

## **THE COMINGS OF THE ANTICHRIST AND CHRIST**

### **2 Thessalonians 2**

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Did the Lord return? Did we miss Him? Are we going through what we were going through because the Lord has not returned and doesn't intend to return?

These are the thoughts of the Thessalonians as they struggle with the whole matter of the Lord's return. There are some within the church that were teaching that the day of the Lord had come.

These Thessalonian believers, having a knowledge of the Old Testament Scripture and a knowledge of the apostolic teaching, realize that if the day of the Lord indeed had come, only one inference could be made—that the Lord himself had either come or did not intend to come, because the day of the Lord represents the outpouring of the wrath of God. If believers are living in a period of time which may be called “the day of the Lord,” then it would indicate that either the Lord didn't intend to come or that He already had come.

These are the fears of the Thessalonian believers as Paul continues writing, in the Thessalonian letter, chapter 2, “Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him, we ask you, brothers, not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by some prophecy, report or letter supposed to have come from us, saying that the day of the Lord has already come” (2 Thessalonians 2:1–2, NIV). What was the response of some of these believers who felt that the day of the Lord had come? They were, as the text indicates, “shaken.” Shaken in mind.

The word which is used here for “shaken” is used elsewhere in the Scripture. It's used in the sixteenth chapter of the Book of Acts, when Paul and Silas are in a prison cell in Philippi. As they are singing hymns unto God, at about midnight, there was a great earthquake. The place was shaken. That word “shaken” denotes “swaying,” “turbulence,” “violent tossing.” It certainly

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indicates the character of unsettledness that had come upon these Thessalonian believers as they lived their discipleship to Christ under the fear that they had missed it.

Another word is used of their response. They were “excited.” That word “excited” is used only four times in the New Testament. Three times it’s used, it’s not translated as “excited.” It’s translated as “alarmed.” Jesus used the word in His Olivet Discourse in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. In that particular statement, Jesus says that when these things come to pass, do not be alarmed. Christians in an age of crisis are the most settled, the most enduring, the most constant people that can be found. So if being shaken or excited about this whole prospect of the coming of the Lord is referred to—the shakiness and the excitedness are an unsettling kind of thing. It’s not to be a part of the believer’s experience.

How had they gotten into that feeling? They were a charismatic church. They believed in the gifts of the Spirit being exercised in their body and in their midst. Evidently, one of the gifts which was exercised in the church was prophecy. We find, in 1 Thessalonian 5, that Paul exhorts them not to despise prophesying. Prophecy can be perceived as a steady proclamation of the Word of God to man or it can be seen as something that is spontaneous—a short word, a spontaneous word of the Lord to the congregation in a particular moment. Evidently, someone within this congregation had been exercising a false gift of prophecy and had “prophesied” that the day of the Lord had come.

In 1 Thessalonians 5, when he talked about not despising prophecy, Paul had immediately gone on to say, “Test everything. Hold on to the good. Avoid every kind of evil” (2 Thessalonians 2:21-22). Here, in the Thessalonian congregation, so called prophecy had emerged and they said the day of the Lord had come. Here is where we always, in reference to any exercise of the gifts of the Spirit, bring to bear on the exercise of that gift the very plain doctrine of Scripture. If in

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any utterance the spirit is in conflict with what God has already revealed, it must be classified, not as an utterance of the Spirit, but as a false word. They'd been unsettled by this happening. Evidently, also the unsettling had occurred by word. That is, there were individuals within the congregation who were teaching this prophecy that the day of the Lord had come and they were left out and were only going to experience God's wrath. Perhaps someone had even forged a letter from the apostle Paul, for he indicates that they shouldn't become unsettled by some "report or letter supposed to have come from us, saying that the day of the Lord has already come" (2 Thessalonians 2:2). There were some lying individuals, evidently, who were masquerading as Christians within this body in order to re-emphasize their doctrine, who had written a letter purporting to be from the apostle Paul. It was either that or somebody had gotten the idea that Paul had written a letter to that effect. While nobody had ever seen it, a lot of people had begun to believe the rumor.

