

Signs of the Coming of Christ and Gathering of Believers

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Text: 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12

2 Thessalonians: [Bibliography](#) or [Manuscripts and Greek Exegesis](#)

UBS 4th Edition Paragraph Topics: The Man of Lawlessness

Central Idea of Message: The Day of the Lord will be preceded by a global apostasy and the unveiling of the man of lawlessness, but will conclude with the judgment of God upon the man of lawlessness and all those who rejected the truth and believed the lie.

Introduction: History is not going in circles. It is heading somewhere, and that somewhere includes the Day of the Lord.

But Paul knew that a great falling away, that is to say an apostasy, must precede the second coming of the Lord Jesus.

Further, it also appears that this apostasy will be both instigated and exacerbated by the "man of lawlessness," who is probably synonymous with the Antichrist.

References to the Day of the Lord, the man of lawlessness, and the judgment of God make this passage both apocalyptic and eschatological in nature, as well as frightening for those lacking a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

I. The Day of the Lord (vv. 1-5)

A. Paul is making a request of his readers in regard to the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ (v. 1)

1. Words associated with the second coming

a) 'Αποκάλυψις: (Rev. 1:1)

(1) Unveiling

(2) Emphasizes the long-awaited disclosure of God's purpose and plan

(3) Notice Paul's suggestion that believers of his day were eagerly awaiting the revelation of Christ and would be confirmed to the end, which is the day of the Lord (1 Cor. 1:7-8)

b) 'Επιφάνεια: (2 Thess. 2:9)

(1) Appearance

- (2) Accentuates the manifestation of the Lord's power and love (cf. Robertson 4:47)
- c) ἔρχομαι: coming (Rev. 1:8)
- d) Παρουσία
 - (1) Stresses God's presence with his people
 - (2) Nearly always in connection with his Messianic Advent in glory to judge the world at the end of the age (cf. Bauer 630)
 - (a) What will be the sign of your *coming* (Matt. 24:3)?
 - (b) *Coming* like lightning (Matt. 24:27)
 - (c) *Coming* like in the days of Noah (Matt. 24:37, 39)
 - (d) Those that are Christ's at his *coming* (1 Cor. 15:23): Christians are present
 - (e) At his *coming* (1 Thess. 2:19)
 - (f) *Coming* with, not for, all his saints (1 Thess. 3:13)
 - (g) Believers are alive at the *coming* of the Lord (1 Thess. 4:15)
 - (h) Sanctified completely, being blameless at the *coming* of our Lord (1 Thess. 5:23)
 - (i) The *coming* and gathering (2 Thess. 2:1)
 - (j) The *coming* of Christ brings the slaying of the man of lawlessness (2 Thess. 2:8)
 - (k) The *coming* of the day of God is associated with the total destruction of the heavens and elements (2 Pet. 3:12)
 - (l) Those who abide in Christ have no reason to shrink in fear at his *coming* (1 John 2:28): Christians are present at his coming
- 2. Gathering together of believers to him
- 3. The return of Jesus and the gathering of believers
 - a) Are mentioned in the same sentence
 - b) Are connected by one definite article: τῆς

- c) Are connected by one preposition, thus tying the two clauses together: ὑπέρ (cf. Criswell 1409)
 - d) Are taking place at the same time
 - e) **The coming and gathering are two parts of the same event as described in 1 Thess. 4:13-18 (cf. Larson 104): trumpets are hardly secretive!**
 - f) While Greek scholar Daniel Wallace of the highly dispensational Dallas Theological Seminary questions the syntax of scholars like F. F. Bruce and Leon Morris regarding application of Sharp's rule to impersonal nouns, he admits that he cannot argue grammatically against their conclusions that a posttribulation rapture is being expressed by Paul, writing, "This is not to say that one could not see a posttribulation rapture in the text, for even if the words do not have an identical referent, they could have simultaneous ones" (Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, 290)
 - g) **"Evidently, Paul has in mind the rapture of believers at the time of Christ's revelation" (cf. Criswell 1409)**
- B. Do not be quickly shaken, lose your composure, or be disturbed (v. 2)
- 1. Some deceivers were apparently teaching that the Day of the Lord had already come as evidenced by terrible affliction coming upon believers
 - 2. These coming days will be disturbing, otherwise Paul would not have warned readers in this way
 - 3. Spirits may be employed to say that the Day of the Lord has come
 - a) Spiritism, mediumship, and channeling have been around for thousands of years
 - b) Charismatic predictions
 - c) Ecstatic utterance?
 - 4. Spoken messages may be employed to say that the Day of the Lord has come
 - a) Oral statements of an alleged conversation with Paul or another apostle, thus effectively abrogating the written epistles
 - b) What has been written will not be changed by what is spoken

