

June 5, 1994

"Above All, Trust Jesus Christ"
II Thess. 1

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. Because of the question last Sunday concerning the "millennium" concept in Scripture, we probably should take some time to consider it. Bible students refer to the thousand-year period noted in Rev. 20:2,3,4,5,6,7 (six times) as the millennium. The word "millennium" is a compound of the two Latin words, mille and ennium, with the first meaning "one thousand" and the latter "year." We often use the word "biennium" which means two years, for example. The period of one thousand years related to end-time events in human history is mentioned explicitly nowhere else in Scripture. However, implicitly it is associated elsewhere with the time of terrible trouble for the nation of Israel, e.g., all of Isaiah and Zephaniah 3:8-20. Its absence from our Revelation 20 would leave an unusual gap in the chronology of the events following the destructive happenings which begin "the day of the Lord." Further, there would be an illogical absence between what Jesus labels as a one-of-a-kind earthshaking period of tribulation in Matt. 24:21,29 and a time during which believers in Jesus' lordship will reign with Jesus on earth, I Cor. 6:2; II Tim. 2:12; Rev. 5:9-10. Immediately following the reference to the thousand-year period, there is to be a consummate judgment (noted in Rev. 20:11-15 as before the great white throne) followed by the establishment of a new Jerusalem wherein there will be no more sorrow of any kind. The twentieth and twenty-first chapters of Revelation constitute the conclusion of what the Lord wants mankind to know as of our time, I believe. It appears that God communicated much of his end-time plans in a rather small capsule, i.e., the last three chapters of the New Covenant. This short synopsis is so brief and somewhat sketchy that many Bible scholars want to put little importance in the information there, even to ruling out little or no credence to the thousand years. My chief reason for disagreeing with such a position is the belief in what constitutes "the day of the Lord" and especially as that day relates to God's eternal promise to his specially called Jewish Nation, Rom. 11:25-26. Most of the Old Testament prophets either end with or include in their prophecies the promise of God to restore the Jewish Nation and Jerusalem's becoming the seat of the Lord's government, Isa. 60; 66:5ff; Ezek. 39:21-29; Dan. 7:9-22; Hosea 14:1-9; Joel 3:1-11; Amos 9:11-15; Obad. 21; Micah 7:15-20; Zech. 8:18-23;14:9-21.

II. A further word should perhaps be stated about how Bible scholars are divided on when and how the millennium fits into the divine sequence in end-time events. There are four main categories of beliefs: The premillennial view, the premillennial/posttribulationist view, the postmillennial view, and the amillennial view. The premillennialists believe that Jesus will return before the millennium interpreting Rev. 20 literally. All believers will be with Jesus and will therefore escape the tribulation period on earth. They hold that Christ will reign on earth for a lengthy period (characterized by 1000 years). The premillennial/posttribulationists assert that Christ will return at the end of the seven-year tribulation to establish a millennial kingdom. This kingdom will end with

a rebellion by the forces of evil followed by the final judgment and eternal reign of Christ. The postmillennialists view is that the millennial is the present age of blessedness (grace) on the earth, a period of indefinite length. They expect Christ's visible return after the millennium, and look for God to use the church's teaching and preaching to usher in a lengthy period of peace and righteousness before Christ's return. From our discussion last Sunday, you will recognize my position to be with the premillennials. The amillennialists interpret Christ's millennial reign in an ideal or spiritual sense. While believing in the second coming, they reject the idea of a literal thousand-year reign on earth. Some see Christ's reign as having begun during his earthly ministry or at the time of his resurrection. God's promise to Israel is one applying to the church age, or to the eternal existence in the new heavens and the new earth.

