

2 Thessalonians 2:3-12

I. JUMPING RIGHT IN FOR THE SAKE OF TIME...

- A. Last week we talked about how Paul made it clear that the final return of Jesus, the day of the judgment of God, the Day of the Lord, would not happen until the world experiences the “rebellion” and the “man of lawlessness” is revealed
- B. I explained that rebellion means apostasy, a great falling away, which is most likely precipitated by what we want to focus on today - the “Man of Lawlessness.”
- C. Give credit where credit is due. In preparation this read the following authors:
 - 1. John MacArthur; G.K. Beale; David Chapman; John Piper

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

A. WHAT IS THE BIBLICAL BACKDROP TO THIS TERM?

- 1. In the book of Daniel, we see a prophecy that points to a real historical figure Antiochus IV, who called himself Epiphanes (“god manifest”).
 - a) He invaded Jerusalem, desecrated the temple, burned the Scriptures, killed many Jews, and ultimately instituted pagan sacrifices (167 BC). This led to the Maccabean revolt.
 - b) But 200 years later, Jesus references this event by saying the “abomination of desolation” would happen again prior to his return
 - c) So Daniel’s imagery becomes an “already not yet” pattern of opposition to God’s rule that points to the Day of the Lord
- 2. Jesus, in discussing the end of days, talks about another man of lawlessness coming who sets himself up as the chief object of worship in the temple. He calls him the abomination of [or that makes] desolation
- 3. Paul draws on Jesus’ tradition as he discusses the “man of lawlessness,” who is the “son of destruction,” who will be like Antiochus Epiphanes IV

B. WHAT WILL THE MAN OF LAWLESSNESS DO?

- 1. **He will behave lawlessly**...The idea is that if a follower of God is defined by his rule and reign, then the man of lawlessness would be characterized by his opposition to God’s rule and reign.
- 2. **He will oppose every pagan religion.**
 - a) He opposes “every so-called god,” → pagan worship
 - b) He opposes every “object of worship,” a word which specifically refers to pagan idols (cf. Acts 17:23).
 - c) Literally, he will be an adversary (a title for Satan) to these things
 - d) So, there is a sense in which this man of lawlessness might stand as part of the monotheistic tradition (Judaism, Christianity, Islam)
- 3. **He will exalt himself over (or as) the worship of God Almighty taking his seat in the temple.**

- a) He claims to be worthy of worship, taking “his seat in the temple of God” perhaps claiming to be the Messiah or God
- b) Temple could mean a few things here:
 - (1) Some suggest that the Thessalonians would imagine an important temple in their city (probably not)
 - (2) Some argue that the temple is a reference to the church as the “temple of God” as Paul says in Corinthians (might be, meaning this figure comes from within the church)
 - (3) Most think it refers to the Jerusalem temple (which is destroyed)
- c) SIDEBAR: Since the temple was destroyed at the hand of Titus (AD 70), some think this passage points to that event, but the specifics of its destruction and the adversary do not line up with any of the other parts of what Paul has written
 - (1) The same argument and response could be said for other religious sites built since then, like the Temple of Jupiter or the current Dome of the Rock
- d) But, again, the temple is currently destroyed, so do we need a physical temple to be built in order for this to come to pass?
 - (1) Some would say, “Yes! We need a physical temple.”
 - (2) Others would say it could be metaphorical

III. *And you know what is restraining him now so that he may be revealed in his time. 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. 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. The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders, and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved.*

A. GOD IS IN CONTROL OF THE TIMELINE

1. “You know what is restraining him now” → Lots of theories, but it appears most likely that God himself is the restrainer
2. All of the unfolding of the end is in God’s timing and not, for a moment, out of his control. He has precision timing for his precise purposes
3. There is a proper time for his revealing, and a proper time for his destruction
4. Over the last 2000, years the mystery of lawlessness has been at work, and God has let it play out as it has under restraint
 - a) This parallels what John states, that “antichrist is coming” and that “now many antichrists have come” (Those who oppose Jesus).
5. Evil has many faces, but it points to one key eschatological figure
6. God, in his divine sovereignty, is working with HIS timeline

B. GOD IS HOLDING BACK WICKEDNESS

1. Evil is at work, but it is being restrained
2. Things are not as bad as they could be. Even now, things could be worse

