

2 Thessalonians 2:1-8 – “The Restrainer and the Antichrist”

Summary Statement:

Paul writes to comfort the believers in Thessalonica who had been deceived to think they were in the Day of the Lord. He comforts them by explaining the prophetic sequence that will precede the day of the Lord and assures them that history is unfolding under God’s sovereign control.

1. A Call To Calmness – 2:1-2

2:1-2 - *Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, we ask you, ² not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of Christ had come.*

There were people in the church who were really struggling with what they were witnessing around them (i.e. persecution, suffering) and they felt like they were perhaps in the Day of the Lord – this time of judgment of God (the NKJV says the **day of Christ**, whereas older manuscripts say the day of the Lord. This seems to be what Paul had in mind).

- We discussed the Day of the Lord in 1 Thessalonians 5 and saw that this was a period of time that begins after the rapture, goes through the 7 year tribulation and lasts through the 1000 year millennium. It’s a day of judgment and the wrath of the Lamb [show chart].
- Paul wrote in 1 Thessalonians 5 that they are sons of light and sons of the day and that this time of darkness would not overtake them (1 Thessalonians 5:4-5). They’ve been assured of Jesus coming to catch them up in the air (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18).

But now they’re experiencing all these things around them and they’re starting to think they’re experiencing the judgment of God and it’s shaken them.

- This church wouldn’t be shaken if Paul told them they’re going to go through this period of tribulation. It seems evident that Paul taught they would be raptured up before this great and dreadful day of the Lord.

Plus it didn’t help that there were some false reports going around that were contradicting the things Paul had passed on to them. These lies came in three forms:

- a) **spirit** – this could be speaking of someone speaking a prophetic word in one of their gatherings. It was perhaps believed being cloaked in the ‘spirit’.

- b) **word** – this was perhaps people speaking out claiming that Paul and other apostles were saying the Day of the Lord was now present among them.
- c) **letter** – this was most likely a forged letter, as though, as Paul said, had come **from us**. It was a letter to stir up trouble and discredit Paul.

So these Thessalonian believers were beginning to think that they've missed out on the rapture and are now smack dab in the day of the Lord.

But Paul writes to bring some clarity to this situation. And over the next few verses Paul shows what must happen before this day of the Lord unfolds, and before the second coming of Christ.

And I think this is one of the great proof texts for the rapture as well.

- There's nothing that needs to happen before the Rapture. We have an imminent coming of Christ this way. But there are some significant things that will take place before the Second Coming of Christ. Remember, these are two very different and distinct events.

What occurrences is Paul talking about that will show we're in the day of the Lord?

2. The Coming Corruption – 2:3-4

2:3-4 - *Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, ⁴ who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.*

Paul is saying that the Day of the Lord won't begin until the **falling away** comes first, and then the **man of sin is revealed**. This man of sin is speaking of the antichrist. He's described in many ways throughout Scripture:

- little horn (Daniel 7:8; 8:9)
- a king of 'fierce features' (Daniel 8:23)
- the prince who is to come (Daniel 9:26)
- the king (Daniel 11:36)
- the worthless shepherd (Zechariah 11:17)
- man of sin (2 Thessalonians 2:3)
- son of perdition (2 Thessalonians 2:3)
- the lawless one (2 Thessalonians 2:8)
- the beast (Revelation 13:1-4)

John wrote in **1 John 2:18**, *"Little children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come, by which we know that it is the last hour."*

There is a coming Antichrist who is going to be an emissary of Satan and seek to establish this Antichrist Kingdom.

- It's pretty amazing to see the power bases that the Antichrist is going to rule through: Political Power, Religious Power, and Economic Power. What's so remarkable is that these are the things that this world presently is moving towards. There's a desire for globalism by which we'll be ready to receive a global leader, a global religion, and a global economy, of which this last one will be tied to a mark from this antichrist by which nobody will be able to buy or sell unless they have that mark (Rev 13). And people are being conditioned now to accept these systems. This is the target of the Great Reset, which some might think is just conspiracy. But I say all this to say, we are drawing close to the day when this Antichrist could emerge.

