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*THE ESCHATOLOGY OF 2 THESSALONIANS*  
*II. 1-12.*

IN considering the Eschatology of 2 Thessalonians ii. 1-12, I must ask to be allowed to assume the authenticity of the Epistle from which it is taken. This may seem a somewhat large assumption in view of the arguments that have recently been directed against its Pauline authorship. But, as I have tried to show elsewhere,<sup>1</sup> interesting though these arguments often are, they are by no means convincing: while the still greater difficulties that surround all conflicting theories of the Epistle's origin are in themselves important evidence in favour of the traditional view. We may accept, then, that view for the present, if only for want of a better. And we may do so the more readily because, as it is the teaching of this very passage which has been generally used as the principal objection to the Epistle's genuineness, we shall have an opportunity of testing the force of that objection when we have seen what it is that the passage really means.

It may seem to some perhaps a more serious matter that in thus postulating the Pauline authorship we at once necessarily exclude all such interpretations of the passage as make it in any way dependent on the teaching of the Apocalypse, or the Nero-redivivus legend, or the Gnostic heresies of the second century. But this again need be the less regretted because there has been a growing tendency to abandon this line of interpretation, even on the part of those scholars who deny the Epistle's authenticity. Wrede, for example, admits that any reference of the passage to Nero has been made wholly impossible by the researches of Bornemann, Jülicher and Zahn, and, from another point of view, of Gunkel and Bonsset<sup>2</sup>; while the assertion that

<sup>1</sup> *The EXPOSITOR* for June, 1904.

<sup>2</sup> "Die Deutung der Stelle auf Nero ist jedenfalls gründlich erschüttert,"

the chapter is in any way influenced by the Johannine Apocalypse no longer finds the support that once it did. And if we can show, as I hope to be able to do, that the passage can be understood in connexion with the conditions of S. Paul's own time, and the general characteristics of his mode of thought, it will be generally admitted that there is no need to go further afield in search of a writer.

For this let me only add by way of preface, that it is solely with the *historical* interpretation of the passage—what it meant for the writer, and for those to whom it was first addressed—that we are at present concerned. It is impossible to attempt even a résumé of the different interpretations that have been applied to it throughout the course of the Church's history: and it lies equally beyond our scope to determine what place, if any, the teaching here embodied is to have in our dogmatic systems regarding the Last Things.

In turning, then, to the passage as an integral part of S. Paul's Second Epistle to the Thessalonians, it may be well, before proceeding to examine it in detail, to recall the circumstances under which that Epistle was written, so far as we can now ascertain them.

On his arrival at Athens, shortly after his expulsion from Thessalonica and brief ministry at Berea, S. Paul, it will be remembered, had despatched Timothy to Thessalonica to "establish" his converts amidst the afflictions from which he had heard that they were suffering, and to "comfort" them concerning their faith (1 Thess. iii. 2). The report which Timothy brought back from Thessalonica, either by word of mouth or in the form of a letter, was in the main highly satisfactory, to judge from the expressions of warm praise which S. Paul bestowed upon the Church

*Die Echtheit des zweiten Thessalonicherbriefs*, p. 1. For the relation of the Neronic myth to Antichrist see especially Charles, *The Ascension of Isaiah*, p. li. ff

as a whole in the opening verses of his First Epistle to them—an Epistle which was evidently written immediately after Timothy's return (*ἄρτι δὲ ἐλθόντος Τιμοθέου*, 1 Thess. iii. 6). One matter only gave the Apostle grave concern, and that was to hear of the aspersions and slanders that had been cast upon the character of his own and his companions' ministry at Thessalonica, after they themselves had left. He nowhere definitely tells us by whom these attacks had been made, but to judge from the language of 1 Thessalonians ii. 14-16—and the point is not without importance for our future inquiry—there can be little doubt that they were the work of the unbelieving, fanatical Jews who had already secured his expulsion from Thessalonica, and who were now doing their utmost to prejudice his converts against him by throwing discredit upon the purity of his motives. It was a charge which the Apostle had little difficulty in meeting by an appeal to the actual experience of the Thessalonian Church. And no sooner had he disposed of it than he turned aside from this, the immediate cause of his writing, to deal with one or two questions of a more practical nature that had been suggested by Timothy's report.

One of these concerned the moral danger which the Thessalonian Christians, who were evidently for the most part Gentiles by birth, ran from contact with the too often vicious and depraved state of the pagan society around them. Another sprang from certain doctrinal difficulties in connexion with the Parousia of the Lord Jesus. We are not concerned with these last at present further than to notice that they were evidently due to the stress which S. Paul had laid on the near approach of Christ's Parousia in accordance with his own personal belief and expectation at the time. And accordingly, no sooner had he reassured the Thessalonians on the special point that was causing them trouble than he proceeded to

inculcate anew the need of constant watchfulness and preparedness in view of a fact so certain in its occurrence, but so uncertain in its precise time and season. "As a thief in the night," so he pointedly warned them, "there is a coming of a day of the Lord" (1 Thess. v. 2).

