

Anti-Christ Revealed and Destroyed

2 Thessalonians 2:1-12

Parallel notes to a sermon by Rev. David H. Linden, Feb. 24, 2013, (revised 3/2013)
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I have been assigned one paragraph in Pastor Pickett's series on 2 Thessalonians. It is the longest paragraph and most controversial. Serious and sincere believers who love each other disagree. We must not avoid a Biblical text because we lack happy consensus, because that would mean we are avoiding things God has spoken. Any matter raised by God in Scripture must not be ignored.

I have chosen in this paper to use the colloquial language and expression of American people. All quotations are from the ESV.

Some Background: The Thessalonian Christians worried that those who had died might be left out when the Lord returns. 1 Thessalonians sets that to rest. The dead in Christ will rise first, and we will be together. We are to believe this and accept the comfort in it. The next error on the loose for those Christians was that the Lord had come already, and they somehow missed it! In 2 Thessalonians 2 the apostle attacks that piece of confusion with zeal and specificity. That is before us this morning.

Some Review: Last Lord's Day my colleague taught that there is one coming of Christ. Our dispensational brothers say that the Lord comes in stages: first for us and then for them – first for the church – and then at the end of the tribulation for OT saints and those saved after the rapture. Those saints remain in their graves when Jesus comes for us – “us” here being the church. That is a sad mistake widely taught in the USA.

A Personal Digression: In the spring of 1961, I was in my third and final year of training at a Bible school. In theology class I raised my hand and asked Mr. Robins (a dear and godly saint, now with the Lord) this question: “When the Lord comes in the rapture, He will take only the church, but the OT saints (who are not part of the NT church) will only be raised at the end of the seven years when Christ comes in the revelation. Sir, is that right?” He confirmed that it was. I was comforted that I understood the doctrine. My next thought was, “I'm not sure I like this – Daniel and Moses and Abraham and all the OT saints not being raised when we are. Something is strange here.” That was the moment doubt arose within me. The viewpoint I once held divides the people of God in a way John 10:16, Ephesians 2:11-22 and Hebrews 11:39,40 will not allow. Pulling on that string resulted in the unraveling of my dispensational theology. This happened even though I knew no one in that school or in my entire family who could see the Lord's return in any other way. There was no external persuasion, just an unsettled feeling. This doctrinal matter is before us today.

Is there One Coming Only? If there is but one, there is no advance pre-tribulation rapture. The church will be here for the big showdown. And since that is so, we have good reason to be alert and looking for His Coming. If our hearts are diverted from this, we are in great spiritual danger. 2 Thessalonians is very plain. Yet many miss

what it is saying and hold to two comings of Christ. The Bible always speaks of the Second Coming in the singular. If there is an exception I would be glad to see it.

A. Those suffering affliction (persecution from the ungodly) will have relief. This will happen *when*¹ the Lord comes to afflict the afflictors, and that is also the time when the Lord will come in flaming fire and vengeance with His mighty angels to punish those who reject Him. A single time is identified with opposite things occurring in the singular coming of Christ. (2 Thessalonians 1:6-8).

B. Those who do not obey the gospel will be punished with eternal destruction “*when* he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints” (2 Thessalonians 1:9,10).

Conclusion: The church is relieved when Christ is revealed in power and glory. This comes at the same time, and on the same day as the judgment of unbelievers. These are not actions of the Lord separated by a block of time. A happens when B happens, and B happens only with A, so our Lord appears in one event not two.

And now our text We know from chapter 1 of two things that will happen at the same time, but how can anyone tell whether the Lord has come? Well, if certain things are tied together, and cannot be disconnected from His return, and if those things are identified for us, and if they happen before He comes, then we have another way to know. This is the way Paul chose to allay their alarm. It is inconceivable to me that the Lord could come without our being aware of it, because chapter one makes clear that it is an awesome moment with mighty angels and flaming fire. Such an event is impossible to miss! Add to this the sound of God’s trumpet in 1 Thessalonians 4:16. Nevertheless, this was not as clear for those early converts to Christ. Christians of our day have had the entire Bible in our possession for centuries. That has made a huge difference for us!

“... *The coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to Him*” (v.1) is just another way to speak of the “rapture”.² Surely being gathered to the Lord and meeting Him in the air are the same thing (1 Thessalonians 4:17). Being gathered to Christ at His coming will be the experience of the church.