But in either case—by spirit, by word or by letter—Paul says the day of the Lord has not come. And that day of the Lord, as we saw several weeks ago through relevant Old Testament texts, is a day when God exercises His justice upon the nations. When He imposes His rule. When He smashes the forces of evil. In that day of the Lord, in the exercise of God's judgment, when the world is literally falling apart from a human point of view, God's people are called to be with Him to experience only His peace and His grace—never His wrath.

Why has the day of the Lord not come? Paul cites three reasons why the day of the Lord has not come. These are to be settling reasons for the Thessalonian believers.

#### **I. The first reason why the day of the Lord has not come is found in verse 3.**

"Don't let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs" (2 Thessalonians 2:3, NIV). The word which is used here for "rebellion" is the word "apostasy."

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It's the same word in the Greek. It literally means "a deliberate, provocative, planned and well executed revolt." In usage outside the Scripture, in the Greek language, it is used to describe political rebellion. Even within the text of Scripture, it can be used to describe those who revolt against God. So that there is to be one thing which is to happen before the day of the Lord: that the spirit of rebellion which is in man will come to a head and burst. And there will be a period of time which can be accurately classified as rebellion.

How will this apostasy occur? And who will be involved in it? The Scriptures indicate that organized religion, organized Christianity, ecclesiastical Christianity, will have within it that same happening. Very clearly, Jesus says, in the Olivet Discourse of Matthew 24, that there will come a falling away and brother will bear witness against brother. Paul, in writing to Timothy, in chapter 4:1, indicates that in the latter times, men will apostatize from the faith and give heed to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons.

Another clear manifestation of the apostasy or the rebellion is to take place in the world. When men become lovers of themselves more than lovers of God. When the age of wickedness and increase of licentiousness reaches its apex. There comes a point in which the spirit of man rebels totally against the Spirit of God. An age of rebellion. The Thessalonians might ask—and we might legitimately ask—are we not already in this age? Yes we are. The seeds of that age are growing in the present.

Jesus talks about it in Matthew 13, in the parable of the weeds and the wheat. He, as the sower, went out to sow and He planted the wheat and it is growing. But while He was planting, there was an attack of the enemy who planted weeds. How neurotic to plant weeds! But that is the sick element of the nature of our enemy. He plants weeds. Jesus says that they both grow together

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until the harvest. Very clearly, also, the Scriptures point to the fact that, as the age continues, man's wickedness will increase along with men's knowledge.

What is happening in our age, what happened in the Thessalonian age is to some a mystery, but to the believer, it's the truth. That evil is growing, side by side, with God's people. That evil is going to systematically develop into more evil until the day when God reaps the harvest and declares that the evil has reached the point when it can be classified as an outright rebellion of all who are without God. A growing kind of rebellion is to characterize the spirit of the age.

Sometimes, we think of the rebellion and wickedness of man as initiating an increase in licentiousness. Sometimes ministers, preachers like myself, have a tendency to spout out a lot of statistics to the congregation. The latest reports are used to justify the scriptural teaching that wickedness is multiplying. There's a truth to that. I believe the more we go into the character of the age, the more we'll see an abundance of that.

But licentiousness, sensual sins, are certainly not the only manifestation of wickedness the Scriptures talk about. In fact, the deceitful nature of rebellion and wickedness at the end of the age is that there will be men whose wickedness will be a hard-heartedness toward God.

Individuals who don't beat their wives, who don't commit adultery, who don't break in to rob or steal, but whose hearts are set against God and who say, ultimately, "Man is God, there is no God." Indeed, aren't the seeds of that planted throughout our system, through our educational system, throughout the scientific community, throughout the cultural community, throughout the youth? Everywhere we see those seeds. The Scriptures indicate that in God's time there is to be a day in which a rebellion will be so absolute and manifest that men will have as their god only themselves, or will set themselves up by worshipping themselves for the false god to make himself known.

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The rebellion has not come. The apostasy—away from God—is present but not yet fully, finally developed.

#### **II. Another thing has yet to occur before the day of the Lord comes: the revelation of the man of lawlessness.**

The end of verse 3 says, “For that day will not come until...the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction” (NIV). The Thessalonians are to take comfort in the fact that they are to know that the day of the Lord has not come, because this man of lawlessness has not been revealed. He must be revealed before the day of God’s wrath, before the day of the Lord occurs.

