
The Day of the Lord

2 Thessalonians 2:1-13

What news would cause you to be the most disturbed?

News about a terrible oil spill and environmental damage?

News that your retirement had been wiped out?

News that your job was going away?

News that your spouse or child or parent was dying?

News that you had missed the rapture?

Concerning the Lord's return, the church at Thessalonica had been:

Uninformed - 1 Thessalonians 4 Led to unchristian grief

Misinformed - 2 Thessalonians 2 Led to unchristian fear.

The mesmerizing imagery of this passage can have the very effect on us today that Paul was trying to counter in their day. A surface reading and handling of this passage can actually lead us to the same sort of misdirected emphasis that disturbs the church. So we must take up this instruction and in doing so, we will discover that Paul is interested in informing the church about the Lord's return; but he is more concerned to awaken them to the importance of truth.

What emerges from this text is Paul's passion for truth. It is a theme that underscores the importance truth has for all people, believer and unbeliever alike.

These words and phrases are like the chime which keeps tolling for truth: prophecy, message or letter (v.2), deceive or deception (v.3, 10), counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders (v.9), believing what is false and not believing what is true (v.11-12) in contrast to phrases like remember what was told (v.5), you know (v.6), the truth (v.10,12,14), our gospel (v.14), traditions (v.15) and word (v.17).

The contrast between the man of sin whose coming is characterized by deception, deceit and counterfeit wonders and the messengers of Christ whose coming is characterized by truth, teaching and holiness.

The truth is to be received and loved (v.10), believed (v.12) by those who have chosen for faith in the truth (v.13) and called by the gospel (v.14).

Condemnation is upon those who do not love the truth (v.10) and under a deluding influence, believe what is false (v.11) instead of believing what is true while taking pleasure in sin (v.12).

With this emphasis upon truth large in our minds, let's study these paragraphs together, asking for God's help.

The Problem that Disturbs

(v.1-2)

In the midst of their terrible suffering in affliction and persecution, the church had been disturbed by misinformation. Their life's context of persecution made them vulnerable to this deception.

¹ Now concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to him, we ask you, brothers, ² 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.

Its Important Subject

(v.1)

They have become disturbed over and he is concerned with what we call Eschatology. Paul introduces this subject under the twin rubric of *the coming* and *the gathering*. It is Jesus the Lord who is coming and it is we, His people, who will be gathered to Him. He is talking about the *Parousia* and the *Assembling*— Jesus' coming and our gathering to Him.

Let me pause for a moment over this term, the rapture. Many use the terms “the rapture of the saints” and “the revelation of Jesus Christ” to refer to different aspects of Jesus' Second Coming. The rapture is a term commonly used to the gathering of the saints, both dead and alive, when Jesus comes. While some separate Jesus' coming into two events, separated by the seven years of Daniel's 70th week, this is not what I believe and teach. The rapture occurs when Jesus comes in His glory just before the Day of the Lord at the end of Daniel's 70th week. At the rapture, all of the saints will be gathered to the Lord. The dead in Christ will rise from the dead in their glorified bodies. Those who are alive at His coming, will immediately receive their glorified bodies. We will all meet the Lord in the air. This gathering is in some way accompanied or accomplished by angels sent to do it.

Now, we have given wide latitude to the elders and congregation to arrive at your own conclusions about the timeline of these things. At the end of the message, we will take a few minutes to update our timeline from the book of Daniel. I hope that it will reflect what is clear from the Bible and will help you to consider what for some of you will be a rather large change in your thinking. So let us pay close attention to what Paul is saying and how it is built on Daniel, Joel, and Jesus' teaching.

Its Disturbing Effect

(v.2)

The problem is that the church was misinformed. They had been told things that were not true that had left them shaken and disturbed. The error, linked with the truth they did know, unsettled and alarmed them. This is often the design and the effect that error has. It uses snippets of truth mixed with error with the result that people struggle in their circumstances.

Its Fraudulent Authority

(v.2)

The church had a prophetic declaration, a preaching message and finally a forged letter. All of these were counterfeit. The prophecy, the word and the letter were all purported to have had Paul as their source or authority. Imagine. In the first century church, a massive letter writing campaign had been mounted against Paul. A letter to Corinth had attacked Paul's apostolic authority; to Galatia,

Paul's gospel; to Thessalonica, Paul's eschatology to the extent that Paul took to signing his letters with his very distinctive and laborious signature to authenticate them.

