

2 Thessalonians 2 • The Order of Things

Introduction

I have not doubt that the everything written in Daniel will come about exactly as God has said. The same goes for Ezekiel, Zechariah, Revelation, and every prophetic word documented in the whole of Scripture. But I'm not sure that we have all the answers just yet as to how they interlock together into one seamless whole. Paul provides us with a concise order of what we as Christians need to know and put into practice so that we'll not just recognize these things, but live rightly during them. This is one of the best teachings of what we should "DO" about the Last Days.

¹Now we request you, brethren, with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, ²that you not be quickly shaken from your composure or be disturbed either by a spirit or a message or a letter as if from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come. ³Let 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,

[Read v.1-3]

Q: So what is the very first thing that will take place prior to Christ's return, even before all the signs and wonders predicted for the Last Days?

A: "...apostasy comes first..." (v.3)

Q: What does "apostasy" mean?

A: It means "falling away".

Q: From what specifically will there be a great "falling away"?

A: The Word of God. This is indicated by the fact that Paul's warning is to not be "shaken" or "disturbed" by false teaching or false prophecy.

Q: In Christ's own "Olivet Discourse" (Mt. 24-25; also Mk. 13 & Lk. 21), what is the thing He repeatedly warns about concerning His return more than any other thing?

- "See to it that no one misleads you." (24:4)
- "For many will come in my name...and will mislead many." (24:5)
- "At that time many will fall away..." (24:10)
- "Many false prophets will arise and will mislead many." (24:11)
- "...false Christs and false prophets will arise...so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect." (24:24)
- "...do not believe them." (24:27)
- "Therefore be on the alert..." (24:42)
- "...you also must be ready..." (24:44)
- "Be on the alert then, for you do not know the day nor the hour." (25:13)

Point: Christ expends four times more emphasis on remaining alert against apostasy and deception than any other sign of His return.

But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron, men who forbid marriage and advocate abstaining from foods which God has created to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth.

1 Timothy 4:1-3

Q: What are the chief identifying characteristics of those leading others into apostasy in this passage from 1 Timothy?

A: They're both hypocrites and liars, people who don't put into practice the whole Word of God and who distort it into something different from what God originally intended.

Q: And what are some examples of their false teachings provided here?

A: They "forbid marriage" and "advocate abstaining from food". In other words, they create something that "feels" religious but is not biblically

supportable. They entice others to exchange personal experiences for faith and obedience to God's Word.

But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come. For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power; Avoid such men as these. For among them are those who enter into households and captivate weak women weighed down with sins, led on by various impulses, always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. Just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so these men also oppose the truth, men of depraved mind, rejected in regard to the faith. But they will not make further progress; for their folly will be obvious to all, just as Jannes's and Jambres's folly was also.

Now you followed my teaching, conduct, purpose, faith, patience, love, perseverance, persecutions, and sufferings, such as happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium and at Lystra; what persecutions I endured, and out of them all the Lord rescued me! Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. But evil men and impostors will proceed from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

2 Timothy 3

Q: What are the chief characteristics of those leading others into apostasy according to 2 Timothy 3?

A: They hold "to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power", they "oppose the truth", and they will be "impostors" who "proceed from bad to worse".

Q: What are some examples of their bad behavior/false teaching provided here?

A: They're actually lovers of everything having to do with this world, actively pursue immoral relationships, interested in Scripture but not comprehending it.

Q: How does one resist deception? What is the proper preparation to prevent it from happening to you personally?

A: Not just consistently living according to the Word of God, but measuring all things by it.

'I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance, and that you cannot tolerate evil men, and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them to be false;

Revelation 2:2

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Point: Jesus hates the false and not only stood up to them in the course of His own earthly ministry, but here commends those who test and oppose them.

Q: What is the second thing that will happen before Christ's return?

A: "...the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction". (v.3)

Q: Who is the "man of lawlessness"?

A: He is the Antichrist as revealed in Daniel 7:25, 8:25, 11:36, and Rev. 13:5

Q: Who is the "son of destruction"?

A: This can also be translated as the "son of perdition". There is only one other person called this in Scripture – Judas.

"While I was with them, I was keeping them in Your name which You have given Me; and I guarded them and not one of them perished but the son of perdition, so that the Scripture would be fulfilled.

John 17:12

Point: Judas is the most important type of the Antichrist. To know more about the Antichrist, learn everything you can about Judas. For example, no one knew who he was until Christ revealed him by giving him the morsel at the Last Supper, he became personally possessed by Satan, when he left to do his work it was "night" – the biblical metaphor for the Tribulation, and when he returns to attack Christ there is a great falling away – a type of apostasy – of people followed by persecution.

Application: The Great Apostasy must first take place followed by the revelation to all Believers of the identity of the Antichrist. How can you tell that the Last Days have already begun? What still needs to take place?

[Read v.4-5]

Q: What does the term "Antichrist" actually mean?

A: Although "anti" in modern-day English has come to mean "the opposite of", its original meaning is "against", "instead", or "in place of". He's not someone who is merely opposed to Christ, but attempts to take the place of Christ.

Q: How will the Antichrist be identified?

A: In general he will be someone who makes himself the "object of worship", the center of a world-wide false religion. Specifically he will seek to literally take "his seat in the temple of God", to be worshiped on the very spot where the One True God was worshiped.

