



PAUL'S LETTERS TO THE
THESSALONIANS

Lesson 9 • 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12
October 31, 2021



LESSON PLAN



Lesson	Date	Passage
1	9/5/2021	Introduction
2	9/12/2021	1 Thessalonians 1:1-10
3	9/19/2021	1 Thessalonians 2:1-16
4	9/26/2021	1 Thessalonians 2:17-3:13
5	10/3/2021	1 Thessalonians 4:1-12
6	10/10/2021	1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11
7	10/17/2021	1 Thessalonians 5:12-28
8	10/24/2021	2 Thessalonians 1:1-12
9	10/31/2021	2 Thessalonians 2:1-12
10	11/7/2021	2 Thessalonians 2:13-3:5
11	11/14/2021	2 Thessalonians 3:6-18
12	11/21/2021	Review
13	11/28/2021	Reading and Reflection

Passage Outline

- A Deep Concern (2:1-2)
- A Deception Corrected (2:3-4)
- The Lawless One (2:5-10)
- A Powerful Delusion (2:11-12)



5 minutes – 11:10 to 11:15

- After a customary greeting and offering encouragement to trust God in the midst of suffering, Paul moves now into the main points of **his letter**. The first topic of this **second** letter sounds very familiar as Paul again addresses questions about the return of Jesus Christ. This was definitely a **topic** that was disturbing the Thessalonian believers. In the first twelve verses of Chapter 2, we will hear Paul providing details around the coming day of the Lord. While we do not know the exact reasons Paul returns to this subject, it is clear that Paul felt more was needed to be said to help this church work through their questions.
- Read 2 Thes. 2:1-12
- Review Outline

A Deep Concern (v. 2:1-2)

- An important request (v. 1)
- An expressed error (v. 2)



10 minutes – 11:15 to 11:25

- In the first part of verse 1, Paul provides the context for his deep concern over this topic; and in introducing the topic he makes a request. **Sticking to verse 1, what are the two areas that frame the context of the Thessalonians concern?**
 - One, the coming of Jesus Christ
 - Two, being gathered to Him
 - These two events should sound familiar as they are the topics that Paul addresses in his first letter
 - Paul is concerned with their understanding of what will happen and how they are responding to error that had been introduced to the church
 - We should not dismiss their concern and confusion because they were likely connecting the persecution and severe hardship with the coming of Christ
- So in **verse 2** we see that he makes a request of them. **What does he ask?**
 - That they **not** be quickly shaken; unsettled or easily misled from what Paul had taught
 - That they **not** become alarmed; feeling panicked or frightened
- Paul addresses three means by which this may have happened.

- By the spirit (lower case) or prophecy (given in error), spoken word or teaching (again error or false teaching), a false letter (someone trying to discourage them)
- **So what was their concern?**
 - That Christ had already come
 - It seems that someone or somehow they were being told that there were signs that they had been left behind
 - This was undermining the teaching that Paul had given them
 - And they may have been more vulnerable to this error by Paul's early departure
- Whatever was happening in Thessalonica, there **is** a great amount of confusion about the timing of Christ's coming. This is clear from Paul's first letter and the immediacy with which Paul addresses it here in this second letter. Despite Paul's previous clarification, it seems the questions continued or Paul had ongoing concerns. Paul seems aware that the Thessalonians had been exposed to false teaching and were being fed error instead of truth. Perhaps because they were new believers, they were open to receive this distorted teaching and began to believe that Christ had already come. We can imagine that coming to such a conclusion would be very distressing. I remember waking up one morning as a young teenager. I searched the house for my mom for several minutes and could not find anyone. In that moment, I became convinced that the rapture had come and felt a bit of panic. Fortunately, my mother was just over at the neighbors and had lost track of time. But it was very a distressing moment.
- I think Paul's understood this and was concerned for them. His request then is heartfelt and is for their good. He calls on them to hold firm and not to waver from what they had been taught. This is a great reminder to us to hold fast to the truth of God's word in midst of a world filled with error and leading us to waver from following Christ.

