PARADISE REGAINED OR STILL LOST?
ESCHATOLOGY AND DISORDERLY BEHAVIOUR
IN 2 THESSALONIANS

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INTRODUCTION

In the third chapter of 2 Thess, the author of this letter addresses himself to the problem that some members of the church behave ἀτάκτως, 'in a disorderly way', and not according to the tradition (3.6). As it seems, this behaviour amounts to a refusal to work for a living. The brothers in question take advantage of others (cf. 3.8), and busy themselves with useless things, causing unrest (3.11–12).

This problem of the disorderly conduct of a group of Christians constitutes one of the two specific problems which the author of 2 Thess deals with. The other one is the commotion caused by the message that 'the Day of the Lord has come' (2.2), a message which the author of the letter condemns as false (2.1–12). As these two problems are the two only specific issues in 2 Thess, it is not astonishing that many commentators have thought some kind of link to exist between the two: the eschatological error is supposed to be the source of the wrong conduct. It seems only logical to surmise such a causal relationship: it would be strange indeed if, in such a short letter as 2 Thess is, the only two specific problems discussed were not related. It is, of course, true that the author does not explicitly connect the two problems. That, however, is not a compelling argument against the connection: if the addressees already knew the problems were related, there was no need for the author to make the relationship explicit.

There are, moreover, some indications in the letter which at least suggest a link between the two issues. The procedures the author of the letter follows in his efforts to solve the two problems display similarities. In both instances, he refers to what he said when he was with the congregation (ἐπὶ δὲν πρὸς ὑμᾶς ταῦτα ἔλεγον ὑμῖν, 2.5; ὅτε ἦμην πρὸς ὑμᾶς, τὸ τό παρηγγέλλομεν ὑμῖν, 3.10), he appeals to their knowledge (οἶδατε, 2.6; 3.7), and he places the apostolic tradition, received by the congregation, in position against the apparently wrong teaching or behaviour (τὰς παραδόσεις ὡς ἔδιδάχθητε,
2.15; τὴν παράδοσιν ἡν παρελάβοσαν1 παρ’ ἡμῶν, 3.6). The section on the disorderly ones immediately follows a reference to the ὑπο­μονή τοῦ Χριστοῦ (3.5), which probably means, in view of the use of ὑπομονή in 1.4 in the sense of ‘steadfastness’ as a virtue of the Thessalonian church, ‘the steadfast expectation of Christ’.2 This sequence would also suggest some connection between eschatological expectation and (the fight against) disorderly behaviour.3

However, in a recent contribution to this periodical, R. Russell4 has argued that the disorderly behaviour is best explained in a sociological way. After having given a useful survey of the history of the interpretation of the relevant passages from 1 and 2 Thess (he considers both letters as Pauline),5 he analyses them,6 and finds that the tradition about work goes back to the time Paul founded the Thessalonian church (see 1 Thess 4.11–12; 2 Thess 3.6–10), whereas the eschatological problems in that congregation (see 1 Thess 4.13–18; 5.1–11; 2 Thess 2.1–12) are from a later time; so the problem of disorderly behaviour existed before the eschatological problems and cannot have been caused by these.7 According to Russell, ‘Paul . . . does not connect the Thessalonians’ questions

1 The reading παρελάβοσαν should be preferred as ‘the reading which seems best to explain the origin of the others’; so B. M. Metzger, A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament (London/New York: UBS, 1971) 637.


5 Russell, ‘Idle’, 105–7. I refer to this survey for the various opinions on the topic; another survey is to be found in J. K. Fraser, A Theological Study of Second Thessalonians. A Comprehensive Study of the Thought of the Epistle and Its Sources (Diss. Durham, 1979) 336–49. G. S. Holland, The Tradition That You Received from Us: 2 Thessalonians in the Pauline Tradition (HUTH 24; Tübingen: Mohr, 1988) 52–3, sees the link between 2 Thess 3.7–12 and 2.1–12 only in this, that the opponents abandon the tradition on two points (one doctrinal, one ethical) and are therefore attacked. That the disorderly conduct is caused by the eschatological ideas of 2.2a, is affirmed by Müller, Anfänge, 162, and denied by F. W. Hughes, Early Christian Rhetoric and 2 Thessalonians (JSNTSS 30; Sheffield: Academic, 1989) 65.


about the parousia with the problem of disorderliness. He finds another argument against the connection in the fact that only a minority in the Thessalonian church behaved in a disorderly way, whereas one would expect that they all did when 'excessive eschatological excitement' was the cause. Neither can the unrest be explained by realized eschatology or gnosticism — there is no evidence for the latter in 1 and 2 Thess, and futuristic eschatology is assumed and used in 1 Thess. For Russell, the best explanation is this one:

Paul's converts included the urban poor, and some may have been unemployed or may have formed a client relationship and obligation to a benefactor. Once brought into the circle of Christian love, they could have appeared to outsiders to be idle beggars who exploited the generosity of the Christian community without any sense of reciprocal response to their new benefactors. As the idle were caught up in new beliefs and practices, they rejected the idea of work to enjoy their understanding of brotherly love and to propagate their opinions and religious ideas.

