

2 Thessalonians 2:1-12 Answers Precursors to the Day of the Lord

Introduction: Short prophetic statements can be found throughout the New Testament. However, there are relatively few many lengthy passages in the New Testament on end time events. The first major passage is Jesus' Olivette Discourse found in Matthew 24 (and its parallel in Mark 13 and Luke 21). Next is 1 Corinthians 15 (the resurrection of the dead). The next stop is not until 1 Thessalonians 4 (the Coming of the Lord), followed by 1 Thessalonians 5 (the Day of the Lord, Part 1). Then comes 2 Thessalonians 1 (Judgment Day), 2 Thessalonians 2 (the Day of the Lord, Part 2), 2 Peter 3 (the Day of the Lord) and then the whole book of Revelation. It is not an insurmountable amount of material to read. If it weren't for the book of Revelation, it would be fairly straight-forward!

Today we are going to discuss two things that have to happen before the Day of the Lord comes.

****What did Paul want the Thessalonians to realize about the Day of the Lord (2:1-12)?

He wanted them to know **1)** the Day of the Lord has not come yet and **2)** will not come until after **a)** the rebellion and **b)** the appearing of the man of lawlessness. The point of the whole passage was to reassure them that the Day of the Lord was not upon them and be until after the man of lawlessness was revealed.

1. Based on 2:1-3a, what caused Paul to write about the Day of the Lord? It looks as if the church might have been shaken or alarmed or deceived about the Day of the Lord due to false information (perhaps in a letter supposedly from the apostles).

Word Study: "Shaken" (2:2) is from *saleuo* (4531) and means to agitate. It was used of the tossing of the sea and of an earthquake (Eadie, p. 255). They were all shook up with last days madness.

2. Did they think the Day of the Lord had already come or that it was at hand (2:2)? If they thought the Day had actually come, all Paul had to do to dispel such a false notion was to ask, "Are the tombs still occupied? Do you see Jesus standing here in person? Was the church raptured?"

The problem appears not to be that they were disturbed that they Day of the Lord had ready come, but rather that it was *about* to come, that its coming was imminent. Instead of the ESV's "has come" the KJV has "is at hand" (2:2). The Greek perfect tense verb is used here for "come", generally denoting a past event with presently continuing results. However, it can also refer to something that is impending. Chrysostom, who spoke *koiné* Greek, said here it carried the idea of near or at hand but not present (Shogren, p. 276).

3. What did Paul write about the coming of our Lord Jesus and being gathered together to him (2:1) back in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18? Paul had already written that when Jesus comes back (the Second Coming), He will bring with Him all the previously deceased saints who will be reunited with their resurrection bodies (the resurrection of the dead). Then all living saints will be caught up (raptured) together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air and thus we will all always be with the Lord.

Word Study: “Coming” (2:1) is from *parousia* (3952) and means presence or arrival (Thayer).

4. To what did the day of the Lord (2:2) refer in the Old Testament? See *Amos 5:18-20, Isaiah 13:6, 9, Jeremiah 46:10, Ezekiel 13:5, 30:3, Obadiah 15, Zephaniah 1:7, 14, Malachi 4:5, Joel 1-2*. The Day of the Lord is an eschatological phrase often used in the Old Testament to refer to any time when God intervenes in history to punish the sinful and rescue the righteous. In the Old Testament, God’s judgment typically came in the form of invasion by a foreign army. All Old Testament fulfillments of the Day of the Lord typify the ultimate Day of the Lord: the Second Coming of Christ (*NBD*, p. 269).

5. What can we learn about the New Testament Day of the Lord (2:2) from 2:1-12? The Day of the Lord is associated with:

- 1) The coming and appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ (2:1, 8).
- 2) Our being gathered together to Him (2:1).
- 3) The destruction the man of lawlessness (2:8).

6. What had Paul written about the Day of the Lord (2:2) back in 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11? Previously, Paul wrote that the Day of the Lord will be a day of judgment, destruction and wrath that will come upon unbelievers like a thief in the night. That was part A, this is part B.

A Package Deal: All these events related to the Day of the Lord appear to happen at once: Jesus comes, the church is raptured and the rebellious are destroyed. If there is a seven year gap between the rapture and the Second Coming, or a one thousand year gap between the Second Coming and the Great White Throne Judgment, it is not stated here.

Technical Note: Some think this passage is a reference to the A.D. 70 judgment coming of Christ. They take Nero or Titus to be the man of lawlessness and the Jewish revolt against the Romans to be the rebellion. However, in light of 2:1 (the coming of the Lord and our being gathered together to Him), 1 Thessalonians 4, 5 and 2 Thessalonians 1 (which are about these same subjects and clearly refer to the Second Coming), this passage almost has to be concerning the Second Coming.

Review: What two things did Paul say to look for before the Day of the Lord comes (2:3)? He said to look for **1)** the rebellion (ESV) and **2)** the revealing of the man of lawlessness.

7. What in 2:3 indicates whether the church will go through the Tribulation or not? Paul expected the church to be on earth to witness the rebellion and the revealing of the man of lawlessness. That is one of the signs of the times so that the Day of the Lord does not catch the church unprepared, like a thief in the night.