The Two Things That Precede Before that “day of the Lord” comes (v.2), two identifiable situations will come about. Both have serious spiritual implications. The Lord will not come before they happen. Paul labors this point to fight

¹ Many translations use the adverb “when” here. This is legitimate because this promised relief happens at a future event, namely, the revelation of Jesus Christ, as the time when the relief will occur. This choice of words may even be the case with a majority of translations. I found it to be so in 11 out of 18 cases. The others without using the word “when” simply say that the relief will come *at* or *in* the revelation of the Lord Jesus. All these translations show two things in one time frame.

² Some definition of *rapture* is needed. All evangelicals agree that “We who are alive ... will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air”. The word *rapture* comes from the Latin word for “caught up”. For those interested, here is the Latin text: “Nos qui vivimus [we who live] qui relinquimur [who remain] simul rapiemur [together shall be caught up] cum illis [with the others] in nubibus [in the clouds].” That shows the etymology of the word *rapture*. Many add to this that it is a secret rapture, one prior to the tribulation, and a coming for the church only, excluding OT saints. This expands the definition with conclusions not accepted by all. Those of us who reject these added elements *appear* not to believe in the rapture, but we do. And when we say “rapture” we mean simply what 1 Thessalonians 4:17 is saying.

off a false understanding of the Lord's return. Naturally, if these conditions have not happened, the Lord has not yet come.

1. There will be a great apostasy
2. The Anti-Christ will be revealed.

Today we have no difficulty accepting that the Lord has not come yet, but we do have vigorous denial by many in our day that these things will precede the coming of Christ for His church. This text deserves sober reassessment.

Both of these markers relate to a denial of Christ. (In a great contrast, our dispensational brothers are true believers; they do not deny our Lord. Very many are His stalwart servants with Christ-centered ministries.) The coming apostasy predicted here is a falling away from the truths of Christ. Many in Christendom though not regenerate have held many truths of the Christian faith, even if loosely. In that time all vital truth will be discarded by a multitude who cast off all Christian profession. All denial of who Christ is is apostasy. It is apostasy to deny His incarnation, deity, virgin birth, sinless life, sacrifice for sins, physical resurrection from the dead, ascension, and coming again. Such denial embraces darkness deliberately. The other way to deny Christ is to worship a substitute for Him, a replacement of our Lord by Satan chosen man, the beast, the Anti-Christ, the man of sin. This will happen on a world-wide scale.

We must not overlook the apostasy in v.3³. This kind of threat has been a constant plague within the church for centuries, but among God's elect it has never resulted in a repudiation of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:3). Most of 2 Thessalonians 2 is devoted to teaching about the man of sin, so we must do the same. I point out however, that as this lawless man is now restrained (v.7) and will later be allowed to go on his rampage, I suspect it is the same with the great apostasy. I think these are simply two facets of the same situation. The coming denial of truth will be the result of the devil on the loose. His seductive deception will sweep many off their feet. The necessary defense against doctrinal error is serious study and proclamation of the Bible. Leaders and people must embrace God's Word intelligently. Bibles may be taken from us, but God's Word inwardly digested will remain. We must have a firm grip on truth, because if we are here when Anti-Christ is revealed, the assault on truth will be as vigorous and vicious as Satan's hatred of Christ. Satan remains a powerful and subtle beguiler. He has a host of victims already. When loosed, in popular American speech we say that he will be "all in" and will "go for broke" with "his foot to the floorboard", "throwing all caution to the wind". This is his last big chance. He will fail.

How Is this Man of Sin Described? He is:

- a. A man of lawlessness
- b. A man of destruction (or perdition)
- c. An opponent of God

³ Some dispensational teachers assert that the Greek word *apostasia*, used here in verse 3, refers to standing away, thus having departed in a physical sense. In this way they seek a little support for a pre-tribulation rapture. There is no example of *apostasia* ever having that meaning anywhere in Scripture or in any other literature of that period. It appears in Acts 21:21 as forsaking Moses. In the Greek OT it is found in Joshua 22:22 and 2 Chronicles 29:19. In both cases it means rebellion. Apart from these four texts *apostasia* does not appear elsewhere in the Bible.