Russell is undoubtedly right in observing that neither in 1 Thess nor in 2 Thess are explicit connections made between disorderly behaviour and eschatological belief. However, his arguments against any explanation of the disorderly conduct by means of eschatological excitement are amenable to criticism — even if one presupposes, with Russell, the Pauline authorship of 2 Thess. That Paul's catechesis on work dates back to the foundation of the Thessalonian church, and that the eschatological problems do not, may be true, but it does of course not exclude that Paul referred back to his earlier catechesis to solve problems that arose later. I do not see why 'excessive eschatological excitement' should necessarily be shared by the whole community; it is quite possible that only part of the congregation drew certain consequences from certain eschatological ideas not shared by others. Russell's sociological explanation for the disorderly behaviour may have some validity, but it elucidates only the possibility of people in Thessalonica being unemployed or dependent for their livelihood upon others. What it leaves unclear is the motive for their not being willing to work (cf. 2 Thess 3.10c), and thereby being a burden to others (cf. 3.8). Russell seems to be aware of this difficulty, when he connects the rejection of work by the disorderly ones with their 'new beliefs and practices'. His sociological approach explains why

9 Russell, 'Idle', 110.
10 Russell, 'Idle', 113.
people are without work; another explanation is required for their unwillingness to work.

In this paper, I want to demonstrate that there is indeed, in 2 Thess, a relationship between the eschatological error and the disorderly behaviour. As already set out, the presence of both issues as the only specific issues in such a short letter, as well as some literary indications, strongly suggest a relationship.\(^{11}\) Such a relationship may be considered as proved if it can be demonstrated that the specific kind of disorderly behaviour combated in 3.6–12 can be explained as caused by the specific character of the eschatological error combated in 2.1–12. So, the question to be asked is not simply whether there is in general a relationship between eschatological error and disorderly conduct, but what kind of relationship there is between the two definite varieties of both as they occur in 2 Thess.

One possible kind of relationship may be ruled out beforehand. It has been supposed that the belief that ‘the Day of the Lord’ has come (2.2), should be interpreted as an early form of gnosticism, comparable to the belief rejected in 2 Tim 2.18, ‘that the resurrection has already taken place’. The ‘disorderly ones’ are, in that case, people who consider themselves as having reached the status of pneumatics, and as, for that reason, elevated above the obligation to work for their living; instead, they occupy themselves with the propagation of their ideas (cf. 3.11–12) and claim a right to be supported by the community (cf. 3.8–9).\(^{12}\) The point is, however, that the wording both of the eschatological error in 2.2 and of its rebuttal in 2.3–12 suggests not a gnostic but an apocalyptic conception – at least in the perception of the author of 2 Thess. What would be the sense of attacking a gnostic error by means of an apocalyptic exposition about what has to happen before the arrival of ‘the Day of the Lord’? If the author of 2 Thess intended to combat a belief that the resurrection had already taken place in a spiritual form, we should expect something else in 2 Thess 2 than what we

\(^{11}\) The tight structure of the letter might suggest the same, see my article: ‘The Structure of 2 Thessalonians’, *The Thessalonian Correspondence* (ed. R. F. Collins; BETL 87; Louvain: Peeters, 1990) 373–82, esp. 380–1.

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It seems, then, that we have to look for apocalyptic ideas to answer the question what kind of relationship there could be between disorderly behaviour and eschatological error in 2 Thess.

Any treatment of 2 Thess or part of it is, of course, affected by the question of authorship. This question seems far from resolved. I lean towards the standpoint that the letter should be considered as Deutero-Pauline, and I shall presuppose that standpoint in what follows. I here mention only one argument from among many for this point of view, because of its bearing on the investigation presented here: the distinctive eschatology of 2 Thess 2 (and of ch. 1) and the problem which gave rise to it (2.2) differ notably from the eschatological problems and statements we find in Paul's letters. In the conclusion at the end of this paper, I shall try to give a tentative description of the milieu in which the eschatological problem of 2 Thess has to be located.

THE ORDER VIOLATED BY THE DISORDERLY BROTHERS (2 THES 3.6-12)

The essential reproach to the church members who are attacked in 3.6–12, is that they walk ἀτάκτος, 'in a disorderly way', 'without order'. The word ἀτάκτος and its derivatives do not in themselves denote, as C. Spicq has demonstrated with ample evidence, laziness or work-shyness, but only that the person(s) or thing(s) indicated resist some kind of order. Exactly what order is meant, depends upon the context in which the word is used. So Philo can call matter before creation ἀτάκτος (Op. 22); Josephus uses the


14 See the surveys and the divergent standpoints of, on the one hand, W. Trilling, Untersuchungen zum 2. Thessalonicherbrief (EThSt 27; Leipzig: St Benno, 1972), who argues for inauthenticity, and on the other hand Jewett, Thessalonian Correspondence, 3–18, who argues for authenticity. See also W. Trilling, 'Die beiden Briefe des Apostels Paulus an die Thessalonicher. Eine Forschungsübersicht', ANRW II, 25.4 (Berlin/New York: de Gruyter, 1987) 3365–3403.


16 '... Dans chaque cas, c’est le contexte qui doit déterminer en quoi le désordre consiste' – so B. Bigaux, Saint Paul. Les épîtres aux Thessaloniciens (EB; Paris: Gabalda/Gembloux: Duculot, 1956) 583.
adverb ἀτάκτως in parallelism with ἄνομως, 'lawlessly' (C. Απ. 2.151), and he characterizes the retreat of an army as ἀτάκτος (Bell. 3.113). In a contract of apprenticeship, the verb ἀτακτεῖν can be used for disorderly conduct, which, in that context, amounts to neglecting work (P.Oxy. 2.275.25, from 66 CE).