Who is this man of lawlessness? Scriptures define him in various ways. In fact, Scripture is filled with insights into the character of this end-time person. In the Book of Daniel, we see the first glimpses of the man of lawlessness. He’s described in Daniel 7 in the following terms, “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” (Daniel 7:25). Sometimes I’ve wondered if this doesn’t reflect the nature of the antichrist government—“to change the times.”

How would you do that? I suppose one way you could do it is to quit calling things A.D. and B.C. I suppose another thing you could do is revolutionize the system of the week or the system of the month. But he has that awesome kind of authority; he changes laws and other things which have passed for human convention for centuries.

When you consider the fact that if there is indeed to be—as the Scriptures teach—a one-world government under a dictator, you think of individual nationalities trying to emerge. Under that one-world authority, just think of how many individual laws might have to come down in order to receive a central law.

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Daniel goes on to further speak of him in terms of his being a prince and/or a king. He writes in Daniel 11, “The king will do as he pleases. He will exalt and magnify himself above every god and will say unheard-of things against the God of gods. He will be successful until the time of wrath is completed, for what has been determined must take place. He will show no regard for the gods of his fathers or for the one desired by women, nor will he regard any god, but will exalt himself above them all. Instead of them, he will honor a god of fortresses; a god unknown to his fathers he will honor with gold and silver, with precious stones and costly gifts” (Daniel 11:36–38, NIV).

The epistle of 1 John also speaks of this end-time being. Daniel describes him as a prince or a king. One who has great power. By the way, whenever the antichrist is described in Scripture, he is seen as being trumped over by God.

John, writing in 1 John 2:18, indicates “Dear children, this is the last hour; and as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come. This is how we know it is the last hour.” What is John saying as an apostle? He’s saying the same thing that characterizes a rebellion among men. The final rebellion has not yet come. The seeds of rebellion are there.

Although the final antichrist has not yet come, there are antichrists in the world. Indeed, in this age, Satan is described by Scripture as the “god of this age.” While he may have a central capital in a time to come when there is an antichrist reigning, his capital may easily be in various places today—in the government and the hearts of rulers in Moscow and Peking and Berlin, and even Washington. His government may be in your heart. It may be planted there today. Within you, the spirit of the antichrist is growing, the “against Messiah” attitude. Satan has manifested his person through individuals like Nero, Napoleon, Hitler, Mussolini, Stalin. He will manifest that

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character in a supernatural format, the end of the age, through a person whom John calls “the antichrist.”

Revelation has another term for him—Revelation 13:1–11 describes in detail the person in the administration of the antichrist that is described as a beast. An awesome individual who has supernatural power and authority. Who exercises control over the economic system, the political system and over the religious systems of man—an end time and a supernatural being.

When Paul writes of this person, however, he does not call him a prince or a king. He does not call him the Antichrist or the Beast. Instead, he uses two terms—this end-time person has so many facets to him that he can be described in many ways. One term is “man of lawlessness,” or the King James puts it “man of sin.” Probably “lawlessness” would be better to use of him. This does not mean that the reign of the antichrist will be lawless from the standpoint of the Antichrist. The reign will truly be man’s desire for law and order. There will be a law and an order in the age of the Antichrist, which will be a law and order without God. In that sense, he’s not lawless. He is the giver of laws. But in the ultimate deep spiritual sense, this man is lawless in that he has no law but his own. He will not submit to the law of God. In that respect, his character is stamped “lawlessness,” as Jesus was described by the characteristic “man of sorrows, acquainted with grief” (Isaiah 53:3). The Antichrist personality is the utter opposite—“man of lawlessness, not acquainted with grief.”

Is that man of lawlessness secretly growing and at work within you? Or is the work in you of the Man of sorrow?

Paul not only describes him as the man of lawlessness but as the “son of perdition.” That word, “perdition,” means “utter destruction.” It is a characteristic which I’m sure the antichrist is not going to use of himself. But it’s a characteristic that believers may use of him. His doom is

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certain. It is fixed. As Jesus called Judas, “son of perdition,” doomed to destruction through his treachery, so also the antichrist is in time a spiritual Judas, one who has no law but his own. Who walks away from all that is true. This is his character. This is the kind of a person he is.

