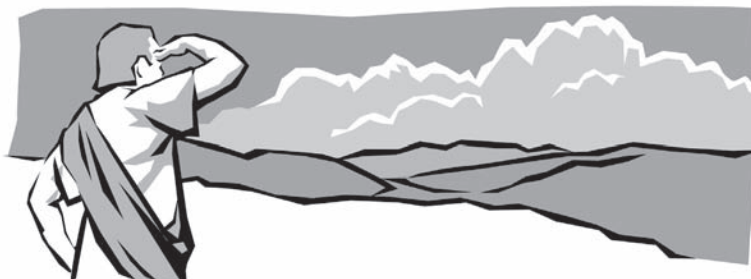


The Antichrist¹

(2 Thessalonians 2:1–12)



SABBATH—SEPTEMBER 15

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: 2 Thessalonians 2:1–12; Matthew 24:1–14; Zechariah 3:1; Daniel 8:8–11; Acts 2:22.

MEMORY VERSE: “Don’t [do not] let anyone trick [fool] you in any way. That day will not come until people rise up against God. It will not come until the man of sin appears. He is a marked man. He is sentenced to be destroyed” (2 Thessalonians 2:3, NlrV).

KEY (IMPORTANT) THOUGHT: In his second letter to the Thessalonians, Paul tried to show and correct false ideas about last-day events.

ALONG WITH PAUL’S WORDS OF ENCOURAGEMENT, HE WROTE ABOUT END-TIME EVENTS. He also included the greatest end-time event of all, the second coming of Jesus.

In this week’s verses, Paul talks about the end. But his point is a bit different from what came before. Paul already told the Thessalonians the details while he was with them. But Paul’s goal in these verses is that of a pastor. He tries to calm the Thessalonians and encourage them to be more patient about end-time events and to warn them about the false teachings on that topic.

The opening of this week’s verses (2 Thessalonians 2:1, 2) holds several Greek words that point back to 1 Thessalonians 4:13–5:11. These words are about (1) the coming of our Lord (1 Thessalonians 4:15), (2) the gathering (1 Thessalonians 4:17), and (3) the day of the Lord (1 Thessalonians 5:2). Paul wrote this week’s verses to try to make clear what he said earlier. He also shows truths in them that we ourselves need to understand today.

1. antichrist—false christ; a person who is against Christ; an enemy of God.

SUNDAY—SEPTEMBER 16**THE PROBLEM
(2 Thessalonians 2:1–3)**

What is the topic (subject) Paul tries to discuss in the second chapter of 2 Thessalonians? How is Paul’s advice useful to us today? In what way do we face many of the same challenges within our church about end-time events? What similar principle (important rule) do we find in 2 Thessalonians 2:1–3 that we are always faced with?

There is no clear proof in these verses that the church was asking questions about the second coming of Jesus. Paul himself sees a problem and deals with it. The words “gathered to him” (NIV) remind us of what Paul wrote in the first letter (1 Thessalonians 4:15–17).

In these verses, Paul’s words remind us of the warning that Jesus Himself had given (Matthew 24: 1–13). The Thessalonians had been “quickly” (ESV) confused by false information they had received after Paul had written his first letter.

Paul does not point to (explain) the cause of their confusion. Perhaps he did not know what it was. But there are two possible causes for this confusion. The first possible cause has to do with what Paul calls “spirit.” By “spirit” (2 Thessalonians 2:2), Paul probably is pointing to a teaching by

a false prophet or by a misunderstanding of his first letter. The second possible cause is the spoken word. It is a teaching passed from mouth to mouth among the members. When Paul speaks of a letter “supposed to have come from us” (NirV), Paul is talking about a letter written in his name by someone else or a wrong use of one of his true letters.

A pastor may be careful about watching over a church. But there are many ways in which false ideas can spread among church members. It is sometimes easier for members to accept a report or rumor than to study the Bible carefully for themselves. Sometimes the new ideas may even come from the Bible. But then they are sometimes used in the wrong way and do not agree with accepted Bible teachings and truths.

The second possible cause seems to have been the problem in Thessalonica. The Thessalonians knew many correct things about the second coming of Jesus and the events that would happen before it. But they made the mistake of not balancing what they knew with the other teachings of the Bible. The Thessalonians had failed to listen to Jesus’ warning about chasing after signs of His return (Matthew 24: 4–8). As a result, in 1 Thessalonians they were unhappy about the delay of Jesus’ return (1 Thessalonians 4:13–15). In this chapter, they seem to have understood that they were already caught in the middle of final events.



New ideas must be balanced with the teachings of the Bible.

MONDAY—SEPTEMBER 17

PAUL'S SHORT ANSWER (2 Thessalonians 2:3, 4)

In the short time period between 1 and 2 Thessalonians, the Thessalonian church members became confused about the meaning of what Paul wrote in the first letter. They thought that the Second Coming was either at hand or had already come in some secret way (2 Thessalonians 2:2). What was Paul's short answer to this problem? "That cannot be true. There are too many things that have not happened yet." The confusion in Thessalonica caused Paul to write a detailed outline of final events.

