

Lesson 8

II Thessalonians 2:1-17 | Stand Firm Against Deception



I. A Concern: Don't be tricked into thinking that the day of the Lord has come (v1-3a)

II. The Expectations: What to expect before the Return of Jesus (v3b-8)

Two events before Jesus returns: The rebellion/apostasy, and the man of lawlessness.

1. Who is he? (v3-4)

2. What is he like? (v4)

3. What will he do? (v4)

4. What is his pattern?

Many people have tried to nail this down. Lots of people have claimed to have identified the anti-Christ.

But before we even attempt to identify him, we need to see that this is actually a pattern throughout biblical history. The Bible develops a repeated pattern in history that leads to a climactic deception and particularly crazy, prideful leader.



Antiochus Epiphanes IV (169BC)

Daniel prophesied about this Dan 11:21-35. In 169BC the Syrian King Antiochus entered the temple. Then the next year he set up an altar to Zeus inside of the temple. And he sacrificed pigs on it and defiled the temple. He was intentionally offending the Jewish people. Daniel also noted this pattern would continue with an ultimate Antiochus 2.0 in Daniel 11:36-45. Daniel says this ultimate future one “will exalt himself and magnify himself above every god, and shall speak astonishing things against the God of gods” (Dan. 11:36).

Emperor Gaius Caligula (40AD)

Caligula claimed that he was divine and thus worthy of worship. He ordered a statue of himself (an idol) to be put in the temple. It almost happened, but he was persuaded against it. This happened 10-15 years before Paul wrote 2 Thessalonians, so it was still fresh on the memory.

Roman General Titus (70AD)

The Romans overtook the temple-mount. The commander was Titus. He walked into the temple. And they hailed Titus as emperor and sacrificed pigs inside. Jesus referenced the pattern from Daniel and then prophesied about this in Matt 24 and Mark 13.

The Mystery of Lawlessness (see below)

Man of Lawlessness (just before Christ's second coming)

This is Paul's focus in 2 Thess 2. Paul is saying that the pattern is going to continue. This will eventually lead to a greater, climactic deception and crazy leader who will rise up right before Jesus returns.

5. How is this presently at work? (v7)

2 Thess 2:7 For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work.

1 John 2:18 Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come. Therefore we know that it is the last hour.

6. Who or what restrains him? (v7)

The Holy Spirit.

The preaching of the gospel.

The Roman state.

An angel, maybe Michael, viewed as the archangel, especially in light of Daniel 10:13, 20, 21; 12:1.

Augustine's view: “I frankly confess, I do not know what he means”

7. How will he be destroyed? (v7-8)

8. Should we expect a secret, “pre-tribulational” rapture before this happens?

Many people, whom I respect, believe that Jesus will return in two stages: They believe that Jesus will come the first time to rapture the church. He will take them away from the earth and they will go to be with him in heaven. And then there will be 7 years of tribulation. And then, after that, he will come again, but this time in judgment. This is the view popularized with the Left Behind series.

But there are two things I want to point out that make me think this doesn't fit

First, the logic. Paul talks just how we would expect him to if he thought that Christians would remain all the way until his second coming. He says “Here's how you know the day of the Lord hasn't come: Because there are two things you'll see first: a rebellion, and the man of lawlessness.”

Second, the context. Notice the way Paul talks about Jesus' return back in 1:6-7, “God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God.”

III. A Warning: do not be deceived (v9-12)

IV. An Encouragement: Thanking God for election and encouragement to stand firm (v13-17)