What does he do? Verse 4 tells us what this end-time being will do. He opposes. It’s fascinating to discover that in the meaning of the Hebrew word “Satan,” the root of the word means “adversary.” “One who opposes.” It’s fascinating also to see that whatever Jesus is accomplishing, the Antichrist seeks to duplicate. If Jesus has risen from the dead, Revelation 13 tells us that the antichrist will be one who will recover as if from a mortal wound and will be raised, and men shall worship the image of the beast that was mortally wounded and lives. If Jesus Christ has a Second Coming, then terms which are used of Christ’s Second Coming are also used of the Antichrist. The term “revelation” or “apocalypse” or “coming,” that are used of Christ, are also used of the Antichrist. He tries to mimic or imitate Christ in every sense, but without the Spirit of Christ. He opposes.

What else does he do? He exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship. Not only is his brand of religion different and what he regards to be superior to Christianity. But all the religions of the world are going to meld in under him and he will set himself against every god or idea of man in the realm of religion. So often in society the phrase “all roads lead to God” is used. You can use the Christian road, the Hindu road, the Islam road, the Buddhist road—whichever road you take, it will lead to God. But the gospel of Jesus Christ has always stoutly denied that on the basis of the Word of Jesus: “I am the way, the truth and the life” (John 14:6). How fascinating to see that, in the end time, the antichrist will also deny that fact—all roads lead to God. He will say, “All roads do not lead to God. It is but one road. It is me and I am god.” He

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will in fact proclaim himself to be god. In other words, he won't simply be a political person. He will be also a religious person.

What else will he do? He'll take his seat in the temple of God. I suppose there are various ways to understand what is meant by "the temple of God." Some feel that he'll take his seat in the church, because in the Corinthian epistles and Ephesians, the word "temple" is used in respect to the body of Christ. So what this may represent is that he will grab ahold of the ecclesiastical machinery of the church. Others feel that by "temple" what is meant is "the national temple of Jerusalem." He will take his seat in that temple. Of course, if this is the meaning, then we are to see the temple of Jerusalem rebuilt.

Another possible meaning for "temple of God" is "dwelling place of God." "The LORD is in his holy temple" (Psalm 11:4). What will be the character of the Antichrist? To literally reign in the place of God. What will he try to do? To sit where God sits. Whatever particular view you may have of sitting in the temple of God, the central teaching is clear. He will be an usurper of authority. He will sit on the place where God seeks to sit and where God indeed does sit.

Paul indicates, "Do you not remember when I was with you I told you this?" We are only left with the written documents. That is sufficient. The Holy Spirit has seen that this is sufficient for our edification. But Paul shared directly with the Thessalonians what verse 6 and 7 would mean about the restrainer. But we have to take as an inference what he meant. In other words, there was a teaching here that was clear to the Thessalonians but has left Christians somewhat divided in terms of how to interpret verses 6 and 7. "Don't you remember that when I was with you I used to tell you these things? And now you know what is holding him back, so that he may be revealed at the proper time. For the secret power of lawlessness is already at work; but the one who now holds it back will continue to do so till he is taken out of the way" (2 Thessalonians

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2:5–7, NIV). Or a better translation of verse 7 is, “until he comes out of the midst.” The Greek word is “out of the middle” or “out of the center.” So it’s coming out of the midst.

Three things I’ve indicated happen before the day of the Lord: the rebellion or apostasy; the revelation of the man of lawlessness...

### **III. And thirdly, the restraining power and person is to be taken from the world in order for the Antichrist to emerge.**

There is something and someone that is restraining the Antichrist from making his appearance upon the pages of history. That something and someone is described in two terms. In the Greek, verses 6 and 7 both are used in regards to the restraining force.

What is restraining is a force, not a person. It’s something that can be described impersonally—a power. But not only is a force or a power restraining, it is also a person. In verse 7, it’s “he who restrains.” In other words, whatever is restraining the Antichrist from making his appearance is both impersonal (a force at work), and personal (a person). What could this be? Christians for twenty centuries have had various ideas of what this could be. What is declared is by way of inference. No one can prove that that is the interpretation and no others are possible.

But let me walk you through this for a moment to indicate what this restraining force that’s keeping the antichrist back from being revealed in his time may be.