Read 2 Thessalonians 2:3, 4. What does Paul tell us about "the man of sin" (NKJV) in these verses? What principles do we find here that help us to understand what Paul is discussing?

Verses 3 and 4 are an unfinished sentence in the original. "That day will not come" is missing in the Greek

but is given in most translations. Paul lists the things that have to happen before Jesus can come. There will be a "falling away" (the Greek word *apostasia* for "apostasy" [backsliding; falling away from God into sin]), and then "the man of lawlessness" (ESV) will be shown. That example is described in 2 Thessalonians 2:8–10 as the working of Satan just before Jesus comes. (We will examine this more closely in Wednesday's study.) But before that example of wickedness, there is a period of "mystery" and holding back (2 Thessalonians 2:6, 7).

Verse 4 is a description of the man of sin (or "lawlessness"). He works undercover (in hiding) for a time and is then made known at the end. He opposes God, puts himself higher than God, sits in the temple, and preaches that he is God. This verse is filled with examples of Old and New Testament verses. The "opposer [enemy]" reminds us of Satan in Zechariah 3:1. His act of putting himself higher than God and stealing God's place in the heavenly temple reminds us of the little horn of Daniel 8. His act of showing himself to be God describes Satan in Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28. It also points to the evil power of Daniel 11:36–39. So, the description of the man of sin points to both Satan himself and a wicked co-worker of Satan in Christian history.

In what hidden ways are we led to have the same kind of attitude (feeling) as we find in this "man of sin"?



The man of sin shares many of the same qualities as Satan.

TUESDAY—SEPTEMBER 18

THE PERSON IN CONTROL (2 Thessalonians 2:5–7)

According to Paul, what two things controlled the world situation at the time he wrote these verses? How do we see the great controversy (war) shown in 2 Thessalonians 2:6, 7?

Putting these verses with the earlier ones, we can see that Paul is outlining three periods of history from his time until the end. The final period begins at the Second Coming. Before this period is the appearance (uncovering; showing) of the man of sin (2 Thessalonians 2:3), also known as the lawless one (2 Thessalonians 2:8). And before that period is a time of mystery and holding back (2 Thessalonians 2:6, 7).

We would like very much to fully understand Paul's meaning here. But

there are many things that are uncertain in these verses. The power in control is neither male nor female in verse 6, but masculine (male) in verse 7. The lawless one is masculine in verse 8 but neuter (a thing) in verse 7 ("mystery of lawlessness"). It is not clear (verse 7) whether the person in power is taken out of the way or has the authority to remove himself (the ESV translates correctly—"until he is out of the way").

Who is the person in control or the power that holds back evil in these verses? This power is there in Paul's day. It is upholding the law (a power that holds back lawlessness in verse 7). It is on God's mission. And it is powerful enough to hold back the working of Satan (verse 9).

According to Matthew 24:14; Mark 13:10; and Revelation 14:6, 7, what is holding back the Second Coming?

In much of the New Testament, the events leading up to the Second Coming follow from the final preaching of the gospel (Matthew 24:14; Mark 13:10; Revelation 14:6, 7). In this case, it is possible that God Himself is the Person in control that Paul is talking about. He is holding the final events back until everyone has had a chance to hear the gospel.

How much control do you need in your life? When tempted (led to sin), how can you learn to claim the power of God to keep you from doing what you know is wrong?



The power of God upholds the law and holds back evil.

WEDNESDAY—SEPTEMBER 19

THE ANTICHRIST EXPOSED (SHOWN) (2 Thessalonians 2:8–10)

Read 2 Thessalonians 2:8–10. How do we understand these events? What is very important in all this about the wording “they refuse to love the truth” (NirV)?

The man of sin was introduced in 2 Thessalonians 2:3, 4. Through much of Christian history, he has worked to destroy God’s law (especially the Sabbath) and to steal powers that belong only to Christ. In passages such as Daniel 7:20–25 (the little horn) and Revelation 13:1–7 (the beast from the sea), this same power works after the fall of the pagan (idol-worshipping) Roman Empire. It joins both religious and worldly governments to attack the saints of God.

The only power in history that fits all these prophecies² is the papacy.³ Many Bible interpreters (explainers) from the Middle Ages, and even today, have pointed to this religious organization as the antichrist. (In the past century or two, most Christians have moved away from this interpretation. This is an interesting move in itself because we are close to last-day events.) This naming of the papacy fits the descriptions of 2 Thessalonians 2 in that the man of sin would be both masculine (a person) and neuter (a world power).

In verse 7, “mystery of lawlessness” (NKJV) is a proper description of the antichrist’s work. But at the close of history, just before the Second Coming, there will be an even more worldwide, open rebellion (war) against God and His laws. These powers, as described in this week’s verses, as well as in Daniel 7 and Revelation 13, show that the papacy will play an important part in the end of time too.

What earlier work of God in the course of history will show Satan’s final trick on the world? Read also 2 Thessalonians 2:9 and Acts 2:22.

Today’s verses pull back the curtain to show an even greater antichrist behind the one that has worked among the nations throughout history. Satan himself is the author of all the tricks that fool the world at the end time. The second coming of Jesus

2. prophecies—special messages given by God, often telling what will happen in the future.