This teaching, however, had at least one unexpected result. Instead of allaying, it seems rather to have increased the restless excitement of which there had already been signs amongst the Thessalonians (see 1 Thess. v. 12-22), and to have led even in certain cases to an abandonment of their daily tasks—"a business which was no business," "a minding of everybody's business but their own."<sup>1</sup> And accordingly in his Second Epistle, written very shortly after the First, S. Paul set himself to rebuke and correct this state of things. And he did so all the more emphatically because he had heard that the Thessalonians were being encouraged in their idle and fanatical conduct by certain misleading and false influences, which he describes as "by spirit, or by word, or by epistle as from us, as that the day of the Lord is now present" (2 Thess. ii. 2). The verse is one of the most difficult in the Epistle; but whatever the exact interpretation we may attach to its different clauses, they evidently point to certain misleading utterances, and even to carefully planned words and a letter, one or all of them shielding themselves under the Apostle's name and authority, and all calculated to throw the Thessalonians off their balance by insinuating that the Day of the Lord was not only imminent, but was actually come.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> 2 Thess. iii. 7-12. It is true that nowhere in the Epistle does the Apostle directly connect the two things—the near approach of the Parousia and this restless idleness; but, as Hollmann has recently pointed out, only to some such cause can this "Arbeitsscheu" in a Church like the Thessalonian Church be ascribed. *Die Unechtheit des zweiten Thessalonicherbriefs* in the *Zeitschrift f. d. neutest. Wissenschaft*, 1904. Heft i.

<sup>2</sup> For this meaning of *ἐπέστηκεν*, cf. Rom. viii. 38, 1 Cor. iii. 22, vii. 26, Gal. i. 4.

Here, then, was the situation that S. Paul had to face—how, on the one hand, to unmask the error underlying these false representations; and on the other, to do nothing to discourage the Thessalonians' belief in the near approach of their Lord. And it must be at once admitted that the manner in which he proceeds to do so is to us at first sight both strange and bewildering. For, instead of conveying his warning in a clear and definite form, the Apostle prefers to embody it in a mysterious apocalyptic picture, which has not only no parallel in his own writings, but is unlike anything else in the New Testament, unless it be certain passages in the Apocalypse of S. John.<sup>1</sup> Nor is this all, but the difficulties of the passage are still further increased by the grammatical irregularities and frequent ellipses with which it abounds, and even more by the manifest reserve with which the whole subject is treated. In the case of the Thessalonians this might not much matter in view of the oral instruction regarding these very things which, as S. Paul reminds them, he had been in the habit of imparting while he was still with them. But to us, who have not had this advantage, the unexplained words and veiled phrases are of such a nature as to make it very questionable whether, with the resources at our disposal, any full and adequate interpretation of them is any longer possible. At the same time we can at least endeavour to indicate the main lines along which any such interpretation must be sought, and to guard against the manifest errors which so often, in popular estimation at least, have been associated with the passage.

Literally translated, it runs as follows:—

Now we beseech you, brethren, touching (or, as to) the Parousia of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our gathering together unto Him, to the end that ye be not hastily shaken from your reason—driven by feverish expectations from your sober senses (Lightfoot)—nor yet be

<sup>1</sup> See especially Rev. xiii. 5-8, 12-17, xvi. 9-11.

disquieted in mind, either by prophetic (i.e. charismatic) utterance, or by reasoned discourse, or by epistle, as though on our authority, representing that the day of the Lord is now present; let no man beguile you in any wise: for *it will not be* (i.e. the Parousia of the Lord will not take place), except the falling away come first, and the man of lawlessness be revealed, the son of perdition, he that opposeth and exalteth himself exceedingly against all that is called God or that is worshipped; so that he in the temple of God takes his seat, showing off himself as God. Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I was in the habit of telling you these things? And now—as regards the present—ye know that which restraineth, to the end that he may be revealed in his own season. For the mystery of lawlessness is already set in operation, only until he that now restraineth be taken out of the way (or, supplying the ellipsis, only *it must work in secret, or be unrevealed*, until he that now restraineth be taken out of the way). And then shall be revealed the lawless one, whom the Lord Jesus shall slay by the breath of His mouth, and bring to nought by the glorious manifestation of His Parousia; *even he*, whose parousia is in conformity with the working (or operative power) of Satan in all power and signs and wonders of falsehood, and in all deceit of unrighteousness for them that are perishing; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God sendeth them a working of error, that they should believe the falsehood: that they all might be judged who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

Looking then at the passage as a whole, and taking the events to which it refers, not so much in the order in which the Apostle refers to them as rather in what he indicates to be the order of their actual fulfilment, we find the following sequence:—

1. The mystery of lawlessness already working, but for the present held in check—kept secret—by some restraining power or person.