A Deception Corrected (v. 2:3-4)

- The timing of Christ's coming (v. 3)
- The signs of Christ's coming (v. 4)



10 minutes – 11:25 to 11:35

- After expressing his deep concern over the error introduced to this church about the day of the Lord, Paul presents his correction of the deception that had developed.
- **What is Paul's exhortation to them at the beginning of verse 3?**
 - To not let anyone deceive them. It is not clear who, if anyone, Paul is referring to here. But he is clearly urging them not to be led astray.
 - Let's give the Thessalonians some credit. I don't think they would have easily been deceived. It is likely that the source of this error had enough credibility or persuasiveness that a good number of of them had begun to believe the error; and it was upsetting and undermining the faith of some.
- **What two things does Paul tell them must happen before the Lord comes?**
 - First, the rebellion must come first; the word for rebellion here is the same word for apostate. While it is not clear here, there is some form of rebellion that will be evident and a sign to believers prior to Christ's return. Based on the text here, this is best interpreted as a large number of people abandoning or falling away from the faith. This could be a part of an all-out **rebellion** against Christ and his church. But the primary sense is that many

will depart from the church and embrace deception. Given this explanation, we can see how the Thessalonian believers might have believed that they were living in a time of rebellion or retaliation against the church and that Christ had come.

- Second, the man of lawlessness must be revealed; Paul's description here is simply a man who is "without law". That is, someone without any moral boundaries. This person will be an agent of evil and a representative of Satan. He is not Satan, since he is referred to later in this text. He is also described the "son of destruction" or in some translations as the man doomed for destruction. The best arguments favor seeing this person as the Antichrist, but from this text alone that is not clear. Nor is it Paul's point. What Paul wants them to understand are the signs when that day would come and to know that Christ will prevail. In knowing the future, we have hope. In the verses to come, we **will** rest in the truth that one who comes to oppose Christ will be defeated and destroyed.
- In verse 4, Paul continues with more details by providing signs of Christ's coming.
What does he say that the "man of lawlessness" will do?
 - He will oppose any and every other deity that is worshipped; including the one true God and worshipping Christ. He will set himself up against anyone or anything that would claim people's devotion.
 - He will exalt himself over every other object of worship. It seems that he will place himself in a position above all others and claim to be the legitimate and proper object of people's worship.
 - Finally, his boldness will be demonstrated when he sets himself up in the temple of God and proclaims to be God. The text indicates that he "sits" in the temple, as on a throne. The sense here symbolizes an attempt to show authority. This does not seem to be a position that he is appointed to, but one he takes for himself. The thought may be that this "man of lawlessness" either will take his place in the temple or will put his own image there to be worshiped. He will expect others to attribute him with divine honors that belong to God alone.
- **What was it that Paul likely taught to the Thessalonians?** Probably what Christ taught, which we find in **Matt. 24:3-16**. Have someone read this text aloud. Listen to the similarities.

The Lawless One (v. 2:5-10)

- A call to reminder (v. 5-6)
- Is being restrained (v. 7)
- Will be killed (v. 8)
- Will deceive the perishing (v. 9-10)



10 minutes – 11:35 to 11:50

- Paul moves on to tell the Thessalonians more about the lawless one in verse 5 through 10. As we know from the previous letter, the events that were to precede the day of the Lord was not new information to the Thessalonians. During his stay there, Paul had taught them about these matters.
- Paul starts in verse 5 with a call to remember. He reminds them of the things they had learned by asking something like this. “Don’t you remember when I was with you I used to teach you about these things?” **What does the question imply?**
 - That the church already had sufficient instruction to evaluate and reject the deceptive teaching that had so moved to doubt and fear. What they needed to do was simply remember and apply Paul’s teaching. But as is frequently the case in the battle against sin and error, we are prone to forget truth. So Paul calls them to remember what they already know.
- Let’s look at verse 6. **What does Paul call them to remember?**
 - That they know what is holding the man of lawlessness back; the what here is referring is a spiritual force or power that is restraining the coming of the lawless one. We are not given the details behind what is doing the restraining. But we will see in the next few verses that the who behind the

what, is God.

- **Why is he being held back? Look for the “so that”.**
 - That he may be revealed when it is time; or at the right time. God is working out the course of history and the redemption of man according to his timeline. Paul’s point here is to assure them that this time has not yet come. The lawless one is being restrained according to God’s perfect and sovereign plan.
- In verse 7, Paul observes that this power, described as the mystery of lawlessness, is not just a future threat but is a present reality. The verb “at work” (energeitai in the Greek) means to be supernaturally active and is found in a different form again in verse 9. How it works and is active is a mystery and not for us to know. But knowing from the previous verses that **he** will come as one demanding worship, should cause us to be on the look out for those who might use religion or religious means to deceive people. Regardless, it is a mystery. Which given its spiritual nature, means it is of a realm that is beyond our means to fully understand. Even though the lawless one is not here yet, we are to be aware that there are activities and things that are happening that are leading up to his coming.
- The wording here is a somewhat hard to follow. **What is keeping the lawless one from being fully active?**
 - God’s restraining power must be removed.
 - Paul is clear here that the mystery of lawlessness while active, is working only in part. It is currently being restrained. But there will come a time when that which is restraining it will be removed.
 - A simpler wording of this verse would be “For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work and is being restrained until that one takes those restraints out of the way.”
- Paul continues his thought in verse 8 noting that when these restraints are removed the lawless one will be revealed. The wording here conveys a sense of immediacy. Once the restraints are removed the lawless one will take the stage. The idea here is again one of removing the veil. The verb that describes his coming indicates that the veil will be removed and he will be seen by everyone.
- But lest the Thessalonians become concerned, Paul tells them of the ultimate end. **What will happen to the lawless one?**
 - He will be killed by Jesus by his breath (Paul may be alluding to Is. 11:4); he will not just be defeated, he will be destroyed; his power and authority will be broken
 - He will be brought to nothing by Christ’s appearing or return; Jesus will return with such power and authority that it will render the work of the lawless one to nothing
- Paul provides a few additional but important details about the lawless one in verses 9 and 10. **Who is behind the lawless one?**
 - Satan; literally, his coming is by the activity or supernatural workings of