3. The river of chaos is battering the rowboat and trying to tug it downstream, but God has restrained it w/ a rope on the dock
4. One day, however, God will cut the rope and let it GO and rescind common grace

C. DESPITE THE ENEMY'S BEST EFFORTS, GOD WINS

1. Jesus said that many false messiahs and prophets would arise over time, but that the gates of hell would not prevail against the church.
2. The enemy is working hard to deceive and manipulate. Paul pictures this w/ his vocabulary choices
 - a) God is "at work", lawlessness is "at work"
 - b) Jesus comes (parousia), the evil one comes
 - c) Jesus will be revealed (apokalypto) as will the man of lawlessness
 - d) There is a mystery of the gospel as well as of lawlessness
3. POINT: Man of Lawlessness is a sort of counterfeit Christ.
 - a) As the Son is the visible image of the invisible God, the Man of Lawlessness will be the visible image of the Adversary
 - b) We will know that he is counterfeit b/c we know the real Christ
4. Even w/ all those fancy signs, wonders, and counterfeiting, the enemy doesn't stand a chance
 - a) Jesus will kill the lawless one and bring him to nothing
 - b) It won't even be hard - Jesus will destroy the lawless one by the "breath of his mouth."
5. We don't need to worry b/c Jesus will defeat the Man of Lawlessness
6. With all his trickery, he's still just a phony and a fake

IV. [9] The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders, [10] and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. [11] Therefore God sends them a strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false, [12] in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

A. WHO WILL BE DECEIVED?

1. Those who are perishing... Those who refused to love the truth... Those who refuse to be saved... Those who did not believe the truth... Those who had pleasure in unrighteousness...
2. In other words: **True believers WILL NOT BE DECEIVED. They can't be deceived.**

B. WHY ARE THEY DECEIVED?

1. Paul's answer is: the tendency of the human heart not to love the truth, but to find pleasure in unrighteousness — to find pleasure not in the God of truth, but in the god of lawlessness.
2. Since they despise God and his truth, God sends a delusion so that they believe what is false...

C. WHY DOES GOD DELUDE EVERYONE ELSE?

1. This is just. They refused to believe the truth so they believed a lie.

V. CONCLUSION

A. WHAT DO I THINK?

1. I think there is a yet-future appearance of a human lawless one, whose arrival will come along with false signs and deception enmasse.
2. TRUE Believers won't be deceived. Many within the "church" will be deceived and stand condemned. I think this will be the great apostasy
3. This leads me to believe that the antiChrist will somehow be connected to the church or to the monotheistic religions of the world
4. His coming will usher in a terrible time of persecution, but it will also precede Jesus' return and final judgment
5. When Jesus arrives, Jesus will win.
6. I think a lot beyond that is conjecture.
 - a) Remember, as is the case with prophecy, God is faithful to his promises, yet these things rarely unfold as we expect them to
 - b) Jesus' fulfillment of prophecy, while clear in hindsight, wasn't anticipated by even the most faithful Jewish students
 - c) No one thought he would be born that way, die that way, be raised, or ascend and then delay his return.
7. Similarly, a natural reading of the Scripture explains that we should anticipate a man of lawlessness, but we shouldn't be too overly zealous to think we will figure out who it will be before the proper time.

8. Only in hindsight will we understand the prophetic word fully.

B. It's easy to become fascinated and overwhelmed by these things, but let's remember the basics.

1. What we are experiencing now in some small way is "par for the course" in our world
 - a) The wickedness of man has been (and is being) kept at bay by the grace of God, but as the day of the Lord approaches that wickedness will increase b/c God will begin to let go of restraint
2. As scary as that sounds, God is sovereign, even over the end
 - a) God's timing is perfect. As Jesus came in the fullness of time, he will return in the fullness of time.
 - b) The Son of Lawlessness will come when God wants him to come so that he can be destroyed once and for all
 - c) It will get bad, but God wins
3. You hold the hope of the world in the gospel of Jesus Christ.
 - a) You know how your friends, family, and neighbors can escape the wrath that is to come.
 - b) You know the secret and God wants you to tell people about it.
 - c) We cannot keep Jesus to ourselves.
 - d) Time is short, hell is real. Eternity is at stake!

Instead of Table Talk, will have another time of Q&A