

INTRODUCTION.

- A. Scripture text: **2Thessalonians 2:7-12.**
- B. In this lesson I want to first go over the entire chapter in an expository manner. Then I will come back and talk a little more about the “man of sin.”
- C. This is a difficult passage to understand in detail, but the overall message is clear.

I. THE DAY OF THE LORD IS NOT ALREADY PRESENT.

- A. Scripture text: 2Th. 2:1-2.
Now we request you, brethren, with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our gathering together to Him, 2 that you may 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.
- B. Paul gives instructions concerning the coming of Christ. Do not:
 - 1. Be quickly shaken.
 - 2. Be disturbed by a message (that X has already come) from:
 - a. A spirit--a communication through a prophet.
 - b. A word--a communication by oral means.
 - c. A letter--a written communication.

II. EVENTS TO PRECEDE THE COMING OF THE LORD.

- A. Scripture text: 2Th. 2:3-12.
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 may 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. 8 And then that lawless one will be revealed whom the Lord will slay with the breath of His mouth and bring to an end by the appearance of His coming; 9 that is, the one whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders, 10 and with all the deception of wickedness for those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved. 11 And for this reason God will send upon them a deluding influence so that they might believe what is false, 12 in order that they all may be judged who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness.
- B. **[v3]** Let no one deceive you. Before Jesus returns:
 - 1. The apostasy must come.
 - 2. The son of destruction (perdition, man of lawlessness) must be revealed.
- C. **[v4]** The son of destruction:
 - 1. Opposes Christ and Xians.
 - 2. Exalts himself against every other object of worship.
 - 3. Takes his seat in the temple of God (this is usurping God’s position; taking a place and position that rightfully belongs to God).
 - 4. Displays himself to be God.
- D. **[v5-6]** Important point: Paul, while in their presence on a previous occasion, has told them of these things in greater detail than what is written here, hence, there is difficulty in knowing exactly who he is talking about.
- E. **[v6-7]** Paul uses the neuter and the personal pronoun(s) in describing the restraining force. Meaning that the force could be either a person or a thing. Lawlessness is already at work, ready to be revealed when the restrainer is removed.
- F. **[v8]** But when the man of lawlessness appears the Lord will overcome.

- G. **[v9-10]** A description of the lawless one and his works:
1. He is in accord with Satan.
 2. He comes with power, signs, and false wonders.
 3. He deceives the wicked: because they have rejected and refused to love the truth (Deut. 13:1-4).
 “If a prophet or a dreamer of dreams arises among you and gives you a sign or a wonder, **2** and the sign or the wonder comes true, concerning which he spoke to you, saying, ‘Let us go after other gods (whom you have not known) and let us serve them,’ **3** you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams; for the LORD your God is testing you to find out if you love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul. **4** “You shall follow the LORD your God and fear Him; and you shall keep His commandments, listen to His voice, serve Him, and cling to Him.”
- H. **[v11-12]** God then sends:
1. A deluding influence (example: OT plagues and Pharaoh).
 2. Those who reject the truth and take pleasure in wickedness will be judged.

III. THANKSGIVING AND AN ADMONITION.

- A. Scripture text: 2Th. 2:13-17.
 But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth. **14** And it was for this He called you through our gospel, that you may gain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. **15** So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught, whether by word *of mouth* or by letter from us. **16** Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself and God our Father, who has loved us and given us eternal comfort and good hope by grace, **17** comfort and strengthen your hearts in every good work and word.
- B. **[v13]** Christians should give thanks because God has chosen you for salvation and sanctification. This comes by the HS and by our faith in the truth.
- C. **[v14]** We are called by the gospel to gain the glory of the Lord JC (Eph. 1:13-14).
 In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation-- having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, **14** who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of *God's own* possession, to the praise of His glory.
- D. **[v15]** So, because of all of the above: stand firm and hold on to the traditions received:
1. From the Holy Spirit (1Cor. 1:2; 2Th. 3:6).
(1Cor 1:2) ...to the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling, with all who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their *Lord* and ours:...
(2Th 3:6) Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep aloof from every brother who leads an unruly life and not according to the tradition which you received from us.
 2. Not those of men (Mt. 15:3, 6; Gal. 1:14; Col. 2:8).
(Mt 15:3, 6) And He answered and said to them, “And why do you yourselves transgress the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition?”... **6** ...he is not to honor his father or his mother.’ And *thus* you invalidated the word of God for the sake of your tradition.
(Gal 1:14) ...and I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries among my countrymen, being more extremely zealous for my ancestral traditions.
(Col 2:8) See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ.
- E. **[v16-17]** A Prayer for the Thessalonians.
 May JC and God the Father give: eternal comfort (by grace) and a good hope (by grace).

IV. AN EXCURSUS ON THE MAN OF LAWLESSNESS.

- A. Depending on your translation, he is known as:
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| 1. The man of sin. | 5. The incarnation of wickedness. |
| 2. The man of lawlessness. | 6. The representative of lawlessness. |
| 3. The son of perdition. | 7. The lawless one. |
| 4. The son of destruction. | |

