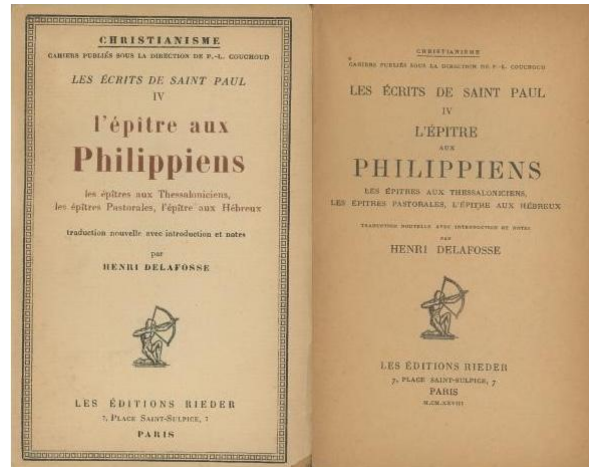


This file was created October 2021 as a translation for my personal use and without any thought of sharing publicly at the time. I only ask that you keep that in mind when using it. I have made a copy of the French text available at

<https://archive.org/details/turmel-les-ecrits-de-saint-paul-iv-l-epitre-aux-philippiens>

Neil Godfrey - November 2023



50

SECOND EPISTLE TO THE THESSALONIANS

This epistle deals with: 1° the fate reserved for infidels and the fate reserved for Christians; 2° from the date of the Lord's advent; 3° labor law; 4° of the conduct that Christians must have. Let's start by getting to know the second essay.

1. The date of the Lord's advent.

It includes the first twelve verses of chapter II. Here are the ideas she expresses.

There are men who say that the coming (parousia) of the Lord is imminent. We must not believe them. We should not even believe a letter which teaches this doctrine, and which is supposed to emanate from the apostle Paul. Before the advent must come the Apostasy, which will be authored by the man of impiety, the son of perdition, the

adversary. He will exalt himself above everyone who is called god, above that which is august, even to sit in the temple of God and show that he is god. This impious man is now stopped by an obstacle. He will appear when the obstacle has disappeared, and he will deceive with lying wonders those who have not loved the truth. To these God will send a power of deception, so that they will believe a lie. As for the Ungodly, the Lord Jesus will destroy him with the breath of his mouth, and will destroy him with the appearance of his coming. Paul already said all this to the Thessalonians when he was with them. He told them again.

51

Such is this piece. He first subordinates the advent to the coming of an Impious one who will put himself above anyone who is called god; he then subordinates the coming of this Impious person to the disappearance of an obstacle; he concludes that the advent is not imminent and that we should not believe a supposed letter written by Paul which says the opposite. Now the first epistle to the Thessalonians says (V, 2, 3) that the day of the Lord will come unexpectedly, but (V, 4-8) that the recipients of the epistle will still be alive when that day arrives. Independent critics today generally believe that instruction II, 1-12 of the second epistle to the Thessalonians is in absolute opposition to the first. They even think that the first epistle is precisely the letter supposedly emanating from Paul, against which the second epistle warns the faithful in 11.1-12. We say with them that the instruction of II Thess., II, 1-12 is the work of a forger who wrongly takes the name of Paul. Moreover, this conclusion will be confirmed by the observations that remain to be presented.

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Because other observations are necessary. It remains for us to find out who is the Impious one whose coming is announced, and what is the obstacle which delays his coming. First of all, who is the Ungodly? According to common opinion, we are dealing here with a character from the future, an imaginary character created from scratch, under the influence of apocalyptic concerns. The Unholy indeed seems to be in the domain of the future, since his coming is the subject of a prediction; on the other hand, he seems to be the fruit of religious or political prejudices, because verse 4, which shows him “exalting himself above everyone who is called god”, is borrowed from Daniel XI, 36 where we read that king Antiochus “will exalt himself above every god”.

