



This study guide can be used for individual Bible Study, small group curriculum, or family studies.

**Small Group Leaders Note:**

The purpose of this study guide is to draw you and your group into conversation and discussion of God’s Word and its application to our lives. The questions are posed in a specific order and each of the questions has a specific purpose. As you are familiar with the purpose of each question, this will help guide the flow of the discussion.

**A high-level view of the five basic questions and their functions:**

1. Introduction (*lean in*). The goal of this first question is to get everyone in the group to “lean in” and get involved. It is normally easy to answer, fun and creates a sense of energy—so much so that you’ll see group members sometimes physically lean in as they engage in the discussion.
2. Observation (*look down*). This is an observation question. It is designed to help group members “look down” and see the relevant details and facts in the Bible passage being studied. This question establishes a solid foundation for the rest of the study. Regardless how much time someone has spent studying God’s word in their lives, everyone in the group can get involved simply by taking an observant look at what the passage says.
3. Evaluation (*look up*). What do we learn about God from this passage? This is the ultimate goal of every Bible study—to get a clearer picture of the God we worship, so that we can serve and love Him better.
4. Understanding (*look out*). This question helps group members “look out” and see the principles of the Bible passage through the lens of the world today. It builds a bridge between the facts of the passage and our understanding of it as it relates to our lives and culture.
5. Application (*look in*). Here is where group members begin to “look in” and see what God might be nudging them to change in their lives. During this part of the study, group members move from “knowing” to “doing” what God’s word says. It’s the final step of all Bible study: life change—of being transformed into the likeness of Christ.

Adapted from the Liquid Curriculum series

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# Week One

## Acts 17:1-9

August 15<sup>th</sup>, 2021

### Introduction to the study

The letters Paul wrote to the church at Thessalonica display the heart of a father to a newly born church. This church was experiencing affliction and suffering, and Paul commends them for standing firm in light of the persecution they were enduring. How we, as followers of Jesus, navigate times of trial is clearly a universal challenge; one we all wrestle with no matter the circumstances or era in which we find ourselves. How are we supposed to view the difficult times we all inevitably face? What is the anchor that steadies our souls?

Paul's answer to these questions here in First and Second Thessalonians, as well as elsewhere in scripture, is *Hope*. Hope is the one force in the universe that God has designed into life and into our psyches that enables us to persevere, to persist, to endure, and to take that next step when there seems to be no apparent reason that we should. Hope is what keeps us looking to the future. Hope is what we cling to when everything else has failed. While these two short letters cover a wide range of topics, much of what Paul writes here seems to center on hope.

One of the topics Paul explores with this young church is the question of the return of Christ. When persecution arises, it is our hope that Christ will someday come to make all things right that can serve as a life-line we can cling to. While Paul spent only three weeks founding this church, he clearly spent a good deal of those three weeks teaching these new believers on Christ's return. Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians answers some questions this church had regarding what the end times would look like. And his second letter corrects some misunderstandings that had arisen about this important doctrine. So, while these letters focus on much more than just the end times, we are going to spend some time in the introductions of this study guide giving some background on this topic.

There are several important caveats to mention before diving into this brief discussion of the return of Christ. The first caveat is the reminder that it is easy for brothers and sisters in Christ to end up producing more heat than light when discussing certain topics. The subject of the "end times" is near the top of that list. This is ironic, since Paul's purpose is to calm enflamed emotions rather than stir them up. Even still, powerful emotions can become intertwined in such discussions and we need to be mindful that we are brothers and sisters in Christ grappling with truths in God's Word. This doctrine is clearly a secondary issue that we must realize is secondary, and that it is perfectly fine to disagree and come to different conclusions on such things. There are very important primary doctrines that we all do need to agree on (e.g. the deity of Jesus, the Trinity, salvation by grace alone through faith alone—and several others). But the end times is not one of them. Regardless of differences of opinion regarding the end times, it is crucial we walk away as friends. Rather, our hope is that we can see that this can be an exciting and even fun topic to explore.

Next, the overriding truth that must guide our discussion throughout this study is a determined focus on the sovereignty of God. This is a core truth that we must come back to time and time again. It is this truth that inspires awe and wonder—that such intricate detail can be revealed to us, millennia in advance, describing what will come to pass. The sovereignty of God serves as guardrails helping remind us that the future is not uncertain. The future is set. God has written the end of the book in advance so that we can learn to trust Him more. We need not worry about the outcome. God is in control. When we keep this truth in mind, the study of the end times can be placed in its proper context—namely that of hope and trust, rather than speculation and division.

Then also, for this to be a profitable exercise, we need to approach this endeavor with a measure of humility and seek to maintain a teachable spirit. We all have presuppositions that sometimes need to be re-examined if we are ever to learn and grow. Presuppositions drive our conclusions—which then inform our theology. The only sure barrier to truth is to assume we already have it.

Lastly, we might need to put away the fear and trepidation that sometimes accompanies this type of study. We may have assumed or may have even been taught that the study of the end times is unknowable, and thus fruitless. But we need to acknowledge that the Holy Spirit included it in the Bible for a reason. Our goal here is to demystify a lot of ideas surrounding the study of the end times. Much of this kind of discussion can often be shrouded in mystery—which can make many of us either fear venturing into these waters, or sometimes obsess about it. Too often, churches avoid even discussing the end times, and so their people end up stuck in an unending cloud of confusion.

Our goal in the next few weeks is to focus primarily on background theological and worldview issues that must be understood first in order to lay a foundation for what is a rational, biblical, scholarly way to approach the study of the end times. When looking into the end times, we typically jump far too quickly to the juicy, scary, enticing, headline material in the book of Revelation, yet fail to realize that much, much groundwork must be laid before even opening up Daniel and Revelation. So, rather than explore the end times “proper,” in these introductions we will be helping lay a foundation that will get us heading in the right direction.

As you may be aware, there is a lot of crazy, sensationalistic teaching out there when it comes to eschatology, the study of last things. The problem is, some of these sensationalistic teachers are very persuasive. From these teachers, full-fledged movements sometimes begin, and websites can flourish. But what ends up being produced is not really “eschatology” (the study of the end times) but rather ends up being what can be called “*eschatomania*” (obsession with and sensationalism about the end times).

There is so much sensationalism out there when it comes to this doctrine that many people have come to lump all of it together into one category and end up throwing the baby out with the bathwater—not realizing that there is actually a responsible, scholarly, and biblical way to approach these studies. As was mentioned, the Holy Spirit included this discussion in the Bible for a reason. There is much that can be known about the end times, if we are willing to put in the work.

1. What is the biggest crowd or gathering you have ever been a part of? What was the occasion?
2. Why do you think it was Paul's custom to go to the synagogue when he first visited a city? Read Romans 1:16. Oftentimes, we fail to read all the way to the end of this verse. What does it mean that the gospel goes to the Jew first? What does this tell us about God's plan (for more background, read Romans 11:1-27)?
3. This is the sixth time Paul had to leave an area in which he was ministering because of opposition and persecution. What do we learn about God from His allowing these kinds of trials in our lives? Why do you believe God works in this way? What would Paul and Silas learn through this situation that they could not learn in any other way?
4. What does this kind of opposition to the gospel teach us about what we should expect from the world when we live as Christians? Why do you think some situations can get so emotionally charged when people are challenged with the truth of the gospel? Where have you experienced opposition to the things of God in the world around you?
5. When has your faith in Christ led to opposition from others around you? How did you respond? What did you learn about yourself and about God through this?

#### Going Deeper:

1. What was Paul's message in Acts 17:2-3? What scripture was available to him? How would you explain the gospel message using the Old Testament alone?
2. Describe in your own words what we learn in Acts 17:11. How can we apply this today?

# Week Two

## 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10

August 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2021

### Why eschatology has exploded recently

It is often asked why prophecy is such a hot topic these days. Why has our current period of history (since 1948) been such a hotbed of theological inquiry and discussion about the end times? Why is it that only now, looking back at all of church history that the church at large is finally getting around to studying this subject in any kind of depth? These are important questions to explore.

Some may say, "Hasn't every generation considered themselves to be living in the last times?" Well, that is true, in a sense. Whenever there is an intense period of suffering or persecution, the default response is to look to scripture for an explanation. Why is this? It is because the only satisfying answer to suffering is hope. The doctrine of the return of Christ is where our hope resides. Within that doctrine, there is a sense of imminence that God designed into our understanding of His return—and that was for a very good reason. While this idea of imminence is important, it's quite different than the almost fanatical pre-occupation with the subject we see today.

I believe the answer to the question of "why now" lies in the fact that this is, in fact, *the age* in which eschatology is supposed to be studied. What I mean by that is that every other major doctrine in scripture has seen a time when it was fully studied and explored by the church—and each of these periods of deep doctrinal exploration was preceded by some sort of significant crisis that caused widespread interest and concern in that specific topic.

For example, during the first few centuries of church history, the main issues the church at large grappled with were more foundational in nature—primarily because they were laying the groundwork upon which would rest the doctrine for the rest of the church for all time. Thus, in the first four centuries of the early church, the doctrines that were explored deeply included the deity of Christ, the Trinity, the nature of man, and how Christ's two natures (divine and human) were related. These were all bedrock issues the church needed to hammer out and solidify before any other doctrine—specifically because there were major heretics during the first three centuries of the church who were teaching otherwise and leading people astray. The rise of these heretics and the official church councils that condemned them were the crises that prompted the in-depth examination of those foundational issues.

Then later, in the time of the Reformation, the church wrestled with the nature of justification (how we are made right with God), authority in the church, and the role of the sacraments—all because major abuses were being committed by an apostate Roman Catholic church. These abuses were so egregious that it made the Reformation necessary. This widespread apostasy was the crisis that caused these next doctrines to be studied and explored.

Eschatology has never been studied in an in-depth way prior to a few generations ago, because there was never a pressing need to. Every theological issue

has had its time and it just so happens that *now* is the time for the study of the end times. The main reason I believe this is happening now is because we are indeed approaching the end. Daniel very clearly states in ch.12 that in the end times knowledge would increase—and what he is referring to is not just knowledge in general, but I believe it is also specifically knowledge about prophecy.

What exactly triggered the widespread interest we now see in eschatology? What was the crisis that caused this discussion to begin? The answer is: Israel became a nation again in 1948. It's clear that the return of Israel to the land in 1948 opened the eyes of a lot of people who didn't take prophecy seriously until they saw a major prophetic fulfillment take place before their eyes.

The fact that Israel is now back in her land after being in exile for nearly 2,000 years is nothing less than monumental in the history of prophetic interpretation. Very few Biblical scholars really understood this possibility prior to the late 1800's. Israel's diaspora (that the nation was dispersed throughout the world for some 2,000 years) was one of the strongest excuses people used for believing it was acceptable to read scripture in a non-literal way.

This makes a lot of sense. For example, if you were a Bible scholar in the 1600's, and you saw that there was no longer a nation of Israel and that this group of people had been scattered across the known world, it would be tempting to begin to look to some form of non-literal way of reading scripture when dealing with passages that discussed the future and fate of national Israel.

It would be difficult back in that time to understand that even though the current political reality militated against what the scripture appeared to be saying, God says what He means, and means what He says. Thus, it took real courage for scholars to stand up for a consistent, literal, prophetic interpretation and insist that even though it seemed impossible, God would indeed reconstruct and rebuild His people and their nation from the ground up—as the Bible clearly says.

This is why Israel becoming a nation again in 1948 sent shock waves through biblical scholarship. One of the only rationales supporting the allegorical methodology of reading scripture (namely, that of the nation Israel not existing) had now fallen.

Ever since that earthshattering trigger event in 1948, we can now see with much more clarity the straightforward nature of prophecy—and that every major theme of end times prophecy in the Bible is well on its way to completion. It's also clear that we need not give in to the pull toward reading scripture in a non-straightforward way.

It is no wonder that we see such a widespread interest in eschatology today. Jesus chided the Pharisees that they were able to discern the signs in the sky but unable to discern the signs of the times. Some have even called the days we're living in "the times of the signs." As one popular Bible teacher says, "We are quickly being plunged into a time about which the Bible has more to say than any other time—including the time Jesus walked the shores of Galilee, or climbed the hills of Judea."

1. Who is someone for whom you have prayed for a long time? What has been the result?



2. What do we learn about the church in Thessalonica both from 1 Thess 1:1-10 and from Acts 17? If this passage in 1 Thessalonians had been written about our church, what would it say?
3. As we see in verse 5, how does the Holy Spirit empower our witness to others? What is the role of the Holy Spirit in evangelism? What is our role?
4. What kind of example did this church set for those in the entire region (vv. 7-9)? In that day, how would it be possible for their faith to become so legendary? What kind of example does the church set for the world today?
5. What kind of model are you when it comes to faith (v.7)? Whose eyes are watching how you represent Christ? If you were given a report card for living out your faith 10 years ago vs. today, what kind of changes would there be?

