



Comments on 1 & 2 Thessalonians

**Should We Believe
the Apostle Paul?**

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Cover: The Alpha and Omega prominently displayed on our cover represents more than mere decorative symbolism. These Greek letters, signifying Jesus Christ as “the beginning and the end, the First and the Last,” invite us to see His role comprehensively—not just in the inception of our faith, but in His promised return that would bring the age of the Law to its definitive conclusion. Just as the Gospel narratives establish Jesus’ authority at Christianity’s beginning, the Thessalonian letters demand we heed His words about the end of the Old Covenant age and the full establishment of the New.

This symbol challenges us to recognize Jesus’ sovereignty over both the alpha of faith’s foundation and the omega of the Law’s fulfillment. As we examine Paul’s urgent claims about Christ’s imminent return during the Second Temple period’s final days, we’re not merely engaging in academic exercise. We’re wrestling with fundamental questions about divine faithfulness and apostolic authority. The Alpha and Omega reminds us that understanding Jesus’ role in both commencement and consummation is essential for grasping the full scope of redemptive history.

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Preamble

How we read the Thessalonian letters matters. Within their urgent lines lies a question that strikes at the heart of Christian faith: should we believe the Apostle Paul? When he wrote of imminent judgment, of Christ's return, of the man of sin sitting in the Temple of God—was he mistaken, or corrected, or simply misread?

The usual answer comes from reading each letter alone. Isolated, 1 Thessalonians can sound unguarded and unconditional—as though the end might arrive at any moment, with nothing left to happen first. Isolated, 2 Thessalonians can then look like a retreat from that claim, a more cautious Paul inserting a delay the first letter never mentioned. Read that way, the correspondence tells a story of a man revising himself, and our subtitle answers itself in the worst possible direction.

This book argues that the story changes once the two letters are read as a single instrument rather than two unrelated soundings. Paul wrote both to the same congregation, almost certainly within months of one another, addressing what was almost certainly the same unfolding crisis. Read together, they do not tell the story of a man correcting his confidence. They tell the

story of a man correcting a misreading of his confidence—and the difference between those two stories is the whole of the argument that follows.

We stand, then, not simply at a crossroads of interpretation but at a choice of method. Mature reading does not mean softening Paul's urgency until it says nothing, nor mining each letter separately for whichever claim best survives on its own. It means holding both halves of the correspondence up together and asking what single image was there from the start.

On Reading in Pairs: The Diptych Method

A diptych is a single work of art composed of two hinged panels, conceived from the outset to be viewed as one image. Separate the panels and hang them on opposite walls, and each will strike a viewer as strange on its own terms—a hand extended toward nothing, a figure gazing at an empty space just past the frame's edge. Nothing is wrong with either panel. What is missing is the other panel. Only reunited do the two halves resolve into the single scene the artist intended.

This book treats 1 and 2 Thessalonians as functioning the same way: two letters to one congregation, written in close sequence, addressing a single developing situation, each incomplete as a

record of Paul's expectation without the other beside it. Call this the Diptych Method: the deliberate practice of reading paired New Testament letters as a single composite witness—cross-referencing claim against claim, and statement against silence—before drawing conclusions about what an author believed.

The method rests on a simple observation about how ambivalence gets manufactured. Take any two statements a person makes months apart on a developing matter, sever them from one another, and hand each to a reader who knows nothing of the other. Both readers will reasonably wonder whether their statement is the whole of the matter, and both will be tempted to fill the resulting gaps with speculation—about hesitation, about second thoughts, about what went unsaid. Reunite the statements, and most of that manufactured ambivalence disappears, because the second statement answers the very questions the first one raised. The uncertainty was never in the author. It was in the separation.

Applied to Paul, the stakes are not academic. 1 Thessalonians 4 and 5, read alone, describe a coming of the Lord with no stated preconditions—the dead in Christ rising, the living caught up together with them, the whole event arriving “as a thief in the night” (1 Thessalonians 5:2). Critics have long used precisely

this passage to charge Paul with predicting an any-moment return that failed to arrive on schedule. 2 Thessalonians 2, read alone, can then look like damage control: a more careful Paul, backpedaling, inserting a sequence of prior events the first letter never mentioned. That is the reading the half produces. The whole reads differently.

2 Thessalonians 2:1–2 tells us directly why the second letter exists: some in Thessalonica had received a report, purporting to come from Paul himself, claiming that the Day of the Lord had already arrived. Paul is not softening his own prior claim in 2 Thessalonians 2. He is correcting a forgery or a misreading of that claim—and 1 Thessalonians is very likely the letter being misquoted. Without both panels in view, a reader cannot see that 2 Thessalonians 2 is a correction of the reader, not a retreat by the author. That distinction is invisible to half a diptych. It is the entire subject of the second panel.

The Diptych Method is not a device for harmonizing away every difficulty a critical reader might raise. It is a discipline for locating the difficulty accurately. Some tensions between paired letters are real and should be named as such. But many are artifacts of the reader's own procedure—of asking each letter to answer, alone, a question it was never written alone to answer.

This book is conceived as the first installment of a series applying that same discipline to other Pauline and New Testament pairs: Galatians alongside Romans on justification, 1 Corinthians alongside 2 Corinthians on apostolic authority, and beyond. 1 and 2 Thessalonians offer the clearest test case, because nowhere else does a New Testament author tell us so explicitly, in his own words, that his second letter exists to correct a misreading of his first.

Introduction

The Thessalonian letters carry one of the most urgent tones anywhere in the New Testament, and that urgency has often been treated as the problem to be explained away. This book treats it instead as the data to be accounted for. Paul's Greek supplies the first clue. The verb *mello*, which appears repeatedly across his letters for what is “about to” happen, does not describe an abstract future possibility; it describes an event already in motion, whose outcome is no longer in doubt even though its completion still lies ahead. When Paul uses this vocabulary of the coming judgment, he is not speculating about a distant horizon. He is describing something already underway.

1 Thessalonians 2:14–16 gives that urgency a concrete referent. Paul frames the Thessalonians' own suffering as continuous with what “the churches of God which in Judaea are in Christ Jesus” had already endured—persecution at the hands of their own countrymen, mirroring what those Judean churches had suffered from theirs. Paul is not writing in generalities about a hostile world.

