

Second Thessalonians

Chapter 2

The Man of Lawlessness

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. 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. 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.

2:1 coming. The second coming of Christ is the principal topic of 2 Thessalonians. What Paul wrote was supplemental to his oral teaching and the instructions contained in his earlier letter. (CSB)

2:2 quickly shaken. The Greek for this verb was often used of a ship adrift from its mooring, and suggests lack of stability. (CSB)

When people think about the end of the world, it often seems they are ready to believe any rumor which comes along. This happens especially when people have not carefully studied what God says about that awesome day. It seems that some of the Thessalonians were no different. (PBC)

alarmed. Jesus issued a similar instruction, using the same verb (Mk 13:7). (CSB)

spirit. Lit. “spirit,” denoting any inspired revelation. (CSB)

Paul strongly warns the Thessalonians to beware of false prophets (false spirits), and also misunderstandings of inspired prophetic teachings (even from the prophetic Spirit through Paul himself) or any of his oral communication. (TLSB)

spoken word. Lit. “word,” perhaps referring to a sermon or other oral communication. (CSB)

letter seeming to be from us. A forgery. (CSB)

May refer to a misinterpretation of 1Th that led to doctrinal error. (TLSB)

day of the Lord. A deception. Paul explains the deception in v 3. This is one of his main purposes in writing 2Th. (TLSB)

What was this false idea which was circulating? Paul does not say much about it, excepts to mention the rumor “that the day of the Lord has come.” (PBC)

has come. Obviously Christ’s climactic return had not occurred, but Paul was combating the idea that the final days had begun and their completion would be imminent. (CSB)

What gives this rumor some status was the added rumor that Paul himself had said the day of the Lord had already come. In his first letter Paul had indeed spent quite a bit of time instructing them about Jesus’ “coming” and their “being gathered to him.” But Paul categorically denies he had ever said that “the day of the Lord has already come.” (PBC)

2:3 *the rebellion.* At the last time there will be a falling away from the faith (see Mt 24:10–12; 1Ti 4:1). But here Paul is speaking of active rebellion, the supreme opposition of evil to the things of God. (CSB)

Gk *apostasia*, root of Eng “apostasy.” Abandonment of the faith. Betrayal, falsehood, hatred, and lawlessness by misled Christians will be marks of this intrachurch rebellion against God and His truth (Mt 24:9–12). (TLSB)

The one thing that would happen is a falling away or a denial. The NIV translation “rebellion” is a possible rendering of the Greek word, which is the same word as our English “apostasy.” But the following verses, especially verses 10-12, indicate that Paul is talking about a denial or desertion from the truth of salvation. In the OT this word referred to unfaithfulness to God or the denial of God. In the only other place where it is used in the NT, Acts 1:21, it also refers to a turning away of desertion. (PBC)

the man of lawlessness. The leader of the forces of evil at the last time. Only here is he called by this name. John tells us of many “antichrists” (1Jn 2:18), and this may be the worst of them—the antichrist of Rev 13—though Paul’s description of the man of lawlessness has some distinctive features. He is not Satan, because he is clearly distinguished from him in v. 9. (CSB)

He comes as the completion of the rebellion. Elsewhere in Scripture, this incarnation of evil is called “the antichrist” and “the beast.” Luther: “[He] not only is a sinner in his own right, but ... through false doctrine [he] causes others to sin with him” (AE 41:288). (TLSB)

The second event which must take place is the revelation of a “man of sin.” The NIV takes the reading “man of lawlessness” which is found in some of the early manuscripts. As the NIV footnote indicates, there are many early manuscripts which read “man of sin.” The latter definitely has the stronger evidence. (PBC)

revealed. Since the Greek for this word is from the same root as that used of Jesus Christ in 1:7, it may indicate something supernatural. (CSB)

son of destruction. For all his proud claims, his final overthrow is certain. The same expression is used of Judas Iscariot (see Jn 17:12). (CSB)

