

## **2 Thessalonians (3): Correction of Mistaken End-times Expectations (1)**

Let us turn in our Bibles to 2 Thessalonians 2. We will continue with the outline of this epistle that we have already provided. With 2:1 we begin the third major section of our epistle, which is below in the bold font.

- I. Salutation: grace and peace (1:1, 2)
- II. Courage for suffering saints (1:3-12)
  - A. Thanksgiving for faith, love, and endurance in tribulation (1:3, 4)
  - B. Judgment on persecutors and glory for saints (1:5-10)
  - C. Prayer for power and glory (1:11, 12)
- III. Correction of mistaken end-times expectations (2:1-12)**

The church at Thessalonica was a relatively new church when Paul wrote them this second epistle. He had written his first epistle several months before this second epistle. One reason for writing his first epistle was to comfort those in the church with view to the second coming of Jesus Christ. He had written to them these words:

<sup>13</sup>But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. <sup>14</sup>For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus. <sup>15</sup>For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. <sup>16</sup>***For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God.*** And the dead in Christ will rise first. <sup>17</sup>Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. <sup>18</sup>Therefore comfort one another with these words. (1 Thess. 4:13-18)

And then in the first chapter of this second epistle Paul again gave instruction regarding the second coming of Jesus Christ. This time he wrote of the coming of Christ in order to encourage these Christians who were suffering affliction. He assured them that they were pleasing God through their faithful endurance and that one day God would deliver them from their tormentors, when He brought His judgment upon them. This deliverance of His people and destruction of His enemies would occur at the second coming of Christ. He wrote to them that

God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you, <sup>7</sup>and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, ***when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels <sup>8</sup>in flaming fire***, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. <sup>9</sup>***They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might,*** <sup>10</sup>***when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints***, and to be marvelled at among all who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed.

Clearly Paul was speaking of a single future event, when Jesus Christ returns. At His second coming Jesus Christ will both deliver His people and judge His enemies.

But the church at Thessalonica did not have a clear understanding of the second coming of Jesus Christ. The members of this church were in error about the nature and the timing of the second coming of Jesus Christ. Apparently some of them had thought that the coming of the Lord was immanent, that He would return very suddenly, and very soon. **William Hendriksen** described their confusion:

Paul had written about the sudden character of Christ's (second) *coming* and about the necessity of being prepared for it (1 Thess. 5:1-11). Apparently this message had been misinterpreted, as if "sudden" coming meant "immediate" coming.

The result of this expectation of the immanent return of the Lord Jesus was that some in the church had become unsettled as to their spiritual well-being. Others, who believed that the Lord's return was immanent, ceased to work and had become dependent and a burden to the other Christians in the church to support them. Before us in 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12 Paul provided both correction and instruction regarding the coming of the Lord.

There was much misunderstanding and error in this church regarding the second coming, and it seems that there has been much misunderstanding and error in churches regarding the second coming throughout the past 2,000 years of this church era. There is still much misunderstanding and error regarding the second coming among many today, and I would say, even among most evangelical churches across our world. It would seem that once a doctrine or teaching about the second coming takes root in some churches, it takes on a life of its own. The false teaching continues to be propagated and popularized. Most people come to the place that they believe that the doctrine is a "clear teaching of the Bible", when in reality it is foreign to Scriptural teaching. And so, there is always the need for instruction in these matters. And there is need for each of us to retain a teachable spirit in these matters, for much error abounds.

Some avoid addressing these issues. Others perhaps speak on these issues too often. Even **Charles Spurgeon** (19<sup>th</sup> c.) was reluctant to preach on aspects of biblical prophecy. He once said, "I think that some ministers would do far more for the profit of God's people if they would preach more about the first advent and less about the second advent."<sup>1</sup> He was certainly right about this. On another occasion Spurgeon said this:

A man says to me, "Can you explain the seven trumpets of the Revelation?"

No, but I can blow one in your ear, and warn you to escape from the wrath to come.