He is drawing a direct line between a Gentile congregation in Macedonia and a specific, escalating crisis unfolding among the Jews of Judea, a crisis he says has already brought “wrath... to the uttermost” upon its authors (1 Thessalonians 2:16).

That Judean crisis has a well-documented shape. In the years leading to the war of AD 66–70, the Zealot movement emerged as a hard-line nationalist faction that treated ritual and political purity as inseparable, and treated any accommodation with Rome—or with a message that welcomed uncircumcised Gentiles as full covenant members—as a betrayal of Israel's election.¹

A message announcing that in Christ “there is neither Jew nor Greek” (Galatians 3:28) was not, to this faction, a theological nuance. It was a direct challenge to the entire framework by which they understood Israel's survival. Paul's apocalyptic language in Thessalonians engages that conflict on its own terrain: the coming judgment he describes is not a timeless abstraction but a specific historical reckoning bearing down on the very system the Zealots were prepared to die defending.

The Second Temple itself stood at the center of that reckoning. Its great gates, some rising over thirty feet, framed a building whose destruction Jesus had already named in the plainest terms:

“There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down” (Matthew 24:2).

Josephus records that even as the city fell under siege, Passover pilgrims continued to press into Jerusalem in remarkable numbers, drawn by long habit and religious duty into a trap already closing around them—so that the very crowds gathered for worship became casualties of a war fought in the Temple's own courts.²

What Jesus foretold and what Paul assumed as background were not two different expectations. They were the same expectation, held by two witnesses standing at different points along its approach.

On the Atavist chronology, the Temple's desolation ran across a marked interval of one thousand two hundred and sixty days, from the twenty-sixth of Tevet in AM 3827 to the seventeenth of Tammuz in AM 3831—the winter of AD 67 to the summer of AD 70, when the daily sacrifice ceased. This was not a vague apocalyptic mood being translated into urgent-sounding prose. It was a countdown already running.

Three interpretive frameworks have grown up around this material, and it is worth naming them plainly before turning to the letters themselves.

Partial Preterism

Partial Preterists read the events of AD 66–70 as a genuine fulfillment of much New Testament prophecy—particularly the Olivet Discourse and large portions of Revelation—while maintaining that Scripture still anticipates a final, still-future, physical Second Coming at the end of history. On this view, AD 70 is a major fulfillment, but not the last one.

Full Preterism

Full Preterists extend the same logic further, treating the destruction of Jerusalem as the complete fulfillment of all remaining biblical prophecy, including the Second Coming, the resurrection, and the

final judgment. On this view, when Christ spoke of coming “in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory” (Matthew 24:30), He described His vindication through Rome's judgment on Jerusalem, and nothing beyond AD 70 remains outstanding in the biblical timeline.

The Atavist Position

The Atavist framework agrees with both Preterist schools that Daniel's fourth kingdom is Rome and that the great majority of New Testament apocalyptic language addresses first-century events rather than our own future. It differs by tracing that fourth kingdom's prophesied dismantling across three phases rather than one: the Hasmonean period (163–37 BC), the Herodian period (37 BC–AD 66), and finally the Judeo-Idumean war coalition, whose defeat did not conclude at AD 70 but continued through the Judea Capta period, the Kitos War, and the Bar Kokhba revolt of AD 132–136—the point at which Daniel 12's scattering of “the power of the holy people” reached its completion. On this reading, Daniel's “great mountain” (Daniel 2:35) is not a still-future kingdom but Christianity itself, already filling the earth in the wreckage of a Jewish state that had, by AD 136, been dismantled in full.

This framework carries a further interpretive discipline worth stating outright: the distinction between Peshat prophecies, which point to one specific historical fulfillment, and Pesher prophecies, whose language may legitimately gather up more than one fulfillment across time. Confusing the two in either direction—treating a Peshat prophecy as endlessly repeatable, or

squeezing a Peshier prophecy into a single narrow moment—is what produces both reckless date-setting and its opposite error, a flattened reading that cannot see any historical specificity in the text at all. Guarding that distinction is not pedantry. It is what keeps a reader from pareidolia, the seeing of a pattern where none exists—a tendency harmless in clouds and tree bark, and considerably less harmless when applied to the timing of the Second Coming.

Chapter One

The Question Half-Asked

Before assembling the diptych, it is worth seeing plainly what the separated folios produce, because the case for reading them together depends on first taking the case against it seriously.

Read in isolation, 1 Thessalonians 4:15–17 gives no advance notice of anything that must happen first. “For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout... and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them.” Paul writes in the first-person plural—we which are alive—with no qualifying clause suggesting a sequence of prior events standing between the Thessalonians and that moment. A reader encountering only this letter has every right to conclude that Paul expected the event to be able to happen at any time, unannounced by any intervening sign.

Read in isolation, 2 Thessalonians 2:1–5 supplies exactly the missing sequence—and supplies it as new information: “Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition... Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things?” A skeptical reader is entitled to notice the shape of this: the second letter reads like a correction, arriving after the

fact, of an expectation the first letter did nothing to discourage. On the flattest possible reading, Paul told the Thessalonians the end could come at any moment; something happened; and Paul wrote back to slow them down.

This is the case the diptych must answer, and it should be stated at full strength rather than caricatured. The two letters, taken as isolated soundings, really do produce an apparent contradiction between unconditioned imminence and a stated sequence of preconditions. The question is not whether that tension is visible—it plainly is—but whether the tension belongs to Paul, or belongs to the act of reading each letter as though the other did not exist.

Chapter Two

Piecing the Diptych

Reassembled, the two letters answer one another directly, folio by folio. What follows treats five such pairings in turn.

First Folio — Imminence and Sequence

1 Thessalonians 4:15–17 describes the Lord's descent with no stated precondition. 2 Thessalonians 2:3–4 supplies one directly: “except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed... who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God.”