Point: This is why many hold the belief the temple will be rebuilt in Jerusalem and why there is so much wrangling over the temple mount even to this very hour.

Q: What do both Daniel and Christ call this?

A: It's the "Abomination of Desolation".

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⁴who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God.
⁵Do you not remember that while I was still with you, I was telling you these things?

Q: Has this ever happened before?

A: During the Intertestamental Period the Macabbean Revolt was initiated when Antiochus Epihanes IV erected a statue of Zeus using his own face in the temple and sacrificed a pig on the temple's altar to his own gods. It happened again in 70 A.D. when the Romans both destroyed and desecrated the temple in a similar fashion. These things will be recapitulated in a final Abomination of Desolation at the hands of the Antichrist.

Application: *It's not simply about the temple being rebuilt, but that the rise of a world-wide, false religious system. How are these things already beginning to take shape? What things have yet to take place?*

[Read v.6-12]

Q: Ultimately, who is it that will be deceived? Who will be susceptible to Satan's "deception of wickedness" and its accompanying false signs and wonders?

A: It's those who "did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved". (v.10)

Q: So will everyone who happens to be alive during the End Times be deceived?

A: No, only those who reject God's Word. They cling so strongly to what is false to begin with, that God finally gives them over to deception so they can fully embrace the lie they refuse to let go of. (v.10-11)

Q: And why does it say that they are deceived?

A: They "did not believe the truth" and in its place "took pleasure in wickedness". (v.12) The definition of the deceived is someone choosing to live according to their own pleasures and will instead of God's Word and desires.

Point: *This should be comforting to Believers because as long as we cling to God's Word and put it into practice, there's no reason to personally fear the coming apostasy or to worry that we ourselves will be deceived. Deception is merely the final condition of a heart that was never committed to Christ to begin with.*

Q: What do you suppose Paul is referring to which "restrains" the Antichrist for the time being?

A: It's most likely referring to the work of the Holy Spirit. How the Holy Spirit worked **before** Pentecost in the Old Testament era was very different and more on an individual basis. Beginning with Pentecost, He began working globally through the church, the body of Christ, and after His removal works again more like He did in the Old Testament.

Q: What might be implied in the fact that the Holy Spirit will no longer continue this work of restraint? What event might this be alluding to?

A: It may be alluding to the rapture – the removal from earth – of the church.

Point: *The Holy Spirit will still be at work on earth after the Rapture since people will believe and be saved afterwards; but His restraining ministry through the body of Christ will end.*

Application: *In order for the final events of the End Times to take place, the Restraint must be removed. How do you see things that teach about or point to this even today? What still needs to take place?*

⁶And you know what restrains him now, so that in his time he will be revealed. ⁷For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only he who now restrains will do so until he is taken out of the way. ⁸Then that lawless one will be revealed whom the Lord will slay with the breath of His mouth and bring to an end by the appearance of His coming; ⁹that is, the one whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders, ¹⁰and with all the deception of wickedness for those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved. ¹¹For this reason God will send upon them a deluding influence so that they will believe what is false, ¹²in order that they all may be judged who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness.

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¹³But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth. ¹⁴It was for this He called you through our gospel, that you may gain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. ¹⁵So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught, whether by word of mouth or by letter from us.

¹⁶Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself and God our Father, who has loved us and given us eternal comfort and good hope by grace, ¹⁷comfort and strengthen your hearts in every good work and word.

[Read v.13-17]

Q: Throughout Scripture, what does the term “the day of the Lord” specifically refer to theologically?

A: It's that day of God's wrath, of His judgment.

Q: But what has Paul said about God's wrath where Christians are concerned?

A: Jesus “rescues us from the wrath to come” (1 Th. 1:10) and “God has not destined us for wrath”. (1 Th. 5:9)

Point: *The greater purpose of the Tribulation is the punishment of the Gentiles and the purification of Israel, which by this time has returned to its own land in unbelief. As He repeatedly does in the Old Testament, God allows earthly kingdoms to carry out His judgment in the Last Days the same way, but only after the removal of His true followers.*

Q: So what are Christians to do in the mean time before all of this takes place?

A: “Stand firm”, holding to the Word of God, and seeking to complete “every good work and word”. (v.15) We're to keep working in order to finish the overall work of sanctification establishing both ourselves individually and the church as a whole in Christ.

Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat!

2 Peter 3:11-12

Point: *This is also Peter's point, that this day's hastening is actually connected to the church's “holy conduct and godliness”. This fits with the fact that Final Judgment is often described as a harvest, something that only happens when the crop is fully ripened. It may be that the timing of the End Times is more connected with the issues of spiritual faithfulness and unfaithfulness than any other thing.*

Application: *We are actually living in the very first and foremost step leading up to Christ's return, the completion of the church. How should this guide your life's conduct not just now, but as the hour of His return draws closer? What still needs to be accomplished?*

Epilogue

If for some reason all other Scripture referring to the End Times had been lost, and this was the only passage passed on to us, we would be able to successfully discern not only the impending return of Christ, but would be armed with exactly what we need to be doing on a practical, personal level to prepare for and live during the Last Days. It all comes down to rejecting versus accepting God's Word, to putting it into practice instead of pursuing our own desires. What we need to do in order to successfully navigate the End Times is not actually difficult nor impossible, but the very same thing we're supposed to be doing each and every “normal” day of our life.