2. The removal of this restraining power, resulting in what is described as “the falling away,” evidently a general apostasy, which is accompanied by, or rather finds its consummation in, the revelation of the man of lawlessness.

3. The ruinous effect of this supreme manifestation of evil on those who yield themselves to its power, a mani-

festation which, however, is finally ended by the complete destruction of its author at the Parousia of the Lord Jesus.

1. As regards the first of these points—the present working of the mystery of lawlessness—it is clear that we are not to think here of any direct incarnation of evil in contrast to the incarnate God, “the mystery of godliness” (1 Tim. iii. 16): that comes later in the revelation of the lawless one. In the meantime the emphasis lies rather on “the mystery,” by which, in accordance with the distinctive New Testament usage of the word, can only be understood the present secret working of *ἀνομία* as distinguished from its future manifestation. This *ἀνομία*, then, “is already at work” (*ἤδη ἐνεργεῖται*)—a fact which in itself at once disposes of all those futurist interpretations of the passage which were once in such favour—and is only kept from making itself more widely and openly known by the action of a certain restraining power—*τὸ κατέχον*.

It is more difficult to determine in what this last consists. The writer himself makes no attempt to define it further, conscious that his meaning will be clear to his readers (“ye know”); and as the phrase in itself is quite indefinite, the door has been left open for the most varied interpretations. It would serve no good purpose to attempt to enumerate these here, and it is the less necessary because modern scholarship seems to be inclining with ever-increasing unanimity towards the interpretation favoured by the majority of patristic writers from Tertullian onwards, that we have here a reference to the restraining power of law or of government, especially as these were embodied at the time in the Roman State. It is certain at least that S. Paul had already found a “restraining” power in the Roman officials both at Paphos (Acts xiii. 6 ff.) and at Thessalonica itself (Acts xvii. 6 ff.); and it was doubtless these and similar experiences that afterwards led him in his Epistle



to the Romans to speak of "the powers that be" as "ordained of God," and of "rulers" as "not a terror to the good work, but to the evil" (Rom. xiii. 1, 3). There is, therefore, nothing unlikely, to say the least, in his having the same thought in his mind on the present occasion. While the fact that he does not give more definite expression to it is not only in entire accord with the generally cryptic character of apocalyptic writing, but may also be due to prudential motives.<sup>1</sup>

2. Strong and salutary, however, as this restraining power or person—for the power is further thought of as centred in a person or class, ὁ κατέχων, he that restraineth—has proved itself, it is not to continue, but is to be taken out of the way.<sup>2</sup> And no sooner has this happened than there occurs what the writer emphatically describes as ἡ ἀποστασία, the falling away, the definite article showing that he has some well-defined apostasy in view, and one, moreover, of which his readers also had already heard. Again the Apostle does not stay to define it further; but the form of the word, its use in the LXX,<sup>3</sup> and in the only other passage in which it occurs in the New Testament, make it

<sup>1</sup> "For if he had said that after a little while the Roman Empire would be dissolved, they would now immediately have even overwhelmed him as a pestilent person, and all the faithful, as living and warring to this end."—Chrysostom, *Hom. iv. in II. Thess.*

<sup>2</sup> The manner in which this was to happen is not specified, but that the idea of the end being at hand when the Roman Empire perished was not unfamiliar to Jewish apocalyptic is proved by such passages as 2 (4) Esdr. v. 1 ff., where it is stated that after the destruction of the fourth (Roman) Empire one "shall reign whom the inhabitants of the earth hope not for," by whom Gunkel understands Antichrist (see in Kautsch, *Pseudepigraphen des A.T.* p. 359), and Apoc. Baruch c. 39, 5-7, where the fall of Rome is represented as preceding the coming of the Messiah. For evidence to the same effect from Rabbinical sources, see Weber, *Jüdische Theologie*, p. 365 f.

<sup>3</sup> E.g. Jer. xxix. 32 ("rebellion against the Lord"), 1 Macc. ii. 15 ("the apostasy," consisting in sacrifice to idols): cf. Jer. ii. 19, 2 Chron. xxix. 19.

