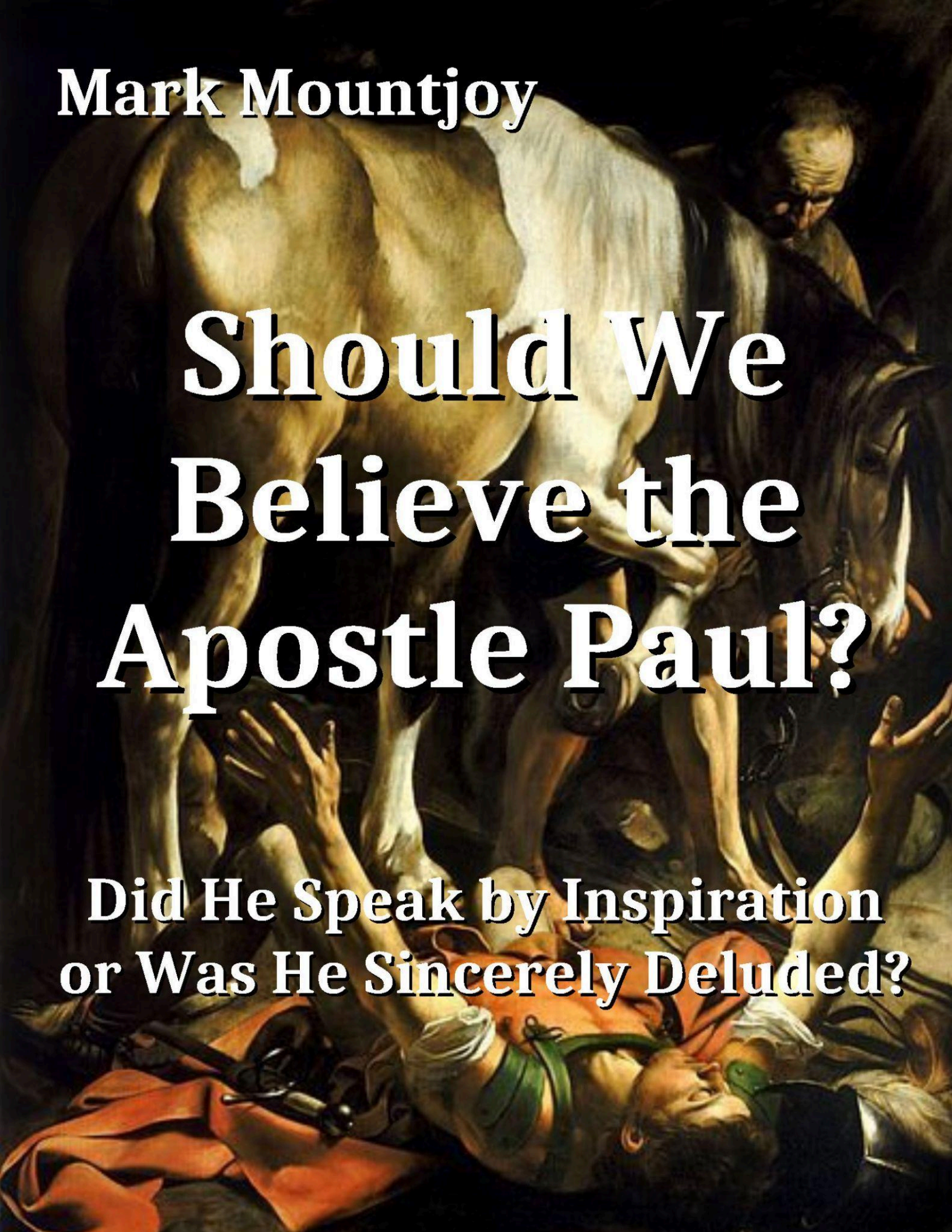




Mark Mountjoy

Should We Believe the Apostle Paul?

**Did He Speak by Inspiration
or Was He Sincerely Deluded?**

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This talk challenges traditional Christian eschatology by examining whether the Apostle Paul genuinely expected Christ's return within his own generation. The author traces Paul's consistent use of urgent temporal language throughout his epistles—terms like “at hand,” “shortly,” and “about to”—arguing that Paul unambiguously proclaimed imminent fulfillment rather than distant future events.

The presentation surveys Paul's letters chronologically, demonstrating how he maintained this expectation from his earliest correspondence through his final prison writings. It addresses common objections, including the Hymenaeus and Philetus controversy and interpretations of 2 Peter 3, arguing that cosmic language described covenant judgment rather than physical planetary destruction.