But, when an imaginary character truly belongs to the future – take, for example, the antichrist of Roman dogmatics – his features and his activity float in vagueness. This is not the case with the Ungodly One of whom our epistle speaks. He must proceed by

way of “defection” apostasia (3). Until now he has been stopped by an obstacle; he will come when the obstacle is removed, and the recipients of the epistle know the obstacle which stops him (6). When he comes he will sit in the temple, he will exalt himself above everyone who is called god, he will pretend to be God, he will perform lying wonders, and to believe in him will be to believe a lie (11). In the picture that is drawn for us of his work, nothing is floating, everything is determined, coordinated. The Ungodly One of the Second Epistle to the Thessalonians is not an imaginary character.

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Besides, how could he be imaginary? At the moment our epistle is written he exists, he awaits the moment to appear, to “reveal himself” (8). He belongs to the realm of reality; only his appearance, his “revelation” is the subject of prophecy and, consequently, is relegated to the future. But, upon closer inspection, we realize that this prophecy is a fiction. The author of the epistle would not be so accurately informed about the doings of the Ungodly One if he had not already appeared on the scene and had not begun, or perhaps even completed, his work of “defection”. The obstacle, which is supposed to hold him back, has disappeared; and he showed himself, he performed lying wonders, he exalted himself above everyone who is called god, above that which is august. He pretended to be God. Who is this Unholy?

Those who attributed historical ties to the Impious One identified this character either with Caligula or with Nero. But it only takes a moment's reflection to see that no Roman emperor succeeded in establishing himself in the temple of God, that none waited to manifest himself and execute his plans until an obstacle was removed. No Roman emperor responded to the report of the Unholy ¹.

1. I will not stop at refuting the theory dear to the ancient Protestants, according to which the Impious is the papacy or the episcopate.

54

You have to look for something else.

Around the year 130, Emperor Hadrian forbade Jews from circumcision and built a pagan city named Aelia Capitolina on the ruins of Jerusalem. These two measures, especially the second, aroused indignation among the Jews of Palestine, which resulted in a revolt as terrible as that of 66, but about which we have only summary information. This revolt, which Saint Justin (I Apol., XXXI, 6) and Eusebius (Hist, eccl., IV, 6, 1) call apostasia (the historian Pausanias, I, V, 5 presents the Jews of this period as

apostantas), had as its leader Simon Barcoziba, better known under the name of Barcochba or son of the star, because Rabbi Aquiba, his supporter, applied the text of Numbers to him. XXIV, 17: "A star (kokab) will come out of Jacob." Barcochba presented himself as the Messiah charged by God to restore the kingdom of Israel. To support his claims, he performed wonders; in particular he put a flaming tow into his mouth to make it appear that he was vomiting fire with his breath.

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Hadrian spent the years 130 and 131 in Syria, Egypt, and then again in Syria. In 132 he went to Athens. Barcochba did not move as long as the Roman emperor was in the neighborhood of Palestine. The trip to Athens seemed to him a favorable opportunity to act, and he called the Jews to holy war. Everyone responded to his call and took up arms. All, except the Christians. The latter, who placed their hope in Jesus, naturally could not follow the so-called Messiah of 132 without betraying their faith. For them Barcochba was a false Messiah, a man of lies, as his first name indicated (Coziba means lie). The Christians therefore refused to take up arms against Rome. Barcochba took revenge by cruelly putting them to death. Here is what Justin says: ¹ "In the recent war in Judea Barcochba, the leader of the revolt, inflicted terrible torture on Christians, and Christians alone, if they did not consent to deny and blaspheme Jesus Christ." Since 70 Jerusalem had served as a camp for a Roman army, around which a Jewish colony was grouped (access to Jerusalem was not yet prohibited to Jews). Barcochba succeeded in driving the Romans out of Jerusalem and establishing himself in their place. Then he had coins struck bearing the effigy of the temple surmounted by a star, and on which the legend "of the freedom of Jerusalem" could be read. The star, which surmounted the temple, designated Barcochba himself; as for the effigy of the temple, it represented the modest sanctuary that the Jewish colony gathered around the Roman camp had built before 132, or that which the rebels hastened to erect immediately after their victory over the Roman army ¹.

