

## 2:1–17 Correction for Misunderstanding the Parousia, part 1

Charles Taze Russel, the founder of the heretical Jehovah's Witnesses cult, infamously predicted that the time of the Gentiles would be over and Christ would return on Oct 1, 1914. Later he changed the date to 1915, then 1918. Other JW leaders dated the beginning of the kingdom at 1925, 1929, 1942, and 1975. JW's currently believe that 1914 marked the end of the Gentile Times and the beginning of the transition period from human rule to the Thousand Year (Millennial) Reign of Christ. I wish we were transitioning, but I don't think we are.

Obviously, we would disagree with the JWs on their eschatology.

Eschatology, the study of end times events, is a controversial topic. People have many different views on these things. Some people do not think it's important—the topic does not matter to them. It does not really matter. But Paul must have thought that it was fairly important; most of 2 Thess pertains to eschatology.

2 Thess chapter 2 is an extended discussion of the Parousia—the 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming of Christ in glory. *Parousia* is the Greek word for “presence, arrival.” It's translated as “coming” in today's passage.

In this chapter, Paul is responding to some questions the people of Thessalonica had concerning the 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming. They were “shaken in mind” and “troubled” about this, because some false teachers had been claiming that the “day of Christ is at hand” (2). So this chapter gives us some information about when Jesus will return and what kind of things must happen before Jesus returns.

Paul's particular concern in chapter 2 is to correct the church's misunderstandings concerning the timing and nature of Christ's 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming—the Parousia.

Sadly, there is still a good bit of misunderstanding concerning this topic. But if we understand what Paul is telling us here, it will dispel much of that error.

Paul teaches three things in this passage to correct any misunderstandings of the Parousia.

- I. The Parousia should not cause anxieties. (2:1–2)
  - A. The Parousia is the 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming of Christ. This is one of the primary doctrines of Christianity—Jesus will return; he will come again.
    1. The KJV has “by (ὕπερ) the coming...” but the sense is probably “concerning/regarding the coming.” He's addressing their question; they had asked about this, and he's answering their questions.

2. Part of the Parousia will be “our gathering together (ἐπισυναγωγή) unto him.” The 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming will result in the gathering together of all Christians.
  - a) We believe that the first phase of Jesus’ 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming will be the *rapture* of the church. Cf. 1 Thes 4:13f where Paul describes this.
  - b) The second phase of this event will be Jesus’ return with his saints in glory to establish his kingdom—the *revelation*.
  - c) The time period between these two events is the Tribulation, which lasts for seven years.
  - d) In any case, “our gathering together” will happen when Jesus returns. Jesus will first come *for* his saints, and then return *with* his saints. Both of these events will require the gathering together of the saints.

B. The Parousia should not cause us to be “shaken in mind” or “troubled.”

1. Apparently, this topic had caused quite a bit of anxiety among the people of the church. They were worried about it. Maybe they were worried that they had missed it.

**Illus.:** When I was growing up, a movie about the rapture was popular—*A Thief in the Night*; many churches hosted screenings of that movie. The result of that and other teachings at the time is that many people were worried that they would get left behind at the rapture. Fear of being left behind motivated many people to get saved (or at least make a profession of faith).

Have you ever been worried that you missed the rapture?

If you are a Christian, you don’t need to worry about it. All Christians will experience the rapture; if you are a Christian, you won’t miss it. If you are *not* a Christian, you will miss it; you will be left behind and what Paul describes here will happen to you. This passage largely pertains to the experience of unbelievers—what happens to them after the rapture.

2. .2 Do not be “shaken in mind” (σαλεύω).

- a) Preventing anxiety over this issue is part of Paul’s purpose in writing. The language and grammar here (εἰς το and the infinitive<sup>1</sup>) imply purpose; Paul’s purpose is to prevent them from worrying about this.
  - b) The word “shaken” pertains to being distressed, worried, unsettled, agitated; to waver or rock back and forth.
  - c) This agitation was happening “in mind” (ἀπὸ τοῦ νοός); literally “from the mind.” He didn’t want this to shake them up, to agitate them, to cause them to waver. They should keep their heads about this.
3. Do not be “troubled” (θροέω) – the word means lit. “to cry aloud,” i.e., to be agitated or shocked; to be startled or alarmed to the point of wailing or crying out.

