

“Some Signs of Christ’s Coming” - 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12

The fifth Sunday of the Epiphany season – Feb 6, 2022

Holy Trinity Church - Tom Mount

Exegesis of 2:1-12

¹ Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him, we ask you, brothers and sisters, ²not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by the teaching allegedly from us—whether by a prophecy or by word of mouth or by letter—asserting that the day of the Lord has already come.”

- In Thessalonica, some people had been teaching that “the day of the Lord” had already occurred. This was also taught in Corinth (1 Cor 15:12-58) and Ephesus (2 Tim 2:18).
- Paul, Silas and Timothy argue here: Don’t be deceived; don’t be alarmed! The NT teaches that deception is one of three key characteristics of the age in which we live, the others being persecution and suffering.
- The team mentions two simultaneous events that will occur: “the coming of our Lord” and “our being gathered to him.” There will be other closely coordinated end time events: the destruction of God’s enemies (2 Thess 1:6-9), the final judgment (Rev 20:11-15), the eradication of evil (2 Ptr 3:10-11) and creation of a new earth (Rev 21:1-4). These are all ushered in by Christ’s “appearing” the “the Day of the Lord.” (2:2).
- **“the Day of the Lord”** (*yom YHWH*) was a familiar OT reference to divine judgment of evil and salvation of God’s people, both immediate and eschatological. Its use was continued by the NT authors to refer to Christ’s coming acts of judgment and salvation. (2:2; Cf. Isa 2:12; 13:9-11; Joel 1:15; Zep 1:14-16; 1 Cor 1:8; 5:5; 15:24-26; 2 Cor 1:14; 1 Thess 5:3,9; 2 Thess 1:5-9; Col 3:5-6; 1 Ptr 1:5; 2 Ptr 2:9-10; Rev 19:11-21).
- **“coming of the Lord.”** “Coming” is *parousia*, “presence, appearance” and was a term in reference to royal visitations (cf. 1 Thess 1:16-17). It is the most common term for Jesus’ return (1 Cor 15:23; 1 Thess 2:19; 3:13). Others include *epiphaneia* – “appearance” (1 Tim 6:14; 2 Tim 1:10; 4:1) and *apokalypsis* – “revelation” (1 Cor 1:7; 2 Thess 1:7).

- **“gathered to him”** is *episunagoge*, had rich meaning for Jews. Cf. Matt 24:30-31; 1 Thess 4:14-17. A key feature of Jewish eschatological hope is a “gathering” of the faithful scattered in the diaspora. Each Sunday, we symbolically rehearse this great event!

³ **Don’t let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction. ⁴ He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God’s temple, proclaiming himself to be God. ⁵ Don’t you remember that when I was with you I used to tell you these things?**

- **“rebellion”** is *apostasia* – “apostasy, a departure from the faith” (see Acts 21:21; 1 Tim 4:1; Heb 3:12). This apostasy will involve false teachers or false Christs (Mt 24:5, 11; 2 Peter 2:1ff.) and a widespread “falling away” from the faith by many (Mt 24:10; 1 Tim 4:1).
- **“the man of lawlessness, the son of destruction.”** John calls him “antichrist” (1 Jn 2:18, 22; 4:3; 2 Jn 7; cf. Dan 11:34-37). In Revelation, there are two characters—the “beast” and the “false prophet” (Rev 13:1-4; 5-18)—who bear similarities to this “man of lawlessness.” Someone in Church (cf. Luke 21:8), who will deceive the Church and world.
- **“he will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped... proclaiming himself to be God.”** This wording is based on Dan 11:36; cf. 11:31; 7:8, 11, which was partially fulfilled by Antiochus IV Epiphanes (175-164 BC). He will act contrary to God’s laws and claim spiritual authority to do so.
- **“He sets himself up in God’s temple.”** Some believe this is a reference to a rebuilt temple in Jerusalem. But the wording “the temple of the god” is ambiguous and could refer to the temples in Thessalonica dedicated to the “gods” Julius Caesar and Octavian. “Temple” might also refer to the Church. The term is used five other times by Paul, never in reference to the Jerusalem temple, but always in reference to Jesus and his Church (e.g., 1 Cor 3:16-17; 2 Cor 6:16; cf. Eph 2:19-21; 1 Pet 2:4-7; Rev 3:12; 21:22).
- What is certain is that this guy is going to gain great influence, will act in ways contrary to Jesus’ teachings, will claim divine authority to do so, and will be instrumental in turning many away from the faith.

