

# Scholastic Dishonesty of the Watchtower Society With Respect to Christ's *Parousia*: "Presence" or "Coming"?

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## Introduction

The Watchtower Society has taught since its inception that Christ's return was invisible. At first it taught that this return had occurred in 1874. Somewhere between about 1929 and 1943 the Society dropped that date in favor of 1914 (see Appendix A). The Society's teaching of an invisible return is mainly based on its translation of the Greek word *parousia* in Matthew 24:3, which it says should be rendered as "presence" rather than the more common "coming" or "advent". In this paper we will examine the Society's effort in the August 15, 1996 *Watchtower* magazine to support this teaching.

The idea of an invisible return of Christ can be traced back at least as far as the "two-stage coming" or "secret rapture" theory originated in the late 1820s by the well-known London banker and Bible expositor Henry Drummond, who was one of the founders of Edward Irving's *Catholic Apostolic Church*. Drummond's theory was adopted by other prophetic expositors, including John Nelson Darby, the founder of the *Plymouth Brethren* and father of Dispensationalism. This school of thought became prominent among British and American millenarians in the 1840s and eventually "constituted one of the most significant elements in the history of Fundamentalism".<sup>1</sup>

Dispensationalists hold that Christ's return, or second coming, will begin with a "secret rapture" in which the church, "the members of the body of Christ, both living and dead, will be caught away to dwell with Christ in heaven".<sup>2</sup> This first stage of Christ's return will be invisible to the rest of mankind. The second stage will be a spectacular revelation or public advent as

<sup>1</sup> *The Roots of Fundamentalism: British and American Millenarianism 1800–1930*, Ernest R. Sandeen, University of Chicago Press, 1970, p. 61.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 62

described in Matthew 24:30 and the book of Revelation. Christ will be invisibly present “in the air” between the two stages. Dispensationalists argue that Jesus’ disciples, in Matthew 24:3, referred to this “invisible presence” when they asked Jesus for a sign of his *parousia*.<sup>3</sup>

The idea of an invisible return caught on among the followers of the Second Adventist Nelson Barbour shortly after Barbour’s predictions that Christ would return in 1873 and 1874 failed.<sup>4</sup> To salvage the prediction, they seized on the fact that the Greek word *parousia*, used in Matthew 24:3 and usually translated as “coming”, could also be translated as “presence”. They found such a rendering in Benjamin Wilson’s New Testament translation *The Emphatic Diaglott*, which renders the part of the verse we are concerned with as, “What will be the sign of thy presence, and of the consummation of the age?” They used this idea to explain how Christ could have returned in 1874 without anyone noticing. So Barbour adopted the notion that *parousia* means “presence” to salvage his failed prediction.<sup>5</sup> In 1876 Charles Taze Russell met up with Barbour and adopted his views on this. For the rest of his life Russell taught that Christ’s invisible *parousia* or “presence” began in 1874.

The Watch Tower Society has often printed articles defending its teaching that Christ returned invisibly in 1914. It has supported this by arguing that *parousia* must mean “presence” in Matthew 24:3, even though most Greek scholars do not support this. The August 15, 1996 *Watchtower* contains one such exposition in the article “Jesus’ Coming or Jesus’ Presence—Which?” Here follows a detailed analysis of this article, with appropriate sections quoted and comments interspersed.

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<sup>3</sup> The Greek word *parousia* can mean “presence”, “coming”, “arrival”, “advent”, “appearing”, “return”.

<sup>4</sup> By 1870 Barbour was predicting that Christ would return in 1873; when that failed he revised it to 1874. See *Evidences for the Coming of the Lord in 1873; or the Midnight Cry*, Nelson H. Barbour, Rochester, N.Y., 1870, 1871; *The Gentile Times Reconsidered*, Carl Olof Jonsson, 4<sup>th</sup> edition, Commentary Press, Atlanta, 2004, pp. 44-45; *Apocalypse Delayed: The Story of Jehovah’s Witnesses*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, M. James Penton, University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 2015, p. 27; *Nelson Barbour: The Millennium’s Forgotten Prophet: A Preliminary Biography*, Bruce W. Schulz and Rachael De Vienne, Fluttering Wings Press as printed by Lulu Press (<https://www.lulu.com/>), 2009, pp. 45, 50-51.

As early as 1859 Barbour was expecting Christ’s return in 1873, but held off on publishing his expectation until 1870 (Schulz & De Vienne, p. 79). Other expositors were also expecting that Jesus would return in 1873. Jonas Wendell, who later influenced some of C. T. Russell’s ideas, was one. In *SUPPLEMENT TO Zion’s Watch Tower, And “Herald of Christ’s Presence.”* (PITTSBURGH, PA., JULY 1, 1879) Russell wrote: “I have been a Bible student since I first had my attention called to the second coming of our Lord, by Jonas Wendel, a Second Advent Preacher, about 1869, who was then preaching *the burning of the world* as being due in 1873.” Russell’s mention of “about 1869” likely means 1869 or 1870, as Wendell apparently borrowed the 1873 idea from Barbour’s 1869-1870 preaching, and perhaps from the 1870 version of *Evidences for the Coming of the Lord in 1873* (Schulz & De Vienne, p. 45).

<sup>5</sup> Schulz & De Vienne, pp. 91-101.

## Analysis of the August 15, 1996 Watchtower Article on Parousia

### General Considerations

The article begins by quoting Matthew 24:3 from the *New World Translation*: “What will be the sign of your presence and of the conclusion of the system of things?” After some introductory remarks the article continues on page 9:

2 At Matthew 24:3, we find one of the most important questions Jesus ever answered. With the end of his earthly life near, Jesus had just warned that Jerusalem’s temple would be destroyed, marking the end of the Jewish system. Matthew’s account adds: “While he was sitting upon the Mount of Olives, the disciples approached him privately, saying: ‘Tell us, When will these things be, and what will be the sign of your presence [“coming,” King James Version] and of the conclusion of the system of things?’ ”—Matthew 24:3.

3 Millions of Bible readers have wondered, ‘Why did the disciples ask that question, and how should Jesus’ reply affect me?’ In his reply Jesus spoke of the appearance of leaves showing that summer “is near”. (Matthew 24:32, 33) Hence, many churches teach that the apostles were asking for a sign of Jesus’ “coming,” the sign proving that his return was imminent. They believe that the “coming” will be the point when he takes Christians to heaven and then brings the end of the world. Do you believe that this is correct?

Note that the above paragraph shows that the writer is fully aware that Matthew 24:32, 33 equates summer being near with Jesus being “near at the doors”, not with Jesus being *present* as if he had already come through the doors. This is a crucial part of Jesus’ answer and the article never directly gets back to it or deals with it. We will consider this point again later in this essay.

4 Instead of the rendering “coming,” some Bible versions, including the *New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures*, use the word “presence.”

This is true, but most of the latter were written before the critical discoveries of Adolph Deissmann concerning the meaning of many previously poorly understood New Testament Greek words. See below for more on this.

Could it be that what the disciples asked about and what Jesus said in reply differ from what is taught in churches? What really was asked? And what answer did Jesus give?

#### **What Were They Asking?**

5 In view of what Jesus said about the temple, the disciples likely were thinking of the Jewish arrangement when they asked for ‘a sign of his presence [or, “coming”] and the conclusion of the system of things [literally, “age”].’—Compare “world” at 1 Corinthians 10:11 and Galatians 1:4, *KJ*.

6 At this point the apostles had but a limited grasp of Jesus’ teachings. They had earlier imagined that “the kingdom of God was going to display itself instantly.” (Luke 19:11; Matthew 16:21-23; Mark 10:35-40) And even after the discussion on the Mount of Olives, but prior to being anointed with holy spirit, they asked if Jesus was restoring the Kingdom to Israel then. —Acts 1:6.

This is another crucial point to keep in mind. Since the disciples were ignorant of the details of Jesus’ exposition (else why would they have asked and why would the exchange be included in Matthew’s account?), they must have been asking about the destruction of the temple and the entire Jewish “arrangement”, and expecting that Jesus’ return would be closely associated with

the events that ultimately culminated in Jerusalem's destruction in 70 CE. Even if one adopts the view that Jesus had in mind two fulfillments, one in 70 CE and another larger one far in the future, the disciples certainly could have had in mind only the former. Since the destruction of the temple and Jerusalem would be rather evident, they could not have been asking for a sign that it had already occurred, but rather, a sign that it was *about* to occur.<sup>6</sup> Similarly, since Jesus' "coming" or "presence" is intimately bound up with the "conclusion of the system of things" (the disciples asked about the "sign"—singular—"of your presence and of the conclusion of the system of things"), it seems reasonable that the sign of his "presence" and the sign of "the conclusion of the system of things" would be the *same* sign. There is neither a textual nor a contextual reason to conclude that the disciples asked about *two* signs.

In the next paragraph, note how the writer introduces the idea that Jesus' return might be difficult to recognize. He does not deal with any of the important issues discussed above. This sets the stage for his argument farther along that Jesus' return would occur in two stages—the first part being invisible and which would therefore require a sign to prove its existence to a small group of 'the faithful', the second part being the quite visible destruction of today's "system of things". Note the parallels with the dispensationalist doctrine of a "two-stage coming".

7 Yet, they did know that he would leave, for he had recently said: "The light will be among you a little while longer. Walk while you have the light." (John 12:35; Luke 19:12-27) So they might well have wondered, 'If Jesus is going to leave, how will we recognize his return?' When he appeared as the Messiah, most did not recognize him. And over a year later, questions persisted about whether he would fulfill all that the Messiah was to do. (Matthew 11:2, 3) So the apostles had reason to inquire about the future. But, again, were they asking for a sign that he would soon come or for something different?

This is indeed the crucial question.

8 Imagine that you were a bird listening to the conversation on the Mount of Olives. (Compare Ecclesiastes 10:20.) Probably you would have heard Jesus and the apostles speaking in Hebrew. (Mark 14:70; John 5:2; 19:17, 20; Acts 21:40) Yet, they likely also knew the Greek language.

#### **What Matthew Wrote—In Greek**

9 Sources back to the second century C.E. indicate that Matthew first wrote his Gospel in Hebrew. Evidently he later wrote it in Greek.

These notions have not been proved and are disputed among scholars. While there is evidence for them, they are not conclusive and many scholars reserve judgment. The fact that the Society's writer uses the word "evidently" in saying that Matthew later wrote in Greek indicates that he has no proof.<sup>7</sup> The article continues:

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<sup>6</sup> Luke 21:7: "when will these things be, and what will be the sign when these things are **about to take place?**"

Mark 13:4: "when will these things be, and what will be the sign when all these things are **about to be accomplished?**"

<sup>7</sup> According to general scholarly opinion, if Matthew's Gospel were written in a language resembling Hebrew, it would have been Aramaic or an Aramaized Hebrew, but not Old Testament Hebrew. see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Language\\_of\\_Jesus](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Language_of_Jesus) [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hebrew\\_Gospel\\_hypothesis](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hebrew_Gospel_hypothesis)

Many manuscripts in Greek have come down to our time and have served as the basis for translating his Gospel into today's languages. What did Matthew write in Greek about that conversation on the Mount of Olives? What did he write about the "coming" or "presence" that the disciples asked about and that Jesus commented on?

10 In the first 23 chapters of Matthew, over 80 times we find a common Greek verb for "come," which is *er'khomai*. It often conveys the thought of approaching or drawing near, as at John 1:47: "Jesus saw Nathanael coming *toward* him." Depending on usage, the verb *er'khomai* can mean "arrive," "go," "get to," "reach," or "be on one's way". (Matthew 2:8, 11; 8:28; John 4:25, 27, 34; 20:4, 8; Acts 8:40; 13:51)

We will later see that Greek writers often used this word *er'khomai* interchangeably with *parousia*.

But at Matthew 24:3, 27, 37, 39, Matthew used a different word, a noun found nowhere else in the Gospels: *parousi'a*. Since God inspired the writing of the Bible, why did he move Matthew to choose this Greek word in these verses when penning his Gospel in Greek? What does it mean, and why should we want to know?