#### Going Deeper:

1. Read 1 Thess 1:6. How is it possible to have joy in the midst of tribulation? Read James 1:2-4, 12; John 16:33; Hebrews 12:2; Romans 5:3; 1 Peter 4:12-14. What is the outcome of our sufferings?
2. Read 1 Thess 1:10; Romans 5:9; 1 Thess 5:9. The time of the tribulation will be the outpouring of the wrath of God upon the usurpers of this realm (Rev 16:1; Eph 5:6). What do we learn about the outpouring of God's wrath and whether or not the church will be a part of this?

# Week Three

## 1 Thessalonians 2:1-8

August 29<sup>th</sup>, 2021

### Israel is the center of God's plan

One very necessary element of a Christian worldview is the recognition of the reality of Satan and the battle that he has been waging against God ever since the beginning. The classic C.S. Lewis work *The Screwtape Letters* imaginatively paints a picture for us of various schemes Satan uses to thwart the plan of God. Knowing that Satan is real, and active, and strategically scheming against what God is accomplishing helps us to more clearly identify and understand what is happening in the world around us, as well as throughout history. The study of the end times is, at its most basic level, a description of the final stages of that warfare.

Clearly, Israel plays the central role in the overarching plan of God as well as in that warfare. We read in the early chapters of Genesis that God's plan of redemption began as he chose one man, Abraham, to be the father of a nation. It is through that nation that God promised a redeemer. And through that redeemer God is saving the world. Israel is God's chosen nation and it is through the conduit of Israel that God's plan is revealed and enacted. This one truth about the centrality of Israel must be our starting place when beginning to explore the end times and how eschatology fits in with God's plan.

But what is Satan's plan? Scripture encourages us to not be unaware of his designs (2 Cor 2:11). We can understand much more about how history has unfolded when looking at both sides of the conflict. In his long war against God, it can be argued that Satan views his mission simply as thwarting the revealed plan of God. It appears he believes that if he can nullify even one promise of God, he can show that God is not trustworthy—and thus Satan, in his way of thinking, would be victorious over God and worthy of the worship he desires.

In order to track Satan's attacks (on the revealed plan of God), we need to look at what precisely God has revealed as His plan and when these revelations have come. As we look all the way back to the beginning, after the Garden of Eden, what do we learn about the plan of God? All God had revealed thus far was that the seed of the woman would crush the head of the serpent (Gen 3:15). So, all Satan could glean from this is that it would be one of the offspring of Eve that would be his undoing.

In response to that revelation from God, what does Satan then do? He focused his attacks on the seed of the woman. Cain was the first seed of the woman, and he was tempted (presumably by Satan) to commit murder when, as God said, "...*sin was crouching at the door...*" (Gen 4:7). Satan was simply trying to thwart the plan of God by corrupting Cain. Then later in Genesis 6, Satan attacked the lines of descent from Adam down to Noah—with the "fallen ones," the Nephilim. Many believe he was attempting to corrupt all the possible generational lines descending from Adam through which Messiah might come. If he could pollute all of these genealogies, then Messiah could not come. Again, Satan is, all along, attacking what he knows about the

plan of God—what God has thus far revealed. As we see, God repels Satan’s attack with the flood, and begins again with Noah, a man possessing an undefiled genealogy.

As we move forward through history, God progressively reveals more and more of His plans—thus Satan has more clarity as to where to focus his attacks. God chooses Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to be the progenitors of a race of people through whom God would bring the savior. With this new revelation, Satan would now no longer have to attack every line coming from Adam. He knew where to focus his attacks—directly on the people of Israel. He now knew that if he could wipe out this people group, then Messiah could not come and God could not accomplish His purpose.

So from then on, we see Satan attacking the people of Israel. Sometimes people will ask why this little tiny nation of people has been so abused and assaulted every step of their journey throughout history. The answer is: Satan is the god of this world, and he influences people and events and powers to accomplish what he wants. He has been at war with this revealed plan of God from the beginning. And this revealed plan clearly focuses on the people of Israel. So, this is where Satan has focused his attacks. This one fact is the source and origin of anti-Semitism.

Moving forward, when we come to the time of Moses, Satan inspires Pharaoh to drown nearly a whole generation of Jews in the Nile, hoping to prevent the coming of their deliverer. But God protects Moses as a baby. Fast-forward to the time of Esther, where Haman gets very close to completely destroying the Jews, using the king’s authority to do so. But God thwarts Satan’s plan again. These attacks continued all the way until we come to the time of Christ’s birth where we see Herod order all the babies in the region to be slaughtered. Satan knew Messiah was coming. These are all attacks by Satan on the plan of God—by attacking Israel.

All throughout history Satan has attacked the people of God—first, trying to prevent the coming of Messiah. After he failed with that mission, he is now trying to prevent the return of Messiah.

What does Satan know about the return of Christ? He knows that it must happen in conjunction with the nation of Israel. So, following the defeat of Satan at the cross, in 70 AD, under the command of Titus Vespasian, the 5th, 10th, 12th, and 15th legions of the Roman army surrounded Jerusalem. After a long siege, they completely leveled the city of Jerusalem scattering the Jews to the four corners of the known world.

This started the diaspora wherein the nation of Israel would not exist for nearly 2,000 years. Then at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, in response to a major work of God in regathering the Jews from all over the world into their land once again, Satan displayed his fury in sponsoring the holocaust and wiping out over six million Jews.

But the question we have to ask ourselves is this: why would Satan care about the Jews after already being defeated in his plan to foil the coming of Messiah? It is because he knows that according to Romans 11:25-26, a partial hardening will happen to Israel “until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in,” and then God will “pour out His Spirit upon them” (Zech 12:10), so that “*they will look on Him whom they have pierced, and mourn for Him as for an only Son.*”

In Hosea 5:15 God says that He will go away and return to His place, until Israel acknowledges their sin of rejecting Him as Messiah, and then they will seek His face. It

says *"in their tribulation they will seek Him."* They will say, *"come, let us return to the Lord. For He has torn us, but He will heal us. He has wounded us, but He will bandage us. He will revive us after two days. He will raise us up on the third day."* When Israel acknowledges their sin of rejecting Messiah and petitions His return, that very act will usher in the second coming.

It is the petition of the Spirit-indwelt, revived nation of Israel that will trigger Christ's return. Therefore, if Satan can wipe out Israel prior to this petition, in his mind, he can prevent Christ from returning. That is the reason for the anti-Semitism and all the attacks on the Jews over the centuries. Satan is real. He is alive and well. And he is about the business of attempting to thwart the plan of God.

If we are ever to understand God's plan, and how the end times fit in with that plan, we need to acknowledge the central role Israel plays in that plan. Israel is the very centerpiece of God's plan. When you want to know what time it is prophetically, all you need to do is look at Israel.

1. Describe a time when you faced opposition in sharing your faith.
2. What were the circumstances that forced Paul to leave Thessalonica (Acts 17:5-10)? How might this be construed as a failure, or in vain? What had happened in Philippi that Paul refers to in 1 Thess 2:2 (Acts 16:16-40)? How would Paul's continued example of perseverance in the face of suffering encourage his readers?
3. Why do you think Paul takes the time to defend his ministry in vv 1-8? What can you glean from these verses as to the sorts of accusations that were being leveled against him? What images does Paul use to illustrate how he felt about this church and how he treated them (2:7, 11)?
4. Why do you think there is such passion with those who are opposed to Christianity? What is at the root of their anger? What does this teach us about God and the witness He has left within each of us (Romans 2:18-23)?
5. What methods have you used to share your faith in the past? What has worked well for you? What methods have you seen others use that you might take issue with?

Going Deeper:

1. In 1 Thess 2:8 Paul mentions imparting to the Thessalonians the gospel of God. What are the necessary elements of the gospel that we should include when sharing our faith? List them out and discuss them one by one.
2. What do we learn about Paul from this passage? What qualities does he highlight that you might want to increase in?

# Week Four

## 1 Thessalonians 2:9-16

September 6<sup>th</sup>, 2021

### We have a promise-making, promise-keeping God

We have taken our first few steps together in exploring and developing a theological framework upon which we can build a solid understanding of the end times. We began by introducing the topic of the end times, and highlighted how Paul includes eschatology (the study of the end times) as one of the topics he covers in First and Second Thessalonians. We then explored why the study of the end times has grown in popularity recently. And last week, we began to describe how vital it is to see the chosen nation of Israel as the very center of God's plan of redemption—not only in the past, but in the future as well.

It is crucial for us to recognize that we will never be able to understand rightly the plan of God and how the end times play into those plans if we are confused about the role Israel plays. In fact, as we will see more clearly, how we view the future and fate of Israel is the central question in all of end times study.

If we are ever to truly know God, one unshakeable truth we must cement in our minds is that our God is a promise-making, promise-keeping God. This is who God is. That brings us to the question: "What does the Bible say about Israel and about the promises has God made to His chosen people?"

In Genesis 12:1-3, we see the first mention of the Abrahamic covenant. In this covenant, God promises to bless Israel and the world through Israel.

*Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go forth from your country, and from your relatives and from your father's house, to the land which I will show you; and I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great; and so you shall be a blessing; and I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed."*

This is an unconditional promise (or covenant). In Genesis 15 we see a ceremony wherein God ratifies this promise to Abraham as unconditional—which means it cannot be broken or forfeited. In those days, the process by which you would seal a treaty or contract would involve cutting several animals in half and lining them up in two rows. Both parties to the contract would then pass between the animals together. In doing this, what you would be saying is: "May *this* happen to you or me if either one of us does not fulfill the responsibilities of the contract." This is how they would "cut a deal."

Here, in Genesis 15, we see God puts Abram to sleep and God's presence alone passes through the animals. The lesson from this is that since it was God and God alone that passed through the pieces of the animals that had been cut in half, it is incumbent upon God and God alone to fulfill the requirements of this covenant. This means there is nothing Israel can do to break this promise from God. God will keep His promises to Israel.

It is also important to understand that the Abrahamic covenant is not only God's promise to bless Israel, it is God's promise of salvation to the entire world. Our salvation is also tied to this unbreakable promise. Therefore, the unconditional nature of this covenant should be eminently important to us as well.

In Jeremiah 31:35-37 we also read:

*Thus says the LORD, who gives the sun for light by day and the fixed order of the moon and the stars for light by night, Who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar; the LORD of hosts is His name: "If this fixed order departs from before Me," declares the LORD, "then the offspring of Israel also will cease from being a nation before Me forever" Thus says the LORD, "If the heavens above can be measured and the foundations of the earth searched out below, then I will also cast off all the offspring of Israel for all that they have done," declares the LORD.*

Here we clearly see that God promises that He has a future for the nation of Israel—that Israel will never completely cease to be a nation. As long as we look up in the sky and see the sun, moon, and stars, we can be confident that God will keep the promises He made to Israel.

The list of passages that describe God's faithfulness to His promises to Israel is seemingly endless. In Genesis 17:8, God promises to give Israel their land as an everlasting possession. In Leviticus chapter 26, as God is laying out the Mosaic Law and all the commandments Israel was to follow as they became a nation, God described the blessings for obedience, and the curses for disobedience. He then promised them that when they rejected Him, He would send them into exile—but that He would restore them back to their land. This restoration would happen because of the iron-clad promise He made to them in the Abrahamic covenant.

Not only did God promise to restore Israel from their 70-year Babylonian captivity, He promised to restore them later from *all the nations* to which they would be scattered in the diaspora (70 A.D.). After Israel rejected Messiah, God indeed allowed them to be scattered all across the known world. They had no homeland for more than 1900 years. But God promised to restore them back to their land.

In Deuteronomy 30:1-6, God describes this regathering back to their homeland. This is sometimes referred to as "the first regathering." This is what happened leading up to 1948 when Israel miraculously became a nation again. Jeremiah 23:3-8 also describes this regathering. Ezekiel 36:22-32 describes how God will take the Israelites from all the nations where they had been scattered and bring them into the land of their forefathers and provide for them the New Covenant that we in the church already enjoy—a covenant that was promised to Israel (Jeremiah 31:31-34). Ezekiel 39:25-29 describes beautifully how God will restore the fortunes of His people and how they will forget their disgrace. They will live securely on their own land. Then Isaiah 11:10-12 describes how God will regather His people *a second time* (this will happen at the end of the tribulation), after they have been persecuted by the antichrist. No matter what they do, Israel will always be God's people. He will always draw them back to Himself.

