

Dr. David Mathewson, Where is His Coming? Session 3, Delay of the Parousia in the Teaching of Paul Resources from NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Briefing Document, 4) Study Guide, and 5) FAQs

1. Abstract of Mathewson, Where is His Coming? Session 3, Delay of the Parousia in the Teaching of Paul, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

Dr. David Mathewson's lecture examines the apparent delay of Christ's second coming (parousia) in the teachings of Paul. He analyzes specific passages in Acts, 1 Corinthians, and 1 and 2 Thessalonians, arguing that these texts do not necessarily indicate Paul mistakenly believed the end was imminent. Instead, Mathewson proposes that Paul's references to the "shortness of time" and the "passing away" of the world reflect the inaugurated end-times following Christ's first coming and a call for urgent living. **The lecture also highlights 2 Peter 3, which directly addresses the delay, suggesting God's perception of time differs from humanity's and that the delay allows for repentance.** Ultimately, Mathewson contends that neither Jesus nor Paul predicted an immediate return, but rather presented a perspective of living in the already-begun end times, anticipating a future consummation that could occur at any moment, while acknowledging the possibility of delay.

**2. 17 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of
Dr. Mathewson, Where is His Coming? Session 3 – Double
click icon to play in Windows media player or go to the
Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link
there (Theology → Where is His Coming).**



**Mathewson_When_
Session03.mp3**

3. Briefing Document: Mathewson, Where is His Coming?

Session 3, Delay of the Parousia in the Teaching of Paul

Briefing Document: Delay of the Parousia in the Teachings of Paul and Early Christian Responses

Executive Summary:

This briefing document analyzes Dr. Dave Mathewson's lecture (Session 3 of "Where is His Coming?") which investigates whether the New Testament authors, particularly Paul, mistakenly predicted the immediate return of Jesus Christ. Mathewson argues that the texts often cited to support this claim have alternative interpretations that do not necessitate viewing Jesus or Paul as mistaken prophets. He examines specific passages in Acts, 1 Corinthians, 1 & 2 Thessalonians, and introduces 2 Peter as a unique text addressing the delay directly. The overall theme is that the New Testament perspective emphasizes living in the "end times" inaugurated by Christ's first coming, with an expectation of a potentially imminent return, but without definitive predictions of an immediate, universally anticipated event. Furthermore, the delay itself is addressed in 2 Peter as being due to God's eternal perspective and his patience, allowing for repentance.

Main Themes and Important Ideas/Facts:

1. The Book of Acts and the Spread of the Gospel:

- Mathewson highlights the structure of Acts based on Jesus' command in Acts 1:8: "you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and then finally to the ends of the earth."
- He argues that this geographical progression inherent in the narrative of Acts "seems to require that Jesus doesn't come back immediately, or at least it almost seems to allow for at least a period of time for this to happen."
- Drawing on Craig Keener's commentary, Mathewson suggests that "the ends of the earth are not just Rome," implying a more widespread future mission.
- **Key Idea:** Acts provides a narrative framework that inherently suggests a period of time for the gospel to spread, allowing for a delay in the Parousia without contradicting early Christian expectations.

2. 1 Corinthians 7 and the "Shortened Time":

- Mathewson focuses on 1 Corinthians 7:25-32, examining phrases often interpreted as Paul expecting an imminent end: "the present distress," "the time is short," and "this world in its current form is passing away."
- Regarding "the present distress" (verse 26), Mathewson suggests it likely refers to contemporary difficulties faced by the Corinthians, rather than the eschatological end.
- He interprets "the time is short" (verse 29) not as a prediction of a near future, but as a consequence of Christ's first coming already inaugurating the "end times." Paul sees the Corinthian Christians as those "upon whom the end of the ages had already come" (referencing 1 Corinthians 10:11).
- **Quote:** "The issue is not how much time is left. The issue is this new perspective that should be your view of time-based on the fact that you're already living in the end."
- Mathewson explains "this world in its current form is passing away" (verse 31) as referring to the fading of the present social, economic, and institutional structures due to the arrival of God's kingdom.
- **Quote:** "Paul doesn't say how long that's going to take place. Paul does not say how soon it will finally take place. He's only interested in saying it's already in the process of passing away because Jesus' death and resurrection have already inaugurated the end time."
- **Key Idea:** Paul's statements in 1 Corinthians 7 are not predictions of an immediate end but rather reflections on living in the inaugurated "end times" with a changed perspective on time and worldly values.

