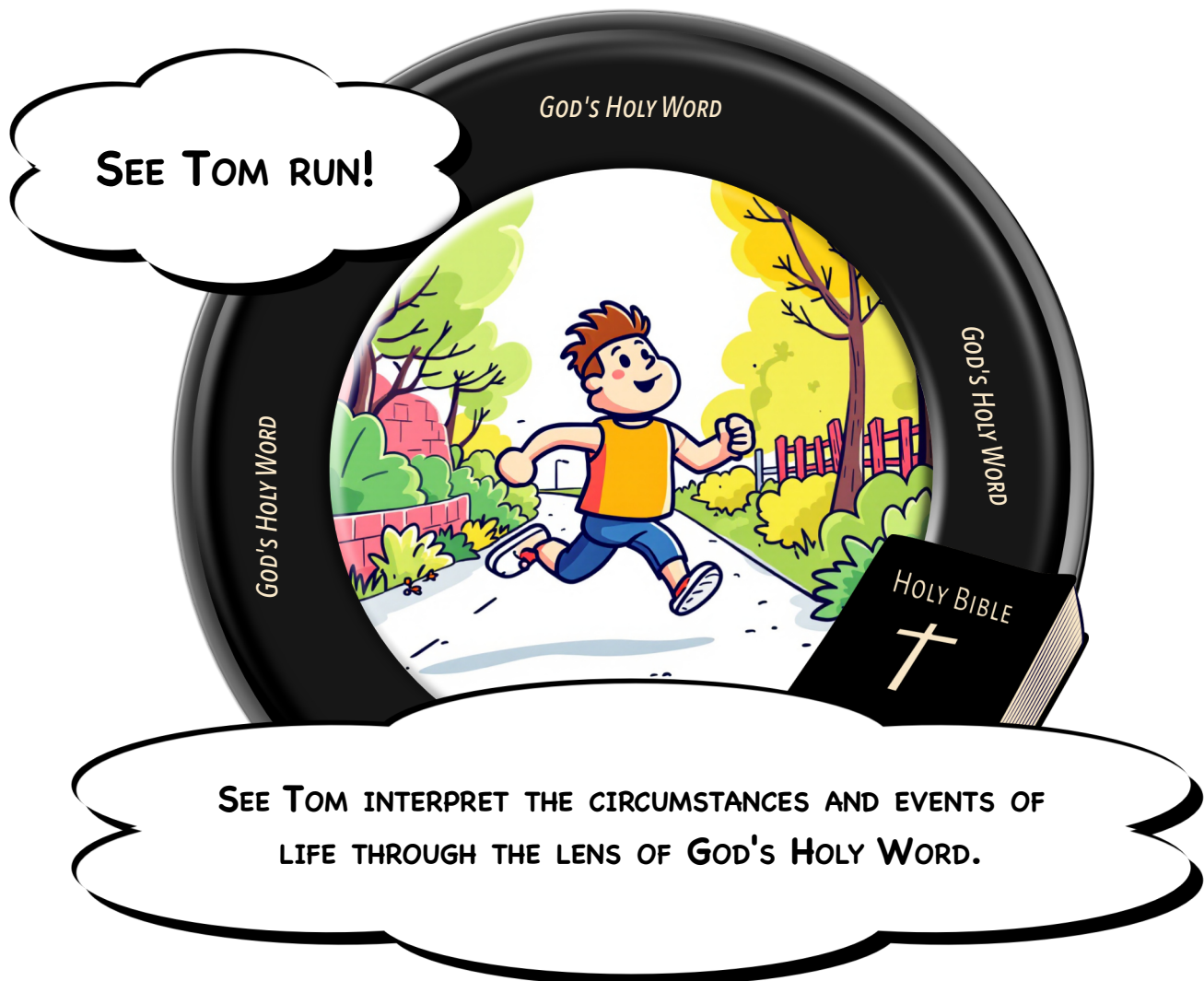


# A PRIMER ON DISCERNING THE TIMES



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- A primer is a small, introductory text designed to teach the basic elements of a subject providing foundational information in a simple format.
  - The purpose of this primer is to teach a biblical perspective on the do's and don'ts of interpreting the circumstances and events of life regarding things both present and things to come.

## DISCERNING THE TIMES — PART ONE ...

### 1. No matter the circumstances we must always hold firm and never deviate from biblical truth, 2:1-2.

- (2 Thessalonians 2:1–2 ESV) **Now concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to him**, we ask you, brothers, 2 **not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by a spirit or a spoken word, or a letter** seeming to be from us, **to the effect that the day of the Lord has come.**

A. The truth was that the day of the Lord had not come.

B. Paul had previously taught them about the day of the Lord when he established the church and also he had addressed this subject in his first letter to them.

