

The Teaching of 2 Thessalonians 2:1-8

In another study of mine (found at ASiteForTheLord.com/id15.html), I examine *The Teaching of 2 Thessalonians 1:4-10*, the passage which immediately precedes the one under consideration here. In that chapter-one examination I concluded that the inspired apostle promised these suffering brethren that, within their lifetime, they would receive relief from their oppression. How would this relief come? Not by their deaths, but by the return of their Savior who would take vengeance on their tormentors, effectively removing them from His presence as well as from the presence of the saints who would be glorified with Him at that time. Subsequently...

Paul took the opportunity to move from the encouraging words of chapter 1 in relation to the return of Christ right into a discussion in chapter 2 about the misinformation they had been fed concerning the idea that the Lord had already returned. We may never know who introduced this false information among our first-generation brethren, but we can know that this doctrine of a previously-completed-coming-of-the-Lord with its attending resurrection-of-the-dead was *not* a minor issue, for aside from it clearly causing a lot of dismay among the Thessalonians in the AD 50s, according to Paul (when writing to Timothy ten years later [2 Tim. 2:16-19]), it had even caused folks to leave their profession of Christ altogether. So let's consider Second Thessalonians 2...

Verses 1-2: Now respecting the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, we ask you to not be troubled or suddenly shaken in mind, whether by word [a verbal message] or by spirit [something allegedly inspired, cf. 1 John 4:1-6] or even by a letter purported to be from us to the effect that the Day of the Christ has come. {Translation essentially by me in order to help keep this study within a specific time frame.}

It's worth quickly noting I think that, against our first impression when using "ing" words like "coming" and "gathering," in verse 1 the "coming of our Lord" and the "gathering together to Him" expressions are actually not verb phrases—they're verbal noun phrases or what English teachers call "gerunds"; a gerund depicts an action as if it were a noun, meaning that the end-result of the action is what's really under consideration. This is helpful to know for a couple reasons:

The original word for "coming" is *parousia* which actually means "presence" not "coming"; so Paul was writing to them here about the result of the action—the presence of the Lord with them upon or following His return from out of the Most Holy Place; and His presence would assume of course that His saints (i.e. His bride) had been gathered together to Him (i.e. the Groom) and were already, in the AD 50s, a wedded union, that which Paul here emphatically denied, agreeing well with his teachings elsewhere on this topic. (I've come across some who, due to some of their presuppositions, place the wedding at Pentecost.) And...

In relation to the word "gathering" being a gerund we find that this is the only passage outside of Hebrews 10:25 in which the Greek phraseology here is employed, and I'm convinced by the same writer. While in Second Thessalonians 2:1 no one disputes that Paul was speaking about the second coming or the return of the Lord, extremely few believe that's what he had in mind in Hebrews 10:25, which in turn creates an interpretive mess in that context; my point is that in Hebrews 10, when Paul wrote of not abandoning the gathering or the assembling together (which is singular not plural, by the way), he was referring to the eschatological / soteriological gathering or assembling that was slated to transpire in the Day of the Lord or on the Lord's Day. {For more information on all 13 chapters of Hebrews, check out ASiteForTheLord.com/id19.html.} Movin' on we find that...

Paul cautioned them to not get all worked up over a "doctrine of demons" taught by "deceiving spirits" (two things he prophesied would happen in 1 Tim. 4:1). This admonishment by the apostle begs an answer to a question relevant for us today: IF (as v. 5 indicates) Paul spent quite a bit of time teaching these brethren about their Lord's return, and if what he taught and what they believed were what most Christians today are taught and believe concerning a yet future return of Jesus, then why in the world would these Thessalonians get all worked up? In other words...

If Christ's return were taught to them and believed by them to be an all-out, grave-emptying, globally-catastrophic, fire-consuming event as depicted by modern-day Christian preachers and teachers—if that really were what Jesus, Paul, and other inspired men taught and wrote, then how in the name of reason, pray tell, could our first-generation brethren get all stressed out over someone telling them that the second coming had already happened? And by the way...