In Isaiah 41:8-9, God reassures Israel that He has not rejected them. Paul echoes this pronouncement boldly in Romans 11:1-4 by saying in the strongest possible terms that God has not rejected His chosen people Israel. Paul goes on in that chapter to

describe how God is using the Jews being temporarily set aside to draw the Gentiles to Himself. He then argues that God uses the Jews' jealousy in seeing the Gentiles blessed by God to draw the Jews back to Himself—and then Paul says triumphantly in Romans 11:26 that at the return of Christ all Israel will be saved.

The faithfulness of God is one of the most prominent themes all throughout the Bible. When studying scripture, we must use this all-important truth as a lens through which we read God's word. In other words, we must develop our hermeneutic (our method for reading and studying scripture) with this truth in mind. This then sets us down the right path for approaching eschatology.

1. What was the hardest job you have ever had?
2. Why do you think Paul worked so hard as a tent-maker in many of the places he planted churches? What does he say ministers of the gospel are entitled to—yet why do you think he did not avail himself of this (Acts 20:33-35; 2 Thess 3:7-9; 1 Cor 9:6-14)?
3. What stands out to you in 1 Thess 2:13? Read 2 Tim 3:15-17; Hebrews 4:12; Matt 4:4; Mark 13:31. How do each of these passages help us understand 1 Thess 2:13 better? What can we see more clearly about God from this?
4. Who has been a positive influence on you, encouraging godly living? How so? How can you be that kind of positive influence this week for someone else?
5. Do you think we really treat the Bible as the word of God? Why or why not? How would we act differently if we truly did?

Going Deeper:

1. Who were these Jews that were being an impediment to the gospel (1 Thess 2:14-16)? Read Acts 7:51-54; Acts 3:13-15; Romans 9:6-8. Were these God-fearing, God-worshipping Jews? How do you think the behavior of these unbelieving Jews led to the rise of anti-Semitism within the early church?
2. What is the work that the word of God performs in us (2:13)? What does it take for this to actually happen in our lives (i.e. what are the practical steps in this process)?

## Week Five

### 1 Thessalonians 2:17-3:13

September 12<sup>th</sup>, 2021

#### Hermeneutics

Now that we have touched on a few important foundational ideas, it's time to dig a little deeper into how studying eschatology works. Along the way, we are going to need to discuss some more scholarly, academically-oriented ideas, using terminology that may or may not be familiar. We will try to explain terms as we go. But you might want to buckle up for this week. We're heading back to English class for a few minutes.

As we begin to explore the various methods out there for approaching the study of the end times, we need to understand that the primary issue involved in eschatology is not theology, but rather hermeneutics. What I mean by that is—we must first decide *how* we are going to read the Bible before we can interpret *what* we read. Your choice of hermeneutical methodologies determines what eschatological camp you end up in. I will explain this important idea as we go.

So, to define our terms, the word "hermeneutics" refers to "the art and science of biblical interpretation." It is a science, in that there are specific rules that must be applied if we are to rightly understand the author's intent in scripture. But it is also an art, in that there is subtlety and nuance that must be taken into consideration as well.

For example, in everyday life, when we read a book of poetry, we read it differently than we read an encyclopedia or a phone book. We understand that different rules apply. The same thing is true in reading scripture. When reading wisdom literature (Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, etc.), we understand that the writer is making general observations about life. When we read historical sections of scripture, we understand that the author is recording what actually happened. There are rules that must be followed so that the intended meaning will be understood. There are rules to be applied when reading apocalyptic literature as well—which is the genre that end times studies falls into. (We will be discussing the literary genre of apocalyptic literature in week 8—if you want to read ahead to get a good definition.)

A very helpful guideline has developed over the years called "The Golden Rule of biblical interpretation." This rule states: "When the plain sense of Scripture makes common sense, seek no other sense; therefore, take every word at its primary, ordinary, usual meaning unless the facts of the immediate context, studied in light of related passages and axiomatic and fundamental truths, indicate clearly otherwise." This rule helps put some guardrails onto how we read scripture. We cannot simply make scripture say whatever we want it to say to suit our own purposes. This is the Word of God and we must not take it lightly. We need to humbly approach the study of the Bible realizing that harmful and destructive theology has led many astray over the centuries.

This "Golden Rule" encourages what is known as a literal hermeneutic. This is in contrast to an allegorical method of hermeneutics. The literal method assumes that the



Holy Spirit wants us to understand what is written in a straightforward, natural way. Yet it also recognizes that types, symbols, metaphors, and allegories are found throughout the Bible, as they are in other kinds of literature. However, it is important to see that these literary devices are used to expound upon and explain the literal message of Scripture, not to reinterpret or infuse new meaning into the text.

For example, John 8:1 says, "*Jesus went to the Mount of Olives.*" That is straightforward and literal. Then John 8:12 reports Jesus as saying, "*I am the light of the world.*" That is figurative or symbolic. Literal hermeneutics does not deny the existence of figurative language. It does, however, deny that such figures must be interpreted so as to destroy, alter, or ignore the literal truth intended through the use of such figures. When Jesus says He is the light of the world, He is using the imagery of light to help us understand more about one of His roles. There is much language in Daniel and Revelation that is symbolic or figurative. But we must understand that if the Holy Spirit is explaining an idea or event to all cultures throughout time, it would be necessary to use analogies to get the meaning across to these various cultures in various eras.

Metaphor, simile, and symbolism are simply literary devices or tools for expounding upon and explaining the intended literal meaning more clearly. Allegory is also a valid literary tool that can accomplish that same purpose. For example, Paul creates an allegory in Galatians chapter 4 to help explain a literal truth. He uses the historical figures of Hagar and Sarah to make a comparison between the Mosaic covenant and the New covenant.

But all these literary tools are sometimes confused with an allegorical method of approaching the reading of scripture. This method looks for a deeper meaning that often ignores the literal sense and seeks to produce a more profound significance that may have nothing to do with the plain, apparent meaning. Paul is not reinterpreting the historical event he mentions in Galatians 4 to say that it actually means something different. He is simply creating an allegory, an analogy or a comparison to help convey truth.

Bible scholar Roy Zuck explains it well. He says, "The interpretation of allegories should not be confused with 'allegorizing' or the allegorical method of interpretation. Allegorizing is an approach that searches for deeper meanings than are apparent in the text, ideas that differ from those clearly identified in the Bible passages." A question we must grapple with is whether the meaning of a text lies with the author's intent, or is it up to the reader to determine? Since the author here is God, I am going to humbly bow out and allow God to say what He wants to say.

Here are some guidelines to follow when interpreting scripture that will help keep us safe. Following the Golden Rule above is very helpful. We must interpret scripture understanding that our goal is not to discover hidden truths, or to be unique in our interpretation. We must interpret literally whenever possible, unless it is clear that a figurative use is being employed to help make the meaning more clear. But even then, the figurative language simply clarifies the literal, apparent meaning. We must not interpret scripture in light of our own personal experience, but rather, interpret our experience in light of the truth of scripture. And we must be humble when approaching scripture—not allowing our presuppositions to color the interpretation. We ought not

interpret scripture (or do theology) in isolation. Pride is a dangerous weapon Satan often uses to draw us away from God's truth. We must also recognize that we can consult, with great benefit to us, the insights of other Spirit-filled believers through commentaries and sermons, both today and all throughout history to help inform our understandings.

1. Describe a time when you were really homesick. When you think of the idea of "home," what is the first thing that comes to mind?
2. How does Paul feel about the church in Thessalonica (2:17-20; 3:6-10)? What specifically does he say in verse 19 about their significance to him? What does the second coming have to do with this?
3. Apparently, when Paul was in Thessalonica, he warned them of coming affliction and persecution (1 Thess 3:4). Why would he do this? What would this accomplish? Why would he then remind them of this expected affliction again in this letter? How could Paul go so far as to say that this was his destiny (Acts 9:15-16). In light of this, how ought we then view the trials of this life? What does this understanding of trials teach us about God?
4. What areas do you see Christians today struggling with the most? How might having an expectation of afflictions affect how Christians handle these trials?
5. In what ways have you been encouraged by someone else's faith? How have you encouraged others? Why is this encouragement so important?

Going Deeper:

1. What does it mean when Paul says, "Satan thwarted us..." in 2:18? Read 1 Peter 5:8; Matthew 13:19; 2 Cor 4:4; Eph 2:2; 6:12. How does Satan operate? What ought our response be to his designs (Eph 6:10-18)?
2. What is the difference between evangelizing and discipling? What did this look like in Paul's life? What does it look like in your life?

## Week Six

### 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8

September 19<sup>th</sup>, 2021

#### The background of allegorical hermeneutics

Last time we began exploring why this issue of hermeneutics must be the starting place for exploring what the Bible says about the end times. We highlighted the fact that not everyone chooses to read the Bible in the same way. Some choose to take the ideas we read in scripture at face value, while others seek for deeper, hidden meanings; and have come up with a process for doing so called the allegorical method. It is important to understand that this issue of allegorical vs. literal hermeneutics is not a recent development. A little history can help us understand how this problem developed in the early church. Here, a battle was waged over how we ought to read scripture.

In examining this history, we need to keep in mind though the long war of Satan against God. Clearly, his aim is to draw people away from pursuing God. He uses every possible means to do that. When looking at history through the lens of Satan's strategy, this battle over hermeneutics begins to make perfect sense. Satan would absolutely want to introduce competing ideas for how we do something even as simple and foundational as reading God's word. If he can get people to empty the scriptures of their intended meaning, then he has won a great battle.

So how did this controversy about how to interpret scripture arise? There were two competing schools of thought regarding hermeneutics in the early church. One was the Syrian school of Antioch, which championed the historical and literal approach to scripture. The other was a Greek center of thought located in Alexandria, Egypt. They advocated for an allegorical or spiritual hermeneutic. They were heavily influenced by Greek (Platonic) philosophy—which saw matter as evil and spirit as good. This drove them to see the straightforward interpretation of a literal, physical, coming kingdom of God as fleshly—and thus, evil. (This same philosophy would later introduce the heresy that Christ was not actually physically a human, but only appeared to be.) Thus, they opted to spiritualize whatever they could to avoid the connection with the physical. The early church father Origen, later branded a heretic, was the champion for using the allegorical method in reading scripture.

Because there was a strong anti-Semitic presence in the early church, there was a push to reinterpret passages that referred to Israel. Some in the early church had laid the blame for the death of Jesus at the feet of Israel. Thus, they wanted to exclude Israel from having a future in God's plan. When reading the scriptures literally, one sees that the kingdom of God is something that is coming physically here on earth (rather than in some sort of spiritualized reign of Christ only in our hearts), and that this coming kingdom is connected to Israel. According to scripture, the Messiah, through Israel, will reign politically over all the nations. This literal, physical, political reign did not fit with their Platonic presuppositions. Thus, Origen

and others pushed the church toward reinterpreting the term Israel to mean something other than what it had always meant.

The allegorical method allowed them to import into established biblical terms whatever meaning they desired. This birthed the idea that the church somehow inherits the promises God made to Israel. Thus, the idea that the church was the “new Israel” grew out of this faulty hermeneutical approach. And because it suited the politics of the Roman Catholic church, it came to be adopted church-wide. It was not until the Reformation that the tide began to turn against this very harmful practice of not interpreting scripture literally.

If we apply this allegorical method to specific passages, the folly of such an approach quickly becomes apparent. In Romans 10:1, Paul wrote “Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved.” The allegorical method tells us that Israel = the Church. So accordingly, they would argue this verse should really be read: “Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for the church is that they may be saved.” Clearly, this borders on the comical. Since the Church is the body of Christ, then they are already, undoubtedly saved. To make the assumption that Israel and the Church are the same results in all kinds of absurdities.

Furthermore, if the church was the new Israel, Romans 11 would be gibberish. The juxtaposition Paul makes between Israel and the church only makes sense if you read it in a straightforward way. Paul argues that God used Israel's disobedience for the purpose of ensuring that salvation would come to the Gentiles (who comprise the church). Then God used the salvation of the Gentiles to cause jealousy in Israel to draw them back to Himself. There would be no need for any juxtaposition if the church were the New Israel.

If we apply the principle of plain, normal interpretation to scripture, we will understand that the term “Israel” always and only refers to the new name of Jacob, and the nation that came from his seed—and thus we will also naturally see a difference between Israel and the Church in scripture and in the outworking of God's plan. It is this one issue—the identity of and future of Israel that is at the heart of the dispute between the various approaches to the end times.

Unfortunately, those that created the allegorical method of interpreting scripture believed as a presupposition that God was finished with Israel, and this drove them to create a hermeneutical approach that allowed them to manipulate the text of scripture to make it say what they wanted it to say.