Read as isolated soundings, these look like two incompatible timelines. Read as one letter answering the misreading of the other, they resolve cleanly. 2 Thessalonians 2:2 tells us the precise error Paul is correcting: some had been “troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand”—that is, someone had claimed, falsely and in Paul's name, that the Day had already arrived. Paul's answer is not a new timeline inserted to slow an overeager church down. It is a denial that the event described in 1 Thessalonians 4 has already taken place, followed by a reminder—“remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things?” (2 Thessalonians 2:5)—that the sequence was never a secret. Paul is not disclosing new preconditions

in 2 Thessalonians. He is re-disclosing preconditions the Thessalonians had apparently already forgotten or been told he never gave. The imminence of 1 Thessalonians 4 and the sequence of 2 Thessalonians 2 are not two competing timelines but one timeline described twice: near enough to be described as mello, about to happen, and specific enough to have identifiable markers along the way. A watchman can tell you the enemy is nearly at the gate and still name the two hills the army must cross first without contradicting himself.

Second Folio — “Times and Seasons” Against the Marked Sequence

1 Thessalonians 5:1 opens with what looks, alone, like a refusal to give any timetable at all: “But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you.” Set beside 2 Thessalonians 2, which supplies a falling away, a man of sin, and a restrainer removed, the two statements can look like flat contradiction—no need for a timetable, followed two letters later by a timetable.

The diptych resolves this by noticing that 1 Thessalonians 5:1–2 answers a narrower question than it is often asked to answer. Paul does not say the manner of the Day is unknowable; he says its date is not the kind of thing anyone needs supplied, because “yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night.” A thief’s arrival is not undetectable in principle—a watchful household can see the signs of a break-in coming—it is simply undated in advance.

Verse 3 names the party the thief overtakes: “For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape.” This is not a swipe at Roman propaganda, however often that reading is proposed. Its nearer, better-attested ancestor is Jeremiah 6:14 and Ezekiel 13:10—false prophets in Judah’s own final years, reassuring a nation under judgment that all was well when it was not. Paul reaches for the same indictment Jeremiah and Ezekiel used against Israel’s own false comforters, and applies it to the same kind of people in his own moment: the “they” of verse 3 continues, rather than departs from, the “them” of 2:14–16, upon whom wrath has already come “to the uttermost.”

Josephus supplies this posture a face. The Judean leadership divided sharply over whether to seek terms with Rome. The moderates wanted peace badly enough to court it at real political cost; Ananus ben Ananus spent his life trying to restrain the war party before the Zealots killed him for it.³ The Zealot faction refused every overture, not from ignorance of the danger but from a settled theological confidence that God would not surrender His own city—a confidence the Zealot leadership actively cultivated among the people rather than merely held privately. At the Temple’s very destruction, Josephus records a false prophet proclaiming that the people should ascend to the Temple courts to receive “miraculous signs of their deliverance”; some six thousand did, and were burned alive when Roman soldiers, acting without orders, fired the portico where they had gathered. Josephus states the cause outright: such prophets were “suborned by the tyrants... in order to keep them

from deserting.”⁴ “Peace and safety” was not a slogan the Zealots imported from Rome. It was the message their own leadership manufactured and broadcast, to their own people, to prevent exactly the kind of surrender the moderates wanted.

2 Thessalonians 2 does not violate the “no calendar date” principle by naming a falling away and a man of sin; it confirms it, since none of those markers amounts to a date. Paul supplies signs, not a schedule, in both letters alike.

Verse 4 then does more than reassure. “But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief” places the Thessalonians inside the blast radius of the same day before excusing them from it—a thief cannot “overtake” someone outside his reach. Paul is not describing a hazard for some distant future generation; he is telling his own readers that the crisis bears on them directly, and that they, unlike those in verse 3, will meet it awake. “Ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief” is the very verse 2 Thessalonians 2 puts into practice: the Thessalonians are not left to be overtaken, because Paul has just told them what to watch for.

Excursus

The Thief in Common Testimony

Paul is not the only apostolic voice who reaches for this image, and the pattern of its reuse tells its own story. The identical figure—a thief, arriving at an hour the household cannot fix in

advance—appears five times across four authors, and the Greek in every instance shares the same root, *kleptes*.

Jesus supplies the original saying, preserved in two independent Gospel traditions: “If the goodman of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched” (Matthew 24:43); “Be ye therefore ready also: for the Son of man cometh at an hour when ye think not” (Luke 12:39). Paul inherits it in 1 Thessalonians 5:2. Peter inherits it independently in 2 Peter 3:10—“the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night.” John inherits it twice: once addressed to a single congregation under threat of specific, personal judgment—“I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee” (Revelation 3:3, to Sardis)—and once folded into the climactic bowl judgments themselves: “Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth” (Revelation 16:15).

The spread of the image across four authors, in contexts too different for one to be simply quoting another, points to a single, older source: dominical teaching, delivered orally, that had already become common property of the apostolic church well before any of these letters were drafted. This matters for what it does not prove and for what it does. It does not prove that any two of these texts were written near one another in time—a shared inheritance from Jesus explains the overlap without requiring literary dependence between Paul, Peter, and John. But it does establish something more important for how the image functions: in every one of its five occurrences, the thief is not a generalized metaphor for mortality or

a vague future reckoning. He is watched for, at a specific address, by people who are told the hour concerns them—Sardis is warned by name; the Thessalonians are told plainly, “ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief” (1 Thessalonians 5:4). The image, wherever it surfaces, keeps its shape: sudden, undated in advance, and aimed at a readership positioned to actually be overtaken by it, not a distant posterity merely instructed to take note.

Chapter Three

Suffering as Portent

First Thessalonians 2:14–16 treats the Thessalonians' persecution as continuous with the suffering of the Judean churches, suffering Paul says has already brought wrath "to the uttermost." 2 Thessalonians 1:4–10 returns to the same theme from the opposite direction, treating the church's endurance under "persecutions and tribulations" as evidence for "a manifest token of the righteous judgment of God," a coming reversal in which "them that trouble you" will be repaid with "tribulation," and the afflicted will be given "rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels."

Set side by side rather than apart, these two passages do more than repeat a theme; they complete an argument neither letter finishes alone. 1 Thessalonians 2 establishes that present suffering is not random but has already, in the Judean case, brought down a specific and datable wrath. 2 Thessalonians 1 then supplies the missing other half of that logic for the Thessalonians themselves: their own suffering is not merely to be endured but is itself the token—the evidence Paul points back to—that the same righteous judgment already operating in Judea has not forgotten Macedonia. The two letters are not making the same point twice. The first letter shows the pattern already in motion elsewhere; the second applies the

pattern to the readers directly, and neither half, alone, makes as strong a claim as the two together.

