

**The Rapture of the Church
and the
Appearing of the Lord.**

BY

W. J. HOCKING

(Editor of *The Bible Monthly*).



LONDON: C. A. Hammond,
11, Little Britain,
St. Martin's le Grand,
E.C. 1.

The following pages consist of a reprint of answers made by the Editor of *The Bible Monthly* in the issue for September, 1941, to certain questions submitted to him on the subject of the Second Advent of the Lord Jesus Christ, particularly with reference to His promised summons to His own, whether they may be then sleeping or waking, to meet Him in the air, and to the distinction of this hope from the Lord's subsequent public manifestation, along with His saints, in His judicial glory to His earthly people and to the world at large.

These replies, after a few verbal changes, are being reproduced with the prayerful desire that they may be of interest and service to those who, according to Scriptural teaching, await God's Son from the heavens and also love His appearing (1 Thess. i. 10 ; 2 Tim. iv. 8).

E.B.D.—Is the Church's expectation of her Lord's return and of being "caught up . . . to meet the Lord in the air" (commonly termed "the Rapture") simultaneous with His manifestation, or is it a separate and previous occasion?

WE believe that the rapture of the church will precede the public manifestation of Christ in glory. The removal of the saints from the earth to be with the Lord must necessarily be an earlier event than that when they will accompany the Lord out of heaven and will be manifested in glory with Him. Scripture teaches that we shall be caught up to be "with the Lord" for ever, and that we shall subsequently return "with Him" at His visible appearance to Israel and to the Gentiles for their judgment and eventual blessing. The apostle writes, "When the Christ is manifested, Who is our life, then shall ye also be manifested with Him in glory" (Col. iii. 4). It follows that those who shall be manifested with Christ when He comes forth out of heaven into the view of those upon the earth must on a previous and separate occasion have been taken from the earth to be with Him where He is on high. The fact of Moses and Elijah "appearing in glory" (Luke ix. 31) with the Lord Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration was evidence that they had previously been removed from the earth.

This relative order of the two future events is made unmistakably clear in 1 Thess. iv. There the apostle writes to remove the despondent state in that assembly due to their fear that some of their number who had "fallen asleep" would miss the glories of Christ's public coming. He bids them not to be sorrowing as those who had no "hope" (iv. 13), which they were doing because they did not understand how their brethren in the grave could possibly participate in the glories of Christ's visible appearing. But Paul declared for their enlightenment and comfort that as certainly as "Jesus has died and has risen again" God will "bring with Him" at His public appearing all those who have "fallen asleep through Jesus" (iv. 14). **How** this will be done had not up till then been revealed in the scriptures, nor apparently in the apostolic doctrine

Accordingly, in the parenthetical verses that follow (verses 15-18), the apostle explains **how** it will come about that departed believers will be enabled to share in the procession of glorified saints on the day of Christ's open manifestation. He is writing in the first of all his Epistles, and he gives the explanation in accordance with the "word" or revelation he had himself received from the Lord on the matter: "For this we say to you in the word of the Lord" (verse 15). Paul then goes on to reveal that the procedure to ensure a joint participation will be by a resurrection of the dead and a transformation of the living. Believers alive at the coming of the Lord will not take precedence of those fallen asleep, nor will death rob a single sleeping one of the honours of the day of Christ; "for the Lord Himself, with an assembling shout, with archangel's voice and with trump of God, shall descend from heaven; and the dead in Christ shall rise first; then we, the living who remain, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air; and **thus** we shall be always with the Lord." (verses 16, 17).

By this new and comprehensive "saying" of the apostle it would be evident to the distressed Thessalonians **how** God will "bring with" Christ in the day of His manifestation those of His own who were then in the tomb. They will be included in the "first resurrection," for "the dead in Christ shall rise first," and be "caught up" in company with living and "changed" ones "to meet the Lord in the air." As the sleeping saints will be "raised in glory" (1 Cor. xv. 43), they will be thus fitted to "be always with the Lord" in glory. In this manner "made perfect" (Heb. xi. 40), and not in their disembodied state, "God will bring with Him" (Christ) those who have "fallen asleep through Jesus." They will be brought from above with Christ, the Firstborn from among the dead (Col. i. 18), because they too will have been raised from among the dead and transported thither to be manifested when the Christ is manifested to the inhabited earth.

We believe, therefore, that the plain meaning of this passage in 1 Thessalonians iv. is that the moment when believers in Christ, whether dead or alive, are caught away

to meet the Lord will be **prior to, and distinct from,** the subsequent manifestation or appearing of Christ and of those who will form His glorious retinue (2 Thess. i. 7-12), together with the "angels of His power."