Another says, "Can you tell me when the end of the world will come?"

No, but I can tell you how to be so prepared for it that you need not be afraid if it were to come tonight. I can urge you to trust the Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior, so that you can await it with holy joy.<sup>2</sup>

But though some do not address these issues readily, the Apostle Paul did so when he saw it beneficial for the people of God. And of course our Lord believed that it is an important matter, for He inspired the apostle to address this subject to this church. And so we will address this matter also, as the text unfolds before us. And as we explain what Paul wrote, we will also attempt to set forth what others in the past have said regarding the apostle's meaning. I expect that you will find the study of this chapter interesting and informative, as I have.

But before we begin to consider the text, let me point out a teaching that many Christians today assume to be true regarding the second coming, but which is not biblical. Just as there were some in the church at Thessalonica who believed the appearing (the second coming) of the Lord Jesus was immanent,

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<sup>1</sup> Tom Carter, compiler, *2200 Quotations from the Writings of Charles H. Spurgeon* (Baker Books, 1988), p. 168.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, pp. 168f.

that is, that Jesus Christ would return the second time very soon, at any moment, so most Christians today believe that the Lord may come at any moment, that His coming is immanent. For the past 125 years or so, the belief in a two stage second coming has been taught and believed by most evangelical (Bible-believing) Christians. They have been taught that at any time Jesus Christ will return in the air to rapture His church, that is, to catch up His church to be with Him in heaven. They say that this is the first stage of the second coming. Then following the rapture of the church, they claim that a tribulation period of 7 years will unfold on the earth, which will be a terrible time of God's wrath. They believe that during this tribulation period an end time political antichrist will rule over the world. And then at the end of the 7 years, Jesus will return to the earth, which is the second stage of His second coming. He will then establish an earthly 1,000 year Jewish millennium.

However, in conflict with the dispensationalist's belief in the immanent return of the Lord Jesus, it is clear that the early Christians did not believe in the immanent return of the Lord Jesus (except, of course, those who were influenced by false teaching). But those who today hold to a pre-tribulation rapture of the church commonly claim that the first century Christians anticipated and looked to an imminent return of our Lord.

But consider the question: Did the early Christians anticipate an imminent return of the Lord Jesus? **Peter** did not believe in the immanent return of the Lord. The Lord Jesus told Peter that he would die before the second coming of Jesus Christ.

<sup>18</sup>Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted, but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go.” <sup>19</sup>(This he said to show by what kind of death he was to glorify God.) (John 21:18f)

**John** the apostle did not know if he would die before the coming of Christ or to remain alive until his coming. Some, however, had rumoured that John would be alive when that event took place. He wrote of this in his Gospel.

<sup>20</sup>Peter turned and saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following them, the one who had been reclining at table close to him and had said, “Lord, who is it that is going to betray you?” <sup>21</sup>When Peter saw him, he said to Jesus, “Lord, what about this man?” <sup>22</sup>Jesus said to him, “If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow me!” <sup>23</sup>So the saying spread abroad among the brothers that this disciple was not to die; yet Jesus did not say to him that he was not to die, but, “If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you?” (John 21:20-23)

Did the early churches anticipate an imminent return of Jesus Christ? No, for they knew that before the second coming of Jesus Christ...

(1) Jerusalem would first be destroyed. The Lord taught His disciples quite clearly that before He returned, God's judgment would fall upon Jerusalem. This is recorded in His Olivet Discourse, the very night that He was betrayed by Judas (Cf. Matt. 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21).

(2) Jesus declared to His disciples that before He returned the second time that the gospel of the kingdom would be proclaimed to the world. Jesus said, “And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come” (Matt. 24:14).

(3) Similarly, Jesus taught that His disciples that they were to go forth and make many disciples of all nations before His second coming (Cf. Matt. 28:18f).