8. What is the difference between rebellion (ESV, 2:3) and apostasy (NAS, 2:3)? A rebellion can be against any type of authority (parental or governmental). An example would be the Jewish rebellion against the Romans in the A.D. 70s. However, apostasy is specifically the renunciation of a religious faith.

The Greek word here is *apostasia* (646). Although we get the word apostasy from it, this is confusing as regards its actual meaning. *Apo* means away from and *histémi* means to stand. Thus it means to stand away from in the sense of a defection or revolt (Thayer). In classical Greek *apostasia* was a technical term for political revolt. In the LXX it was always used to refer to rebellion against God. Here in our verse it seems to refer to a final, catastrophic revolt against God (*NBD*, p. 59).

Thus, if we take *apostasia* to mean apostasy we might look for people to defect from the church in a wholesale fashion. Others take it to refer to the apostasy of the Jews from the true worship of Jehovah when they rejected Jesus the Messiah.

9. What rebellion could Paul have meant (2:3)? See *Revelation 20:7-9*. Per the above word study on *apostasia*, the rebellion Paul referred to may not be the mass defection from the church, but rather some type of mass (world-wide?) rebellion against God (perhaps such as was seen in the French Revolution but on a much larger scale). The world wide spread of atheistic communism and evolutionary Darwinism may be the beginnings of this rebellion. On the other hand, the spread of any false religion (Islam, Buddhism and Hinduism) constitutes a rebellion against the truth. Orthodox preterists think this refers to the Jewish revolt against Rome.

10. What can we learn about the man of lawlessness from 2:3-4? He will **1)** be associated with lawlessness and destruction, **2)** will exalt himself against every god or object of worship and **3)** will proclaim that he is God.

Alias: He could also be called the Man of Sin, based on 1 John 3:4.

ESV **1 John 3:4** . . . sin is lawlessness.

Historical Forerunners: This is happened before in history. For example, Daniel 11:36 predicted similar antics on the part of Antiochus Epiphanies:

ESV **Daniel 11:36** . . . 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 . . .

Also, various Roman demented emperors demanded to be worshipped as divine.

11. To what temple of God did Paul refer (2:4)? See *Matthew 24:15*, *1 Corinthians 3:16-17*, *2 Corinthians 6:16*, *Ephesians 2:21*, *Revelation 3:12*.

- a) Many interpreters naturally link Paul's statement with Jesus' warning about "the abomination of desolation spoken of by the prophet Daniel, standing in the holy place" (Mt 24:15). The Jerusalem temple was standing when Paul wrote this. The problem is that both the temple and the holy place were destroyed in A.D. 70 by the Romans. Thus, some look for a rebuilt Jewish temple in Jerusalem prior to the Second Coming. Many early writers, such as Irenaeus (late A.D. 100s) and Cyril of Jerusalem (A.D. 300s) expected the now ruined temple to be rebuilt (Eadie, p. 272).
- b) Others see Jesus' words (Mt 24) as already fulfilled in the events leading up the A.D. 70 destruction of the temple and look for a different fulfillment of Paul's words. Some see Paul's reference to the temple of God as figurative, meaning the man of lawlessness will claim a standing in society reserved only for God.
- c) Since Paul elsewhere referred to the church as the temple of God, some say this refers to the church (leading many to peg whatever pope occupies the office of the papacy as the man of lawlessness).

To what reminder did Paul appeal in 2:5? Paul had told them all these things when he was still with them, before he had to leave town. They evidently already knew a lot of this. In fact, Paul told them some things that we don't even know (2:6).

According to 2:6-7, what is keeping the man of lawless from being revealed? Something ("what", 2:6) and/or someone ("he", 2:7) is even "now" (2:6) restraining him.

12. Who or what might this restrainer be (2:2-7)? Paul reminded his readers that they knew what is restraining him, but Paul did not record it for us. Guesses as to the identity of the restrainer include the Holy Spirit, an angel, the chains binding Satan in Revelation 20, the church, the rule of law, the Roman Empire and even Nero's mother (!).

13. What are we to make of the fact that Paul wrote as if the man of lawlessness was living when he wrote this (2:6)? See *1 John 2:18*, *4:3*. In every age there has been no end to potential candidates who could become the man of lawlessness. The restrainer is keeping a lid on bad developments until the right time. Similarly, the New Testament states there are already *many* antichrists (plural) and that there is a *spirit* of antichrist (1Jn 2:18, 4:3).

ESV 1 John 4:3 . . . This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already.

It or he? Just as the restrainer is called both “it” and “he” by Paul, so is the man of lawlessness (him/his in 2:6; it in 2:7). In Revelation there is a character called the “Beast” who is sometimes an empire and sometimes a man at the head of the empire. Some people feel the man of lawlessness is the same as the Beast of Revelation 13. Maybe so; maybe not! It all depends on how one interprets Revelation. My view as of this writing is Paul is describing someone who will arise just prior to the Second Coming, whereas John was describing a first century character.

