

PEACE AT THE END  
2 Thessalonians 2:1-17  
June 5 (Kit), June 12 (PVC)

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**2 THESSALONIANS 2:1-17**

The Purpose

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.

The Sign of the End

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. 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.

The Judgment of Unbelievers

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.

The Foundation of Safety for Believers

13 But we ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the first fruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth. 14 To this he called you through our gospel, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. 15 So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by our spoken word or by our letter. 16 Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God our Father, who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace, 17 comfort your hearts and establish them in every good work and word.

This text can be divided into 4 parts. The first is the purpose of the chapter. Paul says he doesn't want them to be "shaken in mind" nor "alarmed." Their particular worries regarded someone telling them that the Lord had come and they didn't know it. The end had begun! But had it? Can you see that some things never change? Harold Camping, the teacher who deceives himself and the church with his strange calculations about when the Lord will return, is not the first. There have always been people who are so obsessed regarding the return of the Lord, that they seem to care not about what is happening right now. They teach others their falsehoods, frightening them.

Being frightened about the end times is very common, and for good reason. It is hard to imagine everything coming to a disastrous judgment without some fear. Paul's language is good for us today. We are not to be quickly shaken in mind. If thoughts of the end times are producing fear in you, set them aside, for you are seeing things in a mistaken way. When the end comes, if it comes while we live, it will not be one of insanity and fear for believers. It will be one where we find we have a sound mind, and peace. "God has not given us a spirit of fear, but one of love, and power, and a sound mind."

The next section of this text deals with the sign that the end is coming. There are either one or two signs listed here. I have a feeling there is only one, and the other related. The two possible signs are these: "the rebellion" and the revealing of "the son of lawlessness."

Paul says, it can't be the end unless you first see with your eyes the rebellion and the son of lawlessness appear. What is the rebellion (apostasy, the falling away)? It is either a falling **away** of the church or a falling away of unbelievers. Many think it is the church. I do not. If there is a great falling away in the church, then who is there to save? Anyway, the entire text is emphasizing that a division is coming to the earth. There will be two groups: those who believe that the man of lawlessness is god, and those who do not. The church must be the ones who do not. No, I think this rebellion is probably mankind's ultimate rebellion against God. And I think this sets the stage for the revealing of the man of lawlessness. More on this in a moment. First, who is this "man of lawlessness?" Well, the text tells us a lot about him, actually. Let's list it out.

1. He's a man. He is not an angel of lawlessness, not a demon, and not Satan himself. No he is a man, a human being. Now, I assume by man, he is also male, but I suppose it is possible that man is being used in a general sense here, and perhaps a female could be this man of lawlessness –but that is mere speculation. In any case, this is a human being.

2. He is called man of lawlessness and the son of destruction. Lawlessness is a term for me that conjure up visions of an old west town filled with bandits and thieves. There is not law except the end of the gun and the whims of those who carried the gun. Such a situation is unsafe for mankind. Man is sinful and needs to have his wickedness restrained. When a man in his heart believes that he is not bound by any law, that right and wrong are completely within his power, he becomes a very dangerous man. Often we call that man a sociopath, because he lives by his own rules, not caring for the harm it does others.

Jesus said that at the end of time, lawlessness would increase causing the love of many to grow cold. We can see how this can be. Imagine a day care center with children of all ages, and all is orderly, and they are loved, and they know their routine and all problems are handled fairly and lovingly by the overseers. Now, imagine that same day care center with the same children, but remove all the routine and all the rules. Remove the loving oversight. Allow the children to rule themselves as they see fit. Perhaps imagine one adult overseeing them who feels no love for kids and no respect for the laws of man. What will happen in that daycare center? Chaos? Cruelty? Injury? Sorrow? Fear? Oppression? Even death? Yes. Given long enough, all these things will happen. Lawlessness unleashes the selfishness and sin within man.

