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stages, perhaps like ascending Russian dolls. At each stage, we should know the pattern  
to expect. Alternatively, we could see it as a telescoping effect, as a series of closely  
related events that stand at a great distance in time that can be collapsed into a single  
concentric structure of expectation.

It is a single reality that is awaited, but a reality that arrives in progressive stages. Paul  
wants to assure the Thessalonians that the Day of the Lord has not already begun, or  
arrived, even if they may have received unsettling communications or messages  
purporting to be from Paul and his fellow missionaries that it had. The Thessalonians  
were rightly expecting an epoch-changing Day of the Lord on the very near horizon.

Jesus had taught that that generation would not pass away until the events prophesied  
in the Olivet Discourse occurred, and that some people standing hearing him teach  
would not die before they saw the Son of Man coming in his kingdom. This event was not  
necessarily the end of the physical cosmos, but it was the end of a world, the end of an  
epoch. Paul wants them to understand that the Day of the Lord, whether the Day of the  
Lord on the near horizon or the Day of the Lord on the final horizon, will not arrive until  
the Man of Lawlessness is revealed.

Jesus, in his teaching in the Olivet Discourse, had described the way that false teachers  
and false messiahs and confusing messages would come along, leading people to  
wonder whether he had already returned. However, the Day of the Lord would not arrive  
before a large-scale apostasy of Christians had occurred. A principle of lawlessness  
would be growing, tribulation would be gathering pace, and many would fall away.

Matthew 24, verses 10-12 writes, And then many will fall away and betray one another,  
and hate one another, and many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. And  
because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold. Before the Day  
itself comes, the Man of Lawlessness must be revealed, someone described as the Son of  
Destruction.

It is perhaps interesting to note that there is one other figure in the New Testament who  
is called the Son of Destruction, that is Judas Iscariot in John 17, verse 12. While I was  
with them, I kept them in your name, which you have given me. I have guarded them,  
and not one of them has been lost except the Son of Destruction, that the Scripture  
might be fulfilled.

This might help us to recognise a further way in which the sufferings of Christ anticipated  
and played out in miniature the reality of the end times themselves. Tribulation,

betrayal, Satan being given a free reign, revelation of the Son of Destruction, widespread falling away, deliverance to death, etc. All of these things occur in the events surrounding the crucifixion of Christ.

The Man of Lawlessness that Paul describes is closely connected to the Temple, where he is elevated, setting himself up as if he were God. Paul and his fellow missionaries had already instructed the Thessalonians concerning this when they were with them. The principle of lawlessness is already operative at that time.

John speaks in a similar way in 1 John 2, verse 18. Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that Antichrist is coming, so now many Antichrists have come. Therefore we know that it is the last hour.

For the time being, however, there were forces holding the principle of lawlessness back. Perhaps this is the restraining work of the Holy Spirit exercised through the ministry of the Church. When this was removed, however, all hell would break loose.

My suspicion is that this, on the nearest horizon of the first century, referred to the Church in Jerusalem in the run up to AD 70, where the leader of the Church, James, the brother of Jesus, was martyred, and then the rest of the Church later fled the city, leaving lawlessness to run rampant and unchecked, without any righteous remnant to arrest it. We might also compare this to the destruction of Sodom. When Lot's family was delivered from the city, the city was no longer preserved.

The man of lawlessness most likely refers to a high priest setting himself up in the temple as if it were his own palace, rather than the palace of the Lord. James Jordan suggests that it is Ananias. Others have argued that it might be John of Giskala, a leader of the Jewish revolt, or Phanas, the last high priest, who is described as follows by Josephus.

The zealots undertook to dispose of the high priesthood by casting lots for it, whereas, as we have said already, it was to descend by succession in a family. The pretense they made for this strange attempt was an ancient practice, while they said that of old it was determined by lot, but in truth it was no better than a dissolution of an undeniable law and a cunning contrivance to seize upon the government, derived from those that presumed to appoint governors as they themselves pleased. Hereupon they sent for one of the pontifical tribes, which is called Aniochan, and cast lots which of it should be the high priest.

By fortune the lots so fell as to demonstrate their iniquity after the plainest manner, for it fell upon one whose name was Phanas, the son of Samuel, of the village Apatha. He was a man not only unworthy of the high priesthood, but that did not know well what the high priesthood was, such a mere rustic was he. Yet did they hail this man, without his own consent, out of the country, as if they were acting a play upon the stage, and adorned

him with a counterfeit face.