- (1 Thessalonians 5:1 ESV) Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers, **you have no need to have anything written to you.**

C. Paul had taught them that the rapture of the saints would proceed the day of the Lord.

Deduction: The day of the Lord would come after the rapture of the Church. They were still there so the rapture had not taken place. The conclusion was then that the day of the Lord had not taken place.

### 2. The person who does not hold firm to the truth will be vulnerable to the misinformation of this world.

A. Paul's teaching on the coming of the Lord was apostolic and authoritative thus Scripture even it was not yet the written word.

B. These people were shaken by human perspectives of the news that conflicted with biblical truth.

C. They allowed other "voices" to alter their perception of the clear statements of Scripture.

### 3. Their vulnerability to misinformation led to an inability to encourage and build one another up.

- (1 Thessalonians 5:11 ESV) **Therefore encourage one another and build one another up**, just as you are doing.

A. Misinformation breeds instability and alarm.

B. Misinformation leads to fear and anxiety which leads to disobedience.

C. This disobedience results in doing the opposite of what the Lord intended as their fear promoted discouragement.

### 4. Antidote: A firm commitment to hold fast to the truth of God's word no matter what.

## Excursus: A case study of the Thessalonians' problem as detailed in 2 Thessalonians 2:2 ...

A detailed case study of the Thessalonians mishandling of incoming information will help us avoid the same mistakes both in life in general and in things to come.

- (2 Thessalonians 2:1b–2 ESV) ... we ask you, brothers, 2 **not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed**, either by a spirit or a spoken word, or a letter seeming to be from us, **to the effect that the day of the Lord has come.**

### Questions we need to ask and answer ...

Why are we too often not strong and courageous as God calls us to be? Why are some people (even Christians, maybe even we ourselves) so easily shaken and alarmed by the incoming news of the world in which we live?

- (Deuteronomy 31:6 ESV) **Be strong and courageous. Do not fear or be in dread of them, for it is the Lord your God who goes with you. He will not leave you or forsake you.**"

### Studying the words ...

- I. They were "not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed" ... **but they were** shaken and alarmed.

A study of the words in the phrase helps us to understand and avoid their mistakes.

2:2 Quickly ... ταχέως [tacheos] – cursorily; it means to do something quickly, hastily, haphazardly or superficially, with little attention to detail; actions performed in a rushed, passing manner rather than thoroughly. It implies a lack of attention.

2:2 Shaken ... σαλεύω [saleuo] – a motion produced by winds, storms, waves, etc; to move, agitate or shake; to cause to totter.

2:2 Mind ... νοῦς [nous] –comprising the abilities of perceiving and understanding; speaks of a mental attitude involving beliefs and feelings and values and dispositions to act in certain ways.

2:2 Alarmed ... θροέω [throeo] –to be alarmed; to be filled with apprehension; to be unpleasantly surprised; to be troubled in mind, to be frightened.

- II. They were "not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed" ... "**either by** a spirit or a spoken word, or a letter seeming to be from us."

- (2 Thessalonians 2:1b–2 ESV) ... we ask you, brothers, 2 not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, **either by a spirit or a**

**spoken word, or a letter seeming to be from us**, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come.

2:2 Spirit ... πνεύματος [pneumatōs] – wind, breath, non material being; supernatural being.

2:2 Word ... λόγου [logou] – a word, message; a communication that is most often spoken.

2:2 Letter ... ἐπιστολή [epistole] –an epistle, a message; a formal letter, document.

III. The effect of the fear and alarm would be that the truth they had been taught would be supplanted by the lie communicated by others.

IV. We need to consider the intensity and the diversity of this battlefield.

- A. This is a no holds barred fight between good and evil, sin and righteousness, God and the devil.
- B. The people of God are right in the middle of the battle.
- C. We need to understand the diversity of attacks of the enemy of which Paul clearly warns us in this text.
- D. We will be attacked in our minds through the spirit world and attacked in our beliefs through the spoken word and the written word.
  - (Ephesians 6:12 ESV) **For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood**, but **against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil** in the heavenly places.
- E. Think about it ... Isn't this exactly what we observe and experience in the world in which we live both personally and socially ... near and far.

V. Answering the beginning question by recounting the mistakes made by the Thessalonians ...

- A. They did not see life through the lens of Scripture but through their emotions and fears.
- B. They became vulnerable to the misinformation of the false teachers.
- C. As a result they misinterpreted the persecutions and afflictions they were going through.
- D. They formed rash, unbiblical opinions regarding the disturbing information and left the truth.
- E. Summary Statement: All the above would have been avoided if they had simply held fast to the truth they had been taught.

**–END EXCURSUS–**

## DISCERNING THE TIMES — PART TWO ...

1. No one (including you, especially including you) is an exception to falling prey to deceit when veering from the truth, 2:3-4.