E.B.D.—It is said that the "*parousia*" (Christ's personal presence, the subjective phase of the Second Advent, 1 Thess. ii. 19) and the "*epiphania*" (His manifestation, the objective phase, Rev. i. 7), the "shout," the "voice of the archangel," the "trump of God," and the raising of the dead "first" (1 Thess. iv. 16, 17) will all take place on the same occasion. Is this so?

We do not think they will all take place on the same occasion. It has already been shown in the previous "answer" that the rapture of the saints and the manifestation or appearing of Christ are not coincident events, so that the various occurrences specified in 1 Thess. iv. 16, 17 should not be associated with the manifestation of Christ to every eye, mentioned in Rev. i. 7. Neither is it in accordance with the scriptural usage of the words to say that the Greek term, *parousia*, is used to express the subjective phase of the Second Advent in distinction from *epiphania*, the objective phase. This alleged distinction between these two words we believe to be unfounded for the reasons which follow.

There are in the Greek text of the New Testament several closely related words each of which varies slightly in meaning from its fellows. All have the basic idea of "coming," and for the most part are alike translated "coming" in our A.V. Of these Greek words, two are mentioned in the query. *Parousia* relates to "coming" especially in the sense that a **state of being absent** has been changed into a **state of being present** by the person's coming, or arrival. In most of its occurrences, *parousia* may therefore be rendered into English by our word, "presence."

Thus, Paul writes of the "coming" (*par.*) of Titus to him in Macedonia (2 Cor. vii. 6, 7); and also of the "coming" (*par.*) to him of Stephanas and his companions (1 Cor. xvi. 17). In Phil. ii. 12, the apostle contrasts his former "presence"

(*par.*) with them in Philippi with his "absence" from them in Rome, where he was writing. See also Phil. i. 26 *Parousia* is used to express his "bodily presence" in 2 Cor x. 10. These instances show that the person to whom *parousia* refers is not merely on the way, but is come, is present, has actually arrived, and is in the company of those to whom he was coming.

Now this same term (*par.*), used as we have seen of the coming or actual presence of Paul or of his friends, is also used of the coming of the Son of man (Matt. xxiv. 3, 27, 37, 39); of Christ (1 Cor. xv. 23); of the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Thess. ii. 19; iii. 13; iv. 15; v. 23; 2 Thess. ii. 1, 8; Jas. v. 7, 8; 2 Pet. i. 16; iii. 4; 1 John ii. 28). All these passages unquestionably refer to the actual, not imaginary, coming of Christ in the future. When Paul (Phil. i. 26) says to the saints, ". . . that your boasting may abound in Christ Jesus through me by my presence (*par.*) again with you," he is plainly expressing his conviction of paying them another pastoral visit. Similarly, as the general N.T. usage entitles us to assume, the apostle used the word in the First Thessalonian Epistle with reference to the Lord Jesus: "What is our hope . . .?" he asks them; "are not ye also before our Lord Jesus at His coming (*par.*)?" (1 Thess. ii. 19, one of the texts in the query). In both instances the apostle speaks of a personal visit; in one case of his own arrival or presence in Philippi, and in the other of the arrival or presence of the Lord Jesus in the air, when, as he expects, he will see there with him his Thessalonian converts, the fruit of his labours and the crown of his rejoicing.

The query relates to the suggestion that in this text (1 Thess. ii. 19) *parousia* is used to signify "the subjective phase of the Second Advent." Now, "subjective" means what is only an idea existing in the mind, and is opposed to what is real and external to the mind, or "objective." And in plain language the suggestion is that in 1 Thess. ii. 19, the coming (*par.*) or second advent of the Lord Jesus means no more than an emotional apprehension of His personal presence without any external basis for its support. In other words, the "coming" (*par.*) of Christ in its "subjective

phase" would be only a dream or a fantasy, pious perhaps but purely mystical, and without any foundation in reality or fact.

The passages already cited from Paul's Epistles prove, however, that the suggestion of a "subjective phase" is an extravagant perversion of the meaning of *parousia*. Was the coming to Paul of Stephanas and his companions a real event (objective), or was it true only in the apostle's inner consciousness or imagination (subjective)? And if the "coming" (*par.*) of Paul's friends was a real phenomenon to him, we may safely believe that the "coming" (*par.*) of our Lord Jesus Christ, so frequently mentioned in the New Testament, will be an actual occurrence, objective not subjective, that is, a real phenomenon, whether to believers or unbelievers.

