

# The What & Who of 2<sup>nd</sup> Thess. 2:3

By David Lee Burris

## 2 Thessalonians - Overview

- Who – Paul, Timothy, Silus
- What – Correct False teachings about the when “Day of the Lord” would happen, reassure them on how to live and wait.
- When – AD 53 or 54, likely within months after 1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians.
- Where – written from Corinth to the church in Thessalonica.
- Why – Encourage the church in Thessalonica to stand firm and help them reject false teachings about the second coming of Christ.
- Key Verse: 2Th 2:3 Let no one in any way deceive you, for it will not come unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction,

# WHAT FALLING AWAY?



2 Thessalonians 2:3, 4

Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God."

## Is There a Departure In 2 Thessalonians 2:3?

John M. Sweigart

### Introduction

I believe it was Melville who said, “To write a mighty book, you must have a mighty theme.” The theme of this paper may not be the search for the great white whale, but it is to attempt to overturn hundreds of years of accepted Bible translations and to contradict leading scholars who hold to the same point of view in eschatology as the author. To simply examine the evidence and exegete the appropriate passages involved while attempting to keep presuppositions from forcing the outcome, I have found to be particularly difficult.

The task before us is to determine the appropriate translation for the word *apostasia* that appears in 2 Thessalonians 2:3. Notice there are no prepositional phrases or other modifiers telling the reader “from whom,” or “from what” the individuals in mind are falling away.

Modern versions imply that what is in view is a “departure, defection, or falling away from a previously known and believed truth of God” or a “falling away from God Himself.” Our procedure for examining this problem of translation (and ultimately interpretation) will be to present evidence in at least five areas arguing for a spatial meaning to the word as opposed to a specialized sense of “political or religious revolt.” First, we will examine the grammar of the passage taking special note of the usage of the definite article. Next will be the lexical data. This will encompass several areas since the word is very low in density in the New Testament. Included in this review will be the verbal cognate of the noun in question.

The next section of the article will examine the structure of both Thessalonian epistles as well as the structure of our passage. Much progress has been made in studies of literary, and especially Semitic language structures recently. Finally, to do justice to the discussion, parallel passages as well as the passage in question must be examined for any clues that help understand the problem passage.

### Possible Translations of *apostasia* in 2 Thessalonians 2:3

Historically, scholars have understood *apostasia* in 2 Thessalonians 2:3 to have four possible interpretive meanings: (1) used in apposition to the man of sin (or lawlessness depending on one’s understanding of the textual variant); (2) as a falling away by the body of Christ from the content of Christian truth. It should be noted that in this author’s opinion **there are sufficient contextual clues to eliminate doctrinal departure of the body of Christ from consideration;**

(3) as a revolt and a rebellion against God by unspecified participants; or (4) the departure or translation of the body of Christ to heaven. A brief discussion of the four views follows.

### Apostasia Used as an Appositive

This interpretation fails because of the structure of the passage. Basically, the protasis of the conditional sentence has two compound sentences contained in it. Both sentences of the protasis contain an articular subject with two verbs. However, the first verb *elthe* is an active subjunctive and the second is a passive subjunctive *apokaluthe*, suggesting a difference. Further, the first verb is modified by the adverbial comparative *proton* indicating a sequence or a list is being presented. **The “man of sin” and the following descriptive terms in true apposition have modifiers, but the word “apostasy” does not.** Concerning the origin of this suggestion, research has shown that Aquila in his translation of the Septuagint consistently uses *apostasia* to translate the Hebrew “Belial.” This may have been the source of the interpretation held by early church fathers.

## **Apostasia as a Falling Away from the Faith**

As stated above, this writer sees **little evidence in the passage for the interpretation being the church or individuals in the church falling away from the faith.** Interestingly Ryrie opts for the term “apostasy” relating to people within the professing church.

Ernest Best presents the basic issues of tension in pursuing this interpretation.

There is nothing in the Pauline letters to suggest that he expected the church to apostasize, and, in particular, he is confident of the ability of the Thessalonians to endure ...

If then the apostasy is not of Christians of whom does Paul expect it? Does he expect it of unbelievers? But apostasy assumes an original relationship with God. [We might add it assumes a covenantal relationship]

In summary we could ask, “How much apostasy is enough to qualify as *the* apostasy? Why do Paul or any of the other NT writers not point out this significant event in eschatological passages?” We can accept that conditions in the churches can deteriorate but these verses do not use the word apostasy nor deal with issues of eschatology.

For a more favorable option under this category, Rosenthal has recognized the difficulty with viewing “the apostasy” as pertaining to the believing church. His extensive discussion and evidence from intertestamental history must not be ignored. In his discussion, he lists several points of analogy between Antiochus and the antichrist. (We prefer to us the term Man of Sin/Lawlessness since the antichrist would more legitimately be a title for the false prophet.)

## **Apostasia as Revolt or Rebellion Against God**

The recommendation that apostasy is an active idea rather than a passive idea is popular with scholars today. Indeed, one of the reasons this seems so is because in the LXX the word “apostasy” and its cognates translate the Hebrew root (*marad*) twenty five times. The verb can mean either rebellion against man (twelve times) or rebellion against God (twelve times). Not surprisingly however, this rebellion is always in the context of the ANE political/religious world.

Rebellion in Israel is always against the king. Rebellion against outside powers is also possible when a suzerain-vassal relationship has been established between someone like Nebuchadnezzar and the king of Israel as a vassal. Since Yahweh's relationship with Israel is defined using a suzerain-vassal model, rebellion against the Lord is analogous to rebellion against the earthly king.

In the passage under consideration, 2 Thess. 2:3, we should ask, "what covenant is in place?", "who is doing the rebelling?", and "against whom are they rebelling?" Let us look at the options.

First of all, the rebels cannot be the world of unbelievers (i.e. the nations) since no covenant is in place with them other than the covenant of Noah. Secondly, the rebels could not be members of the church since one of the promises included in the New Covenant is rescue from the day of the Lord/day of wrath to come. (1 Thess. 1:9–10). Lastly, the rebellion could not be against the Man of Sin since the passage later teaches that a deluding influence would be sent upon unbelieving Israel to cause them to believe the Man of Sin rather than rebel against him.

## The Argument from Grammar

### The Importance of the Definite Article

The definite article is one of the most fascinating areas of study in Greek grammar and is also one of the most neglected. We cannot treat it lightly, for its presence or absence is *the* crucial element to unlocking the meaning of *hundreds* of passages in the New Testament. The article was originally derived from the demonstrative pronoun. That is, its original force was to *point out* something. Wallace presents a seven-fold breakdown of the use of the article with the substantive. He lists the following: (1) Simple Identification; (2) Anaphoric (previous reference); (3) Deictic ("Pointing"); (4) Par Excellence ("Numero Uno") (5) Monadic ("One of a kind" or "unique"); (6) Well-known ("Celebrity"); (7) Abstract (or the article with Abstract Nouns).

The Monadic Usage is a possibility. We would then understand Paul to say, "... the day of the Lord cannot come until the 'one of a kind' apostasy comes first." The Well-Known or Celebrity Usage also is a possibility provided that the noun to which it refers has *not* been mentioned in the preceding context (... but in this case it may have been).

### The Anaphoric Use of the Article

There is one usage of the article, however, that screams from the text itself to be considered. It is the anaphoric usage. Wallace again says:

**Dana and Mantey define the anaphoric article (i.e. the article denoting previous reference): 'The article may be used to point out an object the identity of which is defined by some previous reference.'**

This usage is definitely the case in 2 Thessalonians 2:3. Paul introduces the topic of the following verses as: "Now with reference to the *parousia* ... (coming) and our *episunagogen* (gathering together) to Him ..." We should note that a single article governs both of these important nouns. Thus, they are closely related. We could paraphrase "Now with reference to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ as it related to our gathering together to Him."

Later we are told “that [day will not come] unless the apostasy/departure comes first ...” The definite article is referring to a synonym in the preceding context. Otherwise, we arrive at the strange result that Paul says the topic is “our gathering together to Him” and yet never refers to it again in the entire passage at which we are looking.

## **The Argument from the Lexical Data**

### **Introduction**

The amount of material available here is exhausting. Our goal is to examine lexical data in six different time periods to see whether the semantic range of the word or its cognates ever bore a meaning like “spatial removal” or “departure”. We will examine Classical, LXX, Koine, New Testament, and Patristic data in chronological order.

### **Classical Greek Usage (4<sup>th</sup> Century B.C. and earlier)**

According to Liddell and Scott, the classical Greek noun *apostasiph* shows evidence for the meaning “defection” or “revolt” “in Herodotus Historicus, Thucydides Historicus, and Aristotle. Our basic question then is whether a meaning of “active revolt” or “defection” without some sort of spatial element can be supported for the context.

For Herodotus, the phrase to be considered is as follows:

ei endechaiato apostasin apo Oroiteo

“... if they would consent to a revolt against Oroetes.”

This translation by Godley is a bit askew and a correct translation gives:

“... if they would consent to a departure or defection from Oroetes”

If the author had wanted to say, “... revolt against” he would have used the Greek preposition *epi* not *apo*. The context means a departure from a previously formed alliance not a revolt against political authority.

Aristotle in *Historia Animalium* contains the following original:

meteoroteroph de estu te apo teph gep apostasei ton sauron, tas de kam paph ton ekelon kathaper oi sauroi exei

We have now examined both major meaning groups in the lexicon and have discovered that is a spatial element or a departure nuance in every case. Indeed, this author has serious doubts whether the lexical category of “revolt” or “rebellion” should be listed in the semantic range of the word. Certainly, the evidence does not support the outlandish statement by Gundry, “But even in classical Greek simple departure by no means predominates.”

### **LXX Usage**

1. 2 Chronicles 29:19



kai panta ta skeun, a emianen Axacho basileus en te baileia auton en te apostasia

“... and all the sacred vessels which King Ahaz in his reign did cast away in his rebellion.”

2. 2 Chronicles 33:19

proseuxeph autou kai oph epekousen kai pasai ai amartiai kai ai apostaseiph autou and oi topoi

“His prayer and thus how God was entreated by him, and all his wicked sins, and his wicked deeds, and the places ...”

Here our word is in the plural and must mean something like “wicked deeds” or “acts of apostasy” referring to establishing **alternate places of worship**.

3. Isaiah 30:1

Ouai tekna apostatei, tade legei kurioph

“Woe to you, rebellious children, says the Lord.”

So, we conclude that there have been two other instances of apostasia with the definite article found in the LXX and one in the Apocrypha. However, in all these cases we really don't have a strict parallel to the case in 2 Thessalonians 2:3.

## Koine Greek Usage (299 B.C.–A.D. 99)

The noun apostasia exhibits evidence from the Koine Period for the meaning “defection” or “revolt” in the works of Dionysius’ *Halicarnassensis* (1<sup>st</sup> century B.C.); Josephus’ *Historicus in Vita* (1<sup>st</sup> Century A.D); and Plutarchus’ *Biographus et Philosophus* (1<sup>st</sup>/2d Century A.D). Proof also exists for apostasia to mean **a physical “distance”** early in this period in the works of Archimedes’ *Geometra* (3d Century B.C.), or even some sort of separation.

## New Testament Usage

As widely noted in the literature, the noun apostasia is rare in the NT, appearing only in Acts 21:21. In that verse, the object or qualifier is immediately apparent. Paul was accused of teaching the Jews (converts) apostasia ... apo Mouseoph that is “to depart from Moses.”

We should hasten to point out that often this meant actually **physically departing from the synagogue** and perhaps meeting somewhere else, as in the school of Tyrannus in Ephesus. These two usages in the NT appear not to be similar. In Acts there is the qualifying prepositional phrase. In 2 Thessalonians there is not. In 2 Thessalonians the word is used absolutely as if Paul expected the audience to understand the object implicitly.