(4) The Lord declared that Jerusalem would be occupied by Gentiles for a prolonged period of time before He would return and that the Jews would be scattered throughout the nations. Our Lord said of the Jewish people who refused to believe on Him. “And they will fall by the edge of the sword, and be led away captive into all nations. And Jerusalem will be trampled by Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled” (Luke 21:24).

(5) Paul taught that the man of sin would be revealed before the second coming of Christ. (2 Thess. 2:1-4).

(6) He also taught that a great apostasy from the faith would occur before the return of the Lord (2 Thess. 2:1-4).

Did the first century Christians expect an imminent return of the Lord Jesus? No, they did not, except for those who had been influenced by false teaching.

Let us consider specifically what Paul wrote in the first four verses of 2 Thessalonians 2.

#### A. The false report of the Day of Christ (2:1, 2)

In verses 1 and 2 Paul identified his subject. He wrote, <sup>1</sup>*“Now concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to him, we ask you, brothers, <sup>2</sup>not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by a spirit or a spoken word, or a letter seeming to be from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come.”*

First, when Paul wrote of the “coming of the Lord”, he used the Greek word, παρουσία (parousia), which is translated “coming.” We addressed the meaning and frequency of this Greek word in January in our study of 1 Thessalonians 1:13-18.<sup>3</sup> (I have included a summary of the use of this Greek word at the end of today’s notes.) The παρουσία (parousia) of the Lord Jesus is the second coming of Jesus.

Second, when Paul wrote, “and our being gathered together to him”, he was not speaking of a separate event from His parousia, His coming. His subject was the second coming of Jesus Christ when we (Paul included himself--“our”) will be gathered to Him. In both verses 2 and 3 he spoke of that day, singular. Here he makes it clear that the rapture of His people will take place at His parousia, that is, His coming.

Paul then said to them, “we ask you, brothers, not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by a spirit or a spoken word, or a letter seeming to be from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come.” He did not want them to think that the coming of the Lord was imminent. He did not want them to believe that the Lord has come.

We read in verse 2 that the apostle did not want them “to be quickly shaken in mind.” This terminology is commonly used of those being tossed about by waves on a rough sea. He did not want them to be unnecessarily disturbed about this matter. Of this word **Leon Morris** wrote,

It is a verb which is often used of literal shaking, the motion produced by wind and wave, and especially violent motion. Its use of a ship driven from its mooring shows us the kind of thing Paul has in mind. He is thinking of people who lack a secure anchorage, and are readily tossed here and there.<sup>4</sup>

Paul also said that he did not want them to be “alarmed”, or “troubled.” They had been quite distressed about this matter.

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<sup>3</sup> This was **FBC Sermon #882**.

<sup>4</sup> Leon Morris, *The First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians* (William. B. Eerdmans, 1959), p. 214.

Putting all this together then, Paul is urging them in the first instance to that stability which will enable them to withstand any sudden shock or discovery. Men taken up with advent speculations may easily take an unbalanced interest in the latest idea. Their conduct will be adversely affected thereby. But those whose views on the second coming are more stable are not easily thrown off balance.<sup>5</sup>

Paul next identified the three possible sources of the misinformation that had needlessly troubled them. We want to read it in context, so here again are the first 3 verses of chapter 2:

<sup>1</sup>“Now concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to him, we ask you, brothers, <sup>2</sup>not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, *either by a spirit or a spoken word, or a letter seeming to be from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come.*”

**First**, apparently some in the church had believed that the second coming of Christ was immanent because *“a spirit”* had conveyed this teaching to them. Paul instructed them not to give credence to such sources of information about the things of Jesus Christ. In the early church era God had raised up prophets to communicate His Word directly to His people. This can be shown in a number of places in the Scriptures. But alongside these legitimate God-inspired prophets in the churches, there were those who were false prophets, who claimed to give forth the Word of God, even while they promoted error. An example of a false prophet is in Acts 16:16ff:

<sup>16</sup>Now it happened, as we went to prayer, that a certain slave girl possessed with a spirit of divination met us, who brought her masters much profit by fortune-telling. <sup>17</sup>This girl followed Paul and us, and cried out, saying, “These men are the servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation.” <sup>18</sup>And this she did for many days.