In 2 Thess 3, the context provides sufficient clues to determine what kind of order is meant. First of all, in v. 6 ‘walking ἀτάκτως’ is paralleled with ‘not walking according to the tradition which they received from us’. In vv. 7–8, the fact that ‘Paul’ was not disorderly among the addressees of the letter is paralleled with the fact that he did not eat anyone’s bread without paying, and opposed to his working day and night, in toil and hardship, so as not to be a burden to anyone from the congregation.17 In vv. 11–12, finally, ‘walking ἀτάκτως’ is explained as ‘doing no work but being busybodies’, and people who do so are admonished ‘to eat their own bread, working in quietness’. Of importance is also the maxim of v. 10c, to which ‘Paul’ refers as his earlier oral instruction to them: ‘If anyone will not work, let him not eat.’ This maxim here suggests that the ‘disorderly ones’ were not willing to work. That the accent is on ‘willing’ in this maxim is obvious, not only from the immediate context, but also from a comparison with numerous parallels, both Jewish and pagan, which mostly constitute simple truisms (‘if you do not work, you have nothing to eat’), as, e.g., the words of the ant to the fly in Phaedrus Fabulae 4.25.17: ‘Nihil laboras? Ideo, cum opus est, nihil habes.’18

So, the order which is at stake in 2 Thess 3.6–12 is part of the tradition which the addressees received, and it implies that one should work for his own living, instead of taking advantage of others. To determine this ‘order’ in a more specific way, we should consider, first of all, that in early Christian usage the substantive παράδοσις, ‘tradition’, as well as the verbs παραδίδοναι, ‘to transmit’, and παραλαμβάνειν, ‘to receive’, often have an ethical object (as is evidently the case in 2 Thess 3.6), which derives, via Jewish tradition, from the OT. The ethical tradition transmitted by Paul

17 One could even consider κατ’ in v. 6 and οὔτε in v. 8 as expijective, cf. F. Blass–A. Debrunner, Grammatik des neutestamentlichen Griechisch, rev. by F. Rehkopf (16th ed.; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck, 1984) §442.8a; Rigaux, Thess, 706; Roosen, Tess, 166; Müller, Anfänge, 164.

in 1 Thess 4.1–8 (cf. παρελάβετε v. 1) has a clear OT and Jewish colour,\textsuperscript{19} and the transmitted rules of conduct of 1 Cor 11.2–16 (cf. παρέδωκα, παραδόσεις v. 2) are largely determined by Gen 1–3. In 2 Pet 2.21, ‘the holy commandment transmitted (παραδοθείσης) to them [the false teachers]’ is paralleled with ‘the way of righteousness’. In Did. 4.13 and its parallel Barn. 19.11, the reader is admonished to keep ‘what you have received (ὁ παρέλαβες)’, i.e. the entire preceding series of commandments (ἐντολὰς κυρίου, Did. 4.13; Barn. 19.2), which is very reminiscent of OT passages.

A second consideration also directs us towards an OT provenance of the ‘order’ which is the matter at issue in 2 Thess 3.6–12. The verb τάσσειν, ‘to order’ (from which ἀτάσσετε derives), and its derivatives are used in Jewish and early Christian literature to indicate the order which is ordered in the Law by God or by Moses (see, e.g., Exod 29.43; Lev 18.4; Deut 27.1 LXX; Philo Spec. Leg. 1.296; 2.175; Josephus Ant. 5.98; Mark 1.44 parr.; Acts 7.44; 21.10; 1 Clem. 40.1–2; 43.1). The order instituted by God at the creation is indicated in the same way (see, e.g. Job 38.12 LXX; Wis 11.20; T. Naph. 2.8–9; Philo Cher. 23; Josephus Ant. 1.30; Acts 17.26; 1 Clem. 20.2, 3, 11).\textsuperscript{20}

The above means that it seems worthwhile to look for an OT ‘order’ which could be at the base of what ‘Paul’ tries to inculcate in 2 Thess 3.6–12. Such a thing is easily found in Gen 3.17–19, God’s words to Adam after the Fall:

... cursed is the earth because of you;  
in pain you shall eat of it  
all the days of your life.  
Thorns and thistles it will produce for you;  
and you shall eat the plants of the field.  
In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread ....

It is evident that in this passage God institutes an order to which man is submitted: man has to work hard for his living. It may be of some interest to note that Josephus in his Ant. 1.51 refers to God’s words in Gen 3.14–19 by means of προστάξας, ‘having ordered’.\textsuperscript{21} Also elsewhere in early Jewish literature, the fact that man has to work hard for his living is considered to be an order established by God after the Fall. Sir 7.15 speaks of ‘toilsome labour and agriculture, created by the most High’. According to Vit. Ad. 22, God

\textsuperscript{19} See R. Schnackenburg, \textit{Die sittliche Botschaft des Neuen Testaments 2: Die urchristlichen Verkündiger} (HTKNr. Suppl. 2; Freiburg etc.: Herder, 1988) 61–3.

\textsuperscript{20} See further Delling, ‘τάσσω κτλ.’.

\textsuperscript{21} ... Ο μὲν θεὸς ταύτα προστάξας αὐτοὶς πάσχειν ....
taught Adam and Eve after the Fall 'to work and till the ground so as to have produce by which they and all generations might live'.

In *Sib. Or.* 1.57–8, God says to the first men, after the Fall: 'Increase, multiply, and work on earth with skill, so that by sweat you may have your fill of food.'

A somewhat different idea is also found in early Jewish literature, viz. that the obligation to work for a living was already imposed upon Adam in Paradise. This is stated, in dependence, as it seems, upon Gen 2.15–16; *Josephus Ant.* 1.38; *Abot R. Nat.*, rec. A, 11. The order imposed in Gen 3.17–19 then means, that after the Fall labour becomes hard and toilsome, negative qualities which it did not have before the Fall.