This brings up an interesting point: if Matthew faithfully recorded what the disciples said, then it was the disciples, not Matthew, who first used the word *parousia*. Therefore, if they were inspired to ask the question, the point about whether God inspired Matthew is moot, and the question the Society's writer asks is meaningless. It would mean that God used the disciples to get across a special idea, but the writer does not touch on this. Furthermore, the fact that the Gospels of Mark and Luke do not use *parousia* is evidence that use of the word was not relevant to the narrative. That is supported by the fact that the disciples had no knowledge of any invisible future "presence". The article continues:

11 Pointedly, *parousi'a* means "presence".

This is a grossly misleading statement. True, the *original* meaning of *parousia* is presence (literally, "a being alongside"), but over time it also came to mean coming, arrival, advent and appearing,<sup>8</sup> and is often used that way in Greek literature. As the *Watchtower* article immediately points out, *parousia* often has the flavor of both "presence" and "arrival": "it is not just the moment of arrival, but a presence extending from the arrival onward." The original flavor focuses on the subsequent presence rather than the arrival and corresponds to the first of two major definitions given in the 3<sup>rd</sup> edition of Bauer's *Lexicon*: "the state of being present at a place, presence".<sup>9</sup> But this is an incomplete definition. Bauer's *Lexicon* gives a second major definition,

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<sup>8</sup> *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich & Danker, Second Edition (BAGD), Univ. of Chicago Press, 1979, p. 629; *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, Baker Book House, 1977, p. 490; *The Analytical Greek Lexicon Revised*, ed. by Harold K. Moulton, Zondervan, 1978, p. 307; *A Greek-English Lexicon*, Liddell and Scott, Oxford, 1976, p. 1343; *The New Englishman's Greek Concordance and Lexicon*, Wigram-Green, Hendrickson Publishers, 1982, p. 680; *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol. 3, Balz & Schneider, Eerdmans, 1993, p. 43; *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Kittel and Friedrich, Vol. V, Eerdmans, 1967, p. 859.

<sup>9</sup> *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature*, Third Edition (BDAG), revised and edited by Frederick William Danker, based on Walter Bauer's *Griechisch-deutsches Wörterbuch*, and on previous English editions by W. F. Arndt, F. W. Gingrich, and F. W. Danker, Univ. of Chicago Press, 2000, pp. 780-781.

which focuses on the arrival rather than the subsequent presence: “arrival as the first stage in presence, coming, advent”. The article further admits that *parousia* can mean “the visit of a ruler”, which certainly applies to Christ’s second coming as King and is consistent with the definitions heretofore given. That phrase can be understood to focus on either the beginning of the visit or on the entire visit, depending on context.

Understanding the meaning of *parousia* is not difficult: a presence always requires a preceding arrival, and an arrival always results in a presence. These two sides of the same coin are combined in *parousia*, and the context in which the word is used determines the precise shade of meaning. The Watchtower Society ignores this and for doctrinal reasons only acknowledges the first.

A related word is the verb *pareimi*: “to be present, have come, have arrived, have appeared, be on hand”. An example where it means “arrival with subsequent presence” is from Josephus, *The Jewish War*, Book I, section 10 (subsection 25 in the Loeb Classical Library edition): “My narrative will proceed to tell of the second invasion of our country by Titus . . . the condition to which civil war had reduced the city on his arrival [*pareimi*]”. There are dozens of other examples in ancient Greek literature.

The fact is that, as with many words, *parousia* and *pareimi* have many subtly different shades of meaning. In this essay we will continue to see examples of each.

One such shade is “visit of a ruler”. It is well established that at the time of Jesus, *parousia* was often used in this technical sense. Nearly all Bible translators use “coming”, “advent”, “arrival” or similar terms, despite the fact the original meaning was “presence”. Most early Greek-Latin translators, for whom both languages were living, used the Latin *adventus* (“advent” or “coming”). Translators for other languages used similar terms. The reason is well expressed by the early-20<sup>th</sup>-century scholar Adolf Deissmann, who was instrumental in collating and interpreting the 19<sup>th</sup>-century discoveries of ancient Greek papyrus manuscripts which showed that the New Testament was written in *koine* or common Greek: <sup>10</sup>

Yet another of the central ideas of the oldest Christian worship receives light from the new texts, viz. *Parousia*, “advent, coming,” a word expressive of the most ardent hopes of a St. Paul. We now may say that the best interpretation of the Primitive Christian hope of the Parousia is the old Advent text, “Behold, thy *King* cometh unto thee.” [Matthew 21:5] From the Ptolemaic period down into the 2nd cent. A.D. we are able to trace the word in the East as a technical expression for the arrival or the visit of the king or the emperor [or other persons in authority, or troops]. The parousia of the sovereign must have been something well known even to the people, as shown by the facts that special payments in kind and taxes to defray the cost of the parousia were exacted, that in Greece a new era was reckoned from the parousia of the Emperor Hadrian, that all over the world advent-coins were struck after a parousia of the emperor, and that we are even able to quote examples of advent-sacrifices.

Deissmann goes on to describe a papyrus containing a petition, circa 113 BCE, in which a *parousia* of King Ptolemy the 2<sup>nd</sup> was expected, and for which occasion there was issued a large requisition of corn to be collected by the elders of a certain village (p. 373-8):

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<sup>10</sup> *Light from the Ancient East*, Adolf Deissmann, Hodder and Stoughton, 1908, 1910, p. 372

... and applying ourselves diligently, both night and day, unto fulfilling that which was set before us and the provision of 80 artabae which was imposed for the parusia of the king ...

Deissmann describes further mentions of a *parousia* in ancient writings (p. 374):

An inscription of the 3<sup>rd</sup> cent. B.C. at Olbia mentions a parusia of King Saitapharnes [“when they announced the parusia of the king”] ... Next comes an example of great importance as proving an undoubted sacral use of the word, viz. An inscription of the 3<sup>rd</sup> cent. B.C., recording a cure at the temple of Asclepius at Epidaurus, which mentions a parusia of the healer (saviour) god Asclepius [“and Asclepius manifested his parusia”]. Other examples of Hellenistic age known to me are a passage in Polybius referring to a parusia of King Antiochus the Great [“to expect earnestly the parusia of Antiochus”], and two letters of King Mithradates VI. Eupator of Pontus at the beginning of his first war with the Romans, 88 B.C., recorded in an inscription at Nysa in Caria [“and now, having learnt of my parusia”]. The prince, writing to Leonippus the Praefect of Caria, makes twofold mention of his own parusia, i.e. his invasion of the province of Asia.

It is the legitimate continuation of the Hellenistic usage that in the Imperial period the parusia of the sovereign should shed a special brilliance. Even the visit of a scion of the Imperial house, G. Caesar (4 A.D.), a grandson of Augustus, was, as we know from an inscription [“in the first year of the epiphany [synonymous with parusia, cf. p. 378 below] of Gaius Caesar”], made the beginning of a new era in Cos. In memory of the visit of the Emperor Nero, in whose reign St. Paul wrote his letters to Corinth, the cities of Corinth and Patras struck advent-coins. *Adventus Augusti Cor(inthi)* is the legend on one, *Adventus Augusti* on the other. Here we have corresponding to the Greek *parusia* the Latin word *advent*, which the Latin Christians afterwards simply took over, and which is to-day familiar to every child among us. How graphically it must have appealed to the Christians of Thessalonica, with their living conception of the parusiae of the rulers of this world, when they read in St. Paul’s second letter [“the lawless one, whom the Lord Jesus ... shall destroy by the manifestation of His parusia, whose parusia is according to the workings of Satan”] of the Satanic “parusia” of Antichrist, who was to be destroyed by “the manifestation of the parusia” of the Lord Jesus! A whole host of advent-coins resulted from the numerous journeyings of the Emperor Hadrian ... The parallelism between the Hellenistic and the Imperial period is seen also in the fact that the expenses attending a parusia of the sovereign were considerable. How deeply a parusia stamped itself on the memory is shown by the eras that were reckoned from parusiae ... Towards the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century ... an inscription at Tegea was dated:– “in the year 69 of the first parusia of the god Hadrian in Greece.”

To make the circle of Hellenism complete once more, this inscription from Arcadia gives us again the word *parusia*, which we found in Egypt, Asia Minor, and the New Testament. In Greece, however, a synonym [“epidemia”; “come to stay in a city,” “reside in a place,” “to be present at,” “attend,” “stay in a place,” “be in town,” “visit,” “arrive”] is more usual.

Note how closely this synonym *epidemia* corresponds to the meaning of *parousia* of “visit of a ruler”.

Even in early Christian times the parallelism between the parusia of the representative of the State and the parusia of Christ was clearly felt by the Christians themselves. This is shown by a newly discovered petition of the small proprietors of the village of Aphrodite in Egypt to the Dux of the Thebaid in the year 537-538 A.D., a papyrus which at the same time is an interesting memorial of Christian popular religion in the age of Justinian. “It is a subject of prayer with us night and day, to be held worthy of your welcome parusia.” The peasants, whom a wicked Pagarch has been oppressing, write thus to the high official, after assuring him with a pious sigh at the beginning that they awaited him “as they watch eagerly from Hades for the future parusia of Christ the everlasting God.”

Deissman then makes a crucial point (p. 378), which we will come back to later:

Quite closely related to *parusia* is another cult-word, *epiphaneia*, “epiphany,” “appearing”. How close the two ideas were connected in the age of the New Testament is shown by the passage in 2 Thess. ii. 8, already quoted, and by the associated usage of the Pastoral Epistles, in which “epiphany” or “appearing” nearly always means the future *parusia* of Christ [1 Tim. vi. 14; 2 Tim. iv. 1, 8; Titus ii. 13.], though once [2 Tim. I. 10] it is the *parusia* which patristic writers afterwards called “the first”. Equally clear, however, is the witness of an advent-coin struck by Actium-Nicopolis for Hadrian, with the legend “Epiphany of Augustus”; the Greek word coincides with the Latin word “advent” generally used on coins. The history of this word “epiphany” goes back into the Hellenistic period, but I will merely point out the fact, without illustration: the observation is not new, but the new proofs available are very abundant.

The point of all this is that the technical sense of *parousia* embodies both an arrival and a subsequent presence, often with the emphasis on “arrival”. That is because the advent of a ruler was often attended by ostentatious opening ceremonies that included parades of “white-garbed subjects, trumpet blasts, acclamations, speeches, petitions, gifts and festivities”.<sup>11</sup>

The arrival of Christ in Kingdom power will certainly be the “arrival or visit of a king”, and the general consensus among modern scholars is that the New Testament uses *parousia* in this way with reference to the second coming of Christ, as any modern Greek lexicon will show.<sup>12</sup> Contrary to the Society’s claim, then, *parousia* does not necessarily have the primary meaning “presence” in Matthew 24:3.

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<sup>11</sup> B. M. Nolan, “Some Observations on the *parousia*”, *The Irish Theological Quarterly*, Vol. XXXVI, Maynooth, 1969, p. 288.

<sup>12</sup> *The Analytical Greek Lexicon Revised* (Harold K. Moulton, Zondervan Publishing House, 1978) indicates on p. 311 that *parousia* is related to *pareimi*, which has various meanings including *to be beside*, *to be present*, *to be come* (p. 307). For *parousia* it gives the meanings *presence*, *a coming*, *arrival*, *advent*, and gives Matt. 24:3, 27, 37, 39 as examples of the latter three.

Bauer’s *Greek-English Lexicon* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition, 1979) says that *parousia* has the meanings “*coming*, *advent* as the first stage in presence” (p. 629) and gives several references to ancient Greek literature. It gives Matt. 24:3 as an example of this use “in a special, technical sense”. It says further: “The use of *parousia* as a technical term has developed in two directions. On the one hand the word served as a cult expression for the coming of a hidden divinity, who makes his presence felt by a revelation of his power, or whose presence is celebrated in the cult... On the other hand, *parousia* became the official term for a visit of a person of high rank, especially of kings and emperors visiting a province... These two technical expressions can approach each other closely in meaning, can shade off into one another, or even coincide.”

Liddell & Scott’s *Greek-English Lexicon* (p. 1343) gives “*Advent*” as the meaning in each instance in Matthew.

