

2 THESSALONIANS

After their brief stay in Thessalonica, Paul and his church-planting partners, Silas and Timothy, were forced to leave the city. This left the infant church in a state of uncertainty and worried Paul to no end. After a little while, Paul sent _____[a] back to Thessalonica to see how the church was faring. When Timothy returned with a _____[b] report about their faith, hope, and love, Paul immediately fired off the letter we call 1 Thessalonians. In it he _____[c] them for their faith and encouraged them to continue living sanctified lives. There were also a few issues of concern that he needed to resolve. Evidently, not long after that first letter, Paul was made aware of some problems in the congregation that warranted a second letter (2 Thess 3:11). Since the first letter was probably written around AD 51, the second one was probably written in late AD 51 or AD 52.

THE CITY OF THESSALONICA AND THE CHURCH THERE

We discussed the city of Thessalonica and the founding of the church there in the last lesson. So, if you'd like to refresh yourself on some of those details, feel free to re-visit "Lesson 39, 1 Thessalonians."

THE CONTENT OF 2 THESSALONIANS

In Paul's second letter to the Thessalonians, Paul addressed _____[d] essential matters. First, their _____[e] had become more severe. So, in chapter 1, he encouraged them to stand firm and remain faithful as they suffered for their commitment to Christ. Second, Paul returns to the topic of the _____[f] times. He had instructed them in this topic while he was with them (2 Thess 2:5) and in his first letter to them (1 Thess 4:13-5:11). But Paul had been made aware that they were still confused and concerned about some second-coming-matters. The main reason for their confusion and concern came from a false report or a forged letter that had contradicted Paul's teaching. So, in chapter 2 Paul reassures them and helps them clear up the confusion and put their mind at ease. Third and finally, the problem of _____[g] that Paul had addressed in his first letter (1 Thess 4:11-12) had gotten worse. Some, expecting Jesus to return any minute, had stopped _____[h] altogether. In chapter 3, then, Paul strongly dealt with the idle loafers and told the church how to treat those who didn't obey his instructions to get back to working.

THE SECOND COMING OF JESUS AND THE MAN OF LAWLESSNESS

Paul's teaching on the _____[i] coming of Christ is significant enough that it deserves some special attention. Because our hope as Christians is grounded in Jesus' second coming, Christians of every generation have been really interested in knowing when Jesus may come back. Many Bible believers have even spent a lot of time and attention on discerning the "_____[j]" of His coming again. So, what does the Bible say about these "signs"? Generally speaking, the New Testament makes it quite clear that there aren't going to be "signs of the times." Jesus said His coming will be like a _____[k] who breaks into a home. In other words, His coming will not be announced (Matt 24:43). That is, when Jesus comes back, it will happen _____[l] and _____[m]. Because of this, Jesus presses home the truth that we need to live in constant _____[n] (Matt 24:42-25:30).

And that brings us to the Christians in Thessalonica. As I said a moment ago, many in the church there were confused and concerned by false _____[o] which said that Jesus' second coming had already happened (2 Thess 2:1-2). Paul responds to their fear by assuring them that Jesus had _____[p] returned. And, then, by inspiration, he tells them that Jesus would not return until "the _____[q] comes first, and the man of _____[r] is revealed, the son of destruction who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being god" (2 Thess 2:3-4). He then goes on to say that, for now, the "man of lawlessness" is being "_____[s]" (2 Thess 2:6-7) and that in due time "he will be revealed" (2 Thess 2:6). When the restraints are ultimately lifted from the "man of lawlessness" (2 Thess 2:7) Jesus will come again and "slay [him] with the _____[t] of His mouth and bring [him] to an end" (2 Thess 2:8).

This is one of the most difficult interpretive sections in the New Testament. The difficulties can be summarized around some specific questions: (1) What is the "apostacy" or "_____[u]" that must come before Jesus returns? (2 Thess 2:3); (2) Who is the "_____[v] of lawlessness" that will lead the rebellion? (2 Thess 2:3); and (3) What is it that "_____[w] him [the man of lawlessness] now" (2 Thess 2:6-7)? Now, here's a hard truth: *there is absolutely no scholarly consensus on these questions*. Frankly, if we had several hours to explore these questions, we still wouldn't get any closer to being able to give a dogmatic, definitive answer to each of these questions. But that doesn't mean we can't understand the _____[x] points that Paul is making. I'll now share with you my understanding of what Paul is telling us about the second coming of Christ in 2 Thessalonians 2.

