

May 16, 2021  
Sunday Evening Service  
Series: 2 Thessalonians  
Community Baptist Church  
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Greer, SC 29650  
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## THE MAN OF THE LAWLESSNESS 2 Thessalonians 2:1-5

The verses that comprise our text are the central focus of Paul's second letter to the Christians in Thessalonica. All the verses that precede these twelve verses lead up to the topic of the text. All the verses that follow our text flow out of it into applications for everyday Christian living.

Paul's intent in our text is to clear up confusion about God's plan for the end of the age. The truth is plain in the Bible that God has a plan for all of human history as it leads back to eternity. Satan is well aware of that plan and has tried multiple ways to stop the plan and to confuse people so that we will not trust God. There is little doubt that even the words of our text offer a bit of debate and much thinking for modern interpreters.

God's plan, the plan to redeem His creation, began in eternity. The first expressions of God's plan were seen in the Garden of Eden at the advent of sin on earth. In that setting, God promised that the Seed of the woman would ultimately defeat Satan for good. In response, Satan caused sin to proliferate to such an extent in the world that God destroyed the whole world except for Noah and his family. That narrowed the chances for the source of the Seed of the woman considerably.

After the flood, God revealed His choice to bring that promised Seed through the lineage of Noah's son Seth. In Seth's lineage, God chose Abraham to provide the line for the Seed of the woman. God chose to create the nation of Israel from Abraham, the nation in which the Christ would be born. To that end, God promised that every nation in the world would be blessed because the Christ would be born in Abraham's line. Abraham's posterity ended up in Egypt

where Satan stirred Pharaoh to kill all the Hebrew male babies in an effort to prevent the Seed from being born. He failed again.

Abraham's lineage proliferated until God made them a kingdom and gave them the Promised Land. About 600 years after Moses, the available options for the Seed of the woman being born in Abraham's line was down to one child, Joash, who Satan's pawn (Grandmother Athalia) missed when she killed all the male's in the royal line (2 Chronicles 21-22). Satan failed again to stop God's plan.

Finally the Christ, the Seed of the woman, was born to Mary. But Satan had another plan and moved Herod to kill all the baby boys born in a two-year period in Bethlehem. Satan failed again to destroy the Seed of the woman and stop God's plan.

As Jesus Christ, Seed of the woman, was about to begin His earthly ministry, Satan tried and failed to tempt Jesus to scuttle the whole divine plan by worshiping him. Then he moved the people of Nazareth to try to throw Jesus off the cliff. Satan continued to fail to stop God all the way to the cross and through the resurrection. Surely Satan hoped that Christ's death on the cross was the end. Vainly he watched Christ's grave and must have had a really bad day when Jesus arose.

Satan is well aware that the day of his complete demise is coming. That is why Jesus taught that, before He returns to establish His kingdom on earth where He will rule supremely, Satan will pull out all the stops to deceive people, attempt to win a war against Jesus Himself, and take as many people as possible with him to eternal perdition.

In his final attempt to keep the Seed of the woman from establishing the promised kingdom, Satan will set up his wicked servant to rule the world. God has warned about this, the most wicked man in human history, in Daniel, Ezekiel, Zechariah, Matthew and Revelation. He is the topic of our text. He is the express manifestation of Satan's attempts to deter God's plan for the Seed of the woman.

That there was confusion among the early Christians about the matter is not surprising. That is Satan's objective. That there is still confusion, even about the instruction in our text, is also not surprising. That the man of sin described here will foment deception and confusion in the future should only be expected. Our text will

teach us much about who this man will be and what he will try to accomplish.

### **A Question About the Lord's Coming (vv.1-2).**

Like the very young Christians in Thessalonica, most of us have already learned about the Lord's coming. Paul introduced that topic in this middle section of his letter with the words, *Now concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to him (v.1a).*

Obviously, therefore, his instruction at this point is going to be about the Lord's coming. It is a bit of a repeat. He had already addressed the topic of the "coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" in the first letter (1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:3). We must wonder if a revisit to the topic in this letter is an indication that the instruction caused a little bit of confusion. Maybe some people even responded foolishly and stopped working (2 Thessalonians 3:11-12).