## Patristic Usage

In reviewing the post-New Testament period, Lampe offers evidence for *apostasiph* to refer to “a departure, absence, or separation” in addition to the traditional renderings of the word. In all three of these possible meanings, a physical or spatial connotation may apply.

With the word *apostasia*, although not predominant, Lampe sees the possibility of physical “departure, removal, or **spatial separation as in divorce**.” Sufficient evidence exists for Liddell and Scott to offer their second meaning of *apostasia* as “departure” or “disappearance” a physical or spatial connotation.

### Usage of the Cognate Verb *afistemi*

According to Liddell and Scott evidence exists for *afistemi* to mean **“remove” transitively or “depart from” in an intransitive sense**. One of the most intriguing usages comes from online correspondence from Carl Conrad, a classical Greek scholar.

It may be used of a group leaving a homeland to establish a new colony somewhere; that’s the way Peisetairos and Euelpides use the verb in Aristophanes’ *Birds*, where they leave Athens to establish a “trouble-free” colony *in the sky between heaven and earth*.

After this we again consider the Koine usage of the verb. According to Moulton and Milligan, *afistemi* exhibits a sense of spatial departure along with an intransitive sense of removing oneself. They cite at least three examples of spatial departure. Schlier argues that the verb can be translated **“to remove” either spatially of from the context of a state or relationship or from fellowship with a person**. Concerning the usage in the Old Testament, Feinberg writes:

The verb *afistemi* is clearly used of a physical departure in both testaments. In the OT (LXX) the verb is used in Genesis 12:8 of Abram’s departure from Shechem ... of **physical separation of persons** as in 1 Samuel 18:13, where it is used of David’s departure from Saul, and in Psalm 6:8 of the physical separation of the wicked from God’s presence.

In the New Testament usage, the verb *afistemi* occurs fifteen times, twelve of which carry a spatial departure meaning “physical departure”. In Luke 2, the phrase “... she never left the temple” ... (Luke 2:37) means a physical departure from the temple. “When the devil had finished every temptation, he left Him until an opportune time” (Luke 4:13) means a spatial departure from the presence of Jesus. The same spatial departure meaning is present in all the following verses: (Acts 5:37, 38; 12:10; 15:38; 19:9; 22:29; 2 Corinthians 12:8; 1 Timothy 6:15; 2 Timothy 2:19). The other three instance of the verb refer to **religious defection**. (Luke 8:13, 1 Timothy 4:1, and Hebrews 3:12). In each case, **the context tells the reader from what the subjects are departing**.

### Conclusion

There is abundant lexical data to support the translation of *apostasia* as “the departure” in 2 Thessalonians 2:3. The cognate verb as well has substantial support for the translation “to physically depart.” A number of questionable assignments of categories in the standard classical lexicons contribute to the confusion in our understanding of the word.



## **The Argument from Structure**

### **The Structure of First Thessalonians**

An exegete must not only be aware of the grammatical and lexical portions of the text under examination, but the importance of understanding the literary structure of the passage has been realized within the last decade. It is important to understand the literary structure of the two Thessalonian epistles so accurate contextual comparison can be made. If Paul is dealing with eschatology in both letters then we should be able to make use of insights gained in one when talking about the other.

The literary structure of 1 Thessalonians is a five-part structure based on the familiar Pauline triad found in 1 Thessalonians 1:3a. In that verse Paul calls to mind the Thessalonians' "work produced by faith," their "labor produced by love" and their "steadfastness produced by hope." (Author's translation reflecting his understanding of the nature of the genitives) This leads to a five-part structure:

- I. Opening: (1:1–10)
- II. Work of Faith: (2:1–3:10)
- III. Labor of Love: (3:11–4:12)
- IV. Steadfastness of Hope: (4:13–5:11)
- V. Closing: (5:12–28)

There may be some overlap in these sections, but this outline is not hard to justify. The point is in the first letter the issue of love seems to take a central place.

### **The Structure of 2 Thessalonians**

Now if we accept the previous structure of 1 Thessalonians, the structure of 2 Thessalonians becomes very interesting. The reason it become noteworthy is because the ordering of topics is changed. Eschatology has now taken center stage.

- I. Opening (1:1, 2)
- II. Work of Faith (1:3–12)
- III. Steadfastness of Hope (2:1–17)
- IV. Labor of Love (3:1–16)
- V. Closing (3:17–18)

The effect of this interchange is to help us understand that the hope section in 2 Thessalonians is a more detailed discussion of what had already been discussed in 1 Thessalonians. Paul is apparently elaborating some confusion in the minds of the church at Thessalonica.

## The Structure of 2 Thessalonians 2:1–17

We suggest the following structure:

- A. (2:1–3a) A Warning not to be shaken in mind by a spiritual utterance, a pseudo letter, or an oral teaching that the Day of the Lord had already arrived.
  - B. (2:3b) The Departure of the Church
    - C. (2:3c–5) The Revelation of the Man of Sin by his desecration of the temple.
      - D. (2:6–7) The Departure of the Restrainer
    - C. (2:8–12) The Revelation of the Man of Sin by signs and wonders.
  - B. (2:13–14) The Return of the Lord who will destroy the Man of Sin and grant salvation to the returning church.
- A. (2:15–17) Exhortation to the believers to stand fast in the traditions that they were taught by word or epistle.

## The Argument from Parallel Passages

### 1 Thessalonians 5:1–11

In this next section we again open with the special formula *peri de* that indicates the subject is changing. But in verse 5:1 there is an interesting phrase that many seem to overlook. What does Paul mean when he says, “now concerning times and seasons ...?” This is of interest because the subject being discussed is the day of the Lord, the same topic as in 2 Thessalonians. The first word is *chronon* a word apparently dealing with “periods of time.” The second word is *kairon* dealing with “points in time.” We know that this word is used in 2 Thessalonians to specify the revelation of the Man of Sin will be at the appointed time.

We are surprised then to discover that Paul essentially tells them that they don’t have a need to know. The reason why they have no need to know is because the day of the Lord will come “like a thief in the night.” A thief gives no warning signs.

In summary, when asked about dates and time periods, Paul spends all his time talking about the opening event in the day of the Lord. The believers have no need to know more because they will be gone while the events of the day of the Lord are played out.

### 2 Thessalonians 2:1–17

The first thing we notice is that Paul introduces the subject as “the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him.” Since the two nouns are governed by one article it seems apparent that Paul wants to explain how “the coming and the gathering” are related. Notice that the word *parousia* is not mentioned again until we get to 2:8. If that is the case where is our gathering together to him being discussed?

## Conclusion

A close examination of parallel passages leads us to understand that Paul is presenting in detail in 2 Thessalonians 2 a more detailed description of the chronology he already started in 1 Thessalonians 4 & 5. This adds to the possibility that “departure” should be the translation and not “apostasy.”

## Conclusion

In this brief study we have set out to examine the possibility that the word *apostasia* normally translated **“falling away” in 2 Thessalonians 2:3 should be translated “departure.”** We have examined the grammatical evidence first and found that the anaphoric use of the article leans heavily to that understanding. Next, we surveyed the lexical data for both the word *apostasia* itself as well as its cognate verb and found that there is substantial evidence to suggest that the word had within its semantic range the notion of “physical or spatial departure.” Third, we looked at the literary structure of both epistles and suggested a literary structure for the section of Scripture in which our word was found. We discovered the possibility of a chiastic arrangement that established our word as parallel conceptually to the idea that the believing church has been chosen for the “acquisition” of “glory” which we suggested happened the judgment seat of Christ. Lastly, we examined the two eschatological sections of the two epistles to the Thessalonians and found there was strong evidence that Paul was presenting the day of the Lord as a programmed event; He chose to mention the starting point, the midpoint, and the ending point.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Sweigart, J. M. (2001). [Is There a Departure in 2 Thessalonians 2:3?](#) *Conservative Theological Journal* Volume 5, 5(15), 185–204.

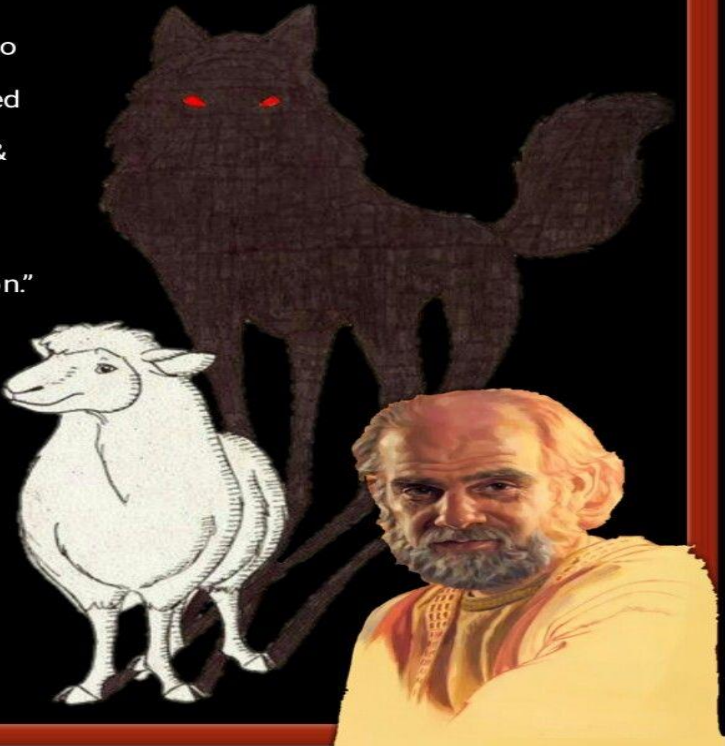
IT IS MY OPINION,  
THIS PHYSICAL  
& SPIRITUAL  
SEPARATION  
IS DETERMINED BY THE  
NEXT QUESTION OF WHO'S  
THE MAN OF  
LAWLESSNESS?

# WHO IS THE MAN OF SIN THE SON OF PERDITION, MAN OF LAWLESSNESS - SON OF DESTRUCTION?

**"FALSE PROPHETS" & "THE MAN OF LAWLESSNESS"**

In the first century, false prophets & apostates were already at work, endeavoring to weaken the Christian congregation. All those involved in spreading lies & religious deception about Jesus Christ & his teachings were included in John's term "antichrist." Jehovah's view of them was revealed when Paul described them as "the son of destruction."

*Let no one lead you astray in any way, because it will not come unless the apostasy comes first and the man of lawlessness gets revealed, the son of destruction.  
(2 Thessalonians 2:3)*





DO NOT BE

deceived

SIN/LAWLESSNESS  
versus  
RIGHTEOUSNESS

Let *no one deceive you* in any way,  
because the *falling away* is to come  
first, and the *man of lawlessness* is to  
be revealed, the *son of destruction*

**2Thessalonians 2:3**

## **Gill's Exposition of the Entire Bible**

**Let no man deceive you by any means**,.... By any of the above means; by pretending to a revelation from the Spirit; or to have had it from the mouth of anyone of the apostles; or to have a letter as from them, declaring the day of Christ to be instant; or by any other means whatever; do not be imposed upon by them for the following reasons, for there were things to be done before the coming of Christ, which were not then done, and which required time: for that day shall not come,

**except there come a falling away first**; either in a political sense, of the nations from the Roman empire, which was divided into the eastern and western empire; for which, way was made by translating the seat of empire from Rome to Byzantium, or Constantinople; the **former of these empires was seized by Mahomet**, and still possessed by the Turks; and the latter was overrun by the Goths, Huns, and Vandals, and torn to pieces; Italy particularly was ravaged by them, and Rome itself was sacked and taken: or rather in a religious sense, of the falling of men from the faith of the Gospel, from the purity of Gospel doctrines, discipline, worship, and ordinances; and this not of some Jews who professed faith in Christ, and departed from it, or of some Christians who went off to the Gnostics; but is to be understood of a more general defection in the times of the Papacy; when not only the eastern churches were **perverted and corrupted by Mahomet**, and drawn off to his religion, but the western churches were most sadly depraved by the man of sin, by bringing in errors of all sorts in doctrine, making innovations in every ordinance, and appointing new ones, and introducing both Judaism and Paganism into the churches; which general defection continued until the times of the reformation, and is what the apostle has respect to in [1 Timothy 4:1](#) where he manifestly points out some of the Popish tenets, as forbidding marriage to priests, and ordering abstinence from meats on certain days, and at certain times of the year: this was one thing that was to precede the coming of Christ, another follows, which should take place at the same time;

**and that man of sin be revealed**; who was now hid, though secretly working; by whom is meant not only any particular person or individual; not the devil, for though he is the wicked one, a damned spirit, an opposer, an adversary of God and Christ, and his people, and who has affected deity, and sought to be worshipped, and even by Christ himself.