We must not let our presuppositions drive our theology. This is entirely backwards. We must let God's word say what it says. Then we can formulate our theology based on what we read. Doing it the other way is not “exegesis” (taking “out” of the text what is there), but rather “eisegesis” (putting into the text something that is not there). This is what we see in other approaches to reading scripture. The originators of this allegorical system were committed to anti-Israel and Platonic presuppositions and then justified using allegory to read the text in a creative way, because that allowed them to reach their desired theological conclusions.

As one writer notes, allegorization “...is to disregard the common signification of words and give wing to all manner of fanciful speculation. It does not draw out the legitimate meaning of an author's language but foists into it whatever the whim or

fancy of an interpreter may desire. As a system, therefore, it puts itself beyond all well-defined principles and laws."

We must be careful when reading the word of God to treat it as such. Placing ourselves as the arbiter of meaning by utilizing allegorization and spiritualization opens the door to, as another writer puts it, "...subjectivism and uncontrolled speculation. It gives emphasis to the hidden, secret, and imported meaning. Through the allegorical method anyone can prove any argument in any way, because there is no objective control for the interpreter. He is seeking after the 'hidden' and 'spiritual' meaning of the text." In the end, as another writer notes, "...the allegorical approach de-historicizes the text and undermines the idea that texts are bearers of meaning. Instead, they become a sort of code that needs unlocking with a secret key which only belongs to the initiated—which is gnostic rather than rational."

One of the doctrines that came out of the Reformation is known as "the perspicuity of scripture." This means that the message of the Bible is clear and understandable, and that the Bible can be understood in its normal sense. This was in contrast to the Roman Catholic Church, which taught the opposite: that the Bible was too difficult for the common person to understand. Thus, they argued, the people should not be trusted to read it for themselves. This was one of the great victories of the Reformation: getting the word of God back into the hands of the people. Let us not take lightly the freedom the Reformers regained for us.

1. What was the one rule that was hardest for you to keep as a child?
2. What command does Paul reaffirm to his readers (1 Thess 4:2-7)? Why do you think he states it in such strong terms (v.2, 8)? How does he describe this idea? How would this be particularly applicable to them, being a new church in a pagan environment?
3. While all sin is sin, why do you think that sins of a sexual nature have such far-reaching ramifications for Christians? What does this particular sin say about our identity in Christ, our intended reflection of Him to the world, and regarding the integrity of our personal witness (1 Cor 6:15-20)?
4. What would you say to someone who might argue that a Christian is not under law, but has freedom, and that as long as no one gets hurt, they can do whatever they would like?
5. What do you see as God's role in sanctification? What do you see as your role? Who controls the pace at which sanctification happens? What does this look like practically?

Going Deeper:

1. What does it look like to “possess one’s own vessel in sanctification and honor” (4:4)? While sanctification involves much more than sins of a sexual nature, why does this particular issue serve as such a touchpoint, or barometer, of the state of our heart and the progress of our sanctification?
2. So many of us struggle with understanding God’s will for our lives. Perhaps we might begin by simply reading the passages that state, “...for this is God’s will.” Read 1 Tim 2:3-4; 1 Thess 4:3; Ephesians 5:17-18; 1 Thess 5:18; 1 Peter 2:19 (along with Phil 1:29). These and other passages state directly (and indirectly) what the will of God is. From these verses, what did you come up with for God’s will for the believer?

# Week Seven

## 1 Thessalonians 4:9-12

September 26<sup>th</sup>, 2021

### An overview of the various millennial views

One question many people ask when the subject of the end times arises is: why should I care? Doesn't Jesus tell us that no one knows the day or the hour of His return? Why should I take the time to study it? These are excellent questions. One truth we need to understand more clearly, though, is that our eschatology (understanding of the end times) and our ecclesiology (our understanding of the nature and purpose of the church) are intimately related. Biblical scholar Thomas Ice has noted, "One's view of the future has tremendous impact upon what one believes an individual should do in the present."

For example, if your eschatology teaches that the world will become a better and better place and that culture will be transformed as a prerequisite to and in order that the kingdom might be ushered in, then that is the kind of work your church will be about. Your church will take up culture as its target. But if you believe the Bible says that it is not through culture or government that the kingdom will come, but that it will be from God intruding into our world and destroying the current systems we have blasphemously created, then you will more clearly see that our job is to spread the gospel and be involved in the work of God transforming hearts (rather than culture). Whatever your eschatology is, then that is the kind of work you and your church will be doing. It is vitally important that we rightly understand the purpose for which the church exists—and this comes in large part from understand the plan of God (which necessarily involves eschatology).

As we continue to lay some foundation for this study, it is important to give a broad overview of the major viewpoints when it comes to the study of the end times. One thing we need to clearly state up front is that all the positions we are going to cover are within what is called "the camp of orthodoxy." What that means is that all of these positions are held by Bible-believing Christians. There are certain doctrines that Christians can agree to disagree upon—agreeably, and this is one of them. We need to be sure not to demonize those who hold different positions when it comes to eschatology. Our church believes in and teaches the premillennial return of Christ (which we will define shortly—and is where we will spend our time exploring). It is part of our doctrinal statement. But we are happy to fellowship with those who hold alternative orthodox positions. It is also important to understand, though, that the only way to get to a premillennial understanding is through a literal hermeneutic (the way we read scripture). This is why such emphasis is being placed on this hermeneutical issue.

The primary point of dispute in this issue of the end times surrounds what the Bible details as the role and purpose of Israel in God's plan. Does the Bible describe Israel as a failed plan by God in the Old Testament with their only remaining purpose being to serve as a cautionary tale for Christians today, and that all the promises God

made to Israel now devolve to the church? In other words, is the church the New Israel? Or does the Bible proclaim the opposite: that God is a promise-making, promise-keeping God—that all the promises God made to His covenant people Israel, He will keep? That is the primary issue that determines which camp you identify with and which position you hold.

The passage that serves as somewhat of a starting place, and which gives us a benchmark to work out from when answering this question, is Revelation chapter 20. Here, in this one chapter, the Holy Spirit inspired the apostle John to write no less than **six** times that there will be in the future something known as a Millennium—a thousand year period in which Christ will sit on David’s throne in the city of Jerusalem and will rule and reign here on this present earth. This Millennium is the beginning of the promised kingdom that God has vowed to give His people all throughout the Old Testament. The term Millennium simply means a thousand years. All biblical views of the end times revolve around when one believes the return of Christ happens in relation to the Millennium. Within the premillennial camp is also debated the question of when the rapture will happen. This is not an issue we will be exploring fully here.

One of the things we will try to accomplish in this study is to clarify misconceptions people sometimes have about these issues. While many folks argue that there are three primary positions when it comes to the Millennium (premillennialism, postmillennialism, and amillennialism), it is important to see that there are actually four.

Premillennialism teaches that the return of Christ and the inauguration of the kingdom happens prior to the literal 1,000 year Millennium. Postmillennialism holds that He returns after the Millennium (which they define as simply a long period of time, rather than a literal 1,000 years), and that the kingdom promised in the Old Testament is not literal, but rather a matter of Christ ruling in our hearts. Amillennialism argues that there is no literal millennium nor physical reign of Christ. They also believe the kingdom consists of Christ ruling spiritually in our hearts with many seeing the spiritual return of Christ and all of the end times event already as having happened. The fourth position is called “dispensational premillennialism.” This position would distinguish itself from what is sometimes called “historic premillennialism” (and, really, all other positions) by arguing that God will keep the promises He made to Israel and Israel will have a role and future in God’s plan. This is the key takeaway. Dispensational premillennialism is the only position that believes that God has a plan and future for national Israel.

While how you deal with the clear teaching in Revelation 20 appears to be the determining factor as to what eschatological camp in which you find yourself, what really lies behind the scenes is the question of how you choose to interpret scripture—as we explored in the past few weeks. As the opponents to premillennialism will readily admit, when you employ a consistent, literal method of interpreting scripture, you will come up with a premillennial understanding of the end times.

Again, we need to dispel some common myths when it comes to how these various positions developed. When we look back at church history, the first couple of centuries were pretty uniformly premillennial in their approach. This idea goes



against much of what is erroneously taught about the history of end times thought. However, the term that is used in early church history to refer to their understanding of the Millennium is “Chiliasm–” which refers to a viewpoint that recognized a literal 1,000 years.

Later in the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> centuries, the philosophical and historical factors we mentioned earlier led to development of these alternative viewpoints. But the way they were introduced into the theology of the church was through the allegorical method of interpreting scripture. This is the approach we explored over the past few weeks which proposes that we should seek to discover a deeper, spiritual meaning that lies behind the apparent, literal meaning of the text. According to this view, the literal reading becomes sort of a code that needs to be deciphered before the more significant and hidden meaning is discovered.

You can imagine the perils of such an approach. Once we allow ourselves to look for “deeper meanings” beyond the literal meaning then there is no limit to what we can imagine and import into our understandings and explanations of the biblical text. This unfortunate reality came to pass in the next few centuries of church history, in that the literal understanding was eventually ignored altogether, and this subjective spiritual meaning became the accepted, approved meaning authorized by the Roman Catholic church. This allowed them to exert power and control over their people by reading the text of scripture in whatever way they desired.

So, to summarize, the Millennium that is mentioned six times in Revelation chapter 20 is the focus of how we separate into the various views regarding how the end times will play out. What allows some people to see this Millennium as something other than literal is an approach to reading scripture that seeks out a deeper, spiritual meaning behind the text. Where this all ultimately leads is to a question regarding whether or not God will fulfill the promises He made to Israel in the future. As we examined in week four, scripture is clear about the truth that our God is a God who keeps His promises.

1. Who is your best friend? Or perhaps was your best friend growing up? Describe your relationship.
2. What does Paul mean that we are taught by God to love one another (4:9)? Read John 13:34; 1 John 4:19. How do these verses inform this discussion? How is it a new commandment if it is said that we are taught by God (hint: what is the connection to the New Covenant and the coming of the Holy Spirit)? How does God’s love motivate our love?
3. Read John 14:15; 1 John 3:13-18; 1 John 4:20-21. What else do we learn about love for God? What is the connection between love and obedience? What do we learn about the heart of God through this discussion? What do we learn about love by looking at God?

4. How ought a lifestyle that bears witness to God affect our sexual morality, work relationships, priorities (financial, time, attention), the love we show others, and our pursuit of sanctification?
5. What does 1 Thess 4:11-12 look like in your life? What is lifestyle evangelism? How is it necessary but not sufficient? What truths will you take away from this short but powerful section of scripture?

Going Deeper:

1. What does Paul mean by showing love to all the brothers in Macedonia (1 Thess 4:10)? 2 Cor 8:1-4; 8:10-15, 24. Why do you think this issue is so important to Paul?
2. Read Mark 12:28-34. What does Jesus say is the greatest and second greatest commandment? Why do you think He would say this? How can the whole of the Christian life be subsumed under this statement? In other words, what does Jesus mean that upon these two commands depend the whole Law and the Prophets (Matt 22:40)? What would actually doing these things look like in everyday life?

# Week Eight

## 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

October 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2021

### Apocalyptic prophecy and the book of Daniel

The study of the end times requires us to take a step back to get a view of the big picture. We need to compile all that we know of God's revelation of Himself and His plan, and organize that together in a way that allows us to view it from the biggest possible perspective. In order to do that, we need to see that there are different kinds of literature represented in scripture. The Bible contains both poetry and history, as well as epistles (letters), narrative, gospel, and wisdom literature. But the one genre that helps us take that giant step back and view things from the big picture is apocalyptic prophecy. This is a genre of literature that reveals to us that God is outside of time. It is through this particular form of revelation that we begin to understand that it is God who holds the future in His hands. He alone is able to reveal the future to us because He knows what He is going to cause to happen. If you recall, in week one, we mentioned that the sovereignty of God is the starting place when approaching this kind of study. Nothing reveals the sovereignty of God like the study of the end times.

So, what is apocalyptic prophecy? The Greek term "apocalupsis" means an "uncovering, unveiling, a revealing." It is the term used in Revelation 1:1, which begins by saying, "*The revelation of Jesus Christ...*" So, an apocalypse is an unveiling or a revelation of something previously hidden. The book of Revelation is a revealing of who Jesus Christ truly is. Apocalyptic prophecy is that special brand of prophecy that has a cosmic sweep to it. It takes us on a journey that first gives us a peek into what will happen shortly, and then broadens the scope to reveal how that initial peek is really a preview of what God will accomplish in the end times. Although there are other examples in the Bible of apocalyptic prophecy, the books of Daniel and Revelation are really the only entire books that fall into that category.

One mistake many people make when trying to learn about the end times is to jump straight into the book of Revelation, not realizing that Revelation is a very Jewish book. One reason we don't understand the book of Revelation very well is that we don't know our Old Testament as well as we might. Revelation is a book of 404 verses. Yet, within those verses are over 800 allusions to the Old Testament. Many of those allusions come from the book of Daniel. If you want to know more about eschatology, or anything about the book of Revelation for that matter, you need to start in the book of Daniel. In fact, Revelation chapters 6-19 are simply an elaboration of a prophecy in Daniel 9:24-27. Therefore, Daniel is where we must begin.