More directly, the instruction here is about our being gathered to Him. Being gathered together to spend eternity in the presence of our Savior who gave Himself to redeem us ought to be a chief source of joy in our lives. That is not to conclude that hoping in the Lord's return hints that we want to escape reality. But children characterized by "light" should find living in this "dark world" to be discouraging at times.

In the first letter, Paul addressed the progressive aspects of this "being gathered together to him." In that letter the issue was the *parousia, the coming of the Lord* (4:13-18). The is the encouraging news that one day, without warning Jesus Christ will descend from heaven with a shout, with the sound of a trumpet. This return will involve only the living saints, and the saints who have already died (4:15-17). At that moment all of us who have trusted Christ as Savior will receive glorified bodies and rise to meet Christ in the air.

It seems clear from the text that Christ will not descend fully to earth in this event, but we will meet Him in the air and will be with Christ forever from that moment on. *Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord (1*

*Thessalonians 4:17).* Of no surprise is the instruction that we should encourage each other with this promise (4:18).

But also connected with the promise that we followers of Christ will be gathered to him is the issue of the sudden destruction (5:1-4). This part of the coming of Christ is not encouraging, at least not to sinners. While people are clamoring about peace and safety, the Lord will send sudden destruction upon everyone on earth (5:3). That part of the "Day of the Lord" will be like a thief in the night. (5:2). The surprise will be the beginning of the judgment process which will probably begin shortly after the *parousia*.

That brings us to our current text in 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12. This revisit to the issues of the Day of the Lord describes the character of those days from the time they begin (with the rapture, the first step in the Day of the Lord) until they end with Christ coming in final judgment.

Because we have this instruction, we should not be confused or according to the very clear command, "Do not be shaken in mind." Paul wrote, *we ask you, brothers, not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed (vv.1b-2a).* Such a request alerts us to the likelihood that something about these end times was upsetting the Christians in Thessalonica. Paul's instruction about the "Day of the Lord" addresses the problem and seeks to correct wrong responses.

Something caused the people to react hastily (quickly). Their minds were unstable like a poorly built building in an earthquake. Their emotions had taken over and they were alarmed like the disciples who cried aloud to Jesus because they thought their boat was sinking. What caused such emotional upheaval for these followers of Christ? What kind of circumstances or information causes us to plunge into anxiety or at least become fearful?

We know that Satan loves to keep Christ's followers in a tither. If we are upset by current situations or events, we will not be thinking about Christ's sufficient grace. If we are confused about what is currently happening in our lives, we will doubt our Lord's faithfulness to keep us and never leave us. Such doubt causes us to quench the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

So what shook the early Christians' equilibrium? An important clue is found in Paul's request for the people not to believe false teaching. He asked them not to be shaken, *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 (vv.2b).* Some kind of untruthful source of information communicated a lie. Maybe there were three different kinds of sources. Or they were probably considered together as the cause for the problem.

There might have been a *spirit* which probably refers to a “prophecy” or a “revelation” by a spirit that claimed to be from God. The early Church relied on what we would call in our day “extra-biblical” revelation because they did not have the complete Bible. Or maybe it was a spoken word, a teacher or preacher in the Church might have spoken a message claiming divine authority. Or someone produced a letter and claimed it was from Paul or Silas or Timothy.