The central proposition: either Paul was fundamentally mistaken about his core message, or modern Christianity has misunderstood what he meant by Christ's “coming.” The author advocates for preterism—that Paul correctly prophesied events fulfilled in first-century Judaism's destruction (62-136 CE), particularly Jerusalem's fall in 70 CE, calling listeners to reconsider taking Paul's time statements literally.

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Introduction

Imagine standing in the agora of ancient Corinth, the marketplace teeming with merchants, philosophers, and travelers from across the Roman Empire. The year is approximately 55 AD. A tent-maker from Tarsus speaks with unmistakable urgency to a small gathering of followers. His words carry no hint of ambiguity: “The time is short,” he insists. “The form of this world is passing away.”

This was not a man given to hyperbole or idle speculation. This was the Apostle Paul, whose intellectual prowess and rabbinic training had once made him the rising star of Pharisaic Judaism. The same man who claimed direct revelation from the risen Christ. The same man whose letters would form nearly half of what we now call the New Testament.

What if I told you that Paul—throughout his ministry—consistently, emphatically, and unambiguously proclaimed that the return of Christ, the judgment of the world, and the full manifestation of God’s kingdom would happen within his generation? What if the Apostle to the Gentiles never once spoke of these events as distant future realities but always as imminent expectations?

And what if I suggested that modern Christianity, in its well-meaning attempt to explain why these things supposedly didn't happen as Paul seemed to expect, has inadvertently reinterpreted Paul's words to mean something he never intended?

The question before us today is both simple and profound: Should we believe the Apostle Paul?

The Weight of Paul's Testimony

Without Paul's contributions, the New Testament collapses in on itself. His thirteen epistles constitute the theological backbone of Christian doctrine. If Paul's testimony about his message is even partly false, Christianity suffers irreparable damage.

Consider what's at stake: If Paul's understanding of the second coming, the resurrection, the kingdom of God, judgment day, the tribulation, and the Antichrist were all figments of his imagination, they would have no real authority. And yet, these concepts form the eschatological framework within which the entire Christian faith operates.

Ask yourself this: Do we believe Paul when he writes about justification by faith, but quietly assume he was mistaken when he writes about the timing of Christ's return? Let us trace Paul's consistent message throughout his ministry:

Paul's Conversion and Commission: The Birth of an Eschatology

Paul's extraordinary encounter with the risen Christ on the Damascus road didn't just transform his understanding of Jesus; it revolutionized his understanding of time itself. From that moment forward, Paul operated with the conviction that he was living in the final days of the age.

In Acts 14, while confirming the souls of believers in Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, Paul declared "it is through much tribulation we shall enter into the kingdom of God." Note the present tense—not that distant generations would enter the kingdom through tribulation, but that he and his contemporaries would.

When Paul spoke of entering the kingdom through tribulation, was he describing a process that would take thousands of years, or was he preparing his converts for imminent events?

In Athens (Acts 17:31), Paul proclaimed that God "has appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he has ordained." The Greek is revealing here: Paul uses the term "μέλλει" (mellei) to describe this judgment—a word that consistently indicates imminence, something "about to" happen. Paul wasn't theorizing about a judgment in the distant future. He was announcing to the

Athenians that this judgment was about to occur in their lifetime.

Similarly, in Acts 24:25, when Paul reasoned with Felix about “righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come,” he again used the term “μέλλοντος” (mellontos)—literally, the judgment “about to come.” Felix’s terror at Paul’s words makes perfect sense if Paul was describing an imminent judgment, not one thousands of years in the future.

If Paul was mistaken about something so fundamental to his message, why should we trust him on anything else?

The Thessalonian Correspondence: A Window into Paul's Mind

Perhaps nowhere is Paul’s expectation of Christ’s imminent return more evident than in his letters to the Thessalonians. Here, Paul doesn’t merely suggest the nearness of the end—he explicitly states it, using language that can only be understood as referring to events within the lifetime of his audience.

Let us examine the systematic witness of the Thessalonian epistles:

First Thessalonians:

- 1:10 - Paul teaches them to “wait for his Son from heaven” - not a distant hope but an immediate expectation
- 2:19 - “For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming?”
- 3:13 - “...at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints”
- 4:13-18 - “We who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep”
- 5:1-4 - “But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you”
- 5:23 - “May your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ”

Note carefully: “We who are alive and remain.” Paul included himself among those who would witness the Lord’s return. Even more striking is Paul’s claim in 1 Thessalonians 4:15 that this teaching came to him “by the word of the Lord.” Paul wasn’t offering personal speculation; he was claiming divine authority for his expectation of Christ’s imminent return.

What modern interpreter would dare say that Paul lied about receiving “the word of the Lord” concerning Christ’s return? And yet, what traditional interpretation fully accepts what Paul actually said? None do!