But Paul, greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, “I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.” And he came out that very hour. (Acts 16:6-18)

The apostles warned Christians not to accept the word of just any spirit. The Apostle John wrote, “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world. (1 John 4:1). There are no legitimate prophets today who communicate divine truth directly to God’s people. We have the Holy Scriptures as our sole and all-sufficient source for the Word of God. Yet sadly, there are Christians in churches today who give credence to the voices of “spirits”, which claim to give forth the Word of God to them. These people will tend to become “quickly shaken in mind and alarmed.”

**Second**, Paul told these Christians not “to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed” through *“a spoken word.”* Just as there were deceitful and deceptive spirits in the first century, there were also many false teachers who taught their false doctrines to the churches. Peter wrote of this problem among the churches:

But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction. <sup>2</sup>And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed. <sup>3</sup>By covetousness they will exploit you with deceptive words; for a long time their judgment has not been idle, and their destruction does not slumber. (2 Peter 2:1-3)

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

A **third** source of false information about the second coming that troubled the Christians in this church was “*a letter seeming to be from us.*” Paul wrote many letters to many different churches. But there were those who had sought to discredit the apostle and influence the churches that he had established so that they would adopt their false teaching. His enemies had resorted on occasion to draft a letter to the churches and then presented it as though the apostle had written it. This was such a problem that Paul began to authenticate his epistles with his own closing and signature. He apparently dictated his letters to a scribe, or an amanuensis. But then at the conclusion of the epistle he signed off in his own hand, thereby authenticating his authorship of the epistle. Consider these verses:

**1 Corinthians 16:21.** “The salutation *with my own hand*-- Paul’s.”

**Colossians 4:18.** “This salutation *by my own hand*-- Paul. Remember my chains. Grace be with you. Amen.”

**2 Thessalonians 3:17.** “The salutation of Paul *with my own hand, which is a sign in every epistle*; so I write.”

This last reference is at the end of the epistle we are studying. And so, Paul mentioned the danger of false teaching being promoted by a letter that purports to be from him. And then he concluded the epistle declaring that he authenticates his epistle with his own hand.

By the way, there is one other place in which Paul betrayed this practice. We read in **Galatians 6:11**, “*See with what large letters I have written to you with my own hand!*” I personally believe that this betrays a problem that Paul had with his eyesight. He found the need to write with large letters, perhaps so he could see them better. This may have been Paul’s thorn in the flesh that had troubled him (cf. 2 Cor. 12:7). He also made an allusion to this in Galatians 4:15. He was writing of the great affection they had once showed to him. He wrote, “For I bear you witness that, if possible, you would have plucked out your own eyes and given them to me.”

But the point that Paul was making that they should disregard any teaching that the day of the Lord was immanent, whether that teaching came from a “spirit” a “word”, or even from “*a letter seeming to be from us*”, that the that “the day of the Lord has come.”

Here are a few words of **Matthew Henry** on these verses:

The thing itself against which the apostle cautions the Thessalonians is that they should not be deceived about the time of Christ’s coming, and so *be shaken in mind, or be troubled*. Note, Errors in the mind tend greatly to weaken our faith, and cause us trouble; and such as are weak in faith and of troubled minds are oftentimes apt to be deceived, and fall a prey to seducers. 1. The apostle would not have them be deceived: *Let no man deceive you by any means*, v. 3. There are many who lie in wait to deceive, and they have many ways of deceiving; we have reason therefore to be cautious and stand upon our guard. Some deceivers will pretend new revelations, others misinterpret scripture, and others will be guilty of gross forgeries; divers means and artifices of deceit men will use; but we must be careful that no man deceive us by any means. The particular matter in which the apostle cautions them not to be deceived is about the near approach of Christ’s coming, as if it was to have been in the apostle’s days; and harmless as this error might seem to many, yet, because it was indeed an error, it would have proved of bad consequences to many persons.<sup>6</sup>

In our next section we read of...

