

2 Thessalonians 1 and 2

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Chapters 1 and 2 of this short yet extremely stimulating epistle afford great encouragement to tried and troubled saints. Particularly while passing through persecutions and tribulations. These saints were being especially tried for the enemy of their souls was assailing them with false teaching that the day of the Lord was upon them.

This infant company of believers which, according to the first epistle 1 Thess. 1: 9, 10, had been delivered from idolatry in turning to God under the power of the grace of God preached in the gospel, had become targets for the opposition of evil men under the dominant influence of the prince and god of this world.

The bent of their evil teaching had earlier failed in its attempt to pervert them from the faith, it having been ably countered by the apostolic teaching bringing before them the revelation as to the coming again of the Lord Jesus Christ. Their opponents then changed their mode of attack. The minions of Satan are like chameleons, being "false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel, for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works" (2 Cor. 11: 13-15).

And so these dear saints in Thessalonica were now being upset by false teaching that they were now in the day of the Lord. If in the first epistle they had been perversely taught that their brethren who had fallen asleep had missed the kingdom they were now being falsely taught that they had missed the rapture and of this the persecutions they were experiencing were the evidence.

Two reasons were advanced by the apostle as to the falsity of this teaching. One, the fact that the saints were still here: Two, the man of sin had not yet been revealed. The rapture followed by the apostasy must precede the presence of the day of the Lord — that period of unparalleled judgments and tribulation.

So the administered stimulus for the assembly in a day of trial and severe persecution with its assault on hearts and minds by false doctrine is the anticipation of the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faith is encouraged by the apostolic ministry to look forward to that day with the certain knowledge that His coming for His own must first take place (2 Thess. 2: 1). In that day there shall most certainly be righteous recompense for those who have troubled the saints. Then, too, shall be redressed the trouble inflicted upon those who have suffered for their Lord during His absence and rejection. Then shall the erstwhile persecuted saints find: "each hope of glory gained, fulfilled each faithful word, and fully all to have attained the image of their Lord." And then shall suffering saints, now witnessing in the measure of their love and fidelity to Him in the day of contrariety, shine forth in the radiance of His glory. For then shall He be displayed in glory to every creature in the universe by those who, cost what it may, have been His faithful witnesses in the world which crucified Him. "When He shall come to be glorified in His saints, and to be admired in all them that believe (because our testimony among you was believed) in that day" (2 Thess. 1: 10). This is the hope of the gospel and this is its consummation.

But prior to the realisation of this blessed hope there shall be, here in the place where their witness has been so faithfully borne, the consummation of evil. The apostasy — the giving up of the faith and truth of Christ — shall come. Between the rapture of the saints and the appearing of the Lord

in power and great glory bringing His saints with Him, there shall be on earth the presentation and acceptance of the devil's masterpiece, the revelation of the man of sin, the son of perdition. This shall be the crowning blasphemy of the mystery of lawlessness, initiated in Genesis 3: 5 when our first head, Adam, succumbed to the proffered bait in Eden, "ye shall be as gods." "This is that spirit of anti-christ, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world" (1 John 4: 3). Indeed, the whole sphere of professing christendom is leavened with it.

Everyone who honours the name of the Father and the Son can expect to be despised and to suffer reproach. Such, most blessedly, shall receive the comfort and sympathy of their blessed Lord, expressed in those feeling words, "Be thou faithful unto death and I will give thee the crown of life" (Rev. 2: 10).

The Day of the Lord cannot come while the Assembly is still upon earth. Before it does come the Lord Himself shall have come for His own and they all shall have been "gathered together unto Him" (2 Thess. 2: 1). Then, and only then, can the apostasy — the general and public renunciation of the faith of the Son of God — take place. There shall no longer be any element of faith in apostate christendom, for all that is held forth in the claims of the man of sin shall only be presented to the senses of men. Note 2 Thess, 2: 9: "whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders."

These latter, "powers, signs, and wonders," had already been used on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2: 22) with regard to the witness of the Holy Spirit as to the life and ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ — "a Man approved of God among you."

Here, as connected with the man of sin, we further read, "And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie; that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness."

So long as the Assembly is here the restraining presence of the Spirit will be exercised. There is "What withholdeth" may refer to divinely instituted authority in government among men. For this see Daniel 2: 37; Romans 13: 1-4 and John 19: 8-11. 2 Thess 2: 7, refers undoubtedly to the Holy Spirit Who dwells in the Assembly as the temple of God (see 1 Cor. 3: 16 and 2 Cor. 6: 16). When "the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and . . . our gathering together unto Him" occurs, the restraint which the Spirit exercises as being in the Assembly shall be withdrawn also. The march of lawlessness shall then receive great momentum. That which presently is working in "mystery" — not generally apparent, being known only to those who have eyes to see and ears to hear — shall develop rapidly. When once it reaches its peak as it shall do when the man of sin — so different from the Lord Jesus, the Man of God's pleasure — claims for himself what is due to God (Rev. 13: 11-17; 2 Thess. 2: 4). then shall the Lord Jesus be revealed from heaven and shall consume the man of sin "with the breath of His mouth and shall destroy with the brightness of His coming."

All who, in the meantime, received not the love of the truth, shall be damned along with the devil and his deputies, the Roman beast and the man of sin — the anti-christ.

May we ever thank God that He has "from the beginning chose you (us) to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth; Whereunto He called you (us) by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Let us all join therefore with the apostle Paul in giving thanks to our God for having enlightened us as to the trend of evil and of its deserved end under righteous judgment. May we also, in the

purifying power of our blessed hope with its encouragement, "stand fast" and "hold fast" the traditions or instructions, which we have been taught, whether by word or apostolic epistle. May we do so until we meet our precious Saviour and see Him face to face in our Father's house in heaven.