Chapter Four

The Restrainer: A Silence That Speaks

Second Thessalonians 2:6–7 introduces a figure or force found nowhere in 1 Thessalonians: “ye know what withholdeth... only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way.” No verse in the first letter prepares a reader for this restrainer, and on a flat reading that silence might look like inconsistency—new doctrine, invented on the spot.

The diptych treats the silence itself as evidence, and points it in the opposite direction. 1 Thessalonians never needed to mention a restrainer because 1 Thessalonians never had to correct anyone’s claim that the restraint had already ended. The restrainer becomes necessary information only once someone has claimed the Day has already come—precisely the claim 2 Thessalonians 2:2 exists to refute. “ye know” (2 Thessalonians 2:6) is the tell: Paul is not introducing a new idea but recalling an oral teaching the Thessalonians already possessed, one that simply had no occasion to appear in a first letter addressed to a church that was not yet confused about whether the Day had arrived. An argument from silence is ordinarily weak evidence. Here the silence has a precise cause, named in the same chapter that breaks it, which is why it strengthens rather than weakens the case for one continuous body of teaching delivered orally in Thessalonica and only partially, and only as needed, committed to these two letters.

Chapter Five

Vindication and the Sons of Light

First Thessalonians 5:4–5 assures the church, “ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness,” framing the coming Day as something the faithful need not fear, since they belong already to it. 2 Thessalonians 1:5–10 completes that assurance with the specific mechanism by which it becomes true: the Lord Jesus “revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God,” while granting “rest” to the afflicted.

Alone, 1 Thessalonians 5 offers comfort without a stated mechanism; alone, 2 Thessalonians 1 supplies a mechanism of judgment that could, misread in isolation, sound like raw retribution detached from the pastoral warmth of the first letter. Together, the two folios show a single coherent picture: the same event that brings “rest” to “the children of light” is, for that very reason, the reckoning that must fall on those who “obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Thessalonians 1:8). Comfort and judgment are not two different divine dispositions competing across two letters. They are the two faces of one event, and each letter, read alone, shows only one face.

Chapter Six

The Man of Sin — Weighing the Candidates

The identity of the “man of sin” in 2 Thessalonians 2:3–4 has drawn more speculative energy than perhaps any other figure in the Pauline corpus, and two candidates in particular have commanded serious, sustained scholarly and confessional support across the centuries: Nero, and the institution of the Papacy. Both deserve to be presented on their own strongest terms before any judgment is offered, because a case that only survives by ignoring its best competitors is not a case worth having.

The Neronian Reading

The case for Nero is not thin. Revelation 13:18 supplies a number, 666, and the Hebrew gematria of Nrwn Qsr—Nero Caesar, transliterated into Hebrew consonants—sums to exactly that figure, a correspondence too precise to dismiss as coincidence.⁵ Nero was, by every ancient account, the first emperor to turn organized state violence against Christians specifically, following the fire of Rome in AD 64. His later years show a documented pattern of self-exaltation bordering on the language 2 Thessalonians uses—coinage and inscriptions from the period increasingly present him in terms approaching divine honor, a trajectory that fits “he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God” with real specificity. And Nero's death by suicide in June of AD 68, followed almost immediately by a wave of popular rumor that he had not

actually died and would return from the East at the head of an army—the so-called Nero redivivus legend, attested independently by Suetonius, Tacitus, and the Sibylline Oracles—gives the “man of sin” a documented afterlife in the first-century imagination that a purely symbolic reading struggles to match.⁶ Some proponents of this view further identify the restrainer of 2 Thessalonians 2:6–7 with the stabilizing hand of the Julio-Claudian succession itself, or with Nero’s own early, Seneca-tutored restraint before his turn to tyranny—a restraint that was, in this reading, quite literally “taken out of the way” at his death.

The Case Against Nero

Set against the letter’s own terms, though, the Neronian identification runs into three difficulties that the philology and the biography, however suggestive on their own, cannot absorb.

The first is a direct collision with this book’s own established chronology. 2 Thessalonians 2:4 requires the man of sin to sit “in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God”—a claim of worship inside the Jewish sanctuary itself. But the twice-daily sacrifice offered on behalf of Nero and the Roman people, a practice over a century old, was formally and permanently halted by the Temple’s own priesthood on 8 Av 3827 (18 August 66 CE), in the very episode this study elsewhere identifies as the true beginning of the war.⁷ From that date forward, Nero was not worshipped in the Temple. He was, by the Temple’s own formal action, no longer honored there at all. A reading that requires Nero’s self-deification inside the sanctuary has

to explain why it locates his supposed enthronement in the one place that had just, on the historical record, thrown him out.

The second difficulty is geographic and administrative, not merely circumstantial. The man of sin, on any natural reading of 2 Thessalonians 2:3–4, is a figure actively present and self-installing—“sitteth,” a claim of occupation, not remote command. Nero did nothing of the kind. When news of the revolt reached him, he was touring Achaia, competing in the Greek games; he learned of Cestius Gallus’s defeat at Beth Horon secondhand, by courier, and responded not by traveling to Judea himself but by commissioning Vespasian—with Titus sent ahead from Achaia to Alexandria—to prosecute the war in his place.⁸ Nero never set foot in Judea before, during, or after the revolt that bears his era’s name. He is, throughout the entire conflict, an absentee figure receiving reports from a great distance, which sits uneasily against a text that describes someone taking a seat.

The third difficulty is the manner of his end, and it is the hardest to reconcile of the three. 2 Thessalonians 2:8 describes the man of sin’s destruction as public and overwhelming—undone by the very brightness of the Lord’s coming, a cosmic unveiling. Nero’s actual death, on 9 June AD 68, was the opposite in every particular: a fugitive’s death, alone but for four servants, in a freedman’s modest suburban villa four miles outside Rome, reached by crawling through a bramble thicket in disguise because he could not risk the road. He had already been declared a public enemy by the Senate; the household guard had deserted him; he begged, unsuccessfully,

for someone else to die first so he would not have to. When the moment finally came, his own hand failed him, and his secretary Epaphroditus had to guide the blade home.⁹ This is not a figure destroyed in splendor before the eyes of the world. It is a man who could not, in the end, even manage his own death without help, expiring in a servant's back room a full two years before the Temple he supposedly desecrated ever fell. Whatever else may be said of Nero's cruelty or his posthumous legend, 2 Thessalonians 2:8's picture of an overwhelming, public reversal does not describe what actually happened to him.