*Expository Dictionary of Bible Words* (Lawrence O. Richards, Zondervan Publishing House, 1985, p. 65) says of *parousia* that “the word means ‘presence’ or ‘coming’ and emphasizes both the idea of ‘being there’ and the idea of ‘having come.’ ... *Parousia* is found four times in the Olivet Discourse (Mt 24:3,27,37,39). The context makes it clear that Jesus’ initial appearing is intended, for the disciples asked how they would recognize the sign of his coming. Jesus explains that he will appear suddenly (v. 27), unexpectedly (v. 37), and with devastating impact on those who do not believe (v. 39). Yet the emphasis in the total passage (Mt 24–25) is not on the meaning of the second coming but on the fact that, until Jesus does come, we are to watch, committing ourselves to serve our absent Lord (see the four illustrations in Mt 24:42–25:46).”

Thayer’s *Greek-English Lexicon* (p. 490) gives Matt. 24:3 as an example of the meaning “the presence of one coming, hence *the coming*, *arrival*, *advent*”.

*The New Englishmen’s Greek Concordance and Lexicon*, Hendrickson Publishers, 1982, p. 680.

*The New Analytical Greek Lexicon*, Wesley J. Perschbacher, Ed., Hendrickson Publishers, 1990, p. 315.

We have examined one of the textual issues regarding the meaning of *parousia*, but what about the *context* of this most important place in which it is used? As touched on above, the context of Matthew 24 indicates that the disciples asked for a sign *in advance* of Jesus' *visible* coming, not a sign of an invisible presence followed by a visible coming. The Sept. 15, 1964 *Watchtower* (p. 576) said that the disciples "had no idea that he would rule as a glorious spirit from the heavens and therefore did not know that his second presence would be invisible." Since Jesus had just told his disciples (Matt. 23:38) that they "will by no means see me from henceforth until you say, 'Blessed is he that comes in Jehovah's name!'," and they were thinking that his return would be visible, they must have been asking about a *visible* appearance. If they were asking about a visible appearance, they were not asking about an *invisible* presence, or about a sign that the appearance had already taken place, for the appearance itself would be sign enough. Therefore they must have been asking for a sign that Jesus' appearance was *about* to take place. This is consistent with Jesus' illustration of the fig tree in Matt. 24:32,33: "Just as soon as its young branch grows tender and it puts forth leaves, you know that summer is *near* [or, "about to arrive"—not "here, invisibly"]. Likewise also you, when you see all these things, know that he is *near at the doors*."

As noted above, *The Watchtower* skirted around these points in paragraphs 3-8 and glossed over the conclusion that Christ spoke of *being near in time*, not near physically. So at this point the Society's argument contains a gaping hole, which is never filled.

The *Watchtower* article continues in paragraph 11:

Vine's *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* says: "PAROUSIA, ... lit[erally], a presence, *para*, with, and *ousia*, being (from *eiemi*, to be), denotes both an arrival and a consequent presence with. For instance, in a papyrus letter a lady speaks of the necessity of her *parousia* in a place in order to attend to matters relating to her property."

Here the Society's writer partially agrees with the above references on *parousia*, except that the definition quoted from Vine's is incomplete. *Parousia* sometimes means "presence" only, sometimes "arrival and a subsequent presence", and sometimes "arrival" only. We will soon see examples of each.

Oddly enough, Vine's definition of *parousia* does not entirely support the Society's definition, because the *Watchtower* article mostly argues for the meaning of "presence" only. This inconsistency seems lost on the writer. He seems to have quoted from Vine mainly because Vine doesn't allow for the meaning of "arrival" only, so he seems to support the Society's contention that the focus of *parousia* is always on the aspect of "presence".

Why does Vine's *Dictionary* appear to support the Society's definition? Basically, because W. E. Vine was a dispensationalist<sup>13</sup> and he adjusted his definition of *parousia* to match his theology. As explained above, dispensationalists believe in a "secret rapture" or "two-stage coming" doctrine of Christ's return. Note what Vine's *Dictionary* further says about *parousia*. It

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<sup>13</sup> Vine was a member of the Plymouth Brethren sect known as the Open Brethren.

is virtually a direct statement of dispensationalist doctrine. Compare the language with the above description of their belief:

When used of the return of Christ, at the rapture of the church, it signifies, not merely His momentary “coming” for His saints, but His presence with them from that moment until His revelation and manifestation to the world. In some passages the word gives prominence to the beginning of that period, the course of the period being implied, 1 Cor. 15:23; 1 Thess. 4:15; 5:23; 2 Thess. 2:1; Jas. 5:7-8; 2 Pet. 3:4. In some, the course is prominent, Matt. 24:3, 37; 1 Thess. 3:13; 1 John 2:28; in others the conclusion of the period, Matt. 24:27; 2 Thess. 2:8.

Vine and a fellow-believer, C. F. Hogg, wrote several books defending the “secret rapture” idea. Concerning one of these, the well-known Bible commentator F. F. Bruce gave the following critical comments on their use of *parousia* in the eschatological system they espoused:

Perhaps the most distinctive feature of *Touching the Coming* was their treatment of the word *parousia*. They insisted on the primary sense of ‘presence’ and understood the word in its eschatological use to mean the presence of Christ with His raptured Church in the interval preceding His manifestation in glory....

It may be questioned whether this interpretation of *parousia* does adequate justice to the sense which the word has in Hellenistic Greek. The writers did, indeed, appeal in support of their view to Cremer’s lexicon; but Cremer wrote a good while before the study of vernacular papyri revolutionized our knowledge of the common Hellenistic speech.<sup>14</sup>

The Society’s reference to Vine’s definition of *parousia*, then, carries little weight. Not only is it based on a doctrine the Society views as a product of “Christendom”, but it is as obsolete as the rest of its references.

The *Watchtower* article continues:

Other lexicons explain that *parousi’a* denotes ‘the visit of a ruler.’ Hence, it is not just the moment of arrival, but a presence extending from the arrival onward.

This is only partially correct. Unfortunately, the writer proceeds to forget this definition and goes on to emphasize that *parousia* means “presence” only. In particular he neglects the fact that the word can focus on the arrival, the presence or both, and that it is *the context in which it is used* that determines the precise meaning.

The *Watchtower*’s next statement is again misleading, so we will examine it in detail.

Interestingly, that is how Jewish historian Josephus, a contemporary of the apostles, used *parousi’a*. \*

This is only partly true. Josephus used *parousia* 32 times in three of his works,<sup>15</sup> and in only five of those instances does it mean exclusively “presence”. We will show this presently.

The footnote for paragraph 11 of the *Watchtower* article illustrates four of those five instances and says:

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<sup>14</sup> F. F. Bruce in Percy O. Ruoff, *W. E. Vine, His Life and Ministry*, London, 1951, pp. 75-6.

<sup>15</sup> *A Complete Concordance to Flavius Josephus*, edited by Karl Heinrich Rengstorff, Vol. III, 1979, p. 329

\* Examples from Josephus: At Mount Sinai lightning and thunder “declared God to be there present [*parousi'a*]”. The miraculous manifestation in the tabernacle “showed the presence [*parousi'a*] of God”. By showing Elisha’s servant the encircling chariots, God made “manifest to his servant his power and presence [*parousi'a*]”. When Roman official Petronius tried to appease the Jews, Josephus claimed that ‘God did show his presence [*parousi'a*] to Petronius’ by sending rain. Josephus did not apply *parousi'a* to a mere approach or momentary arrival. It meant an ongoing, even invisible, presence. (Exodus 20:18-21; 25:22; Leviticus 16:2; 2 Kings 6:15-17)—Compare *Antiquities of the Jews*, Book 8, chapter 5, paragraph 2[80]; chapter 8, paragraph 5 [202]; Book 9, chapter 4, paragraph 3 [55]; Book 18, chapter 8, paragraph 6 [284].

Based on this limited selection the next paragraph concludes that “the meaning ‘presence’ is clearly borne out by ancient literature”. While these four quotations support the Society’s thesis, a detailed study of Josephus’ use of *parousia* shows that the Society’s contention is not true in general. One can find all of Josephus’ uses of *parousia* in *A Complete Concordance to Flavius Josephus* as stated above. Translations of these are listed below.

In examining how Josephus used *parousia* we find that he used it in the strict sense of “presence” only five times. He used *parousia* in the strict sense of “arrival” nine times and in the sense of “arrival with a subsequent presence” eighteen times. In the latter case the context shows that both “arrival” and “presence” are part of the meaning, since one can often substitute either word and the passage still makes good sense.

This selective quoting means that the *Watchtower* writer deliberately selected examples that supported his thesis and ignored the many more examples that contradicted it. This is a good example of the Watchtower Society’s scholastic dishonesty.

### **How Josephus Used *Parousia*—All 32 Instances**

In the following section we present the context of every instance in which Josephus uses *parousia*, based on the listing in Rengstorf’s *Concordance to Josephus*. The first part of each instance is an English translation from the Loeb Classical Library.<sup>16</sup> The second part is from William Whiston’s translation.<sup>17</sup> The works of Josephus we are concerned with here are, *The Life of Flavius Josephus*, *The Antiquities of the Jews* and *The Wars of the Jews*.

Each instance is marked with the name of the work in which Josephus used *parousia*, the number of the book (e.g., *Antiquities* contains ‘books’ numbered from 1 through 20), and the section number used in the Loeb Library. Modern printings of Whiston’s translation, which are widely available, include these section numbers, so it is easy for readers not having access to the Loeb collection to follow along.

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<sup>16</sup> Translated by H. St. J. Thackeray, Harvard University Press

<sup>17</sup> *The Works of Josephus*, translated by William Whiston, Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody, Massachusetts, 1987

## Instances Where *Parousia* Means Presence Only

This section contains quotations where *parousia* takes on the meaning of “presence” only. In these, note that the words translated from *parousia* cannot sensibly be rendered in English by words having a sense of “arrival”.

Antiquities 1, 281

For indeed an abundant and abiding [*parousia*] store of great blessings awaiteth thee through my succour.

For thou shalt have great abundance of all good things by my assistance.

Antiquities 3, 202,203

A delicious dew was distilled therefrom, revealing God’s presence [*parousian*] to those who both desired it and believed in it.

From it there dropped a sweet dew, and such a one as showed the presence [*parousian*] of God to those that desired and believed it.

Antiquities 9, 55

But the prophet encouraged his servant, telling him not to be afraid, and besought God, with whom as ally he was scornful of danger and without fear, to reveal, so far as was possible, His power and presence [*parousian*] to his servant, in order that he might take hope and courage.

But he encouraged him, and bade him not be afraid, and to despise the enemy, and trust in the assistance of God, and was himself without fear; and he besought God to make manifest to his servant his power and presence [*parousian*], so far as was possible, in order to the inspiring him with hope and courage.

Antiquities 18, 284,286: God miraculously sends rain in answer to Petronius’ prayer.

God, on His part, showed Petronius that He was with [*parousian*] him and would lend him aid in all matters... Petronius, on his part, was struck with great amazement when he saw unmistakable evidence that God’s providence was over the Jews and that He had shown His presence [*epiphaneian; epiphaino*]...

And now did God show his presence [*parousian*] to Petronius, and signify to him, that he would afford him his assistance... But as to Petronius, he was mightily surprised when he perceived that God evidently took care of the Jews, and gave very plain signs of his appearance...

The word *epiphaino* means “to make to appear, to display, to be manifested, revealed” and is the verb form of *epiphaneia*, which means “manifestation, appearance, epiphany” (1 Tim. 6:14: “until the *manifestation* of our Lord Jesus Christ”). It is closely related to *parousia*, as shown in the material from Deissmann above. Whiston also makes some comments (p. 495) about how this passage greatly illustrates several OT and NT texts that use *parousia* and *epiphaneia*, the *presence* and *appearance* of God, in closely related ways. In Petronius’ case, since God was already present in the sense that he heard Petronius’ prayer, he appeared or manifested himself so that Petronius became acutely aware of his presence in a special way—God miraculously sent rain and proved that he was “with” him. The two words are used similarly with respect to Christ

in 2 Thess. 2:8: He will do away with the lawless one “by the manifestation or appearance (*epiphaneia*) of his presence or coming (*parousia*)”.

