

GOD AND SECOND CHANCES

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By the Book™ A Chapter by
Chapter Bible Study Series
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Let's Begin

The church fails new converts if she does not teach new Christians Bible prophecy. Why? One fundamental reason is, because prophecy makes up a substantial portion of Biblical revelation. According to one source, there are 1,845 references in the Old Testament alone, regarding the Second Coming of Christ.

And, of the 260 chapters in the New Testament, there are 318 references to the Second Coming, or one out of 30 verses. For every prophecy on the First Coming of Christ, there are eight on Christ's Second Coming. If this estimate on Biblical prophecy is anywhere near correct, to neglect to teach so much of the Bible cannot be anything other than spiritual neglect.

We must understand, however, that the purpose of Bible prophecy is not to make calendar watchers, but to build character. Our Lord forever dealt with those who remain focused on setting dates for the Lord's return. He said, "Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh" (Matt. 25:13; cp. also Mark 13:32). Indeed date-setters are often up-setters.

Even so, the Apostle Paul deals with the Day of the Lord in chapter two, the heart of his second letter to Thessalonica. As we study the chapter, let's follow the outline below:

- I. **First, the Day of the Lord holds a Disturbing Message (vv. 1-2)**
- II. **Second, the Day of the Lord concerns a Deceptive Man (vv. 3-8)**
- III. **Third, the Day of the Lord affects the Deluded Masses (vv. 9-12)**

I. First, the Day of the Lord holds a Disturbing Message (vv. 1-2)

Paul begins by offering truth to stabilize the shaky faith the Thessalonians were exhibiting. He writes, "Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him, That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand" (vv. 1-2). As we unpack these verses, we find two anchors which stabilize the truth of Christ's Second Coming for the Thessalonians.

First, Paul reveals His coming again. From the beginning, Paul refers to the "coming" of the Lord Jesus. The Greek term translated "coming" is *parousia* and literally means "a coming with,"

denoting an "arrival" to be literally on the scene. The Apostle clearly is referring to another descent of the Lord Jesus. He came once in human flesh, God incarnate at Bethlehem. But He will come a second time (John 14:1-3; Acts 1:6-8). The second anchor is the *rapture*, which is distinguished from His coming. Note the Apostle says, "and by our gathering together unto him." The Greek word for "gathering" is *episunagoge* and means a "gathering together." While the Rapture and the Second Coming cannot be separated, the two events must nonetheless be distinguished. In the Rapture, Christ comes *for* His saints (1 Thess. 4:17), and in the Second Coming, Christ comes *with* His saints. These two anchors will keep believers stable when the winds of false doctrine blow.

While there was *stabilizing truth* Paul revealed (v. 1), there remained *paralyzing error* with which the Apostle must deal (v. 2). Apparently, a forged letter, purporting to be written by the Apostle Paul, was making its rounds at the church of Thessalonica. Of historical interest, there were many letters

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Reflection Connection

Think for a moment about the Second Coming. How would you describe the difference between the Second Coming and the Rapture? Perhaps your pastor can schedule a few minutes to speak to the entire study group.

and documents written in the first century purporting to be written by either an Apostle or even an Old Testament prophet. Historians call these documents *pseudepigrapha*, a term coming from two Greek terms meaning “false” and “inscriptions.” Note, however, the New Testament rejects the idea of using the name of an apostle to enhance the authority of the writing.

The paralyzing error solicited from Paul an exhortation for them to not be “soon shaken in mind.” The term translated “shaken” carries the idea of being caught by sudden excitement like a building, for example, being shaken by an unexpected earthquake or a ship tossed on stormy sea. Paul acknowledges a further state the Thessalonians experienced—“troubled.” Here he implores them to shun a continued state of worry and anxiety. The soon coming of the Lord Jesus is to be a joyful event for the people of God, not a worrisome event.

Indeed the return of Christ is the believer’s “blessed hope” and source of authentic comfort, not a cause for mental agitation or excitement. Also, the Apostle mentions the “Day of Lord.” Notice this is not the day of Christ (cp. Phil. 1:6). The fact is, we now live in the day of Christ. However, the present “day of Christ” will officially be closed by the return of Christ. The “Day of Lord” will be a time of judgment of all nations, as Israel is made ready for Messiah (cp. Matt. 25: 31-46). The Great Tribulation begins immediately after the rapture of the church. Happily, the church will not go through the Great Tribulation (cp. Rev. 2; 3; 13:9).

II. Second, the Day of the Lord Concerns a Deceptive Man (vv. 3-8)

Paul continues with his exposition of the “Day of the Lord.” He reveals the prominent place a particular man has in the future coming of the Lord, “Let no man deceive you by any means: for *that day shall not come*, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God” (vv. 3-4).

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According to the Apostle, two events precede the day of the Lord: a) apostasy, b) antichrist. By “apostasy” we are concerned with what Paul dubs the “falling away.” The Greek term translated “falling away” is *apostasia* and means a “defection” or “revolt.” For the most part, the church will forsake true faith in the final days before Christ returns. Indeed the great revolt will characterize professing church at the end. Consequently, the revolt will prepare the way and set the mental atmosphere for the appearance of the “antichrist,” the second event to precede the “Day of the Lord.” Antichrist will be the leader



of this falling away. He will rise to global prominence as a great world leader, offering to solve unsolvable problems the world over. Paul describes him in remarkable detail.