Daniel is, in essence, a book of timelines. It is a roadmap wherein God is revealing how He is going to deal with the world—both through political empires and through the destiny of Israel. That is why Daniel is so crucial to understand. Jesus Himself points us to Daniel in Matthew 24 and Luke 21. He tells us in Luke 21:23-24 that one of the key signs of His return is tied to who controls the city of Jerusalem. He

says that Jerusalem will be trampled underfoot until the “times of the Gentiles” are fulfilled. To understand what the times of the Gentiles refers to, we need to look at the book of Daniel.

According to Daniel the times of the Gentiles is a phrase that denotes a period of time; really, a timeline that measures out Gentile world domination through successive world powers from Daniel’s time until the second coming. Prior to Babylon, there were some dominant nations like Egypt and Assyria, but up until the time of this prophecy, there never really was an empire that ruled the world. But from the time of Babylon on, God reveals to Nebuchadnezzar that there will be four, and only four, empires that will dominate the planet politically until He returns to set up His kingdom (Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome). We will explore later how Rome really does still rule the world today.

Again, Daniel is a book of timelines. In Daniel chapter 2, Nebuchadnezzar is concerned about the future and fate of his kingdom and his empire—and God gives him an answer to that concern that goes far beyond his limited view. Nebuchadnezzar is concerned about his kingdom for the next few decades, and God gives him a vision for what is going to happen to the world politically for the rest of time. This same thing happens in chapter 9. Daniel is praying about the future and fate of his people Israel for the next few years, and God gives him an answer to his prayer that lays out the future and fate of his people all the way until the second coming. These two chapters (2 & 9) in Daniel will be the focus of the rest of our study.

In Daniel chapters 2 and 7 God describes these four upcoming world political kingdoms in significantly contrasting ways. In chapter 2 these manmade kingdoms are shown precisely as mankind would envision them: as beautiful gold and precious metals and as a towering, majestic statue. However, in chapter 7 we get a picture of how God views these same early kingdoms: as voracious, ravenous beasts. Mankind views its accomplishments in conquering and ruling the world as glorious and magnificent, while God views them as abominations.

But where these chapters are foundational for the discussion of the end times, is that God reveals to Daniel some very crucial details about the coming kingdom of Heaven—this kingdom that will displace and destroy all these earthly kingdoms. One of the most important truths to recognize is that there is a clear contrast made here (in Daniel 2 and 7) between the kingdoms of this world and the kingdom that Messiah will set up in the last days. It is in the details of this coming kingdom that we learn much of what the end times will look like. This coming kingdom presented to us in the book of Daniel is the Millennium God promised all throughout the Old Testament; is clarified in the New Testament; and is the focus of the foundation we are laying in these study guide introductions. This kingdom is what we will be exploring over the next few weeks.

1. Describe a time when you weren’t prepared for something important (e.g. a test, an interview, a vacation, etc.). What did you learn? How did it change how you do things?

2. In 1 Thess 4:13-14, what does "sleep" refer to? Why do you think Paul used this term? What do you believe happens immediately after we die?
3. What do we learn about the return of Christ for His saints from this passage? Who will accompany Him on His trip (and why would this have been important to the Thessalonians)? Where will we meet Him? What is the point of this section (v.18)? What do we learn about God from the fact that He tells us the end of the story before it happens?
4. Have you ever talked with an unbeliever about the return of Christ? What was their reaction? What do you think most people think of when Christians talk about Jesus returning in judgment?
5. Read 1 John 2:28. What are we to be about while we await His return? Discuss what "abiding" in Christ involves. How does that affect our behavior now? How does that affect our mindset towards His return?

#### Going Deeper:

1. The purpose of God including a discussion of end times in scripture is to give us hope. Hope enables us to look beyond our present circumstances to a brighter future that God promises. Without hope, all that's left is despair. Describe how hope has helped get you through the most difficult of times. What is it about hope that can keep us going when all else seems bleak?
2. Anticipation of the return of Christ can serve to help us persevere through difficult times, but it can also motivate godly behavior. Have you ever thought about this before? For example, when your parents were on their way home after a trip, and you knew the house was supposed to be clean, how did this affect your motivation? How has the imminent return of Christ affected your behavior? If it has not, why do you think that is?

# Week Nine

## 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

October 10<sup>th</sup>, 2021

### The Millennium in Daniel 2 (pt. 1)

Last week we began to zoom back to afford ourselves the opportunity to view this topic of the end times from a big picture perspective. We saw how the book of Daniel is the place we must begin when studying the end times. In Chapter 2, Nebuchadnezzar is given a dream from God (interpreted by Daniel) which describes the political domination of the planet earth from his time until Jesus Christ returns to set up His own kingdom—a kingdom that God promised His people for thousands of years.

So what is this promised kingdom? All throughout the Old Testament God promised His people that He would bring a time when their suffering would end, their fear would be allayed, the curse would be reversed, and they would be able to live in rest and peace. During this time, Messiah will have arrived and will be ruling over them and providing for them. We learn in the New Testament that this kingdom period will last for a thousand years (Rev 20). Much description is given in scripture as to what this time will look like. You might recall phrases in Isaiah like: *"the lion will lay down with the lamb," "they will beat their swords into plowshares,"* and *"the former things will not be remembered or come to mind."* These pictures describe a time of peace and safety, as well as the comfort and protection that the coming of Messiah will provide for Israel. This is the promise of the coming "kingdom of God" that buoyed and sustained God's people through the most difficult of times and gave them the much-needed hope for which they were so desperate.

We learn as we dive more deeply into this subject that this promised kingdom pertains to the current world we live in, in contrast to the descriptions we read of Heaven—which are clearly describing a completely different realm that God eventually creates. In other words, there will come a time that we experience somewhat of a preview of Heaven, but it will be on a renewed earth—this earth. One of the key reasons we know that this will be a time different than the eternal state is because of the presence of sin and death in the millennial kingdom. Though sin and death will be significantly reduced, they will still be present (Isa 65:20; Rev 20:7-9). This is clearly not the case in the eternal state, in Heaven.

Yes, there will come a time when God will destroy the current universe we dwell in now, and create a "new heavens and new earth" which will be where we reside for all eternity. This is what we think of when we picture "Heaven." Jesus tells us of this plan in Matthew 5:18. Isaiah 65:17 states, *"I will create a new heavens and a new earth."* 2 Peter 3:10-12 says that the heavens and earth will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat. Revelation chapter 21 actually gives us a description of what this new creation will look like.

This distinction between a millennial kingdom here on this earth, and a new Heavens and new earth in the eternal state is crucial to understand. When God

promised in the Old Testament all these things mentioned above, He promised them with regard to this earth. It was God's original intent that Adam rule over this earth. When Adam failed, God provided a second Adam (Messiah) who would accomplish this task. God also gave Israel the mandate to evangelize the world. He will ultimately allow them to accomplish that mission. But for all this to happen, it must happen on this earth—or else God is not really keeping His original promises. So what will this millennial kingdom look like?

We discussed earlier that most of the description of the Millennium occurs in the Old Testament, while the length of 1,000 literal years is mentioned in the New Testament. We also saw how Daniel is the book that allows us to take a few steps back and look at the big picture more clearly. When Daniel shows us what God was revealing about the coming world empires in chapters 2 and 7, we sometimes focus so much on the four human world empires that comprise the statue in chapter 2 and the beasts in chapter 7, that we miss identifying the fifth kingdom that is actually the focus of both chapters—this coming kingdom of God.

So, diving in, we see in Daniel chapter 2 that Nebuchadnezzar has a dream that none of his advisors can interpret. Daniel is called upon to interpret the dream. In this dream we see a giant statue of a man, comprised of four different materials. We also see that these four metals correspond to four upcoming Gentile world empires. The golden head of the statue refers to Babylon, the silver chest and arms refer to the Medo-Persian empire, the bronze belly and thighs refer to Greece, and the iron legs refer to Rome.

Now some people get confused here. They sometimes want to see the feet as a fifth part of the statue. But the feet are definitely part of and an extension of the legs, because they are still partly made of iron. They are just not pure iron anymore. This is confirmed for us in chapter 7, where these same four world empires are described using the imagery of beasts instead of materials in a statue. There are clearly four beasts, not five. So, this last phase of iron legs (which is Rome) in chapter 4 is comprised of the feet, which are iron mixed with miry clay.

What is important to understand about these empires is that each one was conquered and had a clear transition to the next empire—all except Rome. If we look back through history, we see that Rome was never really conquered. It simply broke apart into the various nations that still, in some respect, continue to rule the world today (what we might call "western civilization"). So, the "legs" continue on. Yes, this fourth empire is not currently as authoritarian or cohesive as it was in the early days. That is why the feet are partly of iron and partly of clay. There is a weakness and brittleness that exist today that did not exist in the glory days of Rome.

When Nebuchadnezzar heard the interpretation of the dream, he undoubtedly focused on the head of gold, because that is what pertained most closely to him and his situation. When we read about these four empires, oftentimes we focus in on the first four kingdoms, primarily because we marvel at the precision with which God described so many details that would come to pass over the next few thousand years. That is the power of predictive prophecy. It validates that God could be the only possible author. However, the purpose of Daniel chapters 2 and 7 is not just to give us details on the first four kingdoms. It is to point our attention to the last and final

kingdom. The kingdom of God is coming in to destroy all the four previous kingdoms of this world and set up an everlasting kingdom, one that will never end, and one that is ruled by Messiah. This is the idea we need to zoom in on next.

1. What aspects/features/elements do you anticipate our life in eternity will include (e.g. worship, rest, recreation, learning, work, surprises, purpose, fulfillment, joy, exploration, etc.)?
2. In Paul's zooming out in chapter 5 to discuss the Day of the Lord in general, he uses some very specific pronouns to distinguish two distinct, very different attitudes and reactions to the idea that Christ is coming in judgment. List out the items in 5:1-11 that pertain to us/we/you, and what pertains to they/them. Why don't Paul's readers in Thessalonica need for anything to be written to them regarding Christ's return (vv.1-5)?
3. For those who are expecting/anticipating/looking forward to something, the arrival is met with joy. But for those dreading the arrival of something, it is anticipated with anguish. What does it mean that the return of the Lord is imminent? How do these ideas help us understand what Paul is communicating in this section? What do we learn about the heart of God through the doctrine of the imminent return of Christ?
4. Paul's readers in this brand new church were concerned that those who had died in their church family would somehow miss out on all the benefits of Christ's return. Paul is writing to comfort them and correct their misunderstanding about the deaths of their loved ones. When we attend funerals and memorial services, we are confronted with our own mortality in a striking way. How have you seen both believers and non-believers process these thoughts? How have you been able to discuss such things with friends and family in these settings?
5. What is Paul's final instruction in 5:11? Why do you think he so consistently refocuses our attention back to encouragement and hope when talking about the return of Christ? What do you think of when you think of the second coming? What do you think the Holy Spirit is communicating to you about this important truth?

Going Deeper:

1. Read Luke 12:35-44 and James 5:7-11. What else do we learn about how we should view Christ's return and what we should be doing in the meantime?
2. Our God is a promise-making, promise-keeping God. He promised He would come the first time, and He did. He also promised He would return, and He will. What are the most precious and treasured promises of God in scripture to you?



# Week Ten

## 1 Thessalonians 5:12-28

October 17<sup>th</sup>, 2021

### The Millennium in Daniel 2 (pt. 2)

We have begun to explore the kingdom idea presented in Daniel chapter two. We saw that this chapter helps give us a big-picture view of the scope of salvation history like very few places in scripture. Because of this, the book of Daniel is where we need to begin when solidifying our own understanding of the end times.

We learned how chapters 2 and 7 of Daniel provide a timeline of Gentile political domination of the world from Daniel's time until the return of Christ. The materials and descriptions of the various parts of the giant statue reveal the details of these four successive kingdoms. Then we explored how God divulges to Daniel that there will be a fifth kingdom coming. This will be a completely different kind of kingdom, but will still be a literal, physical, political kingdom ruled by Messiah here on this earth. The description of this next kingdom is where we need to focus our attention. This is really the most exciting part. How Daniel describes this millennial kingdom is as a stone cut without hands flying into the picture. This is so incredibly important, we need to read this together:

*You continued looking until a stone was cut out without hands, and it struck the statue on its feet of iron and clay and crushed them. Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver and the gold were crushed all at the same time and became like chaff from the summer threshing floors; and the wind carried them away so that not a trace of them was found. But the stone that struck the statue became a great mountain and filled the whole earth. (Daniel 2:34-35)*

One of the most important things to notice is that the stone cut without hands is not part of the statue. Each of the four metals, representing Gentile world empires, follow one another as a part of the statue of a man. However, the stone cut without hands, a supernatural kingdom, comes in from the outside and destroys and then replaces these previous world empires.