He spreads destruction and will ultimately be destroyed himself, i.e., he is headed for destruction. He embodies the great rebellion against God. He is satanic, perhaps even Satan possessing a

person. He has not yet come, but the powers that he embodies are already active: the “mystery of lawlessness” (v 7). Judas is a type of the man of lawlessness (Jn 13:27; 17:12). (TLSB)

He would be particularly responsible for the apostasy or falling away because he would be a powerful and influential leader, who would presume to take the place of Christ. Thus he is often referred to as the Antichrist. Since he tries to take the place of Christ and leads people away from Christ, his fate is sealed. (PBC)

There are nine points to keep in mind about the “apostasy” and the “Antichrist”:

- 1) The falling away from the truth of salvation would be accompanied by the revelation of the Antichrist, the man of sin.
- 2) The Antichrist would exalt himself so that he would become the equal of God in the hearts of men.
- 3) The opposition to Christ was already at work when Paul wrote these words, but God was holding it back from working openly.
- 4) Eventually God would let it work openly, and this would result in the Antichrist being clearly revealed as an opponent of God.
- 5) With His Word Jesus would overthrow the power of the Antichrist.
- 6) With His second coming Jesus would completely destroy the Antichrist.
- 7) The Antichrist would be successful in bringing about the apostasy, because Satan would support him with miracles to mislead many.
- 8) Satan would also use his power to lead the Antichrist’s followers to join the man in denying the truth of salvation.
- 9) Because of their denial of the truth, God would harden the Antichrist’s followers in the delusion that they were on the way to salvation when they really were perishing. Note in particular two key facts included in all nine points. First, the Antichrist is clearly a religious teacher. Secondly, the span of time of the Antichrist stretches from Paul’s time to the end of the world. (PBC)

2:4 *every so-called god or object of worship.* He is not merely a political or military man, but claims a place above every god and everything associated with worship. He even claims to be God. (CSB)

The man of lawlessness exalts himself over both true religion (Christianity) and false religion (man-made). Irenaeus of Lyons: “Antichrist shall be lifted up, not above Him, but above those which are indeed called gods, but are not” (ANF 1:420). (TLSB)

His sin is that he not only opposes God, but exalts himself above God. The man of sin, man of lawlessness, demands for himself a position above “everything that is called God or is worshiped.” The word “worshiped” was a word used in the NT time to refer to everyone who held a leading position in the family, government or religion and was to be highly honored. Paul is saying that the Antichrist exalted himself above these people who God wants Christians to honor as His representative. By so opposing God’s will, he even sets himself above God. (PBC)

temple of God. † May refer to a physical building (cf. Mk 13:14) from which he makes his blasphemous pronouncements (cf. Da 11:36–45; Rev 13:1–15). More likely the reference is to a religious institution. Lutheran tradition sees the papacy as the “man of lawlessness.” But this tradition must remain a historical judgment, not a scriptural truth. Paul’s “letters contain some things that are hard to understand” (2Pe 3:16). (CSB)

Paul could be using the Jerusalem temple as a symbol of God's authority or rule. (The temple itself was destroyed in AD 70 and so would not be standing at the end of the age.) Cf Dn 9–12. Church Fathers believed the Antichrist would be a successor to the Roman Empire. During the medieval period, some Franciscans and other theologians asserted strongly that the pope was the Antichrist. Others saw the coming of the Antichrist in the attacks of the Muslim Turks. The Lutheran Confessions describe papal and Islamic doctrines as “marks of Antichrist” and express that the Antichrist will manifest himself as an authority over the Church at the end of time. “The marks of Antichrist plainly agree with the kingdom of the pope and his followers.... [Paul] is not speaking about heathen kings, but about someone ruling in the Church” (Tr 39). Luther: “God's temple is not the description for a pile of stones, but for the holy Christendom (1 Co 3[:17]), in which [the Antichrist] is to reign” (AE 40:232). (TLSB)