Lawlessness cannot be abided. Man destroys himself in that environment. Mankind has always naturally embraced a law outside of himself. It is natural to man to know there is a God, even if he doesn't know that God. It is the norm throughout the 10k plus years of civilized histories that all tribes and all nations had gods. It is the norm of the human race for all governments to see themselves as governed by powers higher than man. What we call a "witch doctor" or a "shaman" is really the priest who endorses the power of the chief to rule from the spiritual realm. All people have gods and acknowledge that they are not the final arbiter of right and wrong. And although it is never good to worship a false god, it is even worse to live as if there is no god at all. At least with a false god, you can be convinced that the true God is greater than yours and you should repent and switch to the truth.

Well, that is changing. The idea of the secular state, or the government with no acknowledgment of a power greater than man, is fast becoming the norm for the entire world. All of China holds to the idea of a secular state. There is no god for communists. All of the western nations, though having a history of acknowledging God, are forsaking such thinking in the way they govern and seeking to purge all remnants of God's governance from our national conversations and policy. We think of it today as normal that we should think of government as separate from the oversight of God. Everyone has different religions, we feel, so we should make our own rules to help us all get along in a practical way. Today we take it for granted that God is not to figure into public policy. But it was not always this way. When America was founded, secularist philosophies of government were on the rise. France's bloody revolutions that led to greater oppression were based on the idea that no god should rule them. But before that, the kings that ruled the nations of Europe all acknowledged that they gained their power from God, through the church of their nation. Before they were Christians, they worshiped pagan gods. They were never secular. But today, they throw off church and God as irrelevant to all things.

In the United States, one little line in one of our founding documents is the thin thread of sanity running through our history and bringing much good to the world. That line is, "We are endowed with our Creator's inalienable rights." This little line is all we have on the national level to keep us tethered to law. For this line says, "Rights and freedoms come from God. There is a law greater than the laws we make. All of our laws are subject to a higher power."

But this little thread of steel is continually under attack. Attempts to govern completely ignoring a transcendent God are the norm today.

Around the world, secular states are becoming the ideal. When we look at nations like Egypt, Libya, Iran, and Iraq, and others, we are told that what is best is if they have secular governments. Islamic governments tend towards oppression of people. This is true. But at least with Islamic government, the human beings still are acknowledging that they are not gods themselves. But American policy is that we replace these governments with secular states which will be, we think, safer for us all. I'm afraid we are only trading a scorpion for a rattle snake.

It is my speculation that the great apostasy or rebellion spoken of in this passage is all of mankind rebelling against God's existence and governance. What greater rebellion can there be than to say, "There is no God over me at all. I am therefore the determiner of right and wrong. I am my own god?" A world of lawless nations is a world of chaos, abuse, exploitation, rebellion, cruelty, etc.

**3.** He "*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.*" Whoever this evil one is, he is copying God Himself, by claiming to be the only god. In other words, he does not acknowledge that all religions are true, like the New Age thinkers do. Instead, he is opposed to all religions. He seeks to copy the true God, saying that all religions are false; he will not be loyal to Islam, nor Christianity, nor Judaism, nor Hinduism, nor Buddhism. He will claim that he is the only god and all religions are false.

This text points in two directions. One, it points back to a man in history named Antiochus Epiphanies, who, a couple of centuries before Jesus was born, claimed to be god, and went to the Temple in Jerusalem, and sacrificed unclean animals and claimed to be god himself. This event was referred to in the book of Daniel as, "the abomination that makes desolate."

Jesus would later say that in the end times, something like this would happen in again. Look at what Jesus said:

Matthew 24:14-16 14 And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come. 15 "So when you see the abomination of desolation spoken of by the prophet Daniel, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), 16 then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.

Paul is clearly referring to the same event when he says that the end cannot come before the lawless one goes to the Temple and reveals himself as the only god. What Antiochus Epiphanies did before Jesus came will be duplicated at the end of all things in some way.

What will this look like? It is hard to say. Right now, there is no Temple at all. How can the man of lawlessness take his place in the temple if there is no temple? Some think that the temple will be rebuilt in the end times. Maybe it will be. Some think this is a symbolic temple, and that the man of lawlessness will declare himself in some way equivalent to the Jewish

Temple. In any case, we need not worry about that. When it happens we will know, I believe. For in Matthew, the text says, “let the reader understand.” That hints to me that it is possible that Jesus is saying, “When you need to understand what I am saying, you will.”