Whatever the source was, it was untruthful. It claimed the Day of the Lord had already happened. That was the same problem, confusion, he addressed in 1 Thessalonians. He had warned the Christians, *For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night (1 Thessalonians 5:2).*

Paying attention to false information is a very serious problem for the Body of Christ. Therefore, Paul offered a very serious warning: *Let no one deceive you in any way.* The point is serious because the attack is relentless and insidious. History and the Bible prove conclusively that Satan’s way is deception. His plan was obvious all the way back to the Garden of Eden. Still he disrupts the Church by being the consummate deceiver of Christians. The Corinthian Christians learned that *such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:13-14).* We must not be deceived by extra-biblical revelation. That is the kind of stuff that causes well-meaning Christians to sell all their possessions and go out to wait on a hilltop for Jesus to return.

### **The Answer is in the Details (vv.3-12).**

The time of rebellion will come and will be a clear indicator that Christ is coming again. The character of the time is defined in the last part of the third verse: *For that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first (v.3b).* Jesus described this rebellion in the

Olivet Discourse when He said, *“And then many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another. And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold. But the one who endures to the end will be saved” (Matthew 24:10-13).*

The character of the age just before Christ returns in judgment against sinners will be extreme, obvious rebellion. Of course there has always been a certain penchant for people to rebel against authorities. History records almost ceaseless rebellion at some place or another in the world. Rulers have constantly been removed and replaced.

Sadly, rebellion is the character of our culture at this time. It may not be extreme yet, but rebellion is a fair assessment of our world. The modern or current climate of rebellion in our culture began in earnest in the 1960's with leaders like Abby Hoffman telling a crowd, “Never trust anyone over 40.” That spirit swept through the culture and is well rooted in two generations. So thorough is the rebellion that parents are told to expect it from their teens.

The typical work place is now a pressure cooker where the busiest department is HR because everyone has a grievance against an authority. One of the most thankless vocations is police work because the media continually whips up animosity against those authorities. Families are in disarray because the idea of the children submitting to their parents or wives submitting to their husbands is considered to be equivalent to “neanderthalism.”

Even churches are not exempt as the preference for discussion eclipses the authoritative preaching of God’s Word. Just the mention or “authoritative preaching” strikes fear in the hearts of many and sends them running away looking for their “safe place.”

This overwhelming spirit of rebellion against human authorities simply flows from the primary rebellion of sinners against God. The English word *rebellion* translates the Greek word *apostasia*. Many Christians are familiar with the word apostasy. It means to rise up in open defiance of authority, with the presumed intention to overthrow it or to act in complete opposition to its demands. To apostatize is to rebel against, to revolt, to engage in insurrection.

In the Bible the word applies most accurately to rebellion against God’s truth. The apostate knows the truth of God’s Word but

rejects. Often the apostate has actually lived in conformity to Bible truth in the past. *For it is impossible to restore again to repentance those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they then fall away, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt (Hebrews 6:4-6).*

A rejection of God's truth, a falling away from the Bible will be the character of the last days. We should not get discouraged or anxious because of the moral/ethical trends in our day. It seems like our society shifted from God-fearing to God-rejecting over night. In fact, it has been an observable digression for many years. It just picked up speed very quickly as the foundation of truth has been destroyed by liberal churches and higher education. Those most pernicious issues that agitate us Christians so much, like abortion, sexual perversion, twisted sexual identity, and so on are simply the traits that will be found in an age that is in rebellion against God. God's plan for a world in rebellion against Him in the last days is working to perfection.

For our benefit the Bible goes on in this text to give us the character of the man of lawlessness. He is lawless and destructive. In the setting of rebellion, *the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction (v.3b)*. It is important to note that this is THE man (*ho anthropos*). The definite article clearly means that this does not refer to a concept of lawlessness or a general climate of sin and wickedness.

