.16 (NPNF 1:173).

³*The New Testament in Hebrew and English* (Edgware, Middlesex, UK: The Society of Distributing the Holy Scriptures to the Jews, 1981), 52-55.

⁴William Wilson, “come,” *Old Testament Word Studies* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1978), 82-6; and George V. Wigram, “athah,” *The New Englishman's Hebrew Concordance* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1984), 182-3.

⁵Brenton, 1061.

describe the Rapture as a separate event from the Second Coming (as Paul did), will be tested by Matthew's use of the word in the Greek text of chapter 24.

Previous to this in chapter 23, Jesus was talking to the Pharisees about the kingdom of heaven (God) and the future of Jerusalem, while at the Temple. He concludes in verse 39 by saying, "For I say to you, from now on you shall not see Me until you say, 'Blessed is He who *comes (erchomai)* in the name of the Lord!'" Apparently, this is a statement about the Nation of Israel not accepting Jesus as the Messiah until His Second Coming.⁶ Then, in 24:1-2, Jesus came out of the Temple. And after the disciples had pointed out the Temple buildings to him, he said, "Do you not see all these things? Truly I say to you, not one stone here shall be left upon another, which will not be torn down." One now knows that Jesus was prophesying about the destruction of the city of Jerusalem and the Temple by the Romans in AD 70 (fulfilled some forty years after He made the prophetic declaration). The first use of the word *parousia* is in verse 3, where the disciples ask three questions, "Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of Your *coming (parousia)*, and of the end of the age?" The context of the questions, clearly points to the events surrounding the Old Testament prophecies of the Day of the Lord and the Messiah establishing his kingdom on earth. This is evidenced by a similar question from the disciples just prior to Jesus' ascension in Acts 1:6, "is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?" Matthew's account alone contains three questions, the other two accounts only two (excluding the question about Jesus' *Parousia*). Since Matthew alone uses *parousia*, he was the only one of the three Gospel writers of the account of the apocalyptic discourse to be present as an eye-witness, he uses *erchomai* in other places in this text, and he

⁶Ryrie, 1489.

had no concept of the Church as the new Theocratic Nation in God's plan, *parousia* in this text probably refers to Jesus' *coming* for His own holy people (the holy Jews or the restored Jewish Nation referred to in Daniel 12:1). According to Stanley D. Toussaint, because of the passage's strict Jewishness, neither the Church nor the Rapture of the Church is in view at all in Matthew 24.⁷

Jesus then proceeds to answer their questions, starting in verse 4 (from a Jewish believer's perspective in prophetic time, looking toward apocalyptic time). He chronicles the first 3 ½ year period of the Tribulation through verse 14 and then speaks of the "Abomination of Desolation, spoken of through Daniel the prophet," in verse 15. This becomes the dividing point of the Tribulation period and starts the Great Tribulation (last 3 ½ years, as mentioned in verse 21). He then shifts to answering the question about his future *coming* in verse 23, by warning them not to be misled by false christs and false prophets. In verse 25, he emphasizes this point by saying, "Behold, I have told you in advance." He then goes on to describe his *coming* in verse 26, by saying what it will not be (based on any human knowledge, wisdom, or origin), and in verse 27 by what it will be (based on heavenly origin, like lightning). Verses 27-31 describe his *coming*. However, based on the Greek text, there appears to be two separate *comings* described, instead of two separate references to one *coming*. The first *coming* is contained in verse 27 using the word *parousia*. The exact same language is used by Luke in 17:24 and similar language to Paul's description of the Rapture in 1 Corinthians 15 ("just as lightning comes from the east, and flashes even to the west," compared to "in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye"). The second

⁷Stanley D. Toussaint, "Are the Church and the Rapture in Matthew 24?" in *When the Trumpet Sounds*, ed. Thomas Ice and Timothy Demy (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1995), 249-50.

coming is contained in verses 30 and 31, using the word *erchomenon* and *coming* with “power and great glory” (as also described in Dan 7:13, in the Septuagint, Matt 16:27; Mark 13:26; Luke 21: 27; and Rev 19:11-16). These two distinct *comings* are separated by verses describing: the battle of Armageddon, the conclusion of the Tribulation, Old Testament quotes about the “day of the Lord” and the “sign of the Son of Man” appearing in the sky. Then, associated with the *erchomenon coming* in verse 31, the angels will “gather together His *elect* from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other.”

