



Unraveling the Mystery of the Lawless One (Part Two)

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Slain With the Breath of His Mouth

Next, Paul says that the lawless one will be slain with the breath of the Lord's mouth at the appearance of His coming (2 Thess. 2:9). Anyone familiar with the Old Testament (which Paul would have expected his readers to be) will recognize this as poetic language for divine judgment. For instance, Isaiah says, "But with righteousness He will judge the poor, and decide with fairness for the afflicted of the earth; And He will strike the earth with the rod of His mouth, And with the breath of His lips He will slay the wicked" (Isa. 11:4). Taken literally, this language is borderline cartoonish. Taken for what it's meant to be, it's brilliant Biblical imagery.

A good example, demonstrating that this type of language is symbolic and metaphorical, can be found in 2 Samuel 22. In context, David is offering praise on "the day that the Lord delivered him from the hand of all his enemies and from the hand of Saul" (2 Sam. 22:1). In conjunction with this deliverance, David describes the Lord as follows: "Smoke went up out of His nostrils, fire from His mouth devoured; coals were kindled by it. He bowed the heavens and came down, with thick darkness under His feet" (2 Sam. 22:9-10).

It's essential to understand that none of this literally happened, but God did in fact literally deliver David from the hand of his enemies. In the same way, the Lord would literally deal with the Zealots and all the apostate Jews who rejected the Messiah. In 2 Thessalonians 2:9, Paul is

using vivid language like that of the Old Testament to express this. The man of lawlessness wouldn't literally be slain by God's breath any more than Saul was literally slain by fire from God's mouth. Another example would be Isaiah 11:4, "And He will strike the earth with the rod of His mouth, and with the breath of His lips He will slay the wicked." This is simply standard judgment language that is quite powerful when we allow Paul's words to be what they were meant to be.

False Signs and Wonders

Verses 9-10 say that the "lawless" one will use false signs and wonders to deceive those who were perishing and did not receive the truth so as to be "saved." This ties in perfectly with Jesus' words in the Olivet Discourse. He speaks of "lawlessness" increasing and says that "the one who endures to the end" would "be saved" (Matt. 24:12-13). Then Jesus says, "therefore" (meaning: because of what I just told you), those in Judea were to "flee to the mountains" (Matt. 24:15) when they saw Jerusalem "surrounded by armies" (Lk. 21:20-21; Matt. 24:15-16). Jesus was adamant: those in the midst of the city needed to leave, and those outside the city needed to stay out (Lk. 21:21).

In stark contrast to this, the Zealots were rallying the people to stay and fight. In their insane delusion, they actually believed they could somehow defeat Rome. According to Josephus, there "was a great number of false prophets" who implored the people to "wait on deliverance from God" in order "to keep them from deserting" the city."^[2] These were the very "false prophets" whom Jesus said would "arise and mislead many" (Matt. 24:11).

According to Jesus, these false teachers would "perform signs and wonders, to lead astray, if possible, even the elect" (Mark 13:14–22). The situation is summed up well in a Ligonier Ministries' post: "Jesus warned that once the Romans invaded the city, many false teachers would implore them not to flee to the mountains. Instead, these preachers of error would try to deceive Christ's disciples, calling them to follow after other people who professed to be the Messiah."^[3] The Zealots portrayed themselves as the true liberators who would deliver them from Rome. They were wrong. Jesus was right. As history bears out, the city was decimated.

Josephus tells of a false prophet "who had made a public proclamation in the city...that God commanded them to get up upon the temple, and that there they should receive miraculous signs of their deliverance."^[4] That deliverance never came. The only ones who were delivered were the ones who heeded Jesus' words and fled to the mountains. Despite all their "signs and wonders," the Zealots could not withstand the Roman onslaught in the end.

Gary DeMar sums it up well, making the connection with Paul's words in 2 Thessalonians: "Eschatological expectation intensified as Jerusalem's war with Rome came to a head. Many believed that the Messiah would return to deliver them. False prophets took advantage of this spurious expectation and deceived many. God had sent them 'a deluding influence so that they might believe what is false in order that they all may be judged who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness' (2 Thess. 2:11–12). This passage parallels 1 Kings 22:19–22

where Ahab is enticed to go up and fall at Ramoth-Gilead. In like manner, first-century Israel was enticed to go up and fight against the Romans and fall at Jerusalem.”^[5]

A Deluding Influence

In stark contrast to this, the popular approach of our day completely removes Paul’s words from their historical context and catapults them into the far-distant future. For today’s pop-prophecy pundits, the “deluding influence” of 2 Thessalonian 2:11 has nothing to do with first-century Israel, the Romans, or the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70, and everything to do with the end of the world and modern technology.

Specifically, today’s prophecy speculators attempt to link Paul’s words, written in the first century, to twenty-first century artificial intelligence. For example, Paul Begley claims that “AI technology” is “becoming part of the biblical narrative” of “the last days”^[6] Charlie Bing of Grace Life Ministries,^[7] concurs: “AI has changed our world in the last few decades and it will have a huge impact on the future as we approach what Jesus called ‘the end.’”^[8]

Bing spends a considerable amount of time discussing the concept of the “metaverse,”^[9] a term coined by Neal Stephenson in his 1992 novel, *Snow Crash*. An updated version of the “metaverse” would be the concept of a “virtual reality,” popularized in the Matrix movies. “The fact that Facebook (Meta) and other tech giants are involved in developing and promoting the ‘Metaverse,’” says Bing, “may propel its acceptance by billions of ‘users’ around the world.”^[10]