<sup>4</sup> Acts xxi. 21 ("apostasy from Moses"). For the verb see 1 Tim. iv. 1, Heb. iii. 12 ("apostatizing from the living God").

practically certain that it is a *religious* apostasy that he has in view.<sup>1</sup>

In this conclusion we are confirmed when we proceed to notice in what the falling away culminates. This is the revelation of the man of lawlessness who is described as (1) ὁ ἄνθρωπος τῆς ἀνομίας, or simply ὁ ἄνομος, the man whose predominating quality is lawlessness, or of whom lawlessness is the true and peculiar mark; (2) ὁ υἱὸς τῆς ἀπωλείας, he who has fallen under the power of perdition, rather than he who is the means of leading others to perdition (cf. John xvii. 12, and the instructive parallel in LXX. Isaiah lvii. 4, τέκνα ἀπωλείας, σπέρμα ἄνομον); and (3) ὁ ἀντικείμενος καὶ ὑπεραιρόμενος ἐπὶ πάντα λεγόμενον θεὸν ἢ σέβασμα, ὥστε αὐτὸν εἰς τὸν ναὸν τοῦ θεοῦ καθίσει, ἀποδεικνύντα ἑαυτὸν ὅτι ἔστιν θεός, "he that opposeth," or simply "the opposer," and "he that exalteth himself against all that is called God, or that is an object of worship, so that he in the temple of God takes his seat, showing off himself as God."

Now whatever other suggestions may underlie these several descriptions, it is impossible to doubt that in the main they are drawn from the Old Testament, and more especially from the prophecies of Daniel, which exercised so strong an influence on all subsequent eschatological teaching. Thus when in Daniel xi. 36 it is said of Antiochus Epiphanes: "And the king shall do according to his will; and he shall exalt himself, and magnify himself above every god (καὶ ὑψωθήσεται καὶ μεγαλυνθήσεται ἐπὶ πάντα θεόν), and shall speak marvellous things against the God of gods (ἐπὶ

<sup>1</sup> In his interesting *Introduction to the Thessalonian Epistles* Dr. Askwith has recently shown a preference for a political interpretation for ἀποστασία, but I do not feel called upon to discuss his argument, if only because I find myself unable to accept on other grounds the view of the man of lawlessness with which it is associated. Dr. Askwith seems to me, if I may venture to say so, anxious to find a more definite historical situation for the passage than is consonant with the general character of apocalyptic teaching in S. Paul's time.

τὸν θεὸν τῶν θεῶν), and he shall prosper till the indignation be accomplished (μέχρις οὗ συντελεσθῆ ἡ ὀργή),” the connexion with v. 4 of the passage before us is at once apparent; while similar illustrative parallels may be adduced from Daniel vii. 25, “And he shall speak words against the Most High,” and Daniel viii. 23–25, where a king of fierce countenance is described, who shall come forth “when their sins are come to the full” (πληρουμένων τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν αὐτῶν : cf. 1 Thess. ii. 16, εἰς τὸ ἀναπληρῶσαι αὐτῶν τὰς ἁμαρτίας πάντοτε), and “shall destroy the mighty ones, and the people of the saints,” and “falsehood shall prosper in his hands” (καλεῖσθωθήσεται τὸ ψεῦδος ἐν ταῖς χερσὶν αὐτοῦ). And though it is more difficult to find Old Testament warrant for the last trait ascribed by S. Paul to the lawless one “that he in the temple of God takes his seat, showing off himself as God,” it is being increasingly recognized that its real root is to be found in the Danielic reference to “the abomination of desolation” (τὸ βδέλυγμα τῆς ἐρημώσεως, xii. 11 : cf. viii. 13, ix. 27, xi. 31), that is, the heathen altar erected by Antiochus on the altar of burnt offering, or perhaps rather in the more personal form that that phrase would seem to have reached in Jewish tradition, to judge from our Lord’s use of it, as reported in the oldest source: “When ye see the abomination of desolation standing (ἑστηκότα) where he ought not” (Mark xiii. 14).<sup>1</sup>

When, however, we proceed to ask *whence* this lawless one is to arise, we are at once met with great differences of opinion. Some commentators indeed, as Bornemann, hold that this is a question to which no answer can be given, and that we must be content to regard this mysterious figure as transcending the bounds of history and of race.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> On the relation of this passage to an expected future Antichrist see arts. ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION and ANTICHRIST (§ 4) in the *Encyclopædia Biblica*, and MAN OF SIN (§ iv.) in Hastings’ *Dictionary of the Bible*.

<sup>2</sup> “Uebergeschichtlich und international,” Bornemann, *Die Thessalonicherbriefe*, p. 358.

But the expressions used are too precise, and the horror awakened in the writer's mind by his vision too great, not to lead us to believe that he himself had formed as distinct an idea of the lawless one's origin, as he evidently had of his manner of working.