- B. "The purpose of the writers (Paul) is clear. They wish to comfort and strengthen the Thessalonians in the midst of persecutions by assuring them of the final victory of the cause of God and the ultimate defeat of those who oppose His cause."
- C. "It is evident, therefore, that the passage yielded itself more readily to the understanding of the Thessalonians than it does to a modern reader. It may thus be that the writers intentionally designed the passage for a limited and local need."
- D. Various interpretations of the "man of lawlessness" are as follows:
1. **A certain Roman emperor or a line of Roman emperors.**
 - a. Nero and Domitian are prime examples.
 - b. If this be true it helps explain the need for symbolic language in trying to protect the readers from further harm.
 - c. The restraining force would be the working of the Roman government in keeping Domitian out of power as long as it did. I believe that Josephus argues that Domitian wanted the throne when Nero went down. In a civil war, Galba, Otho, and Vitellius were killed, but Vespasian ruled instead, then Titus, and finally Domitian came to power in 81AD. The persecuting beast that was (Rev. 17:8) was Nero, and the beast to come (Rev. 17:8) is Domitian.
 - d. But, for this interpretation to be true one might argue that the Roman empire must be in power when Jesus comes again.
 2. **The papacy and the apostasy of the Roman church.**
 - a. There is considerable support for this view in light of the practices of the Roman church as described (and condemned) in the following passages, Mk. 13:22-23; 1Tim. 4:1-5.
(Mk 13:22-23) "...for false Christs and false prophets will arise, and will show signs and wonders, in order, if possible, to lead the elect astray. 23 "But take heed; behold, I have told you everything in advance."
(1Tim 4:1-5) 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, 3 men who forbid marriage and advocate abstaining from foods, which God has created to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth. 4 For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected, if it is received with gratitude; 5 for it is sanctified by means of the word of God and prayer.
 - b. The restraining force would be the pagan (or temporal) power of the Roman Empire that kept the religious power from fully taking hold for many years.
 - c. But, this interpretation may not be true because the claims of the papacy are not always as blatant and unlimited as those of the man of sin.
 3. **The devil himself.**
 - a. Since the work of Satan will be in the world, and increasing through the years, only to be destroyed at the second coming of Christ, such a one so wicked could only be the devil himself.
 - b. The restraining power, in this view, is the Holy Spirit, working through the word to save the lost and keep the saved, saved.
 - c. But this interpretation may not be true for two reasons:
 - 1) Paul says that the coming of this lawless one is "by the activity of Satan" and not Satan himself.
 - 2) It seems a bit inconceivable that if the restrainer is the Holy Spirit, the He would be "taken out of the way."
 4. **A borrowing from Babylonian mythology.**
 - a. This interpretation says that when Babylonian writers wanted to stress the conflict between the forces of good and evil they used similar styles.
 - b. But this interpretation may not be true, because, there are a great number of differences between all of the Babylonian mythological conflicts and the things spoken of in this passage.

5. **The Antichrist.**

- a. This view is in keeping with the pre-millennial view of Revelation, in that the prophecies thereof are to be fulfilled many, many years after they were originally given and discuss the events at the end of time before the second coming of Christ.
- b. *The apostasy* (falling away) refers to the ungodly conditions that will be present in the world shortly before the Lord returns.

The *man of sin* is the anti-Christ who will rule the earth after Jesus has raptured the 144,000. This is the period of the great tribulation that is supposed to last for seven years.

That which hinders is the Holy Spirit, who will also be removed from the earth during the great tribulation, allowing sin and suffering to be incredible and unrestrained.

6. **Judaism.**

- a. This view says that the man of sin was a very powerful and high-ranking Jew that continually used his power and influence to persecute the church.
- b. The restraining force would probably be the Roman government, only allowing this man to do whatever was within the limits of Roman, civil law.

E. In drawing conclusions about the text and who or what the “man of lawlessness” is or isn’t, dogmatism is not in order. Of the six interpretations offered, it seems that either one of these two are the most correct (having the fewest problems in proving).

1. **A certain Roman emperor or a line of Roman emperors.**

In Rev. 13, John identifies two forces that are real enemies of the church. The first beast (the sea beast, Rev. 13: 1-10) symbolizes governmental, *pagan power*.

The lesson for the Thessalonians was one that said there would be a coming ruler in the Roman Empire that would fit the description of 2Th. 2:9. They need not think that the day of the Lord has already come because this man of sin, that Paul had previously warned them about had not yet come. A more permanent lesson here is that it makes no difference as to what pagan, governmental power rules, it will not overcome the church.

2. **The papacy and the apostasy of the Roman church.**

The second enemy of the church identified in Rev. 13, is the second beast (the earth beast, Rev. 13:11-18) which symbolizes false religion, possibly *papal power*.

Some of the members of the Thessalonian church would not die until they saw the fulfillment of this prophecy come to pass. A man would rise up having tremendous religious power; but a power not authorized by the NT.

A more permanent lesson here is that Paul could also be referring to a succession of popes that would allow this prophecy to come true in the immediate future and continually for many years to come. If the prophecy concerned just one man, then Jesus would have to return shortly after the death of that one man. But if the prophecy is actually about many men, all claiming the same power (a success of popes) then the prophecy can last many, many years until Jesus comes again.

F. “This lawless one may be movement, an institution, a system, or even an individual. Whatever may be his exactly identity, his doom is certain.”

V. **PRACTICAL LESSONS.**

Too many times when this chapter is studied the emphasis so focuses on the “man of sin” that the overall lessons to be gained are lost. To avert that end, note the following:

- A. The reason for writing is so that the Thessalonians will not be disturbed.
- B. The false doctrine evidently being taught was that the day of the Lord was already present.
- C. Paul warns the Thessalonians not to be deceived by such teachings.
- D. The ultimate triumph of God and X over Satan and His works is made abundantly clear.
- E. The Thessalonians are people of truth, not of error, and have the sanctification that comes from God.

- F. Paul, again, as he has done so often in these two letters, gives thanks for the brethren and asks God to bless, comfort, and establish them in all they say and do.

CONCLUSION AND INVITATION.

- A. I don't think it is absolutely essential that we know (for sure) who the man of sin is to gain much from this section of Scripture.
- B. Xians are to take comfort that God, X, and the church will triumph over all evil.
- C. You must be a member of the Lord's church to share in that victory.
- D. Plan of salvation for non-Xians; erring Xians.