In a nutshell, Paul says that just before the second coming of Jesus, there will be “the apostasy” (NASB). Some translations call it “the rebellion” (ESV, NIV). Some may wonder, “But hasn’t the world always been in _____ [y] against God since Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit?” It sure has. The evil world system has always been in rebellion to God and His agenda, and Jesus promised His people that they would be _____ [z] and _____ [aa] by the world. Many New Testament letters were written to Christians who were suffering because of their faith in Jesus. Clearly, the rebellion that will precede the second coming of Jesus will not be in the same _____ [bb] of rebellion that has existed since Genesis 3. In other words, the end-of-time “rebellion” refers to a totally _____ [cc] level of rebellion. It is referring to a _____ [dd] spiritual attack by God’s enemies on Jesus’ people and His truth on a level never before seen in human history.

Despite the intensity of persecution that presently exists against Christ’s church and His truth, it’s not as _____ [ee] and devastating as it could be because God is presently “restraining” the power that could overwhelm His people. Paul says “the man of lawlessness”—who he also calls “the son of destruction”—will lead the end-of-time rebellion. According to Paul, “the man of lawlessness” will oppose and exalt himself “above every so-called god or object of worship” and that he will “take his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God” (2 Thess 2:3-4). Paul then reminds his readers of something he had taught them while he was with them, and that is that the “man of lawlessness” is presently being “restrained” (2 Thess 2:6). In other words, his power is presently being _____ [ff] by God Himself (2 Thess 2:7). But there’s coming a day when God will withdraw His restraint of the “man of lawlessness” (2 Thess 2:7). When that restraint is taken away, it will unleash an _____ [gg] of rebellion never before seen, and that will be the _____ [hh] of the _____ [ii]. In other words, it won’t be long after “the rebellion” begins that Jesus will return and “slay with the breath of His mouth” the leader of the rebellion “whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan” (2 Thess 2:8-9).

Before we take a closer look at the “man of lawlessness,” let’s take a look at another New Testament passage that seems to clearly parallel this view of what the world will be like just before the end. That passage is Revelation 20:1-10. This passage opens with an _____ [jj] coming down from heaven holding a chain and a key, and he “laid hold of . . . Satan, and _____ [kk] him for a thousand _____ [ll]” (Rev 20:1-2). The “thousand years” here is a symbolic reference to the entire _____ [mm] age. Well, actually it refers to *almost* the entire church age. It refers to all the church age except the very _____ [nn], because Revelation 20:3 says that after the thousand years of Satan’s binding, “he must be released for a short time.” What does “a short time” mean?

It's impossible to know precisely what it means, but it obviously means that it will be a period of time much _____[oo] than Christian history. Then, when Satan is "released from his prison" (Rev 20:7), he will gather an _____[pp] and they will "surround the camp of the saints and the beloved city" (Rev 20:9). The "beloved city" is not the physical _____[qq] of Jerusalem, but rather "the Jerusalem above" (Gal 4:26), "the heavenly Jerusalem" (Heb 12:22), which is the _____[rr]. The language of warfare here is a _____[ss] for the intense attack that will fall upon God's _____[tt] by God's _____[uu]. It's language that seems to describe a time of unparalleled _____[vv] and suffering the body of Christ. Then, as the people of God are about to be overwhelmed by their enemies, "fire came down from heaven and devoured them" (Rev 20:9). This will bring an _____[ww] to Satan's work and eternal _____[xx] for God's people.

So, to sum it up, both 2 Thessalonians 2: 1-2 and Revelation 20:1-10 seems to reveal the same general picture of the second coming of Christ.

