

24. 2 Thessalonians

*2 Thessalonians 1; Jesus' second coming and judgment (1:5-12)

- Jesus' second coming is described in this passage (1:5-12). Believers will be given relief "when the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus" (1:7-8). Jesus will return with an army of angels to judge unbelievers. They will "pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power" (1:9). This does not mean annihilation, but eternal death by reason of eternal separation from the presence of the Lord. At His second coming ("that day"), Jesus will be glorified and marveled at among all who have believed (1:10).

*2 Thessalonians 2; Rapture, day of the Lord, antichrist (2:1-12)

- This passage of Scripture contains important end-time truths concerning the rapture, the day of the Lord and the antichrist. Paul dealt with a doctrinal error concerning the day of the Lord that had crept into the Thessalonian church. The rapture is described in verse 1; "the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him" (2:1; refer to 1 Thessalonians 3:11-13, 4:13-18). The rapture is then associated with the day of the Lord in verse 2. The Thessalonian believers were greatly disturbed by some false teaching that led them to believe that the day of the Lord had come (2:2; refer to 1 Thessalonians 5:2-3). The "day of the Lord" is used in different ways in the Bible, but in the context of this passage it represents an extended period of time, beginning with the rapture (2:1-2; 1 Thessalonians 5:2-3) and ending after the Millennium, when the old heaven and earth will be destroyed (2 Peter 3:10).

- Paul told them not to be deceived, for the day of the Lord "will not come unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God" (2:3-4). The apostasy (the falling away) is a departure or abandoning of a position once held. This rebellion, which will take place within the professing church, will be a departure from the truth that God has revealed in His Word (1 Timothy 4:1-3; 2 Timothy 3:1-5, 4:3-4). The "man of lawlessness", the antichrist, is also called "the lawless one" and "the son of destruction" (2:3, 8). He "will make alterations in times and in law" (Daniel 7:25) and as king of Babylon the Great (during the last portion of the Tribulation period), will "do as he pleases" and will "exalt and magnify himself above every god" (Daniel 11:36). Lawlessness is really the opposite of righteousness, just as light is the opposite of darkness (2 Corinthians 6:14). "Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness. You know that He appeared in order to take away sins; and in Him there is no sin" (1 John 3:4-5). The one "who practices sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning" (1 John 3:8). It is very fitting to refer to the antichrist as "the lawless one". The fact that the antichrist is "revealed" must be very significant because it is stated three different times in this passage (2:3, 6, 8). To "reveal" is to make known or to disclose. The lawless one will not be revealed unless the apostasy comes first and the restrainer (Holy Spirit) is taken out

of the way (2:3, 6-8) as a result of the rapture. The event that will reveal the antichrist must be significant and easily recognized by believers, after the rapture. This event is probably the signing of the covenant that the antichrist will make with Israel for a period of seven years (Daniel 9:27). This covenant will mark the official start of the seven-year Great Tribulation and will start the countdown to the revelation of Jesus Christ at His second coming. The revelation of the man of lawlessness will only be significant to believers, since unbelievers will probably be unaware of, ignore or dismiss the idea of an antichrist. Prior to the Israel-antichrist covenant, the identity of the antichrist will be uncertain, but once the lawless one confirms the covenant with the Jewish people on behalf of the newly formed world government, there will be no doubt as to his true identity. The antichrist will oppose and exalt himself above every so-called god or object of worship, and will take his seat in the temple of God, "displaying himself as being God" (2:4). The desecration of the Jerusalem temple is referred to as the abomination of desolation (Daniel 9:27, 12:11; Matthew 24:15; Mark 13:14) and will occur at the midpoint of the Tribulation. The lawless one will seek to replace the worship of the true God and all false gods with the worship of himself, and will proclaim himself to be God (Daniel 11:36). The temple in Jerusalem must be built before the second half of the Tribulation in order for these prophecies involving the temple to be fulfilled.

- The next passage of Scripture (2:6-9) describes a "restrainer" that must be taken out of the way before the lawless one is revealed. "And you know what restrains him now, so that in his time he will be revealed. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only he who now restrains will do so until he is taken out of the way. Then that lawless one will be revealed whom the Lord will slay with the breath of His mouth and bring to an end by the appearance of His coming" (2:6-8). Some say that the "restrainer" represents human governments, the Roman Empire or even Satan but the most likely choice is the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the only Person with sufficient (supernatural) power to do the restraining. The antichrist cannot be revealed until the Holy Spirit, indwelling all believers, is taken out of the way as a result of the rapture. This implies that the lawless one will be revealed shortly after the rapture. A scriptural mystery is something unknown in times past but revealed in the New Testament. Although lawlessness is already at work, the "mystery of lawlessness" (2:7) probably means that lawlessness will dramatically increase when the "restrainer" is taken out of the way. At the second coming of Christ, the antichrist will be thrown into the lake of fire (2:8; Revelation 19:20). The antichrist's coming will be "in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders, and with all the deception of wickedness for those who perish" (2:9-10). God will send upon those who reject the truth a deluding influence so that they will believe what is false (the lie). Instead of believing the truth, they will take pleasure in wickedness (2:11-12).

- In summing up this section, Paul reminded his readers that the persecutions and afflictions they were experiencing (1:4) did not indicate that the day of the Lord had come. Since the apostasy and the rapture had not occurred and the man of lawlessness had not been revealed, the Thessalonians were not experiencing the day of the Lord.