### **Instances Where *Parousia* Means Arrival with a Subsequent Presence**

This section contains quotations where *parousia* can take on shades of meaning of both “arrival” and “presence”. In these, note that the words translated from *parousia* could be rendered in English by words having the senses of “showing up, arriving, being here, getting here”. The meaning is “arrival with a subsequent presence”, with the focus sometimes on the arrival and sometimes on the subsequent presence.

In none of these cases does a strict meaning of “presence” make sense. In some cases it is a stretch even to include the meaning “presence” because the sense of the sentence becomes awkward to understand.

Life, 272-3

News of these proceedings reached me in a letter from Silas, urging me to lose no time in coming ... Responding instantly to his advice I went [*paragenomenos: paraginomai*] ... Jonathan and his party having, during their stay at Tiberias, induced a number of aggrieved persons to desert me, on hearing of my arrival [*parousian*] were alarmed about their own safety.

Silas ... informed me of this, and desired me to make haste thither. Accordingly, I complied with his advice immediately and came thither... Jonathan and his colleagues had been at Tiberias, and had persuaded a great many of such as had a quarrel with me to desert me; but when they heard of my coming [*parousian*], they were in fear for themselves.

The word *paraginomai* means “to be by the side of, to come, approach, arrive” (Matt. 2:1: “astrologers from eastern parts *came* to Jerusalem”), or “appear, make a public appearance” (Matt. 3:1: “John the Baptist *came* preaching in the wilderness”). Josephus *went* or *came* (*paraginomai*) to Tiberias; he *arrived and became present* (*parousia*), and the deserters became aware of his being there.

Wars 2, 616-7

Josephus ... set off and, after a rapid night march, reached Tiberias at daybreak. The whole population came out to meet him except John; he, though suspecting that this visit [*parousian*] boded ill for himself, sent one of his acquaintances with a message.

Josephus ... marched with great diligence all night, and came early in the morning to Tiberias; at which time the rest of the multitude met him. But John, who suspected that his coming [*parousian*] was not to his advantage, sent however one of his friends.

Wars 4, 345

The Idumaeans now began to regret that they had come [*parousias*].

The Idumeans repented of their coming [*parousias*].

#### Wars 5, 410

As for Titus, the very springs flow more copiously for him which had erstwhile dried up for you. For before his coming [*parousias*], as you know, Siloam and all the springs outside the town were failing.

As for Titus, those springs that were formerly almost dried up when they were under your power since he is come [*parousias*], run more plentifully than they did before.

#### Antiquities 1, 168

For before the coming [*parousias*] of Abraham the Egyptians were ignorant of these sciences.

For, before Abram came [*parousias*] into Egypt, they were unacquainted with those parts of learning.

#### Antiquities 1, 287

And they pointed out Jacob to her [Laban's daughter] and told her that this stranger had come to ask after her father. Thereupon she, with childish delight at Jacob's coming [*parousia*], asked him who he was, whence he had come to them and what business had brought him.

Then they showed her Jacob, and told her that he was a stranger, who came to inquire about her father's affairs. But she, as pleased, after the custom of children, with Jacob's coming [*parousia*], asked him who he was, and whence he came to them, and what it was he lacked, that he came thither.

#### Antiquities 1, 296

That was the reason for his coming [*parousias*] thither.

This was the occasion of his coming [*parousias*] hither.

#### Antiquities 2, 20

They, on seeing that their brother had come to them, were delighted, not, however, at this visit [*parousia*] from a relative and their father's envoy, but rather as if it had been an enemy, who by the will of God had been delivered into their hands.

Now these brethren rejoiced as soon as they saw their brother coming to them, not indeed as at the presence [*parousia*] of a near relation, or as at the presence of one sent by their father, but as at the presence of an enemy, and one that by divine providence was delivered into their hands.

#### Antiquities 2, 279

On approaching the frontier [Moses] was met, at God's bidding, by his brother Aaron... And they, as they proceeded on their way, were met by the most distinguished of the Hebrews, who had learnt of his coming [*parousian*].

Now when they were near the borders, Aaron his brother, by the command of God, met him... But as they were going forward, the chief men among the Hebrews, having learned that they were coming [*parousian*], met them.

Antiquities 3, 80: This is based on the account in Exodus 19:14-20; 20:18-21.

So for two days they continued in festivity. But on the third, before the sun arose, a cloud settled down over the whole camp of the Hebrews, who had seen not the like before, enveloping the spot whereon they had pitched their tents; and, while all the rest of heaven remained serene, blustering winds, bringing tempestuous rain, came sweeping down, lightning terrified the beholders, and thunderbolts hurled from aloft signified the advent [*parousian*] of God propitious to the desires of Moses.

So they passed two days in this way of feasting; but on the third day before the sun was up, a cloud spread itself over the whole camp of the Hebrews, such a one as none had before seen, and encompassed the place where they had pitched their tents; and while all the rest of the air was clear, there came strong winds, that raised up large showers of rain, which became a mighty tempest. There was also such lightning, as was terrible to those that saw it; and thunder, with its thunderbolts, were sent down, and declared God to be there present [*parousian*] in a gracious way.

In this instance God's spectacular arrival at the Hebrew's camp took the form of a dark cloud (Ex. 20:21) that appeared on the third day. After God "arrived" he was "present".

Antiquities 3, 202, 203: This is an instance where focus on the arrival is evident.

Then did God manifest that He was well pleased with the work of the Hebrews... He came as their guest and took up His abode in this sanctuary. And it was on this wise that He made his entry [*parousian*].

Now God showed himself pleased with the work of the Hebrews... He came and sojourned with them, and pitched his tabernacle in the holy house. And in the following manner did he come [*parousian*] to it.

Antiquities 4, 180

Your possession of those good things which ye have already will rest assured, and those yet absent will soon be present [*parousian*] in your hands.

You will then preserve the possession of the good things you already have, and will quickly obtain those that you are at present [*parousian*] in want of.

Antiquities 5, 109

For think not that by crossing the river ye have also passed beyond God's power: nay, everywhere ye are within His domain and escape from His authority and His vengeance is impossible. But if ye regard your coming [*parousian*] hither a hindrance to sober living...

For do not you imagine that, because you are got over the river, you are got out of the reach of God's power; you are everywhere in places that belong to him, and impossible it is to overrun his power, and the punishment he will bring on men thereby; but if you think that your settlement [*parousian*] here will be any obstruction to your conversion to what is good...

Antiquities 5, 304

After this combat Samson, scorning the Philistines, came to Gaza and lodged at one of the inns. Thereupon the chiefs of the Gazites, informed of his presence [*parousian*] in the town, posted ambuscades before the gates to prevent his leaving it.

After this fight Samson held the Philistines in contempt, and came to Gaza, and took up his lodgings in a certain inn. When the rulers of Gaza were informed of his coming [*parousian*] thither, they seized upon the gates, and placed men in ambush about them, that he might not escape.

Antiquities 5, 355

Confidence then mightily revived among the Hebrews, who hoped through the coming [*aphixin; aphikneomai*] of the ark to get the better of their enemies, while the enemy were in consternation, dreading that presence [*parousian*] of the ark among the Israelites.

So the Hebrews were full of courage, as supposing that, by the coming of the ark, they should be too hard for their enemies; their enemies also were greatly concerned, and were afraid of the ark's coming [*parousian*] to the Israelites.

The word *aphikneomai* means “arrive at, come to, reach, become known to” (Rom. 16:19: “your obedience *has come* to the notice of all”). The context shows clearly that here, *parousia* has the sense of the ark's arrival followed by its presence among the Israelites. That is why Thackeray can use “presence” and Whiston can use “coming” and the passage makes complete sense.

Antiquities 12, 160

The king sent an envoy to Jerusalem... Now there was a certain Joseph... when his mother informed him of the envoy's arrival [*parousian*]—for he himself happened to be away in the village of Phichola...—he went to the city (of Jerusalem).

[The king] sent an ambassador to Jerusalem... There was now one Joseph... his mother... informed him of the coming [*parousian*] of the ambassador; for he was then sojourning at a village named Phicol... Hereupon he came to the city (Jerusalem).

Antiquities 18, 161

When Agrippa had reached Puteoli, he sent a letter to the emperor Tiberius, who was then living at Capri, informing him that he had come [*parousian*] to see and pay court to him.

And now Agrippa was come to Puteoli, whence he wrote a letter to Tiberius Caesar, who then lived at Capreae, and told him that he was come [*parousian*] so far, in order to wait on him, and to pay him a visit.

Antiquities 19, 339

[Agrippa] was visited by [various kings]... His converse with all of them when he entertained and showed them courtesies was such as to demonstrate an elevation of sentiment that justified the honour done him by a visit [*parousia*] of royalty.

There came to [Agrippa various kings]... All these he treated with agreeable entertainments, and after an obliging manner, and so as to exhibit the greatness of his mind, -- and so as to appear worthy of those respects which the kings paid to him, by coming [*parousia*] thus to see him.

## Instances Where *Parousia* Means Arrival Only

This section contains quotations where *parousia* takes on the meaning of “arrival” only. In these, note that the words translated from *parousia* cannot sensibly be rendered in English by words having only the meaning of “presence” or “arrival with a subsequent presence”. In some cases there is a parallel phrase showing clearly that the focus of *parousia* is on “arrival”, “coming” or “advent”.

### Antiquities 6, 102

Saul waited awhile as the prophet had enjoined upon him; then, however, he would observe his command no longer, but when he saw that the prophet tarried and that his own soldiers were deserting him he took the victims and performed the sacrifice himself. Then, hearing that Samuel was approaching, he went out to meet him. But the prophet told him that he had not done rightly in disobeying his injunctions and anticipating his advent [*parousian*]: he was paying that visit in accordance with the will of the Deity...

He waited, as the prophet sent to him to do; yet did not he, however, observe the command that was given him, but when he saw that the prophet tarried longer than he expected, and that he was deserted by the soldiers, he took the sacrifices and offered them; and when he heard that Samuel was come, he went out to meet him. But the prophet said he had not done well in disobeying the injunctions he had sent to him, and had not staid till his coming [*parousian*], which being appointed according to the will of God...

Note the phrase where Saul “went out to meet” Samuel. It means that Samuel was not yet present but was on his way—he was coming and about to arrive.

### Antiquities 8, 325

She reproached the prophet for having come [*parousias*] to her to convict her of sin.

[She] complained to him that he had come [*parousias*] to her to reproach her for her sins.

### Antiquities 11, 328: The setting is that Alexander the Great is approaching Jerusalem:

When the high priest Jaddus heard this, he was in an agony of fear... He therefore ordered the people to make supplication, and offering sacrifice to God together with them, besought Him to shield the nation and deliver them... But, when he had gone to sleep after the sacrifice, God spoke oracularly to him in his sleep, telling him to take courage and adorn the city with wreaths and open the gates... and that they should not look to suffer any harm, for God was watching over them. Thereupon he rose from his sleep, greatly rejoicing to himself, and announced to all the revelation that had been made to him, and, after doing all the things that he had been told to do, awaited the coming [*parousian*] of the king.

Jaddua the high priest, when he heard that, was in an agony, and under terror... He therefore ordained that the people should make supplications, and should join with him in offering sacrifices to God, whom he besought to protect that nation, and to deliver them... whereupon God warned him in a dream, which came upon him after he had offered sacrifice, that he should take courage, and adorn the city, and open the gates... without the dread of any ill consequences, which the providence of God would prevent. Upon which, when he rose from his sleep, he greatly rejoiced; and declared to all the warning he had received from God according to which dream he acted entirely, and so waited for the coming [*parousian*] of the king.

Since the king was not yet present, *parousia* must mean “coming”.

Antiquities 12, 86

Eleazar, the high priest, after dedicating [the gifts] to God and honouring the bearers, gave them gifts to take to the king, and sent them back to the king. And when they came [*paragenomenon*; *paraginomai*] to Alexandria, and Ptolemy heard of their arrival [*parousian*] and of the coming [*eleluthotas*; *erkhomai*] of the seventy elders...