1. Apol., 31, 6.

1. Schaerer, *Geschichte des Jüdischen Volkes*, I3, 679-701 and 765-772.
Renan's errors must be corrected by this author, *The Christian Church*, p. 193-213 and 541-553.

There is no point in pushing further the story of this war which, after three and a half years (132-135), ended with the victory of Rome, the massacre of 500,000 Jews and the prohibition on Jews, on pain of death, from approaching Jerusalem. Let's conclude. Commentators do not know what meaning to give to the defection spoken of in chapter

II of the second epistle to the Thessalonians and which is designated there under the name of apostasia. The obstacle, which prevents this defection from breaking out and which must disappear for it to manifest itself, is a mystery which they admit to being incapable of penetrating. No less mysterious for them is the Impious, the son of perdition, an adversary who must elevate himself above everyone who is called god, above what is august, who must pass himself off as God. They are also embarrassed to say what the temple of God is doing here in which the Ungodly One must sit. Finally they give up explaining how this character will perform lying miracles and how his supporters will believe the lie.

57

However, the revolt of Barcochba was designated by the contemporaries Justin and Pausanias under the name of apostasia. This revolt would have broken out in 130, if the presence of Hadrian in Syria had not prevented it; it was only declared in 132, because the emperor only moved away from Palestine at that time; she therefore had to wait for an obstacle to disappear before appearing in broad daylight ¹.

1. Dio Cassius, 69.12; "As long as Hadrian stayed in Egypt and then in Syre, they remained quiet... but as soon as he left, the revolt broke out."

While waiting for this condition to be fulfilled, the "mystery of iniquity" operated, but it operated in the minds of the Jews, that is to say, in the shadows. Note also that the Roman emperors were the object of a religious cult. Altars were erected to them, and people swore by their divinity. By revolting against Hadrian, Barcochba therefore put himself above someone "called god". He also placed himself above that which was august, Sebasma; because the emperor was the august, sebastos, "adversary", "son of perdition", "impious", Barcochba was necessarily all of this for the Christians, since he claimed to force them under penalty of death to deny Jesus. And since, at that time, Christians considered Jesus to be a god, the man who pretended to be the Messiah, who wanted to supplant Jesus, must have seemed to them like someone who claimed divinity for himself.

58

We would be more embarrassed by the text which shows the Impious settling in the temple, were it not for the coins "of the freedom of Jerusalem" on which the temple surmounted by a star is engraved. They attest that the temple – as modest a temple as one could wish – was rebuilt and that "the star", that is to say the Messiah Barcochba, took possession of it and behaved like a master there. Finally, let us not forget that

Barcochba, who claimed to be the Messiah and whose mouth vomited fire, was originally called Coziba, that is to say "Lie". The Christians, of whom he was the executioner, had to use the weapon that this unfortunate name put in their hands. They had to call him a liar and repeat that by following him we were following the lie.

My demonstration is completed; it's just a matter of collecting it in a formula. The instruction II Thessalonians, II, 1-12 makes sense when we ask the key to the revolt of Barcochba. Apart from that it is only an assembly of incoherent words, a grimoire devoid of any kind of meaning. That's the fact. And here is the explanation of this fact: the instruction II Thessal., II, 1-12 describes the Jewish revolt of 132. But, in this description, there is a feature that I have left until now in the shadow and which I must comment on now. This is verse 8 which says, speaking of the Ungodly: "The Lord Jesus will destroy him with the breath of his mouth and destroy him with the appearance of his coming." This oracle subjects Barcochba to the law of retaliation, since it shows us him destroyed by the breath of Christ, he whose breath threw flames. He adds that this punishment of the Impious coincides with the advent of Christ.

59

But Barcochba was not annihilated by the breath of Christ. In any case "the advent" did not take place either in 135 or later. The instruction here makes a considerable error which allows us to date it. It was written before the end of the Barcochba revolt, since it assigns to this revolt an outcome which did not materialize. It describes facts already accomplished and, in this description, it is exact; but she also launches into divination, and then she pursues chimeras. It was composed in the first months of 135.

