

We are looking again this morning at 2 Thessalonians chapter two.

Please take your Bibles and turn to 2 Thessalonians chapter 2.

We are picking up where we left off last time at verse 3 and looking at “the man of sin” or “the man of lawlessness” as he is referred to here in the NASB.

If you remember Paul is correcting an error that the Thessalonians had received concerning the coming of Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him and the Day of the Lord’s wrath.

Because of the source of the error and who they thought it came from, they believed it had already occurred.

This, of course, caused great alarm.

And that prompted Paul to spend this second chapter correcting this error.

Paul says, beginning at verse 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, 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. Do you not remember that while I was still with you, I was telling you these things? And you know what restrains him now, so that in his time he will be revealed. 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. 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; that is, the one whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders, 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. For this reason God will send upon them a deluding influence so that they will believe what is false, in order that they all may be judged who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness” (vv.3-12).

We noted last time three events that will occur before the Lord’s return and the Day of the Lord’s wrath.

Paul mentions two of them in verse 3.

He says, “the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed.”

Then in verses 6-7 He gives the third:  
the removal of the restrainer.

Once these three events occur, then the Lord will come and gather His saints and then the Day of the Lord's wrath will begin.

Regarding the two events mentioned in verse 3, D. Edmond Hiebert says, "The falling away indicates a tragic movement within the sphere of professed Christendom, the treason of the avowed friends of Christ, while the public manifestation of the man of sin in the arena of history marks the personal culmination of the hostility of the avowed enemies of Christ."<sup>1</sup>

In our study today, I want us to look again at verse 3 and learn more about "the man of sin" or "the man of lawlessness."

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<sup>1</sup> D. Edmond Hiebert, *The Thessalonian Epistles* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1971). 305.

Who is he?

What is he like?

When will he be revealed?

John gives him the title “Antichrist” in 1 John 2:18 but note...

## **HIS DESCRIPTION (in vv. 3, 8, 9)**

Beginning in verse 3, Paul describes this coming world ruler as “the man of sin” or “man of lawlessness,” “the son of destruction,” and then in verse 8 he describes him as “the lawless one,” and in verse 9 as “the one whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan.”

In his first description, he refers to him as...

*The man of sin or man of lawlessness (v.3)*

This is a Hebrew expression meaning a man of eminent wickedness; one distinguished for depravity.<sup>2</sup>

Sin has such absolute domination over him that he seems to be the very embodiment of it.<sup>3</sup>

Calling him the man of “lawlessness” (anomia) literally means “without law.”

This person will be the consummate lawless one; a blasphemous sinner, who will live in open defiance of God’s law.

Of all the billions of godless, evil, lawless sinners in human history, his evil influence will be greater than any other’s.

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<sup>2</sup> Albert Barnes, Barnes Notes on the New Testament. 2 Thessalonians 2:3. MacSword.

<sup>3</sup> D. Edmond Hiebert, The Thessalonian Epistles (Chicago: Moody Press, 1971). 307.

Even in the end times, when “lawlessness is increased” (Matt. 24:12), this Satan-energized leader will stand out as the one whose depraved, wicked, lawless leadership sweeps over the whole world—with influence never before seen.<sup>4</sup>

As righteousness found its embodiment in Christ, "the Lord our righteousness," so "sin" shall have its embodiment in "the man of sin."<sup>5</sup>

Next, Paul describes him as...

### *The Son of Destruction*

This description indicates his certain doom.

D. Edmond Hiebert defines “destruction” or “perdition” as the “loss of well-being, not loss

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<sup>4</sup> John MacArthur, *1 & 2 Thessalonians* (Chicago: Moody Press, 2002). 272-73.

<sup>5</sup> Jamison, Faucett, Brown Commentary: 2 Thessalonians 2:3: MacSword.

of being, extinction. As the very opposite of all that is implied in salvation, it points to ‘an everlasting state of torment and death.’ It is a ‘destruction which consists in the loss of eternal life, eternal misery, the lot of those excluded from the kingdom of God.’”<sup>6</sup>

Only one other individual in Scripture shares the dubious distinction of being named **son of destruction**: Judas (John 17:12; the nasb translates the same Greek phrase “son of perdition”).

The title is thus reserved for the two vilest people in human history, controlled by Satan (John 13:2; Rev. 13:2) and guilty of the two most heinous acts of apostasy.