But if so, it is equally certain that this apostate figure is not to be sought within the Christian Church of the day. The time might come when S. Paul would have to lament that falling away of Christ's people from the faith, which Christ Himself had predicted (Acts xx. 29 f.; Eph. iv. 14; 1 Tim. iv. 1; cf. Matt. xxiv. 11 f., xxiv. 24, Luke xviii. 18); but that time was not yet. And the commendation bestowed upon the Thessalonian Church as a whole throughout the Epistle, and nowhere more emphatically than in the verses immediately following this sad picture, forbids us from thinking of any serious lapsing on its part, or even on the part of some of its members, without this being more clearly specified than is the case here.

It must, then, be either out of heathenism or Judaism that the lawless one is to come, and both views have found strong advocates.

Thus in support of the first view it has been argued that a heathen origin for Antichrist is more in accord with the past history of the application to Antiochus Epiphanes<sup>1</sup>; while further support is found in the same direction if we can see here any direct reference to the horror produced on Christian minds by the Emperor-worship of the time,<sup>2</sup> or more particularly by the attempt of Caligula to set up his own statue in the temple of Jerusalem.<sup>3</sup> But though such

<sup>1</sup> Cf. further the references to Pompey the Great in the *Psalms of Solomon* (48-40 B.C.), where he is described as ὁ ἀμαρτωλὸς (ii. 1), and actually as ὁ ἀνομος (xvii. 13) if we can adopt Ewald's happy conjectural reading.

<sup>2</sup> For the significance of this for the Early Church see Dr. Westcott's Essay on *The Two Empires* in *The Epistles of St. John*, especially p. 255 ff.

<sup>3</sup> Joseph. *Ant.* xviii. c. 8: Philo *Leg. at Caium.* ii. 559 (ὁ Γάιος ἐαυτὸν ἐξετέφωσεν οὐ λέγων μόνον, ἀλλὰ καὶ οὐόμενος εἶναι θεός).

contemporary historical events may have affected the Apostle's language, and even modified the particular form in which his thought was cast, it is elsewhere that we must look for the real roots of that thought. As both Gunkel<sup>1</sup> and Bousset<sup>2</sup> have pointed out, times of political excitement do not as a rule give rise to new eschatological yearnings, whose growth and being are a much slower process. And certainly in no case can we believe that it is out of the Roman Empire itself that the man of lawlessness is to be thought of as arising, if, as we have already seen to be probable, it is that Empire which acts as his restraining power.

On the whole, then, while the heathen attacks on the religion of the one true God may have suggested to the Apostle certain features in his description,<sup>3</sup> it seems more in keeping with that description as a whole to look for this fanatical outburst of evil as arising within the bounds of Judaism. Thus it is in one who is himself *ὁ ἄνομος* that it is said to reach its head. And though there is doubtless a sense in which "lawlessness" is a characteristic of the Gentile nations who "know not God,"<sup>4</sup> it is still more applicable to the Jews who, while having the law, openly set themselves in defiance to it.<sup>5</sup> The fact too that the lawless one regards the temple at Jerusalem as the dwelling-place of God is further evidence in the same direction. For it will not do to say that the phrase "the temple of God"

<sup>1</sup> *Schöpfung und Chaos in Urzeit und Endzeit*, p. 221 ff.

<sup>2</sup> *The Antichrist Legend*, p. 143.

<sup>3</sup> See e.g. the Gog and Magog assault of the Gentiles on Jerusalem in Ezek. xxxviii., xxxix.

<sup>4</sup> It is specially predicated of them in 2 Cor. vi. 14, and for *ἄνομος* used technically of the Gentiles as those without law, see Acts ii. 28, 1 Cor. ix. 21.

<sup>5</sup> According to Dr. Ginsburg, art. ANTICHRIST in *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, the lawless one is none other than Belial (cf. 2 Cor. vi. 10), a name interpreted by the Rabbis as compounded of בלי without, and יול yoke, so that Belial is one who will not accept the yoke of the law. See also Charles, *The Ascension of Isaiah*, p. lxii.

is to be understood here figuratively of the Christian Church, much as S. Paul himself afterwards used it (cf. 1 Cor. iii. 16, 17, 2 Cor. vi. 16; and see Eph. ii. 21). The twice-repeated article—*εἰς τὸν ναὸν τοῦ θεοῦ*—and especially the mention of the lawless one's *taking his seat*, an expression that can hardly be understood metaphorically, conclusively show that the temple at Jerusalem can alone be meant, a temple that was actually standing when the Apostle wrote.

