

Thessalonians

A Careful Study Of Thessalonians

October 24, 2021

I. Introduction

A. **2 Thessalonians 2:1-7** . . . Now we request you, brethren, with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, [2] that you not be quickly shaken from your composure or be disturbed either by a spirit or a message or a letter as if from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come. [3] Let no one in any way deceive you, for it will not come unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, [4] who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God. [5] Do you not remember that while I was still with you, I was telling you these things? [6] And you know what restrains him now, so that in his time he will be revealed. [7] For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only he who now restrains will do so until he is taken out of the way.

B. Pray

II. The man of lawlessness restrained

A. **[3b]** Let no one in any way deceive you **for [the return of Christ] will not come unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed**, (*who is*) the son of destruction [4] who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God.

1. Paul explains that two major events must precede the return of Christ – an apostasy among believers large enough to be noticed, and a public display of the actions and activities of the man of lawlessness – who many think is also the antichrist.

B. **THE APOSTASY:** The word apostasy appears 6 times in the Bible, 5 times in the OT and once in the NT here in 2 Thessalonians.

1. In the OT, the word apostasy is used to describes Israel's abandonment of their trust in God, obedience to God, and worship of God.
 - a. If we take its normal usage in the OT and apply it to this one place where it appears in the NT, it seems reasonable to

conclude that the coming apostasy will be a noticeable amount of Christians abandoning their trust in God, obedience to God, and worship of God – and most probably for one of two reasons:
(1) Either because they have allowed themselves to be misled
(2) Or in order to avoid persecution and affliction for being a Christian.

- b. In my opinion, this should not surprise us since so many in our day have become Christians for their own sake rather than God's sake.
 - (1) Consider: If we come to faith in Christ because of what is in it for us rather than God, then we are starting the Christian life as self-interested Christians.
 - (2) If we do not at some point repent of our self-centeredness so as to stop living for self and begin living for God, then it is likely we will remain self-centered when persecution and affliction comes.
- 2. Jesus spoke about this kind of apostasy on at least two occasions.
 - a. In explaining the parable of the sower, Jesus said in **Matthew 13:20-21**, "The one on whom seed was sown on the rocky places, this is the man who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; [21] yet he has no firm root in himself, but is only temporary, and **when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he falls away.**"
 - b. In talking to His disciples about His return, Jesus said in **Matthew 24:9-13**, "Then they will deliver you to tribulation, and will kill you, and you will be hated by all nations because of My name. [10] **At that time many will fall away** and will betray one another and hate one another. [11] Many false prophets will arise and will mislead many. [12] Because lawlessness is increased, most people's love will grow cold. [13] But **the one who endures to the end, he will be saved.**"
 - c. In **I Timothy 4:1-2** Paul wrote, "But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times **some will fall away from the faith**, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, [2] by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron."
 - d. The writer of Hebrews deals with the matter of falling away by telling us how to work against its possibility. **Hebrews 3:12-14**, "Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart **that falls away** from the living God. [13] But

encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called "Today," so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. [14] For we have become partakers of Christ, **if we hold fast** the beginning of our assurance firm until the end."

- e. And the last scripture I'll read comes from **Revelation 3:1-6**, "To the angel of the church in Sardis write: He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars, says this: 'I know your deeds, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead. [2] 'Wake up, and strengthen the things that remain, which were about to die; for I have not found your deeds completed in the sight of My God. [3] So remember what you have received and heard; and keep it, and repent. Therefore if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come to you. [4] But you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their garments; and they will walk with Me in white, for **they are worthy**. [5] **He who overcomes** will thus be clothed in white garments; and **I will not erase his name from the book of life**, and I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels. [6] He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'"
- 3. I want to be very clear about this – over the last 200+ years the church has held opposing positions as to whether a believer can or cannot fall away. And so I leave it up to you to decide what you will believe. In the end, the final decision is up to God – not us or our theology. And Jesus makes it clear that there will be surprises on both sides – those who are certain they have eternal life but don't (**Matthew 7:21-23**), and those who are surprised they are included with those given the gift of eternal life (**Matthew 25:31-46**, Parable of the sheep and goats).

C. **MAN OF LAWLESSNESS** who is the **SON OF DESTRUCTION**:

- 1. The phrase "man of lawlessness" depicts someone who is a law to himself and who exercises his will as if he answers to no one.
 - a. In fact, Paul goes on to describe him in vs 4 as showing himself to be the supreme authority by opposing and exalting himself above every so-called god or object of worship – even to the extent of setting up his throne or headquarters in the temple of God and acting as if he is God.