I resume: the reproach, in 2 Thess 3.6–12, of walking without order and not according to the tradition may very well be understood as a reproach of not accepting an order imposed by God in the OT. More specifically, it may very well concern Gen 3.17–19, a passage understood in Jewish tradition as God’s imposition upon man of the obligation to work hard in order to be able to eat. What remains to be demonstrated, is that there are some literary connections between 2 Thess 3.6–12 and Gen 3.17–19 as understood around the beginning of our era, which make it probable that the passage from 2 Thess indeed alludes to this OT passage.

First of all, in 2 Thess 3.6–12 the same central terms and ideas are used that are present in the Gen passage. Paul says in v. 8 that 'we did not eat bread (οὐδὲ ... ἀρτον ἐφάγομεν) from anyone for nothing, but we worked (ἐργαζόμενοι) in toil and hardship ...', and accordingly, the disorderly brothers are admonished in v. 12 'to eat their own bread (τὸν ἐαυτῶν ἀρτον ἑσθωσίων), working (ἐργαζόμενοι) quietly', in agreement with the maxim of v. 10: 'If anyone will not work, let him not eat (εἰ τις οὐ δέλαι ἐργάζεσθαι μηδὲ ἐσθετώ)' In Gen 3.17–19 LXX, we meet: ' ... cursed is the earth in your works (ἐν τοῖς ἐργαῖς σου); in pains you shall eat of it (φάγῃ ἀντίν) ... and you shall eat (φάγῃ) the plants of the field. In the sweat of your face you shall eat your bread (φάγῃ τὸν ἀρτον σου).' The other Gen text from which, as we saw, the obligation to work for a living was derived, Gen 2.15–16, also contains in the LXX the central terms ἐργαζόμενοι and ἑσθωσίον: 'And he [God] put him [the

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24 See further Agrell, *Work*, 34–6, 49.
man] in the Paradise to till it (ἐργάζομαι ἀντάξιον, cf. v. 5) and keep it. And the Lord God commanded Adam, saying: From every tree in the Paradise you may eat (βρῶσει φάγῃ). It should be noted that with the exception of the peculiar LXX rendering in Gen 3.17 to be discussed below, the central terms ἐργάζομαι and ἀπεθέσιν (ἐργασίαν) are adequate equivalents of their Hebrew counterparts שָׁבָה (לָעַל). That these terms occur together in both MT and LXX in a passage whose content (man has to work hard for his living) is closely akin to that of 2 Thess 3.6–12 (the disorderly brothers should work for their living), is, as far as I can see, only here the case in the OT.

Secondly, we may observe that in several later versions of Gen 3.17–19 (which at least in part are certainly pre-Christian or contemporaneous with the beginnings of Christianity) it is stressed even more than it was already in the Hebrew text that working is the condition for eating, just as in 2 Thess 3.7–8, 10, 12. In Gen 3.17 LXX, the words Αὐρῶς ἡ θερμή οὐκ ἐπέβαλερ, ‘cursed is the earth because of you’, from the Hebrew text become ἐπικατάραξας ἂν γενοῦς ἐργασίαν σου, ‘cursed is the earth in your works’; apparently, οὐκ ἐπέβαλερ was read as οὐκ ἐπέβαλεν or some such thing. Symmachus’ translation differs only slightly from that of the LXX (ἐν τῇ ἐργασίᾳ σου). The effect of this translation is, when it is read together with v. 19, that now work itself participates in the curse: only by hard and toilsome work will man be able to eat, to provide for his living. The Palestinian Targumim have after Gen 3.18 an addition in comparison with the MT, in which Adam is made to say, among other things: ‘So let us rise and work with the work of our hands and we shall eat food from the food of the earth.’ In Tg. Pseudo-Jonathan, the beginning of v. 19 is rendered as follows: ‘From the work of your hand you will eat food.’ Josephus renders Gen 3.17–19 with the words: ‘... that the earth would no more produce anything of herself, but, in return for toil and grinding labour, would but afford some of her fruits and refuse others’ (Ant. 1.49).

From the above, we can conclude that the order at stake in 2 Thess 3.6–12 is probably that of Gen 3.17–19. God instituted
there—so the text was read in Jewish tradition—the order according to which man has to work hard for his food. That our passage should allude to Gen 2.15-16 is possible, but not too probable, because of the reference to the example of 'Paul' working ἐν κόπω καὶ μόχθοι, 'in toil and hardship' (v. 8), to be compared with the 'pains', the 'thorns and thistles' and the 'sweat of your face' of Gen 3.17-19.

That the author of 2 Thess does not make the allusion to Gen 3.17-19 explicit, cannot be an argument against the reality of the allusion: he never explicitly refers to the OT, but evidently assumes his readers to be able to detect such hints (cf. 1.8 with Isa 66.15; 2.8 with Isa 11.4, etc.).

**THE DAY OF THE LORD HAS COME** (2 THESS 2.2)

The content of the eschatological error combated in 2 Thess 2.2 is: ἐνέστηκεν ἡ ἡμέρα τοῦ κυρίου, which should be translated as: 'The Day of the Lord is present, has come'. This translation is nowadays almost generally acknowledged to be the correct one; it is in accordance with the usual meaning of the perfect ἐνέστηκα elsewhere in the NT, and in other Greek writings. Though the translation 'is imminent' might be theoretically possible, it is virtually excluded for our text by the circumstance that, if ἐνέστηκεν should mean 'is imminent', the statement ἐνέστηκεν ἡ ἡμέρα τοῦ κυρίου would lose the 'heretical' character it should have according to its context. For in that case the statement does not essentially differ from what Paul states in Rom 13.11-12; Phil 4.5 (cf. 1 Thess 4.15-
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17; 5.1–11; 1 Cor 7.29; 15.52), and what other NT authors state as well (Mark 1.15; Jas 5.8; 1 Pet 4.7; Rev 1.3; 22.10). Many scholars choose, because of the lexical evidence, the translation ‘has come’, but then interpret it as if it was actually ‘is imminent’;32 such a policy, however, does not recommend itself, as it also deprives the statement of the content it needs in its context. It is not very probable that the author of 2 Thess, who uses Paul’s name for his work, combats a statement that Paul himself could easily have made. Moreover, the author of 2 Thess himself is convinced that the final decision is at hand, though not yet immediately. He writes about the things that have to happen before the parousia will actually occur, and which are already working in the present time: ‘For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work’ (2.7).33

