

Fact Sheet for “The Rebellion” 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12

Pastor Bob Singer
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Let's begin with a short discussion of the nature of end-time prophecy, or “eschatology”.

In these twelve verses Paul first states the difficulty facing the Thessalonian believers, then gives three overlays in his response.

The Difficulty

ESV ¹ ¶ **Now concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to him, we ask you, brothers, ² 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. ^{3a} Let no one deceive you in any way.**

In 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 Paul had written to them about Christ coming in the clouds and gathering the church to Himself. He references this in verse one when he writes “concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to him”. In both letters Paul had written about the coming judgment on those who don't believe (1 Thess. 5:1-3; 2 Thess. 1:3-10).

Those descriptions are clearly about end-time judgment, and Paul wrote...

ESV **1 Thessalonians 5:4** But you are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief.

In his second letter Paul mentions that same “day of the Lord” in 2 Thessalonians 2:2 with the view of some that it had already come. What apparently was alarming the believers at Thessalonica was the idea that they had missed the boat. Christ had come and they weren't included.

Overlay One

Paul now continues with the first of three overlays of the time immediately preceding the coming judgment.

^{3b} **For *that day* will not come, unless the rebellion comes, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, ⁴ 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. ⁵ Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things?**

Before the “day of the Lord” comes the “rebellion” must come. But what is this? The NT word behind these translations is a combination of the preposition “from” and verb “to stand”. If you were reading the Greek NT it would sound this way, “apostasia”, hence the NASB “apostasy”. The basic meaning of this word is “departure”. This word family appears multiple times in the NT. Here is a sampling... Matt 5:31 (the second word for “divorce”); Lk 8:13; Acts 15:38; 21:21; Heb. 3:12.

The idea is out there that this word in 2 Thess. 2:3 could refer to the rapture (or departure) of the church. But his word seems to acquire increasingly the emphatic sense of religious apostasy in the NT. This seems to fit the context better. Paul will mention this religious departure later in this passage.

The description of “the man of lawlessness”, the “son of destruction”, fits well the antichrist in the book of Revelation. Paul says that he will take his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God.

Overlay Two

⁶ And you know what is restraining him now so that he be revealed in his time. ⁷ 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.

This restrainer is widely understood to be the Holy Spirit. Paul wrote that though the “mystery of lawlessness is already at work” the restrainer is still in place. The word “mystery” refers to something that is not yet disclosed or revealed (Compare Rom. 16:25-26). But one day the restrainer will be removed and the mystery will become clear.

⁸ 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. ⁹ The coming of *the lawless one* is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders, ¹⁰ and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved.

This is certainly consistent with the book of Revelation and the second coming of Christ. When God removes the restrainer the lawless one will no longer be a mystery but he will appear.

Overlay Three

¹¹ Therefore God sends them a strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false, ¹² in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

Not only will God remove the restrainer He will also send a strong delusion so that people will believe what is false from the lawless one, and depart in mass from God. These are people who were not Christians in the first place but who now will actively oppose God.

This is the rebellion Paul spoke of in verse 3! This is the falling away! This is the apostasy!

Why Did Paul Write This?

Paul was responding to a concern that the Thessalonian believers had that the day of the Lord had come and they had missed being gathered together to Him, or understood Paul incorrectly.

He wrote in response that that day would be preceded by the...

- The removal of the restrainer
- The appearance of the Lawless one
 - Who would take his seat in the temple
 - Proclaiming himself to be God
 - Who will display false signs and wonders
- A delusion sent from God on people who do not believe
- And their mass rebellion from God

Since those things had not yet occurred they had not missed their being gathered together with Christ.

This is the same message of comfort for us.

Here's a question. Which side would you be on if Christians would be gathered together with Christ today?