When Eleazar the high priest had devoted [the gifts] to God, and had paid due respect to those that brought them, and had given them presents to be carried to the king, he dismissed them. And when they were come to Alexandria, and Ptolemy heard that they were come [*parousian*], and that the seventy elders were come also...

The word *paraginomai* was defined above. The word *erkhomai* means “to come or go, arrive” (Matt. 24:30: “they will see the Son of man *coming* on the clouds”; Matt. 25:10: “the bridegroom *arrived*”). Here we find three parallel uses of words that illustrate their use as synonyms: the gift bearers *came* (*paraginomai*) to Alexandria; Ptolemy heard of their *arrival* (*parousia*); the seventy elders *came* (*erkhomai*) at the same time. Note that while *parousia* and *paraginomai* by themselves could conceivably mean “presence” here, the parallel use of *erkhomai* with respect to the seventy elders forces the meaning of “arrival”.

Antiquities 12, 93

[The king] promised, moreover, that he would make a special occasion of the day on which they had come [*epiphane*; *epiphaino*] to him and would celebrate it every year so long as he lived, for, he said, the day of their coming [*parousias*] happened to be same as that of the victory which he had gained over Antigonus in a naval battle.

[The king] promised, however, that he would make this day on which they came to him remarkable and eminent every year through the whole course of his life; for their coming [*parousias*] to him, and the victory which he gained over Antigonus by sea, proved to be on the very same day.

Again note the virtually synonymous use of *epiphaino* (*epiphaneia*) and *parousia*. Again we note the parallel use of a word which cannot mean “presence” along with *parousia*, forcing the latter to mean “coming”. The *parousia* of the visitors was their *epiphaneia*.

Antiquities 12, 352

This reverse befell them because they disobeyed the instructions of Judas not to engage anyone in battle before his arrival [*parousias*].

This misfortune befell them by their disobedience to what injunctions Judas had given them, not to fight with anyone before his return [*parousias*].

Using something like “before his presence” would be awkward and inconsistent with the overall context.

## Antiquities 13, 266

The praetor Fannius should give them money from the public treasury for their *return* [*epanelthoien; epanerkhomai*] home. Accordingly Fannius dismissed the Jewish envoys in this manner, giving them money from the public treasury and a decree of the Senate to those who were to conduct them on their way and furnish them a safe return [*parousian*] home.

Their praetor Fanius should give them money out of the public treasury to bear their expenses home. And thus did Fanius dismiss the Jewish ambassadors, and gave them money out of the public treasury; and gave the decree of the senate to those that were to conduct them, and to take care that they should return [*parousian*] home in safety.

The word *epanerkhomai* means “to come back, return” (Luke 10:35: “I will repay you when I *come back here*”; Luke 19:15 “when he *got back* after having secured the kingly power”). Here again we find the parallel use of an unambiguous word determining the precise meaning of *parousia*—which is here “return”.

## Antiquities 20, 30-32

[Helena entreated the nobles] to defer their decision about putting the brothers to death until after Izates had arrived [*paragenomenos; paraginomai*] and given his approval. Failing to persuade her to put the brothers to death as they advised, they, for their own safety, admonished her at least to keep them in custody until his arrival [*paraousias*]... Helena ... set up Monobazus, her eldest son, as king ... she exhorted him to administer the kingdom until his brother’s arrival [*parousias*]. The latter, on hearing of his father’s death, quickly arrived [*heke; heko*] and succeeded his brother.

Helena replied to this ... [that the nobles] would however defer the execution of this slaughter of Izates’s brethren till he should be there himself, and give his approbation to it. So since these men had not prevailed with her when they advised her to slay them, they exhorted her at least to keep them in bonds till he should come [*parousias*], and that for their own security... Helena ... set up Monobazus, the eldest son, to be king ... and exhorted him to administer the affairs of the kingdom till his brother should come [*parousias*]; who came suddenly upon hearing that his father was dead, and succeeded his brother.

We have already seen that *paraginomai* can mean “be by the side of, come, approach, arrive”. The context alone shows that it and the two instances of *parousia* mean “arrival”. The meaning is paralleled by another word, *heko*, which means “to be come, have arrived”. Vine’s *Expository Dictionary* comments on the difference between *erkhomai* and *heko*: “*erchomai* ... signifies the act, in contrast with *heko* ... which stresses the arrival, as, e.g., ‘I am come [*exerkhomai*; ‘to come out’] and am here [*heko*],’ John 8:42 and Heb. 10:9.” (“I am come (*heko*) to do your will”). Again we find an unambiguous word, *heko*, determining the sense of two others, so that *parousia* here means “arrival”.

## Life, 90

I mustered two hundred men and marched all night long, sending a courier in advance to inform the people of Tiberias that I was coming [*parousian*].

I took two hundred men along with me, and traveled all night, having sent before a messenger to let the people of Tiberias know that I was coming [*parousian*] to them.

Since he had not yet arrived, he could not yet be present. This is an extremely clear example.

At this point it is evident that the *Watchtower* writer has given an unrepresentative set of examples from Josephus to support his claim that *parousia* means mainly “presence”. Josephus’ use of *parousia* is varied and consistent with its use in other ancient Greek literature including the New Testament. Liddell and Scott’s *Lexicon* (p. 1343) gives a number of instances in secular literature where strictly “arrival” is meant, and Bauer’s *Lexicon* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 1979) gives many instances where the meaning is “coming, advent as in the first stage of presence”.

The Greek *Septuagint* version’s only use of *parousia* is in a way that does not allow the meaning of “presence”. Neh 2:6 reads, “for how long will thy journey be, and when wilt thou return [*poreia*: form of *parousia*]?”<sup>18</sup> Bauer’s *Lexicon* lists four instances in the Apocrypha, all under the meaning “coming, advent”. These read:

News of her coming [*parousia*] had already spread through the tents. (Judith 10:18; *New Jerusalem Bible*)

Judas ... imparted unto those that were with him that the army was at hand [*parousia*]. (2 Maccabees 8:12; Brenton)

Maccabeus seeing the coming [*parousia*] of the multitude... (2 Maccabees 15:21; Brenton)

To outward appearance [*parousia*] they received us willingly; but belied that appearance by their deeds. (3 Maccabees 3:17; Brenton)

So we find that a variety of ancient Greek literature shows that *parousia* can be used with many shades of meaning of “presence” and “coming”, and is certainly not restricted to a static “presence”. It is therefore astonishing, assuming the *Watchtower* writer has a shred of intellectual honesty, that he argues as he does for the strictly static meaning “presence”.

## Back to the Watchtower Article

Having lied about Josephus’ use of *parousia*, the *Watchtower* writer continues his exposition:

12 The meaning “presence” is clearly borne out by ancient literature,

By now the reader can see that this is a deliberate misrepresentation of the ancient literature. The word has many meanings, from “arrival” to “presence”, with every shade of meaning in between.

yet Christians are particularly interested in how God’s Word uses *parousi’a*. The answer is the same—presence.

This is again not true. God’s Word uses *parousia* in *many* ways, as does all of ancient Greek literature.

We see that from examples in Paul’s letters.

The examples are selectively chosen to exclude any that show the flavor of “arrival”. We will point these out as needed.

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<sup>18</sup> *The Septuagint with Apocrypha: Greek and English*, Sir Lancelot C. L. Brenton, Zondervan Publishing House, originally published 1851.

Many commentaries and Greek word studies deal with the precise meaning of *parousia*. The *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*<sup>19</sup> says (with slight editing for clarity; Vol. 3, pp. 43-44):

The basic meaning of the word is to be derived from the verb *pareimi*, “be present.” “Thus *parousia* originally meant *presence*. Since, however, *pareimi* can take on the sense of “come, approach” (e.g. Judg 19:3 LXX), *parousia* frequently means “arrival as the onset of presence” (BABD s.v. 2). This is the sense that *parousia* usually has in the NT; only in 1 Cor 16:17; 2 Cor 10:10; Phil 2:12 (1:26?) is the presence of the apostle of his fellow worker intended.

The *Watchtower* writer goes on and again engages in selective quoting:

For instance, he wrote to the Philippians: “In the way that you have always obeyed, not during my *presence* only, but now much more readily during my *absence*, keep working out your own salvation.” He also spoke of abiding with them that they might exult “through [his] presence [*parousi'a*] again with [them].” (Philippians 1:25, 26; 2:12) Other versions read “my being with you again” (*Weymouth; New International Version*); “when I am with you again” (*Jerusalem Bible; New English Bible*); and “when you once more have me among you.” (*Twentieth Century New Testament*)

But note that the above-quoted *Exegetical Dictionary* lists the exact meaning of verse 26 as uncertain (“1:26?”). Various other translations use “coming” here: “because of my coming to you again.” (*ESV*). This is a good example where the exact shade of meaning cannot be stated with certainty: “my coming to you again” means virtually the same thing as “my being with you again”.

The *Watchtower* continues:

At 2 Corinthians 10:10, 11, Paul contrasted “his presence in person” with being “absent.” In these examples he plainly was not speaking of his approach or arrival; he used *parousi'a* in the sense of being present. (Compare 1 Corinthians 16:17.)

These examples are also given in the above-quoted *Exegetical Dictionary*.

The footnote for this paragraph 12 says:

\* In *A Critical Lexicon and Concordance to the English and Greek New Testament*, E. W. Bullinger points out that *parousi'a* means ‘the being or becoming present, hence, presence, arrival; a coming which includes the idea of a permanent dwelling from that coming onwards.’

This footnote is among the most dishonest quotations in the *Watchtower* article. Bullinger’s *Lexicon* was published in various editions from 1877 through 1908<sup>20</sup> and has been reprinted many times by various publishing houses. Referring to one edition,<sup>21</sup> the quotation is from page 169 under the entry “COMING” (the *Lexicon* has 11 pages on the meanings of various forms of “come”). The *Watchtower* writer deliberately conceals this information from the reader. The full entry is (bold added):

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<sup>19</sup> *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, edited by Horst Balz and Gerhard Schneider, Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1982–1993.

<sup>20</sup> Bullinger was a dispensationalist who, like John Nelson Darby, W. E. Vine, and Cyrus Scofield, believed in a two-stage rapture/coming, which influenced their scholarly works. see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/E.\\_W.\\_Bullinger](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/E._W._Bullinger)

<sup>21</sup> In *Regency Reference Library*, Zondervan Publishing House, 1975

COMING [noun.]

1. *parousia*, the being *or becoming present*, (from *pareimi*, to be present,) hence, presence, **arrival**; **a coming** which includes the idea of a permanent dwelling from that coming onwards, (*occ.* 2 Cor. x. 10; Phil. ii. 12.

. . .

5. *erxhomai*, to come *or go*, denoting the act of coming *or going*

**“Becoming present” IS “coming”**. So Bullinger clearly indicates that **“arrival”** and **“a coming”** are the second main meanings of *parousia*. The *Watchtower* writer is thoroughly dishonest for not admitting this. He obviously has no respect for the intelligence of his readers or for scholastic integrity.

On pages 598-600 Bullinger lists meanings for various words related to “presence”. On page 598 we find this entry:

PRESENCE.

. . .

2. *parousia*, the being *or becoming present*; presence, arrival.

All of Bullinger’s entries are consistent with the above exposition, show that *parousia* can mean “presence” or “coming” according to context, and can be a synonym for *erxhomai*, as the above 32 quotations from Josephus prove.

Clearly, **the *Watchtower* writer lied to his readers.**

The *Watchtower* article continues with the key question:

What, though, about references to Jesus’ *parousi’a*? Are they with the sense of his “coming,” or do they indicate an extended presence?

Continuing with the *Watchtower* article, we find yet another bit of dishonesty:

13 Spirit-anointed Christians in Paul’s day were interested in Jesus’ *parousi’a*. But Paul warned them not to be ‘shaken from their reason.’ First there must appear “the man of lawlessness,” which has proved to be the clergy of Christendom. Paul wrote that “the lawless one’s *presence* is according to the operation of Satan with every powerful work and lying signs.” (2 Thessalonians 2:2, 3, 9) Plainly, the *parousi’a*, or presence, of “the man of lawlessness” was not just a momentary arrival; it would extend over time, during which lying signs would be produced. Why is this significant?

