

The Enduring Church: An Exposition of 2 Thessalonians
 Discerning: Knows the True Gospel from a False Gospel
 April 28, 2019
 The Lord's Day Evening |

We believe in the personal, imminent coming of the Lord Jesus Christ for His Church, and His subsequent premillennial return to earth to establish His kingdom. –First Bible Church Constitution

Who Is the Man of Lawlessness?

The man of lawlessness (aka, antichrist) will have great authority to devastate humanity with suffering on a global scale unlike any leader in history. He hates God and all who belong to God, and will exalts himself in God's place. The most powerful human being in history, with satanic power, he will aim his rage at God's people and many professing Christians will renounce the faith. But when Jesus returns, Jesus will kill him.

Will the church go through this tribulation? God-loving, Christ-exalting, Bible-honoring Christians are divided on this question. Is the "caught up together" of 1 Thessalonians 4:17 the same, or distinct from, the "gathered together to him" of 2 Thessalonians 2:1? The answer largely has to do with the way we define "imminent."

When Will the Man of Lawlessness (MOL) Be Revealed? Four Views:

Amillennialism: Jesus reigns from heaven right now and will return suddenly; there is no future millennium.

Church Age [MOL]	Return, Resurrection, and Judgment	Eternal State
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Postmillennialism: Jesus returns *after* (post-) the millennial kingdom.

Church Age is the Millennium [MOL]	Return, Resurrection, and Judgment	Eternal State
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Historic Premillennialism: Jesus returns *after* the great tribulation and *before* (pre-) the millennium.

Church Age [MOL]	Resurrection, Rapture- believers; Return of Christ	Millennium	Resurrection, judgment- unbelievers	Eternal State
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Dispensational Premillennialism: Jesus returns before the great tribulation and *before* (pre-) the millennium.

Church Age Acts 2	Resurrection, Rapture- believers 1 Th. 4	7 years of tribulation Dan. 9 [MOL]	Return of Christ Acts 1:11 Zech. 14:4	Millennium Rev. 20	Resurrection, judgment- unbelievers Rev. 20	Eternal State Rev. 21,22
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The Meaning of "Imminent"

1. The word is not used in English Bibles (except NASB, 2 Peter 1:14).
2. Websters (1971): "to hang over; threatening to fall or occur; impending; near at hand."

“Any Moment” doctrine of imminence:

1. Imminence means that Jesus’ coming could happen any moment, without warning. There is no other event on the prophetic calendar that must be fulfilled first.
2. Problem: Verses that sound like other things had to happen before Christ can return.
 - 2.1. Carrying out the Great Commission (Mt. 24:14; 28:18-20; Acts 1:8; 22:21; 23:11; 27:24).
 - 2.2. The death of Peter in old age (Jn. 21:18f; 2 Peter 1:14).
 - 2.3. The destruction of Jerusalem (Lk. 21:23f.)
 - 2.4. The commission of Paul to take gospel to Gentiles, even Rome (Acts 9:15; 22:21; 23:11).
 - 2.5. The Man of Lawlessness must appear first (2 Thess. 2:1-12).
3. Solution: Two-stage return. In first stage, Jesus unexpectedly and secretly comes, but not all the way to earth, and meets the raptured church in the air. Then for seven years on earth, the Man of Lawlessness (Anti-Christ) wreaks havoc in the Great Tribulation. In the second stage, Jesus returns with the church to defeat the Man of Lawlessness and set up his millennial kingdom on earth.
4. Problem with the solution: This relatively modern invention (two-stage return) in church history (c.1830) is not clearly taught in Scripture. “Rapture” is not a word found in Scripture. “Any moment imminence” would support the error being opposed in 2 Thessalonians that the Day of the Lord had already come. Paul’s response is to assure them that the Day of the Lord *cannot* come until the Man of Lawlessness appears.

“Nearness” Doctrine of Imminence

1. Imminence means that Jesus’ coming is near at hand and he stands ready to return after certain prophetic events occur.
2. Problem: The verses that sound like Jesus could come at any moment.
 - 2.1 Like a thief in the night (1 Th. 5:2)
 - 2.2 Like a judge standing at the door (James 5:7-9).
 - 2.3 Like a master returning from a journey (Mk 13:34f).
3. Solution: Nearness does not have to mean “at any moment.” This is the way nearness is used throughout Scripture (Greek: *eggizo*):
 - 3.1 Jewish feasts were near even though they fell on specific days of the year (Jn. 2:13; 6:4; 7:2; Lk. 22:1).
 - 3.2 Seasons of the year were near even though they could not happen at any moment (Mt. 21:34; 24:32).
 - 3.3 Fits with a post-tribulation view of Christ’s return (Lk. 21:8,9; 1 Peter 4:7)
 - 3.4 Though Jesus says he is coming soon (Rev. 22:20), God’s perspective on time is not like ours (2 Peter 3:8,9).
4. Problem with the solution. Seems to blunt the exhortations to be watchful and alert (Lk. 12:40).