III. After Paul sent his first letter to the Thessalonian believers, false doctrine was introduced there disallowing the apostle's teaching concerning Jesus' return. False teachers had apparently taught that Paul was right about the second coming, except that Jesus had already come, and, as believers, they were to live from the labor of others. God had made them "chosen people" to be served by others rather than to serve others. But before Paul reopens the events surrounding Jesus' return, he again extends words of thanksgiving, encouragement, and word of his continuing to intercede with God on their behalf. He states at the outset that Silas and Timothy were still with him in Corinth which means that he was writing the second letter not long after sending the first letter (a few months). Paul pronounced God's and the Lord Jesus Christ's grace upon them along with the Lord's peace. He stated that it was appropriate to thank God for their growth in their faith in Jesus, their love for one another, and their patience in spite of the persecutions and tribulations they were being forced to endure. Their spiritual stamina was justifiable evidence of their worthiness to be among the citizens of God's kingdom. That stamina was precisely why they were being persecuted. Their trouble should be quieted by their knowledge that, "when Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ," vss. 7-8. Their punishment will be that they will be banished from the presence and glory of the power of our Lord. He will come and be glorified through his believers as well as admired by them in "that day," vss. 9-10. Paul wanted the Thessalonian believers to be aware of the fact that he, Silas and Timothy were in continuous prayer to God for them concerning their election and the true worthiness associated with their fulfilling God's purpose there in Thessalonica. Above all the apostle prayed that the new believers would bring glory to the Lord Jesus even as they were glorified through their bearing his name. Only God's grace had made their new relationship with the heavenly Father possible through his Son, Jesus Christ. Everything else is beneath the excellence of holding on to their trust in Jesus Savior. We too must, with B. B. McKinney:

Have faith in God when your pathway is lonely, he sees and knows all the way you have trod. Never alone are the least of his children; have faith in God.

VIA

June 5, 1994

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Wendell Alford,
Teacher

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14:20-21
to 15:
12

quoted in 15:16-17

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12/34/19
 Jan. 3:12
 10/11/10-11

Have faith in God when your pathway is lonely, he sees and knows all the way you have trod. Never alone are the least of his children; have faith in God.

June 12, 1994

"Waiting for the Day"
II Thess. 2

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. This chapter of Paul's second letter to the new believers at Thessalonica makes a unique revelation of God to mankind concerning Jesus' second coming to earth. In no other place in the Old or New Covenants is the information with the same precise revelation as that given in II Tesssalonians 2. The reason God gave Paul (and us) the details clarifying their misunderstanding grew out of false teaching which had crept into the new church there. The false information grew out of the reaction to severe persecutions the new believers were experiencing. Paul's first letter had noted (5:2-3) that there would be severe persecution when the day of the Lord came. Since the believers were, in fact, undergoing persecution, they related their troubles to Jesus' arrival. Paul now (in Letter Two) assures them that that time was not now occurring and would not happen while the believers were still on earth. The chapter begins with Paul's relating Jesus' second coming with believers' "gathering together unto him." Further, they were not to be frightened either by any spirit (as someone asserting that "God's Spirit revealed such and such to me, etc.," note Gal. 1:8-9), by oral communication, or by letter purportedly from Paul to the effect that the day of Christ (the Lord) is now happening. The Thessalonians were troubled, because the new information conflicted with what Paul had disclosed to them when he was there with them. In this part of Paul's second letter he utterly refutes that God had revealed any differently than what Paul had already told them, that any oral contradictory message was a false prophecy, and that any letter supposedly from the apostle was a forgery.

II. I have often referred to the terrible tribulation as the "beginning" of the day of the Lord. The horrible tribulation is the opening or beginning of "that day" which continues onward after the tribulation to and through the lengthy period (millenium) of Christ's reign on earth as outlined in I Thess. 5. The day of the Lord will end with the final judgment noted in Rev. 20:7-15. During that day of the Lord, Jesus Christ will rule with divine judgment over the entire planet earth, Psa. 2; Rev. 2:27. Isa. 11:10-12 notes that God will gather Israel at this time, and in Isa. 11:1-9 (relating to the same period) the prophet foretells that that one who is the Branch of Jesse (Jesus Christ) will judge over a period of peace and prosperity. In summary, the Day of the Lord will begin with Jesus taking all who have become trusters in his righteousness out of the world, purging the world of sin through a troublous tribulation, and thereafter reigning with his believers for a long period (millenium). The Thessalonians, and, as time has come and gone, all believers are to be aware that certain events are to happen before the Day of the Lord begins.

