

2 Thessalonians 2:1-12
The Man of Lawlessness

“Human history has had its share of evil leaders. The first century saw cruel Roman emperors, such as the mad Nero of Paul’s day or the paranoid Domitian of John’s later years. The twentieth century witnessed a host of evil dictators, more notoriously Stalin and Hitler. Man’s religious history has also been plagued by false christs, false teachers, cult leaders, swamis, grugrus, and countless charlatans and wolves in sheep’s clothing.

But one is coming who will surpass them all, both in the extent of his power and the evil of his person. He will be the most fiendish, wicked, powerful man ever to walk the earth. He is known in Scripture by many names, he is ‘god of the land of Magog, the prince of Rosh, Meshech and tubal’ (Ezek. 38:2); the little horn of Daniel 7:8,24; 8:9; the ‘prince who is to come’ (Daniel 9:26); the king who does as he pleases (Dan. 11:36); the foolish worthless shepherd (Zech. 11:15-17); the beast (Rev. 11:7; 13:1; 14:9; 19:20; etc.). In this chapter, Paul describes him as ‘the man of lawlessness’ (vs. 3), the ‘son of destruction’ (v.3), ‘that lawless one’ (v. 8), and ‘the one who is coming is in accord with the activity of Satan’ (v.9). But he is best known as the Antichrist (1 John 2:18). Antichristos (‘Antichrist’) is a compound Greek word, made up of the preposition anti and the noun Christos. Anti can mean both ‘against’ and ‘in the place of.’ Both meanings are appropriate, for the Antichrist will both oppose the true Christ, and seek to usurp His place.” MacArthur

“This section of verses contains truths found nowhere else in the Bible. It is key to understanding future events and it is central to this epistle. Paul dealt with a doctrinal error concerning eschatology (the last things) that had crept into the Thessalonian church. In chapter 2 he spoke to the theological error, and in chapter 3 to practical problems in the church that grew out of that error.” Zuck

2:1-5 *“The day of the Lord”* is a future event where God’s full wrath comes upon a godless world to hold it accountable for its sin. Its occurrence has been prophesied throughout the Old Testament and into the New Testament to warn mankind that judgment upon the world is coming.

Zeph. 1:14-16 *The great day of the Lord is near— near and coming quickly. The cry on the day of the Lord is bitter; the Mighty Warrior shouts his battle cry.15 That day will be a day of wrath—a day of distress and anguish, a day of trouble and ruin, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and blackness—16 a day of trumpet and battle cry against the fortified cities and against the corner towers.*

Vv. 1-2 The second coming of Christ is in two phases. Paul is bringing further clarification to what he wrote in his first letter about the rapture and when it would occur. He makes a distinction between the coming of our Lord and our being gathered to him as two events. 1 Thess. 4:13-18; 2 Thess. 1:5-10.

One coming is for His church (as described clearly in 1 Thessalonians 4:16-18), and the other coming is with His church, to judge a rebellious world. Guzik

- Apparently, someone had been wrongly teaching that the Thessalonian believers were in the day of the Lord. It could have been someone who thought they knew better than Paul, or by a word of false prophecy, or by a letter claiming to have come from Paul himself, Paul didn’t know.

2:3 Satan, that great deceiver, had successfully upset the churches' spiritual wellbeing by putting into question what Paul taught. In fact, the word Paul uses indicates that they were very shaken up about it.

- Clarity always comes from knowing the truth. Confusion and buying into falsehood always come from not knowing or forgetting the truth.

"We can sense Paul's concern for the Thessalonians: Don't be upset. Don't be troubled. Don't be deceived. He knew that their fretfulness about the future was directly related to their forgetfulness about what he had taught them. Therefore, his goal is to help them refocus on their future by providing them with the lens of God's truth." Howell

"The antidote to poisonous heresy is a good strong dose of the truth which Paul proceeded to minister." Zuck

John 8:31-32 So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

1st, the day of the Lord will not come until there is a complete willful departure from the truth, which is necessary for the whole world to accept Satan's deceiving influence.

ἀποστασία apostasía, ap-os-tas-ee'-ah; defection from truth (properly, the state) ("apostasy"):—falling away, forsake.

"... here Paul is speaking of active rebellion, the supreme opposition of evil to the things of God." NIV ft. note

2 Tim. 4:3-4 For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. 4 They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths.

1 Tim. 4:1 The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons.

Matt. 24:10-12, 24 10 At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, 11 and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. 12 Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, 24 For false messiahs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect.

2nd, the man of lawlessness comes on the scene when the overt active rebellion against God and His truth occurs.

- The rapture happens before any of this takes place. When it occurs, there won't be one believer left on earth. As a result, Satan will unleash his full power of deception to keep anyone whose left from believing the good news of gospel.
- The person Satan chooses to deceive the whole world will have the kind of supernatural mesmerizing effect on people that will be hard to resist, yet the Holy Spirit will give some the ability to see through it and be saved.

“doomed to destruction” This will be Important to know for the ones who turn to the Scriptures for help, encouragement and understanding during those times. The same expression is used of Judas Iscariot in John 17:12.