Whether the coming (*par.*) of the Lord will become known only to believers or to unbelievers, or to all in both classes, may be gathered from each passage and its context. The *parousia* of the Lord is in itself a general term, necessarily involving the **fact** of His presence without indicating either the **manner** of His presence or the class of persons who will be aware of it. ¹⁰ But we find that in some texts Christ's coming (*par.*) is said to "appear" or to be manifested. Thus, we read of "the appearing, *epiphania*, of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Tim. vi. 14; see also 2 Tim. i. 10; iv. 1, 8). It is, however, a mistake to suppose that the "appearing" or manifestation is merely a synonym for the Lord's coming (*par.*), for the apostle joins the two terms in a single phrase, in which one of the words qualifies the other. In 2 Thess. ii. 8 he speaks of the future day when the Lord will destroy the wicked or lawless one (antichrist) "by the appearing (*epiph.*) of His coming (*par.*)."¹¹ At that period to which Paul is referring, the presence or coming of the Lord Jesus will be manifested by the shining forth (*epiph.*) of His glory, which will annihilate the lawless leader and religious deceiver of men.

Clearly, then, Scripture has distinguished between the coming or presence (*par.*) of Christ and the manifestation (*epiph.*) of that presence. The "**coming**" is the Lord's

actual presence by-and-by in contrast with His absence which is the fact now ; the **appearing** or epiphany of His coming is the outward evidence of His future presence by the visible outshining of His manifold glories, making that presence manifest to all men. Hence the coming (*par.*) is applied (1) to the time when the presence of the Lord is not manifested to all men, but becomes known to "those that look for Him" (Heb. ix. 28) ; and also (2) to the time when He comes with clouds, and all shall know of His arrival (Rev. i. 7), and He will even "become manifest to those not inquiring" after Him (Rom. x. 20, quoted from Isa. lxxv. 1).

In the first stage of the Lord's coming, He will be concerned only with the removal of "His own." And of this coming the world at large will be ignorant, or oblivious, or incredulous, as the case may be. In effect, the great aerial event will, no doubt, be disregarded by Christendom and heathendom alike as entirely as were the Lord's appearances after His resurrection by Jew and Gentile. Those appearances were confined to a limited circle as the first stage of His second advent will be. As Peter said to Cornelius, "God . . . gave Him to be openly seen (*emphanees*), not of all the people, but of witnesses who were chosen before of God" (Acts x. 40, 41). Thus, the risen Lord manifested Himself to certain of His disciples (John xxi. 1), but not to any of His enemies ; to such as Peter and John, Thomas and Cleopas, but not to Annas and Caiaphas, Pilate and Herod, nor to any of their followers. They, His adversaries, to whose unrighteous judgment He meekly submitted Himself, will nevertheless, according to His own testimony before the Sanhedrin (Matt. xxvi. 64) "see the Son of man" in the day of His manifestation or appearing when He comes with clouds of glory and majesty to exercise His judgment upon all evildoers.

There is therefore a moral distinction between the two successive stages or phases of Christ's coming (*par.*) The first stage is the gathering together of those that are His to Himself in the air : the ones then affected are "those that are Christ's at His coming (*par.*)" (1 Cor. xv. 23), whether they are dead or alive (1 Thess. iv. 15-17). The good only

are "caught up" at this stage, but at the later stage of the coming, the evil are punished. The epiphany of Christ's coming is judicial in its character and universal in its aspect. "For as the lightning goes forth from the east and shines to the west, so shall be the coming (*par.*) of the Son of man" (Matt. xxiv. 27).

The first stage of the Lord's return brings to those concerned immeasurable bliss, but the second, "weeping and gnashing of teeth." His secret coming for "the just" is a delightful prospect for them, but the subsequent "brightness" (epiphany) of His coming (*par.*) is a sudden, shattering and devastating blow for the haters of God and the doers of evil. It will be the day of summary retribution, and the Lord Jesus is God's appointed Judge. In His glorious advent for this purpose, God will "**bring with Him**" those already gathered to Himself at the initial stage of His coming (*par.*) When the Royal Judge on His white horse of successful subjugation is seen issuing from heaven, He will be followed by "armies," also on white horses, and clad in pure fine linen, symbolical of "the righteousnesses of the saints" (see Rev. xix. 11-14; 8). In order to follow the Rider out of heaven, these "armies" of saints **must previously have been transported** there. This preliminary assembling in the heavens of the redeemed in order to take part in the regal procession out of heaven on the day of the manifestation constitutes the "rapture" which is revealed in 1 Thess. iv. 15-17. Thus, the two events are comprehended in the single term, "coming" or *parousis*, the "hope" and the "appearing" both forming essential parts of the *parousia*.