At that date the Christian program had not yet come into contact with the Marcionite movement; it had therefore not yet undergone the transformation from which Catholic theology emerged. Thess. II, 1-12 belongs to the pre-Catholic period. It is inspired by the primitive spirit, and the picture it presents to us of the advent of the Lord could have been drawn by Paul. The "power of error" that God sends to the Jews is a product of the Old Testament which shows us Yahweh busy blinding men and hardening their hearts. The "satan" that 9 speaks of also belongs to the Jewish mentality. If a superhuman character is hidden under this term, we must, to learn about him, consult Job, I, 7 and Zechariah, III, 1. But perhaps this "satan" must be taken here in its sense ordinary enemy.¹ In this hypothesis it would be necessary to translate: "The advent of this powerful enemy..."

1, See the Thesaurus of Gesenius and the Biblical Dictionary from Vigouroux to Satan.

2. Fate reserved for infidels and reserved fate to Christians.

This question is dealt with in instruction I, 3-10, the substance of which is as follows:

The Thessalonians face persecution. But let them not be disconcerted; for God, who is just, will avenge them and reward them. He will avenge them by coming in the setting announced by Isaiah who says (LXVI, 15 Septuagint): “The Lord will come like fire... to inflict punishment and his response will be in the flame of fire. He will come in the fire of the flame to inflict punishment.” This punishment the Lord will inflict “on those who do not know God” in accordance with the oracle of David (Ps., LXXVIII, 6 Septuagint): Pour out your anger on the nations who do not know you. He will also inflict it on those who “do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus”. All of these will be punished with “eternal extermination” *olethron aiônion*. And this punishment will be the fulfillment of the oracle of Isaiah II, 10 where it is a question of homipes who hide themselves (Septuagint): from the face... of the Lord and from the glory of his strength. Therefore the pagans who do not know God and the unbelieving Jews, who know God but do not obey the gospel, will be forever destroyed “from the face of the Lord and from the glory of his might.”

61

God, who will punish unbelievers, will also reward Christians. He will provide them with “rest”, *anesine*, in the company of Paul and his auxiliaries. This rest, Christians will enjoy as soon as the Lord Jesus has manifested himself, descending from heaven surrounded by the executioners of his orders. And then the oracle of David will be fulfilled (Ps. LXVII, Sept. 6) according to which: “God is admirable in his saints. Also fulfilled is this other oracle (Ps LXXXVIII, 8, Sept.) which shows us God: glorified in the assembly of saints; for “the Lord Jesus will come to be glorified in his saints, to be admired in those who believe in him...”.

62

So let the Thessalonians be reassured. They were, by virtue of their faith, sure of having a share in the “kingdom of God” that the Lord Jesus would inaugurate; but the merit (5) of the sufferings to which they are exposed, adding to the merit of faith, gives them a new right to this kingdom.

This instruction applies above all to show that persecutions are a new reason to believe in the “kingdom of God”. His central thought can be formulated as follows: “If you had some doubts about the kingdom whose imminent inauguration I promised you, now that you have suffered because of your faith you can no longer have them; because God, who is just, cannot fail to punish your persecutors and reward you.” He speaks only in passing of the kingdom itself, of its inauguration, of its nature. The recipients of the letter had ample knowledge of these things and did not need to be told about them. It was only a matter of strengthening their wavering faith, and that is what is done here.

Among the meager information which is provided to us as if by accident, the least imprecise relates to the fate of the pagan and Jewish infidels. They will be forever exterminated, annihilated, *olethron aiônion*. The author, who imagines himself to have everything he puts forward from the Old Testament, refers in the present case to Isaiah, II, 10. He has not noticed that Isaiah speaks of people who hide, while that his infidels are exterminated. This distraction led to a bizarre consequence. The syntax authorizes Isaiah to say that the wicked hide themselves “from the face of the Lord”. But it does not allow our author to present to us infidels who undergo eternal extermination “from the face of the Lord”. Its reference, fanciful in substance, is, moreover, incorrect in form. He probably means that the simple approach of the flame which will surround Jesus will be enough to destroy the infidels. Let us note that this flame is really borrowed from the Old Testament, and we conclude that the author, who did not draw from this book everything he affirms, is nevertheless dependent on it.