3. 1 Thessalonians 4 and the Inclusion of the Living:

- Mathewson addresses the "we who are alive" language in 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17, often cited as evidence that Paul expected to be alive at Christ's return.
- He counters this by pointing to 1 Thessalonians 5:10, where Paul entertains the possibility of being "asleep" (dead) at Christ's return.
- **Quote:** "Whether we're alive or asleep or dead, we'll still be with him."

- Mathewson suggests that Paul's inclusion of himself among the living reflects the imminence of Christ's return as a possibility within the already present "end times."
- He also proposes that the "we" could be taken more generally as "we Christians who are alive when Christ comes back."
- **Key Idea:** Paul's language in 1 Thessalonians expresses a strong expectation and possibility of Christ's return within the lifetime of believers due to the inaugurated end times, but it does not constitute a definitive prediction of his own survival until that event.

4. 2 Thessalonians 2 and the Necessary Precursors:

- Mathewson examines 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12, where Paul addresses the concern that "the day of the Lord has already come."
- Paul argues against this by stating that certain events must precede the Day of the Lord: "the apostasy" and the revelation of "the man of lawlessness," who is currently being restrained.
- **Quote:** "for that day will not come unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed..." (2 Thessalonians 2:3)
- Mathewson acknowledges the difficulty in definitively identifying these precursors due to Paul's prior discussions with the Thessalonians (2 Thessalonians 2:5).
- **Quote:** "Don't you remember that when I was still with you, I used to tell you about this."
- **Key Idea:** 2 Thessalonians introduces the concept of a necessary delay before the Day of the Lord, as certain predicted events have not yet occurred. This balances the expectation of imminence found in other texts.

5. Synthesis of 1 and 2 Thessalonians:

- Mathewson suggests that 1 Thessalonians emphasizes the potential nearness of Christ's return, while 2 Thessalonians provides a necessary balance by highlighting the possibility of delay due to prerequisite events.
- He draws a parallel to Jesus' parables of the unfaithful steward and the five wise maidens, emphasizing the need for believers to be prepared for both imminence and potential delay.

6. Introduction to 2 Peter and the Explanation for Delay:

- Mathewson introduces 2 Peter 3:8-10 as a unique text that directly addresses the issue of why Christ has not yet returned.
- He explains that 2 Peter was written to counter false teachers who were using the perceived delay as evidence that Christ would not return to judge, thus encouraging immoral behavior.
- **Quote:** "Where is the coming that He promised? That's what the false teachers were saying. It hasn't happened, so it's not going to happen. That is, there's been a delay."
- Peter's response offers two reasons for the delay:
- God's perspective on time: "With the Lord, one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day" (2 Peter 3:8). Mathewson interprets this not as God being outside of time, but as God viewing time from an eternal perspective, making human perceptions of delay insignificant to Him.
- God's patience and desire for repentance: "The Lord does not delay his promise, as some understand delay, but is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but all to come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9).
- **Key Idea:** 2 Peter provides a theological explanation for the delay of the Parousia, attributing it to God's eternal viewpoint and his merciful desire for widespread repentance. This refutes the notion that delay signifies the non-fulfillment of God's promises.

Conclusion:

Dr. Mathewson concludes that the examined texts in Acts and Paul's letters do not support the idea that these authors mistakenly predicted an immediate return of Christ within their lifetimes. Instead, they operated within a framework of the inaugurated "end times," anticipating a potentially imminent return that could happen at any moment. Texts like 2 Thessalonians acknowledge the possibility of a delay due to specific future events, and 2 Peter offers a theological rationale for this delay rooted in God's eternal nature and his gracious patience. Therefore, these New Testament authors were not mistaken in their understanding, but rather conveyed a nuanced perspective on the Parousia that emphasized both its potential nearness and the possibility of a period of waiting.