The kingdom of God that this stone represents is not one of the manmade human empires that transforms into the kingdom, nor is it another human kingdom just tacked on to the end of the others in sequence. No, it comes in from the outside. It is completely other. It destroys all the others and replaces these kingdoms of men with the kingdom of God. That is how God wants us to look at the coming kingdom. It is not presented as some sort of spiritualized reigning of Christ in our hearts. No, it is just as political as these first four kingdoms. Jesus will sit on the throne of his father David (Luke 1:32).

Next, the stone cut without hands strikes the statue on its feet. This is very important. It does not strike it on the head, or in the chest. It strikes the statue on its feet. What does that mean? It means that the kingdom of God did not arrive on earth during the reign of any of these first three kingdoms—AND it does not appear on

earth until we reach the feet phase of the fourth kingdom. It did not arrive when Jesus came the first time. It will not arrive until the ten kings rise to prominence as we see in Daniel chapter 7.

Then it says that all four materials—all four sections of this statue, all four world kingdoms—were crushed, and verse 35 tells us that they were crushed at the same time. It was not a gradual conquering. It was not progressive. It did not take hundreds of years of growing ecclesiastical influence for the kingdom to grow in significance and power. No, the entire construct of human Gentile worldwide government will be crushed immediately and simultaneously. Everything that mankind has built—as an homage to our own pride and greed will all come crumbling down in a powerful and decisive blow.

Some try to argue that this refers to the first coming of Christ when He established a “spiritual kingdom,” and that it grows gradually larger and larger as the gospel message spreads. Yet, that does not fit the picture here at all. The gospel message and the purpose of the church is not anywhere likened in scripture to a crushing stone that destroys political kingdoms. Jesus did not say in the great commission, “Go into all the world and crush the nations into smithereens.” So, this description of the kingdom does not reference the church in any way, shape, or form. We cannot equate the millennial kingdom with the church.

Furthermore, these kingdoms did not just crumble into pieces. We read that they became like chaff, and the wind carried them away so that there was no trace of them found. That is an absolutely complete destruction. When Christ comes in His kingdom, He will establish and rule over a new worldwide government that will be so complete, so all encompassing, that it will be as if we will not even remember what previous governments were like.

Yet, the description does not end there. It goes on to say that the stone, which destroyed the statue, grew into a great mountain and filled the whole earth. This government that Christ will rule with a rod of iron will be worldwide. We also learn by looking at Daniel 7 that, at some point during this fourth kingdom, ten kings will arise, followed by an additional king—who we eventually learn will be the antichrist.

When reading chapters 2 and 7 together, we see the message that shortly before the return of Christ, certain kings or kingdoms will arise out of the current influence of the Roman empire, and will rule the earth, but not with the strength that Rome originally had. Then, at that time, God will destroy all the previous world powers at once and set up His kingdom, which will reign forever.

So, just to review—the great stone in Daniel 2:44-45, the Messianic kingdom promised in the Old Testament: 1) will be established in “the time of those kings,” 2) will be of divine origin, 3) will be eternal, 4) will be the earthly return and reign of Christ in His kingdom at His second coming, and 5) will be so all-encompassing that it will strike at the feet and all four previous empires will be crushed at the same time.

This is what God wants us to understand the kingdom to be. When we explore the question of the different millennial views, we must do so in light of, and through the lens of, Daniel chapters 2 and 7. God is very specific in how He defines His coming kingdom. We must ask ourselves which millennial viewpoint most resembles what we see in the book of Daniel.

1. What daily hassles sometimes get the best of you (traffic, children arguing, challenges at work, etc.)? Why do you think this is?
2. Discuss the items Paul mentions in 1 Thess 5:12-22. What stands out to you? Which ones do you think you do well? Which ones do you need to work on?
3. What do we learn from Paul's blessing in 5:23-24? How does this blessing relate back to the commands he has just given? What do we learn about the heart of God in this blessing?
4. What does it mean to live in peace with one another (v.13)? Where do you see this happening or not happening: in your family, and in your church?
5. What is the connection between verses 16, 17, and 18? What is something you can do this week to take a step closer to making this a consistent practice in your life?

#### Going Deeper:

1. Read 1 Thess 5:15; Prov 25:21; Matt 5:43-44; Rom 12:17-20; 1 Pet 3:9. What do we learn about vengeance and justice from these verses? Why is it so difficult to leave things in God's hands at times?
2. Why do you think it is God's will for you to give thanks in everything (v.18)? Is this possible? Where have you seen this practiced well? How does the sovereignty of God factor into this command?

# Week Eleven

## 2 Thessalonians 1:1-12

October 24<sup>th</sup>, 2021

### The Millennium in Daniel 2 (pt. 3)

As we continue to grapple with the profound ramifications of what we learn about the coming millennial kingdom, we need to, once again, consider examining some of our presuppositions. It is important, from time to time, to open up the closed gates of our worldview, take out the components we have built there, and re-examine them before putting them back in and closing the gates again. Do these presuppositions line up with scripture? Are we willing to make adjustments to some of our most strongly held opinions when confronted with compelling evidence to the contrary?

One initial (somewhat obvious) fact about the four empires presented in Daniel 2 is that the United States is not listed among them. We see Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome mentioned as the controlling world powers of consequence. While it may be difficult to hear, the United States is not present. This question regularly comes up when modern American Christians study the end times. It can be a sad but telling quirk of human history that every great civilization has thought itself the pinnacle of human achievement—as God’s appointed saviors of mankind.

How true it is that professing Christians all throughout history have supposed that the system of government in power in their nation was nothing less than the kingdom of God on earth. Think of the terms, “Christendom,” or “Holy Roman Empire.” Bad theology has driven men throughout the ages to think that they, through their own efforts, were bringing the kingdom of God to earth.

Even if it’s not stated so blatantly, many in the American church today recognize the Christian influence in the founding of our nation and would perhaps even call this a Christian nation. Some of these folks are baffled that there doesn’t seem to be mention of America in prophecy. In prophecy, we see Russia, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, and obviously Israel, but no mention of “the greatest nation on earth.”

What do we take away from this? Well, there are quite a few lessons. First, it should teach us a little humility. We are, in essence, just a blip on the radar when talking about the most significant kingdoms in human history. We have lasted just under 250 years, while other peoples have been around for millennia. Yes, we are the dominant world power right now—and yes, we are a shining example of freedom, the likes of which the world has probably never seen. However, in terms of world empires, we are still sitting at the little kids’ table, as it were.

What is another potential reason the U.S. is not going to be a major player when it comes to end times events? Perhaps we, as a nation, will not be in a position to wield significant power when these things happen. Does that portend some kind of judgment coming? Possibly. Or, as I believe, there will most likely be such political, social, and societal upheaval in the world as a result of millions and millions of people

simply disappearing at the rapture, the United States will be decimated, and somewhat taken out of the game politically.

More importantly, this should remind us that it is not through human government that the kingdom of God comes to earth. Yes, America is a great nation. However, it really does not matter how wonderful our system of government is, because human government is not the answer. We need to be diligent to see the world from an eternal perspective. This is the kingdom of God that's in view. It is not a really great human kingdom that God uses for His ends.

One very important reminder about the message God gives Nebuchadnezzar in this dream in Daniel chapter 2 is that, again, the stone cut without hands (the messianic kingdom of Messiah) is not part of the statue. Each of the four metals of the statue, representing Gentile world empires, follow one another as a part of the statue of a man. Yet, the stone cut without hands is a supernatural kingdom. This is what "cut without hands" refers to. This stone is the kingdom of God, the millennial kingdom which comes in from the outside and destroys and then replaces these previous world empires.

To review a bit—the kingdom of God is not one of the empires that transforms into the kingdom, nor is it another human kingdom just tacked on to the end of the others in sequence. Nor is it the church. No, it comes from the outside, destroys all the others, and replaces these kingdoms of men with the kingdom of God. This one easily overlooked fact is crucial to get our minds around if we are to have a proper understanding of what the Holy Spirit is communicating through Daniel—namely, what the coming kingdom and the Millennium are all about. The fact that stone is not a part of the statue communicates volumes.

As we humbly approach the study of scripture and are developing our understanding of how the Bible describes the end times, we need to grab onto some of these key insights that Daniel is highlighting. The statue represents the system of Gentile human government throughout the ages that rules planet earth. America is a human system of government. It is part of the statue. It is this system of human government that the stone destroys. God is loudly proclaiming in Daniel 2 that it will not be as a result of natural processes that the kingdom of God will come. It will be supernatural. It will be an intrusion into how things have always been. It will be the ultimate discontinuity. According to John Lennox, "History will not reach its promised goal by means of the processes that are within it. It will reach its goal by supernatural action from outside the earth altogether. The Stone will fall."

As we build our theology of the end times, we must first choose how we are going to read scripture. What hermeneutical system will we use? We must then evaluate whether the theological position with which we align ourselves corresponds to what the Holy Spirit revealed to Daniel regarding what the kingdom will be like. Does that eschatological system recognize that the stone in Daniel 2 is indeed cut without hands? Or, is it portrayed as a product of human achievement? We have seen that the coming millennial kingdom is not the church. It is not human government. It is not the success of the missionary movement. It is God intervening in a radical, violent way, completely destroying the manmade, idolatrous system we have created in order to build our own towers of Babel and make a name for ourselves.

Again, some will circle back to the question of why this matters. Why should I care about the details of this big-picture view of God's plan? The answer is that it gives us confidence and trust and faith in a God who knows the end from the beginning. We have a God who is working all things together for our good and for His glory. God bolsters our faith in His sovereignty when we understand and clearly see prophecy fulfilled before our very eyes. One definition of faith is "confidence in the reality of the unseen, even sometimes over the testimony of the seen." We can have confidence in the reality of that unseen realm when we discover how clearly God has told us what is going to happen before it does.

What does that confidence do for us on a daily basis...in our jobs where things sometimes don't go according to plan...in the hospital room with a loved one who is sick...on our knees when we are crying out to God? What does this confidence accomplish? It grounds us in the presence of a God who cares for us, who is powerful enough to handle anything we throw His way, and who is wise and sovereign enough that we can rest knowing we can leave all things in His hands. That is the essence of hope. That is the purpose and message of eschatology. This is why God has included it in His word to us.

1. Which was a better motivator for you growing up, the carrot or the stick? Rewards or consequences?
2. A few months after his first letter to the Thessalonians, Paul receives word that this young church is being tested through trials and persecution. There is no better breeding ground for doubt and false teaching than a time of persecution. Paul writes this letter to encourage the church experiencing these trials, as well as to help clarify some doctrine. How does Paul encourage them in their affliction (1:3-10)? How does the return of Christ play into this encouragement?
3. What do we learn about Hell in this passage? Also read John 3:16, 36; Matt 25:46; Rev 20:14-15. What else do you notice about Hell? What do we learn about God through the doctrine of Hell?
4. What do you think most people outside the church believe Hell to be? What do you think most people within the church believe Hell to be?
5. Who has been the greatest encouragement to you in your Christian walk? Describe a time when you have been able to be an encouragement to others.

Going Deeper:

1. The Bible mentions the return of Christ more than any other doctrine. What do you notice about the second coming of Christ in these few verses: Heb 9:28; Rev 1:7; Acts 1:10-11; Acts 17:31; Matt 16:27; John 6:39-40?

2. After the end of the Millennium, which is described in Rev 20:1-3, God will destroy the present Heaven and earth and create a new heavens and new earth (Rev 21:1). What are some of the differences between the Millennium here on this earth (Isa 65:20; Rev 20:2; Isa 30:26) and the eternal state—which we refer to as “Heaven” (Rev 21:4; Rev 20:10; Rev 21:23, 22:5)?

# Week Twelve

## 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12

October 31<sup>st</sup>, 2021

### The 70 weeks of Daniel (pt. 1)

We have spent quite a bit of time building our theology of the kingdom based on Daniel chapters 2 and 7. Let me take a moment to reemphasize...this is the proper way to do it. We must let the text of scripture form our theology, and not let our theology form how we read scripture. As odd as this second option may sound, this is done much more than one might think.

As mentioned earlier, some in the early church, after seeing what happened at the crucifixion, had a problem with seeing Israel continue to have a place in God's plan. They blamed Israel for the death of Jesus. In order to support their theological agenda they imported a Greek form of allegorical methodology for reading literature into how they were interpreting scripture. This mechanism gave them the ability to disenfranchise Israel as a member of God's family and strip them of all the promises God had clearly made to His people. Their theology was driving their hermeneutics. This is backwards. We must allow the scripture to say what it says, and then form our theology based on what we read. We must submit ourselves to the Word of God, regardless of whether or not it bumps up against some of our most strongly held beliefs.