However, if we translate in 2.2c: ‘The Day of the Lord has come’, we are left with the question what exactly this statement may have implied. Some scholars interpret it in this way: it cannot mean that the parousia has already occurred, for that should be a public event, perceptible for everybody, leaving no room for doubt; so it can only mean that the chain of events which eventually lead up to the parousia has begun.34 Now this interpretation has as its main problem,35 that in the idiom of the author of 2 Thess and of Paul ‘the parousia of the Lord’ and ‘the Day of the Lord’ refer to the same event. It is obvious that in 2 Thess 2.2 the expression ἡ ἡμέρα τοῦ κυρίου takes up the earlier ἡ παροικία τοῦ κυρίου κτλ. (2.1); the point made here is that the addressees should not think of this event that has already occurred. In 1 Thess 4.15 and 5.2, there is no need at all to suppose different referents for the two expressions, and the same is valid for 1 Cor 1.8; 5.5 and 15.23. Moreover, Paul can make almost identical statements about ‘the parousia of the Lord’ and ‘the Day of the Lord’: compare 1 Cor 1.8; Phil 1.10 with

32 So, e.g., von Dobschütz, Thess, 267–8; Dibelius, Thess, 45; Masson, Thess, 92; Stephenson, ‘Meaning’, 451; Roosen, Tess, 142.
33 Cf. de Boer, Imitation, 130.
34 So, e.g., J. E. Frame, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles of St Paul to the Thessalonians (ICC; Edinburgh: Clark, 1912) 248; Laub, Eschatologische Verkündigung, 140; Agrell, Work, 123; W. Trilling, Der zweite Brief an die Thessalonicher (EKKNT 14; Zürich: Benziger/Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1980) 79. Of course, this interpretation is easily combined with the — wrong — translation of ἐνέστηκεν by ‘is imminent’ or some such thing. A text sometimes quoted in this connection is Hippolytus Commentary on Daniel 4.19, where the clause ἐνέστηκεν ἡ ἡμέρα τοῦ κυρίου should have the sense ‘the Day of the Lord is imminent’, or at least should indicate that the events leading up to the final judgment have started (see esp. W. Wrede, Die Echtheit des zweiten Thessalonicherbriefs [TK 9/2; Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1903] 49–50). When 2 Thess 2.2c is actually taken up in this text, it is an early testimony for the wrong interpretation just discussed.
35 Cf. also the refutation of this view by Stephenson, ‘Meaning’, 450–1.
1 Thess 3.13; 5.23 (the congregation shall be blameless at the parousia/on the Day of Christ/the Lord) or Phil 2.16 with 1 Thess 2.19 (the congregation will constitute Paul’s boast on the Day of Christ/at his parousia).

So it would seem we have to start from the presupposition that 2.2c means: ‘The parousia of the Lord has occurred.’ Quite recently, however, G. S. Holland has tried to avoid this conclusion by postulating that one should distinguish between ‘the Day of the Lord’, being the day of God’s wrath, and the parousia of Christ; the former event should precede the latter. He is of the opinion that already in the OT ‘the Day of the Lord’ is a day of wrath, and that Paul uses the same idea in Rom 2.5, 16 and 1 Thess 5.2; it should be distinguished from the Pauline concept of ‘the Day of Christ’. The author of 2 Thess evidently considers the parousia as an unmistakable event (see 2 Thess 1), which ‘the Day of the Lord’ is not; the proclamation of this day is a cause of unrest, it asks for a human response, whereas at the parousia there is no time left for a human response. The central event of ‘the Day of the Lord’ is the appearance of the Antagonist, described in 2.3–10. It seems to me that Holland misrepresents things at several points. For the post-exilic prophets in the OT at least, ‘the Day of the Lord’ is a day not only of wrath, but also of salvation (see Joel 3–4; Zech 14; Mal 3). As far as Paul is concerned, there is no reason to make the distinction Holland makes: ‘the Day of the Lord’ of 1 Thess 5.2 refers to the same event as ‘the parousia of the Lord’ in 4.15, and the day of God’s judgment in Rom 2.5, 16 is just the same as that of Christ’s judgment (1 Cor 1.8; 5.5; 2 Cor 1.14; Phil 1.6, 10; 2.16).