The writer is arguing against a straw man that he created. As Bullinger pointed out above, and as Josephus’ usage of *parousia* shows, *parousia* means “arrival with subsequent presence” *in appropriate contexts*. The writer’s straw man is his pretending that *parousia* can *only* mean “momentary arrival” or “extended presence” irrespective of the context. The same goes for “coming”: a coming can be followed by an extended presence. Once again: it is not just the word, but the *context* that determines the writer’s meaning.

Furthermore, the writer is arguing as if the *New World Translation’s* rendering *parousia* as “presence” in 2 Thessalonians is authoritative. But if we substitute “coming” for “presence”, the

meaning of 2 Thessalonians 2:9 is not sensibly changed: “the lawless one’s *coming* is according to the operation of Satan ...” That coming would be extended over time. The *Watchtower* writer has invented a non-issue.

Most Bible translations use some variation of “coming” here and make complete sense *in context*. Note how a few other Bible translations render this:

The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan.—*ESV*

the one whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan.—*NASB*

The coming of the lawless one is apparent in the working of Satan.—*NRSV*

The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with how Satan works.—*NIV*

Continuing with the *Watchtower* article, we find yet another straw man:

14 Consider the verse immediately before that: “The lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will do away with by the spirit of his mouth and bring to nothing by the manifestation of his *presence*.” Just as the presence of “the man of lawlessness” would be over a period of time, Jesus’ presence would extend for some time and would climax in the destruction of that lawless “son of destruction.”—2 Thessalonians 2:8.

Again most Bible translations use some variation of “coming” and make complete sense *in context*. Note how a few other Bible translations render this:

bring to nothing by the appearance of his coming.—*ESV*

bring to an end by the appearance of His coming.—*NASB*

annihilating him by the manifestation of his coming.—*NRSV*

destroy by the splendor of his coming.—*NIV*

The phrase “manifestation of his presence” obviously can be translated in various ways, contra the *Watchtower* writer’s claim. “Manifestation” is from the Greek *epiphaneia*, which can be a synonym for *parousia*, as was discussed on pages 8, 12 and 18 above.

## **Lying About the Hebrew Version of Matthew**

Continuing with the *Watchtower* article, we find a virtuoso demonstration of one of W. C. Fields’ classic lines:

“If you can’t dazzle them with brilliance, baffle them with bulls...”—W. C. Fields

Let’s quote paragraphs 15 and 16 verbatim and then take them apart:

### **Hebrew-Language Aspects**

15 As noted, Matthew evidently wrote his Gospel first in the Hebrew language. So, what Hebrew word did he use at Matthew 24:3, 27, 37, 39? Versions of Matthew translated into modern Hebrew have a form of the verb *boh*, both in the apostles’ question and in Jesus’ reply. This could lead to readings such as: “What will be the sign of your [*boh*] and of the conclusion of the system of things?” and, “As the days of Noah were, so the [*boh*] of the Son of man will be.” What does *boh* mean?

16 Though having various senses, the Hebrew verb *boh* ' basically means "come". *The Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* says: 'Occurring 2,532 times, *boh* ' is one of the most frequently used verbs in the Hebrew Scriptures and is at the head of verbs expressing motion.' (Genesis 7:1, 13; Exodus 12:25; 28:35; 2 Samuel 19:30; 2 Kings 10:21p Psalm 65:2; Isaiah 1:23; Ezekiel 11:16; Daniel 9:13; Amos 8:11) Had Jesus and the apostles used a word with such a range of meanings, the sense might be debatable. But did they?

Note how paragraph 15 uses "evidently", as if the speculations the writer set forth earlier have now become solid proof.

15 As noted, Matthew evidently wrote his Gospel first in the Hebrew language.

Whether Matthew did or not doesn't matter because it's all smoke and mirrors from here on.

So, what Hebrew word did he use at Matthew 24:3, 27, 37, 39? Versions of Matthew translated into modern Hebrew have a form of the verb *boh* ', both in the apostles' question and in Jesus' reply. This could lead to readings such as: "What will be the sign of your [*boh* ' ] and of the conclusion of the system of things?" and, "As the days of Noah were, so the [*boh* ' ] of the Son of man will be." What does *boh* ' mean?

All well and good, but if *boh* ' does not mean "presence", the writer's arguments are moot. He next explains that *boh* ' basically means "come", so his two expressions become:

"What will be the sign of your *coming* and of the conclusion of the system of things?" and, "As the days of Noah were, so the *coming* of the Son of man will be."

The writer has shot down his own argument!

He does it again in the next paragraph (bold added):

16 Though having various senses, the Hebrew verb *boh* ' basically means "come". *The Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* says: 'Occurring 2,532 times, *boh* ' is one of the most frequently used verbs in the Hebrew Scriptures and **is at the head of verbs expressing motion.**' (Genesis 7:1, 13; Exodus 12:25; 28:35; 2 Samuel 19:30; 2 Kings 10:21p Psalm 65:2; Isaiah 1:23; Ezekiel 11:16; Daniel 9:13; Amos 8:11) Had Jesus and the apostles used a word with such a range of meanings, the sense might be debatable. But did they?

There are a range of meanings, alright, but none of them include a **static** "presence". Rather, they **express motion**. Here are a few of the meanings that *TDOT* shows: to go into, to come toward or to, to come into, to arrive at, come to, attain to, to add to, come up to, to go into, to go through, to come into contact with, come near, etc.

The writer seems dimly to realize that his argument is on shaky ground, so he proceeds to leap to even shakier ground with his next foray by advancing a truly "dog ate my homework" argument.

17 Bear in mind that modern Hebrew versions are translations that may not present exactly what Matthew penned in Hebrew.

The writer seems to forget that if the other Gospels were inspired and were written in Greek, and Matthew were written in Hebrew and then translated to Greek by Matthew himself—which is what is said by the very traditions he relies on for his contention that Matthew was written in Hebrew—then the original Greek version of Matthew must also be inspired. And assuming that

the originals were mostly copied faithfully down through the centuries, we must today have a Greek version that is quite close to the original autograph. Therefore, the only valid conclusion is that the original Greek used *parousia*, which of course in this context has the meaning “coming”. Therefore, whatever Matthew might have penned in Hebrew would have to mean exactly the same as he penned in Greek—which is exactly what is in contention.

Ignoring these considerations, the writer produces more smoke and mirrors:

The fact is that Jesus could well have used a word other than *boh*’, one that fitted the sense of *parousi’ a*.

A classic case of arguing by assuming the conclusion. We will soon see that the writers and translators of various non-Greek versions of Matthew never used a form of *boh*’ that meant other than “coming” or “arrival”.

We see this from the 1995 book *Hebrew Gospel of Matthew*, by Professor George Howard. The book focused on a 14<sup>th</sup>-century polemic against Christianity by the Jewish physician Shem-Tob ben Isaac Ibn Shaprut. That document set out a Hebrew text of Matthew’s Gospel. There is evidence that rather than being translated from Latin or Greek in Shem-Tob’s time, this text of Matthew was very old and was originally composed in Hebrew. It thus may bring us closer to what was said on the Mount of Olives.

George Howard’s conclusions are disputed by other scholars, as is the age and origin of the Shem-Tob text of Matthew. Some scholars argue that this text could have been translated into Hebrew most any time in the centuries preceding Shem-Tob’s writings. There exist no definitive scholarly conclusions, and the *Watchtower* writer admits this by saying that ‘there is evidence’ rather than ‘there is proof or scholarly consensus’.

The *Watchtower* writer next tries to argue that a word related to the Hebrew *boh*’ (בּוֹהַ)—*bi’ah*’ (בִּיְאָה)—somehow implies a static presence in Matthew 24:3. But *bi’ah*’ is derived from the root *boh*’,<sup>22</sup> which implies movement. Various lexicons give the meaning of *bi’ah*’, used in the Bible only in Ezekiel 8:5, as “entrance, entry, entranceway”, etc. A related word is *pethach*, which is usually used for “entrance, doorway” in the OT (see Ezekiel 8:3, 7, 8, 14).

Now, in Ezekiel 8:5, *bi’ah*’ is used with the conjunction *ba*, which means “in, at, near, to”, so that the combination *ba-bi’ah*’ (בַּבְּיְאָה) means “{in, at, near} the entrance”, as shown by various Bible translations. A slight majority have something like “**in** the entrance” while many others have something like “**at** the entrance” as shown here:

this symbol of jealousy in the entryway.—*New World Translation*  
this idol of jealousy at the entrance.—*New American Standard Bible*  
that infuriating image on the approach.—*Tanakh-The Holy Scriptures*  
this statue of jealousy at the entrance.—*New Jerusalem Bible*  
this figure of jealousy, at the entrance.—*Young’s Literal Translation*

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<sup>22</sup> “*bi’ah*’ fem. *entrance*, Eze. 8:5, from the root *boh*’ to enter.” *Gesenius’ Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament Scriptures*, Mott Media, Milford, Michigan, 1982 reprint by Baker Book House, from the first edition of 1847.

this image of jealousy at the entrance.—*The Interlinear Hebrew/Greek English Bible*, Jay Green  
his offensive statue north of the Altar Gate, at the entrance.—*Christian Standard Bible*  
this idol (image) of jealousy at the entrance.—*Amplified Bible*  
that disgusting idol by the altar near the gate.—*Contemporary English Version*  
by the entrance of the gateway I saw the idol.—*Good News Translation*  
this offensive statue north of the altar gate, at the entrance.—*Holman Christian Standard Bible*  
this statue of jealousy at the entrance.—*New English Translation*  
beside the entrance to the gate near the altar, stood the idol.—*New Living Translation*

The context does not clearly determine whether the meaning is “in” or “at”, and either one makes sense in translation, so one cannot honestly use the passage to claim that the use of *bi’ah* implies the meaning “in the entryway”. Yet that is what the *Watchtower* writer claims. Given the above considerations, it is easy to see the *Watchtower* writer’s faulty reasoning:

18 At Matthew 24:3, 27, 39, Shem-Tob’s Matthew does not use the verb *boh*. Instead, it uses the related noun *bi’ah*. That noun appears in the Hebrew Scriptures only at Ezekiel 8:5, where it means “entranceway.” Instead of expressing the action of coming, *bi’ah* there refers to the start of a building; when you are in the entryway or on the threshold, you are in the building.

Except that, as shown above, Ezekiel 8:5 might mean that the idol was **in** the entranceway, or **at** or **near** the entranceway. The *Watchtower* writer is grasping at straws and has no argument.

The real question here is what Shem-Tob’s Matthew actually says and what it means. George Howard’s book is available as a PDF.<sup>23</sup> From pages 3 through 151 Howard provides his version of Shem-Tob’s Hebrew text on the left-hand pages and his English translation on the right-hand pages. The texts of Matthew 24:3 appear on pages 118-119. The Hebrew is (this is in FrankRuehl font; note that Howard’s Hebrew does not have vowel pointing):

ובשבתו צל הר הזתים נגד בית המקדש שאלו לו פיטרוש ויחנן  
ואנדריאה בסתר מתי יהיה כל אלה ומה האות שיהיה כשיהיו  
כל אלה הצנינים או כשיתחילו ומתי יהיה תכלית הצולם  
וביאתך.

Howard’s English translation reads:

As he sat on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, John and Andrew asked him secretly:  
When will all these things be and what will be the sign when all these matters will take place, or when  
will they begin and when will be the end of the world and your **coming**?

The last line of the Hebrew contains the compound *w-bi’ah-thkh* (וביאתך and-coming-your). There are a variety of online Hebrew to English translators available, which show that this phrase means:

And your arrival<sup>24 25</sup>

<sup>23</sup> <http://adamoh.org/TreeOfLife.lan.io/SDAcomms/Hebrew%20Gospel%20of%20MATTHEW%20by%20George%20Howard%20-%20Part%20One.pdf>

<sup>24</sup> Do It In Hebrew <https://www.doitinhebrew.com/Translate/default.aspx?kb=IL+Hebrew+Phonetic&l1=iw&l2=en&txt=>

<sup>25</sup> Google Translate <https://translate.google.com/>

Various Hebrew-English dictionaries give similar meanings for the root word:

coming ; (euphemism) sexual intercourse, coitus ; (literary) entrance hall <sup>26</sup>

For *ba-bi'ah'* (בִּיאָה) the “Do It In Hebrew” website<sup>27</sup> has a number of entries: in the coming, in coming, comes. Various shades of meaning include to come, to enter; to approach, to come near. With an exclamation point: come in!, enter!.