Its Subtle Error

(v.2)

Now we have to do a bit of thinking here. The phrase *the day of the Lord* is an important one in the Bible. Jesus and the Apostles teach that we are living in *the last days*. The *last days* refer to the period of time from the resurrection of Christ which begins the age of the Spirit ends at the return of Christ. It is the age in which the promised Kingdom of Christ commences and reaches its final and full realization with the coming of Jesus, the *Parousia*. An essential part of the coming of the Lord is this period called the Day of the Lord.

The Day of the Lord is the short period of time in which the very wrath of God is poured out on the unbelieving nations. As we will see, this occurs during the coming of Jesus. Other texts put it at the end of Daniel's 70th week. In Matthew, we saw that Jesus' *Parousia* is an arrival that takes place over time. We tend to think of it as some sort of instantaneous event. It is not. There is a coming, an arrival, a gathering of His people, a response against Him by the world and a massive outpouring of wrath before He brings time to an end.

Now why would it be particularly disturbing to be told that the Day of the Lord had already come? What would be disturbing about an authoritative and prophetic declaration that their persecutions and afflictions come because the Day of the Lord had come? Because it would have meant that the persecution they were experiencing was the beginning of the wrath of God. Thus they had either completely misunderstood what Paul had taught them² or they had missed the coming of Jesus *as unbelievers*. This deeply distressed them just as it would you.

But the lesson is great for us here: *we must be on the guard for subtle errors on important topics that come backed by fraudulent authorities whose effect is to undermine our faith and hope in difficult times.*

The Truth that Informs

(v.3-12)

In response to the misinformation that distressed and disturbed them, Paul gives truth that is to inform and to encourage them. Receiving that truth gives them the responsibility to not be deceived. There were sufficient resources in the truth they had learned and the grace they were receiving not to be led astray. So he is calming their affections by informing their minds. We need this model today when people are upset, alarmed and disturbed due to being misinformed about Biblical truth.

First, let us begin with Jesus' teaching from Mark 13:14-27 and Matthew 24-25. What Paul says clearly has this teaching in mind, whether or not he actually had Matthew or Mark's writing in front of him. Here is the Mark's recording of Jesus' teaching:

¹⁴ "But when you see the abomination of desolation standing where he ought not to be (let the reader understand), then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. ¹⁵ Let the one who is on the housetop not go down, nor enter his house, to take anything out, ¹⁶ and let the one who is in the field not turn back to take his cloak. ¹⁷ And alas for women who are pregnant and for those who are nursing infants in those days! ¹⁸ Pray that it may not happen in winter. ¹⁹ For in those days there will be such tribulation as has not been from the beginning of the creation that God created until now, and never will be. ²⁰ And if the Lord had not cut short the days, no human being would be saved. But for the sake of the elect, whom he chose, he shortened the days. ²¹ And then if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or 'Look, there he is!' do not believe it. ²² For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform signs and wonders, to lead astray, if possible, the elect. ²³ But be on guard; I have told you all things beforehand.

²⁴ "But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, ²⁵ and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. ²⁶ And then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. ²⁷ And then he will send out the angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.

Some of you are being challenged to think about Jesus' coming in a different way than you were taught. You have a particular schema or timeline that you are committed to as a framework. The plain language of this text is going to require you to do one of two things: re-evaluate your framework or force it onto the Scripture. I am concerned that some of the misinformation in churches today about the timing of Jesus' coming is going to expose us to severe difficulty in the time of apostasy and tribulation that may shortly be before us.

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 destruction, ⁴ 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. ⁵ Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things? ⁶ And you know what is restraining him now so that he may be revealed in his time. ⁷ For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work. Only he who now restrains it will do so until he is out of the way. ⁸ And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will kill with the breath of his mouth and bring to nothing by the appearance of his coming. ⁹ The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders, ¹⁰ and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. ¹¹ Therefore God sends them a strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false, ¹² in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

Understand the Prerequisites

(v.3-4)

Before the Day of the Lord, there are two events that must happen. This is the very plain meaning of the words here. These two events must come to pass before the Coming and the Gathering at the Day of the Lord.

The Departure of an Apostasy

The word here refers to a falling away from, a departure from (*apostasia*). In the context, it is a departure from truth. Immediately preceding the Parousia, the professing church will largely abandon the faith leaving only a relative small number of the elect. Paul is alluding to Jesus' teaching in Matthew 24:8-14 where in verse 10 Jesus said that many would "fall away" (*skandalis-thesontai*) from the truth.