- At the moment, while Satan is powerful, his full power is being _____[yy] by God. How does God restrain him? It's impossible to say with certainty what forces God is using to limit Satan's influence. Several ideas have been suggested from the gospel to governments. All that really matters is knowing that God really is _____[zz] Satan's power in our current spiritual warfare.
- Toward the _____[aaa] of the church age—the age we're living in—God is going to lift His restraint of Satan and that will unleash "the apostacy" or "the rebellion." It will be a terrible time for the church worldwide. The _____[bbb] of the persecution of God's people will be at a level never seen before.
- That "rebellion" will _____[ccc] last long. Soon after the power of Satan unleashes one last intense campaign of deception and falsehood in opposition to the gospel of Christ, God will intervene by sending _____[ddd] back. _____[eee] will then be destroyed before he can destroy the church.
- Satan will be the power behind this rebellion, but it will be led by the "man of lawlessness." Who exactly is this? There has been much speculation throughout Christian history, but we have no way of knowing with certainty at this time. Some have identified him with the line of Roman Catholic popes, others with the line of Roman emperors, others think it's a reference to Satan himself, and still others think it's the forces of evil personified. Some of these notions have a bit more merit than others, but, frankly, every suggestion is just _____[fff]. I'm inclined to think it will actually be a specific person at some point in history; but that's, well, just _____[ggg].

LESSONS FROM 2 THESSALONIANS

- Faithful _____ [hhh] is evidence that God has rightly judged us to be His people and destined us for glory (2 Thess 1:4-5).
- God will punish His enemies and the enemies of His people because He is _____ [iii] (2 Thess 1:6-7).
- Salvation is _____ [jjj] upon “ _____ [kkk] the gospel of our Lord Jesus” (2 Thess 1:8).
- Hell is an _____ [lll] condition away from God’s presence (2 Thess 1:9).
- We know we’re _____ [mmm] when we live in holiness (sanctification) through the power of the Spirit (2 Thess 2:13)
- God’s chosen people are totally loyal to the _____ [nnn] of Christ and His apostles (2 Thess 2:15; 3:4).
- Pray regularly for the success of the _____ [ooo] and the safety of God’s _____ [ppp] (2 Thess 3:1-2).
- Don’t be _____ [qqq], don’t be a burden, and don’t be a distraction, and don’t grow _____ [rrr] in doing good (2 Thess 3:6-13).
- _____ [sss] is an important element of church life (2 Thess 3:14-15).
- The _____ [ttt] in every church is the _____ [uuu] Word (2 Thess 3:4, 6, 10, 12, 14)

KEY PASSAGES FROM 2 THESSALONIANS

- 2 Thessalonians 1:6-10
- 2 Thessalonians 2:13-15
- 2 Thessalonians 3:1-3

FILL-IN-THE-BLANK ANSWER KEY

[a] Timothy	[ss] symbol
[b] positive	[tt] people
[c] praised	[uu] enemies
[d] three	[vv] persecution
[e] persecution	[ww] end
[f] end	[xx] deliverance
[g] idleness	[yy] restrained
[h] working	[zz] limiting
[i] second	[aaa] end
[j] signs	[bbb] intensity
[k] thief	[ccc] not
[l] suddenly	[ddd] Jesus
[m] unexpectedly	[eee] Satan
[n] readiness	[fff] speculation
[o] reports	[ggg] speculation
[p] not	[hhh] suffering
[q] apostacy	[iii] just
[r] lawlessness	[jjj] conditional
[s] restrained	[kkk] obeying
[t] breath	[lll] eternal
[u] rebellion	[mmm] chosen
[v] man	[nnn] teachings
[w] restrains	[ooo] gospel
[x] broad	[ppp] messengers
[y] rebellion	[qqq] lazy
[z] persecuted	[rrr] weary
[aa] hated	[sss] Discipline
[bb] category	[ttt] authority
[cc] different	[uuu] apostolic
[dd] concentrated	
[ee] intense	
[ff] limited	
[gg] intensity	
[hh] beginning	
[ii] end	
[jj] angel	
[kk] bound	
[ll] years	
[mm] church	
[nn] end	
[oo] shorter	
[pp] army	
[qq] city	
[rr] church	