This text also points forward to the book of Revelation where we see a man will arise called the Beast, who will have a prophet for himself, who will seek to force the entire world to worship him by taking a mark. Clearly, this Beast is the same person as this man of lawlessness.

4. The coming of the man of lawlessness is a historical event awaiting certain specific conditions that must happen in time. Paul points out that there are time elements involved in when the man of lawlessness will come. One of them is this thing called “the great falling away”. I’m not certain what this great apostasy is, but my guess is that it is the governments of man casting off God himself in their national and self-governance. This is ultimate rebellion. This also leads to lawlessness. This seems to be the right condition for a man of lawlessness to come in, with the slate wiped clean, and claim that he is god after all.

Paul said that the “mystery of lawlessness” was already at work in their time. Whatever that lawlessness is, it had to work itself out in history to a time when the restraint against the coming of the man of lawlessness could be taken away. What is this restraint? Some think it is the church. I don’t think so, since I don’t think we are going anywhere until the Lord returns. Some think it is the Holy Spirit. Again, I don’t think so, for if the Holy Spirit left the earth, no one could be saved, and perhaps all things would blow apart since God holds all things together. I’m not sure it matters what the restraint is. If we really needed to know, God would have told us. But the restraint will soon be gone.

5. Satan is behind this man. He is not Satan, but he is the purely satanic man. He will be controlled completely by the impulse of pride and self-exaltation that Satan has been tempting mankind with since the garden.

6. He will do false miracles that will fool everybody. Never follow anyone because they can do miracles that they say are from God. Only follow leaders who lead in the truth of the gospel. This man will fool the world.

7. Finally, Jesus is going to slay him. Therefore, he won’t reign for long on the earth. Jesus will come back and kill him with the breath of His mouth. That means judgment and fire will come on him faster than you can say, “left behind.” He is a loser. He is the loser. All who go his way are losers.

All men, women, boys, and girls who, in their rebellion, refuse to believe the gospel of Jesus, will be deceived. God will send them a strong delusion so that they will believe the man of lawlessness. They will go after him, they will hate God, and when the Lord returns, their sin will be apparent and their judgment sealed. You might say, "How can it be fair if God sent the delusion on them?" Don't you see? The delusion only works on the already wicked. It's like a magnet that won't attract non metals. If you are not made of iron, you don't have to worry about magnets. This delusion works on them because they are wicked. If someone says they are not stealing from work, sometimes, the boss will leave money lying out, unwatched, as a test. If the person is not a thief, they will not touch it. But if they are, they steal it, and their guilt is sealed.

There is no reason for the Christian to fear this end time. Why not? Because instead of lawlessness, we have Christ. We have God Himself. Our love will not grow cold. We will not be fooled. But instead, to the very end, we will be declaring the greatness of our God and rescuing people from destruction up until the last moment. He will give us insight. He will keep us from delusion.

13 But we ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the first fruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth. 14 To this he called you through our gospel, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. 15 So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by our spoken word or by our letter. 16 Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God our Father, who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace, 17 comfort your hearts and establish them in every good work and word.

We are safe not because of what we did or do, but because God chose us. We are chosen by God to be saved. God's choice cannot be undone. We are safe because God chooses us. Those He has chosen, He has called. Like a mother calling her children home for dinner, He has called us home. He has done it through his gospel! Here is the call: Jesus Christ came to earth as a man, He lived a sinless life, He died a criminals death, He bore your sins on the cross, He died, on the third day, He rose to life so that we may rise one day, He appeared to His followers, He commissioned their work of building the church, He ascended into heaven from where He rules with God, and He will come again. This is the message you heard and you believed! This is how God called you.

So, instead of fearing the end, just stand firm, every day, holding onto the teachings of the Bible itself. God will work through us in this day. And, by so doing, we will shine like the sun itself.

Daniel 12 3 And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky above; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.