They also put upon him the sacred garments, and upon every occasion instructed him what he was to do. This horrid piece of wickedness was sport and pastime with them, but occasioned the other priests, who at a distance saw their law made a jest of, to shed tears, and sorely lament the dissolution of such a sacred dignity. The Lord Jesus would then kill the man of lawlessness, with the fiery breath of his mouth in his coming.

This, I believe, refers to the destruction of Jerusalem, its temple, and its leaders in A.D. 70. The behaviour of the man of lawlessness, the son of destruction, is in accord with the activity of Satan. This period would be one of satanic possession and activity, just as the period of Christ's sufferings and passion was the time of Satan, where Satan was released to do his greatest damage and to wreak havoc.

So the expected day of the Lord will be preceded by another such unleashing of Satan. Just as Satan entered into Judas, so Satan's shadowy agency will be apparent surrounding the man of lawlessness. There will be false signs and wonders, strong deception and delusion, and people will be brought to their own destruction.

This could be compared to the story of the Exodus, where there are false signs and wonders done by the Egyptian magicians, and Pharaoh's heart is hardened to the point of near insanity. God himself will bring delusion to them, so that they are led to their own destruction. The destruction is something that they bring upon themselves, though.

We might think of 1 Kings 22-23 here. The fascinating thing in the case of Micaiah is that he is directly telling Ahab that God has sent him. Surely if God is trying to trap Ahab, then this is precisely the wrong way to go about it.

Yet the fact is that Ahab loves the delusion. The wicked do not believe the truth, not because the truth isn't presented to them, or even that the truth is not in any way apparent to them, but because they refuse to love the truth. When it comes down to it, they want to believe the lie, and God gives them what they want.

Even when he gives it to them with flashing warning signs, they still swallow it whole, because they hate the truth. When we see unbelief in our day, this is so often what it comes down to. Some Christians get drawn into futile debates about the truth of certain teachings, failing to recognise that some people simply hate the truth, and will swallow even obvious lies that present themselves as alternatives to it.

The problem often isn't that scripture isn't clear enough on certain matters, but that people refuse to love the truth. Before we can receive the truth, we need to be lovers of the truth, people who seek the truth where it can be found, and who will go where it leads. The Thessalonian believers, however, contrast with all of this.

Once again, Paul declares their sense of duty as the missionaries to give thanks for what

God is doing, and has done among the Thessalonians. They have been chosen for salvation. This salvation will be accomplished as they are set apart by, and conformed to God's righteous judgement by the work of the Spirit, and as they believe in the truth.

We don't reflect enough upon the strangeness of belief in the truth in a fallen race that loves and wants to believe the lie. The Thessalonians, having been chosen for salvation in such a manner, were called to it through the Gospel declaration and summons of the missionaries, to the end that they might participate in the glory of the reigning Lord Jesus the Messiah. They must not be swayed by rumours and false reports then, but must stand firm in the teachings that they had been given by Paul and the missionaries.

Paul concludes the chapter by praying that the Lord Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who by grace gave the entire Gospel reality, will settle their troubled hearts, and establish them firmly in the truth against the day when all who are not grounded in a love for every good word and every good work will be uprooted in that time of testing. A question to consider. What are some ways in which we grow in our love of the truth, so that our hearts are guarded against the appeal of the lie? Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace, and count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters.

There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other scriptures. You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people, and lose your own stability, but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity.

Amen. These are the five concluding verses of the Epistle of 2 Peter. 2 Peter, like so much of the New Testament, is written in the shadow of the imminent day of the Lord, anticipating the near coming of Christ in judgment.

Considering the imminent coming of their Lord in judgment, the recipients of the letter are charged to ensure that, when the time comes, they will be found holy, without impurity, without moral spot or blemish, and at peace with God and each other. The day of the Lord will be a day when the true character of things and of persons are exposed, and we are called to live our lives as those readied for a great unveiling. As Peter declares in verse 10, the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.

The patience of the Lord, his delay in bringing judgment upon the world, is an act of salvation. It ensures that all of his people can be gathered in. Peter has already spoken of this patience in verse 9. The Lord is not slow to fulfil his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all

should reach repentance.

God's intent in delay is salvation. Peter claims that his teaching on this point is also supported by the witness of Paul's writings, written according to the wisdom that was given to Paul by the Lord. Perhaps he has in mind passages of Paul's letters such as Romans chapter 2 verses 3-4.

Peter's concern in this passage is to help the people to whom he is writing to understand the approaching day of the Lord. However, much of the significance of this passage is found in material that is mostly tangential to Peter's driving point here, in his remarks concerning Paul. The first thing that we ought to notice is the way that he speaks of Paul as our beloved brother.