So, our process for building a biblical model for the Millennium is to begin in Daniel chapters 2 and 7. Here, the Holy Spirit gives us a clear picture of the coming Messianic kingdom. We can then use that biblical picture as a lens through which to read other passages in Ezekiel, Isaiah, and then Revelation to inform what we can expect to see in this kingdom. The next major piece of the puzzle we must examine in order to continue to build a foundation for our eschatology is also in the book of Daniel. Daniel 9:24-27 is what I like to call the "holy of holies" when it comes to understanding end times prophecy.

As we have seen, Daniel is a book of timelines. In Daniel 9:24-27, the angel Gabriel gives Daniel a timeline for how God will work in the world through the nation of Israel. And as a bonus, he also gives Daniel a description of both the first and second comings of Messiah.

In this chapter, Daniel is fasting and praying over the desperate situation into which his people Israel had fallen. The people of Judah had been captives in Babylon for close to 70 years. Daniel knew from reading prophecies in Jeremiah and elsewhere that this captivity was almost complete. But Daniel continued to fast and pray for his people. Daniel prayed about the future and fate of his people over the next few years, and God gave him an answer to his prayer that spelled out the future and fate of His people for the rest of time.

We can only imagine the mindset of the Jews sitting in captivity in Babylon. They knew that the mighty power of Babylon was unstoppable. Nebuchadnezzar was beyond ruthless. They had heard the stories of all the nations Babylon had mercilessly



captured. The worldview they labored under would have taught them that since Babylon had defeated Israel, then that meant that the gods of the Babylonians were more powerful than their God. How devastating would that be? Not only were they defeated politically and militarily, they were defeated religiously and emotionally. Their God had failed them. What about all the promises God had made them? Could they no longer believe anything they had been taught?

This background helps us understand a bit of the immense significance of this passage of scripture—to them, but also to us. At this most crucial time, when the people of Israel were most in need of an encouraging word from God, after the most disheartening chain of events in the history of their chosen nation—after they had lost their nation, after they had spent 70 years in captivity in Babylon, after they thought that their God had failed them or abandoned them—God sends them a message of hope about the coming of their long-awaited Messiah. He not only reaffirms the promises that Messiah is coming, He also tells them when.

Here is a quick snapshot of what we're going to look at over the next few weeks. The vision given by God to Daniel in 9:24-27 is communicated in the idiom of "weeks of years"—which is just another way of saying "periods of seven years." Gabriel tells Daniel that seventy weeks of years (70 sevens of years, in other words, 490 years) are set apart for the people of Israel. While we don't have the ability here to dive deeply into the details, this is how we breakdown this famous passage.

Verse 24 gives an overview of the whole 70-week (490 year) period. Verse 25 looks at the first 69 weeks of years. Verse 26 describes a gap between the end of the 69th week and the beginning of the 70th. Verse 27 then discusses the final week—the famed 70th week of Daniel—that final period of 7 years that precedes the return of Messiah (also known as the Tribulation).

The astounding nature of this prophecy is that the first 69 weeks of years is the time period which leads up to (and reveals) the first coming of Messiah. Then the final week of years in this prophecy are the 7 years that immediately precede the second coming of Messiah. While we will only be able to briefly touch on certain key highlights of this prophecy, what we will see is that this prophecy gives us a framework upon which we can hang all end times prophecies. If we can spend some time understanding this prophecy, then the end times will begin to make much more sense.

1. When you were young, what event, trip, or holiday did you most excitedly wait for and count down the days until it arrived?
2. What does Paul say must precede the coming of the day of the Lord (2 Thess 2:3; also read Matt 24:9-13)? What is the great apostasy (1 Tim 4:1-3)? How does this relate to the doctrine of the imminent return of Christ?
3. What do we learn about the antichrist and the rebuilt temple in 2 Thess 2:3-4, 8-9 (see also Matt 24:15, Rev 11:1-2)?

4. Why do you think the topic of the end times brings up so many emotional reactions in people?
5. How does the discussion of the return of Christ make you feel (afraid, nervous, excited, anxious, uneasy, confused, etc.)? How do you think the apostle Paul would want you to feel?

Going Deeper:

1. If we are anticipating and hoping for the return of Christ, why would Paul mention that some were disturbed and shaken thinking the day of the Lord had come? What is the "day of the Lord" and how is it presented in scripture (Read Isa 13:6, 9; Zeph 1:14-15; Ezek 30:3; Joel 2:1-2)? However, now read Philippians 1:3-6, 8-10, 2:16; 1 Cor 1:4-8; 2 Cor 1:12-14. Why do you think there seems to be a distinction between "the day of the Lord" (or "the day of God") and "the day of Christ"?
2. The biblical phrase "the day of the Lord" refers to more than just one day. It points to the judgment of the nations in the Old Testament, the judgments during the tribulation, the judgment at the second coming, and the judgment when God destroys the heavens and the earth. Sometimes it is limited in scope to an event, while other times it refers to the whole period of Christ's return and the setting up of His kingdom. But it always refers to judgments upon the unbelieving. Take another look at the pronouns in 1 Thess 5:3-11. Now notice the pronouns in 2 Thess 2:11-12 and 2:13-14. In light of this (and 1 Thess 5:9) what does Paul seem to be communicating about the idea of hope as the central focus of the return of Christ?

# Week Thirteen

## 2 Thessalonians 2:13-17

November 7<sup>th</sup>, 2021

### The 70 weeks of Daniel (pt. 2)

Sir Isaac Newton, one of the greatest minds the world has ever known (not to mention a devout Christian), once wrote a treatise on the ninth chapter of Daniel and claimed that one could stake the entire truth of Christianity on this one prophecy alone—a prophecy made five centuries before Christ was born. As mentioned earlier, this passage is literally a framework upon which one can hang most end times prophecy in the Bible. In other words, if we understand this passage, then just about everything else relating to eschatology (the study of last things) starts to make sense.

I believe we have so many divergent opinions about the end times specifically because this prophecy is not widely understood. Understanding this passage is crucial, especially when reading Revelation chapters 6-19. Revelation 6-19 is merely an elaboration of the 70<sup>th</sup> week of Daniel. We will also see that this prophecy presents overwhelming proof for the deity and Messiah-ship of our Lord and Savior—and it is a passage He held the Jews accountable to know and understand. Even more, we're going to see that He expects us to understand it as well.

Just like many other significant passages of scripture, there are different schools of thought, or perhaps, theories about how best to understand this passage. It involves a timeline—and many scholars have done extensive research on this timeline. What I will present to you is one of these approaches. It is the one I believe makes the most sense, and the one which I have found, in my research, has the most support.

In Matthew 24:15, in answer to a question from His disciples as to what would be the sign of His coming and of the end of the age, Jesus pointed them directly to this prophecy in Daniel as the key which unlocks all end times events. What Jesus gives them is a confidential briefing on the end times.

Right at the absolute climax of His ministry, at the end of His time with His disciples when things could not be more tense, you can only imagine Jesus must have been very carefully weighing everything He said to them. At this moment, in Matthew 24:15, Jesus points them to a very precise marker that they were to be on the lookout for. He is saying, if you don't know what Daniel said, you need to study it. Because this is the key.

Last week, we cracked open the door and began to look at the famous 70 weeks of Daniel. It's important to see that v. 24 is the overview verse—an overview of the entire 70 weeks. Gabriel tells Daniel that seventy weeks of years (70 sevens of years; in other words, 490 years) are set apart for the people of Israel. He then elaborates on those 490 years and says that six specific things (including the end of the age) will be accomplished before that period comes to an end.

Verse 24 begins, "Seventy weeks are determined upon Thy people and upon Thy holy city..." The first important thing to take note of is to whom this prophecy is referring. It is dealing with "Thy people and Thy holy city." Gabriel is speaking to Daniel,

so this prophecy relates to his people—to Israel and Jerusalem. He is not talking about the Gentile world empires that were discussed in chapters 2 and 7 and he is not talking about the church. This is the first point we need to get a handle on. This vision is specifically laying out a timeline for Israel.

The prophecy starts out by saying that 70 weeks (490 years) are determined, or set apart, for Israel and the Jews. Just as a timeline was set apart for the Gentile kingdoms in chapters 2 and 7, here, in chapter 9, God is setting out a timeline for Israel. He is telling us the upcoming history of Israel.

The fact that this prophecy begins by specifying that 70 weeks are set apart for Israel gives us the framework for understanding that God works in the world through Israel and the church in mutually exclusive ways. As we will explore later, God chooses to work in the world through a mediator. He chose Abraham to be the progenitor of a race through which He would send a savior. This nation was to be His representative here on earth. They were the mediators of salvation to the world and a light to the nations. When the Messiah came and Israel rejected Him, God began a new work. This new work flowed from the New Covenant. But as we clearly read in scripture back in week 4, God is not finished with Israel yet. He will keep the promises He made to them. So, God works in the world through both Israel and the church—just not at the same time. The 70 weeks of Daniel is a timeline for Israel. This is their history. The first 69 weeks are clearly focused on Israel and we will see how the 70th week (the tribulation) is as well.

1. Were you chosen closer to first or last for teams on the playground growing up? What do you remember about this? How did it make you feel?
2. What does it mean that God has chosen you in 2 Thess 2:13 (see also John 15:16; John 6:37; Acts 13:48; 1 Thess 1:4; Eph 1:4-6)? How does this relate to Paul's theme of comfort and hope amidst the coming judgment?
3. What is the "this" Paul mentions in 2:14? For what were we called (see also 1 Thess 2:12; Eph 1:4; Rom 8:28-29)? What is God's work in salvation and what is the human response?
4. When we live out our sanctification (2:13), by "standing firm and holding to the traditions" (2:15), and perform our good works (2:17) in gratitude to God and for His glory, what effect does this have on a watching world? What kind of witness is our consistent character, love, and joy to those who don't know Christ? What are some examples of this you have seen? What is the effect when we are inconsistent in this?
5. How does being chosen by God make you feel—and motivate your pursuit of holiness? What motivates you the most in your desire to grow in your faith?

Going Deeper:

1. Read Deut 7:6-8; Ex 33:19; Rom 9:11-12, 16; Rom 11:5; 2 Tim 1:9; John 1:12-13. On what basis did God choose us? What reaction should that inspire in us? What behavior should that truth motivate?
2. One of the main purposes of the discussion of the end times in scripture is to enable us to look beyond the troubles of this life and see them as "momentary light afflictions", and help us to begin to develop an eternal perspective. What would "living in light of eternity" look like in your life? Why is this an important idea to keep fresh in our minds? In what ways can our actions today effect our eternal state?

# Week Fourteen

## 2 Thessalonians 3:1-5

November 14<sup>th</sup>, 2021

### The 70 weeks of Daniel (pt. 3)

What we have before us is one of the most important prophetic passages in scripture. Daniel 9:24-27 was not widely studied or understood prior to the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century when a man named Sir Robert Anderson, an inspector at Scotland Yard, wrote a book entitled, *The Coming Prince*. This book unpacked this passage of scripture in a way that had never been seen before. He correlated timelines and star charts from the Royal observatory as well as other historical data to verify with mathematical precision the fulfillment of this prophecy and how it pinpoints the first coming of Christ.

We explored the overall structure of this passage last time. Verse 24 is an overview of the entire time period of 70 weeks of years. Verse 25 is what we will look at today. This verse focuses our attention on the first 69 weeks of years. In Daniel 9:25 Gabriel says, "*From the going forth of the commandment to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until Meshiach Nagid (until Messiah the Prince comes)—will be 69 weeks of years,*" which is 483 years (of 360 days each). According to Sir Robert Anderson's research, the commandment to rebuild came on March 14<sup>th</sup>, 445 B.C. by the Persian ruler Artaxerxes Longimanus. Israel had already been given the right to return to their land and rebuild the temple by Cyrus (538 B.C. Ezra 1), but it was not until 445 B.C. that they were given permission to rebuild the walls, and thus the city (Ezra 7-9).

In Dan 9:25, Gabriel is telling Daniel that once Israel is given this command to allow them to rebuild their city, they will know precisely when Messiah will arrive—483 years later. So Daniel organizes the Magi to watch and wait and prepare for the coming of Messiah—so that when He does arrive, they can come and present Him with gifts, anoint Him as King, and welcome Him into the world. But you know that story.

