

2 Thessalonians: Return of the King

Lesson 2: The Great Apostasy

I. Introduction - Paul wrote the 2 Thessalonians in 51-52 A.D. shortly after writing the first letter to the church in Thessalonica.

A. The main reason Paul wrote this letter is to clear up confusion because of erroneous teaching and flat out lies that had been spoken in the name of Paul particularly around the return of Jesus. It has a harsher tone than the first letter.

1. The erroneous teaching was Jesus had already returned. Some took things Paul taught in the first letter about the day of the Lord and said this event had already happened. This left many in the church hopeless.
2. Many theologians believe that a letter had been forged in Paul's name and was being circulated in Thessalonica. This helps explain **2 Thessalonians 3:17**.

B. Tonight we are going to look at the Great Apostasy (the falling away/defection from the faith that Paul warns about and one of the most debated people in scripture (the man of lawlessness)).

1. Augustine quote on the man of lawlessness - "I frankly don't know what Paul was talking about."
2. We are going to walk through some different opinions on the topic over church history and also look at this historical context of **2nd Thessalonians** that many overlook today when teaching about the man of lawlessness.

II. The Great Apostasy

A. **2 Thessalonians 2:1-12** In these verses Paul gives much insight about the conditions that must be satisfied in order for Jesus to return.

1. Paul is very specific that Jesus had not already come - **verse 2**.
2. Before Jesus comes, there must be a great **apostasia** falling away/renunciation of the faith and the man of sin/lawless must first be revealed - **verse 3**. The word perdition means destruction.
3. The man of sin will sit in the temple of God in Jerusalem and receive worship like he is God - **verse 4**.
4. When Paul was in Thessalonica in **Acts 17** he told them about these events. He also said they already knew what was restraining the man of lawlessness. **If they knew, this meant the thing that was restraining was referring to something that existed in their day - verse 6.**
5. The mystery of lawlessness is already at work. **1 John 4:3**
6. Will operate in the power of Satan with signs and lying wonders - **verse 9**.

7. The lawless one will deceive many because they don't love truth - *verse 10*.
8. The lawless one will be consumed by Jesus at his coming - *verse 8*.

B. Opinions about the Identity of the Man of Lawlessness Throughout History

1. Nero - His name in Aramaic is 666. **Revelation 17:9-10** talks about the city of 7 hills. Rome is seated in the midst of 7 hills. Nero was the 6th emperor (king) counting from Julius Caesar. Nero received worship as God and persecuted the church strongly (fire in Rome and framed Christians). Reasons he wouldn't be the man of lawlessness include not operating in lying signs and wonders, and never sat in the temple in Jerusalem. **There are opinions that he faked his death and reappeared.** The Emperor Claudius is supposed to be the restrainer in this theory.
2. Titus - Roman general that destroyed the temple in Jerusalem and actually sat on the throne. Not much of the rest of his background fits the characteristics of the man of lawlessness.
3. Ananias (Jewish high priest) - would have sat in the completed version of the temple and certainly promoted teaching that warred against Christianity. He persecuted many Christians. (The Jews were the greatest adversaries of Christians, not the Romans in the first century, particularly in Thessalonica. He was killed in the first year of the Jewish Roman War - AD 66. Rome would have been the force that was restraining.
4. Many believe this is a person in the future when the temple is rebuilt. I think this is very possible. It is also possible that people like Nero, Titus, and Ananias were types and shadows of the future antichrist the same way Moses, David, Joseph, etc. were types and shadows of the true Christ.

C. 2 Thessalonians 2:13-17 What do we do with all of this?

1. Until Jesus returns physically we are to stand fast in the faith. When we don't know all of the details, we need to obey that which we are clear about. The fact we have to stand fast means there will be hardship.
2. When we continue to believe the gospel, Jesus will comfort our hearts and establish in good words and deeds.

III. Conclusion - **2 Thessalonians 2** is a great example of why we must know truth to prevent being deceived. Forged letters and false teaching left many hopeless. This still happens today with the prophetic and even with biblical doctrine (truth about righteousness, healing, etc.)

A. Pray Closing

B. Call Up Prayer Team