For Bing, the “lawless one” (whom he equates with the Antichrist) will use this “metaverse” to lie to the world about the Rapture, deceiving people into believing that it never took place. He writes, “The lie the ‘lawless one’ will tell, I believe, is how millions of people living on earth disappeared in the ‘twinkling of an eye.’ If billions of people live in or are influenced by a virtual, augmented ‘Metaverse,’ an imaginary computerized world, believing the lie of how those people disappeared would seem easier than we might imagine.... What will happen is what God says in His Word. The ‘lawless one’ (Antichrist) will lie and the world will believe him.”^[11]

While this makes for an exciting story line on the big screen of our own day and age, one must ask himself/herself what possible relevance it would have had for the very people to whom Paul was writing in their day and age. Believers need to ditch the Matrix theology that undergirds this approach and take the red pill of biblical reality. This is a reality that recognizes the fact that Paul was writing to real people living almost two thousand years ago. As such, he was writing in real time about real events and circumstances that were pertinent to them and their current situation. The imaginative scenarios created by Bing and others would be meaningless and pointless to the Thessalonian believers receiving his letter so long ago.

Ironically, the modern-day sensationalist approach to Bible prophecy has become its own “deluding influence” that “hinders” the true meaning of the text from being “revealed.” This

approach acts as its own “restrainer,” which needs to be “removed” if we’re ever going to see the text for what it truly is.

The Text in Context

Taking the text in context, the picture we get is not one of the modern world, modern technology or a soon to come modern war. It is a picture of a world that was on the cusp of a very different war – a now ancient war (from our vantage point) that would change redemptive history forever.

Once the Romans leveled the temple during the Roman-Jewish War, it would become evident to all that salvation was not to be found in the types and shadows of the Old Covenant system. The temple that housed that system would be reduced to rubble, and Old Covenant Judaism would be nothing more than debris left in the ruins. When that happened, the claims of Christ would be validated for all to see (Matt. 24:2, 34). For that to happen, however, certain events had to unfold first.

In Paul’s second letter to the Thessalonians, he was writing to remedy the Thessalonians’ misguided notions regarding the sequence of these events. Careful attention to what he was telling the Thessalonians, in the context of their own time, will remedy many mistaken notions in our own time.

Concluding Remarks and Further Resources

Like so many other prophetic portions of Scripture, the mystery of the man of lawlessness remains a mystery for so many believers today. As such, these passages hold God’s people back from fulfilling their God-ordained purpose in this world. Most Christians today are waiting for certain events to transpire – events that in reality transpired thousands of years ago. Interpreting already-fulfilled prophecy as yet-unfulfilled continues to be the biggest stumbling block preventing us from actively making a difference in this world. Our passage here has been one of the more sizable of these stumbling blocks for too long now.

As one writer puts it, 2 Thessalonians 2 is “the weirdest piece of writing in all the epistles and has never been satisfactorily explained.”^[12] In reality, it has been adequately explained in several works. The reader is encouraged to access these materials for more specific details regarding the circumstances and personages that coincide with what Paul is writing about in 2 Thessalonians 2. While details will differ on some minor points here and there, the overarching theme of past fulfillment is common to all.

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Chapters 22-23 of Last Days Madness, by Gary DeMar. [\[13\]](#)

“II Thessalonians 2 and the Man of Lawlessness,” by Adam Maarschalk. [\[14\]](#)

“Preterist Paper 20: Man of Sin (theory),” and “Preterist Paper 31: Man of Sin part 2 (Theory),”
by Patricia Bailey. [\[15\]](#)

The Man of Sin of II Thessalonians 2, by Evangelist John L. Bray. [\[16\]](#)

“Abomination, Rebellion, and Lawlessness,” “Who Was the Man of Lawlessness?” and
“Outbreak of Rebellion – the Real History,” by Edward E. Stevens. [\[17\]](#)

The following sermons, by Pastor David B. Curtis, are especially helpful:

THE REBELLION AND MAN OF LAWLESSNESS [\[18\]](#)

THE RESTRAINER [\[19\]](#)

SATAN AND THE MAN OF LAWLESSNESS [\[20\]](#)

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[\[2\]](#) Josephus, Wars of the Jews, 6:5:2.

[\[3\]](#) <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/false-signs-and-wonders>

[\[4\]](#) Josephus, Wars of the Jews, 6:5:2.

[\[5\]](#) Gary DeMar, *Last Days Madness: Obsession of the Modern Church* (Powder Springs, GA: American Vision, 2019), p. 307.

[6] [Artificial Intelligence: Has the Bible warned us against the rise of AI? | Weird | News | Express.co.uk](#)

[7] <https://gracelife.org/aboutus.php>

[8] <https://gracelifethoughts.com/2022/04/28/artificial-intelligence-in-the-bible-part-four/>

[9] <https://gracelifethoughts.com/2022/08/04/artificial-intelligence-in-the-bible-part-seven/>

[10] Ibid.

[11] Ibid.

[12] William Neil, *St. Paul's Epistles to the Thessalonians* (London: Torch Bible Commentary, 1957), p. 132; Q: Doug Burleson, WHO IS THE MAN OF LAWLESSNESS? (2 THESS. 2:3), p. 1.

[13] <https://store.americanvision.org/products/last-days-madness? pos=1& sid=89f7f6c8a& ss=r>

[14] <https://adammaarschalk.com/2018/01/27/ii-thessalonians-2-and-the-man-of-lawlessness/>

[15] <https://preteristpapers.com/31-man-of-sin-part-2-theory/> <https://preteristpapers.com/20-man-of-sin-theory/>

[16] John L. Bray, *The Man of Sin of II Thessalonians 2* (Lakeland, FL: John L. Bray Ministries Inc., 1997).

[17] To request these publications in PDF form, simply send an email to preterist1@preterist.org

[18] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eRcURJXvi4s>

[19] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aQN68uy1wAc>

[20] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nXI1ddlUiVE>