Who is the I here? Richard Borkham has argued that this is very unlikely to mean my. The most likely possibility is that the I refers to Peter with his fellow apostles. The we in verses 16-18 of chapter 1 refers to the very core apostles, Peter, James and John.

And as James has died by this time, one could perhaps even make a case that the we refers to Peter and John alone. Paul is the beloved brother and the fellow witness of these apostles. In Galatians chapter 2, Peter and Paul had a great confrontation in Antioch, but here Peter expresses his union with Paul and appeals to him as a fellow witness.

Peter was the one entrusted with the gospel of the circumcised and Paul with the gospel to the uncircumcised. Paul presents the fact of this mutual recognition in Galatians and here Peter also expresses such a recognition of Paul. The second thing that we ought to notice is that Paul's works seem to have been widely known to Peter.

The leaders and teachers of the early church recognised and supported each other's ministries, seeing themselves as standing shoulder to shoulder in unity in their presentation of the gospel. Paul's letters clearly were shared widely in the early church, beyond the churches and persons to whom they were directly addressed. The early church was tightly networked with lots of movement around between the churches.

Paul's employment of letters, for instance, was not accidental and there was much to commend the writing of epistles over the writing of abstract theological treatises. As letters they formed personal bonds and exchanges between churches, especially as churches were expected to pass them on to other churches. As the letters were passed around, servants of the churches would travel around with them, sharing news, encouragement, gifts and ministry.

They would strengthen the unity of the church in the process. Also, as the direct recipients of the letters shared them, they were ministering their particular gifts to others and presenting themselves as examples from which other churches and

Christians could learn. By this point, it is not unlikely that collections of Paul's letters were already circulating among churches.

The third and most startling thing here, however, is the way that Peter speaks of Paul's writings. He talks of how they are difficult to understand and how many twist them to their own destruction, as they do the other scriptures. The implication here is that Peter considered Paul's writings to be scripture, alongside the scriptures of the Old Testament.

He mentions the wisdom given to Paul. This expression is similar to the expression that Paul uses to refer to the ministry with which he was commissioned and for which he was equipped. Among other places we see him speaking in this way in Romans 12, verse 3. For by the grace given to me, I say to everyone among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think.

In Romans 15, verses 15-17. But on some points I have written to you very boldly by way of reminder, because of the grace given to me by God to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in the priestly service of the gospel of God, so that the offering of the Gentiles may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit. In Christ Jesus, then, I have reason to be proud of my work for God.

In Galatians 2, verses 7-9, Paul describes this grace given to him again as something that was recognized by Peter and the other apostles. On the contrary, when they saw that I had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been entrusted with the gospel to the circumcised, for he who worked through Peter for his apostolic ministry to the circumcised worked also through me for mine to the Gentiles. And when James and Cephas and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given to me, they gave the right hand of fellowship to Barnabas and me, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised.

Peter remarks on the fact that there are things in Paul's letters that are hard to understand and that these elements have been twisted by the uninstructed and unstable to their destruction. This is most likely referring primarily not to followers of false teachers, but to false teachers themselves. Theirs is a culpable lack of instruction in ignorance.

They have not desired to grow in their understanding of the truth, so have not properly instructed themselves in the faith. The condemned persons are also unstable. They are not rooted in a love for the truth, in moral integrity and consistency of life, and as a result, they are unstable.

Their interpretation is not guided by a careful commitment to discovering the truth, but by ungoverned passions, by their desire to justify their sins, by the anger of those whose minds are not at peace, by the rebellion of those who do not want to submit to the clear instructions of the Lord, by the sectarianism of those who wish merely to win arguments

for their own party against others. It is crucial that we recognise that, for Peter, interpretation is a moral activity as much as an intellectual one. People who have not mastered their spirits, subdued their vices, learned to live at peace with their neighbour, developed a love for the truth, people whose minds are not guarded by the peace of Christ, people who are in rebellion against God, will not think clearly.

Rather, they will constantly twist the truth to their own destruction. Their own destruction. This is something that they are bringing upon themselves.

There is a spirit of lawlessness and hatred for the truth that work in the world, and the recipients of Peter's epistle must be on guard against it. They have been warned in advance so that they might be firmly grounded and secure, in contrast to the instability of the false teachers and their followers. The alternative to their instability, and the way that they will be prepared for the coming day that Peter has described, is by growing in the grace and knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

It is in looking to Him that they will put down the roots that will hold them firm and secure when all others are overthrown. Ultimately, all of the glory belongs to Him. A question to consider.

Where else in the New Testament do we get a sense of the close connections between the various writers of the New Testament books?