Avoiding the "I am the exception" complex ...

- (2 Thessalonians 2:3–4 ESV) **Let no one deceive you in any way. For that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first**, and **the man of lawlessness is revealed**, the son of destruction, 4 who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, **proclaiming himself to be God**.

Please understand that being caught up in hasty, superficial reactions to personal, local and worldwide events will lead you into deception.

- A. We are not to be deceived in any way regarding the day of the Lord (and prophetic events in general).
- B. Holding fast to the truth provides comprehensive protection from any and every way of deception.
- C. Anyone and everyone who doesn't hold fast will be deceived. (*Repeat—No Exceptions*)
- D. Accountability: Anyone who provokes this fearful thinking in any way takes part in this deceit whether unintentionally or intentionally.

2. The day of the Lord will not come until the rebellion in which the man of lawlessness is revealed.

- A. The sequence is the same now as it was then—the rebellion and the revealing of the antichrist comes after the rapture and before the day of the Lord.
- B. The man of lawlessness is the antichrist.
- C. There are many antichrists on the planet now.
  - (1 John 2:18 ESV) Children, **it is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come**. Therefore **we know that it is the last hour**.
- D. This rebellion and revealing will bring the battle between God and the devil, good and evil, from out of the shadows.
- E. This man is **the** antichrist and will be the human embodiment of Satan and will exalt himself as God.
- F. As horrible as world events were then, and are now, nothing like this has yet happened.

3. We should expect to be justifiably and sternly rebuked when we allow this to happen, 2:5.

- (2 Thessalonians 2:5 ESV) **Do you not remember** that when I was still with you **I told you these things?**

Apparently in the short time Paul was with them he covered these things pretty extensively because he now is incredulous ... Do you not remember ... I told you these things ...

#### 4. God is the one restraining the man of lawlessness.

- (2 Thessalonians 2:6–8 ESV) **And you know what is restraining him now so that he may be revealed in his time.** 7 For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work. Only **he who now restrains** it will do so until he is out of the way. 8 And then the lawless one will be revealed, **whom the Lord Jesus will kill with the breath of his mouth** and bring to nothing by the appearance of his coming.

More facts regarding the man of lawlessness and the coming time when he will be revealed on earth.

- A. God rules over earth and is restraining the antichrist and will reveal him according to his divine timetable.
- B. The man of lawlessness has not yet been revealed but this lawlessness is already at work in secret.

This covert work of rebellion would include the work of the many antichrists, the rulers, the authorities, the cosmic powers over this present darkness, the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places and, of course, the work of Satan himself.

- C. God will continue to limit this hidden work until the time is right and the antichrist is revealed.
- D. The antichrist will eventually be revealed and after a short time will be terminated (taken away) by the Lord Jesus with the breath of his mouth.

Kill ... ἀναρέω [anaireō] –to eliminate, take away; terminate; to take up, to lift up; to do away with; to put out of the way, kill slay a man.

- E. The antichrist will ultimately be cast into the lake of fire alive. (See Revelation 19:20).

#### 5. The coming of the man of lawlessness comes in accord with the operation (energy) of Satan.

- (2 Thessalonians 2:9–10 ESV) The coming of the lawless one **is by the activity of Satan** with all power and false signs and wonders, 10 and with all wicked deception

**for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth** and so be saved.

- A. His coming is prompted by the activity of Satan.
- B. He will be empowered by Satan.
- C. He will have powerful wicked persuasion to cause those who are perishing to believe what is not true.

- (2 Corinthians 4:3–4 NLT) If the Good News we preach is hidden behind a veil, **it is hidden only from people who are perishing.** 4 **Satan, who is the god of this world, has blinded the minds of those who don't believe.** They are **unable to see** the glorious light of the Good News. They **don't understand** this message about the glory of Christ, who is the exact likeness of God.

- D. He will target people who refuse to love the truth and be saved.

Whatever other conclusions a person may come to it seems that this text teaches us ... that to be saved by the truth we must love the truth ... that our relationship to truth then must go beyond mere acknowledgement or agreement to love ... a love for God and his truth.

#### 6. As a result God gives people who refuse to love the truth over to themselves and their false pursuits.

- (2 Thessalonians 2:11–12 ESV) Therefore God sends them a strong delusion, **so that they may believe what is false,** 12 **in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.**
- (Psalm 81:12 ESV) **So I gave them over to their stubborn hearts,** to follow their own counsels.
- (1 Corinthians 1:18–19 ESV) For the word of the cross is folly to **those who are perishing,** but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. 19 **For it is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise,** and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart."

**Conclusion: 2 simple and highly effective principles for understanding and interpreting life on the planet ...**

1. Hold fast to what we clearly know from God's word.
2. Trust God for everything else.