



## Correspondence

### Did Jesus come in A.D. 70?

May I commend *The Testimony* for publishing the ongoing series of articles "The Olivet Prophecy" by Brother Stephen Hughes? This prophecy of our Master, like those from the book of Daniel, provides excellent instruction in the fundamentals of interpreting Bible prophecy, especially the key aspects of primary and secondary fulfilments of prophecy.

In article 2 ([Jul. 2004, p. 289](#)) Brother Hughes comments on the meaning of the Greek word *parousia*, commonly translated in the New Testament, and in the Olivet Prophecy in particular, as 'coming'. He says: "it would appear difficult to justify an 'invisible' meaning of *parousia* in Matthew 24". On the basis of this rejection of the meaning of *parousia*, he deals with the question, "Did Jesus come in A.D. 70?", and finishes with a cautious and rather limited endorsement: "Jesus would have had some involvement in the affairs of A.D. 70, even though not physically present".

May I suggest at the outset that any interpretation of *parousia* as being of a so-called 'invisible presence' is at best unfortunate and entirely misleading. It also introduces unwanted associations with a well-known false religious organisation that proclaims erroneously that Jesus Christ returned invisibly to the earth in 1914. However, to dismiss entirely the influence that a correct understanding of the meaning of this word has on the interpretation of the Olivet Prophecy in relationship to the important events of A.D. 70 is also very unfortunate.

Rather, I suggest it was very clear that the Lord Jesus Christ in heaven was directing the judgements against the nation of Israel at this time through the actions of the Roman armies under particularly Vespasian and Titus. One only has to note the words of the Lord Jesus in the parable recorded in Matthew 22:1-14: "But when the king heard thereof, he was wroth: and he sent forth his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city" (v. 7). This was clearly foretold in sections of the Olivet Prophecy: Matthew 24:3-28, Mark 13:9-23 and Luke 21:8-23. It is suggested that these sections relate

in primary fulfilment to A.D. 70, but also typify the events of the second coming. Much of this interpretation is dependent on a correct understanding of the meaning of the word *parousia*, as well as other matters such as the actual meaning and order of the Lord's answers to the three questions asked by the disciples.

*Parousia*, according to W. E. Vine in *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, has the meaning: "lit., a presence, *para*, with, and *ousia*, being (from *eimi*, to be), denotes both an arrival and a consequent presence with . . . Paul speaks of his *parousia* in Philippi, Phil. 2:12 (in contrast to his *apousia*, his absence . . .)". Clearly, Philippians 2:12 is a key passage in defining the basic meaning of *parousia*. Note also the definition of the meaning of *parousia* in Liddell and Scott's Greek lexicon: "a being present, presence" (p. 535).

But the word *parousia* has a far greater significance than mere presence, as is illustrated by the following quotation from Moulton and Milligan's *Vocabulary of the New Testament*: "What more especially concerns us in connection with the NT usage of *parousia* is the quasi-technical force of the word from Ptolemaic times onwards to denote the 'visit' of a King, Emperor, or other person in authority; the official character of the 'visit' being further emphasised by the taxes or payments that were exacted to make preparations for it" (as quoted on p. 118 of *The Story of The Bible*, Vol. 11, Logos Publications). This shows why this word was used in significant Olivet Prophecy passages and what is meant by it.

In order to understand the meaning of *parousia* in the Olivet Prophecy, it should be realised that there are (in the main) three different Greek words translated 'come' or 'coming' in the prophecy. Besides *parousia* there is *hēkō*, 'to arrive' or 'to be present', and *erchomai*, 'to come' or 'to go'. Occasions where *parousia* is used must be distinguished from occasions where the other two words are used, especially *hēkō*.

It is, of course, Scriptural usage that is the most convincing way of establishing a word's true meaning. We find that *parousia* is used in four distinct ways:

- 1 six times for the physical presence of an individual, as in Philippians 2:12 ([see above](#));

- 2 once of the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ in his manifestation in glory at the Transfiguration (2 Pet. 1:16);
- 3 six times of the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ in power and authority in A.D. 70 (Mt. 24:3,27; Jas. 5:7,8; 2 Pet. 3:4,12);
- 4 eleven times of the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ in power and authority at his second coming (Mt. 24:37,39; 1 Cor. 15:23; 1 Thess. 2:19; 3:13; 4:15; 5:23; 2 Thess. 2:1,8,9; 1 Jno. 2:28).

Regarding the third usage, the James passage is particularly interesting: "Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the *coming* [presence] of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and the latter rain. Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the *coming* [presence] of the Lord draweth nigh [is imminent]". This passage is addressed primarily to the believers in James's day, shortly before major trials came upon them at the time of the end of the Jewish Commonwealth. He says they were to wait with patience for the Lord's 'presence manifested in power and authority'. This 'presence' was obviously required to come about within a short time of the writing of James's letter (A.D. 43-50), so the initial fulfilment of this passage must have been in A.D. 70, indicating that the Lord was to be 'present' then in some manner.

The Lord plainly taught that he would come again in some way in the lifetime of some (but not all) of the apostles: "verily I say unto you, Ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel, till the Son of man be come" (Mt. 10:23). This clearly implies that at least one apostle (presumably John) would still be alive when the Lord would again be manifested to the nation, which is again indicative that he was manifested in some manner in A.D. 70. This passage links with the statement in Matthew 24:14 that the gospel of the Kingdom must first be preached to all the nations of the (Roman) world before the coming destruction of the temple in A.D. 70, during which time the apostles would be persecuted and most killed.