Second Thessalonians:

- 1:4-10 - “...when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance...”
- 2:1-15 - “...concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him...”

- 3:5 - “Now may the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and into the patience of Christ”

The Social World of Paul’s Apocalyptic Expectation

Paul’s expectation of an imminent end did not emerge in a vacuum. The first century was rife with apocalyptic fervor. A vitriolic Jewish nationalism boiled under Roman occupation. Messianic movements arose and were brutally suppressed. The very fabric of Jewish identity faced multiple pressures during this period.

Consider the political and social backdrop of Paul’s ministry:

- The lingering trauma of Caligula’s attempt to install his statue in the Temple (circa 40 CE). As Josephus records in *Antiquities* 18.261: “Gaius bore a grudge for being ignored only by the Jews... and ordered [Petronius] to lead a large force into Judea” to place his image in the Temple—a crisis was narrowly averted that would have sparked armed revolt
- The reign of Nero began in 54 CE, who while not focused on the Imperial cult, maintained Rome's oppressive presence
- Tensions between Jews and Romans intensified throughout the 50s and 60s CE
- Hellenistic communities in the Holy Land and the Levante continued to challenge traditional Jewish practices

- Internal divisions within Judaism as Zealotry gained traction, pushing toward radical resistance
- The corruption of Roman procurators like Lucceius Albinus and Gessius Florus drove Judea to the brink

When Paul wrote about “the present distress” (τὴν ἐνεστῶσαν ἀνάγκην - tēn enestōsan anagkēn) in 1 Corinthians 7:26 or warned the Thessalonians about “the wrath to come,” his audience understood these references against this complex backdrop of external oppression and internal radicalization—tensions that would erupt in 66 CE into open, explosive, and catastrophic war.

His letters to the Corinthians reveal his belief that the approaching end would:

- Render marriage less important (1 Corinthians 7:29-31): “The time is short, so that from now on even those who have wives should be as though they had none”
- Cause weeping to stop and rejoicing to cease
- Lead the affluent to become destitute (compare with James 5:1-3)
- Render the world’s systems obsolete: “For the form of this world is passing away”

Note the present progressive tense in 1 Corinthians 7:31: “παράγει γὰρ τὸ σχῆμα τοῦ κόσμου τούτου” (paragei gar to schēma tou kosmou toutou) - “for the form of this world is passing away”—not will pass away in thousands of years, but was already, in the late 50s AD, in the process of dissolution. The Greek verb παράγει (paragei) is in the present tense, indicating an action already in progress.

What if Paul wasn’t mistaken about the timing, but we’ve been mistaken about the nature of what he was describing? What if the “κόσμος” (kosmos) that was passing away was not the physical planet, but the Jewish “age” or “covenant world” that was about to be judged in the events of 62-136 AD?

The Consistent Testimony Across Paul’s Epistles

Having established the volatile historical context that shaped Paul’s worldview, we must now examine the remarkable consistency of his eschatological expectation. While many scholars have dismissed Paul’s imminent end-time language as mistaken enthusiasm or rhetorical hyperbole, a careful examination of his entire corpus reveals something far more deliberate. From his earliest correspondence to his final letters, Paul maintained a coherent and unwavering conviction about the proximity of the end.

This consistency suggests not the random excitement of a misguided apocalypticist, but the calculated certainty of someone who understood precisely what events were unfolding and how they aligned with prophetic expectations. When we trace this pattern chronologically through his epistles, we discover not contradiction or evolving views, but a singular vision maintained across decades of ministry:

In Romans:

- Romans chapters 1-2 - Paul taught a judgment coming upon his contemporary world
- Romans chapters 9, 10 and 11 - His concern was focused on Judea, Law zealotry and the Second Jewish Commonwealth
- Romans 13:11-12 - “And do this, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand.”
- Romans 16:20 - “And the God of peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly (ἐν τάχει, en tachei).”

The phrase “ἐν τάχει” (en tachei) in Romans 16:20 is particularly revealing—it means “quickly, shortly, without

delay.” This is the same term used in Revelation 1:1 and 22:6 to describe the timing of those prophecies.