- c) **In Christianity, what is *spoken* must always be consistent with what has been written**
- 5. Forged letters and other bogus writings claiming apostolic authenticity may be employed to say that the Day of the Lord has come: this is why Paul gives a test of authenticity for his letters (2 Thess. 3:17)
- 6. It would be disturbing to think that the Lord had returned
 - a) If so, why is there no world peace?
 - b) If so, why has evil gone unpunished?
- 7. Note that Paul denies the early return of the Lord (cf. Robertson 4:48)
- 8. **It is best to speak of the complex of events surrounding the second coming as imminent but the second coming itself as "impending" (Erickson 1200)**
- C. The Day of the Lord, the apostasy, and the revelation of the man of lawlessness (v. 3)
 - 1. The Day of the Lord
 - a) The second coming of Christ in splendor
 - b) The return of Jesus in power and judgment (cf. 2 Thess. 1:5-10)
 - c) The second advent of Jesus Christ
 - d) **Notice that the Day of the Lord refers back to, and is synonymous with, the coming and gathering mentioned in v. 1, thus explaining that the rapture of believers occurs simultaneously with the coming of Christ**
 - (1) Believers rise to meet him in the sky
 - (2) Then, all descend with him to earth
 - e) The time of the establishing on earth of the millennial reign of the messiah
 - 2. But none of this can happen until two things occur
 - a) The apostasy (Matt. 24:10ff; 1 Tim. 4:1-3; 2 Tim. 3:1-9; 4:3ff)
 - (1) There have been defectors from the outset of Christianity: Judas Iscariot
 - (2) Falling away from the faith
 - (a) Utter rejection of biblical Christianity
 - (b) Abandonment of biblical Christianity even by so-called believers

- (3) Religious revolt, likely against evangelical, apostolic, biblical Christianity
- (4) An intense "marshaling of the powers of evil against the people and purposes of God" (Hubbard 1363)
- (5) More than the normal apathy or dislike for Christianity!
- (6) This effectively dismantles postmillennial talk of evangelism ushering in the kingdom
- b) The revelation of the man of lawlessness
 - (1) The son of perdition; beast; Antichrist
 - (2) Doomed to destruction
- D. **The man of lawlessness will exalt himself above every god or object of worship (v. 4)**
 - 1. **A male not acting in the name of any god, but rather, opposing every form of deity (anti-Jew, anti-Christian, anti-Muslim, etc.)**
 - 2. An impostor who takes his seat in the temple of God displaying himself as being God
 - a) Temple of Jerusalem (cf. Hubbard 1364)? But it would have to be rebuilt
 - b) From the fourth century on the predominant view has understood the temple to be the church (cf. Tolbert 91)
 - 3. He will reign approximately three and a half years (Dan. 7:25; Rev. 13:5)
 - a) Notice the presence of the saints in that they are persecuted (Dan. 7:25)
 - b) The beast kills the two witnesses after they have prophesied and have done supernatural works for 1260 days (Rev. 11:7)
 - (1) First mention of the beast
 - (2) Probably the time of unveiling: midway through the tribulation
 - (3) The witnesses
 - (a) What could empower them other than the Holy Spirit?
 - (b) The Holy Spirit is still present and at work!
 - c) John never uses the term "Antichrist" in Revelation, but this is him!
 - d) He is given authority to act for forty-two months (Rev. 13:5)

- e) **Notice that the beast makes war with the saints, so Christians are present (Rev. 13:7)**
- 4. One who displays himself as being God
 - a) An individual person, not a religious system
 - b) One man, not a succession of men, such as popes or Caesars (cf. Baxter 6:225)
 - c) **As Christ Jesus was the complete embodiment of righteousness, this man will be the complete embodiment of sin: worse than Nero, Hitler, Stalin, Saddam Hussein, or any Muslim fundamentalist Ayatollah**
 - d) The full incarnation of the spirit of antichrist mentioned in 1 and 2 John (1 John 2:18, 22; 2 John 7)
 - e) The beast from the sea in the Book of Revelation (Rev. 13:1)
 - f) The beast whose number is that of a man, 666 (Rev. 13:18)
- 5. Therefore, the coming of "Christ-gathering of the saints-day of the Lord" cannot occur any earlier than midway through the seven years of tribulation, but there is more
- E. Paul had already spoken these same things to the Thessalonian Christians (v. 5)
 - 1. Paul preached these truths more than once (1 Thess. 4:13-17)
 - 2. Paul wrote the truths that he preached: this preserved his teachings for later generations

II. **The Destruction of the Man of Lawlessness (vv. 6-12)**

- A. **The arrival and/or disclosure of the man of lawlessness is being restrained until a specific time to be revealed (v. 6)**
 - 1. What restrains his coming? We are unsure
 - a) The early church fathers interpreted this to mean the Roman Empire (cf. Halley 523; Henry 6:798)
 - b) An angel?
 - c) The gospel message?
 - d) The church?
 - e) Civil government (cf. Hubbard 1364; Hobbs 292)?
 - f) **The one restraining is likely the Holy Spirit (cf. Baxter 6:226; Larson 107)**