Holland is right in stressing that the parousia as described in 2 Thess 2 is unmistakable; it is quite possible, however, that not all Christians in the first century saw it precisely that way, or considered the same events as unmistakable, so that the supporters of the view of 2 Thess 2.2c may have perceived the parousia of Christ in a way different from that of the author of the letter. Holland’s view that the appearance of ‘the Lawless One’ is the central event of ‘the Day of the Lord’ clearly shows the problems of his view, for it makes the assertions of the author of 2 Thess in 2.1–4 into a tautology: ‘the

36 Holland, Tradition, 96–105.
37 Holland, Tradition, 119–21.
40 Cf. Trilling, Untersuchungen, 126.
Day of the Lord’ will not come before ‘the Day of the Lord’ comes – in the appearance of ‘the Lawless One’.41

Our problem remains: what exactly did the statement ‘the Day of the Lord has come’ imply for its adherents as the author of 2 Thess understood them? In view of the fact that – as observed above – the expression ἡ ἡμέρα τοῦ κυρίου in 2.2 takes up ἡ παρουσία τοῦ κυρίου . . . καὶ ἡμῶν ἐπισυναγωγῆς ἐπ’ αὐτόν from 2.1, it is obvious that ‘the Day of the Lord’ implies some personal appearance of the Lord, who will assemble his faithful. Such a conception of ‘the Day of the Lord’ is in line with the conception the author of 2 Thess himself has of this day, as it is evident from 2.8 (about the Lord, who will slay the Lawless One and who will destroy him ‘by the appearing of his parousia’) and 1.7–10 (about ‘the revelation of the Lord Jesus from heaven’, who comes ‘to be glorified in his saints’). It should be noticed here that the author of 2 Thess does not give any evidence that he calls in question the character of ‘the Day of the Lord’ as viewed by his opponents; he only discusses its timing. In view of these observations, it does not seem advisable to suppose that those who thought that ‘the Day of the Lord has come’ sought its presence in the experience of the Spirit, or in some kind of sacramental celebration;42 the relevant passages from 2 Thess suggest that some real, personal presence of the Lord is envisaged.

It has often been observed that there are similarities between the eschatological passage 2 Thess 2.1–12 and the eschatological discourse of Jesus in the synoptic gospels (Mark 13 par.);43 apparently, both come from the same world of thought. Now in the eschatological discourse, Jesus is presented as warning against those who will say that they are the Christ, false Messiahs and false prophets who will lead people astray. In all three synoptic gospels,

42 Cf. the Introduction above, about the improbability of an early form of gnosticism being behind 2.2c. That ‘the Day of the Lord’ was thought to have come in a ‘materialization of eschatology’, consisting in ecstatic experiences of the Spirit and in misuse of the sacraments, was advanced by B. Reicke, Diakonie, Festfreude und Zelos in Verbindung mit der altchristlichen Agapenfeier (UUA 1951/5; Uppsala: Lundequista/Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1951) 240–7, and his pupil R. M. Evans, Eschatology and Ethics: A Study of Thessalonica and Paul’s Letters to the Thessalonians (Diss. Basel; Princeton, NJ: McMahon, 1968) 118–37. Both Reicke and Evans see this conception of ‘the Day of the Lord’ as connected with the idleness of the ἄνωθεν.
Jesus starts the discourse with a warning against ‘many’, who will come in his name, saying: ‘I am’ (Matt: + ‘the Christ’) (Mark 13.6; Matt 24.5; Luke 21.8). The fact that they come in Jesus’ name strongly suggests that Matthew was acting along the lines of Mark when he expanded Mark’s simple εγώ εἰμι into the fuller εγώ εἰμι ὁ Χριστός. The deceivers pretend to be Christ returned on earth. In Matthew’s version of the discourse, we meet then a reference to ‘false prophets’ leading many astray in 24.11. ‘False Messiahs’ and ‘false prophets’ are again mentioned in Mark 13.22//Matt 24.24; they will perform signs and wonders to lead astray, if possible, the elect. In the preceding verse (Mark 13.21//Matt 24.23), the listeners are admonished not to believe those who pretend to be able to indicate the place where the Messiah is (cf. also Matt 24.26; Luke 17.23). The most reasonable explanation for all these warnings is that there were indeed people who claimed to be or were supposed to be the eschatological prophet or Christ returned on earth, at least at the time Mark’s gospel was composed. On the Jewish side, we have very specific testimonies about such persons in the stories Josephus tells us about those who passed themselves off as prophets who were on the point of realizing eschatological salvation for their followers (see Ant. 20.97–8, cf. Acts 5.36; Bell. 2. 258–63//Ant. 20.167–72, cf. Acts 21.38; Ant. 20.188; cf. Ant. 18.85–7; Bell. 2.433–4; 7.437–41). I quote one example:

At this time [= ca. 54 CE] there came to Jerusalem from Egypt a man who declared that he was a prophet and advised the masses of the common people to go out with him to the mountain called the Mount of Olives, which lies opposite the city at a distance of five furlongs. For he asserted that he wished to demonstrate from there that at his command Jerusalem’s walls would fall down, through which he promised to provide them an entrance into the city. (Ant. 20.169–70) 45

44 Luke adds a second statement of the false Messiahs, ὁ καυρὸς ἤγγικεν, characteristic of his idea of delay of the parousia: to say even that ‘the time has drawn near’, is already an effect to lead people astray. Hartman, Prophecy Interpreted, 159–60, is of the opinion that εγώ εἰμι in Mark 13.6 is a formula of divine revelation, implying that the ‘many’ make themselves into anti-gods. Though this interpretation may be possible on a literary level anterior to the Markan redaction, it is virtually ruled out for Mark’s version of the discourse on account of the preceding τοῦ ὄνοματος μου, see, e.g., R. Pesch, Das Markusevangelium 2 (HTKNT 2/2; Freiburg etc.: Herder, 1977) 279. Moreover, the fact that the background of the εγώ εἰμι-formula is to be found in divine revelatory formulae in the OT, esp. in Deutero-Isaiah (see Isa 41.4; 43.10 etc.), does not exclude at all that in the NT it is a formula with which the bringer of God’s eschatological salvation reveals himself, as is clearly the case in John (see John 8.24, 28, 58; 13.19).