Now when he does come, he's not going to be some devilish character who opposes Christ outright. The word ***anti*** in Greek has 2 meanings: *against* and *in place of*. And this coming man of sin is going to come in the place of Christ. He's going to be a charismatic leader who the world will fawn over. He will come bringing peace as Daniel 9 says. He will have a great following. Jews will think this is their Messiah as he will lead them in the rebuilding of their temple.

But this man will be satanically driven and half-way through the 7 year tribulation he will seek to exalt himself. He will oppose God and enter into the temple to be worshipped as God.

- This is known as the abomination of desolation. Daniel referred to this in Daniel 9:27. Jesus references this in Matthew 24:15 and He says when you see this, flee to the mountains. It's at this point that the antichrist shows who he truly is and goes after the Jewish people with great hostility (Revelation 12).
- Back in 167 B.C. a Greek ruler named Antiochus Epiphanies set up an altar to Zeus over the altar of burnt offerings in the Jewish Temple at Jerusalem. He also sacrificed a pig on the altar in the Temple. This event was known as the abomination of desolation.

- But then Jesus, some 200 years after this event, spoke of a future event that would take place called the abomination of desolation. I believe that Jesus was referring to the antichrist and this time of the tribulation. Revelation 13:14-15 speaks of an image that is to be erected for the worship of the antichrist.

Before moving on, we need to talk about this **falling away**. Paul uses that as a clear sign that this must happen first before the day of the Lord and the antichrist comes.

But what is he speaking of?

That term **falling away** is **apostasia** in the Greek. Kenneth Wuest said, "The words "falling away" are an interpretation of the Greek word, not a translation."¹ It's transliterated as apostasy, but one of the meanings of *apostasia* is actually **departure**. Early English Bible translations such as Coverdale, Tyndale, and the Geneva Bible translated *apostasia* in this verse as departure.

- Now we know that in the end times many will depart from the faith.
- Paul makes that clear in **1 Timothy 4:1**, "*Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons,*" Also in **2 Timothy 4:3-4**, "*For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; ⁴ and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.*"
- Jesus said as much in His Olivet Discourse when the disciples asked Him what will be the sign of Your coming, and Jesus answered, "*Take heed that no one deceives you. ⁵ For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many*" (**Matthew 24:4-5**).

So we know there will be a great apostasy that will come where many will be deceived and will abandon the worship of God for the worship of the beast. But Paul is talking about something that happens before the beast arrives. This word *apostasia* is used only twice in Scripture. In Acts 21:21 which speaks of the Jews forsaking the law of Moses, and here in 2 Thessalonians 2. Now we can certainly get an understanding of the meaning of a word through other uses of it,

¹ Wuest, K. S. (1997). *Wuest's word studies from the Greek New Testament: for the English reader* (Vol. 22, p. 141). Eerdmans.

but context must always determine how that word is being used. And in the context that Paul is writing, he seems to be making a reference to a significant event happening before the antichrist is revealed and the day of the Lord commences.

I believe this could very well be a reference to the departure of the church at the Rapture. It's what we see in the next few verses.

Before hitting those, let me point out that there is a definite article in front of "falling away" and in front of "man of sin".

In other words, Paul is specifying *THE* falling away, and *THE* man of sin.

- "By providing these two definite articles essentially Paul is indicating that the apostasy will be something that has specific, time bound-qualities just like the man of sin's coming has such qualities. In other words, just like the advent of the man of sin will be specific and an instantaneous event in future history, the coming *apostasía*, or departure, will similarly be specific and time bound." (Andy Woods, "The Falling Away")

3. The Current Control – 2:5-8

2:5-6 - *Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things? ⁶ And now you know what is restraining, that he may be revealed in his own time.*

Though these were relatively new believers in Thessalonica, Paul took time to teach them Eschatology, the study of end times.

