

PAROUSIA



# PAROUSIA

GARY *K.* PRANGER

REDEMPTION  PRESS

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Printed in the United States of America

Published by Redemption Press, PO Box 427, Enumclaw, WA 98022.

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ISBN 978-1-63232-271-5

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 2003112744

# DEDICATION

I wish to acknowledge the many people who helped in the writing of this novel. This is unusual, I suppose, because fiction is mainly a work of the heart, whereas non-fiction is mainly a work of the mind. However, I need to honor those whom God has utilized to work on this heart over many years. Hence, this novel is dedicated to all the following: an electrician in Wheaton, Illinois, an aging group of InterVarsity pals, a host of students, faculty, friends, pastors, and fellow church members in Normal, Illinois, Chicago, Singapore, Beijing, Changchun, and in Tulsa—whether they ever have the opportunity to read these pages or not. Some of these patiently put up with me and read this story and gave me their comments and encouragement. A few have received the ultimate honor of having fictional characters modeled after them in this story.

Finally, this story is dedicated to my wife Michele, my daughter Leah, and my son Mark. They have put up with

their own tribulation in allowing me to write this book. It is my prayer that their lives will be hidden always in Jesus Christ's abiding love—no matter what happens.

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# PREFACE

**T**his story is about the growing spiritual lives and adventures of four individuals and the issues that confront every young Christian. All true Christians face the antichrist or his spirit, whether they ever meet him in his most organized form at the end of the age or are simply seduced, deceived or confronted by him in the meantime.

This story is not intended to foretell the future. The author claims no prophetic gift. It is not speculation about the identity or coming of the antichrist, nor does the author claim to know what Jesus Christ's Second Coming or life afterward will be like. This is simply the author's love letter to Jesus Christ and it is meant to honor all those earnest believers who have had to suffer persecution and/or their "tribulation" in this world, either in the past or in the present without ever seeing the Rapture. This story utilizes an historical post-tribulation view of Scripture and the Lord's

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Second Coming for several reasons. First, the author believes this line of interpretation. Secondly, in order to let the Hero of all time rescue those who love Him more than their lives in this story. And lastly, the tensions of a second coming story line were utilized because I am simply not sufficiently gifted to think of a better plot. This is the plot that is inherent in all of history and the Bible.

The title, *Parousia*, from the New Testament, means *His coming*, *His presence* or *His arrival* and was used in the Hellenistic Greek to designate the visit of a ruler. “The same Jesus Christ who ascended into heaven will once again visit the earth in his personal presence at the end of the age in power and glory to destroy antichrist and evil, to raise the righteous dead and to gather the redeemed” (Acts 1:11; Matthew 24, 2 Thessalonians 2, 1 Corinthians 15:23). Christ’s return, or parousia, is usually associated with two other words and so will also be an *apokalypsis*, an unveiling or disclosure of His power and glory (1 Corinthians 1:7; 2 Thessalonians 1:7; 1 Peter 1:7, 13). *Epiphaneia* means His appearing and the visibility of His return (2 Thessalonians 2:8; 1 Timothy 6:14; 2 Timothy 4:1, 8; Titus 2:13).\*

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\* J. D. Douglas, Editor, *The New Bible Dictionary* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. (1962) 1973), p. 387.





# Chapter |

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## ROSEDALE

Rosedale is a small middle-class and industrial suburb on the southern border of Chicago. It is only two-and-half square miles and it occupies nobody's thoughts except for those who live and work there. The town has never changed geographically, being bordered on three sides by other bigger suburbs and the river on the north. The river, a steel mill and two rail yards break up the pattern of rectangular blocks of neat rows of brick houses and apartment buildings. A railroad, the Illinois Northern, cuts across from north to south on a high, wide embankment. There are two commuter stations that serve the office workers as the I & N shuttles them to their jobs eighteen miles away in downtown Chicago.

There are little green parks on either side of the "I & N" hill as it is known. A small school, called Park School, is at the edge of the eastern side, almost up against the hill. On the main street are numerous stores and a library that used

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to be a grocery store. An older part of town exists in memories that once comprised an old city hall, brewery, and a theatre but these have long since been demolished. Only a bank and a tavern are there today.

Crime is not a major factor except when it boils over from Chicago or one of the larger suburbs. There are only three grade schools; high school students must be bused to the neighboring suburbs east and south.

The town has seen its share of changes, but its stability has contributed to the feeling of a “nothing special” place in the midst of more important places. The weatherman on television would never use Rosedale as part of his report. If anything great happened in Rosedale it has been forgotten. If anyone really important ever came out of it, few knew it. The feeling one gets when living there is that history is made somewhere else and nothing ever has or ever will happen in Rosedale except the everyday proceedings of life: the dog barking next door, the children playing, and people streaming to the train on cold mornings and returning in the evening rush hour. The evening news is ignored for the latest weather report and two-and-a-half centuries of re-runs of *Leave it to Beaver*.

Kings and presidents frequently visit Chicago, but never Rosedale. It seems safe and snug from dangerous or unpleasant matters. Inflation and unemployment have had effects on the populace, but nobody knows the serious effects of broken homes, divorces, or suicides except by some grapevine over the backyard fence. One only sees these problems somewhere else. Grumbles and complaints are a way of life.

## Rosedale

There are churches in Rosedale, but unless one is a devout Christian it is hard to ever dream of religion really affecting life. Just as politics, war, terrorism, crime, and poverty exist somewhere else, so too is God above and beyond the reach or desirability of the people. Even the Christian tends toward a serene complacency. Church and Sunday school are well attended but are anachronistic and remembered only for unpleasant feelings and abject day-dreaming. At the time of this story there is an unprecedented revival and persecution that is taking place in many nations and in remote corners of the world, but few people including Christians in this nation had any organized understanding or knowledge of it. There were no newspapers anymore and even if there had been they would have said nothing about it. Magazines and books that helped one to think were becoming relics or relegated to edited and manipulated versions on the computer. Life was becoming simpler and most people in Rosedale liked that.

To most citizens of Rosedale things really do not change. The humdrum of life seems to drag out and deflate all of the devout and noble beliefs and desires. Adventure is associated with movie micro-discs, computer games, and the yearly family vacation. Few understood that this was the last oasis of freedom. Most believed that this kind of life would go on just as it had and would never stop.

As in average lower middle class suburbs, the more successful the bread winner becomes, the higher the promotion, the more a temptation it is to move to the higher class suburbs or into the very heart of the city. It is some day in the future. The more things change, the more they stay the same.