As one very helpful commentator has put it: "It will be a defection on the part of those who have been reached by the gospel (cf. I Peter 4:17; Ezekiel 9:6), and it will be on a large scale: 'many shall stumble ... many false prophets shall arise and shall lead many astray ... the love of many shall wax cold' (Matthew 24:10-13). ...by and large, the visible Church will forsake the true faith."³

The Disclosure of the Antichrist

That the man of sin or lawlessness here refers to the final Antichrist is little disputed. There are many anti-christs down through the ages (1 John 2:18, 22;4:3; 2 John 7) The language Paul uses alludes to Daniel 7:23-28; 8:9-14,23-26 and especially Daniel 9:24-27 and Matthew 24:4-5⁴. In these texts the Antichrist is an *eschatological* person. He is a real person who will appear on the stage of history at the end of the last days. He is here portrayed in all his wickedness. How will he be revealed for who he is? (1) He will oppose and exalt himself over every religion. (2) He will enthrone himself in the temple⁵ of God (3) He will proclaim or display himself to be god.

This man of sin may be revealed or uncovered, but he is doomed to destruction.

Remember the Clear instruction

(v.5-8)

⁵ Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things? ⁶ And you know what is restraining him now so that he may be revealed in his time. ⁷ For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work. Only he who now restrains it will do so until he is out of the way. ⁸ And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will kill with the breath of his mouth and bring to nothing by the appearance of his coming.

Paul was reminding them that he had been continually teaching them these things. This was not new information to them. In fact, what he was saying to them was rooted in Jesus' own teaching on eschatology that expounded on the Old Testament prophecies.

Who is this person? We can easily identify him *Biblically*. There have been attempts all through history to identify him *personally*. We must be very careful—we will know who he is when he does what the Bible predicts.

There is coming a time in the future when this man of sin, the anti-christ will come to power. He will sit on a throne recognized as in God's Temple. He will

command that the entire world bow down and worship him as god. This is what is called *the abomination of desolation*. Then begins the great tribulation, the last 3½ years of Daniel's 70th week, when this embodiment of evil persecutes those who worship the true God. That period of time is shortened for the sake of the elect when Jesus appears, gathers His elect to Himself and begins the awful outpouring of His wrath on the Day of the Lord.

From this sequence of events, we can see why:

The church was disturbed. If the Day of the Lord had come, then they were subject to the wrath of God as unbelievers and had not been gathered at Jesus' appearing.

The church could know that these events had not yet transpired *because what must precede them had not yet taken place*. It is quite evident that Paul is informing them that the rise and revelation of the Antichrist and his desolating abomination in the middle of the Daniel's 70th week must occur before the Day of the Lord. So the persecution they were suffering was terrible, but not yet that of the great tribulation from which they would be rescued.

So they must remember (and so must we) Paul's clear instruction:

A Present Restraining

(v.5-7)

The reason that the antichrist had not been revealed is that he was being restrained. Frankly, in all my studies I cannot come to honestly say to you what or who this restrainer may be. They well knew; we do not. I do not think it is the church since the pronouns here are masculine. Furthermore, if the church is to be taken out of the way first before this person is revealed then Paul is contradicting himself. The church cannot be both the restrainer to be removed and also on the earth when he is revealed. Other theories abound some of which have merit, but no real proof. The only one that connects to the Scripture itself is the reference to Michael in Daniel 12:1 whose "arising" is associated with the launch of the great troubles and the final saving of God's people.

But, we do know that, in spite of all of Satan's efforts to bring forth this man, God will continue to restrain until it is in God's timetable. Then God will remove the restrainer so that this Satan inspired person may carry His evil to its full measure. Until then, the secret force, or hidden principle of lawlessness is at work. There is an evil principle of sin working in the public arena even in our society and culture today. There will come a day when out of the *mystery* of sin will come forth the *man* of sin.

A Future Destruction

(v.8)

The one who is revealed will be utterly destroyed. Here is the great comfort of this text. That man of sin who emerges out of the chaos of the mystery of lawlessness who exalts himself to be worshipped as God is utterly overthrown and destroyed.

He will be destroyed by the breath of the Lord. The Spirit of God going forth in the Word of God is a sword at the throat of Satan's false christ to bring an end to his life.

He will be brought to an end by the appearing of Jesus. Here is an amazing statement. All of the deceiving effects of the antichrist will be nullified by the brightness of the majesty and glory of Christ's appearing.