Whatever the precise relationship may be between 2 Thess 2.1-12 and the synoptic eschatological discourse, it is evident that according to the latter the endtime is introduced by, among other things, the appearance of people claiming to be Christ returned on earth, and by persecution of the Christian community (Mark 13.9-13 parr.), which events are not yet the end (Mark 13.8 parr.), whereas according to the former there are, at the time of the writing of 2 Thess, which is marked by persecution of the church (1.4), persons who claim that the parousia has taken place (2.2); the author rebuts this claim by pointing to future events that have to take place before the parousia (2.3-12).\footnote{I mention two verbal agreements between the synoptic apocalypse and 2 Thess 2 which are of importance within the scope of this article: ὃροιςθα, 'to be alarmed', in Mark 13.7//Matt 24.6 and 2 Thess 2.2, in the warning to the believers, and ἐποιόμενος/ἐποιομασθῇ, 'to gather/gathering', in Mark 13.27//Matt 24.31 and 2 Thess 2.1, for Christ's saving action towards his followers. Moreover, the verb ἀπολελαμβάνει, 'to lead astray', from the warning Mark 13.5-6 parr., is easily paralleled with ἔφεστήκον, 'to deceive', in the warning 2 Thess 2.3 (cf. also Matt 24.11; Mark 13.22 par.; 2 Thess 2.10-11). It seems, after all, that there are more agreements between Mark 13.5-6 (and its parallel Matt 24.4-5) and 2 Thess 2.1-12 than Hartman, \textit{Prophecy}, 203-4, supposes. Best, \textit{Thess}, 278, rightly considers an interpretation of 2 Thess 2.2c by means of Mark 13.6 as a serious possibility.}

I conclude that the phrase ἐνεστηκέν η ἡμέρα τοῦ κυρίου meant for its adherents as understood by the author of 2 Thess, that Christ had already returned on earth and was already performing his task or was on the point of doing so.

\section*{ESCHATOLOGY AND DISORDERLY BEHAVIOUR}

The next question is then: what can this conviction that the parousia has taken place have to do with the refusal of the disorderly ones to accept the order of Gen 3.17-19?

In Jewish and early Christian apocalypticism as it was current at the beginning of our era, absence of hunger, thirst and labour belongs to the blessings of the new era. Or, to put it positively: those who will participate in the new aeon will have plenty of food and drink, and will enjoy freedom from labour.\footnote{To mention just a few examples: \textit{1 Enoch} 10.17-11.2; \textit{2 Baruch} 29; \textit{Sib. Or.} 3.619-23; Luke 14.15-24//Matt 22.1-10; Rev 7.16; 21-22. At the basis of these texts are, of course, various OT passages, such as Isa 49.10; 58.11; Ezek 34.29. See further P. Volz, \textit{Die Eschatologie der jüdischen Gemeinde im neutestamentlichen Zeitalter} (Tübingen: Mohr, 1934) 367-8, 384-5, 387-90.} This expectation frequently takes on the form of expectation of the restoration of paradisiac conditions or of Paradise itself, in analogy to some prophetic passages from the OT, which deal with the restoration of Zion or of the land so that it will be like the garden of Eden (Isa 51.3;
Ezek 36.35) and with the restoration of the original good relations of animals and men (Hos 2.20; Isa 11.6–8; 65.25). A clear example is to be found in 2 Baruch 73–4, where the time of salvation is described in terms strongly reminiscent of the OT descriptions of Paradise and is seen as the reversal of the curses of Gen 3.16–19:

And it will happen that after he [the Anointed One] has brought down everything which is in the world, and has sat down in eternal peace on the throne of the kingdom, then joy will be revealed and rest will appear. And then health will descend in dew, and illness will vanish . . . . And nobody will again die untimely, nor will any adversity take place suddenly . . . . And the wild beasts will come from the wood and serve man, and the asps and dragons will come out of their holes to subject themselves to a child. And women will no longer have pain when they bear, nor will they be tormented when they yield the fruits of their womb. And it will happen in those days that the reapers will not become tired, and the farmers will not wear themselves out, because the products of themselves will shoot out speedily, during the time that they work on them in full tranquillity.48

In 4 Ezra 8.52, God says to Ezra and the other righteous: ‘... it is for you that Paradise is opened, the tree of life is planted, a city is built, rest is appointed, goodness is established and wisdom perfected beforehand.49 Many other passages from apocalyptic writings contain similar descriptions of eschatological bliss in terms of Paradise, in which the abundance of food, often associated with the tree of life, and the absence of toil and labour are prominent themes (see 1 Enoch 24.4–25.7; T. Levi 18.10–11; T. Dan 5.12; Sib. Or., fragm. 3.46–9; Apoc. Mos. 13.4; 28.4; 4 Ezra 2.12; 7.36, 123; 2 Baruch 4.3–7; 51.11; Apoc. Abr. 21.6; 2 Enoch 8–9; 42.3–5; 65.9–10; Apoc. Elijah 5.6, and, of course, Rev 2.7; 22.2, 14, 19).50 This way of interpreting eschatological salvation apparently belonged to the usual apocalyptic repertory, and, in view of its currency, it is quite probable that the conviction combated in 2 Thess 2.2, that ‘the Day of the Lord’ had come, implied a conception of this day in terms of, among other things, the restoration of Paradise or of paradisiac conditions.