So the word *parousia* does not necessarily indicate solely a physical presence; it can be a presence or manifestation represented through some other agent. Hence the Lord Jesus Christ could certainly be considered to have been present in A.D. 70, manifested in power and authority through the Roman army as his agents,

as indicated in Matthew 22:7 quoted above. This was the predicted punishment on the rebellious Jewish nation (Lk. 19:41-44).\*

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### Reply

I would like to thank Brother Clover for his interesting comments in relation to the meaning of the Greek word *parousia*, translated as 'coming' in Matthew 24:3. I agree with him that Jesus was involved in directing the judgements on the Jewish nation in A.D. 70. However, I do not think that we can use *parousia* to show this. The main reasons for believing that Jesus was involved in A.D. 70 are:

- 1 God gave Jesus authority over the affairs of mankind, as we see from Matthew 28:18, Ephesians 1:20-22 and 1 Peter 3:22.
- 2 The Roman armies that came against Israel in A.D. 70 are called "the people of the prince", that is, Christ, in Daniel 9:26.
- 3 Under the Law a leprous house was inspected twice; and after that, if, on a third inspection, there was no improvement, the house was pulled down. During his ministry Jesus inspected the temple twice. On each occasion he overturned the tables of the money-changers, indicating that there was no spiritual improvement between the two visits. A.D. 70 would correspond to the third visit of Jesus, which resulted in the dismantling of the leprous house of Israel.

James 5:7,8 and 2 Peter 3:4,12 are passages external to the Olivet Prophecy that are often taken to refer to A.D. 70, as mentioned by Brother Clover. I believe that the context of both these passages indicates that the return of Jesus to establish the Kingdom is being referred to.

James directs his epistle to the Jewish believers who are "scattered abroad" (1:1). In James 5:8 we read: "Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh". An interesting question is, Why would the Jewish believers remote from Israel have to be patient and stablish their hearts in readiness for the destruction of the Jewish state in A.D. 70? In the next verse James continues: "Grudge not one against another, brethren, lest ye be condemned:

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\* For a fuller exposition of these matters, see Brother Thomas's *The Last Days of Judah's Commonwealth*, pp. 36-7, Logos Edition.

behold, the judge standeth before the door". Again we ask a question, How was the behaviour of the Jewish saints out in the Roman Empire relevant to the Roman armies standing before the door of the Jewish state in A.D. 70? It would seem more reasonable to apply this verse to the judgement seat of Christ that we must all stand before (2 Cor. 5:10).

I suggest that the coming in 2 Peter 3:4 can best be applied to the second coming of Jesus to establish the Kingdom. The people referred to in 2 Peter 3:4 say, "Where is the promise of his coming?". Did the Jews see the events of A.D. 70 as the promised coming? Also, in relation to

verse 12, would the Jewish saints scattered throughout the Roman Empire really be "looking for and hasting" the destruction of their homeland? The following verse makes it clear that Peter was encouraging the Jewish saints to look forward to the time when God's righteous Kingdom would be established on the earth.

One other point I would like to make is that throughout the New Testament the return of Jesus is always spoken of as imminent; for example, Revelation 3:11; 22:7,20. As we know, the return of Jesus is never further than a lifetime away.

Stephen Hughes

## Zipporah and the circumcision

Deborah Hurn

**J**ETHRO'S POSITION as priest of Midian reveals that the Truth had survived and even flourished amongst some of Abraham's 'Arabian' descendants while it was completely absent in Canaan and in serious decline in Egypt. When Moses first fled to Midian, therefore, he was coming to an 'ecclesia', much as Jacob had done many years before when he fled to Haran. The providential encounter with the daughters of Jethro at the well (Ex. 2:15-20) is strongly reminiscent of Eliezer's selection of Rebekah for Isaac (Gen. 24:10-24) and Jacob's first meeting with Rachel (29:1-12), and we can be sure that Yahweh had guided him to the most spiritual family in the land. Zipporah was therefore an eminently suitable wife for Moses, being a believer herself, and from a priestly family.

### Circumcision amongst the descendants of Abraham

The Midianites, as descendants of Abraham, would still have been circumcising their male children as a sign of their faith and ethnic identity, as the Arab races do today. The descendants of Ishmael circumcise their sons in their thirteenth year because this was Ishmael's age when baby Isaac and all the other males of Abraham's household were circumcised (17:25). Jethro was not himself descended from Hagar, but from Keturah, Abraham's 'Cushite' concubine (1 Chron. 1:32; cf. Num. 12:1). Keturah's children were later sent to live in Arabia (Gen. 25:6), where an older age of initiation became

the custom. This might then explain why only one of Moses' sons was overdue for circumcision at the time of their return journey to Egypt (Ex. 4:25).

By way of contrast, it seems that the practice of circumcision had totally lapsed amongst Jacob's descendants in Egypt, for, according to Exodus 12:50, "all the children of Israel" were circumcised after they came out of Egypt.<sup>1</sup> As a nation of slaves, the Israelites would have found it hard to maintain their religious and cultural traditions. The great majority of them seem to have lost all but their ethnic and tribal identities by the time they came to leave Egypt, and were serving all the idols of the land (Josh. 24:14; also Ezek. 20:7,8,16,24). It is unlikely that the people would have resorted to paganism at Mount Sinai if they had never practised it before (Ex. 32:4; Deut. 9:12).

The final impetus to cease circumcising the baby boys may well have come around the time of Moses' birth, when the persecution was reaching its peak and the Egyptians were killing all newborn males. Mothers were no doubt trying to hide their sons in various ways, and knew that if the babies were discovered and checked

1. In "The circumcision at Marah" (*The Testimony*, Dec. 2001, p. 451) I presented the case for Israel's national circumcision having taken place at Marah, though it is not detailed as such, but encoded in spiritual terms and types.