- d. One who exalts himself
- e. One who acts to take over the temple, i.e., God's church
- f. One who proclaims himself to be God
- g. One who is supported by Satan's false signs and wonders

His Mode of Operation

- a. He will seize the structure of Christian institutions, seated in the temple of God with diabolical power. He does not appear as a "lone ranger". This is not merely setting up the worship of himself as God to the world, it is a palace coup to take over the church. (You can be sure the Lord will not allow that for long!)
- b. As the "son of destruction" he crushes all opposition (v.3).
- c. He proclaims his own audacious theology, namely that he is God! Other Scriptures predict his blasphemy (Revelation 13:1-6; Daniel 7:25; compare with Daniel 11:36). This is double blasphemy: first he claims that God is not God, and then he adds that he is. The real God is denied (we are used to that), then a false one is proclaimed. (In American history that is very rare, though I heard of one man calling our President "our lord and savior", reported on Fox 2/28/13.) In a figurative sense the man of lawlessness is the human incarnation of Satan. (Note in a completely literal sense, Christ is God in human flesh.) Satan's method is to offer a counterfeit Christ. Thankfully, this particular satanic device is well understood among all Christian teachers.

And will all this come about before the Lord returns? This text is clear. We should believe that the lawlessness in the world is restrained, but when it suits the purpose of our sovereign God it will be unleashed. This lawlessness will be centered in the ultimate Anti-Christ in the final battle of human history. God is quite prepared to have extreme opposition when it suits His purpose. He allowed Satan to enter Judas, and used the moves of the Evil One to return utter defeat back upon the devil's head (Luke 22:21,22). Our Lord is willing to use our deaths (Revelation 6:11) to accomplish His holy will. On Satan's part this is murder, but for us, our participation in the way of the cross will glorify God greatly. We should accept His will cheerfully, for our vindication is certain.

Additional Perspective from Other Scriptures

Concerning Bloodshed: Paul says nothing in the Thessalonian epistles of the bloodshed of the Lord's people. That this is in the picture is explicitly clear in Daniel and Revelation:

- "... This horn made war with the saints and prevailed over them" (Daniel 7:21).
- "And when they have finished their testimony, the beast that rises from the bottomless pit will make war on them and conquer them and kill them" (Revelation 11:7).
- This same beast "was allowed to make war on the saints and to conquer them." (Revelation 13:7).
- "And I saw the woman [Babylon], drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of the martyrs of Jesus." (Revelation 17:6).

- “And in her [Babylon] was found the blood of prophets and of saints, and of all who have been slain on earth” (Revelation 18:24).
- Daniel predicts that in the distant future a king will arise when transgressors reach their limit. He will destroy the saints in an uprising against the Prince of princes, Christ. (See Daniel 8:23-26).

Concerning the Entire Present Age: Jesus warned of many false prophets (Matthew 24:11); Paul did as well (Acts 20:29; 2 Timothy 3:13). John defines an anti-Christ as *any* liar who denies the Father and the Son (1 John 2:21-25; 4:1-3). Thus there have been many. The spirit and activity of anti-Christ has been present in the world ever since the first coming of our Lord. What 2 Thessalonians and Revelation add is further information about the supreme Anti-Christ. His end comes directly by the hand of Christ in His Second Coming. For this to be so, Anti-Christ must be here in advance of that great day. His rampage will not be tame or limited in scope through all the earth, but it will be brief and unsuccessful.

Anti-Christ Will Be Destroyed by the Lord Jesus Paul says in the same sentence that the lawless one will be revealed and that the Lord Jesus will kill him. It is wonderful to read such things side by side. This will be done at the time of His coming.

The Lord has chosen that the ongoing strife which began in the Garden of Eden should come to a climax in a truly cataclysmic encounter. Satan will be allowed his “fifteen minutes” of diabolical glory to dominate the stage. Then the Lord will finish him off. Just as God waited for the iniquity of the Amorites to come to completion (Genesis 15:16), and only then did He send Israel to wipe them out, so it is here. All issues come to a head. Likewise, the Lord chooses for Gog of Magog along with his hordes to attack His people without provocation (Ezekiel 38:3,4), so that, with the evil out in the open, the Lord can justifiably crush him in battle and leave him no survivors. (Ezekiel 38,39 and Revelation 19,20.) In this way God puts His greatness and holiness on display, showing His glory to the nations (Ezekiel 38:22,23).

