

Observing
May 15, 2022
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2 Thessalonians 2:1-12

Confused sheep – *“This time of year the city of Lincoln [California] employs thousands of sheep and goats to cut down the vegetation before fire season. They are contained by temporary electric fencing and the fences already in place that separate homes from grassland. Lincoln resident Scott Russo wanted his young daughters to get a better look at the hundreds of sheep grazing behind their home, so he opened his backyard gate. The sheep took that as an invitation. [All this was captured on video] At first, Mrs. Russo sounds amused in the video. But as the flock continues to flood into the family’s yard, her tone changes. “Go, now. I’m serious. I’m telling you right now. I’m being serious. Scare them out.” The uninvited guests still weren’t getting the message. Scott walking out through the gate seemed to help. But what really did the trick was the lady of the house jumping on the family’s trampoline with a tambourine. Eventually, all of the sheep made their way back out of the yard, but Scott said his backyard ended up smelling like a barn.”⁴* Confused sheep.

Sheep are not only easily confused; they can easily be frightened. The website familyfarmlivestock.com cites “8 Things You Should Not Do Around Sheep.” #1 is don’t let your dog chase someone’s sheep. It seems like harmless fun but *“the sheep are paying dearly for your dog’s entertainment. Sheep are very sensitive to stress. Being chased by dogs is stressful. So stressful, in fact, that all this chasing can cause miscarriages in bred ewes or death to lambs from trampling or older sheep due to heat exhaustion. The catch here is that you may not see these results for a few hours or a few days after the chasing is over.”⁵*

- Jesus compared His Church to sheep (John 10.) Jesus also warned of “false prophets” who He called “wolves in sheep’s clothing” (Mt 7:15).
- What better method could Satan use to disrupt the functioning of the Church than to scare and confuse the sheep? Scared and confused sheep were a problem in the church at Thessalonica.
- Word came to Paul that false teachers were confusing and scaring the “flock” in this new church particularly regarding the second coming of Christ. Paul wrote to clarify his teaching and calm the sheep.
- Here’s the point for us: Followers of Christ can avoid becoming scared and confused “sheep” by being well-grounded in biblical truth in general, and regarding the second coming of Christ in particular.
- Let’s read and then unpack Paul’s reminder about his prior teaching.

2 Thessalonians 2:1–12 (ESV) — **1** 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. **3** 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.

- In 1 Thessalonians 4 the people were concerned their loved ones who had already died would miss the second coming. Now they were afraid it had already happened and THEY might have missed it.
- Paul wrote, *“Don’t fall for any line like that. Before that day comes, a couple of things have to happen.”*ⁱⁱⁱ
- First there will be a “great rebellion against God.” A great “apostasy.”
- What is “apostasy?” One definition: *“...a general defection from the true God, the Bible, and the Christian faith.”*^{iv} Why might that scare “sheep” today? Is what we’re seeing the “great” rebellion or just more of the same?
- There has always been apostasy; Paul is talking about a “great” rebellion.
- Once commentator: *“Every age has its defectors, but the falling away at the end times will be complete and worldwide. The whole planet will be in rebellion against God and His Christ.”*^v
- If you believe in a pre-tribulation rapture (I do), the Church will be gone.
- Two points: 1. Christ-followers should be discerning about apostasy and false teaching. The best defense is comparing any teaching to scripture. 2. Don’t run around like a “scared sheep” thinking THIS is the great apostasy because that “complete falling away” will happen when an evil leader called “the man of lawlessness” is revealed. Who is the “man of lawlessness?” What is the term used by the Apostle John in his letters?
- Quoting another commentator: *“The meaning of the term antichrist is simply “against Christ.” As the apostle John records in First and Second John, an antichrist denies the Father and the Son (1 John 2:22), does not acknowledge Jesus (1 John 4:3), and denies that Jesus came in the flesh (2 John 1:7). There have been many “antichrists,” as 1 John 2:18 states. But there is also coming the Antichrist.”*^{vi} [In that case “instead of” Christ]
- Antichrist “spotting” has been a favorite “sport” for centuries! Is it Putin? Is it the Pope? Obama? Trump? In the 40’s they thought Hitler! Trying to figure out who is antichrist is like spotting Elvis at Burger King or Big Foot.
- Scared sheep will waste time spotting antichrists behind bushes. What does scripture say about this “man of lawlessness?” **Revelation 13:5–8 (ESV) — 5** *And the beast was given a mouth uttering haughty and blasphemous words, and it was allowed to exercise authority for forty-two months. 6* *It opened its mouth to utter blasphemies against God, blaspheming his name and his dwelling, that is, those who dwell in heaven. 7* *Also it was allowed to make war on the saints and to conquer them. And authority was given it over every tribe and people and language and nation, 8* *and all who dwell on earth will worship it, everyone whose*

name has not been written before the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who was slain.