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<sup>6</sup> D. Edmond Hiebert, *The Thessalonian Epistles* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1971). 307.



Judas lived and ministered intimately with the incarnate Son of God for more than three years—a privilege granted to only eleven others.

Yet after observing Jesus' sinless life, hearing His wisdom, and experiencing His divine power and gracious love, Judas betrayed Him.

Amazingly, he was so much a **son of destruction** that the glories of Christ that softened the eleven hardened him.<sup>7</sup>

Before leaving verse 3, Paul states...

### **HIS REVELATION (v.3)**

He says the coming of Christ and the Day of the Lord's wrath will not happen "unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is *revealed*, the son of destruction."

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<sup>7</sup> John MacArthur, *1 & 2 Thessalonians* (Chicago: Moody Press, 2002). 273.

The word “revealed” is an aorist tense verb that points to a definite time when this man will appear.

It implies his prior existence on earth, for he will doubtless have been living many years before his manifestation as the man of sin.

“The man of sin” will be suddenly manifested just as false apostles pose as angels of light ([2Co 11:13ff.](#)).<sup>8</sup>

What will identify his revelation?

## **HIS ACTIVITY (vv.4-5)**

Paul says he will do two things: “oppose and exalt himself...displaying himself as being God.”

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<sup>8</sup> A.T. Robertson, Robertson’s Word Pictures of the New Testament: 2 Thessalonians 2:3. MacSword.

This will depict his blasphemous activity.

His double activity will establish his true identity.

Paul says...

*He Opposes and Exalts Himself Above Every So-Called God or Object of Worship*

Energized by Satan and aided by the false prophet, Antichrist will have immense power to successfully demand that the world worship him.<sup>9</sup>

Listen to this as John describes it in Revelation 13.

To say that he “opposes” is to characterize him as the opponent or adversary of Christ.

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<sup>9</sup> John MacArthur, *1 & 2 Thessalonians* (Chicago: Moody Press, 2002). 274.

He keeps up his opposition to all that is called God or is worshiped.

He embodies not merely an Anti-Christian, but an Anti-Theistic revolt.

Haughtily he will seek to abolish all existing forms of worship by seeking to replace them.

Every so-called god will be deposed in favor of himself.

He “exalts himself” by lifting himself above them all.

This is an apt description of Daniel 11:36-37 which says, “Then the king will do as he pleases, and he will exalt and magnify himself above every god and will speak monstrous things against the God of gods; and he will prosper until the indignation is finished, for that

which is decreed will be done. “He will show no regard for the gods of his fathers or for the desire of women, nor will he show regard for any other god; for he will magnify himself above them all.”

The phrase “so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God,” brings this picture of self-deification to its awful climax.

Takes his “seat” (kathizo) is in the aorist tense and denotes the definite act of taking his seat in the temple of God, the inner sanctuary of the temple not in the hieron, which denotes the entire complex with its courts.

This is what Jesus calls in Matthew 24:15  
“the abomination of Desolation.”

He says, “Therefore when you see the Abomination of Desolation which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains. “Whoever is on the housetop must not go down to get the things out that are in his house. “Whoever is in the field must not turn back to get his cloak. “But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! “But pray that your flight will not be in the winter, or on a Sabbath. “For then there will be a great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever will” (vv.15-21).

Now this is what Paul told them according to verse 5 when he was with them.

They should have remembered this and not believed a lie.

Why would Paul tell them this when he was with them and then change his mind and say Jesus had come and they were now in the day of the Lord's wrath?

That's why Paul uses strong words at the beginning of verse 3:

“Let no one in any way deceive you.”

These two events have to occur first before the day of the Lord.

The third is found in verses 6-7 and they have to do with...

### **HIS RESTRAINT (vv.6-7)**

What is holding back the man of sin from being revealed?

Whatever it is, they knew because Paul told them.

He says in verses 6-7, “And you know what restrains him now, so that in his time he will be revealed. 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.”

John MacArthur in his commentary on 1 & 2 Thessalonians says, “The Greek verb translated **restrains** (*katechō*; “to hold back,” “to hold down,” “to suppress”) appears in this text as a neuter participle, prompting commentators to suggest numerous options as to the identity of that restraining force.