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<sup>6</sup> Henry, Matthew, *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible*, vol. 6, pp. 1407f.

## B. The rise and destruction of the man of sin (2:3-12)

Paul declared that two events must take place before the second coming of Jesus Christ. First, there will be...

### 1. The “rebellion”

Paul wrote, “*For that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first.*” The first of two events that must take place before the coming of the Lord is that a great rebellion must take place. The major English translations do not all use the word, rebellion, in their translations. Here are a few of the major English translations.

NKJ **2 Thessalonians 2:3.** Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless *the falling away comes first*, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition,

KJV **2 Thessalonians 2:3.** Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come *a falling away* first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition;

ESV **2 Thessalonians 2:3.** Let no one deceive you in any way. For that day will not come, unless *the rebellion comes first*, and the man of lawlessness<sup>1</sup> is revealed, the son of destruction,<sup>2</sup>

NAS **2 Thessalonians 2:3.** Let no one in any way deceive you, for it will not come unless *the apostasy comes first*, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction,

RSV **2 Thessalonians 2:3** Let no one deceive you in any way; for that day will not come, unless *the rebellion comes first*, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of perdition,

NIV **2 Thessalonians 2:3.** Don't let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until *the rebellion occurs* and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction.

BGT **2 Thessalonians 2:3.** Μή τις ὑμᾶς ἐξαπατήσῃ κατὰ μηδένᾱ τρόπον. ὅτι ἐὰν μὴ ἔλθῃ ἡ ἀποστασία (*apostasia*) πρῶτον καὶ ἀποκαλυφθῇ ὁ ἄνθρωπος τῆς ἀνομίας, ὁ υἱὸς τῆς ἀπωλείας,

The Greek word, ἀποστασία (*apostasia*), is translated as “rebellion”, “the falling away”, “the apostasy.” It describes a sinful departure from the truth. It is not speaking of a falling away of the world, but of the departure from the faith within professing Christendom. This apostasy describes many who formally had the truth but who had turned away from the truth, presumably due to the influence of false teachers and their false doctrine. **Greg Beale**, whom we quoted last week, wrote of this,

The first reason they should not be misled is because Christ will not come back finally until there has come “first” come a “falling away” from the faith. Though the word *apostasia* can refer to a political or a religious crisis, the latter is the only use in the Greek Old Testament (Joshua 22:22; 2 Chron. 29:19; Jer. 2:19; 1 Macc. 2:15) and New Testament (Acts 21:21; see verbal form in 1 Tim. 4:1; Heb. 3:12), and that is its meaning here. Such is apparent because of the immediate context of false teaching (2:1-2, 9-12) and clear allusions to Daniel’s prediction of an end-time opponent who

will bring about a large-scale compromise of faith among God's people. The apostasy will not occur primarily in the non-Christian world but rather within the covenant community...<sup>7</sup>

And so, the apostle declared that the Lord Jesus would not return at his second coming until after a large scale apostasy first takes place within Christendom. But a second event must also occur before the Lord returns.

## **2. The “the man of lawlessness is revealed.”**

We read once again:

Now concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to him, we ask you, brothers, <sup>2</sup>not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by a spirit or a spoken word, or a letter seeming to be from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come. <sup>3</sup>Let no one deceive you in any way. For that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God.”

The various translations convey the description of this man in two different ways. In our English Standard Version (ESV) it is translated as “the man of lawlessness.” In the older King James Version (KJV) and the NKJV use the term, “the man of sin.” The Greek word translated as “lawlessness” and “sin” is the word, ἀνομίας (*anomias*). This Greek word is a combination of the word, νόμος (*nomos*), with the letter “a” preceding it. The presence of the “a” negates the word “law”; therefore a literal translation of the Greek word is best “lawlessness.” And although Christians commonly use the expression, “the man of sin”, actually the “man of lawlessness” would be the better translation. And although Paul does not specifically say so, most believe that it is right to understand this “man of lawlessness” to be the antichrist foretold in Scripture. And so, in this verse, Paul was declaring that before the second coming of Jesus Christ occurs, two events must occur: first, the apostasy of the church will take place, and second, the man of lawlessness will be revealed.