III. Remember that in I Thess. 5:4,9 Paul stated that the day of the Lord would not overtake believers as a thief, i.e., the general corrupt moral condition of the world would be understood by those led by God's Holy Spirit. [The exact time, however, only God the Father knows.] In vs. 3 God tells us through Paul that the day

of the Lord will not come until certain conditions prevail. We believers do not know the specific day or hour, but we can know the season, Matt. 24:32-33. The first evidence of the soon coming of the Lord Jesus is a lack of influence by God's Spirit in the affairs of mankind. This lack of Godly influence will prepare the world's population to look, not to God for guidance, but to a world leader, a human being. Paul (for God) here gives some characteristics of that world leader. He will be a "man of sin" who promotes attitudes and activities which are contrary to God's will (the Lordship of Jesus, God's Son). His status as a representative of Satan's power and will will be evident to those who know God, i.e., who are led by his Holy Spirit. The evil one and his purposes will be revealed to God's people (believers). One of the evidences which will make his position clear to believers is that he will oppose God's Son and exalt himself as God. This "son of perdition" will insist that he is God and that he alone is to be worshipped. Further, he will erect a seat of authority for himself which will be known as God's temple or throne and from there will announce to the whole world that he alone is the very God of the universe, vs. 4. In vs. 5 Paul parenthetically reminds the Thessalonians that he had told them these things during his three-week stay with them. In vss. 6-7 Paul refers to a "restrainer" who is holding the "man of sin" back. The restrainer is a person as noted by the male pronoun, "until he be taken out of the way." Many Bible students have conjectured who the restrainer is or was. Some have supposed him to have been the Roman emperor Nero; others say Satan himself who was or is biding his time until the times are just right for his advantage; and finally, many political and/or religious leaders have been so identified through the centuries. Paul makes it clear that the evil activities, which are to culminate in the coming of this ultimate personification of evil, were already being exercised. However, this "lawless one" will be controlled by God and finally destroyed by Jesus when the Lord comes. Satan has always been leashed by God and can only operate within God's limits. (Remember God's control of Satan as relating to God's servant Job.) I conclude that the Restrainer is God himself in the person of his Holy Spirit. Jesus promised in John 14:16-21, 26-29; 15:26 that God's Spirit would abide with a believer for ever, John 14:16, and review Rom. 11:25. In vs. 13 Paul assures the Thessalonian believers that they had been sanctified by God's Spirit (set aside for God's purposes) and that they should "stand fast" even in spite of those who would trouble them and seek to make them feel that their spiritual salvation was in jeopardy. In vs. 16 the apostle reminds them that both God the Father and Jesus Christ, God's Savior, loved them and "had given us (believers) everlasting consolation and good hope through (God's own) grace (unmerited favor)." Believers, because of God's unfulfilling promise, are to be comfortable in their faith in Jesus Christ and settle down to please the Lord with their good attitude and activities [whether persecuted or not]. With Louisa Stead let's affirm:

'Tis so sweet to trust in Jesus, just to take him at his word.
Just to rest upon his promise, just to know, "Thus saith the Lord."
Jesus, Jesus, how I trust him; how I've proved him o'er and o'er!
Jesus, Jesus, precious Jesus! O for grace to trust him more!

The legislative came & went quickly
next wk SSC meets in Orlando

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June 12, 1994

"Waiting for the Day"
II Thess. 2

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

with 21:30
and
Rev. 1:7
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note +
study
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reference
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8:10

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choice
not God's
John 14:18
If you
are not,
keep my
teaching
(command
ments)

John 13:2
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17:15
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Read
John
16:13

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 Just to rest upon his promise, just to know, "Thus saith the Lord."
 Jesus, Jesus, how I trust him; how I've proved him o'er and o'er!
 Jesus, Jesus, precious Jesus! O for grace to trust him more!

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June 19, 1994

"While We Wait for the Day"
II Thess. 3

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. Both of the Thessalonian letters are composed like a sandwich. Paul is very careful not to forget the daily bread along with the meat, tomatoes and lettuce. He did not want to arouse sole interest in the climax of the Christian Era and leave these new believers without the joys of everyday life while maintaining and relishing the lifelong hope of cherishing the glorious wedding of the Lord and his bride, all the trusters in God's eternal promise, Matt. 9:14-17; Rev. 21:2,9; 22:17. In other words, Paul wanted them to know, along with the privileges of being a child of God through faith in Jesus Christ, that there are likewise serious responsibilities for believers while they wait for "that Day." First, Paul encouraged the Thessalonian believers to pray for him as a missionary dedicated to taking God's Good News that Jesus saves throughout the area, even as he had brought it to Thessalonica. God's communication about Christ (the Word) would be exalted and glorified as it then was in Thessalonica. Fully aware that Paul and his companions, Silas and Timothy, would continue to be hindered everywhere, the apostle wanted the Thessalonians to include in their prayers safety for them from unreasonable and wicked persons, for not all (in fact, at that time, not many) were guided by God's Holy Spirit with faith in Jesus as Savior. At this point in this second letter Paul reiterates the faithfulness of God to keep his promise to the believers that the evil one would not only not be able to prevent these new believers from growing in their faith in Jesus Christ ("shall stablish you"), but also, if Jesus should return, they, in that event, would be kept safely ("keep you from the evil one"). The apostle here encourages them further by expressing his confidence that their lives were and would continue to follow Paul's example while with them. They were to, above all, follow the Lord's Spirit into lives reflecting God's love, and as they served him, demonstrate the patience exemplified by Christ himself, Matt. 26:39,41; Phili. 2:5-8.