Those who believe in a posttribulation Rapture, in conjunction with the Second Coming, use this verse (and parallel verses in Mark and Luke) to establish their position. However, the question remains, who are the *elect* that the *angels are gathering* at this *coming* (from one end of the heavens to the other)? In the Greek, the word *eklektos* is used. This means, “chosen, select, by implication chosen with accessory idea of kindness, favor and love . . . to arrive at the proper conclusion of who the elect are in each instance of its occurrence the context has to be taken into account. In Matt 24:22, 24 and Mark 13:20-22, it is evident that the elect are only those who will be saved during the tribulation, not all the saved of all generations.”⁸ If one follows the logic that this whole discourse of Jesus is directed at the Jewish Nation, then the *elect* would be the Jewish Nation, which accepts Jesus as the Messiah at his Second Coming (joined by the Old Testament saints already in Paradise—from one end of the heavens to the other).⁹ Also note that the angels do the gathering in this instance, compared to Jesus Himself doing the gathering in 2 Thessalonians 2:1 at the Rapture of the Church.

⁸Zodhiates, “eklektos,” *Dictionary*, 545.

⁹Toussaint, 242-3.

This description of the *comings* in Matthew 24 is almost identical to Luke's in 17:22-37; except Luke uses, "so will the Son of Man be *in His day*," instead of *parousia* (although, Bruce Metzger comments that some readings of this phrase do contain *parousia*)¹⁰ to describe the *first coming* and *apokalupto*, "to remove a veil or covering exposing to open view what was before hidden, to make manifest or reveal a thing"¹¹ to describe the *second coming*. If this passage in Luke 17 is combined with his account of Jesus' Apocalyptic Discourse in chapter 21 (where an inference is made to the Rapture in verse 36, "to *escape (ekpheugo)* all these things that are about to take place and *stand before the Son of Man*"), a case can be made that Luke is also putting an apocalyptic time interpretation into Jesus' prophetic time discourse. This may be further confirmed by the use of *parousia* in Jesus' relating the *first coming* (of the two *comings*) to the days of Noah in Matthew 24:37-39 and *erchomai* to the *second coming* (of the two *comings*) to the faithful householder and the wise servant in verses 42-51. Noah and his family were *saved (sozo)* from the flood by God seven days/a week (strikingly similar to Daniel's 70th week) before the Flood came (Gen 7:4). In the other two parables of Matthew 24, the focus is on the Day of the Lord coming "like a thief" or "on a day when the servant does not expect" (similar to Paul's description of the Day of the Lord coming in 1 Thess 5:2).

From Matthew's single use of the word *bow* to refer to *coming* in Hebrew, one would assume that Jesus was only talking about a single *coming* at the end of the Tribulation for the Jewish Nation. However, taking the same text in Greek, a case can be made that Matthew's apparent separate use of the words *parousia* and *erchomai* describes two separate *comings*

¹⁰Bruce Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, rev. ed. (New York: United Bible Societies, 1975), 167.

¹¹Zodhiates, "apokalupto," *Dictionary*, 224-5.

related to the Lord's apocalyptic Second Coming. It also may be an extrapolated interpretation to say that the specific use of *parousia* in this text is an inference to the Rapture (of the new Theocratic Nation to replace Israel—the Church); since it was written in the setting of prophetic time and the disciples did not understand it as such at the time of the Apocalyptic Discourse by Jesus. The conflict of the interpretation of the Hebrew text and the Greek text may be explained by scribes, redactors, or editors writing the later Greek text for Matthew and inserting the apocalyptic time knowledge of the Rapture into the prophetic time words of Jesus. This same idea of commingling and confusing prophetic and apocalyptic time contexts could explain coming up with a similar interpretation when combining both passages in Luke 17 and 21 (Luke's complete rendition of the discourse, as recorded in Matthew 24).

All this considered and in the final analysis, it seems the most appropriate interpretation should rely on the Hebraic rendition and disregard the use of *parousia* in the Greek. Another way of saying this would be that the uses of *erchomai* and *parousia* by Matthew in this text are interchangeable. This appears to be confirmed by the fact that there is no other writing of Matthew to compare to his usage of *parousia* in this context. Next, the use of *parousia* in James 5, 2 Peter 3 and 1 John 2 will be explored.