Obviously, then, the static sense of entranceway of *bi'ah'* in Ezekiel 8:5 is not common, and is derived from the active sense of *boh'* of coming, arrival as shown above.

Furthermore, and consistently with the above information, *bi'ah'* is derived from the active root *boh'*, as shown by the *BDB Lexicon* <sup>28</sup> on pages 97-100. For example, the derived word *ma'oh'* means entrance, a coming in, entering, act of entrance (p. 99).

Working in reverse, we can look up the Hebrew word for coming in an English-Hebrew dictionary. The Morfix Dictionary <sup>29</sup> gives this result:

בִּיאָה, הַגָּעָה ; (המונית) הגעה לפורקן מיני

Note that the very first word (on the right) is a slightly different spelling of the *bi'ah'* we have been discussing: בִּיאָה (*biy'ah'*) as opposed to בִּיאָה . The two have slightly different pronunciations but mean the same thing. <sup>30</sup>

The *Watchtower* writer had at his disposal a variety of Hebrew texts made down through the centuries. These are the “J” translations listed on pages 1564-1566 of the 1984 *New World Translation With References*. Assuming the writer was competent and checked these sources, the fact that he does not cite any of them in support of his claims about Matthew 24:3 shows that they do not contain any support. Thus, as the Shem-Tob text and the above Hebrew dictionary entries show, the sense of *bi'ah'* in 24:3 must be the same as the Greek *parousia*: “coming, arrival”, not “presence”.

Clearly, then, the Watchtower writer deliberately hid from his readers the fact that the Shem-Tob Hebrew text not only provides no support for his claim, but contradicts it when all relevant sources are taken into account. Yet another instance in Watchtower literature of “baffle them with bulls...”

The Gospel of Matthew has been translated into many languages. One related to Hebrew is Yiddish, which was spoken by Jews in eastern and central Europe, and is a sort of pidgin of

<sup>26</sup> see Morfix Dictionary <http://www.morfix.co.il/en/>

<sup>27</sup> <https://www.doitinhebrew.com/Translate/default.aspx?kb=IL+Hebrew+Phonetic&l1=iw&l2=en&txt=>

<sup>28</sup> *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*; Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, Charles A. Briggs; translated by Edward Robinson; Oxford at the Clarendon Press; 1907; 1972 revised reprint.

<sup>29</sup> see <http://www.morfix.co.il/en/coming>

<sup>30</sup> For a detailed explanation of Hebrew vowel sounds, see Bill Mounce’s website <https://www.billmounce.com/hebrew> and <http://hebrew.billmounce.com/BasicsBiblicalHebrew-02.pdf>

German, Hebrew and other languages. It is written with Hebrew letters, including vowel points. A text from 1925 from the British and Foreign Bible Society (no further information is in the pamphlet containing the text) contains the Yiddish version described below. The Yiddish text is written in Hebrew letters on the right-hand pages and an English version is on the left-hand pages. The English version of Matthew 24:3 reads:

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?

The Yiddish version of Matthew 24:3 is (this is in FrankRuehl font):

און ווען ער איז נעגעסען אויף דעם הר הזיתים אזוי זענען זיינע תלמידים  
 צו איהם נעקומען בייא זיך אליין און האבען נעזאנט זאג אונז ווען דיזע  
 זאבען וועלען נעשעהען און וואס איז דאס צייכען פון דיין קומען און פון  
 דעם ענד פון דעם צייטאלטער

The portion of interest, with a word-for-word translation is: <sup>31</sup>

און פון	קומען	דיין	פון	צייכען	דאס	איז	וואס
of	and	come, arrive	yours	of	sign	that	is
ווען	זאבען	וועלען	נעשעהען	און	וואס	איז	דאס
age	the	of	end	the			

So even in the Yiddish translation we find the word for *parousia* translated as “coming, come, arrive”.

The Watchtower Society has provided no actual support for its translation of *parousia* as “presence” in any translation of Matthew of the last 2,000 years.

Getting back to the *Watchtower* article, it is almost amusing to see how the writer shoots himself in the foot yet again. As discussed on page 3 of this essay, Matthew 24:32-33 clearly indicates that Jesus’ main answer to the disciples’ question in verse 24:3 was that “the sign of the Son of Man” (whatever that is) would appear in heaven and that everyone on earth would see it. Therefore *there would be no sign in advance of Jesus’ coming* because the “sign” would be this stupendous event itself, appearing in heaven. Note verses 24:29-33 (*ESV*):

#### The Coming of the Son of Man

29 “Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. 30 Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. 31 And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

<sup>31</sup> Various online Yiddish to English translators and dictionaries were used, such as <http://www.etranslator.ro/yiddish-english-online-dictionary.php>  
<https://ia802703.us.archive.org/28/items/nybc211297/nybc211297.pdf>  
<https://ia801409.us.archive.org/18/items/nybc211300/nybc211300.pdf>

## The Lesson of the Fig Tree

32 “From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts out its leaves, you know that summer is near. 33 So also, when you see all these things, you know that he is near, at the very gates.

The point is that when “the sign of the Son of Man” appears in heaven, Jesus’ followers should conclude “that he is *near*, at the very gates”—not that he is *inside* the gates.

In view of these passages, let’s look again at what Ezekiel 8:5 says:

Then he said to me, “Son of man, lift up your eyes now toward the north.” So I lifted up my eyes toward the north, and behold, north of the altar gate, **{in, at, near} the entrance**, was this image of jealousy.

Because the Hebrew prefix *ba* (from *ba-bi’ah* בַּבִּיאָה) can mean “in, at, near” etc., and the context does not clearly select the exact shade of meaning, one cannot say exactly where the “image of jealousy” was—in, at or near the entrance. Therefore the *Watchtower* writer cannot honestly use the passage to argue that “the meaning ‘in the entrance’ shows that *parousia* means ‘presence’ ”.

The *Watchtower*’s next few sentences are good examples of “baffle them with bulls...”:

Also, non-biblical religious documents among the Dead Sea Scrolls often use *bi’ah*’ regarding the arrival or commencement of priestly courses. (See 1 Chronicles 24:3-19; Luke 1:5, 8, 23.)

Does the writer mean that versions of 1 Chronicles 24:3-19 and Luke 1:5, 8, 23 are to be found among the Dead Sea Scrolls and that even Luke is written in Hebrew? Baffling indeed.

But the writer again defeats his own argument: if *bi’ah*’ is used in these documents “regarding the arrival or commencement of priestly courses”, then *bi’ah*’ is being used in the non-static sense of “coming, arrival, commencement”—exactly what most scholars indicate for the sense of *parousia* in Matthew 24:3, 27, 37, 39. There is again no sense of a static “presence”. The writer has become incoherent.

And a 1986 translation into Hebrew of the ancient Syriac (or, Aramaic) *Peshitta* uses *bi’ah*’ at Matthew 24:3, 27, 37, 39.

An un-source-referenced 1986 translation from Syriac to Hebrew is supposed to be evidence? Worse for the writer’s claim, modern English translations of Matthew 24:3 all use “coming” or “advent” for *parousia*.<sup>32</sup>

So there is evidence that in ancient times the noun *bi’ah*’ may have had a sense that differed somewhat from the verb *boh*’ used in the Bible. Why is this of interest?

As shown above, the writer’s “evidence” is either completely inconclusive or just plain wrong. He still has no case. Apparently realizing this, he continues trying to baffle his readers:

19 The apostles in their question and Jesus in his reply may have used this noun *bi’ah*’. Even if the apostles had in mind simply the idea of Jesus’ future arrival,

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<sup>32</sup> <http://www.dukhrana.com/peshitta/index.php>

The entire context of Matthew 24 *proves* that “the apostles had in mind simply the idea of Jesus’ future arrival”. Because they knew nothing of a future “invisible presence”, as the Society has admitted (p. 9) and as the context proves (p. 5), that is all they *could* have had in mind.

Christ may have used *bi’ah’* to allow for more than what they were thinking.

But it was *the disciples*—not Christ—who used *parousia* or *bi’ah’* here. The writer is beyond incoherent.

Jesus could have been pointing to his arrival to commence a new office; his arrival would be the start of his new role.

The writer is implying that the disciples, not knowing anything about a future “invisible presence”, may have used a different word than *parousia*, but when Christ or God inspired Matthew to write his Gospel, Jesus inspired Matthew to use *parousia* to make the disciples appear to say what they ought to have said first time around! The special pleading and circular argumentation here is astonishing. This is seen in the writer’s next statements:

This would match the sense of *parousi’a*, which Matthew subsequently used. Such a use of *bi’ah’* would, understandably, have to support what Jehovah’s Witnesses have long taught, that the composite “sign” Jesus gave was to reflect that he was present.

Here the writer inadvertently admits the truth: he must bend the biblical interpretation to support longstanding Watchtower tradition. That is really the point of the entire *Watchtower* article.

The *Watchtower* writer concludes his article with some boilerplate tradition:

#### **Awaiting the Climax of His Presence**

20 Our study of Jesus’ presence should have a direct bearing on our life and our expectations. Jesus urged his followers to stay alert. He provided a sign so that his presence could be recognized, though most would take no note: “As the days of Noah were, so the presence of the Son of man will be. For as they were in those days before the flood, eating and drinking, men marrying and women being given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark; and they took no note until the flood came and swept them all away, so the presence of the Son of man will be.”—Matthew 24:37-39.

The writer, following Watchtower tradition, equates two extended time periods: “the days of Noah” and “the days of the Son of man”. But the passage actually *equates climactic events within those periods* with one another. J. B. Phillips’ New Testament renders these verses:

For just as life went on in the days of Noah so will it be at the coming of the Son of Man. In those days before the flood people were eating, drinking, marrying and being given in marriage until the very day that Noah went into the ark, and knew nothing about the flood until it came and destroyed them all. So will it be at the coming of the Son of Man.

By substituting the correct words in the writer's exposition, one can easily see what the passage really means:

Our study of Jesus' coming should have a direct bearing on our life and our expectations. Jesus urged his followers to stay alert. He will provide a sign so that his coming will be recognized, because when "the sign of the Son of man" appears in heaven "all the tribes of the earth will beat themselves in grief."—Matthew 24:30. People will be forced to take note: "As the days of Noah were, so the coming of the Son of man will be. For as they were in those days before the flood, eating and drinking, men marrying and women being given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark; and they took no note until the flood came and swept them all away, so the coming of the Son of man will be."—Matthew 24:37-39.

The writer next gives more Watchtower tradition:

21 During the days of Noah, most people of that generation just carried on with their normal affairs. Jesus foretold that it would be the same with "the presence of the Son of man." The people around Noah might have felt that nothing would happen. You know differently. Those days, which spread over time, led to a climax, "the flood came and swept them all away." Luke presents a similar account in which Jesus compared "the days of Noah" with "the days of the Son of man." Jesus admonished: "The same way it will be on that day when the Son of man is to be revealed."—Luke 17:26-30.

The tradition, from Russell's day and originating with Nelson Barbour and his followers, is that an extended time period ("the days of Noah") is equated in Luke with another extended time period ("the days of the Son of man"). But the proper translation of *parousia* in Matthew, along with a proper interpretation of Luke, makes far more sense, which is that *Luke equates climactic events* that occur during those days. He does not equate the two *periods* of "those days". Indeed, Luke 17:30 clearly states: "It will be the same on **that day** when the Son of man is revealed."