I leave to your sanctified imaginations the wonder and amazement with which we will marvel and the fear that will grip the unbeliever on that day. This is the day when our glorious king will shine forth in majesty from the heavens. The sword of His Word and Spirit will plunge deep into the wicked heart of the lord of darkness and the blinding, choking smog of his deception will vanish in the hot glow of Jesus' glory and holiness.

Be Warned about Deception (v.9-12)

.⁹ The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders,¹⁰ and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved.¹¹ Therefore God sends them a strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false,¹² in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

The Character of that Deception (v.9-10a)

The coming of the man of sin will be a natural progression from the religious and cultural environment in which he arises. His coming will not be sudden and strange, but will seem to arise naturally out of the apostasy and its characteristic religious activity. In some measure, what Paul goes on to describe has always been with us. But we cannot help but wonder as we see the astounding rise of these characteristics across all religious, not just denominational grounds.

The antichrist will arise out of the apostasy characterized by counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders energized and activated by Satan. It will also be accompanied by the blinding and binding effects of ever growing wickedness for those who are doomed to perish. They will perish, having loved their sin while following after the signs and wonders, because they did not receive the love of the truth.

The Consequence of that Deception (v.10)

Here is the horrible outworking of power and pleasure—they do not love the truth. And loving the truth is the antidote to the fascinating allurements of supernatural power and seductive pleasure. Because they would not receive the love of the truth, they are not saved.

Listen loved ones, here is a sobering message to the Christianity of our day. To be saved, you must love the truth. And it is a *love for the truth*. Many who are in the middle of the signs, wonders and miracles will nod to the truth while embracing deception. They are seeking after the power of signs, wonders and miracles, not the power of God in the Word. The end result is that they are being snared by Satan and denying the sufficiency of the Word. This is why Paul is so concerned for truth. And it is why we must have a passion for truth in the Word. And bless God for those who believe in the power of God to do the miraculous and who deeply love, teach and spread the truth.

The Condemnation by that Deception**(v.11-12)**

The terrible purpose of God is revealed. He will accomplish his judgment and condemnation of those who are perishing. Those who were not elect and are not gathered at the appearing of Christ, those who were perishing and were not saved:

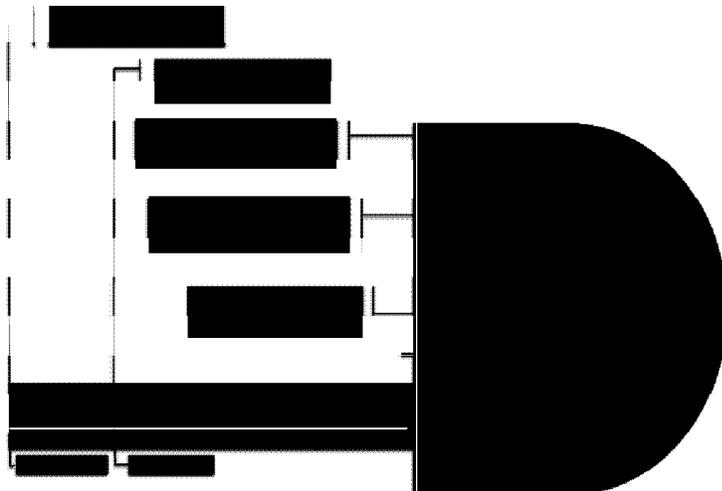
God will send them a deluding influence
 So that they will believe the lie (what is false)
 So that they may be condemned (judged)

Because they
 Did not believe the truth
 But delighted in wickedness.

After the gathering of the church at the appearing of Christ, no one will be saved who heard the truth and delighted in their sin because God will send a deluding influence which will cause them to believe the lie of Satan. Sobering words these. There is no second chance. You are hearing the truth now. If you do not receive the love of the truth, if you do not believe the truth now, your heart will be so turned by your sin and the powerful delusion that you cannot and will not believe to be saved. Even in the face of the horrible judgments that will fall in the wrath of God on the Day of the Lord, you will continue to pant after your pleasure and will shake your fist in rebellion against God. O, my friend, believe in Christ today. Turn your heart to believe and love the truth so as to receive and submit to the Lord.