So how exactly does the ministry of Jesus fit into the timeline Gabriel gives to Daniel? We must determine when, if ever, Jesus presented Himself to the people as king. We notice that whenever the people tried to take Him by force to make Him their king, He would slip away quietly, eluding them. A phrase He often used was that His hour had not yet come (John 6:14-15; John 7:8; 7:30; 8:20).

His birth certainly wasn't very majestic or king-like. His entire ministry was characterized by service and humility. But there was one event in His life that was quite different—an occasion upon which Jesus specifically set up circumstances to fulfill very detailed prophecies about the promised coming of Israel's king. The "triumphal entry" was that very day. In Luke 19:28-35, Jesus goes out of His way to ensure the people know He is presenting Himself to them as their Messiah, their King. He arranges for a donkey to be brought to Him so He can enter Jerusalem just as Zech 9:9 foretold Messiah would.

As Jesus approaches the city, some of the people cry out "Hosanna," recognizing Him to be the Messiah. But why was this particular day so significant? Why

did Jesus choose this day to enter into Jerusalem in this particular way? As it turns out, this was the exact day God's people had been waiting for, for a very long time. This was the precise day that Gabriel told Daniel the Messiah would come as King. This was the end of that 69 weeks of years...to the very day!

Jesus confirms this by the way He went out of His way to set this day up. But it is also confirmed by the reaction Jesus has. Take a look at what He says. Again, this is supposed to be the *triumphal entry*. In Luke 19:41-44 it says:

*When He approached Jerusalem, He saw the city and wept over it, saying, "If you had known in this day, even you, the things which make for peace! But now they have been hidden from your eyes. For the days will come upon you when your enemies will throw up a barricade against you, and surround you and hem you in on every side, and they will level you to the ground and your children within you, and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, **because you did not recognize the time of your visitation.**"*

When Jesus approaches the city, He weeps over it. He goes on to say that Jerusalem is going to be destroyed. This happened in 70 A.D. when the Roman army under Titus Vespasian laid siege to the city and destroyed it, killing over a million inhabitants.

But why was Jerusalem destroyed? Jesus gives us the answer in v. 44 when He says, "...because you did not recognize the time of your visitation." Jesus held them accountable to know this prophecy from Daniel. God not only told them hundreds of years earlier that Messiah was coming, He told them the very day—and they still rejected Him.

This remarkable day was the very day all of creation had been waiting for since the beginning. It was the day God had set apart to make all things right again—the day He would send His Son to be King. This was the very day that God revealed to Daniel Messiah was to come—and still He was rejected and crucified. This is a most amazing part of this remarkable prophecy. But that is just the beginning...

1. For whom do you regularly pray? What results have you seen?
2. What do you notice about the prayers of Paul in this letter (2 Thess 1:11-12; 2:16-17)? How does this compare to the prayer request he makes of them in 3:1-2?
3. What do you notice in 3:3? How does God protect us? Read Eph 6:12; Ps 138:7; Deut 31:6. How do you experience God's protection in your life?
4. Where have you seen spiritual warfare active in the world around you?
5. What has the Holy Spirit been teaching you about prayer? Why do you think that so many Christians struggle having a robust prayer life?

Going Deeper:

1. What do we learn about prayer and God's answers to prayer from Dan 9:20-23 and Dan 10:1-14?
2. What do we learn about spiritual warfare from Dan 10 and 2 Kings 6:8-17?



# Week Fifteen

## 2 Thessalonians 3:6-18

November 21<sup>st</sup>, 2021

### The 70 weeks of Daniel (pt. 4)

As we come to the end of our brief introduction and attempt at building a foundation for the study of the end times, it might be helpful to revisit the idea we began our study with. This is the truth that the study of the end times is important, but it is a secondary doctrine. It is something that can inspire increasing awe and wonder at the majesty and sovereignty of God—as

well as engender a trust and peace with respect to the current state of the world. Our God is in control. That is the message of eschatology. But we must not let the details of this issue divide us. Many who read this may disagree with some of the thoughts and ideas presented here. That is perfectly fine. This is but one way Christians have been able to compile an understanding of the outworking of the plan of God. The goal in what is presented here is that it be true to the text of scripture and that God's name would be magnified. Perhaps this study might inspire some further conversations and a deeper study of this fascinating doctrine.

We have been exploring the famous 70 weeks of Daniel. In Daniel 9:24-26 we see that 70 weeks of years are set apart for Israel, during which God will accomplish the redemption of the world. After the first 69 weeks of years—which is the point at which Messiah presents Himself as King—Messiah will be killed and Jerusalem will be destroyed, and God's prophetic clock regarding Israel is put on hold. At this point, God begins to work in the world through the church (the Gentiles—Romans 11).

Verse 27 describes for us the last remaining week of this 70 week period—the 70th week of Daniel. The first 69 weeks are the timetable for pinpointing when the Messiah would arrive the first time. This last week of years will lay out for us the tribulation period and will pinpoint for us when He will arrive the second time. After the “times of the Gentiles” is fulfilled, the time will come for the 70<sup>th</sup> week of Daniel.

This verse (Dan 9:27) tells us that the antichrist will confirm (or enforce) a covenant with “the many” (an idiom for Israel) for one week of years (7 years). This is the final week of the 70 weeks of Daniel 9. What starts the clock ticking again, (in other words, what starts the 70th week of Daniel), is the enforcement of this covenant by the antichrist. This period is quite well known because it is more popularly referred to as the “Great Tribulation,” though that description actually only applies to the last half of those 7 years.

This 70<sup>th</sup> week is a period in which the antichrist will lead the ten horns from Daniel chapter 7 to world domination and then set up world-wide worship of himself. This week of years is characterized by intense persecution of those who convert to faith in God during this time, but especially persecution of the Jews. This period is called “*the time of Jacob’s trouble*” (Jer 30:7). As you know, Jacob is the former name of Israel. According to Matthew 24:21, this is a time where Israel experiences greater trouble than they ever have before (including the Holocaust). For a more detail on this 7-year

period, see what else Jesus says in Matthew 24-25. Again, Revelation 6-19 is essentially a detailed elaboration of this 70<sup>th</sup> week.

In the middle of this week of years, the antichrist will break the covenant he made with Israel. He will put an end to the sacrifices he has allowed to happen in the rebuilt temple. This begins a period of time that is the most documented period of time in the Bible. It is referred to variously as: 1260 days, 42 months, 1/2 a week, as well as "time, times, and 1/2 a time." Again, the Holy Spirit left us no choice but to understand that this is a literal 3 1/2 years. Therefore, we can know without a shadow of a doubt that when this "Abomination of Desolations" happens, the return of Christ will come 1260 days later.

So, as promised, this prophecy in Daniel 9 gives the details of both the first and second comings of Christ. All we need to recognize is the trigger which starts the clock running.

This passage also helps us understand that God works in the world through different groups in different time periods. From the calling of Abraham all the way until Israel rejected the kingdom offer by Messiah, God worked in the world through Israel. God always works through a mediator. His initial mediator was the nation of Israel. However, when they rejected His offer of the kingdom, administratively, they were put on the shelf for a time.

God then called out for Himself a people from among the Gentiles—and the church was born. The people of God were no longer a nation among nations. They were now people called out from many nations. This was the mechanism by which God would spread His gospel around the world. The church is a different organism from Israel. The church is the "bride of Christ"—something that is not said of Israel.

We need to understand that God works in the world through these organisms in a mutually exclusive way. The church did not exist until God had temporarily put Israel on the shelf. In Romans 11:25-26 we see that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in...and thus, (or and then), all Israel will be saved. When the full number of Gentiles has come in—in other words, when the church is complete and taken out of the world—it is only then that God will once again work in the world through Israel. Then the 70<sup>th</sup> week of Daniel will commence.

Yes, during this current time period of the church, there are Jews and Gentiles together in the body of Christ, but God is not working in the world through the nation of Israel now. That will not happen until Ezekiel 36-39 is fulfilled...when the dry bones have come together and flesh is put on them, and the breath of life is breathed back into them. Israel was prophesied to come back into the land in unbelief—but they are simply dry bones at that point. That is what we see now. Then God will put flesh on those bones and will breathe life into them, and give them a new heart. As a lead-up to this time, the battle including Gog and Magog from Ezekiel 38-39 will take place, and God will miraculously rescue Israel from this attack. Here, Israel begins to see that God is once again fighting their battles.

This is an absolutely foundational truth to understand. God worked in the world through Israel until they rejected His offer of the kingdom. He is now working in the world through the church. Once the church is gone, He will once again work in the world through Israel. The 70<sup>th</sup> week of Daniel is called the time of Jacob's trouble for

a reason. Jacob is just another name for Israel. That final 7 years is a time that is set aside for Israel.

It is amazing to see the precision with which God detailed the coming of Messiah for His people. It seems incredible the Jews failed to recognize it, and Jesus held them accountable for it. Jesus is requiring us to understand it as well. 1 Thess. 5 makes it very clear that the Day of the Lord comes upon only the sons of darkness as a thief. Paul says in v. 4, "*But you, brethren, are not in darkness, that the day should overtake you like a thief.*" We are to know and to understand...just like Daniel.

When we examine this prophecy, we must stand back in awe at the sovereignty of our Lord. He not only details when these things will take place, He then orchestrates and controls all of history to make it work out. It all goes according to His plan. Even knowing ahead of time what will take place (after seeing these prophecies), Satan can do nothing to hinder the purposes of God.

It should provide a great deal of comfort to understand that God is working out His plan in His time. Through fulfilled prophecy like this, we can have confidence that this is truly the Word of God. It is reliable, trustworthy, and we can wager our eternities on the fact that it's true. The Bible says what it means, and it means what it says—literally.

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What we have attempted in these brief introductions is to cover some necessary background topics that must be explored before the topic of the end times is studied. This is such a broad topic; a lifetime could be spent digging into such things. However, a few essential foundation stones must be laid first before engaging in such a study. The systematic, scholarly, responsible way to approach the study of eschatology is to:

- examine our presuppositions
- learn the rules of interpreting apocalyptic prophecy
- be consistent in our hermeneutical approach (don't change the rules because of a difficult passage)
- seek to understand the background theology that eschatology is built on (such as what we began to explore here),
- commit to reading the Bible through the lens of the sovereignty of God as well as the truth that God always keeps His promises
- master the book of Daniel before even opening the book of Revelation

When we do this, we will hopefully be much more on guard against approaches that rely on reinterpreting scripture based on subjective allegory.

We also must be aware of agendas at play. Everyone teaching on the end times has an agenda. It is important not only to be aware that agendas are operating, but to discover what that agenda is. Here the agenda has been very clear: we absolutely must be committed to reading the Bible in a straightforward way. Yes, there is symbolic language in scripture. However, that does not require us to create an allegorical method of interpreting scripture to make sense of these symbols. If we commit to a straightforward approach, it provides safeguards against imaginative, fanciful, or theologically driven outcomes coloring our hermeneutics. The other part of our agenda here is to become confident in the central role Israel plays in God's plan. Israel is the apple of God's eye (Zech 2:8). When we understand the promises God has made

to Israel, we can then see the promises that are still yet to be fulfilled. Then, and only then, can we begin to understand more clearly how God's plan will play out, as well as the role we play in this plan.

1. What was your first paying job? What did you do with the money (save, spend, waste, etc.)?
2. How might a misunderstanding of Paul's teaching in 1 Thess 5:1-3 on the imminent return of Christ have led to idleness in some (2 Thess 3:6-12)? What else has Paul taught them on this (1 Thess 4:11-12)? How does this touch on why Paul might have chosen not to rely upon their generosity but rather support himself in Thessalonica (1 Thess 2:9; 2 Thess 3:7)?
3. What is Paul commanding here in 2 Thess 3:6, 14-15? How does this relate to the exercise of spiritual discipline we see in Matt 18:15-20? Is this the same thing—or if not, the same method? How would this have been effective in Paul's day? How would this play out today?
4. Do you think the work ethic of those in the church is the same or different than those outside the church? Why? What are the respective motivations for each to work hard?
5. Would you characterize yourself as a worrywart, busybody, workaholic, or perhaps someone who is undisciplined? What is Paul's message to you in 2 Thessalonians? What is the ultimate source of anxiety? What is the source of our peace? What steps can we take to access that peace?

Going Deeper:

1. Why do you think Paul chose to highlight his handwriting here (2 Thess 3:17)? What issue was this church facing that might necessitate this mention (2 Thess 2:2)? Take another look at Acts 17:11. How does this admonition touch on this question here?
2. What are your big takeaways from journeying through 1 and 2 Thessalonians? What questions were answered about the end times? What questions still remain?

The following resources were very helpful in the creation of this study guide: "SmallGroups.com" and "Serendipity Bible for Groups" as well as Bible teachers John Walvoord and Chuck Missler. For helpful answers to many of your Bible questions, the website GotQuestions.org has often proven to be useful.