

## 2 Thessalonians

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### 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12

#### Vss. 1-2

- Paul begins the heart of the letter by trying to get the Thessalonians to calm down. Evidently they had become extremely shaken by the idea of the immediate approach of the Second Coming of Christ and there was even a suggestion that they had already missed it. If a traveling preacher or a random letter or anything or anyone suggests that they need to be in a panic, Paul says they are to disregard all of that.
- Evidently, they had misinterpreted some things Paul said just before his hasty departure from the city and had done the same with some things he said in the first letter. More than once I have had people upset with me because they misinterpreted something in a sermon or an article I had written, so it can easily happen.
- What Paul wants to do in the rest of these 12 verses is to help them to understand that there are things which much happen first BEFORE Christ returns.

#### Vss. 3-12

- What follows is to us perhaps a bit confusing, a passage that only raises more questions for us. But in that Paul offers no real explanation and his statement in vs. 5 that he had told them all these things when he had been with them, makes it seem that the Thessalonians understood exactly what he was saying without any additional explanation.
- First, Paul says Christ's return will not take place "unless the apostacy comes first." This seems to point to a period of general rebellion against God throughout the earth, not unlike the time before The Flood. The Greek word for apostacy literally means "falling away" so that this will be a time when people will fall away, turn away from The Way. To the Jews who heard Jesus speak, the real sin of The Prodigal Son was not that he wasted his father's money on riotous living, but that he turned his back on his father. Paul is saying that there will be an age, a period of time, when people will fall away, turn their backs on God, and be in open rebellion against Him. When this time will come or how long it will last, he does not say or even hint. What he does say is that this rebellion **will come** like some desperate final act of Satan to throw all that he has against Christ (think of the Germans and the Battle of the Bulge just months before then of the war in Europe).

- Second, Paul says that before Christ will return “the Man of Lawlessness” will emerge and have his moment. Who this is we cannot say. It is not inappropriate to say this is another name for the Antichrist. But as we saw in 1 John (2:18) there will be (are?) many little antichrists. But here, especially in vss. 3-6, 8 it seems that Paul is speaking of a specific person. And to be clear, this is not a false Christ, but one who is actively opposing Christ and seeks to draw the world to himself.
- More, it seems that The Man of Lawlessness will be spawn from (vs. 7) “the mystery of lawlessness” which is already loose and at work in the world. In Paul’s time a mystery is something completely unknown and unexplainable. Why are people drawn to lawlessness and intentionally live lives filled with loneliness, pain, and facilitate self-destruction? If you know an iron is hot, why keep touching it? God’s way, The Way, is for your benefit and greater well-being, yet Jesus points out there are few who choose it.
- Whoever The Man of Lawlessness is, he will surely be impressive. Satan will equip him “with all power and signs and false wonders (vs. 9). People will be drawn to him and choose him because they “did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness” (vs. 12).
- Three final thoughts: First, vs. 11 says God “will send upon them a deluding influence”. The idea here is that if the beginning of sin is to forsake God, then the end of sin is to be God forsaken (Herschel Hobbs). What God does is give us what we want. If we choose the self-deluded idea that we don’t need God and we can manage our lives and our world just fine without Him, He will give us over to our delusions. God does not will it. It is God’s will that none should perish and that all should be saved. But destruction via self-delusion is the natural outcome of rejecting God’s moral and spiritual law, of rejecting The Way. Second, how will The Man of lawlessness be destroyed? Not by massive armies, nor nuclear bombs. No, this mighty force of evil will be destroyed by a simple breath from the mouth of Christ. In Greek, the word “to destroy” means to render something completely inoperable. So not only will The Man of Lawlessness be destroyed, but all of the machinations of evil will be destroyed as well. Third, what is it that is currently restraining him? Many are tempted to point to a Roman emperor as The Man, but time and again in Paul’s life it was the Roman empire who rescued Paul: magistrates, officers, and Roman law itself. But we need not look far to see what may happen when lawless people take over governments and the evil such governments can produce. It seems all that is restraining The Man is an international system of law based loosely on God’s moral law. Set such a system aside and there will no longer be any restraint.