⁶ **And now you know what is holding him back, so that he may be revealed at the proper time. ⁷ For the secret power of lawlessness is already at work; but the one who now holds**

it back will continue to do so till he is taken out of the way.⁸ And then the lawless one will be revealed,

- **“the one who now holds it back”** has occasioned a lot of scholarly debate. Probably most natural way to interpret this is that it is an angel (Revelation 20:1-3; cf. Rev 12:7; Dan 10:13). Regardless, two things are clear:
 1. **“the secret power of lawlessness is already at work”**, cf. 1 Jn 2:22; 4:3.
 2. At a specific point in time, the restrainer will be **“taken out of the way”** and the lawless one will “be revealed” for who he is.

^{8b} whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendor of his coming.

- **“breath of his mouth”** was a common way to depict divine power, whether in creation (e.g., Gen 1:2; 2:7; Ps 32:6) or judgment (Isa 11:4).
- **“splendor of this coming.”** Jesus’ destruction of the lawless one is virtually effortless; his glory too great to bear (2 Thess 1:7-8; Rev 19:11-21).

⁹ The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with how Satan works. He will use all sorts of displays of power through signs and wonders that serve the lie,¹⁰ and all the ways that wickedness deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved.¹¹ For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie¹² and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness.

- This “Lawless one” is really just a front man for Satan, who is pushing his agenda to undermine God’s good creation (cf. Rev 13:1-2, 15).
- Satan will use **“displays of power”** to deceive people into thinking that they are on the right path: **“signs and wonders”** is shorthand for supernatural phenomena or miracles. Jesus warned his disciples about false prophets doing “great signs and wonders” (Matt 24:23-25). We need to be discriminating about miraculous claims.
- The goal of Satan and the lawless one is to deceive people. Some common deceptions today:
 - God: doesn’t exist, or is an impersonal force, or doesn’t love us.
 - Jesus: was merely good moral teacher, not divine, not born of virgin
 - Bible: is nothing more than the religious projections of men

- Truth: is relative, you have your truth, I have mine. Both can be right even if diametrically opposed.
 - Sex: is not reserved for marriage, but a natural act that satisfies our legitimate pleasures
 - Gender: not part of the created order but merely a social construct.
 - Fetus: is not a precious gift from God but simply nondescript organic tissue that can be removed just as one might remove a tumor
- **“God sends them a powerful delusion”** – God doesn’t force faith or obedience. When people choose to live separated from God, he honors that choice and “gives them over” to their desires and delusions (cf. Rom 1:18-32).

To summarize the biblical teaching here about Christ’s return

1. We are called to be faithful witnesses to God’s grace and message, resisting deception and triumphantly enduring persecution and suffering.
2. At some unknown point, the “man of lawlessness” will gain significant influence, deceiving many through his persuasive speech and miracles.
3. Many people in the Church will believe him and “fall away” through a widespread apostasy. Those who refuse to renounce Christ will be persecuted and killed.
4. Jesus will return in glory to judge his enemies, rescue his people and establish his kingdom on earth.

Takeaways

- Be informed: don’t be misled. Be a careful student of God’s Word (2 Tim 2:15)!
- Be assured: don’t be afraid. We will face hard times, but God will make everything right in the end if we remain faithful (1 Cor 15:58; Rev 2:7, 11, 17, 26-28; 3:5, 12, 21)!