This same question of course may be asked in relation to the other passage I mentioned moments ago in this vein: Second Timothy 2:16-19, in which Paul wrote about two fellas who were teaching that the resurrection had already occurred, thereby shipwrecking the faith of many Christians. Surely if those early brethren believed what most (if not all) of us were taught, then how could they throw their faith aside when they could see with their own eyes that not one dead body had come alive from one grave pit? Anyway...

A question completely fulfilled prophecy believers might be asked is this: "Well, if those Christians believe what you believe (that the Lord's return was fulfilled in AD 70 in the demise of Jerusalem with its temple, priesthood, sacrifices, genealogies, etc.—that it wasn't something globally catastrophic), then why would first-generation Christians get worked up over that transpiring?" And that's a good question; but I have a good answer as well:

As I alluded to in the beginning, the main reason Christians of that time looked forward to their Lord's return was (as Paul wrote to these very brethren about in 2 The. 1:4-10) to receive the promised relief from persecution at the hands of the Jews, whose base of operations was of course in Jerusalem with their authority coming from the temple's sanhedrin! So, obviously, if nothing had changed in regard to all of that, then I would've been all stressed out too, even perhaps contemplating that the Jews were right and Jesus was a false prophet. ... OK, let's continue with verses 3-8, on which I won't be spending as much effort, for since it's all past, it isn't necessary that we understand it perfectly.

Verses 3-7: Let no one deceive you by any means, for that day will not come before the apostasy and the revealing of the man of sin, the child of damnation who—in order to sit down in the temple of God and present himself as God—is setting himself against and exalting himself above every one/thing called "god" or is an object of worship. Don't you remember my telling you about these things when I was still with you? You know what's restraining him until he's revealed in his appointed time; for the mystery of lawlessness is already working, but only until the one currently restraining is out of the picture.

Obviously the question on everyone's mind today who reads verses 3ff is this: "Who was Paul thinking of when he wrote about the man of sin?" The answer is that I don't believe anyone can now know with certainty who—or what—precisely Paul had in mind. However...

I will say I'm convinced that the overall New Testamental evidence leans toward some one or thing or both related to Judaism, for such corresponds to the immediate context of this chapter, the adjacent context of the Thessalonian letters, and the remote context of other NT writings.

Right here in these verses it seems to speak of the child of damnation or the man of sin or lawlessness in a generic fashion; as I implied just a moment ago when I added the word "what" to the identity of this child or man here, it's very possible that this "lawless one" (as he's called in v. 8) was meant to reference a corporate body of men (perhaps even with a specific person presiding as its head), for in this passage Paul wrote of him in both a future tense ("will be revealed") and a present tense ("is setting himself against and is exalting himself above"), picturing the mysterious, behind-the-scenes, workings that were believed to win-out in the end. And isn't that exactly what Revelation depicts in chapters 18-19 when in chapter 18 it seems to the Jews (headed up by the sanhedrin and high priest) that they're squashing Christianity, only in chapter 19 to find themselves being squashed by Jesus via the Romans? See, here's the thing:

As I spent time dealing with in my study on First John 2:28—3:2 (on my website here: ASiteForTheLord.com/id15.html), the primary and most prevelant problem between Pentecost of Acts 2 and Holocaust of AD 70 was over the question, "Who are God's true children—the natural progeny of Abraham or the spiritual progeny of Abraham?"

Even in the passage under consideration in this study, Paul chose the word "child" in "child of damnation" as if to imply there was a "child of salvation" (corporately speaking of course); and the one that had been rejected would be manifested beyond doubt at the return of the Lord who by them was rejected. Related to all this...

