

2<sup>nd</sup> Thessalonians

## "God's Timetable"

(2<sup>nd</sup> Thessalonians 2:1-12)

**The Big Picture:** The purpose of prophecy is to encourage the suffering saints not to fill our heads with knowledge and make us look smarter than we are. When it became apparent to Jesus' disciples that the religious leaders stood in opposition to him and his ministry, they tried to encourage him and point out the impressive characteristics of the Temple in Jerusalem. In response Jesus foretold the destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem. Some of the disciples specifically asked him when this destruction would be. Regarding this Jesus emphasized that only the Father knew when this was to occur (Matthew 24:36-45) and they were to not concern themselves with the timing of these events, but to live their life being ready for the Lord's return at any time. There have been many throughout history that have set dates for these events, only to be embarrassed when the predicted dates come and go.

**Some Context:** This is what happened to the Thessalonian church as the persecutions intensified. Someone had deceived the church into incorrectly believing that they were living in the Day of the Lord and then this was substantiated in their minds by a letter appearing to be from Paul himself on the issue. Paul needed to correct this doctrinal error. He did so in Chapter 2 and in Chapter 3 he discussed some practical issues that grew out of this error. To put their fears to rest, Paul explained that they were not in the Day of the Lord and told them why. That day could not arrive without other events taking place first. At this, Paul provided more detail on God's prophetic timetable. He told them that (1) The rapture of the Church must occur first, (2) Then the Antichrist will be revealed and after this (3) Jesus Christ will return to the earth.

**The Text:** Now concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to him, we ask you, brothers, <sup>2</sup> 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. <sup>3</sup> 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, <sup>4</sup> 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. <sup>5</sup> Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things? <sup>6</sup> And you know what is restraining him now so that he may be revealed in his time. <sup>7</sup> 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. <sup>8</sup> 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. <sup>9</sup> The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders, <sup>10</sup> and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. <sup>11</sup> Therefore God sends them a strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false, <sup>12</sup> in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness. (ESV)

**The Rapture of the Church (2:1-2, 6-7):** Paul dealt with their fears on the basis of what he had told them in his first letter (1<sup>st</sup> Thess 4:13-8). They were not to be shaken because of an errant prophecy (Tongue and Word of Knowledge), nor were they to be shaken because of a forged letter. Once the church is removed Satan's program can unfold (v3-5). What is keeping Satan's program from unfolding starting now? God has a plan, and he will unfold it in his time. There is a restrainer (v6-7) who restrains the unfolding of Satan's program until he is taken out of the way. Many bible students believe that the Holy Spirit is the restrainer. There is a restraining force present in the world (The Thessalonians knew "what" that force was). This restraining force is a person (v7) and the Holy Spirit dwells in the hearts of God's people. The Holy Spirit will be taken out of the midst and the church, who has him forever, will go with him. At that time, with the church removed from the earth, Satan's program will be free to unfold. We can never underestimate the significance of the presence of God's church in the world. The world is likely to degrade into chaos pretty quickly.

**The Revelation of the Antichrist (2:3-5, 8a):** The Day of the Lord will not come unless there is a rebellion that comes first. This refers to an abandoning of a position once held. According to a recent Gallup poll, US church membership was 73% in 1937 and remained near that level for the next six decades. Since that time there has been a steady decline in church attendance to its current level of 47% in 2021. Paul also indicates that the "man of lawlessness" also called the "son of destruction" will be revealed. This man opposes all things of God and any so-called god. This man esteems himself higher than any identifiable object of worship. This man will proclaim that he is God. Paul has previously told all of this to the Thessalonians. Who is this man? The Apostle John refers to him as the Antichrist (1<sup>st</sup> John 2:18, 2:22, 4:3, 2<sup>nd</sup> John 7). He is the Little Horn of Daniel Chapter 7. He is the Peacemaker of Revelation 6. He is the Protector (Daniel 9:24-27) – Prince Who Shall Come. He will make a covenant with Israel at the beginning of the 70<sup>th</sup> week. He is also the Peace-Breaker (Daniel 9:27) – In the Middle of the 70<sup>th</sup> Week he will break this covenant. He is the Willful King of Daniel Chapter 11 and he does whatever he wants to do. Jesus referred to him as the "Abomination of Desolation" (Matthew 24:15) referring to Daniel's prophecy. He is the Persecutor (Revelation 13:15-17 and identified as a Prisoner (Revelation 19:11-21) who will be thrown into the lake of fire. It is only after the one who restrains is taken out of the way that he will be revealed.

**The Return of Jesus Christ (2:8-12):** The Event described in 2<sup>nd</sup> Thessalonians 2:8-12 is a furthering of the event Paul described in 2<sup>nd</sup> Thessalonians 1:5-10. It will occur at the end of the seven-year tribulation period. It is important to distinguish between the rapture of the church and this event. Paul teaches that Christ will judge Antichrist and the unsaved. Antichrist will be controlled by Satan who without the Holy Spirit restraining is an overpowering presence on earth. At the return of Christ, Antichrist will be killed and brought to nothing (Not annihilation). He will be tormented forever in the lake of fire (Revelation 20:10). Paul reveals this to the Thessalonians that they might be encouraged. While many will be saved during the Tribulation, the vast majority of the people on earth will be lost. Most of the people on the earth will be incapable of discerning right from wrong. Paul indicates that "God sends them a strong delusion." How does God send a strong delusion? He doesn't actively engage them, rather he gives them over and allows their sin nature to run its course. As Paul teaches in Romans 1:18-32: (1) God gave them up to the lusts of their hearts (v24), (2) God gave them up to dishonorable passions (v26), and (3) God gave them up to a debased mind (v28). This is the ultimate act of judgment... God gives up on people. What is the result of this? Though they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.

**Next Week:** "Nothing but the Truth" (2<sup>nd</sup> Thessalonians 2:13-3:5)