Nor were there wanting circumstances in S. Paul's surroundings at the time which might well lead him to look for such a climax of wickedness amongst his fellow-countrymen. Up to this time, as Dr. Bernard Weiss has well pointed out, the Apostle had not met with any fundamental opposition from the Gentiles. "The evil and unreasonable people, who everywhere stood in his way (*ἄστοι καὶ πονηροὶ ἄνθρωποι*) to be delivered from whom was, in his opinion, the condition of an unhindered activity of the word of God (2 Thess. iii. 1, 2), and by whom Satan had already often hindered him (1 Thess. ii. 18), were the fanatical Jews. They had for the most part remained disobedient to the Gospel (2 Thess. i. 8), they had persecuted him from the commencement of his missionary activity (Acts ix. 23, 24, 29, xiii. 8, 45), they had everywhere stirred up the heathen populace against him (xiii. 50, xiv. 2, 5, 19, xvii. 5, 13), and had shown themselves his deadly enemies (xviii. 6; cf. 1 Thess. iii. 7). It was against their evil calumnies and slanders that he had to defend himself, in the First Epistle, before the young Christian Church, which they sought, by these means, to turn away from their teacher."<sup>1</sup>

What more natural, then, than that the Apostle should continue to look to these Jews as the real source and cause of the time of tribulation and travail which, in accordance with the prevailing belief of his time, was to precede the

<sup>1</sup> *Biblical Theology of the New Testament*, Eng. Tr. vol. i. p. 306.

appearance of the Messiah?<sup>1</sup> And as Christ Himself had warned against false prophets who would tempt men to believe in false Messiahs (Matt. vii. 15, xxiv. 4 f.; Mark xiii. 21 f.; Luke xvii. 21, 23; cf. Acts xiii. 6 ff.), it was but a following out of the same train of thought that S. Paul should depict the opposition to Christ as finally reaching its head in a pseudo- or counterfeit Messiah, who has his "mystery," his "revelation," and his "parousia" just like the true, and who stands in the same relation to Satan that Christ stands to God.<sup>2</sup>

3. This comes out, if possible, still more clearly in the description of Antichrist's working or *ἐνεργεία*, a word which elsewhere S. Paul uses expressly of the exercise of Divine power (Eph. i. 19, iii. 7; Phil. iii. 21; Col. i. 29, ii. 12), and which here shows itself "in all power and signs and wonders" (*ἐν πάσῃ δυνάμει καὶ σημείοις καὶ τέρασιν*)—the same three terms by which in various combinations the miracles of Christ and His disciples are elsewhere described (Acts ii. 22; Rom. xv. 19; 2 Cor. xii. 12; Heb. ii. 14)—only with this fatal difference, that in the present instance they are all works "of falsehood" (*ψεύδους*). False in themselves, they lead also to falsehood, with the result that those who submit themselves to their power are miserably deceived "in return for their refusal to entertain the love of the truth" (*ἀνθ' ὧν τὴν ἀγάπην τῆς ἀληθείας οὐκ ἐδέξαντο*)—a refusal which, though in the first instance due to their own wilful conduct, the Apostle does not hesitate to refer in the last instance to God Himself in true Old Testament

<sup>1</sup> Volz, *Jüdische Eschatologie*, p. 178 ff.

<sup>2</sup> With this caricature of Christ may be compared the account of Beliar in *The Ascension of Isaiah*, c. iv. 6-8, a passage which Dr. Charles regards as of Christian origin inserted in an older Jewish work: "And all that he hath desired he will do in the world: he will do and speak like the Beloved and he will say: 'I am God, and before me there has been none.' And all the people in the world will believe in him. And they will sacrifice to him and they will serve him saying: 'This is God and beside him there is no other.'"

fashion. As they loved lies, God "sends" them lies for their portion.

And yet, after all, in accordance with a fundamental law of Jewish apocalyptic, this climax of evil only proves the herald of its final destruction. For "the Lord Jesus shall slay [the lawless one] with the breath of His mouth, and bring [him] to nought by the glorious manifestation of His Parousia."

The first part of this description is clearly drawn from the prophecy of the destruction of the Rod of Jesse in Isaiah xi. 4 (*καὶ ἐν πνεύματι διὰ χειλέων ἀνελεῖ ἀσεβῆ*), a passage which the Targum of Jonathan afterwards applied to the destruction of Armillus, the Jewish Antichrist, and whose use here, therefore, S. Paul may well have drawn from the Jewish tradition of his time; while with the latter part may be compared the LXX. version of Isaiah xxvi. 10, "Let the wicked be taken away, that he may not see the glory of the Lord" (*ἀρθήτω ὁ ἀσεβής, ἵνα μὴ ἴδῃ τὴν δόξαν κυρίου*), and still more suggestively the vision of the Son of man foreshadowed by Daniel (vii. 13, 14 LXX.), and to which our Lord Himself points as the signal of the final consummation (Mark xiii. 26, with Dr. Swete's note).