Yet the man of sin is here distinguished from Satan, [2 Timothy 2:9](#) nor is any particular emperor of Rome intended, as Caius Caligula, or Nero, for though these were monsters of iniquity, and set up themselves as gods, yet they sat not in the temple of God; nor is Simon Magus designed, who was a very wicked man, a sorcerer, and who gave out himself to be some great one, and was called the great power of God, before big profession of faith in Christ; and afterwards affirmed that he was God, the Father in Samaria, the Son in Judea, and the Spirit in the rest of the nations of the world; and, because of his signs and lying wonders, had a statue erected by the Roman emperor with this inscription, "to Simon the holy god"; but then this wicked man was now already revealed: nor is this to be understood of a certain Jew, that is to be begotten by the devil on a virgin of the tribe of Dan, and who is to reign three years and a half, and then to be destroyed by Christ, which is a fable of the Papists; but a succession of men is here meant, as a king is used sometimes for an order and succession of kings, [Deuteronomy 17:18](#) and an high priest for that whole order, from Aaron's time to the dissolution of it, [Hebrews 9:7](#) so here it intends the whole hierarchy of Rome, monks, friars, priests, bishops, archbishops, cardinals, and especially popes, who may well be called "the man of sin", because notoriously sinful; not only sinners, but sin itself, a sink of sin, monsters of iniquity, spiritual wickednesses in high places: it is not easy to reckon up their impieties, their adulteries, incest, sodomy, rapine, murder, avarice, simony, perjury, lying, necromancy, familiarity with the devil, idolatry, witchcraft, and what not? and not only have they been guilty of the most notorious crimes themselves, but have been the patrons and encouragers of others in sin; by dispensing with the laws of God and man, by making sins to be venial, by granting indulgences and pardon for the worst of crimes, by licensing brothel houses, and countenancing all manner of wickedness; and therefore it is no wonder to hear of the following epithet,


**the son of perdition;** since these are not only the Apollyon, the king of the bottomless pit, the destroyer, the cause of the perdition of thousands of souls, for the souls of men are their wares; but because they are by the righteous judgment of God appointed and consigned to everlasting destruction; the devil, the beast, and the false prophet, will have their portion together in the lake that burns with fire, [Revelation 20:10](#) the same character as here is given of Judas, the betrayer of Christ, [John 17:12](#).

**Civic Institution Church Of Inherited Religion**  
**THE MAN OF SIN BELIEVED REVEALED**  
**2<sup>nd</sup> Thessalonians Chapter 2: 3 - 12**

**"IT WAS NOT UNTIL THE 'TAPPING AWAY' OCCURRED,  
THAT THE KINGDOM OF GOD WAS DESTROYED BY MERGING  
WITH THE PAGAN RELIGION OF THE GREEKS AND ROMANS,  
AND KILLING BEGAN AGAIN IN THE NAME OF GOD.  
THIS WAS A RETURN TO THE OLD TESTAMENT, JUST AS  
THE NEW RELIGION OF ISLAM IN THE SEVENTH CENTURY  
WAS A RETURN TO THE OLD TESTAMENT IN MANY WAYS."  
- ROBERT FINLEY, THE TIME WAS AT HAND**

**Civic Institution Church Of Inherited Religion**  
**THE MAN OF SIN BELIEVED REVEALED**  
**2<sup>nd</sup> Thessalonians Chapter 2: 3 - 12**  
**DUAL APP: 2<sup>ND</sup> TIME ZONE REFERENCE**

**"THE ANTICHRIST, MUHAMMAD, CAME IN THE SEVENTH CENTURY. HE  
WAS NOT 'AGAINST CHRIST' BUT RATHER TOOK THE PLACE OF CHRIST,  
AS AN 'ANTI-CEHMAN' REPLACES A CEHMAN. MUHAMMAD'S CUMULATIVE  
INFLUENCE OVER 13 CENTURIES HAS BEEN A 1000 TIMES GREATER THAN  
ALL OTHER ANTICHRISTS PUT TOGETHER: PAST, PRESENT, & FUTURE."  
"THE FIRST BEAST OF REVELATION 13 WAS THE ROMAN EMPIRE.  
IT WAS 'WOUNDED UNTO DEATH' BY BARBARIAN INVADERS,  
THEN REVIVED BY THE 2ND BEAST (THE PAPAL DYNASTY)  
IN 800 A.D. AS THE HOLY ROMAN EMPIRE."  
- ROBERT FINLEY, THE TIME WAS AT HAND**



***"A peaceful take-over by Muslims took place when the spreading Islamic revival reached Jerusalem around A.D. 630. Robert Ripley's *Believe It Or Not* explained how the city was delivered to Omar Al-Khattab in 637 without a struggle. That's because so many of the Hebrew rabbis in Palestine had come to believe that Muhammad was that prophet foretold by Moses in Deuteronomy chapter 18 verses 18-19. They were astounded to see thousands of new converts to Islam from their own synagogues kneeling in prayer to worship God five times a day. Eventually, virtually all the synagogues in Palestine became mosques." - Bob Finley, *The Time Was At Hand*, page 219***

## Matthew Poole's Commentary

**For that doth shall not come, except there come a falling away first;** there is a supplement in our translation, for **in the Greek it is only,**

**for, except there come a falling away first,** & c., or an apostacy, a recession, a departing, or a standing off, as the world imports; so that apostacy may be either good, when it is from evil to good, **or evil, when it is from good to evil: it is always used in this latter sense in Scripture.** Again, it is either civil or spiritual: civil, as when people fall off from the civil government they were under, and so **some would interpret the text of the defection from the Roman empire, the east part from the west, and the ten kingdoms that arose out of it;** which was the opinion of Hierom, Epist. ad Algasiam. But the apostle writing to the church speaks not of civil government, and the affairs of state, and **speaks of such an apostacy which would give rise to the man of sin,** and the revelation of him. And **this man of sin riseth up in the church, not in the civil state;** and the **consequence of this apostacy is giving men up to strong delusions to believe a lie,** and then follows their damnation; and the cause of it is said to be, not receiving the truth in the love of it; so that it is not a civil, but a **spiritual apostacy,** as the word in Scripture is always (I suppose) so taken. And it is **not of a particular person, but a general apostacy** of the church, though not of every individual; that church that is afterwards called *the temple of God*, where the man of sin sitteth, and is exalted above all that is called God, Neither is it some lesser apostacy which may befall the best congregation; but such as would be eminent, called apostasia, that apostacy, greater than that of some believing Jews to Judaism, or of some Christians to Nicolaitanism, which some think is meant. Much less can it be Caius Caesar, as Grotius interprets, or any one person, for the apostle **saith not apostate, but apostacy;** else a man of sin could not rise out of it, and exalt himself above all that is called God, and worshipped. It is an **apostacy from sound doctrine, instituted worship, church offices, and true holiness of life,** as may be further considered afterwards.

**Neither is the apostacy all at once, but gradual; for out of it ariseth a man of sin, who grows up to this manhood by degrees; and sin and wickedness are not completed at first, as well as holiness.** Much less is this apostacy a falling off from the Church of Rome, as some papists affirm, and make the Reformation to be the apostacy, *which was a return from it*. Doth the man of sin rise out of the Reformation? Did any of the first Reformers oppose and exalt themselves above all that is called God? Or did any of them forbid to marry, and to abstain from meats, etc? Which is the character our apostle gives of this apostacy, [1 Timothy 4:1-3](#). And that man of sin be revealed: the next argument is from the revelation of the man of sin. A warlike man is styled a man of war; a bloody man, a man of bloods; a deceitful man, a man of deceit, etc.: so a man eminent in sin is here called a man of sin; not only personally so, but who doth promote sin, propagate it, countenance it, command it. In sins of omission, forbidding what God requireth; in sins of commission, requiring or allowing what God hath forbidden. In sins of the first table; corrupting God's worship by superstition and idolatry, taking God's name in vain by heartless devotion, dissembling piety, dispensing with perjury and false oaths, taking away the second commandment and the morality of the fourth commandment, and making men's faith and obedience to rest upon a human authority, etc. In sins of the second table; to dispense with duties belonging to superiors and inferiors; with murder, adultery, fornication, incest, robbery, lying, equivocation, etc. And besides all these, promoting a false religion, and destroying the true, by fines, imprisonments, banishments, tortures, fire, and faggot. And **this man of sin is not a single person, but a company, order, and succession of men; because all are acted by the same spirit, therefore called a man;** as *the man of the earth*, [Psalm 10:18](#), is all men of an earthly spirit, and *a man of the field*, [Genesis 25:27](#), is men whose minds and employments are in the field. Or, **it is a sinful state.** So by *man of sin* is meant a sinful state, which though it consisteth of many people and nations, yet, being under the influence and government of one man, may be also styled the man of sin upon that account; *impietatis Coryphaeus. Moulin*. And because the sin of the whole community is chiefly centred in him, and springs out from him; a man in whom is the fountain of all sins. *Hierein ad Algasiam*.