Paul cannot be referring to the temple in Jerusalem. He knew from Jesus' prophecy that it would be destroyed so that “not one stone will be left on another” (Matthew 24:2). Paul was accustomed to use the term “God's temple” to refer to Christians, especially to Christ's or the Holy Spirit's dwelling in the hearts of Christians by faith. The major result of the Antichrist's exaltation, then would be that in the Christian church he would tyrannize the hearts of believers by demanding to be recognized as God's equal. The clearest fulfillment of this in the Roman Catholic papacy is the consistent upholding of the principle that the “tradition” (the official teachings of popes and councils) be given equal place with, and in some cases greater authority than, the Word of God. Moreover, the exaltation of the papacy over every one of God's earthly representatives in the family, state, and church was proclaimed by Pope Boniface VIII (1294-1303): “It is altogether necessary to salvation for every human being to be subject to the Roman Pontiff.” This proclamation still stands as the official position of the papacy. (PBC)

proclaiming himself to be God. This is the height of what could be called “false Gospel” (Gal 1:6–8). (TLSB)

2:6 *what is restraining him now.*† The expression is neuter, but the masculine equivalent is in v. 7. There have been many suggestions as to the identity of this restrainer: the Roman state with its emperor, Paul's missionary work, the Jewish state, the principle of law and government embodied in the state, the Holy Spirit or the restraining ministry of the Holy Spirit through the church, and others. The first suggestion would harmonize with the Lutheran tradition on the identity of the “man of lawlessness.” (CSB)

The man of lawlessness is confronted with an obstacle, a restrainer. Paul does not plainly write what this restraint is, though he had explained it to the Thessalonians (cf Dn 9–11, esp 10; Rv 9:11–21). However, we do know that God—then and now and always—is working things according to His will, His time, and His plan of salvation. (TLSB)

2:7 *secret power.* Lit. “mystery,” which in the NT usually denotes something people could not know by themselves but that God has revealed (see note on Ro 11:25). It is most often used in reference to the gospel or some aspect of it. The expression here indicates that we know some things about evil only as God reveals them. This evil is already at work and will continue until the restrainer is removed at the end time. (CSB)

2:8 *the lawless one will be revealed.* Evidently refers to some supernatural aspects of his appearing (see v. 9). (CSB)

kill the breath of his mouth. Despite his impressiveness (v. 4), the man of lawlessness will easily be destroyed by Christ (cf. Da 11:45; Rev 19:20). (CSB)

The Word of Christ, of which the Holy Spirit is the preeminent preacher. Gk *pneuma* means both “breath” and “spirit” (cf Eph 6:17). (TLSB)

appearing. In 2Ti 1:10 (“appearing”) the Greek for this word refers to Jesus’ first coming, but everywhere else in the NT to his second coming. (CSB)

appearance of His coming. After the son of destruction is revealed, Jesus will kill this lawless one by the Word. This occurs with Christ’s second coming. However, we are not told any dates or intervals of time regarding these climactic events. (TLSB)

2:9 coming. The same word used of Christ’s coming in v. 8. Satan empowers him with miracles, signs and wonders (cf. Mt 24:24). (CSB)

The lawless one is an agent of Satan, while at the same time embodying and fully representing the evil that Satan is. Note the unholy anti-Trinity of Rv 13:1–18, which depicts multiple manifestations of the satanic being. (TLSB)

false signs. Not “bogus,” but “producing false impressions.” (CSB)

A parody by the Antichrist of the true Christ, who did true “mighty works and wonders and signs” (Ac 2:22). Jesus prophesied about this work of the devil (Mk 13:22–23). These evil and misleading miracles are intended to draw people into falsehood. (TLSB)

2:10 deception. The aim of the miracles of v. 9. (CSB)

refused. Their unbelief was willing and intentional. (CSB)

truth. Often closely connected with Jesus (see Jn 14:6; Eph 4:21) and with the gospel (see Gal 2:5; Eph 1:13). (CSB)