- The antichrist will emerge from the people, be very attractive and persuasive, pretend to be FOR Christ, rise to power, then reveal his true plot, to REPLACE Christ and be worshipped.
- David Jeremiah gives a very concise overview: *“The Bible is clear that one man, the Antichrist, will rise up to unite the world under one government during the Tribulation. This global dictator will pose as an angel of light, just like his father the devil, but will later act out of his true, evil nature.”*^{vi}
- The key words in that quote are “during the Tribulation.” Again, if you believe in a pre-tribulation rapture and are saved, we won’t be here.
- *“What if that’s wrong? All this stuff makes me a very nervous “sheep!”*

5 Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things? **6** 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.

- God is “restraining” the great rebellion and antichrist until His timing.
- What/who is the “restrainer?” What theories have you heard?
- A calm, collected “sheep” can rest in the fact that God is in control.
- When antichrist emerges, he will have a “limited shelf life.” (7 or 3.5 years)

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.

- “Why doesn’t God just keep antichrist restrained forever?” I don’t know, God is God and I’m only a “sheep!” I DO know I can trust the Shepherd!
- Let’s look at one more scary and controversial part of this passage:

9 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. **11** 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.

- We might think: *“Okay, so this is the activity of Satan and his “wicked deception” I get that, but what is this about God sending a “strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false”...and be condemned?”*
- Look back at verse 10: The deception is *“for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved.”*
- God doesn’t desire that “any should perish.” (2 Peter 3:9) After all He sent Jesus to die so we could have eternal life! BUT...
- Jesus said in **John 3:17–18 (ESV)** — **17** For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be

saved through him. **18** Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.

- At the end of the great tribulation God will give those who want nothing to do with Him exactly what they asked for, a hardened heart and mind.
- C.S. Lewis put it this way: *“There are two kinds of people: those who say to God, ‘Thy will be done,’ and those to whom God says, ‘All right, then, have it your way.’”^{viii}*
- The “strong delusion” will be God’s final judgment on those who reject Him. It should motivate us to share the gospel.

So, What’s the Takeaway?

- Remember the fable about “Chicken Little?” Foxy Loxy tricked Chicken Little into running around declaring the “sky is falling.” All the other chickens, ducks, and geese got swept up in the panic and wound up running into Foxy Loxy’s den where he had a feast of frightened fowl.
- Sounds like Satan’s plan to confuse and scare the “sheep” in the Church. If he can keep us upset by false teaching and worry, we won’t be effective in sharing the gospel and doing good works for Christ.
- That earlier article also said sudden loud noises frighten sheep but normal sounds like a car going by don’t.
- Sheep: *“No worry, it’s just a car.”* We need to be like that!
- [Illustration of the calm and collected – See the Weather Channel video: <https://twitter.com/weatherchannel/status/1524109580426530816>]
- How can Christ-followers keep from being scared and confused “sheep?”
 - Beware of false teaching. Compare all teaching to scripture.
 - Don’t fret and worry about who the antichrist is.
 - Instead of fretting about the darkness in our world we need to let Christ’s light shine in our lives as He commanded. His light can’t be overcome by darkness. (John 1:5)
 - Don’t waste time trying to figure out when Christ is coming.
 - Instead, as I said a few weeks ago: As we await Christ’s return let’s not get dozy, distracted, (scared or confused.)
 - Instead, let’s be watching, waiting, working, and witnessing.
 - Most importantly, we must remember that God has placed a “restraining force” in this world and we don’t need to worry about when He will remove it because He promised to never “leave or forsake” us.
 - We don’t need to be scared or confused “sheep” because we have the Good Shepherd to take care of everything we need.

ⁱ <https://fox40.com/news/local-news/video-shows-lincoln-family-trying-to-get-confewe-sed-sheep-out-of-their-baackyard/>

ⁱⁱ <https://familyfarmlivestock.com/8-things-you-should-not-do-around-sheep/>

iii Peterson, E. H. (2005). *The Message: the Bible in contemporary language* (2 Th 2:3). Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress.

iv <https://www.gotquestions.org/great-apostasy.html>

v ibid

vi <https://www.gotquestions.org/what-is-the-antichrist.html>

vii <https://www.davidjeremiah.org/this-could-be-the-day/the-tribulation/6-answers-to-questions-about-the-antichrist>

viii <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/733731-there-are-two-kinds-of-people-those-who-say-to>