The Papal Reading

The case for the Papacy carries a different kind of weight: not philological precision but sheer historical durability and confessional pedigree. This was, for centuries, the majority Protestant reading—articulated by Luther, embedded in the original Westminster Confession of Faith, and defended by reformers who saw in “he as God sitteth in the temple of God” not a single emperor's brief self-exaltation but an institution claiming ongoing, functional divine authority over the conscience of the Church—indulgences, the claim to bind and loose, the assumption of titles historically reserved for Christ alone.¹⁰ This reading has the advantage of taking seriously 2 Thessalonians 2:7's claim that “the mystery of iniquity doth already work”—present tense, ongoing, ripening rather than exploding into being at a single moment—which a centuries-long institutional development

arguably satisfies more naturally than a single emperor's five-year reign of terror.

Weighing Both Against the Letter's Own Address

Both readings earn their keep on their own terrain—Nero on philology and imperial biography, the Papacy on institutional durability and confessional weight. But 2 Thessalonians was not written to a distant posterity charged with eventually recognizing a sign. It was written to a specific, named congregation in Macedonia, and Chapter Three of this study has already shown that the letter's own stated frame for the coming crisis is not Rome and not a future Western church—it is the Judean conflict, the same wrath that had “come upon” the Thessalonians' persecutors “to the uttermost” (1 Thessalonians 2:16), the same suffering the letter treats as continuous with what “the churches of God which in Judaea” had already endured. The Second Folio has already established the letter's own internal rule: the day must be near enough, and the readers positioned closely enough, that they could in principle be “overtaken” by it. That is the test any candidate for the man of sin has to clear—not merely fitting the description in isolation, but fitting the letter's own claim about who is at risk and why.

The Papacy fails this test almost immediately. Whatever institutional weight it carries in later Christian history, it did not exist in any form a Macedonian congregation in the AD 60s could watch for, and a sign that requires centuries to become recognizable cannot satisfy a letter whose entire pastoral urgency rests on nearness—“ye have no

need that I write unto you” because the readers already know how to watch, now, for something already approaching.

Nero fares better on the merits already examined, and has now been weighed with equal care against the letter’s own claims—and found wanting on three separate grounds: the Temple that had already ceased honoring him, the war he directed from a thousand miles away rather than presiding over in person, and a death too obscure and too early to satisfy the letter’s picture of a public, climactic undoing. A Judean figure—installed at the heart of the very Temple system whose sacrifice for Rome had just been halted, whose leadership was, on the ground, actively manufacturing exactly the “peace and safety” confidence the Second Folio has already documented—satisfies both the letter’s language and its stated stakes for its actual readers more completely than either alternative can.

Chapter Seven

The Last Days Without an End

Before turning to the three case studies that follow, the thread connecting them is worth naming plainly, because it is easy to miss when each is examined on its own. Scripture itself dates “the last days.” Peter, at Pentecost, applies the phrase to the very moment he is standing in: “it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh” (Acts 2:17)—and closes his sermon by urging his hearers to “save yourselves from this untoward generation” (Acts 2:40), a bounded, contemporary scope, not an indefinite one. Paul, preaching at Pisidian Antioch, warns his own audience in the same register, quoting Habakkuk directly at them: “Beware therefore, lest that come upon you... for I work a work in your days, a work which ye shall in no wise believe, though a man declare it unto you” (Acts 13:40–41). In your days. This generation. Both apostles place “the last days” inside the lifetime of the people actually listening to them, not at the far edge of an open-ended future.

The obliviousness runs deeper than a lost date. Ask any variety of Futurism what, precisely, was “ready to vanish away” when Peter and Paul spoke of the last days as already dawning, and the answers scatter toward objects Scripture never named: the Roman Empire, human history in the aggregate, the physical cosmos itself. Hebrews names the actual object plainly: “that which decayeth and waxeth

old is ready to vanish away” (Hebrews 8:13)—the first covenant, the Levitical system, the Second Temple order still standing when the letter was written. The author does not mean Rome. He does not mean the created world. He means the Second Jewish Commonwealth itself, already old, already decaying, with little more than a century left to run before the process Hebrews describes as “ready” would complete itself. Hebrews 12:28 confirms the same shaking is already underway—“we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved” presupposes a kingdom that could be, and was, moved. Revelation’s own final scene pictures that same removal in its most totalizing language: “the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them” (Revelation 20:11)—not the literal cosmos dissolving, on the reading this study has defended throughout, but the old covenant order’s world, the Second Temple’s own heaven and earth, with nowhere left to stand.

Every tradition surveyed below inherited that phrase and let it drift loose from its own anchor. Premillennialism, Postmillennialism, and Amillennialism all continue to describe the present age—any present age, including this one, nineteen centuries after Paul’s warning—as still within “the last days,” with no more principled a terminus than “not yet.” The Millerite-descended movements kept the urgency but discarded the historical check, recalculating a private end date every generation since 1844. Smith and Rigdon kept the urgency and relocated its object entirely, opening a new dispensation and a new Jerusalem rather than asking whether the old one had already closed. Different in nearly everything else, all three share the same underlying loss: the object of “the last days”—a real terminus, in real

time, for a real first-century audience—has gone missing, replaced either by indefinite deferral, uncontrolled recalculation, or reinvention.

What follows are three case studies in that same loss, arising within a few years and a few hundred miles of one another on the American frontier—proof that this is not one tradition's peculiar error but a recurring failure to keep hold of what the apostles themselves said plainly: in your days.

The Conventional Four Views

It is worth naming the four positions most commonly taught in seminary and pulpit alike, since none of the three frameworks named in the Introduction—Partial Preterism, Full Preterism, Atavism—actually answers the separate question these four views address: what, if anything, does “the millennium” of Revelation 20 name, and when does it occur?