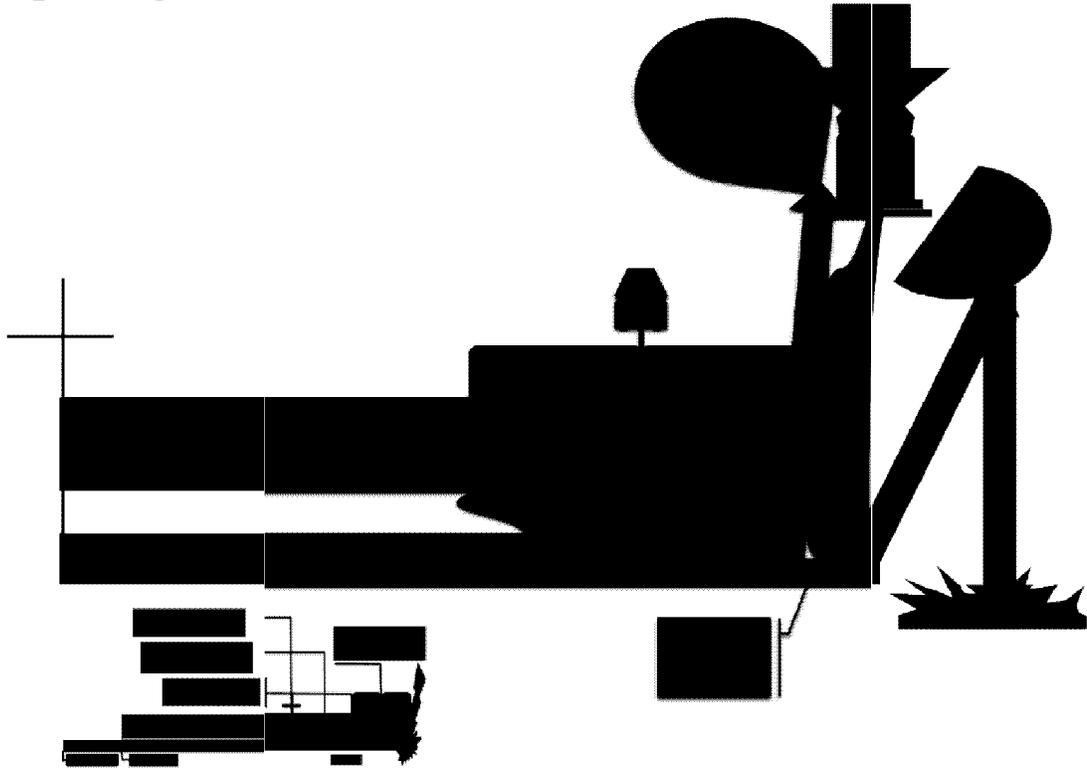
So the church is not to be distressed because the coming of Christ and the gathering of the church to Him has not happened yet.

Thank God for the “buts” of Scripture. In contrast to the sad doom awaiting those who would not believe, Paul is so thankful for this church. The great contrast is between those who are perishing and those have been chosen for salvation. This is a great doctrine about which a great deal of the church is misinformed. But we will have to come back to this another day in another series.

Time Line from Daniel

Seventy weeks determined to bring about redemptive history. Sixty-nine weeks have taken place. The seventieth appears to be yet future. Between the cross and the covenant is an undetermined amount of time. The seventieth week begins with a covenant and ends in the Day of the Lord.

Updating the Time Line



This portion of our timeline is representing the time from the cross to the final judgment. Please note that it is incomplete. At this point in our study, we still have other Scriptures yet to look at which will give more details and will tell us more about what happens after the final judgment.

Between the cross and the coming of Jesus, believers and unbelievers will exist in the world and in the visible church/kingdom. At some point in the future, Daniel's 70th week will begin. In the middle, the antichrist will do what is described in 2 Thessalonians 2 and is referred to as the abomination of desolation. This will launch what Jesus calls, the great tribulation which is the last 3 ½ years of Daniel's 70th week.

Towards the end of that period, Jesus will come. At His coming, all the saints will be gathered to Him, through the rapture and resurrection. We will meet Him at His throne in the immediate heavens. He will then pour out His wrath during a period of time known as the Day of the Lord. At the end of that period, the unbelieving dead are raised from the dead so that all the lost will stand before the throne at the final judgment. The book of life is opened and the saved are confirmed and enter into the "joy of the Lord". The lost whose names are not in the book of life will have the book of their deeds opened, the severity of their punishment in hell determined and then, after acknowledging that Jesus is Lord, will be cast into the eternal lake of fire along with Satan and the fallen angels.

Reflect and Respond

If we learn nothing else from these paragraphs, we must learn to value the truth. The truth is to be heard, taught, told, loved and believed. The truth will save us, mature us, encourage us and inform us so that we will not be easily distressed.