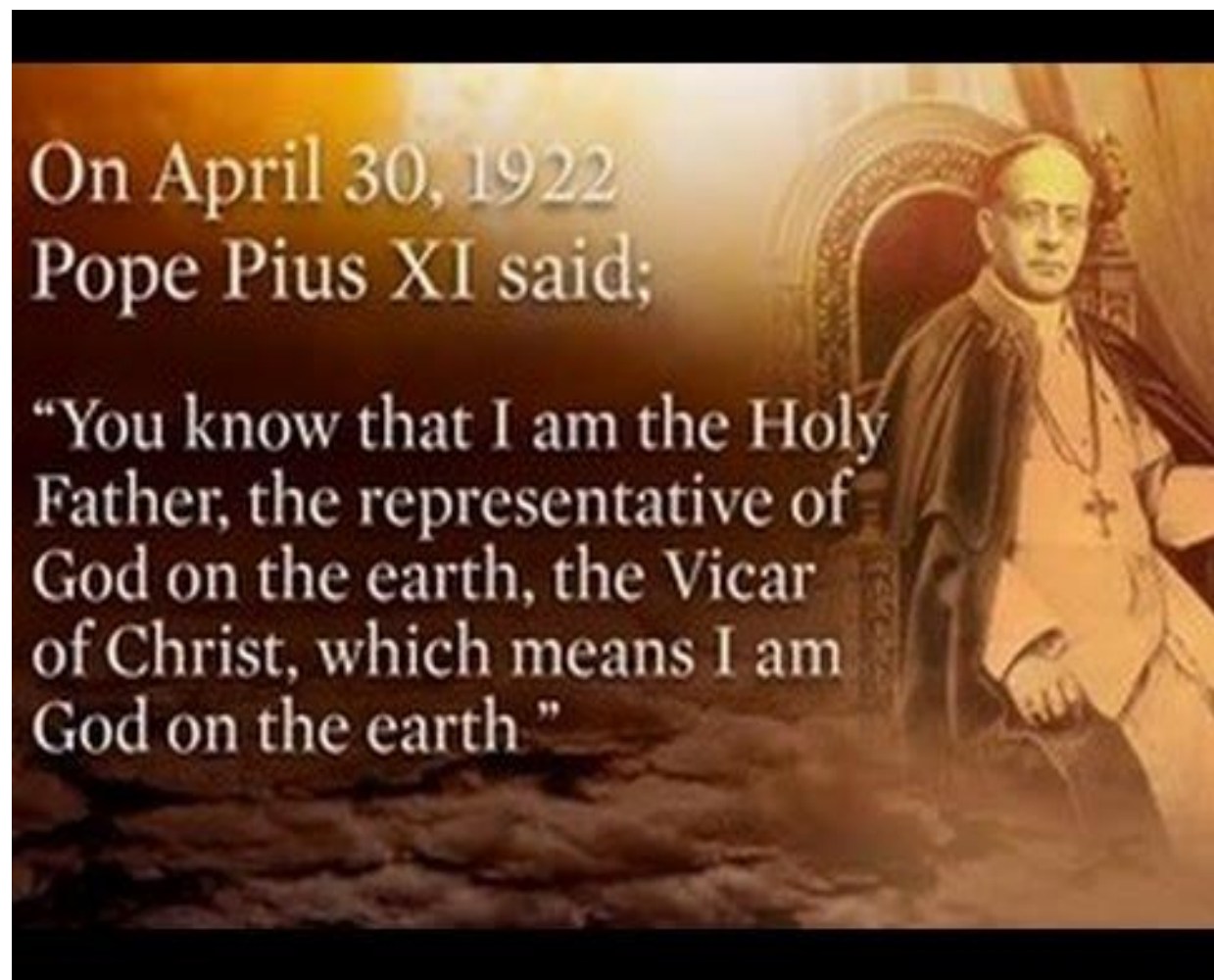
And the sin of this state is called *a mystery of iniquity*, [2 Thessalonians 2:7](#), and therefore may be judged to be the same with the whore sitting on many waters, that hath *mystery* written in her forehead, [Revelation 17:1,5](#). And as no expositor takes the whore to be meant of a single woman, and the true apostolic church is represented by a woman in travail, [Revelation 12:1](#), why then should we take the man of sin to be a single man, as the papists do? Ridiculous! Neither call this man of sin be Simon Magus and his followers, for he was revealed in the apostle's time, seeing the mystery of iniquity belonging to this man of sin began to work in the apostle's days, as [2 Thessalonians 2:7](#), and he is the same as the *spirit of antichrist*, that began to be in the world in his time, [1John 4:3](#); and the nations are to be made drunk with the cup of his fornication, and to serve and obey him, etc. [Revelation 13:8](#); all which requires more time than allotted: but they set him a great way off, that none may suspect him to be among themselves. And this man of sin is to

**be revealed** also, which shows that he is not a single person, not yet born: revealing relates not so much to a person, as a thing; in particular to *the mystery of iniquity*, mentioned [2 Thessalonians 2:7](#): his revealing is either *quoad existentiam*, or *apparentiam*. The former is meant here, and the latter [2 Thessalonians 2:8](#). He grows up into existence, as apostacy grows, as vermin grows out of putrefaction. As the church's purity, faith, love, holiness declined, and as pride, ambition, covetousness, luxury prevailed, so he grew up: and which was the direct point and time of his full revelation in this first sense is conjectured by many, but determined by none; it is most generally referred to the title ecumenical bishop, and to the Church of Rome to be the mother church. But as the apostacy brings forth this man of sin, so as he riseth he helps it forward; so that he both causeth it, and is caused by it. As corruption in doctrine, worship, discipline, and manners brought him forth, so he was active in corrupting.

**The son of perdition**; another **Hebraism**, where sometimes that which any way proceeds from another, as its cause, is called its son, as branches sons of the tree, [Genesis 49:22](#), and the learner the son of the teacher, [Proverbs 3:1](#); and sometimes that which a man is addicted to, as a wicked man is *the son of wickedness*, [Psalm 89:22](#).

Again, that which gives forth what it hath in itself, as the branches of the olive trees giving oil are called the sons of oil, [Zechariah 4:14](#); and in the text, the man of sin is

**the son of perdition**, as Judas is called, [John 17:12](#): and he is so either actively, as he brings others to destruction, and so may be called *Apollyon*, [Revelation 9:11](#); or rather passively, as devoted to perdition; as [Revelation 19:20](#), *the beast and false prophet* are both cast into the lake of fire and brimstone; and *the beast that was, and is not*, is said to go into perdition, [Revelation 17:11](#). The destroyer of others both in soul and body will be destroyed himself: first, morally, by the word and Spirit, as [2<sup>nd</sup> Thess. 2:8](#); and then judicially, by God's revenging justice in this world, and that to come. The apostle, at the very first mentioning him, declares his destiny; at his first rising and revealing, mentions his fall and ruin.





## IDEAS OTHER THAN ISLAM OR THE PAPACY:

Paul's second letter to the Thessalonians, which seems to have been written very soon after the first, was written to clear up some difficulties concerning Paul's comments about the Second Coming in the first letter. If the readers were under the impression that Jesus' return is imminent, they must know that certain things have to happen first.

Paul begins the second letter to the Thessalonians by giving thanks for the converts' steadfastness in the face of persecution. They will be rewarded when Christ comes in glory, as their persecutors will be punished.

In the second chapter, Paul reveals that Jesus will not return until the Man of Sin is revealed. This phrase, "the Man of Sin," is a kind of Devil's messiah who, in the last days was expected to war on God and his saints. 2 Thess 2:6–7 mentions someone or something that is presently restraining him. This is most likely the Roman Empire.<sup>46</sup>

The apostle Paul when he declares the appearance of the Man of Sin, the opponent who rises against everything which contains good and God's service, will precede the coming of Christ (2 Thess 2:3–4) no doubt also thought in the first place of a pseudo-Messiah in personal recollection of the bitter opposition to the Gospel by Judaism filled with political Messianic thought (1 Thess 2:15).

For his picture Paul no doubt took some traits from the description of Antiochus Epiphanes in the Book of Daniel, and from the Emperor Caligula in his own day, who had his image in the form of Jupiter erected in the Temple of Jerusalem.

Some scholars make a number of connections among the "little horn" of chapters 7 and 8 of Daniel, Paul's "Man of Sin," and the beast of the book of Revelation. These three images are often seen as synonyms for the Anti-Christ, and that may be what Paul has in mind in his description in 2 Thessalonians.

Most scholars see a connection between the Man of Sin of 2 Thessalonians 2 and the "little horn" of chapter seven of Daniel. They also see a connection between one or more of the beasts in Revelation 13, and the "Great Harlot" and "Babylon" in Revelation 17 and 18. Although most scholars see connections among these elements, they often disagree on how they are related.

The Pauline "Day of the Lord," will be preceded by a "revolt" and the revelation of "the Man of Sin." The latter will sit in the Temple of God, showing himself as if he were God. He will work signs and wonders by the power of Satan.

He will seduce those who do not receive the love of truth, so that they might be saved. But the Lord God will kill him with the breath of his mouth, and the brightness of his coming.

In Paul's view, then, the "Day of the Lord" will be preceded by "the Man of Sin," known in the Johannine epistles as the Anti-Christ. The "Man of Sin" is preceded by a "revolt." The major impediment to the Second Coming is the Roman Empire that now restrains the "Man of Sin."

Paul's view merely follows a Jewish tradition that began in the imagery of the prophets Ezekiel and Daniel. But unlike the images in John's epistles and Revelation, where the **Emperor Nero was thought to be the Beast**, in Paul, this figure has no apparent political significance.

The gospel of John, like the Epistles of John, Revelation, and Matthew and Luke, sees the coming of false prophets as a sign of the end times. John 5:43 tells us: "I have come in my Father's name, and you do not accept me. If another comes in his own name, you will accept him."<sup>47</sup>

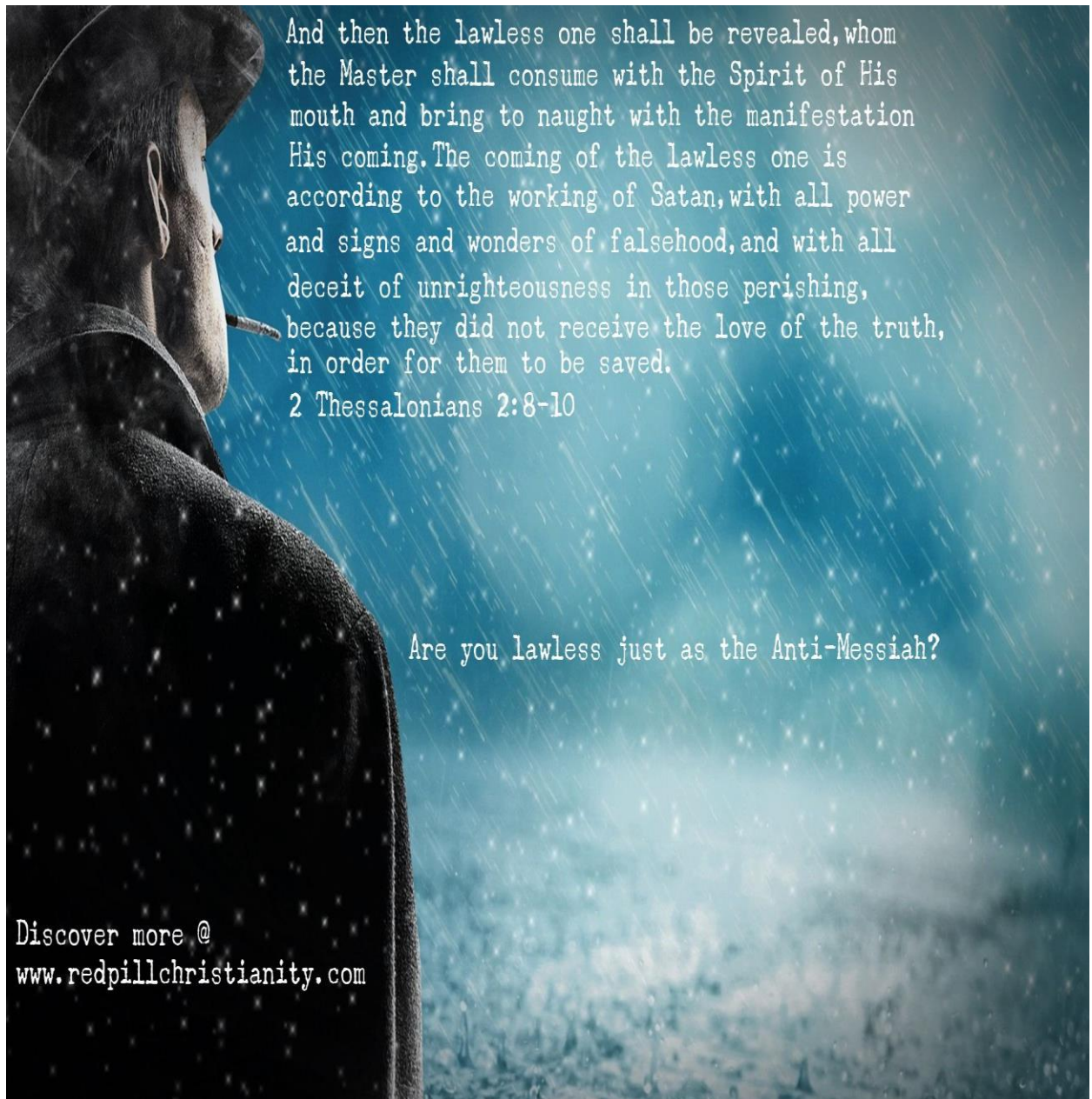
This notion of false prophets and deceivers is also found in 2 John 7, where John writes, "For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an Anti-Christ."<sup>48</sup> Many years earlier Jesus had warned John and the other disciples to "Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in my name saying, 'I am Christ' [pretending to preach or act by Christ's authority] and shall deceive many—including true Christians."<sup>49</sup>

The apostle Paul also warns of "false apostles" and deceitful workers" (2 Corinthians 11:13–15), disguised as "ministers of righteousness," who went about deceiving Christians into believing "another gospel." (Galatians 1:6–9 and Acts 20:28–31.) **These false teachers and false brethren—anti-Christ—were "tares among wheat,"** (Matthew 13:24–30, and verses 36–42). They sounded sincere and godly, but were far from real Christians.