“son of destruction” *“The expression **son of** is a Hebraism indicating a close association, or of the same kind, just as a son shares his father’s nature. The Antichrist will be so completely devoted to the destruction of all that relates to God’s purpose and plan that he can be said to be destruction personified.” MacArthur*

2:4 Satan’s desire, from the time he was initially cast out of heaven until now, has been to exalt himself above God so that he alone is worshipped and revered by everyone.

- The place the Antichrist chooses to be worshipped is the Jewish temple in Jerusalem. It will be the ultimate act of defiance toward God. The temple will be built by the Jews during the false peace ushered in by the Antichrist at the start of the tribulation. That peace will be broken mid-way through the tribulation to begin what is known as the great tribulation.

Rev. 13:5-8 *5 The beast was given a mouth to utter proud words and blasphemies and to exercise its authority for forty-two months. 6 It opened its mouth to blaspheme God, and to slander his name and his dwelling place and those who live in heaven. 7 It was given power to wage war against God’s holy people and to conquer them. And it was given authority over every tribe, people, language and nation. 8 All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast—all whose names have not been written in the Lamb’s book of life, the Lamb who was slain from the creation of the world.*

Dan. 9:27 *27 He will confirm a covenant with many for one ‘seven.’ In the middle of the ‘seven’ he will put an end to sacrifice and offering. And at the temple he will set up an abomination that causes desolation, until the end that is decreed is poured out on him.”*

Matt. 24:15 *“So when you see standing in the holy place ‘the abomination that causes desolation,’ spoken of through the prophet Daniel—let the reader understand—*

Rev. 13:14-15 *14 Because of the signs it was given power to perform on behalf of the first beast, it deceived the inhabitants of the earth. It ordered them to set up an image in honor of the beast who was wounded by the sword and yet lived. 15 The second beast was given power to give breath to the image of the first beast, so that the image could speak and cause all who refused to worship the image to be killed.*

2:5 Paul felt it important to teach a very young church about the day of the Lord and what would transpire before *the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels (1:7)*. It should be as important in today’s churches to teach about end time prophecy. It shows us how easily we can forget the truth and not live in the light of the Lord’s return if we’re not careful.

3rd, the restraining force that holds Satan back from fully implementing his plan of rebellion against God, must be removed for the man of lawlessness to wield his deception and influence.

2:6-7 God Almighty will choose to get out of Satan’s way so that Satan can freely work his devious plan of deception and rebellion against Him.

“The Holy Spirit of God is the only Person with sufficient (supernatural) power to do this restraining... How will He be taken out of the way? When the church leaves the earth in the Rapture, the Holy Spirit will be taken out of the way in the sense that His unique lawlessness-restraining ministry through God’s people will be removed (cf. Gen. 6:3). Walvoord/Zuck

Gen. 6:3 Then the Lord said, “My Spirit will not contend with humans forever, for they are mortal; their days will be a hundred and twenty years.”

“..., the church, has never been able to restrain even human evil. It may do so to some extent in the lives of its members, but the outside world continues to grow worse and worse—a situation that will especially characterize the end times (2 Tim. 3:13). If no human or angelic power restrains, that leaves only the power of God to hold back the purpose of Satan for his Antichrist.” MacArthur

2 Tim. 3:13 while evildoers and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.

Taken out of the way: We should not think that the Holy Spirit would leave the earth during the Great Tribulation. He will be present on the earth during the Great Tribulation because many are saved, sealed, and serve God during this period (Revelation 7:3-14 and 14:1-5), and this can't happen without the ministry of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is taken out of the way, not removed. Guzik

“In the midst of judgment is mercy.”

2:8 No one knows who the lawless one is, he might not even be born yet. He will not be revealed until after the rapture and the restraining influence of the Holy Spirit is removed.

- Paul makes it clear that the One who defeats him without hardly any effort is Jesus Christ.

Isa. 11:4b He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth; with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked.

2:9-10 Satan will use counterfeit miracles, signs, and wonders and every kind of evil. Man will be incapable of distinguishing between what is real and what isn't. Whatever Satan does, it will be super sensational and very convincing. He knows the heart of man, and he will know how to give man's deceitfully wicked heart everything it desires to draw him in to worship him. We see that today by how easily man buys into the godlessness that is thrown at him.

Rev. 13:2-4 2 The beast I saw resembled a leopard, but had feet like those of a bear and a mouth like that of a lion. The dragon gave the beast his power and his throne and great authority. 3 One of the heads of the beast seemed to have had a fatal wound, but the fatal wound had been healed. The whole world was filled with wonder and followed the beast. 4 People worshiped the dragon because he had given authority to the beast, and they also worshiped the beast and asked, “Who is like the beast? Who can wage war against it?”

- To refuse to believe the truth means that their unbelief was willing and intentional. They choose to believe Satan over God, which has been man's problem from when Adam and Eve sinned.

“The phrase the love of the truth appears only here in the New Testament.” MacArthur

2:11 God will not force this delusion on anyone, but those who do not receive the love of the truth will receive this strong delusion. Guzik

“**the lie**” means not just any lie but “**the lie**” that the Antichrist is the true god.

2:12 To not believe in the truth of the gospel is a willful act of the heart. It is in essence calling the Holy Spirit a liar about the truth of the gospel, which is blasphemy against Him. Those who refuse to believe condemn themselves.

Matt. 3:28-30 28 “Truly, I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the children of man, and whatever blasphemies they utter, 29 but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin”