

**Don't Be Fooled**  
**Don't Be Fooled About The Second Coming of Christ.**  
**2 Thessalonians 2:1-8**

**Introduction:** Nothing has been used by Satan to mislead, confuse, or sidetrack Christians away from the mission of the Church and the beauty of the Gospel more than the subject of the Second Coming of Christ, so much so that people find themselves avoiding the subject in order to avoid all the nonsense. For instance, throughout church history, people continually rise up claiming to know when Christ will return and are shockingly believed by noticeable numbers of people despite the fact that the Bible EXPLICITLY tells us nobody will know!!! Jesus even said HE didn't know (Matt 24:36, Mark 13:32) and He is the WORD of God!!!!

Sadly, however, to avoid all the nonsense, many Christians have chosen to avoid the subject of the Second Coming of Christ altogether. As a result, people are avoiding THE HOPE every Christian should be looking forward to—maranatha, come Lord Jesus (1 Corinthians 16:22)!!

Therefore, after teaching the church in Thessalonica about the Second Coming of Christ when he was with them, then writing a letter to them that addressed the subject, Paul is now having to write a second letter to them that includes more content to guard them from some very dangerous false teaching on the subject that some had already bit into hook, line and sinker!

Now, before we get into the text, let me give you a few definitions that put the last two thousand years of debates on this subject into proper context. Specifically, let me give you some definitions related to the four major schools of thought concerning the Bible's teachings on the reign of Christ and His Second Coming. They are listed from the newest to the oldest.

The newest school of thought emerged in the 1850s from a man named John Darby.

**Pre-Millennial Dispensationalism** is the view that the church will be raptured before a terrible seven-year tribulation. In this rapture, those who were dead or alive in Christ will receive resurrected bodies as Christ currently has. At the conclusion of the tribulation, Christ will come back with all who were raptured. It places the restoration of Israel as a central focus of Christ's return, including the restoration of the Mosaic Law over Israel and temple sacrifices. At His return, the church and Israel will rule with Christ over the earth for 1,000 years. At the end of the 1,000 years, Jesus will judge all, and all who are not in Christ, including Satan and his demons, will be cast into the lake of fire forever. The Church and a separately restored Israel will then spend eternity with Christ and one another.

The next school of thought, which has significantly decreased in popularity over the last 100 years, is called Post-Millennialism.

**Post-Millennialism** is the view that a figurative millennium began after the Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed in 70AD by the Romans. They believe Jesus is now ruling the earth through His Church, which is ruling with Him as it spreads the Gospel worldwide, leads people to be His disciples, and brings nations under the geopolitical rule of the Church. It is known as the optimistic view because it proposes that life on earth is going to get better and better for everybody as the church claims more and more nations. What has been claimed by Satan in the fall of man, including money and power, is supposed to be reclaimed by the Church. The Second Coming of Christ will occur when every nation is ruled by the Church. At His return, all who are in Christ (dead or alive) will be given resurrected bodies as Christ already has. He will judge the living and the dead and cast Satan and his demons, and all unrepentant souls into the Lake of Fire. He will then restore all things to perfection, and all who are in Him will live with Him and one another forever.

This school of thought didn't come into prominence until the 17<sup>th</sup> century. During the 17<sup>th</sup> century, a worldview known as liberalism began to be popularized. Liberalism believes that human beings and, consequently, society as a whole, have been evolving to become increasingly moral and ethical. Post-millennialism credits this to the spread of the Gospel and the Church. However, by the time we reach the midpoint of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, events like World War I and II had sufficiently undermined the idea that humans are born good and are evolving to become better. With the removal of the rose-colored glasses of liberalism, there's no logical way to conclude that somehow the church bringing governments under its subjugation resulted in humanity becoming more moral and ethical. Life has been made easier by modern technology, but clearly, mankind and society are just as corrupt as they've always been!

The theological groundwork for Post-millennialism was actually established more than a thousand years prior by a guy named Augustine. In the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries, Augustine put forth a school of thought known as Amillennialism. Unlike Post-millennialism, this view of Scripture is still very popular. It's the official doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church and can also be found among many Presbyterians and other Reformed Protestant believers.

**Amillennialism** is the view that Christ and all who are in Him are currently living in a figurative millennium, whereby the Church rules all creation with Christ from heaven. Although they believe Satan has already been bound, the church will still be actively persecuted on earth until it makes disciples of people from every ethnic group. That suffering will climax with a great and horrible seven-year tribulation where Satan is unleashed, then Christ will return, all who are in Christ (dead or alive) will be given resurrected bodies as Christ already has, He will judge the living and the dead, restore all things, and all who are in Him will live with Him and one another forever on a totally restored earth.

The final school of thought I want to share with you is the oldest. People like Justin Martyr articulated it in the first century. After 1,800 years of church history, the rise of Dispensationalism relegated it to the background; however, in the last two decades, it's been coming back on the scene with increasing popularity.

**Historic Pre-Millennialism** is the view that Sin and Satan are still ruling the earth, and eventually their reign will get so bad that the church will go through a terrible seven-year tribulation. At the conclusion of the tribulation, Christ will come back, and all who are in Christ (dead or alive) will be given resurrected bodies as Christ already has and will rule with Christ over the earth for 1,000 years. At the end of the 1,000 years, Jesus will judge all, and all who are not in Christ, including Satan and his demons, will be cast into the lake of fire forever.

As Post-millennialism came out of Amillennialism, Dispensationalism came out of Historic Pre-millennialism. However, despite both schools believing in a future literal 1,000-year millennial reign of Christ and His church over all the earth, there are many substantial differences, which are primarily seen in how prophecy applies to Israel and the Church.

Okay, so that's the four major schools of thinking Christians have concerning the Second Coming of Christ and the associated prophecies. I grew up being taught Dispensationalism, but the more I studied the Bible for myself, the more I found myself disagreeing with it. I started forming my own understanding of what I believed the Scripture taught about Israel, the Church, and the second coming of Christ. But I had no knowledge of any other official view of Scripture other than Dispensationalism, so I was really encouraged when I finally heard what I was seeing in Scripture had been taught by church leaders since the first century—**Historic Pre-Millennialism**. HOWEVER, the fact that I believe the Historic Pre-Millennial view of Scripture is the most accurate interpretation of the Bible does not mean that I think the other views are false teaching. In each camp, there are tremendously respected conservative evangelical Biblical scholars who support them, and the fundamentals are the same. Jesus is coming back, all who are in Christ will receive resurrected bodies just as Christ, and we will live with Him and one another forever!

However, whether you want to or not, as you study the Bible, you will find yourself in one of these schools of thinking. As stated, I found out my understanding of Scripture is called the Historic Pre-Millennial view, and I found myself in it mainly because it seems to me to be the view of the first-century Church. They were anticipating Jesus' return, and that when He did, they were going to rule and reign with Him. This anticipation was so intense that when somebody started pitching the idea in Thessalonica that Jesus had actually already returned, it started significantly discouraging some people. If Jesus had come back, then why are they still being persecuted? When Jesus comes back, we are going to receive resurrected bodies as He has and rule and reign with Him, something that hadn't happened yet. So, when Paul got word that somebody in Thessalonica was leading people to believe this, he responded with what we now call 2 Thessalonians.

The view that the Second Coming of Christ had already occurred was unacceptable and had to be rebuked. It was an extremely dangerous view that not only deeply misled and discouraged some of the believers in Thessalonica, but also left them open for an even greater disaster—believing a person currently walking around on the earth to BE Jesus!

It was false teaching that Paul addressed head-on in chapter two of 2 Thessalonians, and in doing so, we not only see his clear rebuke of the false teaching but also gain some

significant information about the Second Coming of Christ. To help us digest all this a little better, we are going to dig into verses 1 through 8 this week and then look at verses 9 through 15 next week. What we read in verses 9 through 15 will expound on what we read in verses 1 through 8.

**Proposition: In 2 Thessalonians 2:1-8, Paul sets the record straight on two matters related to the second coming of Christ.**

**The first matter Paul sets the record straight about should be the most OBVIOUS!**

**(1) Don't be fooled by those who claim Christ already returned—He didn't! (2:1-2)**

- A. 1 Now concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to him, we ask you, brothers, 2 not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by a spirit or a spoken word, or a letter seeming to be from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come. (2:1-2)**
- B.** The key point in this text is super easy to see. Paul clearly says Jesus hasn't come back. But let's take a second and look at some of the supporting information to that point within the sentence. In verse one, Paul writes,
- C. 1 Now concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to him, we ask you, brothers,**
  - 1. First, we need to notice the seriousness of this subject. When Paul says, "**we ask you**," it can also be translated "*we beg you*". Paul is pleading with them not to get distracted by people who say Jesus has already returned! Don't give it any mental attention whatsoever! This is a seriously dangerous thing to believe!
  - 2. In doing so, Paul also begins to teach us the truth about the Second Coming of Christ. Notice that when Christ returns, the church will be "**gathered together to him**". In the original text, one Greek word is translated "being gathered together," and it's a noun. It's not referring to how, as in the action involved, but what. The base word, or root word for "gathered together to him," is translated as "synagogue". It refers to a singularly defined physical event that occurs when Christ returns. When He comes back, everybody who is in Him will be gathered to Him in that very moment. Talk about a reunion!
  - 3. This is also why the belief that Christ has already returned would be so discouraging and dangerous to someone who is still in persecution. If you haven't been gathered together with all the other believers, then you are being left out of the joy of being a part of the millennial reign of Christ. In addition, you are being increasingly persecuted while you believe all the

other Christians in the world are having a party with Jesus! Talk about FOMO!

4. But Jesus hasn't come back yet, and the church hasn't been gathered together yet; therefore, there is no need to get all worked up! As such, Paul tells them,

**D. 2 not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by a spirit or a spoken word, or a letter seeming to be from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come.**

1. Paul says not to be “**quickly shaken in mind or alarmed**,” which can also be translated, “not to be alarmed *so easily*.”<sup>1</sup> Paul is calling them out! It's as if he's saying, “Guys! Come on, man! Stop getting worked up over these claims! Why are you even paying attention to them? When Jesus comes back, it will be obvious to everybody!”
2. Now, you would think nobody could be fooled by such a claim. However, what if you got a letter that claimed to be from Paul, or quoted Paul? What if somebody claimed they were an eyewitness to it happening? What if somebody stood up and, seemingly filled with the Spirit, prophesied something like that in one of your meetings?
3. To that, Paul says they need to be shut down and dismissed immediately. Give it no attention whatsoever because the Second Coming of Christ and the physical gathering together of the church at His coming will be so obvious that the entire world will know when it happens. Therefore, don't give any mental or emotional attention to the idea. It is totally undeserving of attention. Nobody will have to tell anybody that Jesus has come back! Lost and saved alike, EVERYBODY WILL INSTANTLY KNOW!

**E.** Now, some of you are thinking to yourself that this truth is so apparent that there was really no point in taking your time to address it. Nobody would believe Jesus has already come back. Yet, Paul is writing to well-educated, intelligent believers who are entertaining the claim to be true!

1. And lest you think that it's just ancient believers in Jesus who are being tempted by this false teaching, I did a Google AI search to see other modern examples of people who claim Jesus has already returned. Here's what it kicked out:
  - a. **Eastern Lightning (The Church of Almighty God):** This new religious movement, founded in China, teaches that Jesus Christ has returned as a

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<sup>1</sup> Hendriksen, W., & Kistemaker, S. J. (1953–2001). [\*Exposition of I-II Thessalonians\*](#) (Vol. 3, p. 168). Baker Book House.

Chinese woman. They refer to themselves as Eastern Lightning, referencing a biblical verse about the Son of Man's coming from the east. Chinese media and some Christian groups have described it as a dangerous cult.

- b. **Shakers:** A historical sect in the US, now almost extinct, the Shakers believed that Jesus' second coming occurred through their leader, Ann Lee, who they saw as the female embodiment of Christ.
  - c. **Kimbanguist Church:** A large denomination in Central Africa, the Kimbanguist Church believes that one of its former leaders, Papa Diulangana, was the returned Christ.
  - d. **Church of the Last Testament:** This group in Russia follows a leader who claims to be the reincarnation of Jesus.
  - e. **World Mission Society Church of God:** Founded in South Korea, this church believes that its founder, Ahn Sahng-hong, was the Second Coming of Jesus and that another leader, Zahng Gil-jah, is "God the Mother".
- 2. Without directly claiming to be Jesus, in the late 1970s, **Jim Jones** implied he was essentially a divine manifestation of Jesus, and in so doing convinced over 900 people to commit suicide with him.
  - 3. In the 1990s, the world met **David Koresh**. He again didn't directly claim to be the literal Jesus, but, like Jim Jones, in a convoluted semi-real way, claimed that he was a divine messianic manifestation of Jesus. In doing so, Koresh also convinced his followers that he was the only one who could have sex. As such, all the men in the group surrendered their wives to him to bear him children and serve him as a wife. He even claimed minors in the group as wives. Most of them died in a fire while refusing to surrender to authorities.
  - 4. **José Luis de Jesús Miranda** claimed to be both Jesus Christ and the Antichrist simultaneously. He was known for leading the sect 'Growing in Grace International Ministry,' tattooing followers with "666" and proclaiming himself immortal. He died in 2013.
  - 5. **Wayne Bent (Michael Travesser)** claimed he was the Messiah. He led a group called 'Lord Our Righteousness Church' (also called "Strong City") in New Mexico. In 2008, he was sentenced to 8.5 years in prison for sex crimes related to underage girls in the church.
  - 6. Finally, **Joseph Smith** claimed an Angel of God revealed the truth to him about a book he claimed to have dug up in his backyard. He claimed he was

given some special tools to read and interpret the book, which was written in a secret language, but that only he was allowed to see the book. Smith claimed that since Jesus' ascension, he had already come back once but would still come back a third time in the future. Smith claimed Jesus came back and visited the native Americans and reveal to them some things He and the Father had changed their mind about since the last time he came, as well as some stuff the Apostles apparently just misunderstood—mainly that Jesus is not the eternal Son of God who took on flesh (John 1:1-4), but rather a man who earned the right to be a son of God because he perfectly obeyed the rules of Mormonism, something men can still earn today, and in so doing, like Jesus, gain a planet or universe of their own. Smith also said the book revealed that native Americans were actually the lost tribe of Israel, a claim thoroughly refuted by history and genetics. So, while believing Jesus will come again, technically, they believe that to be the third coming of Christ. Currently, there are over 17 million people in the world who confess this blatantly false Gospel to be true.

- F. So, my point in sharing all that with you is to make you realize that you need to be careful about thinking you could never be fooled into believing such a ridiculous claim that Jesus has already come back or that somebody claiming to be Jesus might indeed be Him. What we need to do is listen to the Word of God and refuse to intellectually or emotionally entertain such teachings because when Jesus comes back, everybody will know, and everything will be instantly changed! As Paul stated in his first letter to the church in Thessalonica,
- G. **16 For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17)**
- H. Elsewhere we read,
  - 1. **10 And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, 11 and said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven." (Acts 1:10-11)**
  - 2. **10 But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed. (2 Peter 3:10)**

3. **7 Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. Even so. Amen. (Revelation 1:7)**

**The second matter Paul sets the record straight about concerning the Second Coming of Christ has to do with some of the things that will happen prior to His coming and at His coming.**

**(2) Don't be fooled by the lawlessness and the Lawless one—Jesus wins! (2:3-8)**

- A. Now remember, Paul is doing what John did in writing the book of Revelation. Both were ultimately writing to Christians trying to make sense of the persecution they were enduring and all the other evil in the world. The church in Thessalonica is under tremendous pressure, so the idea that Christ may have already come while they are still stuck in persecution would be incredibly disheartening and confusing. But now that Paul has made it clear that Christ has not returned and that they haven't missed out on anything, he wants them to understand some things about the evil in the world around them and what's going to happen in that context when Christ returns.
- B. Side note, this is one of the many passages that keep me from buying into the concept that the church will be "raptured" out of this world before the seven-year tribulation. There are just too many scriptures in the New Testament to equip the church to persevere during that horrible period of time to think the church won't be here. It makes all those scriptures rather pointless if the church will never need them!
- C. So, let's read verses three through eight, and then I'll go back through each verse and explain some of the key points in them.
- D. **3 Let no one deceive you in any way. For that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, 4 who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God. 5 Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things? 6 And you know what is restraining him now so that he may be revealed in his time. 7 For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work. Only he who now restrains it will do so until he is out of the way. 8 And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will kill with the breath of his mouth and bring to nothing by the appearance of his coming.**

Note: Before we get into the details, I want to make sure you don't miss the most significant point. The church has no fear of lawlessness or the man of lawlessness because Jesus is going to return at some point and kill him! That's the day we are longing for!!! That's the Second Coming of Christ, the permanent



removal of sin and Satan, and the promise of the renewal of all things in Him! We will come back to that in a minute, but in going through the details of this passage, I wanted to make sure you have the end constantly in mind—Jesus wins, therefore all who are in Christ win as well!

- E. **3 Let no one deceive you in any way. For that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction,**

**Note:** Notice that Paul says two very obvious, and very specific things are going to happen before the return of Christ. “THE rebellion” and the revealing of “THE man of lawlessness”. So, let’s look at those two things a little deeper.

1. “**THE rebellion.**”

- a. A rebellion is when people who are with you turn against you. The lost world already refuses to live in submission to God and, as such, is vehemently against God (Romans 5:10!) already. Therefore, Paul can’t be talking about the world that is already against God. Paul is talking about people who claim to be followers of Christ turning away from Jesus in such massive numbers in such a short period that it will be an obvious event worthy of labeling as a singular identifiable event, and thus the word “THE”.
- b. Calvin noted, “Paul therefore uses the term rebellion or “apostasy” to mean a treacherous departure from God, not on the part of one person or a few individuals, but such as would spread far among a wide circle of people. Now, nobody can be called an apostate but he who had previously professed to follow Christ and the Gospel. Paul, therefore, is predicting a general rebellion in the visible church. “The church must be reduced to an unsightly and dreadful state of ruin before its full restoration can take place.”<sup>2</sup>
- c. Likewise, Green wrote, “It is unlikely that the apostle has in mind the rebellion of the Jewish people against the gospel (cf. 1 Thess. 2:14–16) since the term itself implies that a person was once a participant in something and then separated or apostatized. Both Jesus and Paul indicate that Christians could anticipate deserters from the faith before the end (Matt. 24:11–24; 1 Tim. 4:1).”<sup>3</sup>
- d. This is NOT a reference to the different divisions that have happened among Christians throughout church history, for instance, when the Eastern Orthodox Church broke from the Roman Catholic Church, or the

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<sup>2</sup> Calvin, J. (1999). [\*1, 2 Thessalonians\*](#) (pp. 86–87). Crossway Books.

<sup>3</sup> Green, G. L. (2002). [\*The letters to the Thessalonians\*](#) (p. 307). W.B. Eerdmans Pub.; Apollos.

Protestant Reformation. This is referencing a total abandonment of the belief in the deity of Christ and His Gospel.

**2. “THE man of lawlessness is revealed,”**

- a. The definite article (“the”) tells us this is a specific person and that Christ will not return until after this person has been revealed, meaning he is currently not known, nor is he knowable until he is revealed. By the will of God, his identity is totally and completely hidden; therefore, not even the most ingenious Biblical scholar can detect who he is, and as you will see in a minute, by the will of God, he will not be revealed until the one who is hiding him from being known is removed.
- b. This means, the man of lawlessness will not be revealed by someone who figured out a secret code in the Bible, or received a special revelation from God, but rather, as you will see in a minute, in a very public and very obvious way; the one who is keeping him hidden now will be removed, so that he is no longer hidden.
- c. This horrible human being will not be a giver of life but a giver of destruction, so much so that he will be called “**the son of destruction**,”. Verse four then explains just how destructive he will be. The Bible says, “the man of lawlessness” will be the one,

**F. 4 who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God.**

1. Let me first comment on the fact, “**that he takes his seat in the temple of God**”. There are numerous theories as to what Paul meant. Since the early church had rejected the idea that there was any building that served as “the temple” of God, the idea that this is a reference to the temple in Jerusalem is not correct. In John 4, when speaking with the woman at the well, Jesus refuted the idea that the temple was still necessary. In fact, Paul taught that the body of every believer is the temple of the Holy Spirit to shine forth His glory to the world (1 Cor. 6:19-20). Therefore, I believe what Paul is saying here is that whatever a majority of the lost world considers to be the “temple of God,” at the time of the revelation of the lawless one, whether that be an institution or actual building, will become the place the lawless one will claim as his temple.
2. The bigger point is that the “lawless one” brings spiritual ruin to people rather than spiritual prosperity because he leads people to believe that he is God. Former self-proclaimed Christians and people from every other religion in the world will gladly surrender themselves to him. He will set

himself up to be the only god that exists, and the vast majority of the world and a massive majority of former Christians will agree with him!

3. How in the world will he do that? Well, we will get into that more next week. For now, you just need to know that the Bible is very clear that it will happen and that a massive number of former Christians will be in the mix. For more on the man of lawlessness, read the following quotes from other Biblical scholars:
  - a. “The “man of lawlessness” not only opposes God, he opposes everything that is worshiped. Paul uses the language of Dan 11:36 and Ezek 28:2 to describe this destructive person (see note on Ezek 28:2)”<sup>4</sup>
  - b. “The picture of the lawless one’s actions in verse 4 draws heavily on Scripture. In Daniel 11:31, an unnamed king sends forces that “occupy and profane the temple....” Further, we learn that that king “shall exalt himself and consider himself greater than any god, and shall speak horrendous things against the God of gods” (Dan. 11:36; these same verses arguably stand behind imagery used in Mark 13 and its parallels in Matthew 24 regarding the end times). In Ezekiel 28:2, these words are put in the mouth of the prince of Tyre: “I am a god; I sit in the seat of the gods.” Also of interest in Ezekiel 28 is the prophet’s repeated response to the prince’s divine presumptions: “... yet you are but a mortal, and no god ...” (Ezek. 28:2) and “... though you are but a mortal, and no god ...” (28:9). Lost in the NRSV—and, for that matter, my (as provided above)—translation of verse 3, is that when the lawless one is first identified in 2 Thessalonians, it is clear in the Greek that he is mortal: “the man of lawlessness” or better, “the human being of lawlessness.” In 2 Thessalonians 2:3 Paul uses the very same word for “human being” as is used in the Septuagint version of the Ezekiel text to render “mortal” (this is true for 2 Thess. 2:3 only; in 2:8 a simpler designation is used, which is accurately translated by “lawless one”).<sup>5</sup>
  - c. “The Antichrist places his kingdom in direct opposition to Christ’s kingdom. So, because Christ’s kingdom is a spiritual kingdom, this tyrant will wage war on souls, so that it may rival the kingdom of Christ. Later we will find that Paul assigned to him the power to deceive by employing wicked teaching and fake miracles. So if you want to know about the Antichrist, you must view him as being diametrically opposed to Christ.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Barry, J. D., Mangum, D., Brown, D. R., Heiser, M. S., Custis, M., Ritzema, E., Whitehead, M. M., Grigoni, M. R., & Bomar, D. (2012, 2016). [Faithlife Study Bible](#) (2 Th 2:4). Lexham Press.

<sup>5</sup> Weidmann, F. W. (2013). [Philippians, First and Second Thessalonians, and Philemon](#) (P. D. Miller & D. L. Bartlett, Eds.; p. 192). Westminster John Knox Press.

<sup>6</sup> Calvin, J. (1999). [1, 2 Thessalonians](#) (p. 88). Crossway Books.

- d. "His exaltation also extends over *everything ... that is worshiped* (*sebasma*), which designates any sanctuary, idol, or person that receives adoration (Acts 17:23; Wis. 14:20; 15:17). In the year 27 b.c., the ruler of the Roman Empire, Octavian, received the name "Augustus" in Latin and its Greek equivalent *Sebastos*, a word that shares the same root as *worshiped* and so was replete with religious and divine associations. The divinization of Augustus was celebrated throughout the empire, while even in Thessalonica a temple was erected to honor him and his father, the divine Julius Caesar. This was the hub of the imperial cult in the city during the first century, although the primary responsibility for maintaining the emperor cult in Macedonia was in the hands of Berea, the seat of the Macedonian *koinon*. The divine claim of the emperor celebrated in the imperial cult was thus the **prototype** of the "man of lawlessness," and the Thessalonian believers would have understood this allusion well. ... In Ezekiel 28:2–10 the prophet announces an oracle against one who has exalted himself in precisely the same way, "In the pride of your heart you say, 'I am a god; I sit on the throne of a god; I sit on the throne of a god in the heart of the seas.' But you are a man and not a god, though you think you are as wise as a god.... Will you then say, 'I am a god,' in the presence of those who kill you?" The "man of lawlessness" who exalts himself as a god will likewise meet his doom at the hands of the Lord Jesus (v. 8) ... Antiochus Epiphanes profaned that temple (169 b.c.) in an event that Daniel described as the "abomination which causes desolation" (Dan. 9:27; 11:31; 12:11; 1 Macc. 1:54). This event prefigured the profanation of the temple that Jesus anticipated before his coming (Matt. 24:15; Mark 13:14). Antiochus had taken to himself divine honors that have been preserved for us in a tetradrachm that has his image and the ascription, "Of King Antiochus, god made manifest and victorious." This one may have served as the prototype for the figure Paul describes as the "man of lawlessness." However, the identification cannot be pressed since Antiochus IV did not establish himself or his image in the Jewish temple. His profanation of the temple consisted of sacrificing swine on the altar and identifying the God of Israel with Dionysus. A closer parallel arose during the period of Roman occupation when the emperor Caligula (Gaius) tried to have his own image placed in the temple in Jerusalem during a.d. 40 (Josephus, *Antiquitates* 18:261–309 [18.8.2–18.8.9]; Philo, *De Legatione ad Gaium* 203–346). His design was to turn the Jerusalem temple into a sanctuary for his own cult as one who designated himself "the new god manifest" (*theos epiphanous neou*; cf. 2 Thess. 2:8). Fortunately, the Syrian legate stalled when given the order to set up the image there, and the whole event never came to pass due to the rather timely death of the emperor by assassination in a.d. 41. These events, which Paul would have known

well, may have served as the prototype for the way the “man of lawlessness” will seek divine accolades.”<sup>7</sup>