In Corinthians:

Paul’s letters to the Corinthian church provide perhaps the richest source of his eschatological thinking. Written to a cosmopolitan congregation facing immediate social and moral challenges, these epistles reveal how Paul’s apocalyptic framework shaped his practical instruction. Corinth—a bustling commercial center where Greek philosophy, Roman governance, and diverse religious practices converged—served as a microcosm of the world Paul believed was passing away. His guidance to this community wasn’t abstract theology but urgent ethical direction for navigating the brief interval before cosmic transformation. Throughout both Corinthian epistles, we find Paul repeatedly anchoring his ethical and ecclesial instructions in the imminent expectation of Christ’s appearance and judgment. The language here is particularly striking in its temporal immediacy:

- 1 Corinthians 1:4-8 - “...so that you come short in no gift, eagerly waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ”
- 1 Corinthians 7:29-31 - “But this I say, brethren, the time (καιρὸς, kairos) is short (συνεσταλμένος, synestalmenos)...”

- 1 Corinthians 10:11 - “Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages (τὰ τέλη τῶν αἰώνων, ta telē tōn aiōnōn) have come.”
- 1 Corinthians 15:23-56 - His detailed discussion of the resurrection is framed within an imminent expectation
- 2 Corinthians 5:1-10 - Paul speaks of the transformation from earthly to heavenly dwelling

In 1 Corinthians 7:29, the Greek term συνεσταλμένος (synestalmenos) literally means “drawn together, compressed, contracted”—conveying the idea of time being compressed or shortened. And in 1 Corinthians 10:11, Paul explicitly states that he and his contemporaries were those upon whom “the ends of the ages have come”—not will come in the distant future.

In His Pastoral Epistles:

If Paul’s eschatological expectations were merely ardent and unchecked enthusiasm or a rhetorical device, we would expect them to diminish as he aged and as the anticipated events failed to materialize. Yet his pastoral letters—written later in his ministry as he mentored the next generation of church leaders—maintain the same urgent apocalyptic framework. These personal communications to his protégés Timothy and Titus were intended to prepare the church for continued ministry, yet they consistently frame this preparation within the

context of Christ's imminent appearing. Far from adjusting his timeline or reinterpreting his earlier predictions, the aging apostle intensifies his focus on the approaching judgment as he instructs his spiritual heirs:

- 1 Timothy 6:14-15 - "...that you keep this commandment without spot, blameless until our Lord Jesus Christ's appearing (ἐπιφανεΐας, epiphaneias)"
- 2 Timothy 4:1 - "I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who is about to (μέλλοντος, mellontos) judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom"
- 2 Timothy 4:8 - "Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing."

In 2 Timothy 4:1, Paul again uses the crucial term μέλλοντος (mellontos)—“about to”—to describe the timing of the judgment. This is consistent with his usage in Acts 17:31 and 24:25, emphasizing the imminence of the events he describes.

Note Paul's consistent use of terms like “shortly,” “at hand,” and “near” across decades of ministry. Even in his final letters, written from prison near the end of his life, Paul maintained this imminent expectation. He instructed Timothy to keep the

commandment “until the appearing” of Christ, clearly expecting Timothy to witness this event.

Has traditional Christianity sanitized Paul’s urgent apocalypticism into a comfortable doctrine that places Christ’s return safely in the distant future? What if Paul wasn’t mistaken but was speaking about events that truly were about to unfold in his generation?

The Crisis of Interpretation

Here we arrive at the heart of our dilemma. The traditional eschatological systems that dominate Christianity today—Amillennialism, Postmillennialism, Historicism and Premillennialism—all reinterpret Paul’s imminent time statements to mean something other than what they plainly say.

These systems, developed centuries after Paul, assume that since Christ did not return in Paul’s lifetime in the way later Christians expected, Paul must have meant something different than what he wrote.

But what if the problem isn't with Paul’s expectation but with our understanding of what he was expecting?

Could it be that Christ's “coming” as Paul understood it was not the end of the physical universe but the end of the age—the

conclusion of the Old Covenant order in the cataclysmic events of 66-70 AD?

Consider that Jesus himself tied his return to the destruction of the Temple and said it would happen within his generation (Matthew 24:34). Paul, as Christ's appointed apostle, was simply proclaiming the same timeline his Lord had given.

The Hymenaeus and Philetus Problem: Resurrection Timing and the Fall of Jerusalem

A common objection to the view that Paul expected an imminent eschaton tied to the Jewish-Roman war comes from his condemnation of Hymenaeus and Philetus in 2 Timothy 2:17-18:

“Their teaching will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, who have departed from the truth. They say that the resurrection has already taken place, and they destroy the faith of some.”

Traditional interpreters cite this passage to argue that Paul couldn't have connected the resurrection with Jerusalem's approaching destruction, since he condemns those claiming the resurrection had already happened. But this argument fundamentally misunderstands both Paul's timeline and the error of these false teachers.