- Some believe that's not important, but Paul said do not despise prophecies. He taught these things to this very young church. This is decades away from John writing Revelation, and speaking in more detail about this one world leader, the antichrist. And yet this was on Paul's mind and he spoke of these things to this church.
- We know from 1 Thessalonians 4 he was preparing them for the *harpazo*, the catching up to meet the Lord in the air.

Paul says they should know by now how all these things are going to unfold and what's restraining and holding back this antichrist. And if you're still uncertain, he clarifies it all for us in the next verse...

2:7-8 - *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. ⁸ And then the lawless*

one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming.

The working of Satan is already taking place in the world. This world is not going to get better and better until Jesus just has to show up and receive this kingdom ready world. But as wicked as this world is, there is restraint. When the restrainer is removed it will get really bad.

So what is the restrainer? I believe it's speaking of the Holy Spirit, and more so, the Holy Spirit at work in the church. Notice how the pronoun **He** is capitalized. The translators seemed to think this was speaking of deity.

You see, at the rapture, the church will be removed and the Holy Spirit's influence through the church will be gone. This will open the way for the antichrist to come onto the scene.

- So many people ask, *'How will people be saved in the Tribulation if the Holy Spirit is not here?'* But He will be! He's God, He's omnipresent.
- David wrote in **Psalms 139:7-8**, *"Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? ⁸ If I ascend into heaven, You are there; If I make my bed in hell, behold, You are there."*
- So the Holy Spirit can't be absent, but His effect in the world can be diminished through the absence of the Church. The Holy Spirit indwells each believer and empowers us to live as light in the darkness. There is a restraining work happening through the Holy Spirit's power in and through the church.
- So when the church is raptured up, it will open the way for the enemy to push ahead and the antichrist will emerge and be revealed.

But remember, he cannot be known until the church is raptured up. So if those believers in Thessalonica are still around, the antichrist has not come on the scene and they're certainly not in the day of the Lord then. This is Paul's purpose in writing this.

Many people are trying to determine who the antichrist might be. Many theories have been proposed. But the bottom line is, as Christians we're not going to know because we're going to be outta here! If you're still here, he can't be revealed. So we don't need to waste time looking for the antichrist, let's stay focussed looking on Christ and growing in Him.

In verse 8 Paul kind of fast-forwards to the end of the antichrists time. We know the antichrist will be very active during the Tribulation. Revelation 6-19 records all that's going on during this Tribulation. And it culminates in Revelation 19 when the antichrist and his armies gather together to come against the Lord and His people. Here Paul tells us he will be consumed ***with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming.***

I can't wait to witness this. The Bible tells us that we'll be with Him at His side when this happens.

- The idea of the antichrist being destroyed does not speak of annihilation. It means to render inactive, he'll be put out of commission.
- **Revelation 19:20** shows us what happens to him: *"Then the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who worked signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image. These two were cast alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone."*

With all that is going to come, we as believers do not need to fear. When talking about last days, some Christians seem to get a little worried thinking about what the tribulation and the day of the Lord will be like. Will they be able to survive? Again, we're not appointed to this time of wrath, but to receive salvation. Jesus has already taken this judgment from us. We're not going to be around during this time. Eschatology is not meant to make us survivalists; it's meant to make us witnesses. Time is short and we have the answer the world so desperately needs to hear. Let's be active in sharing it and not keeping this hope for ourselves.

Points to Ponder:

1. Don't let deception shake what Scripture has settled.
 - We can have many competing voices, or headlines easily trouble us, but stay grounded in the certainty of God's Word.
2. We're not waiting for the antichrist, we're waiting for Christ.
 - Don't spend your life trying to identify the antichrist, rather spend it representing Christ.
3. Is your life actively holding back evil in this world through the power of the Holy Spirit?
 - We're called to be salt and light, so shake and shine for Jesus!