3. papacy—the religious government of the Roman Catholic Church, headed by the pope.

will force Satan into his final, hopeless act. He will become less careful and come out of hiding to copy the earthly ministry (work) of Jesus (read Friday's lesson). Through false miracles Satan will try to pull people's attention away from the gospel (the life, death, and resurrection [return to life] of Jesus) and even away from the Second Coming itself.

Think about this idea of “the love of the truth” (NKJV). How do we “receive” (NKJV) it? Why is having this love so important for anyone who does not want to get caught up in any spiritual tricks in the last days? How can we learn, even now, to “receive the love of the truth”?



The papacy, the antichrist power, has attacked God's law (the Sabbath) and taken powers that belong only to Jesus (forgiveness of sins).

THURSDAY—SEPTEMBER 20

TRUTH AND LIES (2 Thessalonians 2:10–12)

Read 2 Thessalonians 2:10–12. Why does God let so many people be deceived? According to these

verses, what have the wicked turned down?

Verse 11 is a verse that many people find very challenging. Paul says very clearly, “God will fool them completely. Then they will believe the lie” (2 Thessalonians 2:11, NIV). The puzzle of this verse is something like, “How can a God of truth deceive people? How can He act the same as Satan at the end?” (Read 2 Thessalonians 2:11 and 2 Thessalonians 2:9.)

In today's verses Paul pulls back the curtain and gives us a glimpse of the great controversy (war) between Christ and Satan. This war involves much more than just the events of this earth and its history. Satan has accused God of not being reasonable, of being a bully, and a deceiver. In the final crisis of earth's history, God will “send” a lie to the wicked. This is not because He lies but because He lets the wicked choose lies over truth. In this way the wicked expose (show) the decisions that they have already made (2 Thessalonians 2:12). God just lets them be responsible for the fruits of their wrong actions. The events of the end time clearly show the minds and characters (who Satan and his followers are) of Satan and his followers for all people to see.

The deception begins when people refuse to accept the gospel of Jesus Christ. In verse 10, the wicked refuse to receive the love of the truth. The underlying (basic) reason for the work being done by evil powers in 2 Thessalonians 2 is the offer of

salvation in the gospel. Through its teachings and practices, the papacy has tried to destroy the gospel. That work will continue until it is exposed by the final events described in 2 Thessalonians 2:8–12. So, the final preaching of the gospel (Matthew 24:14; Revelation 14:6, 7) sets the stage (makes possible) for both the final judgment and the end time.

In the end, whatever the events of the great controversy (war) on earth, the gospel of Jesus Christ has always been the important difference between good and evil throughout Christian history. The antichrist shows its true character by trying to destroy the life and heavenly rule of Jesus. All the other actors of the world play less important parts in the great war between Christ and Satan.

Read carefully 2 Thessalonians 2:12. What is the key (main) reason that people do not receive the truth? How have you experienced this principle in your own life? How has the “pleasure” of unrighteousness (unholy living; sinfulness) kept your mind from being open to truth?

FRIDAY—SEPTEMBER 21

ADDITIONAL STUDY: “The apostle Paul warned the church not to look for the coming of Christ in his time. ‘That day shall not come,’ Paul says, ‘except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed [exposed].’ 2 Thessalonians 2:3

(KJV). The great apostasy [backsliding; falling away from God], and the long period of the rule of the ‘man of sin’ must first happen. Then we can look for the coming of our Lord. The ‘man of sin’ represents the papacy, which Bible prophecy [messages from God] shows us was to hold great power over the Christian world for 1260 years, from A.D. 538 to A.D. 1798.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, page 356.

“In the greatest act of deceiving people, Satan himself will act as Christ. . . . In a gentle, merciful voice Satan offers some of the same beautiful, heavenly truths which the Saviour taught. Satan heals the diseases of the people. And then, in his pretended character of Christ, Satan claims to have changed the Sabbath to Sunday, and commands all to keep holy the day [Sunday] which he has blessed. . . . Only those who have been careful students of the Bible and who have received the love of the truth will be protected from the powerful lie that enslaves the world.”—Pages 624, 625, adapted.

“In preaching the message, make no personal attacks against other churches, not even the Roman Catholic Church. Angels of God see in the different churches many who can be reached only with the greatest care. Therefore let us be careful of our words. . . . Upon these themes [subjects] silence is perhaps the best. Many are deceived. Speak the truth in words of love.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Evangelism*

[Spreading the Gospel], page 576.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ❶ Today many believe that the papacy has changed. In some ways it has. But on the basic issues of salvation, it still tries to destroy all that Christ has done and is doing for us. It is still the power described in prophecy. How can we stand strong in our Bible position toward Rome but do so with Christian love, patience, and kindness?
- ❷ As a church, we face people who come up with new dates for final

events, new charts, new theories (ideas) about this undercover group or that one attacking or planning to take down some government. While we must remain open to new light, how should we deal with these challenges (claims)?

SUMMARY: Paul corrected some of the Thessalonians' wrong ideas about last-day events. In so doing, Paul gave us important truths on the topic. We must always make sure that we are on the right side of the great controversy (war) as we near the last days of the earth's history.