**App:** I think this exhortation shows us that we should not become excessively agitated or anxious about this doctrine. Years ago, people were often obsessed with the details of the events of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming. Some people no doubt went too far; they were anxious and agitated about this, unnecessarily.

The study of eschatology should provide hope, assurance, and stability, not instability and tumult. If Christians are upset about this issue, it’s because they don’t understand it.

4. .2b Paul lists several sources that might be the cause of such mind-shaking tumult and fear: he mentions spirit, word, and letter.
- a) By spirit
    - (1) Obviously not the Holy Spirit
    - (2) “spirit” can refer to one’s own inner personal feelings or intuitions—what I’d call mysticism.

**App:** Many religious leaders base their teaching on inner feelings and intuitions. They claim that God is talking to them. But what they say has no authority; most of it is fraudulent and fake.

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<sup>1</sup> A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1933), 2 Th 2:2.

- b) By word—verbal statements, things overheard; various reports, gossip, hearsay. Perhaps someone claiming to speak for God, someone claiming to be a prophet.

Even at this early point in church history, false teachers were already promoting false theology and leading churches astray.

- c) By letter as from us—someone was apparently claiming that Paul had sent an epistle/letter to the church or to an individual that taught that the day of the Lord was at hand.

Paul had not written any such letter or spoken anything that might lead them to be mistaken on this topic.

**App:** This serves as a warning about where we get our doctrine and what we see as authoritative. Some people get their ideas from their own feelings. Some people have mystical experiences. Some people hear others talking.

In our age, people hear things on TV or in movies; they see videos; they listen to various Internet teachers; they have mystical experiences—that’s where they get their doctrine. And that process leads to many errors in doctrine.

Obviously, the only authoritative source of teaching is God’s inspired word. All of our doctrinal beliefs must rest on “thus saith the Lord.” And we follow preachers who accurately proclaim the word of God.

Even among Christians, anxiety often results from following the wrong authorities, especially from inner feelings or from false teachers. We find stability and peace when we follow the authority of God’s word.

We should avoid any teachers who bypass the authority of God’s word and authorize their own personal experiences.

- 5. .2end Do not think that the “day of Christ is at hand.

Paul notes the particular cause of this anxiety/alarm: they thought the day of Christ had already come.

- a) “at hand” (ἐνίστημι) is the translation of a word meaning “present, in place, near; happening now.”

b) Paul denies that this event is “at hand,” happening now or in the immediate future; it’s not present. They were not in the day of the Lord.

c) What is the day of Christ?

(1) In the OT, the Day of the Lord was judgment day, the era in which God would judge the wicked. The Messiah would come, destroy God’s enemies, and establish a kingdom.

*Joel 2:30–31 And I will show wonders in the heavens and in the earth: Blood and fire and pillars of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, And the moon into blood, Before the coming of the great and awesome day of the LORD.*

(2) Likewise in the NT, the Day of the Lord is the whole complex of events surrounding the return of Christ, his kingdom, the final judgment, and the renewal of all things.

*1 Thessalonians 5:2 For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night.*

(3) The Thessalonians were worried that they were already in the Day of the Lord, or perhaps that it had already passed.

Maybe the persecution they were experiencing was part of the end times events. Perhaps the false teachers had stirred up this fear in them—they were suffering because they were in the great Tribulation. So they were confused about this—they were shaken up and troubled about it.

(4) But that was unnecessary, because the day of Christ had not yet come, as Paul goes on to demonstrate.

**Trans:** So Paul’s main point thus far is to assure his readers that they need not be troubled or anxious about this issue. The Day of the Lord has not yet come. It will come at some point, but it has not come yet.

There is an order/schedule to eschatological events. If we understand the schedule, we’ll not be troubled or shaken in mind about these issues.