- b. The reference in **vs 4** to the “temple of God” is taken by many to refer to the temple Solomon built in Jerusalem – which in turn is used to support the belief that prior to the return of Christ the Jerusalem temple must be rebuilt where Solomon’s temple stood and the Dome of the Rock (an Islamic shrine) now stands.
 - c. Of course, if the Jerusalem temple is the temple Paul speaks of, then the Dome of the Rock must be removed so a temple like Solomon’s temple can be built in its place.
2. The phrase “son of destruction” speaks of someone destined to lose everything except his life. In other words, the man of lawlessness will be utterly defeated and all that he has will be taken from him, yet he will live on for eternity – separated from God.
3. Many students of eschatology believe Daniel prophesied about the man of lawlessness in **Daniel 11:31 & 36-37**. And many believe that **Revelation 13** refers to the man of lawlessness.
4. The earliest Christians thought the man of lawlessness was the same person as the antichrist spoken of in **1 John 2:18-22**. Like the man of lawlessness, the antichrist is described as a deceiver (**2 John 7**) who is yet to be revealed. And like the man of lawlessness, the spirit of antichrist is already at work in our world (**1 John 4:3**).
 - a. The title “man of lawlessness” appears only once in the Bible – here in **2 Thessalonians 2:3**. The title “antichrist” appears 4 times in the Bible – 3 times in **1 John** and once in **2 John**.
 - b. John makes an interesting yet somewhat confusing statement about the antichrist in **1 John 2:18**, “Children, it is the last hour; and just as you heard that antichrist is coming, even now **many antichrists have appeared**; from this we know that it is the last hour.”
 - (1) Many Christians at the time of Nero thought he was the antichrist.
 - (2) Luther and Calvin believed the pope was the antichrist, and there are Protestants today who hold that same view.
 - (3) In his day, Napoleon was seen by many as a possible antichrist.
 - (4) In more recent times, Hitler was thought to be the antichrist. And during the Cold War, Henry Kissinger was suspected of being the antichrist.
5. So who is the antichrist? The reality is, God has not revealed who the man of lawlessness is or who the antichrist is. He has not revealed if they are one and the same or two different individuals.

- a. The best we can do is speculate – and many have. However, most speculation has been based on the local circumstances and world events at the time of the speculation.
 - b. Therefore, I encourage you to leave the unknown things about Christ's return to the speculators and focus on being prepared for His return and being worthy of God's kingdom by loving God as you ought and on loving your neighbor as yourself.

- D. [5] Do you not remember that while I was still with you, I was telling you these things? [6] And you know what restrains [the man of lawlessness] now, so that in his time he will be revealed.
 1. It seems obvious that what Paul told them while with them was more than he is reminding them of in this letter. Therefore, they knew what Paul was talking about when he spoke of a force restraining the man of lawlessness – whereas the best we can do is speculate who the restraining force is.
 2. However, we do learn two things from **vs 6**.
 - a. **First**, we learn that the man of lawlessness can only make his presence known and freely exercise his will when allowed to.
 - b. **Second**, we learn that he either has an appointed time or a time that is dependent on other things happening first.

- E. [7] For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only he who now restrains will do so until he is taken out of the way.
 1. **For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work;**
 - a. What is the mystery of lawlessness that is already at work?
 - b. I suspect it is the unseen forces that are working to motivate or compel the general population to believe that the best way to live is to be self-ruled, that is, to exercise their will and demand their way as if there is no authority greater than themselves.
 - c. In my opinion, this kind of mindset and behavior is a growing problem in our nation today. Yet in spite of numerous opinions as to its origin, no one has been able to identify exactly where it is coming from. In other words, it is a mystery.
 2. **only he who now restrains will do so until he is taken out of the way**
 - a. Here in **vs 7**, the restraining force is spoken of as a person whose task is to prevent the man of lawlessness from appearing before his appointed time. But when his time comes, the restrainer will be removed so the man of lawlessness can operate freely.

- F. I want to finish by reading Jesus' words about His return found in **Mark 13:5-23**. Listen as I read and you will hear a message similar to what the Thessalonian believers received from Paul and were personally experiencing when Paul wrote to them.
- G. **Mark 13:5-23** . . . And Jesus began to say to [His disciples], "See to it that no one misleads you. [6] Many will come in My name, saying, 'I am He!' and will mislead many. [7] When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be frightened; those things must take place; but that is not yet the end. [8] For nation will rise up against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be earthquakes in various places; there will also be famines. These things are merely the beginning of birth pangs. [9] But be on your guard; for they will deliver you to the courts, and you will be flogged in the synagogues, and you will stand before governors and kings for My sake, as a testimony to them. [10] The gospel must first be preached to all the nations. [11] When they arrest you and hand you over, do not worry beforehand about what you are to say, but say whatever is given you in that hour; for it is not you who speak, but it is the Holy Spirit. [12] Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; and children will rise up against parents and have them put to death. [13] You will be hated by all because of My name, but the one who endures to the end, he will be saved. [14] But when you see the **Abomination of desolation** standing where it should not be (let the reader understand), then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains. [15] The one who is on the housetop must not go down, or go in to get anything out of his house; [16] and the one who is in the field must not turn back to get his coat. [17] But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! [18] But pray that it may not happen in the winter. [19] For those days will be a time of tribulation such as has not occurred since the beginning of the creation which God created until now, and never will. [20] Unless the Lord had shortened those days, no life would have been saved; but for the sake of the elect, whom He chose, He shortened the days. [21] And then if anyone says to you, 'Behold, here is the Christ'; or, 'Behold, He is there'; do not believe him; [22] for false Christs and false prophets will arise, and will show signs and wonders, in order to lead astray, if possible, the elect. [23] But take heed; behold, I have told you everything in advance."
- H. What awaits our world is both horrible and wonderful. May we heed God's word and be prepared so that we are counted worthy of our calling and the kingdom of God when Christ returns.