4. Study Guide: Mathewson, Where is His Coming? Session 3, Delay of the Parousia in the Teaching of Paul

Study Guide: Delay of the Parousia in Paul's Teaching

Key Concepts:

- **Parousia:** The second coming or return of Jesus Christ.
- **Eschatology:** The theological study of last things, such as death, judgment, heaven, and hell, including the return of Christ.
- **Delay of the Parousia:** The apparent time lapse between the early Christian expectation of Christ's return and its non-occurrence within their immediate lifetime.
- **"The Present Distress" (1 Corinthians 7):** Paul's reference to difficulties faced by the Corinthian church in their current situation, not necessarily the eschatological end times.
- **"The Time is Short" (1 Corinthians 7):** Paul's assertion that due to Christ's first coming and the inauguration of the end times, believers should view time with urgency, not as a literal prediction of immediate return.
- **"The World is Passing Away" (1 Corinthians 7):** Paul's declaration that the current form and structures of the world are losing their ultimate significance due to the arrival of God's kingdom.
- **1 Thessalonians 4:15-17:** Paul's description of the resurrection of the dead and the gathering of the living at Christ's return, where his use of "we" has been interpreted as a belief in his own immanent expectation.
- **1 Thessalonians 5:10:** A verse indicating Paul's awareness of the possibility of death before Christ's return, qualifying the interpretation of "we" in the previous chapter.
- **2 Thessalonians 2:1-12:** Paul's correction of the Thessalonians' belief that the "day of the Lord" had already come, outlining events that must precede it (apostasy, man of lawlessness, removal of the restrainer).
- **The Day of the Lord:** An Old Testament concept referring to a future time of God's judgment and salvation, which early Christians associated with Christ's return.

- **The Apostasy (2 Thessalonians 2):** A future widespread rebellion or falling away from the faith.
- **The Man of Lawlessness (2 Thessalonians 2):** A figure of opposition to God who will be revealed before Christ's return.
- **The Restrainer (2 Thessalonians 2):** An unidentified force or figure currently holding back the man of lawlessness.
- **2 Peter 3:8-10:** Peter's explanation for the delay of Christ's coming, attributing it to God's different perception of time and his patience in offering opportunities for repentance.

Quiz:

1. According to Mathewson, what is the central question being addressed in the lecture concerning Paul's letters?
2. How does Mathewson interpret Acts 1:8 in relation to the timing of Jesus' return? What does this imply about the New Testament authors' expectations?
3. Explain Mathewson's interpretation of Paul's phrase "the present distress" in 1 Corinthians 7. Does he believe it refers to the second coming?
4. What is the significance of the Greek participle translated as "short" in 1 Corinthians 7:29, according to Mathewson? How does this relate to the concept of living in the "end times"?
5. How does Mathewson explain Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians 7:31 that "this world in its current form is passing away"?
6. In 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17, Paul uses the pronoun "we." How have some interpreted this, and what is Mathewson's initial counter-argument based on 1 Thessalonians 5:10?
7. What is the primary issue Paul addresses in 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12? What did the Thessalonian Christians incorrectly believe?
8. What are the three events Paul mentions in 2 Thessalonians 2 that must occur before the "day of the Lord" can come? Why does this suggest a potential delay?
9. According to Mathewson, what is the unique contribution of 2 Peter 3:8-10 to the discussion of the delay of the Parousia? What specific reason does Peter offer for this delay?

10. Summarize Mathewson's overall conclusion regarding whether Paul mistakenly predicted an immediate return of Christ.

Answer Key:

1. The central question is whether Paul, like some interpretations of Jesus' teachings, mistakenly predicted that the end of the world and the second coming of Christ would occur in his lifetime.
2. Mathewson interprets Acts 1:8 as a rough plan for the spread of the gospel from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth, suggesting a period of time was necessary for this expansion, implying the New Testament authors may have allowed for some delay in Jesus' return.
3. Mathewson interprets "the present distress" as likely referring to current hardships faced by the Corinthian Christians (such as famine or persecution), rather than a future eschatological event like the second coming of Christ.
4. Mathewson explains that the Greek word for "short" means "shortened" or "compressed," and Paul is arguing that the first coming of Christ inaugurated the end times, giving believers a new, urgent perspective on time, rather than predicting a literal short time until the Parousia.
5. Mathewson believes Paul's statement signifies that with the arrival of God's kingdom through Jesus' death and resurrection, the current social, economic, and institutional structures of the world are losing their ultimate significance, not necessarily predicting an immediate physical end.
6. Some interpret Paul's use of "we" as his belief that he and his readers would be alive at Christ's return. Mathewson's initial counter-argument points to 1 Thessalonians 5:10, where Paul entertains the possibility of being "asleep" (dead) before Christ returns.
7. The primary issue is the Thessalonian Christians' mistaken belief that the "day of the Lord" had already arrived. Paul writes to correct this misunderstanding.
8. The three events are the apostasy (a rebellion), the revealing of the man of lawlessness, and the removal of the restrainer. These preconditions suggest that Paul believed Christ's return would not be immediate, as these events had not yet occurred.
9. 2 Peter 3:8-10 uniquely addresses the issue of why Christ has not returned immediately. Peter explains the delay by stating that God's perception of time is

different from humans ("one day is like a thousand years") and that God is patiently waiting to allow more people to repent.

10. Mathewson concludes that Paul did not mistakenly predict an immediate return of Christ. While Paul believed Christ's return could happen at any moment due to the inauguration of the end times, he did not definitively state it would occur in his lifetime and even acknowledged the possibility of delay in 2 Thessalonians.

Essay Format Questions:

1. Analyze how Mathewson uses specific passages from 1 Corinthians 7 to argue that Paul's statements about the nearness of the end should be understood in light of the inaugurated eschaton rather than as literal predictions of an immediate return.
2. Compare and contrast Paul's perspective on the timing of Christ's return as presented in 1 Thessalonians 4 and 2 Thessalonians 2. How does Mathewson reconcile these seemingly different viewpoints?
3. Discuss the significance of the "restrainer" in 2 Thessalonians 2 within the broader context of the delay of the Parousia. According to Mathewson, why is it difficult to definitively identify this figure or force, and what is Paul's main point in mentioning it?
4. Explain the two-part rationale provided in 2 Peter 3:8-10 for the delay of Christ's coming. How does Peter's explanation address the concerns of those who doubted the promise of the Parousia?
5. Evaluate Mathewson's overall argument that neither Jesus nor Paul made mistaken predictions about the timing of the Parousia. What are the key interpretive principles he employs to support this conclusion regarding Paul's writings?

Glossary of Key Terms:

- **Apocalyptic Literature:** A genre of writing that often uses symbolic language and imagery to describe the end times, divine judgment, and the triumph of good over evil.
- **Consummation:** The final completion or fulfillment of something, in this context, the ultimate realization of God's kingdom at Christ's return.
- **Eschatological:** Relating to the end times or the study of last things.
- **General Epistles:** A collection of New Testament letters (Hebrews, James, 1 & 2 Peter, 1, 2, & 3 John, Jude) that are generally addressed to a wider audience of Christians rather than specific churches.
- **Immanent Expectation:** The belief that Christ's return is likely to happen very soon or even imminently.
- **Inaugurated Eschaton:** The theological concept that the end times began with the first coming, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and believers are currently living in this overlap between the present age and the age to come, awaiting its full consummation at the Parousia.
- **Martyrdom:** The suffering of death on account of religious beliefs.
- **Ontological:** Relating to the nature of being or existence.
- **Rapture:** A theological concept (not explicitly found in the passage) referring to a supposed event in which believers will be caught up into the air to meet the Lord at his return.
- **Sovereignty (of God):** The supreme power and authority of God over all creation and events.