Regarding that schedule, Paul reminds them that...

II. The Parousia will be preceded by apostasy. (2:3–12)

Before Jesus returns in glory to establish his kingdom, a few other things have to happen first. If these things have not happened, we cannot be in the day of the Lord/Christ.

A. .3 Do not be deceived.

1. .3 Paul prohibits (μηδε) all of these erroneous sources of doctrine—“let no man deceive you.” He’s telling them not to allow themselves to be led astray by these false claims.

2. Deceive (ἐξαπατάω) – to cheat, beguile, mislead

So someone must have been attempting to deceive them. Do not listen to false teachers.

*Matthew 24:11 Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many.*

Many deceitful false prophets are in the world today. We must not be deceived by them.

3. “by any means” – don’t be deceived through spirit, word or letter (vs. 2).

**App:** The Bible repeatedly calls us to be discerning and to avoid being gullible and easily deceived.

Sadly, many Christians today both lack discernment and gullibly accept the latest fads and bogus theological ideas. I’m always amazed by how many people follow the latest false teachers and cults.

We avoid being deceived by following the example of the Bereans in Acts 17:11 – search the Scriptures daily. The better we know the Bible and solid theology, the less likely it is that we’ll be led astray. We must be discerning and a bit skeptical.

B. .3b A falling away has to happen first.

1. .3 The original language here says “because except might come the falling away first.” I.e., this won’t happen until something else happens. They had not missed the rapture, they were not in the day of the Lord, and they were not suffering in the Tribulation. Something else has to happen before any of that happens. What has to happen first is a “falling away.”

2. The word here is ἀποστασία – rebellion, defection, revolt, abandonment. Before Jesus returns, there will be a religious revolt, a defection, a rebellion against God and the church.

**Quote:** The falling away/apostasy points to a deliberate abandonment of a former professed position.<sup>2</sup>

That means that a large number of people who professed to be Christian will apostatize—they’ll reject the faith; they’ll defect and revolt; they’ll abandon Christ and the church.

3. Scholars can point to various historical apostasies among the Jews and among Christians where people and groups have defected from the faith. But the apostasy that Paul is referring to *had* not happened when he wrote this, and it *has* not happened yet from our perspective either.

**Quote:** This worldwide anti-God movement will be so universal as to earn for itself a special designation: “*the* apostasy”—[this will be] the climax of the increasing apostate tendencies evident before the rapture of the church.<sup>3</sup>

This has to happen “first.” I.e., the day of Christ will not happen until after this apostasy/rebellion/defection.

**App:** We might think that the decline in Christianity is bad now, but it will be much worse in the future. Just before the Day of the Lord, many professing Christians will apostatize; they will leave the faith and rebel against Christ. The majority of the world will turn against Christianity; most will reject it altogether.

Only after that happens will ...

- C. .3end The “man of sin” will be “revealed” (ἀποκαλύπτω) before Jesus’ 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming/Parousia in glory.

In this coming series of events associated with the Parousia, in association with this great falling away/apostasy, a satanic religious leader will arise—the Antichrist.

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<sup>2</sup> Rober L. Thomas, “2 Thessalonians,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Ephesians through Philemon*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 11 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 321.

<sup>3</sup> Rober L. Thomas, “2 Thessalonians,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Ephesians through Philemon*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 11 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 322.

1 John 2:18 *Little children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come, by which we know that it is the last hour.*

We know that “many antichrists will come,” but Paul has one particular antichrist in mind who will fulfill these expectations.

The implication is that the revelation will take place suddenly or unexpectedly. He will arise to prominence dramatically and quickly.

1. He’s the “man of sin.”

The primary characteristic of this man will be “sin.” He will delight in everything sinful. He will glory in his rebellion against God. He’s opposite of everything Jesus stood for.

There were many people like that in Paul’s day, and likewise today, we are surrounded by men of sin—people who are absolutely opposed to God and to everything Christian.

But this particular man of sin will also be ...