These false Christians were hard to discern from the real thing, which made it easy for them to rise to leadership positions. From there, they infected the Church with false doctrines, deceiving many. As we shall see, these New Testament images of "false prophets," false Messiahs," and "false brethren" who are really Anti-Christ, play a key role in subsequent Christian scholarship on the Anti-Christ legend.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Vicchio, S. J. (2009). [\*The legend of the anti-christ: a history\*](#). Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock.



And then the lawless one shall be revealed, whom the Master shall consume with the Spirit of His mouth and bring to naught with the manifestation His coming. The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power and signs and wonders of falsehood, and with all deceit of unrighteousness in those perishing, because they did not receive the love of the truth, in order for them to be saved.

2 Thessalonians 2:8-10

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# Identifying the Man of Lawlessness

## **2 Thessalonians 2:8** Updated American Standard Version (UASV)

<sup>8</sup>Then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will do away with by the spirit of his mouth, and wipe out by the appearance of his presence,

It is imperative that we identify this man of lawlessness. Why? His objective is to undermine the righteous standing of every genuine Christian and cost them their hope of everlasting life. How does the man of lawlessness accomplish such a task? He does so by getting Christians to abandon the truth for the lie. Jesus said, “true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth.” (John 4:23) It is the man of lawlessness’ mission to get us away from our pure worship. He is in opposition to God and His purposes and is adamantly opposed to his dedicated worshippers. If any of us is so bold as to believe we are above being misled, we are just the ones he is looking for, as “pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.” – Proverbs 16:18, ESV.

## **2 Thessalonians 2:3** Updated American Standard Version (UASV)

<sup>3</sup>Let no one deceive<sup>74</sup> you in any way, for it [the Lord’s day of destruction of ungodly men] will not come unless the apostasy<sup>75</sup> comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction,

Paul prophesied that an apostasy would develop and before that apostasy would be brought to an end the man of lawlessness would come. In fact, in verse 7 Paul stated, “For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work ...” Notice that, in the first century, this man of lawlessness was already making himself known.

## Origin of the Lawless Man

## **2 Thessalonians 2:9-10** Updated American Standard Version (UASV)

<sup>9</sup>but the one whose coming is in accordance with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders, <sup>10</sup>and with every unrighteous deception<sup>76</sup> for those who are perishing, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved.

**We see here that is Satan, who originated this lawless man. Satan, the father of the lie, is also the one who has and who will continue to sustain the lawless one. In addition, just as Satan is an enemy of God and his people, so too, this man of lawlessness.**

## **2 Thessalonians 2:8** Updated American Standard Version (UASV)

<sup>8</sup>Then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will do away with by the spirit of his mouth, and wipe out by the appearance of his presence,

This man of lawlessness has but one future, i.e., destruction, along with anyone who goes along with him.

## **2 Thessalonians 1:6-9** Updated American Standard Version (UASV)

<sup>6</sup>since indeed God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you, <sup>7</sup>and to give relief to you who are afflicted along with us when the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, <sup>8</sup>in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not

know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. <sup>9</sup> These ones will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, from before the Lord<sup>77</sup> and from the glory of his strength,

Paul gives further information in helping his readers to identify this man of lawlessness.

**2 Thessalonians 2:4** Updated American Standard Version (UASV)

the son of destruction, <sup>4</sup> 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, showing himself as being God.

**Here we see that Satan will raise up this lawless man, making him a false object of reverence, who will even place himself above God. On this Knute Larson writes, “This man will oppose everything connected with the divine—not only Christianity but anything that has to do with theism. This man will wage war against everything that hints at religion, faith, or spirituality. He will try to eradicate worship of any kind: prayers, songs, gatherings & shrines.”**

He goes on saying, “The man of sin will set himself up in God’s temple, or more literally, put himself into God’s seat in the inner sanctuary of the temple, proclaiming himself to be God. This will be more than a taking over of some building. The man of sin will understand the implications and claims that attend taking his seat in the sanctuary of God. He will anoint himself as divine. He will usurp the rightful place of God & declare himself the one to be worshiped.” (Larson, 106)

This lawless one is a hypocrite, **a false teacher claiming to be Christian**, who “takes his seat in the temple of God,” namely, what such false teachers claim to be that temple.

## Identifying the Lawless Man

Just like the antichrist, we have to ask, are we looking for a single individual? Was Paul speaking of just one person, who would be this man of lawlessness? No, for if he were just one person, he would have to be able to go without dying. Paul had stated **that the man of lawlessness was “already at work” in Paul’s day, and would be at work up unto the Lord’s day of the destruction of ungodly men**, that is, beyond the day of the penning of this book, which would make the lawless one almost 2,000 years old. Apparently, no ordinary man has lived that long. Therefore, the expression **man of lawlessness must be composite, standing for a body or class of people**.

The false religious leaders within Christianity, who are being used by Satan whether they are aware of it or not. Of these lawless ones, be it the Pope, Cardinals, Bishops, preachers, ministers, elders, or pastors, they will share in the destruction of the man of lawlessness, for their sins. Worse still, those within the churches, who make up the flocks of these false religious leaders of Christendom, will also share in the Lord’s day of the destruction of ungodly men. King David wrote, “I do not sit with men of falsehood, nor do I consort with hypocrites.” (Psa. 26:4, ESV) If one of God’s holy ones are in one of these false denominations that call themselves Christian, God will offer them deliverance. The Palmist also wrote, “Hate evil, you who love the Lord, Who preserves the souls of His godly ones; He delivers them from the hand of the wicked.” (Psa. 97:10, NASB) Jesus spoke of those who believed they were on the correct path, but, in fact, they were not. Jesus said,

**Matthew 7:21-23** Updated American Standard Version (UASV)

<sup>21</sup> “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. <sup>22</sup> On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord,

did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’<sup>23</sup> And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you who practice lawlessness.’

## Learning a Lesson from the Apostle Paul

The actual way to God was through the Israelite nation for over 1,500 years. When Jesus arrived he began what would become known as Christianity, his followers being called Christian.

**Matthew 9:16-17** Updated American Standard Version (UASV)

<sup>16</sup> But no one puts a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment; for the patch pulls away from the garment, and the tear becomes worse. <sup>17</sup> Nor do they put new wine into old wineskins. If they do, then the wineskins burst and the wine spills out and the wineskins are ruined. But they do put new wine into new wineskins, and both are preserved.”

Jesus was making a point to the disciples of John the Baptist that no one should expect the followers of Jesus Christ to try to retain the old practices of Judaism, such as a ritualistic fasting. A Christian can fast if he chooses to do so, but there are no obligations to do so. Jesus did not come to patch up the old ways of worship by way of Judaism, which would be set aside on the day of Jesus’ ransom sacrifice. Christianity is not to conform to the old way of worship, to the form Jewish religious system, with the traditions of men.

As Jesus said, **Christianity was not going to be a new patch on an old garment or a new wine in an old wineskin. Any Christian or so-called Jewish Christian, who tries to suggest the mixing of the two is nothing more than false prophets.** – Matthew 24:11.

We can define antichrist as anyone, any group, any organization, or any government that is against or instead of Christ, or who mistreat his people. Thus, we are not just looking for one person, one group, one organization, or one power. The Bible does not refer to just one antichrist. The greatest misidentification has been the interpretation that the man of lawlessness is just one particular person.

## Our Point Begins with Paul

However, Jesus brought a new way, Christianity. Saul/Paul was slow to accept this because he could not see Jesus Christ as the long-awaited Messiah. Nevertheless, after Jesus visited Paul on the road to Damascus and Ananias, a Christian disciple of Damascus, visited Paul, he saw the Old Testament Scriptures pointing to the Messiah accurately, he was able to humble himself and accept a different belief, i.e., Christianity was the truth and the way.

To believe without enough support, to believe in the face of contrary evidence is irrational. Therefore, we must humbly examine the facts behind what we believe, to establish the truth continually. Just as the apostle Paul exhorted the Christians at Corinth to “examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves.” (2 Cor. 13:5) We could say, ‘examine our beliefs, to see whether they are the truth, test our beliefs.’

**1 Timothy 1:13** Updated American Standard Version (UASV)

<sup>13</sup> although formerly I [Saul/Paul] was a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and a violent man. But I was shown mercy because I had acted unknowingly with a lack of trust,

What has been demonstrated here thus far? Just because one is very active in their Christian church, this activity does not guarantee that they are receiving God's approval or that they are doctrinally correct. See Jesus words below for those who believed that they were in an approved relationship. It takes real heart and character to accept that one may be on the wrong path when it comes to long held biblical beliefs. It takes an act of humility to accept that we may need to make an adjustment in our view of a certain doctrine. Jesus words from above bear repeating.

**Matthew 7:21-23** Updated American Standard Version (UASV)

<sup>21</sup> "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. <sup>22</sup> On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' <sup>23</sup> And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you who practice lawlessness.'

It was Saul/Paul's zeal and his conscience that was pricked to defend what he thought was the truth, and yet he openly admitted that his was over-zealous, that his zeal was misdirected, because of ignorance. This should cause us to pause and reflect. The presence of false teachers in the Christian congregation from the first century onward means that one cannot just naively accept that they are getting the truth. It would be foolish to assume such.

**1 Thessalonians 5:21** Updated American Standard Version (UASV)

<sup>21</sup> But examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good;

The Greek word *dokimazete* rendered simply as "test" in the English Standard Version or the Holman Christian Standard Bible denotes a careful examination of "everything." If one is to make a careful examination of everything, it will require that they are not just passively going along, but rather, one should be buying out the time, to have an accurate understanding of God's Word, by doing an in-depth study of what they believe to be true.

Certainly, if what Paul had to say about the Scriptures was under examination, no one else is above having their beliefs examined. The Jews of Berea did not just accept what Paul was saying about the death and resurrection of Jesus, as being so. Moreover, Paul commended them for their due diligence. (See 17:3) This was no brief or superficial examination of the Scriptures either; they met **daily** to **examine** the Scriptures. For the above reasons, it is only through living by faith and accurate knowledge that we can receive God's favor.

## Pride and Haughtiness Is an Identifying Marker

The man of lawlessness throughout history has evidenced such pride, arrogance, and haughtiness that they have controlled world leaders. They have used the pretext of God's Word and Bible doctrines, they have controlled the masses, as well as an intermediary between the world leaders and God. For centuries, these false Christs have crowned and dethroned kings and emperors. In many ways, their words and deeds have been similar to those of the Jewish religious leaders of Jesus' day, "We have no king but Caesar." (John 19:15, ESV) However, Jesus words were far different, "My kingdom is not of this world." – John 18:36.

To place themselves above God's people, these false religious leaders, these men of lawlessness have adopted different clothing, which is usually black, and in some cases a white color around the neck. Keep in mind, others dress in \$5,000 suits while their flocks are fleeced.



Jesus and his disciples did no such thing. In fact, when Jesus was being arrested, Judas had to kiss him because he could not be distinguished from the others with him. Moreover, they have bestowed upon themselves titles such as “Father,” “Holy Father,” “Reverend,” “Most Reverend,” “His Excellency,” and “His Eminence,” when Jesus said, “call no man your father on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven.” (Matt. 23:9) Remember, these ones are wolves in sheep’s clothing.