4. Paul then points to other information the believers in Thessalonica knew about concerning the rebellion and the man of lawlessness that Paul taught them when he was with them, but that he didn’t write down for us to know! Paul wrote,

**G. 5 Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things?**

Note: That doesn’t mean Paul taught them things that would help identify who the man of lawlessness is before he is revealed, because that would contradict the statement that he won’t be revealed until the one who is keeping him revealed is removed. Everything Paul says will remain so until Paul says that it won’t be a mystery. Therefore, nobody can stand up and say they found some writings believed to be from the church in Thessalonica that recorded information Paul taught them when he was there, that somehow reveals when Jesus is coming back or who the man of lawlessness is, because Paul taught them and now again in this letter that those things are NOT revealed in God’s Word. However, he did give them some clarification on something that we have nothing in the Bible, or any historically reliable source, to tell us what he told them concerning the one who is restraining the man of lawlessness from being revealed. Paul writes,

**H. 6 And you know what is restraining him now so that he may be revealed in his time. 7 For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work. Only he who now restrains it will do so until he is out of the way. 8 And then the lawless one will be revealed,**

1. Ok. So we got three different things going on in verses 6 through 8a.
2. First – the one being restrained in verse 6 is the man of lawlessness, or lawless one who will be revealed (vs. 8).
3. Second – Although not fully understood (mystery), the lawlessness of the lawless one is already at work, but it is being restrained by the same one that is restraining the man of lawlessness, which also keeps the man of lawlessness from being revealed.
4. Third – The “what” in verse 6 is not a “what” but is clarified as a “who” in verse 7. This “who” seems to be holding back the full unleashing of lawlessness and the revealing of the lawless one, both of which will be fully revealed and unleashed when this “who” is out of the way.

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<sup>7</sup> Green, G. L. (2002). [\*The letters to the Thessalonians\*](#) (pp. 310–312). W.B. Eerdmans Pub.; Apollos.

- a. Now, some believe this passage supports the theory of the rapture, that is, that the church will be raptured away from the earth and thus no longer restrain the lawlessness of the lawless one and give way for the lawless one to step out of hiding and claim to be God. The problem with that interpretation is that it forgets what Paul already said about the church. This passage is equipping the church for when lawlessness will be fully unleashed by the Lawless one, which is entirely pointless if the church isn't around to witness it! If that were the case, Paul would have just said, "Don't worry. When he's revealed, you'll be gone anyway!"
- b. However, if the church is what restrains lawlessness and the lawless one, then the great turning away from Christ by people who claim to be Christians will be the opportunity for the lawless one and his lawlessness to flourish. The church will be taken out of the way by the apostasy of mass numbers of self-proclaimed Christians who, in turn, bow down to the lawless one as God!
- c. Nonetheless, as confident as I am in my interpretation of the passage, that the restrainer is the church and the Gospel, Weidmann wisely notes, **"Now, who or what is this restrainer? We don't know. That has been the honest answer regarding this passage since at least the time of Augustine (*City of God*, 20.19) and probably well before, which is not to say that there are not some interesting and suggestive candidates."**<sup>8</sup>
- d. The following is some insightful information from other scholars:
  1. "From Paul's previous teaching the readers should *now* be able to recollect why the rebel has not yet appeared. He will be revealed at the proper time, but presently there is something (neuter in v 5, but masculine in v 7) *holding him back* (or possibly 'holding sway'). At present, to be sure, rebellion against God is active, but in a hidden way, and this will last only until the restraining force is removed. Then, it is implied, the rebel will act openly—and the Lord will come to defeat him. But what is the restraining force? Some have taken it to mean the Roman emperor (or the forces of law and order typified by him). Others think that it refers to Satan or some other evil force which is presently in power, but will step aside when the rebel comes. Another interpretation is that it means that God himself, through some heavenly agency or the Christian gospel or the church, restrains the power of evil. ... Although no solution is free from difficulty the latter one causes

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<sup>8</sup> Weidmann, F. W. (2013). [\*Philippians, First and Second Thessalonians, and Philemon\*](#) (P. D. Miller & D. L. Bartlett, Eds.; p. 193). Westminster John Knox Press.

the fewest problems. *Till he is taken out of the way* obviously does not refer to God being forced off the scene but to his withdrawal of whatever it is that restrains the power of evil until the moment for the final showdown.”<sup>9</sup>