The critical chronological factor here is when this statement was made. Paul wrote 2 Timothy around 66-67 CE, before Jerusalem's destruction in 70 CE. What made the teaching of Hymenaeus and Philetus heretical wasn't that they connected the resurrection to covenant judgment—Paul himself did this—but that they claimed this event had already occurred before the prophesied catalyst that would trigger it.

Jesus explicitly connected the resurrection of the dead with the events surrounding Jerusalem's destruction in the Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24). Daniel 7 similarly aligns the judgment scene and resurrection with the downfall of the fourth kingdom—which I contend was Judea, not Rome. Paul's consistent eschatological framework maintained this connection: judgment, resurrection, and the age to come would emerge from the chaos of Jerusalem's fall.

Hymenaeus and Philetus violated this clear prophetic sequence by claiming the resurrection had happened prematurely, before the covenant judgment had even begun. Their error wasn't about connecting resurrection to historical events—it was about disconnecting it from the specific prophesied events that hadn't yet occurred when they made their claim.

Ironically, traditional interpreters now commit the opposite error. While Hymenaeus and Philetus placed the resurrection too early (before Jerusalem's fall), modern interpreters place it too

late—postponing it indefinitely beyond the very events Jesus and Paul identified as its context. Both errors disconnect resurrection from its covenantal framework.

The traditional church leans on 2 Timothy 2 to argue that Paul never taught an eschaton connected to Judaism's dissolution—but he absolutely did. Their argument positions the Second Coming as an event entirely separate from the termination of the age, but in the opposite direction: after and apart from all those events.

This misreading not only fails to understand Paul's condemnation of Hymenaeus and Philetus in its historical context but also misses the consistent covenant framework that unified Jesus' teaching, Daniel's prophecy, and Paul's eschatology.

Confronting the 2 Peter 3 Challenge: Cosmic Language and Covenant Judgment

Perhaps no passage is more frequently deployed against the view that the New Testament writers expected an imminent fulfillment of eschatological events than 2 Peter 3. This text, with its vivid language of heavens passing away, elements melting with fervent heat, and the earth being burned up, is routinely interpreted as describing the future physical destruction of the planet—supposedly proving that apostolic eschatology extended far beyond first-century events.

This interpretation, however, fundamentally misunderstands both the apocalyptic language Peter employs and the immediate context of his warning.

The Scoffers' Actual Denial

First, we must precisely identify what the scoffers were denying. Peter writes:

“Knowing this first: that scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, and saying, ‘Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation’” (2 Peter 3:3-4).

These scoffers weren’t denying a coming thousands of years in the future—such a denial would be meaningless to both them and Peter’s audience. Rather, they were mocking the Christian expectation of Christ’s imminent return. They were challenging the very premise of Peter’s declaration in 1 Peter 4:7 that “the end of all things is at hand.” Their skepticism specifically targeted the notion that Jesus would return within that generation as He had promised.

The Hebrew Apocalyptic Tradition

The catastrophic language in 2 Peter 3 derives not from scientific cosmology but from the established Hebrew prophetic

tradition that used cosmic dissolution imagery to describe covenant judgment against nations. Compare Peter's language with Jeremiah 4:23-26, where the prophet describes the Babylonian judgment against Judah:

“I beheld the earth, and indeed it was without form, and void; and the heavens, they had no light. I beheld the mountains, and indeed they trembled, and all the hills moved back and forth. I beheld, and indeed there was no man, and all the birds of the heavens had fled. I beheld, and indeed the fruitful land was a wilderness, and all its cities were broken down at the presence of the LORD, by His fierce anger.”

This cosmic language described not the end of the planet but the end of a covenant world—the dissolution of a social, political, and religious order. Peter, thoroughly immersed in Hebrew prophetic tradition, employs this same language to describe not the physical destruction of planet Earth but the cataclysmic termination of the Old Covenant world centered in Jerusalem.

The Urgency in Peter's Language

Peter's actual vocabulary reveals the imminence he perceived. Consider his choice of words in 2 Peter 3:12-14:

- “Looking for” (προσδοκῶντας, prosdokōntas) - indicates active, expectant watching for something imminent
- “Hastening” (σπεύδοντας, speudontas) - suggests acceleration toward a rapidly approaching event

- “Looking for” (προσδοκῶμεν, prosdokōmen) - again emphasizes eager expectation of something near

These terms become nonsensical if Peter is describing events thousands of years distant. Why urge his readers to actively watch for and hasten something that wouldn't occur in their lifetimes? This language only makes sense if Peter, like Paul, expected these events within his generation.

Moreover, 1 Peter 4:7 explicitly states: “The end of all things is at hand” (πάντων δὲ τὸ τέλος ἤγγικεν). The perfect tense of ἤγγικεν (ēngiken) indicates something that has already come near and remains near—not something distant by millennia.