In Matthew Chapter 7, Jesus started out by talking about two paths and false teachers. False teachers imply false teachings. Again, what did Jesus say he would say to those who thought they were doing the right thing or thought they were teaching the right thing but were not? ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’ (Matt. 7:23)

We have false teachers, who are difficult to recognize, as they appear as innocent as sheep. **Recognizing them can only be accomplished by recognizing their fruit (words and deeds)**, as well as knowing the true will of the Father. Does it not then seem prudent on our behalf that we should apply,

**2 Thessalonians 2:10** Updated American Standard Version (UASV)

<sup>10</sup> and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved.

**2 Corinthians 13:5** Updated American Standard Version (UASV)

<sup>5</sup> Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you fail to meet the test!

Yes, the ones, who are deceived by these false teachers, will perish because refused to be receptive to the truth. Therefore, we need to be in a constant mode of examining ourselves, as well as our beliefs, to see whether we are really in the truth. We would be wise if we heed the insight from Paul to the Corinthians,

**2 Corinthians 11:13-15** Updated American Standard Version (UASV)

<sup>13</sup> For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. <sup>14</sup> And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. <sup>15</sup> Therefore it is not a great thing if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness, whose end will be according to their deeds.

## Rejection of the Truth Is an Identifying Marker

The apostle Paul said that this man of lawlessness was going to grow with apostasy (rejection of the truth). Actually, the first sign Paul gave as to the identity of this lawless class is that “the day of the Lord [i.e., the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men] ... will not come unless the apostasy comes first.” (2 Thess. 2:2-3) What exactly did Paul mean by “apostasy”? He meant to stand off from the truth, i.e., to not only fall away from the faith but to then turn on the faith, rebellion.

## The Great Apostasy

**2 Thessalonians 2:1a, 3** Updated American Standard Version (UASV)

<sup>1</sup> Now we request you, brothers, with regard to the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ ... <sup>3</sup> Let no one deceive<sup>81</sup> you in any way, for it will not come **unless the apostasy comes first**, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction,

On this text, New Testament scholar Jon A. Weatherly writes, “Following the warning about deception, the rest of the verse in the Greek text is an anacoluthon, a subordinate clause with no clause to complete it. Literally, the text reads, ‘Because unless the rebellion comes first and the man of lawlessness is revealed.’ Translators must supply the clause introduced with ‘because’ (ὅτι, *hoti*), which can be clearly inferred from v. 2. Since the question concerns the coming of the day of the Lord, Paul apparently expects the reader to conclude that the day is preceded by the rebellion and revelation of the man of lawlessness.”<sup>82</sup> (Weatherly 1996)

As has already been stated, but bears repeating, the blame lies with Satan. He attempted to have Jesus killed as a baby; he tempted Jesus in the wilderness after his baptism, and he attempted persecution right from the start. Peter wrote, “Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.” (1 Pet. 5:8) Initially, the persecution to this young Christian body came from Jewish religious leaders, and then from the Roman Empire itself. With “all authority in heaven” (Matt. 28:20) Jesus watched on, as the Holy Spirit guided and directed them, this infancy Christian congregation endured the best that Satan and his henchman had to offer. (See Rev. 1:9; 2:3, 19) As we know from Scripture, Satan is not one to give up, so he devised a new plan, divide and conquer. Yes, he would cause divisions within the Christian congregation. Satan broke out the ultimate weapon – **the apostasy**.<sup>83</sup>

**“[Jesus] Be Aware of False Prophets ...**

**[Peter] There Will Be False Teachers Among You”**

**Matthew 7:15** Updated American Standard Version (UASV)

<sup>15</sup> “Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves.”

Jesus was well aware of what Satan would try to accomplish step-by-step, and that divisions through those from within were on the list. New Testament scholar Stuart K. Weber says, “Jesus had an important reason for inserting the wolf metaphor (Acts 20:27–31)—to alert his listeners to the danger of a false prophet. If the false prophets were thought of as a source of bad fruit, then the disciples might think it was enough simply to recognize and ignore the false prophet, refusing to consume his bad fruit, and awaiting God’s judgment on him. But the wolf metaphor attributes a more active and malicious motive to the false prophet. He is actually an enemy of the sheep, and, if not confronted, will get his way by destroying the sheep.” (Weber 2000, 101)

Weber mentions Acts 20:28-30, where Paul, about **56 C.E.**, warned the Ephesian elders,

**Acts 20:28-30** Updated American Standard Version (UASV)

<sup>28</sup> Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the congregation of God, which he obtained with the blood of his own Son. <sup>29</sup> I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; <sup>30</sup> and **from among your own selves** men will arise, **speaking twisted things**, to **draw away the disciples after them**.

**“[Paul says it] Is Already at Work.”**

About **51 C.E.**, some 18-years after Jesus' death, resurrection and ascension, division was already starting to creep into the faith, “the mystery of lawlessness **is already at work**.” (2 Thess. 2:7) Yes, the power of **the man of lawlessness** was already present, which is the power of Satan, the god of this world (2 Cor. 4:3-4), and his tens of millions of demons, are hard at work behind the scenes.

The apostle Peter also spoke of these things about **64 C.E.**, “there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies ... in their greed they will exploit you with false words..” (2 Pet. 2:1, 3) These abandoned the faithful words, became false teachers, rising within the Christian congregation, sharing their corrupting influence, intending to hide, disguise, or mislead.

As the years progressed throughout the first-century, this divisive “talk [would] spread like gangrene.” (2 Tim. 2:17, **c. 65 C.E.**) About **51 C.E.**, They had some in Thessalonica, at worst, going ahead of, or at best, misunderstanding Paul, and wrongly stating by word and a bogus letter “that the day of the Lord has come.” (2 Thess. 2:1-2) In Corinth, about **55 C.E.**, “some of [were saying] that there is no resurrection of the dead. (1 Cor. 15:12) About **65 C.E.**, some were “saying that the resurrection has already happened. They [were] upsetting the faith of some.” – 2 Timothy 2:16-18.

Throughout the next three decades, **no** inspired books were written. However, by the time of the apostle John's letter writing days of 96-98 C.E., he tells us “Now many antichrists have come. Therefore, we know that it is the last hour.” (1 John 2:18) These are ones, “who denies that Jesus is the Christ” and ones who not confess “Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God.” – 1 John 2:22; 4:2-3.

From 33 C.E. to 100 C.E., the apostles served Christ as a restraint against “the apostasy” that was coming. Paul stated at 2 Thessalonians 2:7, “For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; but only until the one who is right now acting as a restraint [Jesus’ apostles] is out of the way.” 2 Thessalonians 2:3 said, “Let no one deceive you in any way [misinterpretation or false teachers of Paul's first letter], for it will not come unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness [composite person, or maybe an organization / movement, empowered by Satan] is revealed, the son of destruction.”

So, again, how did this apostasy, this rebellion, grow out of the first-century Christian congregation? Repeating Paul’s words to Thessalonica about “the thing that acts as a restraint” on the lawless one. We have already said that **it was the apostles, who acted as this restraining force**. It was the presence of the apostles, with the powerful gift of the Holy Spirit, which held off the apostasy in its full force. (Acts 2:1-4; 1 Cor. 12:28) Nevertheless, **when the last apostle John died in about 100 C.E., this restraint was removed**. Again, we look at an example, from the words of New Testament textual scholar, Philip W. Comfort,

Once the final, authorized publication was released and distributed to the churches, I think it unlikely that any substantive changes would have occurred during the lifetime of the apostles or second-generation coworkers. By “substantive,” I mean a change that would alter Christian doctrine or falsify an apostolic account. The primary reason is that the writers (or their immediate successors) were alive at the time and therefore could challenge any significant, unauthorized alterations. As long as eyewitnesses such as John or Peter were alive, who would dare change any of the Gospel accounts in any significant manner? Anyone among the Twelve could have testified against any falsification. And there was also a group of 72 other disciples (Luke 10:1) who could do the same. Furthermore, according to 1 Corinthians 15:6, Jesus had at least five hundred followers by the time he had finished his ministry, and these people witnessed Jesus in resurrection. Most of these people were still alive (Paul said) in AD 57/58 (the date of composition for 1 Corinthians); it stands to reason that several lived for the next few decades—until the turn of the century and even beyond.<sup>85</sup>

We must keep in mind that the meaning of any given text is what the author meant by the words that he used, as should have been understood by his audience, and had some relevance/meaning for his audience. **The rebellion [apostasy] began slowly in the first century and would break forth after the death of the last apostle, i.e., John. As the historian, Ariel Durant informed us earlier, by 187 C.E., there were 20 varieties of Christianity, and by 384 C.E., there were 80 varieties of Christianity.**

The Roman Catholic Church can trace its existence back to the council of Nicaea in 325 C.E. at best. Protestantism had its beginnings in the Reformation of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. However, there were dissensions in within Catholicism for a thousand years. **Another identifying marker was the unscriptural clergy class that would develop over the coming centuries after the Council of Nicaea. This relegated the Christians to a second-class status. This is the way, the apostate; man of lawlessness slowly took the reins of power.** It was Constantine the Great, who legalized Christianity but it was Theodosius I (d. 395 C.E.), who made Christianity a state religion. For centuries there was the Holy Roman Empire (5<sup>th</sup> to the 15<sup>th</sup> century C.E.),<sup>86</sup> which was anything but holy. As schisms and rifts took place, Christianity fragmented into tens of thousands of denominations.

## The Man of Lawlessness

LaHaye writes that of “all the titles given to him, the one used by the Apostle Paul in 2 Thessalonians 2:3, ‘the man of lawlessness,’ is the most descriptive. As ‘the man of lawlessness’ he will come on the scene in the last days as the embodiment of all the sinful people who have ever lived. Second Thessalonians 2:4 offers an appropriate description of his conduct: ‘He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshipped, so that he sets himself up in God’s temple, proclaiming himself to be God.’ ”

Paul does not describe the “man of lawlessness” as someone who embodies “all the sinful people who have ever lived.” The actions of the “man of lawlessness are not much different from those of Herod Agrippa I who had James the brother of John put to death (Acts 12:2) and thought of himself as a god. When Herod “put on his royal apparel,” he “took his seat on the rostrum and began delivering an address” (Acts 12:21). He had assumed the role of a deity: “The people kept crying out, ‘The voice of a god and not of a man!’ ” (Acts 12:22). Notice that the “man of lawlessness,” like Herod before him, “takes his seat” (2 Thess. 2:4). God did to Herod what He would do to the man of lawlessness in the first-century temple: “And immediately an angel of the Lord struck him because he did not give God the glory, and he was eaten by worms and died” (Acts 12:23). **In a similar way, the man of lawlessness was killed “with the breath of [God’s] mouth” when he took his seat in the temple and proclaimed himself to be God prior to the temple’s destruction in A.D. 70** (2 Thess. 2:8).

Although we are not told the identity of the man of lawlessness by name, we are told when he would appear. The “man of lawlessness” was said to take “his seat in the temple of God” (2 Thess. 2:4). When Paul wrote this letter to the Christians at Thessalonica, the temple was still standing. Paul did not write, “The man of lawlessness will take his seat in a rebuilt temple.” Those who first read his letter would immediately have thought of the temple that was still standing in Jerusalem because Paul did not give them any reason to think any other way.

Paul’s man of lawlessness was alive in his day since the restrainer was alive, and the Thessalonians knew the identity of the restrainer: “And *you know* what restrains him *now*” (2 Thess. 2:6, emphasis added). In the next verse, we read, “He who *now* restrains will do so until he is taken out of the way” (2:7, emphasis added). Paul wrote, “The mystery of lawlessness is *already at work*” (2 Thess. 2:7, emphasis added). Paul was not describing a distant antichrist figure; he had someone in mind who was alive in the first century. This person was identified as “the son of destruction” (2 Thess. 2:3), like Judas (John 17:12). Therefore, it’s reasonable to assume that the person Paul was describing was a Jew who occupied the temple during the siege before it was destroyed.