Dispensational Premillennialism reads the Church age as a parenthesis in God's dealings with ethnic Israel, expects a future seven-year tribulation and a pretribulational rapture of the Church, and locates Christ's thousand-year earthly reign after His return, still future to the present day.

Historic Premillennialism shares the expectation of a future, earthly millennial reign following Christ's return, but without the dispensational distinction between Israel and the Church, and typically without a separate pretribulational rapture.

Postmillennialism holds that the preaching of the gospel will progressively Christianize the nations, producing an extended era of peace and righteousness—the “millennium”—before Christ’s final, single return at history’s close.

Amillennialism treats the thousand years symbolically, as the present reign of Christ and the saints in heaven, or as a figure for the entire Church age between the two advents, with no future earthly millennial kingdom distinct from the age the Church already inhabits.

Of these four, Amillennialism carries the broadest institutional weight: it has been, in one form or another, the majority position across the oldest and largest Christian communions—Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and the mainstream Reformed and Lutheran confessional traditions all hold some version of it.¹¹ Its appeal is considerable and ought to be acknowledged rather than dismissed: it resists speculative date-setting, gives the present Church age real theological weight, and asks nothing extraordinary of history that history has not already supplied.

But that same resistance to historical specificity is exactly what leaves Amillennialism unable to account for the two things 1 and 2 Thessalonians most insist on. First, the letters’ own civilizational referent—a wrath that has already “come upon” specific persecutors “to the uttermost” (1 Thessalonians 2:16), tied to “the churches of God which in Judaea,” not to the Church in the abstract. An interpretive frame that reads the thousand years as the whole Church age, undifferentiated, has no principled way to explain why

Paul anchors his readers' present suffering to one particular, nameable crisis rather than to Christian suffering in general.

Second, and more concretely: Amillennialism's timeless register cannot recover what was actually at stake, in the body, for the believers these letters describe. Torah required three pilgrimages a year to Jerusalem—Passover, Shavuot, and Sukkot—commanded explicitly in Exodus 23:14–17, Exodus 34:22–23, and Deuteronomy 16:16, the last of which states plainly that “three times in a year shall all thy males appear before the LORD thy God... in the feast of unleavened bread, and in the feast of weeks, and in the feast of tabernacles.” For a Judean believer in the years this study covers, that command was not an abstraction. It was a decision made three times a year, in person, with the city itself under increasing threat: go up and risk exactly the fate Josephus records for the Passover crowds trapped inside the siege,¹² or abstain, and set aside a commandment older than the Temple itself. Paul's warning that the day would come “as a thief” and his assurance that his readers were “not in darkness” to be overtaken by it read very differently once this is held in view—not as pastoral comfort about an indefinite future, but as counsel bearing directly on a choice some of his readers' own Judean brethren were making three times a year, with their lives on the line each time. An Amillennial reading, built to describe the whole Church age at once, has no natural place to put that choice. The Atavist framework, and the Judean referent Chapter Three of this study has already established, does.

A Case in Point:

Partial Preterism's Own Inconsistency

R.C. Sproul's *The Last Days According to Jesus* supplies a useful test case for how far even a serious, historically engaged reading can go before stopping short. Sproul builds his case for the Olivet Discourse's fulfillment in AD 70 substantially on the New Testament's own time-frame language—"this generation shall not pass," "the time is near"—arguing that these markers require a first-century fulfillment on pain of Jesus having simply been wrong.¹³ It is a serious, philologically grounded argument, and this study's own two-phase grammar test in the companion volume on Revelation shares its basic method.

But Sproul does not extend that same test to 1 Thessalonians 4:15–17. There, Paul uses an equally concrete time-frame marker—"we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord"—placing himself and his own generation inside the event's expected timeframe exactly as directly as "this generation" does in the Olivet Discourse. Sproul's own words draw the line plainly: "The coming of Christ in AD 70 was a coming in judgment on the Jewish nation... But this was not the final or ultimate coming of Christ."¹⁴ The same "we," the same near-term grammar, and yet one instance is read as requiring first-century fulfillment and the other is not—with no stated principle distinguishing the two cases. Sproul's inconsistency runs further still: having built his AD 70 case for the Olivet Discourse on its time-frame language, he does not turn the

same test on 2 Thessalonians 2:1–12—the falling away, the man of sin, the restrainer, “the mystery of iniquity doth already work”—despite that passage sharing the same near-term grammar and the same original audience as the letter he has already, two chapters earlier, treated as urgently present-tense. Independent reviewers of the book have noted the same asymmetry: partial preterism, on this accounting, “wants to have it both ways.”¹⁵ A hermeneutic that applies rigorously to Matthew 24 and stops applying by 1 Thessalonians 4 and 2 Thessalonians 2 alike is not a hermeneutic yet—it is a set of conclusions in search of a consistent method. The diptych reading this study proposes does not share that inconsistency, because it does not need to: 1 Thessalonians 4, 2 Thessalonians 2, and the Olivet Discourse describe the same near-term expectation, held by the same generation, for the same reason.

I. Campbell, Stone, and the Quiet Drift to Amillennialism

The Restoration Movement that produced the Churches of Christ built its entire ecclesiology on a disciplined method: Command, Example, and Necessary Inference (CENI)—the principle that authorized practice must be established from Scripture itself, not inherited by custom or convenience. Applied to baptism, the weekly Lord's Supper, congregational governance, and a cappella worship, this method was rigorous almost to a fault, testing every practice against explicit textual warrant.

Eschatology never received the same treatment, and the movement's own founders make the omission conspicuous rather than invisible. Alexander Campbell held a confident postmillennialism, anticipating the gospel's gradual triumph over the nations before Christ's return—and when William Miller's date-set Adventism swept the region in the early 1840s, Campbell reviewed it directly and rejected it, unwilling to let speculative chronology stand where CENI's own discipline should have governed instead.¹⁶ Barton Stone, by contrast, held an idiosyncratic premillennialism of his own, expecting a literal thousand-year reign calculated at “a day is as a thousand years” scale. The movement's two founding streams did not agree on this question at its outset—which makes what happened next more notable, not less.