The conclusion that must be drawn is that the Apostle Paul was not teaching an imminent return of the Lord, nor was he teaching the second coming of Jesus Christ would take place in two separate events or stages, which are 7 years apart, as our dispensationalist friends advocate.

Who is this “man of lawlessness”? There are different interpretations that vary greatly from one another. The majority of evangelicals believe that the man of sin is that antichrist, a man whom they say will rise to rule over the world in a future 7 year tribulation period. They claim that he will be primarily a political figure, who will come to power after the rapture of the church.

The common conception is that he will be an atheistic politician who will appear in the near future with vast control of jet planes, rockets, bombs, computers, spy systems, and cause all manner of hell to break out on planet earth.<sup>8</sup>

Those who have held to this futurist view of the end time antichrist have always been ready to identify this antichrist. During WWI many believed the German Kaiser to be the antichrist. Later before WWII it was said that Joseph Stalin was the antichrist. Benito Mussolini acted the part in Italy, and

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<sup>7</sup> Greg K. Beale, *1-2 Thessalonians*. The IVP New Testament Commentary Series (InterVarsity Press, 2003), pp. 204. Beale then gave four reasons that it was clear the apostasy was within the church, the covenant community of God.

<sup>8</sup> Ralph Woodrow, *Great Prophecies of the Bible* (Ralph Woodrow Evangelistic Association, 1971, 1989), p. 127.



Adolph Hitler in Germany. After the war, prominent political figures in the west were said to be the future antichrist. I can remember in the early 1970's those who claimed John F. Kennedy had not really died, but was recovering at a schloss in Europe and would soon rise to lead the European Common Market as the antichrist. Many believed Henry Kissinger was the antichrist. And more recently Barak Obama was accused of being the antichrist. It would seem that there is always a ready candidate that is said to be the man of sin.

Other than these futurists who believe that a single person will rise to be the end time antichrist, most Christians through history have held what may be called the "fulfilled" interpretation of the man of sin. These have held that the papacy of the Roman Catholic Church is the antichrist, the man of lawlessness. This was the position of all of the Protestant Reformers and Puritans. Advocates included the "who's who" of historic Protestantism. These include John Wycliffe, John Huss, Martin Luther, John Calvin, John Knox, Ulrich Zwingli, William Tyndale, John Newton, Jonathon Edwards, George Whitefield, and the Wesley brothers.

The belief that the Roman Catholic papacy is the man of lawlessness, or the antichrist, is set forth in all of the older Protestant confessions of faith. It is stated in the historic Westminster Confession of Faith in this way:

There is no other head of the Church but the Lord Jesus Christ. Nor can the Pope of Rome, in any sense, be head thereof; but is that Antichrist, that man of sin, and son of perdition, that exalts himself, in the Church, against Christ and all that is called God. (WCF, Ch. 25, Art. 6)

The wording was somewhat modified adopted by the framers of our own Baptist Confession of 1689. This statement regarding the papacy is found in Article 26, paragraph 4. It reads,

The Lord Jesus Christ is the Head of the church, in whom, by the appointment of the Father, all power for the calling, institution, order or government of the church, is invested in a supreme and sovereign manner; neither can the Pope of Rome in any sense be head thereof, but is that antichrist, that man of sin, and son of perdition, that exalteth himself in the church against Christ, and all that is called God; whom the Lord shall destroy with the brightness of his coming. (Col. 1:18; Matt. 28:18-20; Eph. 4:11, 12; 2 Thess. 2:1-9)

This is the most debated statement in the confession by reformed Baptists today. There are those, though acknowledging the error of the papacy through history, nevertheless, believe there will be an end time antichrist who may not be a Roman Catholic pope.

