

2 Thessalonians 1:7–2:17

Paul picks up this eschatological theme again in 2 Thessalonians 1:7–2:17. Remember, this second epistle was written just months after, and as a follow-up to, the first epistle. He starts in verse 7 by talking about the retribution, judgment and wrath to be poured out on the unbelievers and ungodly (Day of the Lord) at the Second Coming of Christ. Paul uses the word, *apokalupsis* to describe the Second Coming here.

He continues on in chapter 2 by reminding them of the *Parousia* and the *episunagoge*, “gathering together to Him” at that time. He uses the term *episunagoge* to reinforce the fact that he is talking about the Rapture. In verse 2, he continues by setting this understanding of the Rapture in juxtaposition to the false teaching that the Day of the Lord has already come. In verse 3, he outlines the timing of these events: it (Day of the Lord) will not come unless the *apostasia* comes first, and the man of lawlessness (Antichrist) is revealed (remember the theological debate over the meaning of the word *apostasia* in this context). For the sake of continuity of thought and Paul’s logic in this contextual setting, it makes perfect sense that *apostasia* be translated, “the departing, departure” (relating to the aforementioned Rapture in verse 1). Therefore, verse 3 may be translated, Let no one in any way deceive you, for it (Day of the Lord, referred to in verse 2) will not come unless the *departing/departure* (Rapture, referred to in verse 1) comes first, and the man of lawlessness (Antichrist) is revealed. Based on this translation, the Rapture and the revealing of the Antichrist precede the Tribulation (Day of the Lord). Paul goes on to talk about the *what*, in verse 6, and *he*, in verse 7, that now restrains the Antichrist from being revealed. Again, there has been much theological debate over what or who this *what* and *he* represents. Traditionally, by pretribulationists, it has been

narrowed down to two possibilities: the Holy Spirit or the Body of Christ/Church (spoken of in the “masculine” gender by Paul in 1 Cor 12 and Eph 4).¹ On the other hand, Ladd describes the restrainer as God, and that both verses 6 and 7 are saying the same thing: that God restrains “to the end that he may be revealed in his own season” in verse 6, and “until he come out of the midst” in verse 7.² However, with the end of verse 7 saying, “until *he* is taken out of the way,” there seems to be a relation to the continuity of Paul’s thought about the *departure* of the Body of Christ/Church in verse 3. Therefore, in keeping with Paul’s flow of thought contextually, it makes sense to interpret the *what* and *he* to mean the Body of Christ/Church. Bell on the other hand states, “It would seem rather obvious that neither the argument for *apostasia* as being the rapture nor the argument for the removal of the restrainer and therefore the church is based on exegetical considerations at all but that they are deductive attempts to locate proof texts for an already accepted doctrine.”³ Despite Bell’s interpretation, up to this point in the passage, everything seems to flow very nicely, neatly and logically, until reaching verse 8.

In verse 8, Paul talks about the demise and destruction of the Antichrist by, “the appearance of His coming;” or “brightness of His coming” in other translations.⁴ This phrase relates to the Second Coming (described by Rev 19:19-20 and by similar word usage in Matt 24:30; Mark 13:26; and Luke 21:27). The problem is that two separate Greek nouns, both in

¹House, 276-7; and Feinberg, 306-8.

²Ladd, *The Blessed Hope*, 94-5.

³Bell, 290.

⁴George Ricker Berry, *The Interlinear Greek-English New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979), 537.

the dative case and which are normally used in singularly distinctive contexts to identify Jesus' coming, are used back to back with the first modifying the second adjectivally (*epiphaneia* modifies *parousia*).⁵ As has been seen thus far, *parousia* is primarily used by Paul to speak of the presence of Christ in the clouds, as part of the *harpazo* (Rapture) of his Church.

Epiphaneia is used five other times in the New Testament (1 Tim 6:14; 2 Tim 1:10; 4:1,8; and Titus 2:13). Using the translation, "manifestation, specifically; *the advent of Christ, past or future*" and applying it to these five scriptures: three (2 Tim 1:10; 2 Tim 4:1, 8) refer to Jesus' First Coming for Salvation; 1 Timothy 6:14 refers to the Second Coming; and Titus 2:13 also refers to the Second Coming, preceded by the mention of the "Blessed Hope" (which Ladd believes also refers to the Second Coming).⁶ However, a separate case can be made that the "Blessed Hope," in this verse, refers to the Rapture (related to the message of hope, comfort and encouragement Paul gives to the Thessalonian church—1 Thess 4:18; 5:11; 2 Thess 2:16-17). In Titus, the "Blessed Hope" is separated from *epiphaneia* by the word "and" indicating two connected, yet different ideas. All this being said, it appears that Paul's usage of both *epiphaneia* and *parousia*, back to back, in 2 Thessalonians 2:8, without a conjunction to separate them, indicates one thought and refers to the brightness, splendor, and glory of the Second Coming of Christ. Paul then continues in verses 13-17 by encouraging the believers to stand firm and hold to the traditions which they were taught because God has chosen them for *salvation (soteria)* through sanctification—v. 13, and that they may gain the "glory of our Lord Jesus Christ"—v. 14 (two more inferences to the Rapture).

⁵Zodhiates, *New Testament, KJV*, 682.

⁶Ladd, *The Blessed Hope*, 11, 13, 162.