Since the man of lawlessness has not been revealed to us by name, but by his time, we can only speculate about his identity. We should look for a first-century candidate. Southern Baptist evangelist and prophecy writer John Bray has identified a likely candidate. John Levi of Gischala “was the key man in the destruction of Jerusalem, the greatest instigator of the tribulation upon the Jews in the city, and an ‘abomination’ himself as he ‘sat’ in power in the Temple itself. And he was the cause of the ceasing of the daily sacrifices three and one half years after Vespasian came against the city. So far as the people were concerned, he had taken the place of God in the Temple!”

Following the first-century historian Josephus, Bray offers compelling historical evidence for his opinion, everything from murder to defilement of the temple. Mireille Hadas-Lebel recounts John's lawless deeds:

Crimes against men were accompanied by what Josephus considered crimes against God. John of Gischala was especially guilty of these latter. Early in the siege he had used timber intended for the Temple to construct war machines. Next, he had all the sacred vessels melted down, including precious vases offered by the emperor Augustus and his wife. Then he had dipped into the Temple reserves of oil and wine.

John Levi of Gischala was a prominent figure during the temple siege. His occupation of the temple followed the surrounding of Jerusalem by armies.

In the final analysis, the Bible does not identify the man of lawlessness, the beast, or the many antichrists by name. It's possible that even Paul did not know the identity of the man of lawlessness. He only knew that he was alive and being restrained as he wrote his letter. Tim LaHaye and other prophecy writers who share his views have the luxury of never having to identify the man of lawlessness, since in their prophetic scenario they and all other Christians will be raptured before he reveals himself.

## Conclusion

While LaHaye paints a fascinating picture of an end-time world leader, whom he describes as Antichrist, we have to ask why the biblical definition of this figure does not match his amalgamated world leader. We also must ask why LaHaye insists on skipping over centuries of history in search of an "antichrist candidate" when there are a number of more likely candidates that fall within the time frame of first-century biblical history. Further, we have to ask why Tim LaHaye's understanding of Antichrist is so certain when hundreds of speculative prophecy writers throughout the centuries were equally certain of their choice. Lastly, we **must ask why LaHaye disagrees with Paul when he states that the "mystery of lawless was already at work," and John assured his first-century readers that the presence of antichrists in his day was evidence "that it is the last hour."**<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> DeMar, G. (2009). [\*Left Behind: Separating Fact from Fiction\*](#) (pp. 131–150). Powder Springs, GA: American Vision.



## Who is the “Son of Perdition”?

2 Thessalonians 2:3,4 – 3 Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, 4 who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.

This “son of perdition” can be identified by two of his pursuits. He “opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped.” He is filled with great pride. The word “God” does not need to be capitalized for it could refer to pagan gods. This language is used in Daniel eleven to refer to Antiochus IV Epiphanes. In 168 BC he had defiled the Temple when he sacrificed a pig to Zeus. The Roman emperor Octavian “received the Latin name ‘Augustus’ which is derived from the same root (sebastos) rendered ‘worshiped’ in our passage” (Weaver 480).

The second act of the “man of sin” is noted for is “that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.” This is not the literal temple which was destroyed in 70 AD. The term “temple” is used both to refer to the body of the believer and the church (1 Cor. 3:16,17; 6:19; 1 Pet. 2:5; 1 Tim. 3:15; Eph. 2:21). He has enthroned himself in the position of God Himself

In this context the “son of perdition” is called “man of sin” and “lawless one.” He is not Satan, but he does work with him (2:9). One of the most common views is the “son of perdition” is the pope or papacy. “The preface to the original King James Version of the bible names the pope as the ‘Man of Sin’.” (Barton 127). Many of the early reformers, such as, Luther, Calvin & Zwingli held this view. Many New Testament Christians have agreed with this.

**However, the Catholic pope did not exist until AD 606 and Paul said the “mystery of lawlessness” was already at work at the time the letter was written to the Thessalonians.** The Catholic popes responded by labeling one of the reformers as the “son of perdition.”



Gaining in popularity is the belief that Mohammed and the Islamic religion represent the “man of sin.” However, Mohammed was not born until AD 570. Others have suggested one of the Roman Emperors. Nevertheless, these have not continued to exist till the Lord’s coming. **Trying to connect this with the destruction of Jerusalem has led some to look at some zealot or Pharisee seizing the Temple just before the Roman’s had destroyed it in 70 AD. Yet, how would this relate to the gentile saints at Thessalonica.** Over the years many political figures have been lided as the “son of perdition.” Napoleon, Hitler, Stalin, etc. have all been popular choices. Notice in the text it is a spiritual rebellion not a political rebellion under consideration.

Nonetheless, some still are looking from some world political leader to raise up and take the throne of God. Hal Lindsey has said, “I believe that this very man lives right now somewhere in Europe.” Modern pre-millienialists have marked the sea beast in Revelation 13 as the “son of perdition.” This refers to a political entity such as the Roman Empire which has been long gone for centuries. One of the most common identifications with the “son of perdition” is to call him “the Antichrist.” The term is only found in the epistles of John. The apostle specifically identified various aspects of an antichrist which would eliminate him from the list of likely suspects. The term “antichrist” is found five times in the New Testament (1 John 2:18,22; 4:3; 2 John 1:7). The antichrist is not one individual, but many. The antichrist is not yet to come, but many have been at work for centuries. All of them have been liars because they deny the truth about Christ being the Messiah, being the Son of God and coming in the flesh. **One final ideal about the “son of perdition” is that it is symbolic of the principle of lawlessness. Paul used personification to refer to sin as if it were human. The “man of sin” is defined as “an impersonation of the sinful principle spoken of by the apostle Paul in an emphatic manner”** (McClintock & Strong 689).

– Daniel R. Vess

## 2 Thessalonians 2

Whatever interpretation is placed upon this passage, its use to refer to a future personage is doomed to failure since Paul explicitly stated that he was referring to a person who would be the product of the circumstances of **his own day**, i.e., “already at work” (vs. 7). How could Paul have had in mind a future dictator that still has not arisen, though 2,000 years have transpired? One need go no further to know that 2 Thessalonians 2 does not refer to the future.

History is replete with a variety of interpretations of this passage, the most prominent one likely being the view that the papacy is under consideration (see Workman, 1988, pp. 428-434; Eadie, 1877, pp. 340ff.). Another possibility is that the “falling away” (vs. 3), or apostasy, referred to the Jewish rejection of the “new and living way” of approach to God (Hebrews 10:20). The Jews were the single most adamant opponents to Christ and the infant church (John 8:37-44; Acts 7:51-53; 13:45-50; Romans 10:20-21; 11:7; 1 Thessalonians 2:14-16). **This rebellion, or falling away, would not reach its “full” (Matthew 23:32) climax until the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, and the resulting dispersal of the Jewish people. Paul had already alluded to this Jewish apostasy in 1 Thessalonians 2:15-16. The pouring out of God’s wrath was the logical consequence of the first-century Israelite failure to make the transition to Christianity.**

According to this viewpoint, the “man of sin” or “son of perdition” (vs. 3) would have referred to the personification of Roman imperialism, and would have been equated with “the abomination of desolation” that Jesus, quoting Daniel 9, alluded to in Matthew 24:15 and Luke 21:20. **Verse 4 would refer to the Roman general who introduced his idolatrous insignia into the Holy of Holies in A.D. 70** (cf. Swete, p. xci).

**That which was “withholding” (vs. 6), or restraining, this man of sin, at the time Paul was writing 2 Thessalonians in approximately A.D. 53, would have been the presence of the Jewish state.** The ingenious design of God was that Christianity would appear to the hostile Roman government to be nothing more than another sect of the Jews. Thus, Christianity was **shielded** for the moment (i.e., A.D. 30-70) from the fury of the persecuting forces of Rome, while it developed, spread, and gave the Jews ample opportunity to be incorporated into the elect remnant—the church of Christ (cf. Romans 11:26). Thus, the nation of Israel was rendered totally without excuse in its rejection of Christianity, while at the same time serving as a **restraining force** by preventing Christianity from being perceived by the Romans as a separate, and therefore illegal, religion (*religio illicita*). **Once the Jewish apostasy was complete, and God’s wrath was poured out upon Jerusalem, Christianity came to be seen as a distinct religion from Judaism. Increasingly, Christians found themselves brought into conflict with the persecution from “the wicked” or “lawless one” (vs. 8). In fact, after A.D. 70 (when the withholding effect of Judaism was removed), Roman opposition to Christianity gradually grew greater.**

Once the shield of Judaism was removed (vs. 7), and Christianity increasingly found itself subject to the indignities of governmental disfavor, the Lord was to come and “consume with the spirit of His mouth” the one responsible. This terminology is not an allusion to Christ’s second coming. Rather, this verse refers to Christ’s **coming in judgment on the Roman power**. Such a use of the word “coming” to describe the display of God’s wrath upon people **in history** is not unusual (Isaiah 19:1; Micah 1:3). Paul alluded to the government’s use of counterfeit miracles (vs. 9) & thus deceit (vs. 10), that is reminiscent of the Concilia’s employment of tricks & illusions to deceive people into worshipping the emperor (Revelation 13:13-15) during the first century A.D. (Summers, p. 178; Swete, pp. 170-172).

### **Temple Desecrated A.D. 70 per Josephus:**

"When Caesar failed to restrain the fury of his frenzied soldiers, and the fire could not be checked, he entered the building with his generals and looked at the holy place of the sanctuary and all its furnishings, which exceeded by far the accounts current in foreign lands and fully justified their splendid reputation in our own.

As the flames had not yet penetrated to the inner sanctum, but were consuming the chambers that surrounded the sanctuary, Titus assumed correctly that there was still time to save the structure; he ran out and by personal appeals he endeavored to persuade his men to put out the fire, instructing Liberalius, a centurion of his bodyguard of lancers, to club any of the men who disobeyed his orders. But their respect for Caesar and their fear of the centurion's staff who was trying to check them were overpowered by their rage, their detestation of the Jews, and an utterly uncontrolled lust for battle."

**Q: Who Was The Man Of Sin?**

**A: Written of Emperor Nero!**

## ‘Exalts Himself over Every So-Called God’, 2 Thessalonians 2:4

Given that a characteristic of their faith was that they were those who ‘wait for His Son from heaven’ (1 Thess. 1:10), Paul in his second letter to the Christians in Thessalonica explains further aspects of ‘the day of the Lord’, dealing with ‘the times and the seasons’, its total unexpectedness and important ethical implications. He emphasizes that it is not necessary for him to repeat certain aspects of his teaching on this issue because they had readily embraced his eschatological perspective (1 Thess. 5:1–11) in spite of the Roman claims of the *pax romana* of ‘peace and security’ that Rome boasted it had brought to all those in the empire.

It emerges in 2 Thessalonians that subsequently a radical change had come about in their eschatological understanding because of recent teaching from a source that was mischievously attributed to Paul. As a result, the Thessalonians had become alarmed and unsettled. The circumstances that gave rise to this came from what others were saying, i.e., what they prophesized. Paul told them to ignore these sources including the misleading letter, as it definitely was not from him—‘neither a letter seeming to be from us that the day of the Lord had arrived’ (μήτε δι’ ἐπιστολῆς ὡς δι’ ἡμῶν ὡς ὅτι ἐνέστηκεν ἡ ἡμέρα τοῦ κυρίου) (2 Thess. 2:1–2). This declared that the day they had been waiting for in 1 Thessalonians 1:10 had actually occurred—hence the use of the perfect tense, ἐνέστηκεν of the verb ‘to arrive’.