Again substituting the proper words and ideas into the *Watchtower* writer's bogus exposition, we have a proper understanding:

During the days of Noah, most people of that generation just carried on with their normal affairs. Jesus foretold that it would be the same with "the coming of the Son of man." The people around Noah might have felt that nothing would happen. Those days ended with a climactic event: "the flood came and swept them all away." Luke presents a similar account in which Jesus compared "the days of Noah" with "the days of the Son of man." Jesus admonished: "The same way it will be on that day when the Son of man is to be revealed," and "the sign of the Son of man" appears in heaven.—Luke 17:26-30; Matthew 24:30.

Having fully butchered his exposition with Watchtower tradition, the writer continues with more bogus tradition:

22 All of this takes on special meaning for us because we are living at a time when we recognize the events that Jesus foretold—wars, earthquakes, pestilences, food shortages, and persecution of his disciples. (Matthew 24:7-9; Luke 21:10-12) Such have been in evidence since the history-changing conflict significantly named World War I, though most people treat these as normal parts of history. True Christians, however, sense the meaning of these momentous events, just as alert people understand from the leafing of a fig tree that summer is near. Jesus advised: "In this way you also, when you see these things occurring, know that the kingdom of God is near."—Luke 21:31.

So much wrong in one paragraph! First, a careful study of Matthew 24:3-30, Mark 13:3-37 and Luke 21:5-36 shows that Jesus did not foretell war, earthquakes, pestilence, etc. as signs of

his “invisible presence” but as the opposite: his followers were **not** to interpret those common, everyday disasters that had always occurred as signs presaging his arrival. He simply said that these traditional “signs” common in Jewish apocalyptic writings would *continue to occur* before his arrival, and they should not make anything of them. If such massive, disastrous killers had been occurring since 1914 as the Watchtower Society claims, world population would have suffered a massive decline. Yet world population has exploded, which disproves the entire Watchtower 1914 doctrine.

In 1993 the Watchtower Society even admitted, in an article on natural disasters, that earthquake intensity and frequency have always been about the same: “**The earth and its dynamic forces have more or less remained the same throughout the ages.**”<sup>33</sup> How is it that in the Watchtower Writing Department the left hand does not know what the right hand is doing?

Second, as pointed out above, the “sign” that the disciples asked about was not concerning conditions that would be present during an invisible presence, since they knew nothing of such, but was something they thought would be evident **in advance** of Jesus’ return (see pages 4 and 9). Again note the disciples’ questions:

“When will these things be, and what will be the sign when these things are **about to take place?**”—Luke 21:7

“When will these things be, and what will be the sign when all these things are **about to be accomplished?**”—Mark 13:4:

## Conclusion

The Watchtower Society’s tradition about the meaning of *parousia* in Matthew 24:3 is based, not on sound exposition of Scripture or honest evaluation of what source references on Greek literature say, but on an attempt by Nelson Barbour, the originator of C. T. Russell’s 1914 chronology, and his followers to salvage Barbour’s failed prediction that Christ would return in 1873/1874. To explain away the fact that they had not seen Christ’s visible return, they resorted to Dispensationalist doctrine and decided that Christ had indeed returned, but invisibly. As part of their rationalizations to salvage the failed prediction, they adopted the notion that *parousia* means “presence” in Matthew 24:3. However, in so doing, they ignored the rest of Matthew 24, as well much of Mark 13 and Luke 21, as briefly shown above.

That completes this commentary on the *Watchtower’s* exposition on the meaning of *parousia*. Clearly, the *Watchtower* writer is as dishonest as the day is long, has no respect for proper scholarship, and thinks his readers are too stupid to notice his lies. This is, unfortunately, typical of Watchtower ‘scholarship’.

The organization of Jehovah’s Witnesses, which controls the various corporations held by the Watch Tower Bible & Tract Society of Pennsylvania, teaches that it, and it alone, comprises “the one true religion”. It claims that Jehovah’s Witnesses, both as an organization and as individuals

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<sup>33</sup> *The Watchtower*, December 1, 1993, p. 6

who follow its teachings, are the only true Christians and the only true worshipers of Jehovah God. But this organization is demonstrably dishonest, both in its scholastic writings and in what it produces for consumption by the community of Jehovah's Witnesses and the public. The very Bible that the Governing Body of Jehovah's Witnesses, and those who follow it, claim to revere condemns such dishonesty. As Job told his accusers: <sup>34</sup>

Are you defending God with lies? Do you make your dishonest arguments for his sake? Will you slant your testimony in his favor? Will you argue God's case for him? What will happen when he finds out what you are doing? Can you fool him as easily as you fool people? No, you will be in trouble with him if you secretly slant your testimony in his favor. Doesn't his majesty terrify you? Doesn't your fear of him overwhelm you? Your platitudes are as valuable as ashes. Your defense is as fragile as a clay pot.

## Appendix A

The last clear mention of the 1874 date was in the 1929 book *Prophecy*, pages 65-66. It stated:

The Scriptural proof is that the second presence of the Lord Jesus Christ began in 1874 A.D. This proof is specifically set out in the booklet entitled *Our Lord's Return* <sup>35</sup>. In the Scriptures there are three different Greek words used in connection with the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. Those words are, to wit: *parousia* (Matt. 24:3), which means presence; *epiphaneia* (2 Tim. 4:1), which means presence and shining forth with increased light; and *apokalupsis* (Rev. 1:1) which means the presence of the Lord shining forth with increased light and to a complete uncovering or revelation. Thus is shown the progressive unfolding of the prophecies during the presence of the Lord.

Just a year later the Society began a quiet process of migrating 1874 to 1914. The April 30, 1930 *Golden Age* stated (pp. 503-504) that Christ's second coming or presence began in 1914

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<sup>34</sup> Job 13:7-12, *New Living Translation*

<sup>35</sup> *Our Lord's Return: His Parousia, His Apokalupsis, and His Epiphania*, 1929, p. 27: "The time of the Lord's second presence dates from 1874." The 1874 date came from the ruminations of Nelson Barbour and Charles Russell. By complicated and specious arguments they claimed that 539 CE was a special prophetic date that was the basis for the various "prophetic days" in the book of Daniel, chapters 11 and 12. On pages 25-27 of *Our Lord's Return* Rutherford set forth the specious reasoning that led to the 1874 date: "The world powers or governments have been designated in the Scriptures by God's prophet as 'beasts' ". A 4<sup>th</sup> beast, described in Daniel 7:7-8, comprised of the world's politicians, financiers and religious leaders, originated in 539 CE with the overthrow of the Ostrogothic monarchy (the correct date was 554). Applying the "time, times and a half" = 3 ½ "times" of Dan. 12:5-7 to the notion of a "prophetic time" of 360 days, Rutherford arrived at 1,260 "times" or years. This "would mark the beginning of the time of the end of this beastly order. Twelve hundred and sixty years from 539 A.D. brings us to 1799—another proof that 1799 definitely marks the beginning of "the time of the end". This also shows that it is from the date 539 A.D. that the other prophetic days of Daniel must be counted." Applying the 1,335 days of Dan. 12:12 to this sequence, Rutherford calculated the date of Christ's second coming: "Applying the same rule, then, of a day for a year, 1335 days after 539 A.D. brings us to 1874 A.D., at which time, according to Biblical chronology, the Lord's second presence is due. ... There are two important dates here that we must not confuse, but clearly differentiate, namely, the beginning of "the time of the end" and of the presence of the Lord. "The time of the end" embraces a period from 1799 A.D., as above indicated, to the time of the complete overthrow of Satan's empire and the establishment of the kingdom of the Messiah. The time of the Lord's second presence dates from 1874, as above stated." Over the next decade and a half, all of these claims were abandoned, such that both "the time of the end" and "the Lord's second presence" were migrated to the period beginning in 1914.

with the appearance of “signs” such as war, famine, pestilence and earthquakes—as if these things had never occurred before—but gave no actual arguments. It claimed that Christ’s work of destroying all evil worldly systems began in 1914. It stated:

If it is true that Jesus has been present since the year 1914, then it must be admitted that nobody has seen Him with his natural eyes. The only way that He can be seen is by these signs or evidences, which Jesus declared would indicate His presence.

Applying Revelation 11:17-18 to 1914, it stated:

Here again, we are told that the evidence of Christ’s presence is the fact that the nations were angry, pointing again to the year 1914, when the whole world became angry, and the World War began. Thus, for over sixteen years, Christ has been present, unseen by men, but plainly revealed to those who are students of the Bible and looking for evidences which Jesus said would be a proof of His presence.

Another half year later we find a reversion to the 1874 date. The October 15, 1930 *Watch Tower* said (p. 308):

The second advent of the Lord Jesus Christ dates from about A.D. 1875.

A year and a half after that, the 1932 booklet *What Is Truth?* stated without any argument about 1874 (p. 48):

The year 1914, therefore, marks the second coming of Christ. ... The prophecy of the Bible, fully supported by the physical facts in fulfilment thereof, shows that the second coming of Christ dates from the fall of the year 1914.

Another half year later, the November 1, 1932 *Watchtower*, clearly based on the 1932 booklet, confusingly stated (p. 325):

From approximately 1875 forward Christ Jesus, the Chief Executive Office of Jehovah, was ‘preparing the way before the Lord Jehovah’. In 1914 Jehovah placed his royal Son upon his holy hill in Zion, that is to say, made him the capital or head of his organization, and which marks the birth of the kingdom.

Another year later we find the first clear statement that 1914 was now the year that Christ’s second coming commenced. The December 1, 1933 *Watchtower* stated (p. 362):

When Jesus reached heaven he was told by Jehovah that he must sit and wait until God’s due time to put the enemy Satan under his feet. In the year 1914 that due time of waiting came to an end. Christ Jesus received the authority of the kingdom and was sent forth by Jehovah to rule amidst his enemies. The year 1914, therefore, marks the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, the King of glory.

So between 1929 and 1933 the Watchtower Society quietly changed its all-important teaching about Christ’s second coming or second presence from 1874 to 1914. The date of the beginning of “Christ’s reign” was changed in 1922 from 1874 to 1914.

The quiet method used for this change was typically Watchtowerish: Deliberately confusing and conflicting statements were made in various bits of literature over a period several years. The result was that the doctrine was completely changed, but it was difficult or impossible to pinpoint when the change was made because it was spread out over years. This greatly lessened the impact that such a big doctrinal change would have had on the Witness community.

It is not even clear that the Watchtower's Writing staff was in agreement with itself about 1874 and 1914 as the date of Christ's second presence. The 1973 book *God's Kingdom of A Thousand Years Has Approached*,<sup>36</sup> probably written by or under the direction of the Society's head theologian Fred Franz,<sup>37</sup> stated:

It is true that the editor and publisher of *Zion's Watch Tower and Herald of Christ's Second Presence* calculated that the "presence" or parousia of the heavenly bridegroom began in the year 1874 C.E. ... In the year 1943 the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society published the book "*The Truth Shall Make You Free*." In its chapter 11, entitled "The Count of Time" it did away with the insertion of 100 years into the period of the Judges and went according to the oldest and most authentic reading of Acts 13:20, and accepted the spelled-out numbers of the Hebrew Scriptures. This moved forward the end of six thousand years of man's existence into the decade of the 1970's. Naturally this did away with the year 1874 C.E. as the date of return of the Lord Jesus Christ and the beginning of his invisible presence or parousia.

This last is yet another deliberately fuzzy explanation for a doctrinal change. *The Truth Shall Make You Free* said nothing about 1874, so what is the *God's Kingdom* author saying? A careful look at the *Truth Shall* book shows that it actually changed the date for mankind's creation from Russell's 4128 BCE to 4028 BCE, which would have moved the 1874 date to 1974—which would have seemed ridiculous even to JW readers in 1973. So the most that can be said is that the *Truth Shall* book established a chronological necessity for getting rid of the 1874 date. Since the above-quoted and earlier Watchtower literature had already moved the 1874 events to 1914, from about 1920 through 1933, 1874 did not have to be mentioned again.

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<sup>36</sup> *God's Kingdom of A Thousand Years Has Approached*, 1973, pp. 206, 209-210.

<sup>37</sup> Fred Franz was on the Watchtower Society's Writing Staff from the early 1920s onward. From the writing style that later became so recognizable, it is likely that he wrote or had a hand in producing much of the Society's literature during that period. So he would surely have known about all the statements about 1874 and 1914 quoted above.