This unity of these two distinct events, making them two parts of the same event, is plainly expressed in a statement of Paul, and is illustrated in a prophecy of Isaiah. The apostle speaks of the hope and the epiphany of the Second Advent as a single event for the Christian (Tit. ii. 13), and the Jewish prophet, in a single sentence, foretells Messiah's introduction of the day of grace and the day of judgment (Isa. lxi. 1-3). No interval of time between the two events is noted in either of these passages; but that there is an interval in both cases we learn elsewhere in Scripture.

Take first the prophecy in which the Spirit of Christ speaks concerning Himself as Jehovah-Messiah Who was coming. In the synagogue of Nazareth, the Lord read aloud from this part of Isaiah, declaring to the audience, "To-day this scripture is fulfilled in your ears" (Luke iv. 16-21). Then the Lord with apparent abruptness rolled up the book and sat down. He had ended His reading in the middle of a clause. Why? The prophecy declared that His mission was twofold: "to proclaim the acceptable year of Jehovah and the day of vengeance of our God." In the prophecy the proclamation of the "acceptable year" and the gloomy "day" are united as a single service of Christ. But the Lord, by His own lips, showed that the fulfilment of the second half of the clause has been deferred, and that in His Advent to this world a wide interval of time separates the "acceptable year" from the "day of vengeance," though the announcement of both events appears in the prophetic utterance of Isaiah as a single phrase, only one half of which was fulfilled by the First Advent of Christ.

There is in Titus ii. 13 a like comprehensiveness in the apostle's reference to the Second Advent of Christ. In a single phrase, Paul unites the two stages of the coming (*par.*) of Christ—the blissful hope and the impressive epiphany—as the twofold event, filling the believer's outlook. He describes the redeemed as those "awaiting the blessed hope and appearing (*epiph.*) of the glory of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ." In both the English and the Greek, the hope and the epiphany or manifestation are bracketed as a single theme of confident anticipation for the Christian, intimating by this grammatical construction that both, taken together, comprise the future "coming" or presence (*par.*) of Christ. To the believer, therefore, the unity of his proper expectation consists in the twofold truth that (1) Christ will come **for** him; and that (2) he will come **with** Christ at the epiphany (appearing or manifestation) of His coming in glory.

E.B.D.—Is there any ground for supposing (a) that what is termed the doctrine of "the Rapture" owes its origin to "gnostic heresy," and (b) that it is antinomian in its results?

(a) We do not believe there is any ground for such a hypothesis. We believe that the doctrine of the "rapture" is a revelation of God recorded only in scripture. It is not derived from human philosophy nor heathen mythology. Light does not originate in darkness, nor truth in falsehood and fancy. Gnosticism consisted mainly of wild speculations based upon an amalgam of Jewish and Gentile philosophy, to which were added perversions of apostolic doctrine. Poisonous germs from this cult appeared in some of the early assemblies, in Colosse, for example, and the inspired Epistles were provided as antidote against these corrupting influences (see J.N.D.'s *Synopsis*, Colossians; Bp. Lightfoot's *Colossians*, 1904, pp. 71-111).

The fact is that the historical church, having quickly abandoned the distinctive truth of her heavenly calling, and having succumbed to the influence of worldly opportunism, lost all relish for the heavenly hope. And in even the earliest extant Christian writings, apart from Scripture, no allusion is made to the specific calling and hope of the heavenly bride of Christ (see "*The So-Called Apostolical Fathers on the Lord's Second Coming*," by W. Kelly).

(b) No. We do not agree that "the blessed hope," rightly understood and faithfully maintained, is "antinomian" in its effect upon the Christian life. The converse is the case. It was the evil bondman that relinquished the blessed hope, saying in his heart, "My lord delayeth his coming," who became "antinomian" in consequence, for he ill-treated his fellows and he also ate and drank with the drunkards (Matt. xxiv. 48, 49). Such conduct was a plain outrage upon the law of fidelity and decency in his master's house.

One of the greatest spurs to Christian fidelity and diligence is the expectation of the Lord's immediate return. Thus, James used the fact that "the coming of the Lord is drawn nigh" as an incentive to patience and firmness of character (Jas. v. 7, 8). In view of the same hope, Paul also

exhorts the Thessalonians to "watch and be sober" (1 Thess. v. 4-11). The possible nearness and the certain suddenness of the rapture is actually a corrective to any tendency to laxity and antinomianism in the household of God. Any abuse of the truth that arises is surely the fault of the abuser and not of the truth itself.



C. A. Hammond, 11 Little Britain, London, E.C.1.

Made & Printed in Great Britain.