Some believe that the preaching of the gospel keeps Antichrist in check. Eventually, they argue, the gospel will be fully proclaimed



(*cf.* Matt. 24:14) and the restraint will be removed. Other suggestions for the restrainer include the nation of Israel, the alleged binding of Satan by believers, the church's influence as salt and light in the world (*cf.* Matt. 5:13–14), human government (*cf.* Rom. 13:1–4), the general principle of law and morality in the world, the Roman Empire, and even Michael the archangel (*cf.* Dan. 10:21).

But none of those opinions is satisfactory. The most significant problem with all of them (except the last) is that they are human forces. Humans preach the gospel; humans make up the nation of Israel; humans attempt to bind Satan; humans comprise the church; humans run the world's governments; humans agree on

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principles of law and morality; and humans made up the Roman Empire. But human power, ingenuity, and institutions cannot restrain the supernatural power of Satan that seeks to release Antichrist. And the one supernatural person in the list, Michael, does not have the power to restrain Satan (Jude 9). The most logical of those choices, 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.

And God does the restraining **so that in his time he will be revealed**. Satan, of course, does not want to operate on God's timetable. If he could, he would have revealed Antichrist long

before now. He longs for the false messiah, through whom he will rule the earth, to appear. But nothing—not even the purposes of hell—operates independently of God’s sovereign timetable. Job confessed, “I know that You can do all things, and that no purpose of Yours can be thwarted” (Job 42:2). In Isaiah 46:10 God declares, “My purpose will be established, and I will accomplish all My good pleasure.”

Therefore, the man of lawlessness will not appear until the **time** predetermined by God.”<sup>10</sup>

Though Antichrist may be restrained, evil will not be; in fact, **the mystery of lawlessness is already at work.**

*Mustērion* (**mystery**) describes something “which has been kept secret for long ages past” (Rom. 16:25) and is incapable of being

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<sup>10</sup> John MacArthur, *1 & 2 Thessalonians* (Chicago: Moody Press, 2002). 277-78.

known unless revealed by God. The true character of **lawlessness** is already at work (cf. 1 John 3:4); and “even now many antichrists have appeared” (1 John 2:18; cf. 4:3).

Evil, lies, hypocrisy, immorality, and false religion permeate the world and grow increasingly worse, so that every generation is more wicked than those before (2 Tim. 3:13), but sin’s ultimate manifestation is yet to come.<sup>11</sup>

The change in gender from the neuter participle translated “what restrains” in verse 6 to the masculine participle rendered **he who ... restrains** is significant.

The sovereign, divine force that currently restrains Antichrist is exerted by a person—the

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<sup>11</sup> John MacArthur, *1 & 2 Thessalonians* (Chicago: Moody Press, 2002). 278.

Holy Spirit (cf. John 14:26; 15:26; 16:13 where Jesus used a masculine pronoun with the neuter noun translated “Spirit”).

Only He has the supernatural power to hold Satan in check.<sup>12</sup>

## **CONCLUSION**

Referring back to verse 5, Thomas Manton says, “the doctrine of Antichrist is a profitable doctrine, and a point very necessary to be preached and known.”<sup>13</sup>

Why?

Because he will soon be revealed and we need to be ready.

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cf. *confer* (Lat.), compare

<sup>12</sup> John MacArthur, *1 & 2 Thessalonians* (Chicago: Moody Press, 2002). 278-79.

<sup>13</sup> Thomas Manton, *Works Volume 3*

Are you ready?

Are you willing to suffer for the gospel of Jesus Christ?

2 Timothy 3:12 says, “Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.”

Not only living a godly life but identifying with Christ will bring about a certain reaction from the world that is no less than persecution.

Don't be deluded.

Jesus hasn't already come nor has the Day of the Lord's wrath.

Both events are not signless as we have already seen from Matthew 24.

Let's continue to prepare ourselves to meet our Lord.

There are three ways one can be ready to meet Jesus.

One is to repent and believe in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins.

The other is, as a child of God, daily live in the righteousness of Christ.

And third, study and be prepared.

We will learn about the end for this coming world ruler next time.

Let's pray.

## **LIFE APPLICATION**

What can Christians do to prevent forgetting key teachings from Scripture?

Is this the first time you have been exposed to this type of teaching?

If the Holy Spirit is the One restraining the appearance of the Antichrist, what else does He restrain?