- (1) Must be supernatural in order to restrain evil, which is supernatural
 - (2) This conclusion narrows the possibilities considerably
- 2. The arrival of the man of lawlessness will be allowed when the time is ripe
- 3. His reign will be comparatively short lived, perhaps only three and one half years (Dan. 7:25)
- 4. **What would this sinful world be like without the influence of Jesus Christ and the restraint of evil and then this evil man?**
- 5. **How would the apostasy or the revealing of the Antichrist be a sign to the Church [Christians] that has already been raptured (cf. Hubbard 1364)?**
- B. **The mystery of lawlessness is already at work (v. 7)**
 - 1. Lawlessness is indeed a mystery: we do not know why God allows it
 - 2. Lawlessness has been on earth since Adam and Eve and in the universe since Lucifer's revolt
 - 3. Whatever now restrains will do so until he is taken out of the way
 - a) **Whatever is restraining will be taken out of the way, not taken out of the world**
 - b) This probably means no longer blocking the emergence of this evil man
- C. **The return of the Lord Jesus brings to an end the man of lawlessness (v. 8)**
 - 1. Slain with the breath of the Lord's mouth
 - a) Effortlessly, no battle
 - b) The Lord's weapon is his word (Rev. 19:15)
 - c) The beast and false prophet are seized and thrown into the lake of fire (Rev. 19:20)
 - 2. His power will be brought to an end by the appearance of the Lord at his coming
 - a) **The same word for "coming" (parousia) is used here as was used in v. 1, once again implying that the coming of Christ and gathering together of believers occur at the end of the tribulation when he returns and destroys the man of lawlessness**
 - b) Overwhelmed by the glory of Christ
 - c) Evil cannot stand in the radiance of Christ's magnificence
- D. The appearing and energizing of lawless man (v. 9)
 - 1. Energized by the activity of Satan

2. **Beware of the pseudo-spiritual: miracles alone are never to be accepted as proofs of the activity of God (Matt. 7:22)**
 - a) Accompanying power: supernatural ability
 - b) Accompanying signs
 - (1) Tokens to confirm power
 - (2) Purpose is to validate authority
 - (3) False signs support false doctrines (cf. Henry 6:799)
 - c) Accompanying false wonders
 - (1) Strange or spectacular things which evoke amazement
 - (2) Purpose is to cause a sensation and adoration
3. Neither Nero, the Catholic Church, Hitler, nor any man has ever exhibited these pseudo-attestations
4. The man of lawlessness has not yet been revealed
- E. **The man of lawlessness will operate on deception and wickedness (v. 10)**
 1. Satan is a liar and a murderer
 2. People who do not receive the love of the truth are unsaved and perish from the presence of God
 - a) There is clearly such a condition as unsaved
 - b) The gospel is the truth
 - c) The love of the truth is to be received, not rejected: and it can be rejected
 3. **Belief of the truth protects against deception**
- F. **God will send a deluding influence upon unbelievers (v. 11)**
 1. May not sound too loving of God, but holy God is saying to sinful, rebellious man, with grave reluctance, "Thy will be done; go ahead and believe the lies if you wish"
 2. This is part of the penalty of sin and rejection of the truth
 3. **"The lie" is not just any lie, but the lie that the man of lawlessness, the Antichrist, is God and that Jesus is not**
 - a) Not a false Christ but Antichrist; the arch-rebel against Christ (cf. Hobbs 292)
 - b) Both Jesus and the Antichrist have a coming and a revealing (cf. Larson 108)
 - c) One proclaims truth, the other proclaims lies (cf. Larson 108)

- d) Both demonstrate miraculous powers, one from truth, the other from deception (cf. Larson 108)
 - e) Both claim exclusive worship (cf. Larson 108)
 - f) Both are empowered, one by God and the other by Satan (cf. Larson 108)
- 4. God gives unrepentant people over to reprobate minds (Rom. 1:24-26)
- 5. **The deluding influence is the opposite of the Holy Spirit, who leads the believer into deeper perceptions of reality (cf. Tolbert 92)**
- 6. The deluding influence leads unbelievers into ever-deepening deception
- 7. **These are not innocents; these are rejectors**
- 8. **Light rejected results in blacker darkness**
- 9. **"The beginning of sin is to forsake God; the end of sin is to be God-forsaken" (Hobbs 294)**
- G. **The standard of God's judgment on unbelievers (v. 12)**
 - 1. **Did you believe the truth or did you reject the truth and take pleasure in wickedness?**
 - 2. Those who believe the truth act on the truth, live in the truth, and take no pleasure in wickedness
 - 3. Condemnation is the result of one's choice, not chance, of one's determination, not determinism

Conclusion: The Day of the Lord will be preceded by a global apostasy and the unveiling of the man of lawlessness, but will conclude with the judgment of God upon the man of lawlessness and all those who rejected the truth and believed the lie.

Rejecting the truth is a dangerous thing to do in light of the present passage. Embrace the truth while you still can.