Paul exhorts them not to be beguiled in any way, explaining that some Christians would commit **apostasy as a prelude to that eschatological event**, presumably including some from Thessalonica. They would also rebel, and after that ‘the man of lawlessness’ would appear. Paul describes further what would happen when ‘the son of destruction’ appeared—

who opposes (ὁ ἀντικείμενος) and exalts over every so-called god (καὶ ὑπεραιρόμενος ἐπὶ πάντα λεγόμενον θεόν) or object of worship (ἢ σέβασμα), so that he takes his seat in the temple of the God (ὥστε αὐτὸν εἰς τὸν ναὸν τοῦ θεοῦ καθίσει), proclaiming himself that he is God (ἀποδεικνύσται ἑαυτὸν ὅτι ἔστιν θεός). (2:3–4)

Here Paul exposes the motivation of the man of lawlessness, whose claims and actions are reminiscent of those in Daniel 11:36–7, where similar terminology is used to describe the divinity of the emperors. Cited here from the Septuagint, it also records a similar eschatological perspective and motivation. The terms chosen by the translators of the LXX as appropriate renderings of the Hebrew were similar at times with that used in 2 Thessalonians 2:1–5.

[A]nd the king shall do as he wills. He shall exalt himself and magnify himself above every god (καὶ παροργισυήσεται καὶ ὑψωθήσεται ἐπὶ πάντα θεόν) and shall speak astonishing things against the God of gods (καὶ ἐπὶ τὸν θεὸν τῶν θεῶν ἐξαλλα λαλήσει). He shall prosper till the indignation is accomplished; for what is decreed shall be done. He shall pay no attention to the gods of his fathers.... He shall pay no attention to any other god for he shall magnify himself above all (καὶ ὑποταγήσεται αὐτῷ ἔθνη ἰσχυρά). (Dan. 11:36–37)

Some of this language also resonates with that found in official inscriptions in the East relating to the Julio-Claudian emperors. The use of the superlative ‘the greatest’ succinctly echoes Paul’s reference to the one who exalts himself over every so-called god or object of worship. Others use another superlative, ‘most divine’, when referring to the Caesars.

For example, on 5 April, A.D. 54, Claudius, just six months before his death, was declared to be ‘the most divine Caesar and truly our savior’ (τοῦ θειοτάτου Καίσαρος καὶ ὡς ἀληθῶς σωτῆρος ἡμῶν). The first extant recording of this term used of emperors was by Paulus Fabius Maximus, the proconsul of Asia from 10 to 8 B.C., who wrote to the League of Asia. He chose the superlative θειοτάτος when referring to Augustus in his lifetime as the ‘most divine Caesar’ (τοῦ θειοτάτου Καίσαρος). (See p. 134.)

A somewhat synonymous concept, ‘the greatest’, was later used of Nero. He was referred to as the ‘emperor greatest Caesar Nero Claudius Sebastos Germanicus, son of a god’ (αὐτοκράτορα μέγιστον Νέρωνα Καίσαρα Κλαύδιον Σεβαστὸν Γερμανικὸν θεοῦ υἱόν). He was also declared to be ‘the son of the greatest of gods (τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ μεγίστου θεῶν), Tiberius Claudius’. In the East an inscription dated 28 November, A.D. 67, records, ‘Nero, Zeus the Liberator, the one and only, the greatest imperator of our times’ (εἷς καὶ μόνος τῶν ἀπ’ αὐῶος αὐτοκράτωρ μέγιστος).

The only appropriate response of those who were the recipients of his ‘incredible gift’ was to address him as ‘the Lord of the entire world’ (ὁ τοῦ παντὸς κόσμου κύριος) and ‘the new sun that has shone on the Greeks’ because he bestowed benefactions on Greece and has shown piety towards ‘our gods who have stood by him everywhere for his care and safety’.

This inscription also adds that Nero would be ‘worshipped ever hereafter as Nero Zeus Liberator’ (Νέρωνος Διὸς Ἐλευθερίου). Calling Nero ‘Zeus Liberator’ was a very great honor. Pausanias recorded the significance of this designation, ‘Zeus is king of heaven’, and then added ‘this is a common saying of all men’ (οὗτος μὲν λόγος κοινὸς πάντων ἐστὶν ἀνθρώπων); ‘this same god rules in all the three “allotments” of the Universe, as they are called’. This was the highest accolade and the most divine title the Achaeans could confer upon him.

This decree was promulgated for all to see, being inscribed ‘on a column set beside Zeus the Savior in the agora and in the temple of Ptoian Apollo’. Nero’s speech in Corinth in which he aggrandizes himself by implication in relation to his predecessors and the response in terms of the greatest honors bestowed on him parallels the divine self-promotion recorded in 2 Thessalonians 2:1–5. The terminology found in the epigraphic evidence concerning Claudius and Nero helps in seeking to identify the god being referred to by Paul.

Paul also adds the phrase ‘every so-called god’ (πάντα λεγόμενον θεόν) in 2:4, which is exactly the same term he used in 1 Corinthians 8:5, ‘so-called’ (λεγόμενός). It is argued that there the reference was to imperial gods and that Paul chose the term ‘so-called’ to indicate that they were popularly but erroneously regarded as such. (See pp. 212–13.)

How have scholars sought to identify the *Sitz im Leben* of the passage in 2 Thessalonians 2:1–5? With respect to imperial self-promotion in the East, Sartre concludes of the other Julio-Claudians who promoted themselves—‘As for Caligula and Nero they contrastingly became its keen propagators, to the point that Caligula sought to have his statue introduced into the temple in Jerusalem.’ Harrison suggests it may be **as a result of Caligula attempting to place his statue in the Jerusalem Temple that Paul believes the emperors have exceeded their mandate and hence 2 Thessalonians 2:4**. However, Caligula reigned from 37 to 41 A.D., prior to Paul’s first visit to Thessalonica. By contrast van Kooten defends the dating to the era of Nero (A.D. 54–68), relating it to A.D. 68–69 after his suicide.

Astrologers had predicted of Nero that he would one day be repudiated.... Some of them, however, had promised him the rule of the East, when he was cast off, a few expressly naming the sovereignty of Jerusalem and several the restitution of all his former fortunes.

One of the challenges in seeking to locate the *Sitz im Leben* of the references in 2 Thessalonians 2:1ff. is to bear in mind that it is important to note that **they point to the future**. Paul had already given them this prophetic eschatological teaching presumably on what seems to have been his one and only visit, i.e., the evangelistic one recorded in Acts 17:1–10. If this is the case, then it occurred c. A.D. 50–51 if note is taken of the dates that Gallio was proconsul of the province of Achaëa. Both epigraphic evidence and events mentioned in Acts 18:12–17 occurred after Paul left Thessalonica and settled in Corinth. He therefore asked, ‘Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things?’ (2 Thess. 2:5). He had previously written to them about this in 1 Thessalonians 5:1–11. So, the teaching in 2 Thessalonians was not a new topic.

The language used to describe this man of lawlessness who sought to exalt himself over all other gods resonates not only prophetically with Daniel 11 but also with that in some official inscriptions where the terms ‘the most divine’ and ‘the greatest’ are used of the last two Roman emperors of the Julio-Claudians, i.e., Claudius and Nero. (See pp. 66, 69.) Furthermore, numismatic evidence reveals that provincial coins did not portray emperors as gods with the divine radiate crown in imperial provincial coinage in the Julio-Claudian era ‘with the exception of Caligula and, especially, Nero’.

It is important how the Thessalonian Christians coped with the fact that they could no longer participate in giving divine imperial honors. They had been confronted with this both in the past and again in their present situation. Paul writes that he had boasted to other Christians ‘in the churches of God’ about the believers located in Thessalonica because of ‘your steadfastness and faith (ὕπμονης ὑμῶν καὶ πίστεως) in all your persecutions and afflictions (διωγμοῖς καὶ θλιψεσιν)’ that they ‘are enduring’ (ἀνέχεσθε) (2 Thess. 1:4). He asserted, ‘this is an indication that you may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God for which you are also suffering’ (ὕπὲρ καὶ πάσχετε) (1:5), and assures them that God will act to ‘afflict those who are afflicting you’ (καὶ πάσχετε τοῖς θλίβουσιν ὑμᾶς θλίψιν) while judgement will occur when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire (1:6–7).

Within the parameters of the extant evidence of Thessalonian Christianity, these events relate to the theme of this monograph. These Christians in Thessalonica were confronted from ‘day one’ with a conflict of loyalty over whether they could render divine honors to the Caesars now that they were followers of Jesus. They were also warned to expect on-going confrontation over the ‘so-called’ imperial gods as confirmed by their present sufferings. They were not alone in turning away from idols of the imperial gods, to worship and wait for the return of the Son of God from heaven (1 Thess. 1:9–10).<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Winter, B. W. (2015). [\*Divine Honours for the Caesars: The First Christians’ Responses\*](#) (pp. 260–265). Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.



### (ii) *The Number of the Emperor's Name*

A greater challenge was issued that would test the skills of his readership to undertake a more complicated form of numerical calculation—‘this calls for wisdom’, literally ‘here is the wisdom’ (ὧδε ἡ σοφία), a term used in Greek for ‘skill’ in various disciplines of learning including music, poetry, medicine and divination, and here the author of the letter uses it of *gematria*. He further defines the person possessing this skill as ‘the one having knowledge’ (ὁ ἔχων νοῦς). The clue is in the use of an imperative when he writes that ‘he must calculate the number of the beast’ (ψηφισάτω τὸν ἀριθμὸν τοῦ φηρίου), and then explains, ‘for the number of the beast is a man and his number is 666’ (13:18). The actual text does not have the Greek letter for six (Σ) repeated three times but ΧΞΣ, i.e., 600, 60 and 6. This followed the Greek convention of spelling each of the letters that were represented numerically—‘six hundred’ (ἑξακόσιοι), ‘sixty’ (ἑξήκοντα) and ‘six’ (ἕξ) (13:18).

What is the numerical value of the Greek letters for ‘beast’ (φηρίον)? It totals 247 (θ = 9, η = 8, ρ = 100, ι = 10, ο = 70, ν = 50). So he is not referring to a calculation in Greek of letters of this term. However, ‘the same numerical technique was used in the Hebrew alphabet, and “beast” in the Hebrew alphabet is 666 (ת = 400, ר = 200, י = 10, ו = 6, ך = 50)’.

The number of the beast is explicitly said to coincide with another number. The writer explains, ‘[F]or it is the number of a man’ (ἀριθμὸς γὰρ ἀνθρώπου ἐστίν) and then discloses that number is ‘666’ (Rev. 13:18). So the total number for ‘beast’ and that for ‘man’ are the same. **There is official external evidence of the numerical value of the name of Nero in a Hebrew-Aramaic script on an official deed of debt in A.D. 55 declared to be the second year of ‘Nero’.** The numerical value of the letters of his name is recorded in Hebrew (נ n = 50, ר r = 200, ו w = 6, נ n = 50, ק q = 100, ס s = 60, ר r = 200) and totals 666.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Winter, B. W. (2015). [\*Divine Honours for the Caesars: The First Christians' Responses\*](#) (pp. 292–296). Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.

**Q: Who Was The Man Of Sin?**

**A: Nero The Revelation *Beast***

**Q: What Was *The Falling Away*?**

**A: *Departure of Matthew 24:16***

**DEVIL WAS IN THE DETAILS @ JERUSALEM A.D. 70**

Josephus claimed that, "there was an Egyptian false prophet that did the Jews more mischief than the former; for he was a cheat, and pretended to be a prophet also, and got together thirty thousand men that were deluded by him; these he led round from the wilderness to the mount which was called the Mount of Olives, and was ready to break into Jerusalem by force from that place." (*The Wars Of The Jews*, 2:3:5).

Josephus also wrote: "Now it came to pass, while Fadus was procurator of Judea, that a certain magician, whose name was Theudas, persuaded a great part of the people to take their efforts with them, and follow him to the river Jordan; for he told them he was a prophet, and that he would, by his own command, divide the river, and afford them an easy passage over it; and many were deluded by his words." (*Antiquities Of The Jews*, 20:5:1).