Over the following decades, and by the testimony of historians of the movement itself, this founding diversity did not resolve through renewed exegetical rigor. It simply faded. Postmillennial confidence eroded through the late nineteenth century, and Amillennialism—the view assuming the least historical specificity of any position on the table—became, by default rather than argument, “the position which has dominated all three strains of the Movement until the present.”¹⁷ When R.H. Boll attempted to reintroduce a premillennial, more historically engaged eschatology into the movement's flagship journal in the early twentieth century, the reaction was not a fresh appeal to command, example, and necessary inference. It was controversy, followed by his removal.

A movement that would not permit an instrument in worship without direct textual warrant permitted its entire eschatology to settle by inherited default. The Atavist framework this study advances is, among other things, an attempt to close that gap—to ask of 1 and 2 Thessalonians exactly the question CENI would ask of any other practice: what does the text itself require, read on its own terms, rather than what a surrounding religious culture has already assumed.

II. Miller and the Opposite Error: Date-Setting Without a Historical Anchor

If Amillennialism represents a hermeneutic that never showed up to do its work, the Millerite movement of the 1830s and 1840s represents the opposite error: a hermeneutic that showed up with far more confidence than its method could support. William Miller, a Baptist lay preacher, calculated from Daniel 8:14's “two thousand and three hundred days” a specific date for Christ's return—first 1843, then, after that date passed without incident, October 22, 1844. As many as one hundred thousand adherents gathered to wait. When the day passed like any other, the movement's own historians named the result plainly: the Great Disappointment.¹⁸

The theological wreckage did not simply dissipate. Seventh-day Adventism arose directly from the Millerite remnant—organized in 1863 by Joseph Bates and James and Ellen White from among those who reinterpreted October 22 as a heavenly rather than earthly event. Jehovah's Witnesses descend from the same soil by a more

indirect but still traceable path: Charles Taze Russell, though never a Millerite himself, drew his biblical chronology and his rules for calculating prophetic time periods directly from Nelson Barbour, a former Millerite, and his doctrine of conditional immortality from George Storrs, another.¹⁹ The specific dates changed; the method—private numerological calculation, detached from any independently verifiable historical anchor, applied with a confidence the method could not earn—passed down largely intact, and continues to produce new failed dates within Adventist and Witness communities to the present day.

The contrast with the chronology this study defends could not be sharper. Every date offered here is checked against an independently attested ancient historian's own narrative—Josephus's dated account of a siege, a sacrifice halted, a Temple burned—not against a private arithmetic performed on Daniel's days with no external control. Miller's error was not that he took biblical time-frame language seriously; Amillennialism's error, examined above, is that it does not take that language seriously enough. Miller's specific failure was applying that seriousness without any historical check on his own calculation, and the movements that trace back to his error have often continued the same uncorrected pattern.

III. Smith, Rigdon, and a Restorationism Without a Closed Canon

Not every “restorationist” impulse on the American frontier pointed the same way, and the contrast is instructive precisely

because one of its central figures came directly out of the Stone-Campbell movement itself. Sidney Rigdon was a prominent Reformed Baptist preacher in Ohio's Western Reserve, closely associated with Alexander Campbell and Walter Scott, pastoring a substantial congregation in Mentor before breaking with Campbell in the spring of 1830—not over eschatology, but over two other questions: whether miraculous spiritual gifts should be restored alongside New Testament doctrine, and whether the early church's practice of holding property in common bound Christians still. Within months of that break, Rigdon read the Book of Mormon, was baptized into Joseph Smith's new church in November 1830, and brought more than a hundred of his own congregation with him. He became Smith's closest advisor and First Counselor in the First Presidency.

Where Campbell's restorationism insisted the New Testament pattern was complete and recoverable by disciplined reading alone, Smith and Rigdon's went the opposite direction: revelation, on their account, had not closed. Rigdon served as Smith's scribe on an ongoing “new translation” of the Bible, and within a year of his conversion, he stood with Smith at Independence, Missouri, where a revelation identified the town as the site of the latter-day Zion and New Jerusalem—“the land which I have appointed and consecrated for the gathering of the saints... this is the land of promise, and the place for the city of Zion... Independence is the center place; and a spot for the temple is lying westward” (Doctrine and Covenants 57:1–3).²⁰ The movement's very name—the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints—makes the eschatological claim explicit: not a

recovery of what the apostolic church already had, but the opening of a new and final dispensation, complete with new scripture, a New Jerusalem relocated to the American Midwest, and a doctrine, drawn from the Book of Mormon's own narrative, that Native American peoples descended from a branch of ancient Israelites who had crossed the ocean centuries before Christ.

Alexander Campbell recognized the threat this posed to his own movement and answered it directly, publishing a formal critique of the Book of Mormon in the *Millennial Harbinger* within months of Rigdon's defection—the same journal, and very nearly the same moment, in which he had already reviewed and dismissed William Miller's date-set Adventism. Campbell, in other words, spent the early 1830s rejecting two rival errors simultaneously: one that read biblical chronology with too much numerological confidence and too little historical anchor, and one that abandoned a closed New Testament pattern altogether in favor of ongoing revelation, new geography, and a new sacred people. Between those two poles, Campbell's own CENI held a narrow, disciplined middle course—which makes it the more notable that eschatology specifically, alone among the major questions the movement faced, was the one area where that discipline was not maintained, and was allowed instead to settle into the least historically specific option available.

A Fourth Path

Three failures, then, from the same religious moment: a hermeneutic that showed up everywhere except eschatology, a hermeneutic applied with more numerological confidence than historical control, and a hermeneutic replaced altogether by new revelation, a relocated Jerusalem, and a reinvented ethnic history. All three, in the end, leave “the last days” running still—open, ongoing, undated, exactly the condition Peter and Paul did not describe. The chronology this study has tried to practice throughout is offered as the fourth path: dates checked against Josephus rather than private calculation or indefinite deferral, a terminus actually named—Bar Kokhba’s defeat closing in 136 CE what Pentecost opened in 33—so that “the last days” refers, at last, to days that ended.