First, Paul gives a general *description* (vv. 3b-4). Antichrist's character is as a "son of perdition" and the "man of sin" (v. 3). It is not so much antichrist is a sinner but is *sin personified*. He is controlled and dominated by sin. As "son of perdition" his doom is certain but will remain in power for a season. However, when his season is past, the veil is removed. Consequently, his true identity will be exposed as one who "opposes." In other words, he is the Adversary of

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Christ. Posed as a peacemaker (Rev. 6:1-2; Dan. 9:24-27), he will be revealed as a peacebreaker (Dan. 9:27). Ultimately, he will abolish all existing forms of worship while raging against any evidence of God. After the Rapture and during the Great Tribulation, the temple in Jerusalem is to be rebuilt. Then, antichrist will take a seat in the rebuilt temple's holy of holies. By this act of sacrilege he will publicly display himself as God. Antichrist becomes the climax of human sin.

Second, Paul reveals a specific *delay*. He writes, "And now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time. For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth *will let*, until he be taken out of the way" (vv. 6-7). By pointing out that the "mystery of iniquity works," Paul refers to the secret activity of lawlessness already at work in the world. In addition, Paul uses two more action verbs—"withholdeth... let." The Apostle clearly refers to a "restraining" or "holding back" until something or someone is "taken out of way." Toward what or whom does Paul refer?

Reflection Connection

Reflect what your life would be like were it not for God's presence through the Holy Spirit. How different would your life be? Explain.

While scholars have different suggestions, it seems clear Paul refers to the Holy Spirit in our midst. In other words, the Spirit presently indwells God's saints. And, Who alone is able to hold back the efforts of Satan? Only God! If it is possible to imagine, consider what Pentecost reversed would be like. At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit assumed a special relationship to the church as indweller. However, when the Holy Spirit is "taken out of the way," His relationship to people on earth will resume a similar relation He had to human beings before Pentecost. In essence, His relationship reverts back to what we find in the Old Testament! He will continue to be the *convictor*; but He will no longer be the *restrainer*.

Finally, Paul reveals a horrible *destruction*. He writes, "And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming" (v. 8). Antichrist's career will be brief and decisively terminated. And, at the end of the Great Tribulation, Christ will return in glory and power. The Lord "consumes" and "overthrows" the antichrist with but His breath!



III. Third, the Day of the Lord Affects the Deluded Masses (vv. 9-17)

In the final section of this chapter, Paul reveals the deluded masses which go after antichrist. He writes, “*Even him*, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness” (vv. 9-12).

Paul’s vivid concern is a great *satanic deception* which is to come (v. 9). The deception is nothing less than a powerful parallel to Jesus Christ. He has his own coming, a revelation, and even a “gospel,” even though it is a lie. Indeed the power of antichrist to perform counterfeit miracles is “after working of satan.” He will operate in the power of Satan, an operation of supernatural power. Hence, “miracles” and “signs” will exist, but only as “lying wonders.” Satan can make a full display of all kinds of power (cp. Acts 2:22; Heb. 2:4)

From the *satanic deception* will arise a *strong delusion* (vv. 10-11). And, just what will the purpose be? In the main, it means to lead people to believe his lies. By the term “strong delusion” Paul has in mind a powerful working of error (cp. 1 Cor. 1:18). Today, people have ample opportunity to believe and consequently be

saved. However, a person can so resist the truth that finally he or she becomes deluded and believes a lie rather than the truth. Hence, a person becomes his or her own god. Paul is revealing the awful reality of human pride, the crowning deception of antichrist posing as God. These verses seem to clearly indicate that those who have rejected the truth of God in the age of grace will have no second chance during the Great Tribulation.

A clear caution exists to every person on the globe: if one does not open his or her heart to the saving truth found only in the Gospel, deception and falsehood remain the ultimate consequences. If persons choose darkness, God will eventually confirm their choice. A sure damnation awaits those whose heart is focused self-wardly (v. 12). Rejecting truth, one finds delight in unrighteousness.

Paul closes this section with a prayer of thanksgiving and an affirmation that God’s call on believers’ lives was sure (vv. 13-15). Moreover, he assured them

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Golden Greek Nugget

Paul speaks of a horrible consequence of continued rejection of God. He writes, "And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie" (v. 9). The Greek term translated "delusion" is *plane*. It literally means "a wandering," and is always used in the New Testament of mental errors and beliefs. The "delusion" becomes more serious when the Apostle uses the adjective "strong" which is the Greek word *energeia*, the same word used to describe God's power in raising Jesus from the dead (cp. Eph. 1:19). No one must take God for granted. Open refusal now means one's mind is closer to powerful delusion.

that God's love was unfailing, a promise which should comfort Christians in whatever persecution they face (vv. 16-17).

Wrap Up

What is the believer's responsibility while he or she waits for the coming of the Lord? First, believers must seek to win others to the Savior. Since no second chance will be offered, the time to get right with God is present, not future. No one must delay dealing with personal sin. Jesus Christ offers full pardon through His death on the cross. However, one must turn from sin and trust Him completely. Second, believers should leave the hidden things with the Lord. God does not call us to be date-setters or star-gazers. Instead, Christians should trust the Lord and seek to grow in holiness. This is the way Bible prophecy should affect us personally.