The “Day of the Lord” in Historical Context

Peter’s reference to the “day of the Lord” must be understood within its consistent biblical usage—not as the end of material creation but as a covenant judgment day. Throughout the Hebrew Scriptures, “the day of the LORD” referred to historical judgments against nations (Isaiah 13:6-9 against Babylon; Ezekiel 30:3 against Egypt; Joel 1:15, 2:1 against Jerusalem).

When Peter applies this language to his own time, declaring “the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night” (2 Peter 3:10), he's referencing the same imminent judgment Jesus described in the Olivet Discourse—the catastrophic destruction of Jerusalem

and the Second Temple, which would indeed come “like a thief” within that generation.

The New Heavens and New Earth

When we read about “new heavens and a new earth,” our modern minds naturally think of a completely new physical universe. This interpretation feels obvious to us—but it would have been completely foreign to Peter’s first-century Roman Asian audience.

To understand what Peter actually meant, we need to think like his original readers. They were deeply familiar with Hebrew Scripture and its rich symbolic language. When they heard “new heavens and new earth,” they wouldn’t immediately jump to cosmic replacement—they’d think of covenant transformation.

Consider how the prophets used this same language. When Isaiah spoke of “new heavens and a new earth” in chapters 65 and 66, he wasn’t describing the end of the material world. He was prophesying about Israel’s restoration after judgment—a new covenant era where God’s people would experience renewed blessing and righteousness.

The text itself makes this clear. Immediately after describing the “new heavens and new earth,” Isaiah explains that people will still “go out and look on the dead bodies of those who rebelled against me; the worms that eat them will not die, nor will the fire that burns them be quenched” (Isaiah 66:24). If this were truly a

brand new physical planet, how could there be visible carcasses from the previous age? The presence of these remains demonstrates that Isaiah is describing a transformed covenant relationship on the same earth—not a replacement cosmos.

This same logic applies when Jesus references this exact passage in Mark 9:48, speaking of hell “where the worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.” He’s drawing from Isaiah’s covenant language about judgment and restoration, not describing the annihilation of the physical universe.

This observation really drives the point home—the text itself contradicts a literal “new planet” interpretation. The presence of physical remains proves we’re dealing with covenant transformation, not cosmic replacement (see Revelation 19:17-21).

This prophetic pattern of using cosmic language to describe covenant changes was well-established in Scripture. The prophets regularly described political and spiritual transformations in terms of heavens shaking, earth melting, and stars falling (see Isaiah 34:4 about Edom, or Isaiah 13:10 about Babylon’s judgment).

Peter, writing within this biblical tradition, uses the same covenant language his readers would immediately recognize. And so, Peter’s promise of “new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells” (2 Peter 3:13) doesn’t describe a

replacement cosmos but a new covenant order—Christianity, the full establishment of Christ’s kingdom following the dissolution of the Second Jewish Commonwealth. This follows Isaiah’s prophetic pattern where “new heavens and a new earth” (Isaiah 65:17, 66:22) described the restoration of Israel after covenant judgment.

The Apostolic Unity: Peter’s Final Testament on Paul and Imminence

The climactic revelation of 2 Peter 3 emerges in its concluding verses, where Peter deliberately connects his apocalyptic teaching to Paul’s eschatology:

“Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless; and consider that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation—as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you, as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures” (2 Peter 3:14-16).

This passage doesn’t merely mention Paul—it establishes an unbreakable theological chain linking Jesus, Peter, and Paul in a unified eschatological vision:

The Language of Urgency and Presence

Understanding Peter’s eschatology begins with recognizing the electric urgency that permeates his language. Modern readers often miss this because we’re accustomed to thinking about biblical prophecy in terms of distant future events. But when we examine Peter’s actual words in their original Greek, we discover a vocabulary saturated with immediacy and pressing concern. This isn’t the language of someone describing events millennia away—it’s the urgent counsel of a pastor preparing his flock for imminent, life-altering circumstances. Every verb choice, every grammatical construction, points toward events his readers would personally experience.

The Greek text pulses with immediacy. Peter commands his readers to “be diligent” (σπουδάσατε, spoudasate)—an aorist imperative demanding immediate, zealous action. This verbal form directly connects to the “hastening” (σπεύδοντας, speudontas) mentioned in verse 12. Both terms share the same root that conveys urgent acceleration toward an impending reality.

Why such urgency? Because Peter expected his actual readers—not distant generations—to “be found by Him in peace” (εὐρεθῆναι ἐν εἰρήνῃ). The infinitive εὐρεθῆναι (heurethēnai) employs the language of judicial discovery—being personally revealed in a particular state when the Judge arrives

for evaluation. This isn't preparation for a distant tribunal but for imminent scrutiny.