Such, then, is the passage; and if we have understood it rightly, this at least is certain, that it is to be taken neither as a direct and original revelation granted to S. Paul, nor as an arbitrary invention on his part, but rather as a recasting in the light of his personal experience, and of the particular circumstances in which he found himself at the time, of certain beliefs long held amongst the Jewish people.<sup>1</sup>

Thus we have had frequent occasion to notice how powerfully the language and ideas of the Book of Daniel

<sup>1</sup> "Die *ἀνομος*-Erwartung des 2 Thessalonicherbriefes ist also nicht willkürliche Erfindung eines Einzelnen, sondern nur der Ausdruck eines in langer Geschichte gewordenen und damals allgemein verbreiteten Glaubens." Gunkel, *Schöpfung und Chaos*, p. 221.



have influenced the whole passage, and other parallels from the Old Testament might easily be cited. Bornemann, for example, has traced many echoes from the LXX. version of Pss. xciii. and lxxxviii. in the *ἀνομος* section, and other illustrations of its various details from Old Testament prophecy will be found in the different Commentaries. Apart, moreover, from these incidental comparisons, it is of interest to notice that the central idea of the whole conception is in entire accord with that predominant element in the teaching of the prophets which led them whenever they saw "a quickening of the currents of providence in any direction, whether of judgment or salvation" to see in it "the beginning of the day of the Lord."

Nor in estimating further the formative influences in S. Paul's conceptions regarding the Last Things, can we lose sight of the effect produced upon his mind by the eschatological teaching of Jesus, as that has been handed down in the Apostolic tradition. Of this dependence we have abundant proof in the Parousia passages of 1 Thessalonians, as e.g. in the comparison of the day of the Lord with a thief in the night (1 Thess. v. 2; Matt. xxiv. 43), and the consequent exhortation not to sleep, but to watch and be sober (1 Thess. v. 6 f.; Matt. xxiv. 42). And the same dependence appears still more strikingly in the chapter before us. Dr. Kennedy, indeed, in his recent valuable lectures on the Pauline Eschatology, does not hesitate to say that Matthew xxiv. is the most instructive commentary upon it, citing as parallels 2 Thessalonians ii. 1 with Matthew xxiv. 31; ii. 2 with xxiv. 6; ii. 3 with xxiv. 12, 4; ii. 4 with xxiv. 15; ii. 9 with xxiv. 24.<sup>2</sup> And it should also be noted that according to John v. 43 our Lord

<sup>1</sup> Dr. A. B. Davidson, *The Theology of the Old Testament*, p. 379.

<sup>2</sup> *S. Paul's Conceptions of the Last Things*, pp. 55, 56.

distinctly contemplated a leader "coming in his own name" and demanding allegiance.

When, however, we pass beyond these two influences, the influence of the Old Testament and of the teaching of Jesus, it is more difficult to determine what is the precise nature of the Apostle's relation here to contemporary Jewish thought. We cannot, of course, forget that S. Paul was not only a man but a theologian of his time, and that his early Pharisaic training could hardly fail to leave its traces upon his whole doctrinal system. At the same time I venture to think that these traces are to be looked for rather in the framework or outward setting of the Apostle's teaching than in its actual contents. And certainly, so far as the passage before us is concerned, I have been unable to discover any essential feature in it which would seem to have been taken over from current Judaistic notions, without first being authenticated in the literature of the Old Testament or the Synoptic tradition.

The same may be said regarding the very interesting attempt of Bousset in his *Antichrist Legend* to find evidence here of a primitive eschatological tradition which had been handed down orally in Judaism, and which, in the form which it assumes in the Pauline teaching, is nothing else than a later anthropomorphic transformation of the Babylonian myth of the dragon which stormed the abode of God (see especially pp. 128 ff., 144, 165 f., 182).