5. FAQs on Mathewson, Where is His Coming? Session 3, Delay of the Parousia in the Teaching of Paul, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

Frequently Asked Questions: The Delay of the Parousia in the Teachings of Paul

1. According to Dr. Mathewson, why do some people believe that Paul was mistaken in his understanding of Jesus' return? Some interpretations of Paul's writings suggest that he anticipated Jesus' immediate return and the end of the world within his own lifetime. Phrases like "the time is short" and the inclusion of himself in statements about those "who are alive" at Christ's coming have led some to believe Paul predicted an event that did not occur, thus concluding he was mistaken.

2. How does Dr. Mathewson interpret Acts 1:8 in relation to the timing of Jesus' return? Dr. Mathewson, drawing on Craig Keener's commentary, sees Acts 1:8 ("You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth") as outlining a plan for the gospel's spread. This geographical progression, culminating in the "ends of the earth," implies a period of time would be necessary for this mission to unfold. While not demanding a 2,000-year delay, it suggests the New Testament authors likely anticipated a time lapse before Jesus' return, as the gospel needed to reach all nations.

3. What are the three key phrases in 1 Corinthians 7 that are often cited as evidence of Paul's belief in an imminent return, and how does Dr. Mathewson interpret them? The three phrases are "the present distress," "the time is short," and "this world in its present form is passing away." Dr. Mathewson interprets "the present distress" not as a reference to the second coming but likely as immediate hardships faced by the Corinthians. He explains "the time is short" (Greek: *synestalmenos*, shortened or compressed) as Paul's perspective that the end times were inaugurated with Christ's first coming, leading to a new, urgent understanding of time rather than a prediction of temporal nearness. Finally, he suggests "this world in its present form is passing away" refers to the dissolving of the current social and economic structures due to the arrival of God's kingdom, not an immediate end to the physical world.

4. In 1 Thessalonians 4, Paul uses the pronoun "we" when describing those who will be alive at Christ's return. Does this definitively mean Paul expected to be alive? Dr.

Mathewson argues that while Paul includes himself with "we who are alive," this should not be taken as a definitive prediction. He points to 1 Thessalonians 5:10, where Paul entertains the possibility of being "asleep" (a euphemism for death) before Christ's return. Dr. Mathewson suggests Paul's use of "we" could be a general inclusion of Christians alive at that future time, or that Paul, living in the inaugurated end times, saw Christ's return as a possibility at any moment, without a specific prediction of his own lifespan.

5. How does Dr. Mathewson explain Paul's statements in 2 Thessalonians regarding the "day of the Lord"? In 2 Thessalonians 2, Paul addresses the concern that the "day of the Lord" had already arrived. He counters this by stating that certain events must precede it: the apostasy, the revealing of the man of lawlessness, and the removal of the restrainer. By listing these unfulfilled conditions, Paul aims to dissuade the Thessalonians from believing the end had already come, implying that a period of time would pass before Christ's return.

6. What is the significance of 2 Thessalonians in understanding the timing of the Parousia according to Dr. Mathewson? Dr. Mathewson highlights that 2 Thessalonians provides a balance to the sense of imminence found in 1 Thessalonians. While the first letter emphasizes the possibility of Christ's soon return, the second letter introduces the idea of potential delay due to necessary preceding events. This suggests that even within Paul's teachings, there was an understanding that Christ's return might not be immediate and that believers should be prepared for either possibility.

7. Why is 2 Peter 3:8-10 a unique passage in the New Testament concerning the delay of the Parousia? Dr. Mathewson identifies 2 Peter 3:8-10 as unique because it directly addresses the issue of the delay of Christ's coming. It tackles the arguments of false teachers who used the apparent delay as evidence that Christ would not return at all. This passage offers a rationale for the delay, stating that with the Lord, "one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day," emphasizing God's eternal perspective on time.

8. What are the two main reasons Peter gives for the delay of Christ's return in 2 Peter 3? According to Dr. Mathewson, Peter provides two main reasons for the delay. First, he explains that God's perception of time is different from humanity's; from an eternal perspective, what seems like a long delay to humans is not the same for God. Second, Peter states that the Lord is "patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but all to come to repentance," indicating that the delay serves God's merciful purpose of giving more people the opportunity to turn to Him.