

Deceived and Troubled**2 Thessalonians 2:1—2**

Paul had just finished encouraging the Thessalonians by telling them not to look at all the problems, trials and tribulations they were going through, but rather to lift their eyes heavenward, focusing on their future glory. Focusing on our future hope is the best way to put ourselves above all our day-to-day cares. Imagine being tormented for your belief in Pauline doctrine and then told to let not to lash out, but to allow the Lord to take care of vengeance upon the perpetrators. We, almost naturally, want to get even to those who have done us wrong. We sometimes lie awake at night seething over things people said or did against us. Paul says this is wrong. We need to let those things go and put them in God's hands to allow Him to deal with their wrongdoing against us.

However, Paul didn't stop there. We aren't told to just turn away from these detractors, but to look above to our future glory in heaven. Paul could confidently say this because he was taken up into the third heaven to be given a glimpse into his future dwelling place (2 Corinthians 12:2). Instead of groveling in the muck and mire of this world, we are to lift our eyes to the place that God already sees us...in the heavenly places (Ephesians 2:6). This hope of glory (Colossians 1:27) is our confident expectation that we will absolutely spend eternity with the Lord Jesus Christ. This is the hope upon which we need to keep our eyes fixed.

Shaken and troubled

Paul had taught the Thessalonians about the Rapture and the Second Coming. They accepted Paul's words as coming from God (1 Thessalonians 2:13). Since that time, they had been going through persecution and tribulation at the hands of those surrounding them. This left them open to accepting the words, written as if from Paul, saying they had missed the Rapture and were now going through the Tribulation. Their hope of being caught up to be with the Lord forever was shattered. This is why Paul still praised them for their faith and love, but couldn't do the same for their hope (2 Thessalonians 1:3; compare with 1 Thessalonians 1:3).

These believers took their eyes off of the Word of God and began trusting their experience. They interpreted the trials they were going through to be part of the seven-year tribulation and accepted the false letter as truth, even though it contradicted what Paul had taught them earlier. Believers today are easily shaken when they accept experience or church tradition to guide them in their day-to-day walk. Scripture is the only thing we can reliably build our life upon. We should always hold Scripture up to any teaching to see if that teaching measures up. This is what the Bereans did when Paul taught them, and they were praised for being more noble than the Thessalonians for faithfully searching out Scripture (Acts 17:11).

The day of...

To understand what the Thessalonians were going through requires that we understand some of the different terminologies used in Scripture. There are two major "days" in view that need to be dispensationally understood. The Day of the Lord and the Day of Christ are usually understood to be two different terms for the same event. Building on this perspective will, I believe, warp the true meaning of what God is revealing through His Word. A study of Scripture, rightly divided, reveals two separate biblical programs, one for Israel, and the other for the Church, the Body of Christ.

Day of the Lord

Any time the Day of the Lord is used, including general terms such as "that day" (i.e. Zephaniah 1:15), Israel's prophetic program should immediately come to mind. The Day of the Lord can, but not necessarily depending upon context, cover the period from the beginning of the Tribulation, all the way to eternity future. It helps to see it in contrast with the day of man,

beginning with, I believe, Adam who was given authority over the earth (Genesis 1:26). Some incorrectly connect the times of the Gentiles (Luke 21:24) with the day of man. The times of the Gentiles are linked to Israel's prophetic program, possibly beginning with the Babylonian captivity. Since that time, Israel has been under Gentile rule. Our current Dispensation of Grace is not counted as the times of the Gentiles since God is not currently dealing with Israel as a covenant nation. Once this Age of Grace is closed out with the Rapture of the Church, God will once again put Israel front and center. Unfortunately, they will follow the anti-Messiah during the Tribulation, who will turn against them during the last half. Gentile armies will surround them and put them under siege for three and a half years, until the Messiah comes back to rescue them (Luke 21:24; Zechariah 14).

The Day of the Lord is not just a single day, but refers to a period of time. There are times Scripture uses the Day of the Lord in terms of the Tribulation (Isaiah 13:6, 9, 13; Ezekiel 30:3; Joel 1:15; 2:1; Zephaniah 1:14—15). Other times it is focused on the Second Coming (Joel 2:31; Amos 5:18). Other passages point to the Millennial Kingdom as being a part of "that day" (Isaiah 2:17). Since it is all a part of the Day of the Lord, it is completely proper to refer to a part of it as the Day of the Lord. Again, remember that the word "day" is referring to a span of time, not a single day.

Day of Christ

This term is used exclusively by the Apostle Paul to speak of the time from the Rapture forward, and relates only to the Church, the Body of Christ. This is, I believe, not referring only to an event (the Rapture), but to the beginning of an age for members of the Body of Christ.

This Day of Christ is found in both Paul's earlier writings (1 Corinthians 1:8; 2 Corinthians 1:14), as well as some of his later writings (Philippians 1:6, 10; 2:16). This is significant because there are some who try to divide Paul's letters up into two parts, the earlier and later books. They claim the earlier books belong to Israel's prophetic program, giving them the opportunity to accept the Kingdom offer until the end of Acts 28, while saying the Mystery was not preached until after Acts 28. They resort to the books of the Bible, taking them out of what I believe was a God-ordained canonical order, put them into chronological order, then cut them approximately in half. They ignore the clear teaching from Luke 13:6—9 that God gave Israel one additional year (instead of 40 additional years) to accept the offer of the Millennial Kingdom. They also ignore the significance of Paul exerting his authority over Peter in Galatians. Peter was going against the message Paul was preaching, and began treating the Gentiles as they had done before Paul was given the revelation of the Mystery. Paul says to follow him in his earlier and later books (1 Corinthians 4:16; Philippians 3:17). According to Romans 16:25 (an earlier book penned by Paul) He was already given revelations concerning the Mystery.

Paul's use of the phrase "Day of Christ" relates to his usage of the "Kingdom of Christ," another phrase used exclusively by Paul, directed to the Church, the Body of Christ, in this Dispensation of Grace (Colossians 1:13; 2 Timothy 4:1). The Kingdom of God is general and covers either or both the Millennial Kingdom (Mark 1:15; Matthew 3:2; Luke 1:33) and/or the Kingdom of Christ. This can be seen in Ephesians 5:5 where both terms are being used. In this case, the Kingdom of God encompasses the Kingdom of Christ.

A controversy

Our next lesson will focus on a controversy surrounding 2 Thessalonians 2:2. Some versions speak of the "Day of the Lord" while other translations use the term "Day of Christ." Why are there two different versions and what difference does it make?

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