I am, of course, very far from denying the possibility of some connexion between this old myth and the Pauline man of lawlessness, more particularly in view of the light that has recently been thrown, not only on the Old Testament but on the New Testament, from Babylonian and other Eastern sources. And yet one cannot but desire clearer evidence for the existence of the tradition in its Jewish form than any Bousset has been able to furnish. He depends mainly, as is well known, on certain data con-

cerning Antichrist which he finds in the eschatological commentaries of Irenæus, Hippolytus, and other early Fathers, and which, because unsupported by anything in the Bible, can only (he thinks) be referred to some such esoteric doctrine that had not previously been embodied in any written records. But is it not just as likely that these foreign data were rather the result of the imaginations of the spiritualizing commentators themselves, working upon what they found both here and in the other passages relating to Antichrist in the Scriptures? <sup>1</sup> And in any case, if this Jewish tradition really existed in the form which Bousset's theory requires, is it conceivable that it should have left no traces of itself in early Rabbinical literature? <sup>2</sup>

On the main point, then—the fundamental sources from which the picture before us has been drawn—we do well to depend chiefly upon the LXX. version of the Old Testament, and the eschatological teaching of Jesus, or perhaps one should rather say that teaching as interpreted in the light of the writer's living Christian experience, leaving to Judaistic tradition and primitive myth little more than the possible suggestion of certain features in the outward portraiture. <sup>3</sup>

Even, however, if it be granted that these several influences are sufficient to have supplied the materials from which a Jewish writer of S. Paul's time might have constructed the picture we have been considering, it may still be objected that in no case can that writer have been

<sup>1</sup> Kennedy, *ut supra*. p. 212 f.

<sup>2</sup> Mr. Thackeray thinks that the lack of early Rabbinical attestation for the belief is probably due to its being adopted by the Christians, and to the important part which it played in their expectation of the second coming of Christ (*The Relation of S. Paul to Contemporary Jewish Thought*, p. 187).

<sup>3</sup> On the subsequent doctrinal and historical value of the passage see the brief but suggestive summary by Dr. Lock in Hastings' *Dictionary of the Bible*, iv. p. 749, § vi.

S. Paul himself, as has hitherto been assumed; for, if our interpretation of the passage is correct, it is inconsistent (1) with the eschatology of 1 Thessalonians—whose Pauline authorship is beyond question, and (2) with the light in which the Apostle elsewhere represents the future of his fellow-countrymen.

(1) As regards the first of these points, it must be kept in view that any supposed inconsistency with 1 Thessalonians is not to be looked for, as is often done, in a lengthened delay of the Parousia in the teaching of the Second Epistle. For there, just as much as in the First Epistle, the Parousia is regarded as close at hand, the signs preceding it being already at work (v. 7). It is rather in the introduction of any such "signs" at all, and in the consequent depriving the Parousia of its unexpected character that S. Paul seems to come into conflict here with his own earlier teaching.

At most the conflict is not a very serious one, and justification for the Apostle's attitude has been sought in the presence of the same apparent inconsistency in the record of our Lord's own eschatological discourses, and also in the general apocalyptic literature of the time.<sup>1</sup> But after all, it is probably wiser not to attempt to reconcile the two positions too literally. Nothing can be clearer than that S. Paul had at this time no definite and ordered system regarding the Last Things, and that his teaching on any particular occasion was determined by practical rather than by theological motives.<sup>2</sup> It was only natural, then, that on hearing of the special restlessness which, as we have seen, the Thessalonians were manifesting at this time, he should

<sup>1</sup> See Spitta, *Zur Geschichte und Literatur des Urchristenthums*, i. p. 129 f.

<sup>2</sup> "Es sind also nur Bruchstücke seiner Anschauung gegeben, und zwar solche, die unter den gegebenen Umständen zu betonen nötig war."—Bornemann, *ut sup.* p. 585.

be led to emphasize anew (2 Thess. ii. 5) that aspect of the Parousia by which he thought this restlessness could be most successfully checked; and all the more so, if that aspect fell in with a passing mood in his own mind caused by the circumstances in which he found himself.

(2) For, to pass to the second point, there is nothing psychologically impossible in the attitude which S. Paul here adopts towards the Jews, as compared, for example, with the view that he takes of their future in Romans xi. We have seen how hardly beset and thwarted he was by the Jews at the time that the Epistle was written. And terrible no doubt as is the picture of the false Jewish Messiah, which, according to our interpretation, he here paints, there is after all nothing in it more condemnatory of his nation than the scathing words of 1 Thessalonians ii. 14-16, of which we can only get rid by an altogether unsupported theory of interpolation.<sup>1</sup> For the time being the Apostle could see in his unregenerate fellow-countrymen only the active and determined opponents of all that was dearest to him, and essential for their own salvation. And it needed the course of subsequent events to open his eyes to the wider possibilities that God had in store for His chosen people.

On the whole, then, there seems to be nothing in the teaching of this passage, as we have tried to understand it, to prevent our continuing to regard it as genuinely Pauline. And if so, it must clearly be taken into account in any attempt to frame a complete picture of the Apostle's views regarding the Last Things.

GEORGE MILLIGAN.

<sup>1</sup> Schmiedel, *Hand-Commentar zum N.T.* in loco.