Summary and Conclusion

Taken as a diptych rather than as two unrelated soundings, 1 and 2 Thessalonians do not tell the story of an apostle whose confidence eroded between one letter and the next. They tell the story of a church that misread—or was told a forged version of—Paul’s first letter, and of an apostle who wrote a second letter not to walk anything back but to restate, more explicitly, a sequence he says outright he had already taught them in person. The apparent contradiction that a flat, half-at-a-time reading produces—unconditioned imminence in 1 Thessalonians against a marked sequence in 2 Thessalonians—dissolves once the two are read as what they always were: one continuous transmission to one

congregation, in one unfolding crisis, separated only by the accident of having survived as two documents rather than one.

This is the argument the Diptych Method exists to make visible. Ambivalence is not a fixed property of an author's words; it is frequently a byproduct of how those words are handled after the fact. Sever two statements that were always meant to be read together, hand each to a different set of eyes, and both will look less certain than either author intended. Reunite them, and in Paul's case here, reasonable doubt about his confidence very largely disappears—not because every hard question about the Thessalonian correspondence has been resolved, but because the specific charge of inconsistency, brought against Paul for two thousand years on the strength of reading these letters apart, does not survive reading them as he wrote them: as a pair.

Set within the Atavist framework, that pair also takes its place within a longer historical arc—from the Hasmonean and Herodian phases of the fourth kingdom, through the desolation of AD 67–70, to the final scattering of AD 132–136—in which the urgency of these two letters is neither an embarrassment to be explained away nor a countdown that quietly expired, but a precise, two-part testimony to a judgment that arrived on schedule. The Thessalonian letters, read whole, stand as testimony to divine faithfulness rather than to apostolic failure: not a prophecy that missed, but a warning delivered in two installments, exactly as urgent, and exactly as accurate, as Paul said it was.

This volume is offered as the first application of the Diptych Method, in the hope that the same discipline—reading paired apostolic letters as one composite witness rather than as isolated fragments—will prove equally clarifying wherever else the New Testament preserves two halves of what was always meant to be a single conversation.

Endnotes

1. Josephus describes the Zealots' rise and their violent seizure of the Temple precincts in *Wars*, Book 4, chronicling how the faction turned the sanctuary itself into a fortress and battleground during the internal conflict that preceded the Roman siege.
2. Josephus, *Wars*, Book 5, describes the multitudes trapped within Jerusalem during the siege, including many who had entered for the feast and could not afterward leave.
3. Josephus records Ananus ben Ananus's efforts to restrain the war party and preserve a path to negotiated terms with Rome in *Wars*, Book 4, Chapters 3–5, prior to his assassination by the Zealot faction.
4. Josephus, *Wars* 6.5.2 (§283–286), records the false prophet at the Temple portico and states plainly that such prophets were set on by the rebel leadership to prevent desertion—the clearest documented instance of the “peace and safety” psychology Paul describes being actively manufactured rather than spontaneously believed.
5. The gematria identification of Nero Caesar with 666 depends on the Hebrew transliteration Nrwn Qsr; a variant reading of Revelation 13:18 preserved in some manuscripts gives 616, which corresponds instead to the Latin form of the name lacking the final Hebrew nun—itself taken by many text critics as evidence that early scribes were already making this identification and adjusting the number accordingly.

6. Suetonius, *Nero* 40, 57; Tacitus, *Histories* 2.8; Sibylline Oracles 4.119–124 and 5.28–34 all attest the Nero redivivus legend and the belief that Nero would return from the East, in some versions specifically to Jerusalem.

7. See Chapter One, above, on Josephus's dating of the sacrifice's cessation, *Wars* 2.17.2–4, and its identification as “the true beginning of our war with the Romans.”

8. Josephus, *Wars* 3.1.2–3, records Nero receiving news of the defeat while in Achaia and commissioning Vespasian in his place; Titus was dispatched from Achaia to Alexandria to retrieve the Fifth and Tenth Legions.

9. Suetonius, *Nero* 47–49; Cassius Dio 63.27–29. Both sources describe Nero's flight to Phaon's villa, his failed attempts to find someone else to strike the blow, and Epaphroditus's assistance in the final act.

10. Westminster Confession of Faith (1646), XXV.6, identifies “that Antichrist, that man of sin, and son of perdition, that exalteth himself in the Church against Christ” with the office of the Pope—language later softened or removed in a number of subsequent Presbyterian revisions.

11. Amillennialism's confessional standing is reflected in, among others, the Augsburg Confession, the Roman Catholic magisterium's general avoidance of a future earthly millennial kingdom, and the historic Reformed confessions, including the Westminster Standards as commonly interpreted.

12. See Introduction, above, and n. 2.
13. R.C. Sproul, *The Last Days According to Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), esp. pp. 25, 158, 170.
14. Sproul, *The Last Days According to Jesus*, p. 158.
15. J.T. Bartsch, “A Critique of R.C. Sproul’s *The Last Days According to Jesus*,” noting that partial preterism leaves unclear “how much of Matthew 24–25 and Revelation 4–19 the partial preterists wish to reserve for the future.”
16. Alexander Campbell’s postmillennialism and his direct review and rejection of William Miller’s chronology are documented in the *Millennial Harbinger*; see also Disciples Historical Society, “Campbell, Alexander (1788–1866).”
17. Hans Rollman, quoted in “*Postmillennialism Revisited*,” Word & Work Online, noting that by the late nineteenth century Amillennialism “has dominated all three strains of the Movement until the present.” On R.H. Boll’s removal from the editorship of the *Gospel Advocate* over his premillennial views, see “*Eschatology in the Stone-Campbell Movement: A Brief History*,” Wineskins Archive.
18. On William Miller’s calculations from Daniel 8:14 and the Great Disappointment of October 22, 1844, see William Miller (preacher), and *Great Disappointment*, standard historical accounts of the Millerite movement.
19. On the direct organizational descent of Seventh-day Adventism from the Millerite movement (1863), and on Charles Taze Russell’s

formative debt to former Millerites Nelson Barbour and George Storrs, see Ronald Lawson, *"Sect-State Relations: Accounting for the Differing Trajectories of Seventh-day Adventists and Jehovah's Witnesses."*

20. Doctrine and Covenants 57:1–3, given at Independence, Missouri, July 1831, identifying the town as the site of the New Jerusalem; see also section 58, in which Rigdon is instructed to dedicate the land. On Rigdon's Campbellite background and 1830 break with Campbell, see *"The Conversion of Sidney Rigdon to Mormonism,"* Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought.

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