Love of true doctrine, love of all that Jesus has commanded to be taught (Mt 28:19–20). Such love is not distinct from faith in Jesus; faith cherishes the truth (cf Jn 8:31–32). (TLSB)

2:11 therefore. Because of their deliberate rejection of the truth (v. 10). (CSB)

God sends them a strong delusion. God uses sin to punish the sinful (cf. Ro 1:24–28). (CSB)

what is false. Not just any lie, but the great lie that the man of lawlessness is God (v. 4). (CSB)

God gives the perishing (the wicked, those persistent in unbelief; cf Ps 14:1) over to the evil they themselves have chosen. If they persist in error, He gives them finally to evil’s destructive end: condemnation. This is a work of His Law (sometimes called God’s “alien work”), but it is not what God desires for people. Cf Rm 1:21–28; 11:8; 2Co 4:4; Rv 3:16. (TLSB)

2:12 in order that all may be condemned. God predestines/elects no one to condemnation; this would be counter to His very character and being as the God of grace and mercy in Christ Jesus (Ezk 33:11; 1Tm 2:3–4; cf Jn 3:17–21; 2Pt 3:9). Luther states that the reason God created us was to redeem us! See LC II 64. Condemnation is truly self-chosen by willful rejection of God’s love in Christ. (TLSB)

2:1–12 Paul warns the Thessalonians not to be misled regarding the second coming of Christ, that the day of the Lord has already come. He describes those apocalyptic events yet to take place before the return of Jesus, specifically the revelation of the man of lawlessness. We must be on guard against deception. There is much false teaching, especially regarding the end times. Our only protection against falsehood is to cling to the Word of God: read the Bible, pray based on the Word, and continue to hear the Word in the communion of saints. The Lord, the Word made flesh, brings us life under this Word of truth. Paul pastorally comforts the Thessalonians, and us, that Christ will overthrow this Antichrist. We look forward, with great hope and joy, to Christ's return in glory. • "Lord, keep us steadfast in Your Word; Curb those who by deceit or sword Would wrest the kingdom from Your Son And bring to naught all He has done. O Comforter of priceless worth, Send peace and unity on earth; Support us in our final strife And lead us out of death to life." Amen. (LSB 655:1, 3). (TLSB)

Stand Firm

13 But we ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the firstfruits 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.

2:13 *always to give thanks to God* – Paul repeats the obligation of thanks he feels toward God which he had earlier expressed in 1:3. There he said he owed a debt of thanks to God for enabling the Thessalonians to grow in faith and love in spite of the bitter persecution. Here he expresses thanks for their election from eternity and for their call to faith at the present time. (PBC)

beloved by the Lord ... God chose. For the connection between God's love and election see Col 3:12; 1Th 1:4. (CSB)

Family of God. As members of the Church, the Body of Christ, they are loved by the Lord Jesus. (TLSB)

as the firstfruits. Election is from eternity (see Eph 1:4). (CSB)

The primary point is that as God's chosen we can rest assured that our salvation will not be taken away from us. Predestination is whatever God has done, is doing and still will do for us during our life on earth to bring us to faith in Christ and to preserve us in this faith unto eternal salvation. Some things to remember:

- 1) It is not a matter of chance.
- 2) It is not motivated by any personal merit on the part of humans.
- 3) People are not predestined to hell. That would be contrary to God's will as expressed in 1 Timothy 2:4, "who desires all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth."
- 4) People can through willful and intentional neglect throw away their faith. There is no such thing as "once saved, always saved" [Cain Gen 4:16 – Pharaoh – Judas/Peter – Jews – Romans 1:24]

- 5) The life of the Christian is not in the hands of “fate.” In this short phrase three things are said:
- Our destiny is in God’s hands,
 - The spirit in which God handles us is loving, and
 - Christ is the agent through whom our destiny is managed.