Some, perhaps even most, believe there's a direct correlation between Paul's "lawless one" and John's "antichrist": If correct, then the antichrist yet to come (1 Jhn 2:18a) is equivalent to the man of lawlessness yet to be revealed (2 The. 2:3b), while the many antichrists who had already come (1 Jhn 2:18b) are equivalent to the lawlessness that was already at work (2 The. 2:7a); in fact, 1 John 2:18 might be seen as paralleling the man of sin, with verse 19 paralleling the falling away. Either way one can see this concept of all anti-christs comprising *the* anti-christ, just as those lawless ones working behind the scenes (while Paul was writing Second Thessalonians) comprised the corporate man of sin who would soon be revealed as the child of damnation, which corresponds well to Christ's description of the leaders of Israel as the "child of gehenna" (Mat. 23:15). {You may need to reread this paragraph multiple times.}

As far as the identity of the one restraining the child of damnation from completely obliterating the child of salvation is concerned, I'm convinced that's a reference to the controlling force of Rome over the Jews. See...

At one point in time (in fact during the time Paul wrote the Thessalonians) the caesar in power was Claudius who had implemented the *Pax Romana* in his reign between AD 41-54 which essentially said that all religions were to be tolerated and not persecuted; but once he died and Nero (who by the way was married to a Jew) took his place between AD 54-68, the *Pax Romana* was ignored so that Jews could begin hounding Christians from city to city, beating them with whips, putting them in chains in prison, and so on. However...

Toward the end of Nero's reign (ca. AD 66), he, instead of continuing to support the Jews in their quest to stamp out Christianity, turned against them due to all the seditious acts that were constantly having to be quelled by Rome; in this decision by Nero, the power that had been restraining the Jews from obliterating Christianity turned itself against the Jews thereby—ironically—fulfilling the releasing of the restraint. But how? By destroying those who were being restrained! Talk about irony! Anyway, movin' on...

Verse 8: Then will be revealed [Gk. *apocalypse*] the lawless one whom the Lord will consume by the breath of His mouth and destroy by the manifestation [not "brightness"] of His presence [not "coming"].

The word "apocalypse" pictures something being splayed open, and it's of course the precise opposite of the word "mystery" in verse 7.

By the Lord's return in judgment and choosing who were His true people—Christians—to the exclusion of national Israel resulting in her demise, He thus publicly and indisputably demonstrated or manifested for and to all who—in His eyes—sadly comprised the "child of damnation."

While on the one hand the child of damnation was manifested, Paul wrote in the previous chapter about the saints being glorified and admired, or, as Jesus said in Matthew 13:43, "the righteous were shining as the sun in the kingdom of their Father." What a contrast! And this contrast between Second Thessalonians 2:8 & 1:10 also begs us to see the comparison between 2:8 & 1:9: In 2:8 the lawless one is revealed, destroyed, and consumed by the Lord at His return, while in 1:9 those who didn't know God and thus didn't submit to the gospel of His Son were incinerated in the vengeance of His flaming fire, which is reminiscent of Hebrews 10:31 and 12:29 where Paul wrote of it being a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God for He is a consuming fire.

Let's end this study with a couple of other verses from Second Thessalonians.

In 1:6-7 Paul wrote that it's "a righteous thing with God to repay with tribulation those who trouble you, and to give you rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from Heaven with His mighty angels."

Corresponding to 2:2, later in 2:15 he said, "Stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught"; i.e., don't listen to those who would have you believe the Lord has already returned and didn't fulfill His promise to give you the rest of which we spoke.

In 2:16-17, 3:3, 3:5, and 3:16 he wrote of his desire that the Lord who loves them would comfort their troubled hearts, keep them from the evil one (who I believe to be the persecuting body of Jews who rejected Jesus as Messiah), direct them into the love of God and the patience of Christ, and give them peace always in every way. Why?

As he said to them in the previous letter, he wanted the God of peace to preserve blameless their whole spirit, soul, and body until the return of the Lord Jesus Christ (5:23).

{Tony E. Denton, July 2016; TEDenton64@hotmail.com}