2. “The identity of this restraining person or power remains unknown. Paul does not provide additional details since he already discussed the matter with the Thessalonian believers (1 Thess 2:5). Paul describes this restraining power as both impersonal (2 Thess 2:6) and personal (v. 7). This combination may refer to the Roman Empire and the Emperor, the power of evil and Satan, or Roman law or government and political leaders. Alternatively, Paul could be referring to a thing or person that plays a positive role in God’s plans, such as the Holy Spirit, the Church, or the preaching of the gospel. Either way, Paul reassures the Thessalonians that God is using this restrainer until the proper time comes for Christ’s destruction of the man of lawlessness (vv. 7–8).”<sup>10</sup>
3. “Unfortunately for us, the author does not explain many aspects of the knowledge he shared with the Thessalonians. For that reason v. 6 remains quite opaque to us as observers of their conversation. To what is Paul referring to when he speaks of that which is *holding him back* and *the one who now holds it back* (v. 7)? This Gordian knot has been nearly impossible to cut!”<sup>11</sup>
4. “That which prefigured the coming of “the lawless one” was still present. Whether we understand the final clause of v. 7 as active or passive, the verse in no way indicates that the Holy Spirit or the church will in some way be taken out of the world. This is hardly an adequate foundation for the commonly held teaching that the rapture of the church will happen sometime before the antichrist is revealed!”<sup>12</sup>
- e. The point, however, is how this ends, which is why there isn’t a period after “And then lawless one will be revealed,” but a comma! The point is that when evil and the evil one appears to have truly won, Jesus will come back and end it! Paul writes,

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<sup>9</sup> Marshall, I. H. (1994). [2 Thessalonians](#). In D. A. Carson, R. T. France, J. A. Motyer, & G. J. Wenham (Eds.), *New Bible commentary: 21st century edition* (4th ed., p. 1289). Inter-Varsity Press.

<sup>10</sup> Barry, J. D., Mangum, D., Brown, D. R., Heiser, M. S., Custis, M., Ritzema, E., Whitehead, M. M., Grigoni, M. R., & Bomar, D. (2012, 2016). [Faithlife Study Bible](#) (2 Th 2:6). Lexham Press.

<sup>11</sup> Green, G. L. (2002). [The letters to the Thessalonians](#) (p. 314). W.B. Eerdmans Pub.; Apollos.

<sup>12</sup> Green, G. L. (2002). [The letters to the Thessalonians](#) (p. 319). W.B. Eerdmans Pub.; Apollos.

I. **8 And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will kill with the breath of his mouth and bring to nothing by the appearance of his coming.**

1. So, after all the previous things, the lawless one will be revealed, implying he will be at work before anybody realizes it, meaning people who claim to know who the lawless one already is are fooled. Nobody will know until all do. However, once everybody knows, and the lawless one has accomplished all he is meant to accomplish, then Jesus comes back and kills him and all his lawlessness—period!
2. It's also important to note the frankness of this passage. At the Second Coming of Christ, there is no "battle" per se, you know, as in the kind you see in the movies with Jesus and his soldiers charging Satan and his soldiers, and we fight it out with Jesus against Satan and his demons. I love the idea because at that point, we can't lose! But it's not Biblical. It's much more like the moment when God created the heavens and the earth. There was nothing, God spoke, and instantly there it was.
3. When Jesus comes back, the lawless one will immediately die! Christ's very appearance will eradicate the claim of the lawless one to be God, and the Word of Christ commanding him to die will instantly bring it about, just as the Word of God brought about the creation of the universe. In other words, Jesus actually is GOD, and nothing makes it more clear than what will happen at His coming.
4. Lawlessness is ultimately living in rebellion against God; that is, refusing to live in glad submission to Him. Whatever happens after that is a lawless action because you are doing it while shooting God the "bird," telling Him you're going to do whatever you want whenever you want to do it. Even if it's something good, if it's being done in the posture of rejecting the authority of God, then it doesn't matter!
5. But at the coming of Jesus, the sky will melt away! There will be no way anyone can be lawless. As the church is gathered to Him, rejoicing, the rest of the world will bow before Him in horror of their reality.
6. **12 "Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense with me, to repay everyone for what he has done. 13 I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end." (Revelation 22:12-13)**

So, to me, if that's the future of lawlessness and the lawless one, if the future is that Jesus is coming to judge, the challenge is kind of obvious!



**Challenge:** Lawlessness is already the reality of the lost world that says no to God and yes to ourselves. Where is lawlessness manifesting itself in your life? Claim the grace of Christ, confess your sin, and repent now while you have time to prosper in His life!

**13** Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy. (Proverbs 28:13)

**4** Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? (Romans 2:4)

*Jesus said,* **15** "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel." (Mark 1:15)