This text leads me to conclude that the professing church will experience more and more counterfeit signs, wonders and miracles while sliding more and more into apostasy. The church will feel great and powerful while being deceived and doomed. In this setting, the antichrist will arise, possibly in its very midst.

Truth must be transformed into living. It is of little value that you hold the truth in your head when you do not do the truth. In fact, the whole of the Scripture condemns that kind of knowledge as a dead faith.

Finally, in the face of the destruction of the anti-Christ and the damning delusion of those who did not love the truth, here is the great comfort held out to God's people.

¹³ But we ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the firstfruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth. ¹⁴ To this he called you through our gospel, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. ¹⁵ So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by our spoken word or by our letter.

¹⁶ Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God our Father, who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace, ¹⁷ comfort your hearts and establish them in every good work and word.

No matter what affliction or apostasy or spirit of antichrist surround us, may God give us grace that we will be comforted and strengthened in every good work and word.

Notes

² It is curious to me that the way some Pretribulation rapturists teach could be what the Thessalonians were being told and what had disturbed them. If they were being persuaded that their present sufferings were the Day of the Lord, equating it with the whole of Daniel's 70th week, then their being upset confirms that they understood Paul to have taught them that the rapture, the coming and gathering to the Lord, occur together just before the Day of the Lord.

Everything in this text points to the rapture occurring at the end of Daniel's 70th week and before the Day of the Lord. This has been commonly called a Post-Tribulation view and has a more modern representation in a Pre-Wrath view. There are two substantive differences between the two: Post-Tribulation sees the wrath of God, the Day of the Lord as being after the great Tribulation and is generally Amillennial and Covenantal in its hermeneutics. Pre-wrath sees the Day of the Lord as the final short period of the Great Tribulation and is generally Premillennial and dispensational in its hermeneutics.

My New Covenant, Christo-centric, Redemptive-Grammatical-Historical approach to the Bible seems to integrate well with the timeline I am suggesting. More about that later.

³ Hendriksen, William and Simon J. Kistemaker. *New Testament Commentary : Exposition of I-II Thessalonians*. New Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953-2001.

⁴ The following extended quote from Hendriksen is very clear and helpful.

It can now be positively stated that the apostle's use of the concept is capable of being traced to a canonical book. It is, indeed, true, as conservatives have always maintained, that many of the features in Paul's description of the great and final prince of wickedness are derived from the book of Daniel:

(1) "The man of lawlessness," cf. Dan. 7:25; 8:25.

(2) "the son of perdition," cf. Dan. 8:26.

(3) "the one who opposes," cf. Dan. 7:25

(4) "and exalts himself against everything (that is) called God or worshiped," cf. Dan. 7:8, 20, 25; 8:4, 10, 11.

(5) "so that he seats himself in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God," cf. Dan. 8:9-14.

This is not surprising, for "the little horn" of *Dan. 7*, the one which came up after the ten horns, is the antichrist, and "the little horn" of *Dan. 8*, the one which came up out of one of the four notable horns, is Antiochus Epiphanes, antichrist's most notorious forerunner, the one who desecrated Jerusalem's temple by erecting a pagan altar over the altar of burnt-offering, and by sacrificing upon it (which was an "appalling horror" in the estimation of every true believer).

Moreover, in Matt. 24:15 (cf. Mark 13:14) "the desolating abomination" ("appalling horror") of which Jesus speaks is derived from Dan. 11:31; 12:11 (probably not directly from 9:27). History, in a sense, repeats itself. Better: prophecy attains multiple fulfilment. The underlying thought is ever the same. God's city and sanctuary are desecrated, whether by Antiochus Epiphanes and his sacrilegious offerings (Dan. 8:9-14; cf. "Gog" in Ezek. 38, 39), by Roman armies with their idolatrous standards (Luke 21:20; Mark 13:14); or finally by the antichrist himself.

Now with respect to the final antichrist as pictured by Paul, our present passage (II Thess. 2:3b, 4) states the following:

He is "the man of lawlessness" (a Semitism), that is, the man in whom opposition to God's law will as it were be embodied, the very personification of rebellion against God's ordinances.

He is also "the son of perdition" (another Semitism), the final Judas, see N.T.C. on John 17:12. Cf. David's remark to Nathan, "The man who has done this is *a son of death*" (i.e., must certainly die); and cf. also Matt. 23:15: "a son of hell." The man of lawlessness is pictured here as the utterly lost one, designated unto perdition. Contrast "sons of light" in I Thess. 5:5.