In the NT divine predestination is always presented in the context of gratitude for God’s grace, never is the sense of blaming God or questioning God’s choices. (LL)

God has elected His people unto salvation; thus our salvation is sure. Cf Rm 8:29–39; Eph 1:3–14; 2Tm 1:9. (TLSB)

2 Timothy 1:9 “who has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. Th the day is grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time,”

through sanctification by the Spirit. A necessary aspect of salvation, not something reserved for special Christians. (CSB)

Men can choose to reject the truth, as they do when they follow the Antichrist, but they cannot choose to believe in Christ as their only Savior. This choosing only the Holy Spirit can accomplish by working the miracle of faith in a human heart. “No one can say, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ except by the Holy Spirit” (1 Corinthians 12:3). By bringing them to trust in Jesus as their Lord, their Savior, the Holy Spirit sanctified or made the Thessalonians holy. AS they heard the gospel, the Holy Spirit led them to accept it as true. He led them to believe its message of Jesus’ redemption of the world as the only way of salvation. (PBC)

firstfruits to be saved. God the Father chose us in Christ before He made the world. Cf 1Pt 1:18–20; Rv 13:8. (TLSB)

truth. All three persons of the Trinity are mentioned in this verse. (CSB)

2:14 *called ... through our gospel.* The past tense refers to the time when the Thessalonians were converted; but the divine call is a present reality in 1Th 2:12; 5:24. (CSB)

our gospel. Paul, Silas and Timothy had had the privilege of bringing this saving gospel to the Thessalonians. They also looked forward to sharing with the Thessalonians the future glory which was their firm possession in Christ. (PBC)

glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. Cf. 1Th 2:12. Ultimately there is no glory other than God’s. (CSB)

Here again Paul stresses that these blessings were theirs only because of what God did. God chose them from eternity. God established the gospel of salvation by sending His Son. God sent Paul to preach this gospel to them. God called them to faith through His Spirit by the preaching of that gospel. (PBC)

2:15 *stand firm* – God had called the Thessalonians to follow Christ and not the Antichrist, This would mean nothing if they failed to stand firm in their faith. This is done, Paul asserts, by holding tightly to those teachings he and the other apostles have “passed on” to us. Strengthen by constantly reading and hearing them we will be able to stand firm. (PBC)

traditions. Until the NT was written, essential Christian teaching was passed on in the “traditions,” just as rabbinic law was; it could be either oral or written. In 1Co 15:3 Paul uses the technical words for receiving and handing on traditions. (CSB)

The doctrine that the apostles received from their divine Master. There was already at this time, before any written Gospel had appeared, an established Christian teaching that one was not allowed to alter. Cf Ac 2:42. (TLSB)

2:16–17 There is a similar prayer in about the same place in the first letter (1Th 3:11–13). (CSB)

2:16 *comfort.* Gk *paraklesis*, an allusion to one of the Holy Spirit’s names: the Comforter (KJV) or Helper (Jn 14:26); the blessing is trinitarian. (TLSB)

hope through grace. Because of God’s good favor toward us, His loving and kind disposition, we have sure hope for the day of redemption. (TLSB)

2:17 *comfort... establish.* Also used together in 1Th 3:2. The prayer is for inner strength that will produce results in both action and speech. (CSB)

In our earthly trials and tribulations he supplies us with “encouragement.” We can bear our troubles patiently, because we know God will make them serve our eternal good. (PBC)

2:13–17 Paul calls on the Thessalonians to stand firm in the faith the Lord has given them. He reminds them that both their calling and comfort have God as the source. We must not seek the truth in the spirit of the age, in the fads, trends, or ideas of today’s marketplace. The God who has elected us unto salvation keeps us steadfast in the faith (cf 1Th 5:23–24). The doctrine of election is a doctrine of the Gospel, by which we know that our salvation is guaranteed (Eph 1:14) because it depends on God alone as He has chosen us before the foundation of the world. God assures us of this through the external signs of His Word and Sacrament He handed down to us through the apostles. • “The body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ strengthen and preserve you in body and soul to life everlasting.” Amen. (*LSB*, p 164) (TLSB)