Paul's "Difficult" Teachings: Misunderstood Imminence

One of the strongest objections to viewing New Testament eschatology as already fulfilled comes from the apparent complexity of Paul's writings. Critics argue that if Paul really taught imminent fulfillment, why did Peter describe some of his teachings as "hard to understand"? This objection actually strengthens the case for unified apostolic expectation when we examine what Peter specifically identifies as difficult. The problem wasn't conflicting timelines between the apostles—it was the sophisticated way Paul explained how ancient prophecies would be fulfilled through first-century historical events. Peter's clarification helps us understand exactly what made Paul's teachings complex and how they were being twisted by those who wanted to deny imminent fulfillment.

When Peter acknowledges that some of Paul's writings contain "things hard to understand" (δυσνόητά τινα) which people "twist," he isn't suggesting Paul taught a different timeline.

Paul's Multiple Manifestations - The True "Second Coming"]

The traditional concept of a single "Second Coming" event finds no support in Paul's actual language. In 1 Timothy 6:14-15, Paul uses the plural "καιροῖς" (times/seasons) when describing

Christ's future manifestations: "which in His times He shall show" (ἣν καιροῖς ἰδίους δείξει). This grammatical choice reveals that Paul expected *multiple* distinct appearances of Christ across different appointed seasons.

This multi-stage revelation model explains what Peter means when he refers to Paul's "difficult" teachings. Paul wasn't describing one dramatic cosmic event, but a sophisticated sequence of divine manifestations that would unfold across the covenant transition period (62-136 CE):

- 62 CE - Christ appears with his armies (the beginning of sorrows)
- 67 CE - Christ descends with Michael the Archangel
- 70 CE - Christ's presence during the Temple siege and destruction
- 115-117 CE - Christ manifests through the "iron rod" judgment against the Diaspora revolts
- 132-136 CE - Christ's final revelation of His Face in the closing days of the Bar Kokhba catastrophe

This understanding resolves the apparent tension between Peter's and Paul's writings. When Peter warns about those who "twist" Paul's teachings, he's addressing people who deny or oversimplify Paul's complex timeline into either immediate fulfillment or distant delay. Paul's actual teaching was far more nuanced - a series of manifestations across multiple "times" that would collectively constitute Christ's complete revelation and the establishment of His eternal kingdom.

The genius of Paul's plural "καιροῖς" is that it encompasses both imminence (the first manifestations were indeed "at hand") and completion (the final manifestations would conclude the age). This sophisticated timeline explains why Paul could simultaneously teach that Christ's coming was imminent while providing detailed instructions for ongoing Christian life and ministry.

and new creation would unfold through historical events—were complex enough to be distorted.

The specific distortion Peter warns against becomes clear from context: it's the denial of imminent fulfillment by the scoffers who asked, "Where is the promise of His coming?" Both

apostles taught an approaching judgment and transformation, and both faced resistance to this timeline.

The Greek term for “twist” (στρεβλοῦσιν, streblousin) describes a deliberate warping or torturing of meaning. Peter isn’t warning that Paul’s teaching is inherently incomprehensible, but that it can be deliberately misinterpreted against its intended meaning—precisely what traditional eschatology has done by stretching Paul’s “at hand” statements to mean “thousands of years distant.”

The Shared Apostolic Expectation

Perhaps the most compelling evidence for first-century fulfillment comes from the remarkable unity of apostolic testimony about timing. Modern dispensational theology has trained us to see contradictions where none exist—to imagine that Jesus taught one timeline, Paul another, and Peter yet another. But when we let the apostles speak for themselves, a powerful consensus emerges. Peter doesn’t just happen to agree with Paul’s timeline; he explicitly tells us that Paul wrote about “these things”—the very same events Peter describes using cosmic dissolution language. This isn’t coincidental agreement; it’s deliberate apostolic unity on the most crucial question facing the early church.

Notice the perfect integration of expectation:

- Jesus prophesied Jerusalem’s destruction within “this generation” (Matthew 24:34)
- Peter warns his readers to prepare for this imminent judgment, instructing them to actively “look forward” and “be diligent” in preparation
- Paul, according to Peter’s direct testimony, wrote about “these things” (περὶ τούτων)—the very same approaching events Peter has described using cosmic dissolution language

This triangulation of testimony creates an impenetrable case for unified apostolic expectation. Peter explicitly states that Paul's eschatology aligned with his own imminent timeline. Any interpretation that separates them—making Paul teach one timeline and Peter another—directly contradicts Peter’s own testimony about their doctrinal unity.