Christ defeated Satan at the cross (1 John 3:8; John 12:31; Colossians 2:13-15; Hebrews 2:14,15). At the end of the age, He will allow His defeated foe one last futile lunge at the His people. This ancient conflict will end in a moment with the defeat of the Anti-Christ and all those with him. For them it will be unending suffering. The final shout of triumph will not be Satan’s. It will belong to the people of God. (Revelation 19:1-7.)

The Issue for All Mankind God has broadcast the good news of the Lord Jesus Christ to the nations. In Him there is salvation and safety. Those who refuse “to love the truth and so be saved” (v.10), shall not know the truth as truth, and they shall not be saved. Their repudiation of Christ is their final decision; therefore they will fall under the deception of Anti-Christ. God will lock them into it, making sure they will believe what is false (v.11). They do not want truth and they shall not have it. We should take God seriously. It is His unbending policy that we may come to Him by His Son and in no other way. The issue of truth remains uppermost as Paul brings this paragraph to a close. Naturally the opposite of being gripped by truth is being blinded in error. When the truth of the gospel is gone, all that is left is condemnation.

Two Ways to Face God We shall all face God. “... *For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God; for it is written, ‘As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God.’ So then each of us will give an account of himself to God*” (Romans 14:10-12). But there are two ways to appear before Him: by ourselves, or with the Mediator. God accepts only one Mediator, the only Person He appointed to this role, the One sent here to be our Savior. To appear on our own before Him, would be the ultimate horror. It means an offended and holy Judge will execute deserved judgment on a guilty sinner who has no place to run or hide. Here is final rejection as each unforgiven sinner is ushered into hell. The Lake of Fire will burn out only when God stops hating sin, and that can happen only if the immutable Lord loses His holiness, which is impossible. There is no hope of that for those who have no one to represent them for their sin. No one can “tough it out”. The Lord meant it when He said, “*Whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven*” (Matthew 10:33).

The other way to stand before God is the way Christians do. Like the others, we have sinned, but God sent this Mediator to stand in for us and plead our case. Jesus literally became one of us. He was severely tempted by the Master Tempter. After 40 days the devil gave up. Jesus Christ is shown to be the only righteous human in the history of the world. This was well proven in the desert of Judea. As both a man and a righteous one, this God-ordained Priest was qualified to represent us in the sacrifice He offered to His Father. He took on Himself the full load of the sins of His people and sin’s consequences. The wages of sin is death, and that is what Jesus underwent for us. Our sins were given to Him, thank God, and His righteous obedience has been imputed to us, thank God. On the Judgment Day, we shall stand corrected and chastened for all our sins, but not rejected or condemned. The One judging is the Judge Who loves us; He died for us convicts! The punishment He will give to His rejecters is what He has already endured for us in our place on the cross. Every Christian says that He is the One “... *who loved me and gave Himself for me*” (Galatians 2:20). In Him, even before the Judgment Day arrives, we have been acquitted, declared righteous, and accepted.

All who decline to obey this gospel, not believing Him and not placing their trust in Jesus as Lord, will fall into darkness even before the Lord comes. They will accept the mark of the beast rather than the seal of God (Revelation 14:9-11; 7:2, 9:4). They will buy into the deception which many anti-Christis are already selling. False signs and wonders will snare their minds, and they shall share the hell *prepared for the devil and his angels* (Matthew 25:41). So the thing to do is to flee to Christ. The only way we can come is in our sins. He will take you in, wash you in His blood and plead successfully for your forgiveness. The only way to the Father is through the Son, and Jesus gives eternal life now and forever. He will write His law on your heart, and you will have no other gods before Him (Exodus 20:3 and Jeremiah 31:33). You will not worship the Anti-Christ.

Meanwhile, as Psalm 2 puts it, the heathen will rage and join in a rebellion which cannot succeed. Satan has a man to sit on his throne, but God has declared that Christ is King, and has already given the nations to Him as His inheritance. Thus we bow before God’s Son. The Lord Jesus will destroy the Anti-Christ and rule the nations with a rod of iron. Blessed are all who put their trust in Him.