Some have said that, in the early days of the church, it was the Roman Empire and the Emperor.

The Empire was the impersonal force and the Emperor was the person. His law and order made it possible for the gospel to spread through the world and kept a check on lawlessness. Of course, the problem with that particular view is obviously that it wouldn’t have any meaning for today.

There’s no Roman Empire or Emperor.

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There are those who have evolved that a little bit and said that the restraining force and person are really human government. As long as there is human government, with laws and civil statutes, etc., the spirit of anarchy and lawlessness cannot break out. The only problem with this particular point of view is that, if it's a government that is holding back the Antichrist, then it's not a "he." It's not a person. It's an impersonal force.

A third view that's been advanced, which many believe and adhere to and is taught in many evangelical churches, is that the Holy Spirit is the restrainer. That the Holy Spirit is both the force and the person that is holding back the Antichrist from being revealed. This particular view evolves from the fact that some originally thought that maybe it was the Church that was restraining the Antichrist from being revealed. But the Church, again, cannot be described as a person—"he." So, therefore, it couldn't be the church. So there are those who say it must be the Holy Spirit in the Church. And when the Church is taken out of the world, the Holy Spirit also goes and therefore lawlessness breaks out.

There are several problems with that point of view. While it is very attractive, there are some problems with it. One is that it is largely built upon the idea that the word "spirit" in Greek is a neuter word. So, therefore, when you read verse 6, "what restraineth," you can say the Holy Spirit can be described as a force, since the term is neuter. Then you turn around and describe the Holy Spirit in terms of a personal force. The only problem with that is that, while the Greek word itself is neuter, the person of the Holy Spirit is not neuter. "He," Jesus says. And in John 16, Jesus makes a real point by noting the person of the Spirit—"He will lead you into all truth, He will guide you" (John 16:13).

Sometimes in my experience, people would receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit and then say, "I got it!" I'd just cringe. You don't get *it*. You get *Him*. He is not an "it." He is a person.

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There is also a problem with that point of view in the Book of Revelation, because there we see a great multitude who are brought out of the Tribulation, who have their robes washed in the blood of the Lamb, who have come through triumphant. And really, if God is going to take His Spirit out of the world when the Christians depart, then He's immediately going to have to turn around and put Him right back in order to make Christians who would have their allegiance to Christ stand up during that period of time. Scriptures teach that Jesus is coming before the manifestation of God's wrath. Whether seven seconds or seven years, this is sure. We will not experience the wrath of God because we are destined for God's grace.

What is another possibility in terms of the "restraining force"? The possibility that makes the most sense is that the restrainer is God himself, who has a plan whereby, in this age, He allows men freedom of choice. Satan is called "the god of this age." In the ultimate plan of God, God allows this. And therefore, the power of God, that which restrains, is the power and the plan of God which keeps the Antichrist from being revealed. But verse 7 says, "For the secret power of lawlessness is already at work [that is, Satan is already doing his work]; but the one [that is, God] who now holds it back will continue to do so till he [the Antichrist] is taken out of the way" (2 Thessalonians 2:7, NIV).

You'll notice verse 6 is divided into two parts. There is one who restrains and there is one who is revealed. The one who restrains, I'd say, is God. The one who is revealed is the Antichrist. In verse 7, that same parallel could be made. The one who restrains, the person who restrains, is God. The one who is being restrained, and who will come out, is the Antichrist. If this is the case, if this interpretation is a strong possibility, why would God in this age be restraining the end age from being at hand? Why has the Antichrist not yet appeared? What plan could God have in mind that would be both His power and His plan and involve His person?

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I find the answer in the words of Jesus, “This gospel shall be preached unto all nations and then the end will come” (Matthew 24:14). And Peter, in writing his second letter, comments on the fact that there are many who are saying, “Where is the promise of his coming [scoffers are saying that].” And the apostle Peter replies, in 2 Peter 3:8–9, “Do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years and a thousand years is as one day. The Lord is not slow about his promise as some count slowness. But is forbearing toward you, not wishing that any should perish but that all should reach repentance.”