II. In vs. 6 Paul divulges a knowledge of what apparently was a problem for the Thessalonian believers. There were some among them who were conducting themselves "disorderly." These disorderly ones were to be noted and identified as those who were not following true fellowship practices. Paul stated that his activities were to be emulated. The nature of these disorderly activities involved two distinct problems, and those two were interrelated. The first we noted two weeks ago; some were interpreting Paul's details regarding Jesus' second coming as having already taken place, or that he would be arriving momentarily. If his return were here already, then they could order their lives entirely on a short-time basis. There would be no need for training youngsters for lifetime vocations or trades, and no need for storing food and clothing for off-season months (winter?). In fact, there was little or no need to work at all. Evidently, what was being proposed or practiced was that life's necessities owned by those in better condition materially were being used commonly. In vs. 7 Paul suggested that his own conduct was fitting, for was he not among the elect to be "taken

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up" when Jesus returned? He reminded them that during the three weeks he was with them, he did not shirk working for his own keep. He did not eat or lodge at others expense, but rather practiced his own trade (tentmaking, Acts 18:1-3) to support himself. (One would assume that he also supported Silas and Timothy unless they also practiced a trade.) In order to understand Paul's position more fully about his opinion regarding believers' supporting those who serve them in their spiritual needs, we should examine his first letter to the believers at Corinth, 9:1-19. He relates his Thessalonian experience as one in which he worked regularly at his trade and afterwards at teaching believers, "night and day." As an apostle he could reasonably expect material support from the believers, but he specifically wanted to add emphasis to his spreading the Gospel by not taking their monetary support. Paul's instruction to them was singular and direct: "- - if any would not work, neither should he eat," vs. 10.

III. Paul's information about their situation was that some of them were not only refraining from gainful occupations, but were using the idle time to tend to other people's business as busybodies! Therein was the second interrelated problem associated with their misinterpretation of Paul's first letter. He instructed the congregation to disassociate with such people, i.e., not to consider them to be members in good standing. Such activities destroyed their effectiveness as witnesses to the goodness of God's grace through Jesus Christ. They were wrong in misinterpreting Paul's teaching in the way they had. The problems so created, resulted not only in theological error, but produced an immediate social problem as well. They were told to correct the problems, and "with quietness eat their own bread." As they were waiting for the Lord to return, they were to maintain a constant vigil in their faith and "be not weary in well doing." The wrongdoers were to be reprimanded according to Paul's instructions but were not to be thought of as enemies. They were to be considered members of the church family still. Paul's ultimate persuasion was not an appeal to his own authority but the Lord Jesus himself, vs. 12. That emphasis is basic to the individual believer and should never be overlooked when considering ones prime allegiance in making choices. The Holy Spirit will lead a believer in making correct choices if he or she asks in faith, Matt. 7:7-11; Jam. 1:5-8; 4:2-3. As Paul concludes this second letter, note especially how he did so. His salutation of grace and peace were, of course, included, but note that he called attention especially to the fact that he was signing it with his own handwriting. Remember that in II Thess. 2:2 he noted that there was the possibility of someone other than Paul sending letters to the churches and claiming Paul to be the author. At the end of this second letter to the Thessalonians, he makes sure that they knew by his own hand that he was indeed the author. The practice of authenticating ones own authorship is still practiced today, but one would do so by registering the work with the national copyright office. Paul, of course, did not have that possibility available to him. *while we wait for the day*

Ready to go, ready to stay; Ready my place to fill;
 Ready for service, lowly or great; Ready to do his will.