63

Christians will find “rest” in the kingdom¹. Today they are facing persecution, they are suffering. When they inhabit the kingdom, they will taste “rest” and this rest – so the context dictates – will consist of exemption from all the tribulations that they are currently undergoing. As for Christ, he will be glorified and admired in his saints, that is to say, Christians will attest to his power, and this power will be admirable.

1. We are here at the source of the Requiem which occupies such a considerable place in the liturgy of the dead.

64

This piece, with its infidels annihilated at the moment Jesus descends from heaven, contains archaic theology whose placement after 140 is not possible. But the instruction on the date of the Lord's advent is also earlier than 140; and yet we have noted that it does not come from Paul and that it was written around 135. Would the dissertation I,

3-10 not be from the same period, and would it not have for author the same one who fixed the date of the advent of the Lord? When we ask ourselves this question, from which we cannot escape, we are obliged to agree that the original identity is probable. However, there is a lack of evidence that would raise this probability to the level of certainty. It is naturally Paul who benefits from this situation. So let's leave him with dissertation I, 3-10 which perhaps does not belong to him.

In any case, the "kingdom of God" whose establishment will require such a display of power is indeed the one that Paul dreamed of. It will extend over the entire world, but its capital will be Jerusalem. The "saints", who will attest to the power of Christ, owe their title to a reminiscence of the psalms. The only holiness known to the psalms is legal holiness, that which is acquired by submission to the law. Since Paul substituted faith for the law, holiness consists of belief in the mission of Christ, in his kingdom. All Christians are saints, since all Jews were saints. This is also what verse 20 declares interpreted according to the rules of parallelism: "...to be glorified in his saints, to be admired in all those who believe in him".

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3. Labor law.

This subject is treated in piece III, 6-12. Paul reminds us that. During his stay in Thessalonica, he worked day and night to earn his bread and not be a burden to anyone. He would certainly have had the right to be fed; but he did not want to use this right to serve as a model. As a result he blames certain individuals who, according to what he has been told, are getting restless and doing nothing. It's up to everyone to make a living from their work. If you don't want to work, don't eat.

This little dissertation is so closely related to that of the first epistle II, 9, that both must necessarily have the same author and be inspired by the same concerns. Piece III, 6-12 is therefore the protest of a Catholic from around 165 against the financial system inaugurated by Montan to put the preachers of the good word in charge of the communities. The distinction he makes between the law, exousian, and the use of the law, is a riposte to the thesis which is set out in chapter IX of the first epistle to the Corinthians, more precisely to the primitive edition of this thesis. Our author refutes this doctrine. It is he who, to give his response all the desired effectiveness, has, through a judicious rearrangement, given the said chapter IX the form it has today.

66

4. Maxims on the conduct of Christians.

Alongside these instructions are disseminated (I, 11-12; II, 13-17; III, 3-5; III, 13-1) maxims which tend to give Christians a high idea of their dignity, exhortations which lead the faithful to the love of God and the practice of virtue. Where do these religious accents come from which tell us of the "vocation", of the "sanctification of the spirit" of the practice of good? We would not know this if the author had not put his signature in text III,3 where we read: "The Lord is faithful; he will strengthen you and protect you from the Bad." It was in Marcion that the "Bad One" was denounced and Christians were warned against this perverse being. The pious note that our epistle makes us hear comes from a Marcionite apostle.

67

In short, four workers worked successively to raise the second epistle to the Thessalonians. The first is Paul, to whom we can attribute, with the reservations we have seen, the instruction I, 3-10. Let us add here that we can, with the same reservations, attribute verses 1,1-2 to him; III, 1-2,17,18. The second is the author of the dissertation on the date of the advent of Christ II, 1-12 which is placed around 135. The third is the Marcionite apostle who found the epistle in the form of a manifesto apocalyptic and who enriched it with religious maxims. The fourth is the Catholic to whom we owe part II, 1-12 of the first epistle to the Thessalonians.