What is Peter saying? If you want to know why Jesus hasn't returned, there's just one reason: that He's merciful. That He wants all men to come to repentance. That He wants to give every man the chance to hear. There is a place and a time, in the fullness of time, in the plan of God, that program and vision that the church has been given will have been accomplished. The gospel shall have been declared. In a sense, the gospel has been taken to all nations. At least, practically every nation has some kind of witness. Maybe the Lord still waits because He wants more than the presence of one Christian or a small group of Christians in a country. He might want a deeper saturation of the presence of the church in the world. That is the only reason I can find in the Scripture for why the day of the Lord may not yet have been at hand. Because the Lord himself is exercising restraint, until He determines that the gospel has indeed filled His command to the church.

If that is the case, what an opportunity for us who live in the here and now! To be part of the extension of Christ's kingdom, to be part of those who, through Christ's command, usher in His return and say to Him, “Welcome home.”

What will happen to this lawless one when things have come to pass? When the rebellion has occurred? When the Antichrist has emerged and the restraining force has been lifted? What is

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going to happen? Verse 8, “And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendor of his coming” (NIV).

How is Jesus going to defeat the power of evil in that one great world conflict, which will bring this age to its conclusion? By His Word. Psalm 33:6 says, “By the word of the LORD were the heavens made.”

Your word and my word can't really do much. Christ's word is so powerful that He can talk to anything in His creation. If He wants to bring anything into existence, there's that scriptural teaching that all He needs to do is speak. There's a doctrine of creation—out of nothing, God created. God needed no existing material to create the world. By His Word, the heavens were established. By His Word, He will slay the Antichrist at His appearing and His coming.

In Revelation 19, which describes the final conflict—Jesus coming back in great clouds of glory with all His saints with Him—He has a sword which is coming out of His mouth. That's a figure of speech. He doesn't really hold a knife between His teeth. It represents the fact that His Word is the conquering thing. And none of the hosts with Him are described as having any weapons.

Only Jesus has a weapon. He's the only one who needs one. And He only has one. It is His Word. And by His Word He effects His will, so that there is an annihilation of that most supreme, rebellious, world dictator and his system, the destruction and annihilation of that system by God himself. The Lord Jesus will slay him at His appearing, at His coming. Paul's words here reflect the prophet Isaiah in 11:4, “The Lord will come with righteousness to judge the poor and decide with equity for the meek of the earth. He shall smite the earth with a rod in his mouth and with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked.”

What will be men's response toward the Antichrist and Christ? That response is noted for us by the apostle Paul. The response toward the Antichrist is seen in verse 9 and following, “The

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coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness” (2 Thessalonians 2:9–11, NIV).

Notice the coming of the man of lawlessness is with great signs and wonders. These are miracles which he is able to feign or to actually do. Revelation 13 talks about these further. He’ll do great signs and wonders.

In our time, there is an explosion of interest in parapsychology, the unknown, extrasensory perception, the occult—these are but seeds which the antichrist himself can capitalize on by showing himself to be the wizard of the wizards, the medium of the mediums, and yet be a very normal person from the outside. A person gifted for doing stupendous acts which make the world stand in wonder.

It’s fascinating to see that never did Jesus, in His miracle ministry, do anything stupid. His ministry was one of healing and helping. But it was not one of simply jumping off a place and coming out ok—bending nails. But the Antichrist has this force.

How will men respond to the Antichrist? They are going to wallow in the belief of the antichrist. Why? Because they did not love God. Because they refused the truth. Why? Because in the age of grace, they were part of the rebellion. They were part of the apostasy. They initiated the Antichrist coming into the world. Remember that the rebellion occurs before the Antichrist. There is that spirit of lawlessness toward God. A spirit of rebellion which says no to God. It can be a sophisticated agnosticism, a hardened atheism, or a walk in some other way. But a way that

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says no to God. As Paul presents in Romans 1, the person who ultimately says no to God, God confirms that choice and says no to them. So that Romans is able to state, in essence, “They gave God up, so God gave them up.”

What do the Scriptures say in reference to the deliverance of Israel from Egypt? “Pharaoh hardened his heart.” And the next thing you read is “God hardened Pharaoh’s heart.” In other words, God knows each of you make a choice. And if you move towards Jesus, He moves Jesus into you. And if you move away from Jesus, He moves Jesus away from you. If you move toward the Antichrist, He moves the Antichrist in you. He will give you what you want because He has made you free. He will ratify the choice of the world. The end thereof is doom and gloom. The end is punishment and wrath. The end is destruction.