“Found in Peace”: The Ultimate Apostolic Concern

The practical urgency behind all apostolic eschatological teaching becomes clear when we understand what was actually at stake for first-century believers. This wasn’t academic theology or speculative prophecy—it was survival guidance for Christians living through the greatest crisis in Jewish history. When Peter urges his readers to be “found by Him in peace,” he's not offering general spiritual advice for all time. He’s providing specific, life-saving instructions for believers who

would face the catastrophic events Jesus predicted in the Olivet Discourse. Understanding this practical dimension helps us see why the apostles wrote with such urgency and why their expectations were so consistently immediate.

The phrase “found by Him in peace” encapsulates the practical urgency driving all apostolic eschatology. This wasn’t abstract theology but life-saving guidance. Being found “in peace” (ἐν εἰρήνῃ) meant:

- Being in right covenant relationship with God through Christ rather than remaining under the Old Covenant system facing judgment
- Following Jesus’ instructions in the Olivet Discourse for how believers should respond when these events began unfolding
- Separating from the doomed systems and structures rather than being destroyed with them

This was precisely Paul’s concern when he urged the Romans that “now it is high time to awake out of sleep” (Romans 13:11) and instructed the Corinthians about the proper response to the “present distress” and “short time” (1 Corinthians 7:26, 29).

The Final Verdict

Peter's direct connection between his teaching and Paul's delivers the final refutation to any claim that these apostles

taught contradictory timelines. Far from presenting competing eschatologies, they spoke with one voice about the imminent fulfillment of Jesus' prophecies concerning judgment and covenant transition.

The tragedy is that Peter's specific warning about the distortion of Paul's eschatology has itself been fulfilled in the very way traditional interpretations have stretched both apostles' clear time statements beyond recognition—making them say precisely what neither intended.

When we allow Peter and Paul to speak for themselves—accepting their urgent language as genuinely urgent, their imminent expectations as truly imminent, and their covenant focus as centrally covenant-oriented—we discover a unified apostolic witness that confirms rather than contradicts Jesus' own prophecies about the end of the age coming within his generation.

The challenge before us isn't whether to believe Peter or Paul, but whether to believe them both as they actually wrote, without twisting their words to fit theological systems they never knew.

Conclusion: A Call to Reconsider

As we conclude our examination of Paul's eschatological expectations, we stand at a crossroads of interpretation that has

profound implications for how we understand not only the apostle's writings, but the entire trajectory of New Testament Christianity.

The evidence we've surveyed is both extensive and compelling. Throughout his ministry—from Damascus to Rome, from his earliest letters to his final prison correspondence—Paul maintained a consistent, emphatic conviction that Christ's return and the accompanying judgment were not distant events but imminent realities. His language was neither ambiguous nor meant to be stretched across millennia. He spoke with the clarity and urgency of a man who genuinely believed the culmination of all things would occur within his generation.

This consistent testimony forces us to confront an uncomfortable but necessary choice:

Either Paul was fundamentally mistaken about something central to his apostolic message—a conclusion that undermines his claim to divine inspiration and compromises the reliability of his entire theological framework;

Or Paul was precisely right, but we have misunderstood what he meant by Christ's "coming"—perhaps conflating his expectation of a covenant judgment against first-century Judaism with later notions of cosmic termination.

The second option not only preserves the integrity of Paul's apostleship and the inspiration of Scripture, but it also allows his writings to be understood in their proper historical and covenant context. Rather than constantly reinterpreting his plain temporal statements, we can accept them at face value and recognize their fulfillment in the monumental events that transformed the religious landscape between 62-136 CE.

We are not asking you to abandon your faith. Quite the contrary—we are inviting you to consider whether your faith might be strengthened by taking Paul at his word rather than reinterpreting him to fit later theological systems.

Should we believe the Apostle Paul? I suggest that the integrity of the Christian faith depends on our answer. Not because Paul's specific timeline matters in itself, but because the truthfulness of apostolic testimony is the foundation upon which Christianity rests.

If we want a faith true to its historical roots—a faith that takes Scripture seriously on its own terms—we must be willing to reconsider our assumptions about what Paul meant when he declared, with unwavering confidence, that “the Lord is at hand.”

The time has come to believe the Apostle Paul, not by dismissing his clear time statements, but by understanding them

as he intended—as truthful declarations about events that would soon transform the world he knew.

The question is not whether Paul expected an imminent end. The evidence is overwhelming that he did. The question is what to do with this uncomfortable fact. Will you reconsider? Will you allow Paul's actual words to challenge your understanding? Will you believe the Apostle Paul?

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