Next week, Lord willing, we will begin to work through this second chapter of 2 Thessalonians to determine how the apostle set forth this man of lawlessness before this first century local church.

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But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus,  
after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you.  
To Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen. (1 Pet. 5:10f)

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## The Coming, or the *Parousia* ( παρουσίας ) of the Lord Jesus

The Greek word most commonly used to refer to the return of Jesus Christ is the word **παρουσία** (*parousia*). It is commonly translated as “coming.” It is in our text, **1 Thessalonians 4:15**, which reads, “For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the **coming** (**παρουσία**) of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep.” But this word is found in many other places as well. Below are all the verses in the New Testament that uses this Greek word, in which the Second Coming of Jesus Christ is referenced.

**Matthew 24:3.** “Now as He sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, ‘Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your **coming**, and of the end of the age?’”

**Matthew 24:27.** “For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so also will the **coming** of the Son of Man be.”

**Matthew 24:36-39.** “But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only. <sup>37</sup>But as the days of Noah were, so also will the **coming** of the Son of Man be. <sup>38</sup>For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, <sup>39</sup>and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the **coming** of the Son of Man be.”

**1 Corinthians 15:23.** “But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's at His **coming**.”

**1 Thessalonians 2:19.** “For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Is it not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His **coming**?”

**1 Thessalonians 3:13.** “...so that He may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the **coming** of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints.”

**1 Thessalonians 4:15.** “For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the **coming** of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep.”

**1 Thessalonians 5:23.** “Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the **coming** of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

**2 Thessalonians 2:1.** “Now, brethren, concerning the **coming** of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, we ask you, <sup>2</sup>not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of Christ had come.”

**2 Thessalonians 2:8.** “And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His **coming**.”

**James 5:7f.** “Therefore be patient, brethren, until the **coming** of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain. You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the **coming** of the Lord is at hand.”

**2 Peter 1:16.** “For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and *coming* of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty.”

**2 Peter 3:3-4.** “...knowing this first: that scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, <sup>4</sup>and saying, ‘Where is the promise of His *coming*? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation.’”

**2 Peter 3:11.** “Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, <sup>12</sup>looking for and hastening the *coming* of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat?”

**1 John 2:28.** “And now, little children, abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His *coming*.”

It is quite clear, I would argue, that each of these references to the *παρουσία* (*parousia*) speaks to one event at the end of the age, even the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. From the verses above, we may conclude that when the “coming” of Jesus Christ takes place, the following events will occur:

- (1) When Jesus Christ comes, He will raise His people from the dead, gathering unto Him that they will dwell with Him through eternity.
- (2) “The lawless one” will be destroyed at His coming.
- (3) When the coming of the Lord occurs, He will defeat His enemies and judge all of the inhabitants of the world.
- (4) When the coming of Jesus Christ takes place, this present universe will be dissolved and He will create a new heavens and earth.

The Holy Scriptures, we would argue, set forth the future coming of Jesus Christ is a single, future event that will bring an end to human history in this present world. It will be a day in which He will judge the world, saving His people from their sin and damning all others to their just condemnation. I would argue that the rapture that Paul set forth here in 1 Thessalonians 4:13 is but one aspect of that one Second Coming of the Lord. In asserting this, some would falsely accuse is of “not believing in the rapture.” But this is not true. The Scriptures certainly foretells of the future rapture of those redeemed by Jesus Christ. But the Word of God declares that this rapture is the same event as the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, not a different event that is separate from His Second Coming. Nor is the rapture to be understood as the first stage of the Second Coming, the second stage being seven years later when Jesus returns to the earth. There is one Second Coming of Jesus Christ. It is depicted by this word “appearing”, which is the translation of the Greek word, *παρουσία* (*parousia*).