But what about the believer? “But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because from the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth. He called you to this through our gospel, so that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the teachings we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter” (2 Thessalonians 2:13–15, NIV).

How does the believer feel about the end day? Whenever the Scriptures talk about the end time, whenever the apostle Paul addresses himself to the subject, he comes right back to us as believers—how we are feeling toward the whole thing? What are we thinking? He says to us, as believers, “Remember God is for you.” God is for you! He uses the phrase, “God chose you from the beginning to be saved.”

I suppose here are two ways to read that in verse 13. There are two ways God could have chosen you from the beginning. He could have chosen you as a person from the beginning. Or, from the

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beginning, He could have chosen the means by which He was going to save you—sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth. The Christian is one who knows that God has elected us, that God has chosen us. Not from any arbitrary sense that God has chosen us and hasn't chosen somebody else, because Peter very clearly says that "He would that all men would come to him and be saved" (2 Peter 3:9). Whosoever will, let him come. But there is that standpoint that we saw in the first chapter of Thessalonians, where we realize that God has called us. And we could have never come unless He initiated the action toward us. God is for us. He chose us to be His. And we chose Him. He ratified our choice and we ratified His. I suppose one of the problems of theology is to decide which choice came first. Did God choose us before we chose Him or did we choose Him and then He chose us? They are so interlinked, they're simultaneous.

He not only chose me, but He chose the process by which I would be saved. Christ is the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. You are not an afterthought of God. God didn't think your salvation up when everything else He tried missed. He thought about you and the plan of salvation—that He would bring you to himself—from the beginning of eternity. And He will think of it to eternity—the future.

One of the glories of heaven is to be able to see the Lamb of God who has taken away our sins and forgiven us. He cares for you. God is for you. And inasmuch as God is for you, what kind of a person are you to be? "So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the teachings we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter" (2 Thessalonians 2:15). That is, apostolic traditions. That which has been delivered to you by the apostles themselves, the good news of Jesus Christ, the doctrine of the Lord—keep it, stand firm in it.

That results in a very beautiful thing. Every prayer that has been prayed for you, in the deepest will of God for you, is going to come true. Every prayer you've prayed for yourself, that you

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would be God's—God is going to make possible. Every prayer of someone else for you, as a fellow believer, that prayer asked in sincerity, that God will establish you, is going to come to pass. Verses 16–17 say, “May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word” (NIV). God's going to do that for you. He is going to establish you. You're established now, but He's making the foundation and the walls that you are His stronger and stronger.

Once more, take yourself to the doctrine of the Lord's return. What is your belief about it and how do you feel toward it? Many times as Christians we have a belief that the Lord is coming. While we believe the doctrine of the Lord coming again with our mind, when someone talks about it, fear can well up within the life of the believer. What does Paul say to the Thessalonians? “Get your head straight and your heart straight. Put your head and your heart together. Your emotions in respect to the Lord's coming should be consistent with what your head is thinking.” Never is the believer to be filled with fear at the prospect of the Lord's return. He's to be filled with the joy that the Lord is coming and that all things are in His hands. How are your emotions in respect to His return? Does the Lord need to do a work of healing in you in regard to emotions? How are your emotions even concerning your own death? Whether you like it or not, you're in the last times. *Your* world will end when you die. How do you feel emotionally towards your departure from this life, either through meeting Christ or through death? Where is your hope? Not just your belief, but, how do you feel?

This word is coming to us, “Lift up your heads. Rejoice. God will and shall and has established you in Him.”

### **Closing Prayer**

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We find, our Father, that Your Word is a sure foundation for our souls. A rock in which we can trust and even hide. We're thankful that, in the day to come, when all things that can be shaken are shaken, we will be unmovable—steadfast and always abounding in You. Grant to this congregation and individuals within it the peace of the Lord. Peace which surpasses knowledge and understanding (Philippians 4:7). A certainty that our hearts are well with You. Grant that assurance today to persons in here who may not be Yours, who have never let You move in on them. May there be a turning to You at this moment of quietness and worship.