

# A Study of 2 Thessalonians



In our last lesson we began to look at 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12 and in this lesson we will complete our study of this passage. We divided this lesson into two parts because of the difficulty in interpretation and the many ways in which this Scripture has been understood.

## The Man of Lawlessness 2:1-12 (Part 2)

### 1. What characteristics of the man of lawlessness are given in verse 4?

What can we make of such a difficult passage and what are we to take from it?

**First, let us not forget that this passage was a message of encouragement and warning to a first century church.** Paul writes to give the Thessalonian Christians the assurance that the Lord had not yet returned. What Paul wrote was understood by the first century church and had direct bearing upon their faith. Paul writes to help them avoid error and to remain faithful. There were those who wanted to deceive the young Christians and he wants to help them overcome this deception.

It does not seem likely that Paul is writing about something that would happen 2,000 years or more after he writes to the Thessalonians. If so why Paul and the church often discuss these matters in the past (v. 5) and why was this “mystery of lawlessness” already said to be at work? If everything of which Paul writes is centuries after the Thessalonian Christians lived, it would seem to have little relevance to them.

### **Second, “the rebellion” or apostasy will precede the Second Coming.**

The definite article “the” comes before “rebellion” indicating that Paul is picturing a specific period of apostasy. While it is possible there is still some future great apostasy, false teaching was prevalent in Thessalonica and in every city of every church in the New Testament. Wild and fanciful ideas are held by many who claim to be Christians and there is no shortage of preachers and teachers who peddle teaching that is contrary to Scripture. Catholicism along with many cults would fit the criteria needed to be termed as apostates.

### 2. According to verses 10-11, what allowed men to be deceived?

It is not necessarily true that there is just one specific act or period of rebellion and apostasy that Paul has in mind. It might include all those acts of apostasy that have taken place through the centuries and still continue to this day. the act of apostasy may be the lack of love, acceptance, and obedience to the truth.

### 3. According to John when is the last hour? (1 John 2:18)

**Third, the man of lawlessness sets himself up against God.** He opposes God and calls himself God. He is called the “son of destruction” because he is destined for destruction. As Paul writes, the man of lawlessness has not yet been “revealed,” but his ideas are already at work.<sup>1</sup> If he was already at work in the first century it is difficult to see the man of lawlessness as a particular human individual still in our future. The Greek word translated “at work” is in a tense and form to indicate that “this movement currently was working itself towards a greater goal. The child, later to become a Man, was growing in Paul’s day.”<sup>2</sup>

As we saw in the previous lesson, the antichrist is used to refer to anyone who claimed that Jesus had not come in the flesh. John was combating the teaching of Gnosticism which was beginning to infiltrate the church toward the end of the first century. This particular false teaching was not yet found in Thessalonica at the time of Paul’s writing. Just as the antichrist can refer to any number of individuals who teach falsely and are agents of deception, it is not necessary to assume that the man of lawlessness is just one particular individual at one specific time in history.

Why can’t we assume that anyone who fits the description of the man of lawlessness in 2 Thessalonians 2:4 is a man of lawlessness? If this is the case there have been countless men of lawlessness since Paul wrote nearly twenty centuries ago.

### 4. What is the meaning of lawlessness?

### 5. Describe the relationship between truth and lawlessness.



While it has been popular thorough the past several centuries to believe the pope (or the papacy) is the man of lawlessness (and he does fit much of the description) many others also peddle in falsehood and sometimes claim divinity. What makes the Catholic Church such an attractive target is that they have been so pervasive and lawless for centuries and have deceived countless millions. No other group purporting to act as agents of the Lord’s Church has been as destructive.

Still, there are other groups, some of which are quite active today who would seem to fit this criteria (or some of it) as well as the Catholic Church.

**Fourth, the temple should be understood as a metaphor of the church.** Why write extensively to a Gentile church about the Jewish temple? In the New Testament, after the resurrection, the temple is never used to describe a physical place in Jerusalem. It

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<sup>1</sup> 2 Thess. 2:7.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.christiancourier.com/articles/677-study-of-pauls-man-of-sin-a>

seems almost certain that the temple is used here to refer to the church.<sup>3</sup> The Greek word translated as “temple” is never used as a reference to the Jewish temple.<sup>4</sup>



This man of lawlessness sets himself up ***within the church*** as an opponent of Christ. Through the power of Satan he is able to do powerful, but false signs and wonders. This should warn Christians to look carefully at any so called signs and wonders as they may not be from God.