49 Transl. B. M. Metzger, in: OT Pseudepigrapha 1.
50 Cf. also Odes Sol. 20.7. One should also consider the notions of Paradise being the place where the deceased pious ones are already present (see 1 Enoch 60.8; 61.12; 70.4; Jub. 4.23; Luke 23.43; cf. 2 Cor 12.4), and of Paradise or the tree of life consisting in the pious ones (see Pss. Sol. 14.3; Odes Sol. 11.16–24). Pertinent rabbinic texts can be found in Str-B 4.948–50, 1147–65. See further W. Bousset, Die Religion des Judentums im späthellenistischen Zeitalter (3rd ed. by H. Gressmann; HNT 21; Tübingen: Mohr, 1926) 282–5; Velz, Eschatologie, 413–18.
I here recall my earlier conclusion, that the order at stake in 2 Thess 3.6–12 is probably that of Gen 3.17–19. We are now in a position to explain in a very precise way the disorderly behaviour combated in 2 Thess 3.6–12 by means of the eschatological error combated in 2.1–12. The content of the eschatological error is that the parousia of the Lord has taken place. He has returned, and is already performing his task or is on the point of doing so. This task implies, of course, defeating the satanic powers still at work (cf. 2 Thess 2.8–10), executing judgment (cf. 2.12; 1.8–9) and bringing salvation to the believers (cf. 2.13–14; 1.5, 7, 10). In apocalyptic fashion, the regaining of Paradise or at least the restoration of paradisiac conditions is also part of this salvation. When Christ has returned, the restoration of Paradise and the annulment of the curse of Gen 3.17–19 are being realized or going to be so very soon; therefore, there is no need to work any more, in toil and trouble, for a living. There is no need to stick any longer to the order, imposed by God after the Fall, of having to work hard before enjoying food, because this order has been or is being annulled. And that is exactly the conduct of the ἀτακτοι of 2 Thess 3.6–12. They do not obey the order worded in v. 10c as: ‘If anyone will not work, let him not eat.’ In fact, they live of course at the expense of others (as suggested in vv. 8, 12), because they have to eat something after all. Instead of working, they are busybodies (τερετραζεμένους, v. 11), which may very well refer to their activities in proclaiming their message of the realized parousia (2.2). Over against their message and their disorderly conduct, ‘Paul’ inculcates on the one hand that the parousia will not take place before certain events, which have not yet occurred, do so (2.3–12), and on the other hand that the order of Gen 3.17–19 is still in force, as the example of his own conduct shows (3.6–12). He tries to give his readers a sense of ‘eschatological realism’: as long as definite salvation has not yet been realized, they should not behave as if it already had. They are still living in the situation of Paradise lost; it has not yet been regained.

51 Sometimes, the disorderly behaviour of 2 Thess 3.6–12 is compared with, and explained as, the behaviour of some wandering Christians as pictured in Did. 12. Those people want to live at the expense of the churches they visit, and should be tested by the community: when such a Christian is not prepared to live from the work of his own hands after two or three days, he is a χροστεμόρος, ‘someone who barters with Christ’ (12.5). This explanation is given by Trilling, 2 Thess, 152; Holland, Tradition, 53; cf. Dibelius, Thess, 55. One should not overlook, however, that the disorderly ones of 2 Thess are not characterized as wilful swindlers and that the passage from Did. tells us nothing about the real motives of the people in question.

52 So several commentators, see, e.g., Roosen, Tess, 167–8; Agrell, Work, 123.
CONCLUSION

It is, of course, impossible to prove in a definite way that the disorderly behaviour of some brothers as discussed in 2 Thess 3.6-12 has been caused by the realized eschatology which the author of 2 Thess combats in 2.1-12. I have tried to show, however, in the above that a causal relationship between these two issues via the eschatological abolition of the order of Gen 3.17-19 is at least a very plausible hypothesis. It has the advantage of connecting the distinctive doctrinal and ethical issues of 2 Thess not in a general, but in a specific way, and it fits in with the data of the letter itself.

The hypothesis developed here suggests that 2 Thess is to be situated in Christian circles dominated by a strong apocalyptic mood. This mood is also perceptible in Jesus’ eschatological discourse in the synoptic gospels, and in such texts as the Book of Revelation and Did. 16. Both 2 Thess and the synoptic apocalypse show that here and there in such circles it was declared that Christ had already returned and (in 2 Thess) that Paradise was being restored; the usual reaction to this declaration is to point to what still has to happen before the parousia, but this reaction remains within the same apocalyptic framework. The apocalyptic mood and the realized eschatology into which it was sometimes derailed may have originated in Palestine (see already the Q-passage Matt 24.26-7//Luke 17.23-4); they were presumably intensified by the events of the Jewish War, and worked through later in other areas.

Where 2 Thess should be located, is hard to tell; it is quite possible that the mention of Thessalonica in 1.1 is no more than a literary expedient. The letter comes from an area where both Jewish-Christian apocalypticism and Paul, at least his first letter to the church of Thessalonica, were influential. Asia Minor might be a good candidate, being both one of Paul’s missionary areas and the cradle of the book of Revelation and – at a later stage – of Montanism.


What is evident, anyhow, is that the rather general admonitions from 1 Thess on work and on disorderliness (1 Thess 4.11; 5.14) recur in the second letter in a much more specific way and with different motives (cf. 1 Thess 4.12 with 2 Thess 3.7-10). It seems here as if the author of 2 Thess combined various admonitions from 1 Thess into a new whole, to address the problems of his own community: to make his church aware of the temporal distance still separating them from the restoration of Paradise. We should be careful of projecting the findings concerning the relationship of eschatology and disorderly behaviour in 2 Thess on that same relationship in 1 Thess.\(^{55}\)

\(^{55}\) According to Laub, *Eschatologische Verkündigung*, 146, one should not simply consider 2 Thess 3.6ff. as a further development of 1 Thess 4.11-12; 5.14, because in that case one explains 1 Thess on the basis of 2 Thess, and arrives at a circular argument. Cf. also his p. 151, and Müller, *Anfänge*, 142. – I thank Mrs K. M. Court for improving the English style of this paper.