Satan

- **What will accompany the lawless one?**
 - He will come with power and false signs; the idea here is that he will appear doing wondrous things that appear as signs, but they will be counterfeit.
 - He will come with **all kinds of wicked** deceptions to mislead those who are perishing; Not the extent of his deception here – all kinds and wicked. Is it any wonder that an agent of Satan will come with lies and false signs to deceive the world? Satan will employ every form of deceitfulness and seduction to lead the world in rejecting the truth of the gospel and to keep them from being saved.
- Paul provides the reason for this at the end of verse 10. **Why will they be deceived?**
 - Because they refused to love the truth. Isn't it interesting that Paul chose the word "love" here? The point here is that the lost will perish not because they did not know the truth, but because they refused to love and believe it. They reject the Gospel as truth and have no desire or affection for it. How do you know you are a Christian? You will have a love for God's word. You will have a desire to know it. Our ultimate destiny is bound up in our relation to the **truth**. Either we reject the truth of our need for salvation or we embrace it and love it as God's grace and mercy to us. To love truth is to obey it and strive to walk according to it. **And** those who are deceived and reject the truth will not be saved.
- **Is it any different here in our modern day? Has any of this changed? Do we see this in the world around us?**
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A Powerful Delusion (v. 2:11-12)

- The consequences of rejecting the truth (v. 11)
- The judgement for rejecting the truth (v. 12)



10 minutes – 11:50 to 12:00

- Note the word “Therefore” here at the beginning, connecting us to the context immediately prior to this verse. What follows is tied to those who have refused to love the truth. Paul concludes his thoughts by pointing out the ultimate end of those who have rejected the truth. What Paul says here may surprise some. These can be hard truths to hear.
- Paul starts this connection in verse 11. **What does he note is a consequence of rejecting the truth?**
 - God brings a powerful delusion to them. What God sends them in a judicial act is a powerful supernatural **and** action. This “power” produces in them a great delusion. Since they did not receive the truth of the gospel, God causes them to be confused so that they cannot distinguish between good and evil, between truth and **the lie**. And so they believe lies as if they were truth. And believe truth to be lies.
 - As **strange** as this kind of judgment may **seem** to us, it is in harmony with other scripture that shows God giving sinners over to be consumed and destroyed by their rejection of His ways.
 - I also think there is a connection here to the mystery of lawlessness. We

should not be surprising that those who have rejected the truth of the gospel will rebel against it. And in their rebellion they will reject the Gospel and believe the lies which are the work of the lawless one.

- Does this sound like the world around us? Do we see good replaced with evil? Do we see sin celebrated and treated as if it were good? Do we see the truth of scripture treated as if it were lies? We should not be surprised. This is God bringing a delusion upon those who have rejected truth. And unless the Spirit opens the eyes of the lost, they will not see it nor their need for a Savior.
- In verse 12 we see God's purpose in this delusion. **Why does God send them a powerful delusion?**
 - So that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth; in accepting the lies of Satan and rejecting the truth of the Gospel, they incur God's fair judgement upon themselves. The word translated "condemned" here comes from the legal world and points to judgement and conviction of guilt.
- **Who does Paul say will experience God's condemnation?**
 - Those who have not believed the truth; those who rejected the message of the Gospel – salvation in and through Jesus alone
 - Those who took pleasure in unrighteousness; delighted in wickedness and lies. The idea here is of those who have accepted and given in to the deception and lies of Satan.
 - None of those who believe what is false will escape God's condemnation. All who reject His truth will experience it. There will be no exceptions.
- In what ways do we see that the world not only rejects God's truth, but embraces Satan's lies? What happens to people when the rule of law and constraints of society are removed?



5 minutes – 12:00 to 12:00