2. .3end He’s the “son of perdition.”

a) “perdition” (ἀπώλεια) is another word for “destruction, ruin; to perish.”

b) In the Hebrew way of thinking, calling someone the “son of” something indicates that he has those qualities or characteristics. This man epitomizes destruction/ruin. Destruction is his character and his destiny is ruin.

c) Jesus called Judas the same name (Jn 17:12). The Antichrist is not Judas, but someone like him. Judas is a type or shadow of the Antichrist.

d) This individual is also not Satan, but he does the work of Satan.

3. .4 The Antichrist has a set of distinct characteristics

a) He opposes Christ.

(1) The preposition “anti” means “opposed to.” We call him the Antichrist because he’s opposed to Christ.

The word in Greek (ἀντίκειμαι) means “to be averse to, to withstand.”

- (2) He'll stand against God's word and God's program. He'll be in favor of everything God is against.
- b) .4 He exalts himself (ὑπεραίρω) above God or false gods. σεβάζομαι – object of worship<sup>4</sup>
- c) .4 He will claim to be a god by sitting in the temple.
  - (1) Various historical individuals have demanded worship and even attempted to enter the Jewish temple to set themselves up as a god.
  - (2) The Roman Emperor Caius Caligula (reigned AD 37-41) claimed to be god and attempted to have his statue set up for worship in the Temple in Jerusalem.<sup>5</sup>

Note that the Antichrist will attempt to enter *the temple* and demand worship. What temple? The one in Jerusalem. Is that temple standing now? No. Will it stand in the future? I believe so. This is one of those verses that implies that the temple will be rebuilt. It will be standing when the Antichrist is revealed. He has to go there and demand worship.

Remember the sequence of events here: The Antichrist arises shortly before Jesus returns. So this person has not shown up yet; this prophecy has not been fulfilled.

According to prophecy (Dan 9:24-27; cf. Mk 13:14), the Antichrist enters the temple and commits the “abomination of desolation,” apparently an attempt to set himself up as god. So in order for that to happen, the temple has to be standing.

I've heard that some Jewish groups in Israel are ready and waiting to rebuild the temple. They have everything ready.

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<sup>4</sup> A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1933), 2 Th 2:4.

<sup>5</sup> A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1933), 2 Th 2:4.

The Iranians shot a missile that hit near the temple mount in Jerusalem. It missed one of the Muslim shrines there by just a few hundred feet. Imagine if that missile had hit the shrine or the Dome of the Rock?

Who is the Antichrist? Nobody knows; he has not yet been revealed. Many people have attempted to identify this person—Judas, Nero, other Roman Emperors, Nixon, Trump??

Some suggest that the person in view here is not the Antichrist but the second beast of Rev 13.

We do not know who this person is, but Paul's point is that, since he has not yet appeared or been revealed, we cannot be in the day of the Lord. Don't worry about this because these events have not yet happened.

Vs. 5 is a parenthetical comment; he reminds his readers that he told them about these things while he was there. He seems a bit surprised that they have forgotten what he told them about these issues.

Paul is appealing to the authority of his own inspired teaching. The authority always goes back to the apostolic teaching. For us, that's the NT. We must base our beliefs on the inspired word of God, not feelings, mystical experiences, or hearsay.

Paul's most significant point here for his readers is that they should not be troubled or shaken in mind regarding these issues. The falling away has not happened yet, and the Antichrist has not been revealed yet. We believe the rapture will happen before any of that happens. So this doctrine ought to provide comfort and stability, not anxiety and fear.

We can rest assured that these events will happen eventually. The first event in the Day of Christ will be the rapture of the church. Most of what Paul refers to here will happen *after* the rapture, so Christians do not need to be shaken in mind or troubled about these things.

If you are *not* a Christian, you have good reason to be both shaken in mind and troubled. This is your destiny if you are alive when Jesus returns. A good reason to get saved is to avoid the things that Paul is describing in these verses.

After a discussion of the Antichrist, Paul goes on to talk about other things that will happen before the 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming, but we'll wait until next week to consider the other thing Paul has in mind here.