Other guesses as to the identity of the man of lawlessness have included Nero, Napoleon and the office of the papacy (which would be both an it and a he).

14. What is the mysterious of lawlessness (2:7)? “Mystery” (2:7) is from *musterion* (3466) and means a hidden thing, secret, not obvious to the understanding, a hidden purpose (Thayer). Lawlessness works in secret (mysteriously/underground) until it is openly personified in the man of lawlessness (Shogren, p. 286).

Based on 2:8, what fate awaits the lawless one? He will be killed and brought to nothing by Jesus at His coming.

15. What does it mean for Jesus to kill by His breath (2:8)? See *Revelation 19:11-21*.

Joke: This proves that it is biblical to have bad breath! Perhaps this is to illustrate the ease with which Jesus will destroy the lawless one: He will simply *blow* him away. The same God who spoke the world into existence will speak the man of lawlessness into destruction.

This also sounds a lot like what Jesus will do to the Beast of Revelation (but in my opinion describes a different event):

ESV Revelation 19:11-21 . . . I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war . . . From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations . . . He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty . . . And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth with their armies gathered to make war against him who was sitting on the horse and against his army. And the beast was captured, and with it the false prophet who in its presence had done the signs by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped its image. These two were thrown alive into the lake of fire that burns with sulfur. And the rest were slain by the sword that came from the mouth of him who was sitting on the horse . . .

16. According to 2:9-10, what supernatural help will the lawless one receive? The lawless one will be empowered by Satan. He will have power and false signs and wonders and wicked deception. My view is that this is a future man of sin who will be empowered just prior to Jesus’ Second Coming. John described a similar Satanic empowerment of the Beast (which I think was fulfilled in the first century):

ESV Revelation 13:2 . . . to it [the beast] the dragon [Satan] gave his power and his throne and great authority.

Based on 2:10, what will make people so susceptible to the lawless man's deceit? It is because they already refused to love the truth and so be saved.

In speaking of generations past, Paul wrote:

ESV **Romans 1:25** . . . they exchanged the truth about God for a lie . . .

In speaking of the events leading up to A.D. 70, Jesus said:

ESV **Matthew 24:24** . . . false christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect.

What role will God play in the lawless one's popularity (2:11-12)? God will send them a strong delusion.

17. Why would God cause people to believe what is false (2:11-12)? He will do it order that they all may be condemned since they did not believe the truth but instead took pleasure in unrighteousness.

ESV **Romans 9:18** . . . he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills.

ESV **Romans 11:7-8** . . . Israel failed to obtain what it was seeking. The elect obtained it, but the rest were hardened, as it is written, "God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes that would not see and ears that would not hear, down to this very day."

ESV **1 Peter 2:8** . . . They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do.

These really are the hard things of God (no pun intended).

So What?

18. What was Paul's goal in writing 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12? It was to be sure they were not deceived by a false teaching concerning the timing of the Day of the Lord.

What two things will happen before the Day of the Lord comes? The man of lawlessness will be revealed and there will be great rebellion.

19. What in this passage indicates whether or not the church will be raptured out before all this happens? The church feared the Day of the Lord was upon them. Paul expected the church to be on the earth to witness the rebellion and the rise of the man of lawlessness. Otherwise, all Paul had to do was write, "You don't need to worry about end times events, the church will be raptured out long before anything bad happens!"

20. What parallels can be detected between 2 Thessalonians 1 & 2 and the events of Revelation 20? Suppose the thousand years are symbolic of the church age. The **restrainer** (2Ths 2:6) would be the chain that binds Satan in his efforts to deceive the nations. Then at the close of the church age, just before Jesus' return, the restrainer is taken **out of the way**, loosing Satan who will empower the man of lawlessness (2Ths 2:7). The nations will **believe a lie** since they are deceived by Satan, **rebel** against God and gather to surround to destroy the church (2Ths 2:3, 9-10). Then in both passages, **fire** from heaven will destroy the wicked (2Th 1:7-8) and they will face **eternal destruction** (2Th 1:9) at the Great White Throne Judgment (Jay Adams, *The Time is at Hand*, p. 19).

21. Based on 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12 how imminent is the return of Christ? Compare 2 Thessalonians 1:7. No one knows the exact day or hour of Jesus' return, but we can know the signs of the times and the season for it. The Thessalonians feared that the Day of the Lord was upon them. Paul wrote clearly that the Day would not come until after the rebellion and the revealing on the man of lawlessness. Based on 2 Thessalonians 1:7, Paul believed that Jesus might return within his lifetime. Imminence is a matter of a generation, but not at any moment. The man of lawlessness has yet to appear.

Note: To maintain a belief in that Jesus might return at any moment, some hold to the secret return of Jesus to rapture his church before the appearing of the man of lawlessness and before the actual Second Coming. Yet at we've already seen from 2 Thessalonians 2, Paul expected the church to be on earth to witness the rise of the man of sin.

**** = ask this question before reading the text aloud. This is put people's minds in gear, giving them something to look for as the text is read. It causes focus.

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