6. For what reason might Satan want to allow the lawless one to perform signs and wonders?
7. Why would false signs and wonders hold more sway than the love of the truth amongst those who are deluded?
8. How can a person know the origin of any sign or wonder?
9. What do the following verses teach about false signs and wonders? (Matt. 24:11, 24; Mark 13:22)

**Sixth, the identity of the restraining force whatever or whomever it was was known by the first century Christians.** Verse 6 clearly says, “And you know what is restraining him...” While we may not “know” for certain the identity of the restraining force, the Thessalonians did.

Ultimately it seems that God is the restrainer. Those who believe the pope (or papacy) is the man of sin believe the restrainer to have been the Roman Empire. There is some reason to believe that early Christian writers such as Tertullian, Chrysostom, Hippolytus, Cyril of Jerusalem, Jerome, and Augustine viewed the Roman Empire in this way.<sup>5</sup> The fall of the Roman Empire in A.D. 476 did allow for the vast expansion of power within the Catholic Church.

The restraining force may be as simple as the truth itself which was ultimately rejected by both the Jews and Gentiles. Perhaps God restrained the ability of falsehood to

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<sup>3</sup> 1 Cor. 3:17; 2 Cor. 6:16.

<sup>4</sup> The word translated temple is the Greek word *naos*. See <https://www.christiancourier.com/articles/677-study-of-pauls-man-of-sin-a>

<sup>5</sup> Elliott, David Vaughn. *Nobody Left Behind: Insight into “End-Time” Prophecies*. Methuen, Massachusetts, 2004, p. 182-186,

flourish completely before the completion of the New Testament. What we do know is that the lack of love for the truth prevents people from being saved. Also God allows them to be deluded.<sup>6</sup>

**Seventh, the end of the man of lawlessness and all who follow him is destruction.** The Lord Jesus will kill this lawless one “with the breath of his mouth and bring to nothing by the appearance of his coming.” Likewise all those who do not love the truth and who are deceived by the false signs and wonders will be condemned.

The lawless one who acts under the power of Satan and who is able to perform amazing signs and wonders will be utterly and totally defeated when the Lord returns.

#### **10. How can the knowledge of the ultimate defeat of all lawlessness bring comfort to the Christian?**

**Eighth, safety is found in the truth.** Falsehood and lawlessness is prevalent in this world. For this reason Paul urges the Thessalonian Christians to not be shaken in mind or alarmed by a spirit, a spoken word, or a false letter. The Christian should cling to the truth and not be deceived or deluded even by those things which look to be powerful signs and wonders.

The follower of God is one who loves and believes the truth and receives salvation. Jesus taught in John 8:31-32, “If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

**2 Thessalonians 2:1-12** is a very difficult passage of Scripture for us to interpret and many sincere Christians have understood some of the details in a variety of ways. Because of this it would be prudent for us to be humble in our own interpretation.

Still there are three key lessons for us to take away from this passage. **First, we need to be prepared for the Lord’s Second Coming.** It would be foolhardy for us to say that certain events **must** take place (that haven’t yet taken place) before the Lord can return. As John says, we are in the last hour already. Furthermore we are told that no man knows the hour of the Lord’s return. The Thessalonian Christians are instructed in 1 Thessalonians. 4:13-5:11 about the Lord’s return in such a way that seems like he could come anytime.

**Second, we must believe and love the truth so that we are not deceived by Satan and those who follow him.**

**Third, the ultimate defeat of Satan and all who follow him is assured.** The hope of all Christians comes through a belief in and love for the truth. We are not destined for wrath, but for salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Thess. 5:10).

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<sup>6</sup> The word translated delusion (planēs) can also be translated as error or deceit. ESV GreekTools from [ESVBible.org](http://ESVBible.org).