There is a man coming who is a particular, clearly identified, clearly described individual. He is the fourth beast, the little horn described in Daniel. *He shall speak words against the Most High, and shall wear out the saints of the Most High, and shall think to change the times and the law; and they shall be given into his hand for a time, times, and half a time (Daniel 7:25). By his cunning he shall make deceit prosper under his hand, and in his own mind he shall become great. Without warning he shall destroy many. And he shall even rise up against the Prince of princes, and he shall be broken – but by no human hand (Daniel 8:25).*

He is the prince who is to come. *And after the sixty-two weeks, an anointed one shall be cut off and shall have nothing. And the*

*people of the prince who is to come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. Its end shall come with a flood, and to the end there shall be war. Desolations are decreed (Daniel 9:26).*

He is the king who does as he pleases. *And the king shall do as he wills. He shall exalt himself and magnify himself above every god, and shall speak astonishing things against the God of gods. He shall prosper till the indignation is accomplished; for what is decreed shall be done (Daniel 11:36).*

He is the worthless, foolish shepherd (Zechariah 11:15-17).

He is the Beast of *the Revelation*. *And when they have finished their testimony, the beast that rises from the bottomless pit will make war on them and conquer them and kill them (Revelation 11:7). And I saw a beast rising out of the sea, with ten horns and seven heads, with ten diadems on its horns and blasphemous names on its heads (Revelation 13:1). And another angel, a third, followed them, saying with a loud voice, "If anyone worships the beast and its image and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, he also will drink the wine of God's wrath, poured full strength into the cup of his anger, and he will be tormented with fire and sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb" (Revelation 14:9-10).*

He is Antichrist, the ultimate expression of all the antichrist spirit in the world throughout history.

This Antichrist, this man of sin will be characterized by THE lawlessness (*teis anomias*). Again this noun is accompanied by the definite article though almost no English translations acknowledge it. The man will not be characterized by just sin, but rather a specific level and kind of lawlessness. This will be the most wicked person to ever live on earth. Lawlessness is opposition to rebellion against the laws of humanity or society—he will do that. Lawlessness is opposition to God's law—he will do that to the extreme. But this lawlessness is rebellion against God, His character, His person, and all He represents.

Therefore, he will oppose all objects of worship. He is one *who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship (v.4a)*. He will be against not only the one true God but all things religious. He will abolish (or attempt to abolish) all forms of worship of anything but himself. He will be self-centered like pagan kings of the past (Nebuchadnezzar, Darius, even Caesars to some

extent). John foresaw that *they worshiped the dragon, for he had given his authority to the beast, and they worshiped the beast, saying, "Who is like the beast, and who can fight against it?" And the beast was given a mouth uttering haughty and blasphemous words, and it was allowed to exercise authority for forty-two months. It opened its mouth to utter blasphemies against God, blaspheming his name and his dwelling, that is, those who dwell in heaven (Revelation 13:4-6).*

He will take God's seat in God's temple. He will be so anti-God that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God (v.4b). Apparently, a new temple will be built in the fashion of Solomon's temple and the second temple. The false idea having been proposed by Antichrist for three-and- one-half years. Daniel saw that *he shall make a strong covenant with many for one week, and for half of the week he shall put an end to sacrifice and offering. And on the wing of abominations shall come one who makes desolate, until the decreed end is poured out on the desolator (Daniel 9:27).*

Jesus taught about this abomination of desolation. *"So when you see the abomination of desolation spoken of by the prophet Daniel, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains" (Matthew 24:15-16).* The temple was always the house of God and the place that represented God's presence. Satan living vicariously through the man of the sin will pretend to finally have succeeded in "unseating" God. Satan is as make-believe as Hollywood.

This is important information. Paul wrote to his new Christian friends, *Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things? (v.5).* Those words remind us that Paul himself ("I") taught these things verbally. It seems amazing to us that this teaching was appropriate for the newest of Christians.

While we watch our world spiral down into the depths of sin and wickedness, we must remember that this is God's plan. This might cause us to think about the passing statement Jesus made in the context of patiently waiting: *"Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?" (Luke 18:8).* Abominable trends, laws, practices that are sweeping through our culture are simply preparing the world for the man of the lawlessness. We praise God that nothing is outside His control . . . especially not His children. We thank Him for deliverance.