

In the first epistle to the Thessalonians, teaching is provided regarding the return of our Lord Jesus Christ and the resurrection of the dead (I Thessalonians 4:13-18). God did not want them to be ignorant (verse 13) which indicates that they were lacking knowledge about this subject. In II Thessalonians, apparently false teaching rather than ignorance had become the problem. The subject was the timing of the return of Jesus the Christ.

The time of Christ's return is increasingly the concern, or at least in the conversation, of many people today. The subject has been discussed and taught countless times ever since he left. The current false teaching and prophecies about it are not new with our generation because, according to II Thessalonians, it was already a problem in the 1st century. From the context of the epistle, we can conclude that the believers were being led to believe that Christ was about to appear. To correct this error (and indeed it was error since this is the year 2003, and he still has not returned) Paul gives specific detailed information about the things that must happen before he returns.

II Thessalonians 2:1

Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him,

The word "coming" is the Greek word *parousia* which is the most common word used in the New Testament for the coming of Christ. *Parousia* was used in profane literature (non-biblical contemporary writing) as a technical expression for the arrival or the visit of the king or the emperor.

Verse 2

That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand.

"By spirit" is referring to those professing to be speaking by the spirit (I John 4:1-3). "By word" implies orally communicating, false teachers (I Timothy 4:1 and 2). "By letter as from us" — was purported to be from Paul, Silvanus, or Timothy and therefore was a forgery. Perhaps this is why he ends the epistle by saying, "The salutation of Paul with mine own hand, which is the token in every epistle: so I write" (II Thessalonians 3:17). The believers were shaken up by the wrong communication about Christ's return. I have observed a number of times over the years how people have been rattled greatly by false prophecy regarding his return. Do you remember all the commotion when the millennium changed? Many churches were convinced Christ was coming and made preparations such as storing food, water, etc. Some of these churches have since disbanded because of the disappointment of his not returning and because of doubting the integrity of the pastors who wrongly prophesied.

II Thessalonians 2:3

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;

Two events that must take place before Christ returns are clearly set forth. First, there shall be a "falling away." The Greek word for this term is *apostasia*; the English word is "apostasy." The Greek word is used only one other time in the New Testament, and that is in Acts 21:21. However, it appears about 40 times in the Septuagint (the Greek version

of the Old Testament). "Apostasy," according to these usages and the English dictionary, means a renunciation or rebellion of a religious faith. Apostasy has been occurring since the beginning. However, the definite article "the," which is not seen in the King James Version but is in most other versions, means the well-known apostasy. Jesus spoke of **the** apostasy which would take place before he returns in Matthew 24:9-12, 30.

The second event preceding the return of Christ is that of the man of sin being revealed. He is not someone who "just" sins, but is the personification of sin. He is the final embodiment of all the evil and rebellion against God which has taken place in the world since the days of Cain, the first rebel. "Perdition" means utter destruction. He will be the son of destruction which means his father (the primary influence of his life) will be destruction.

Verse 4

Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God.

Very specific information is given about what this man will do. Many throughout history have done similar things, but no one has done all that is stated that the man of sin will do. He will sit in the temple of God declaring himself to be God. The temple of God has always been located in Jerusalem, and many Old Testament prophecies indicate that two more temples will be built there. The first will be constructed before Christ returns and will be where the man of sin will take his seat. This temple will be destroyed. The second and final temple, the Messiah will build, and from there he will rule the world as King and Priest (Zechariah 6:13).

Verse 5

Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things?

Acts 17 has the record of Paul's time in Thessalonica, which was approximately three to four weeks in duration. Paul brought the Gospel of the Kingdom to them. In that very short time, he thought the information about the man of sin important enough to teach them about it. Much is written about these things in the Hebrew Scriptures to which Paul would have referred.

Verses 6 and 7

And now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time.
For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth *will let*, until he be taken out of the way.

The words "letteth" in verse 7 and "withholdeth" in verse 6 are translated from the same Greek word basically meaning

to hold back or detain. Something is holding back the man of sin from being revealed. The Thessalonians were apparently informed as to what or who was restricting this event from happening. Unfortunately, Paul did not write it down so that we can know. Commentators have many opinions, but I will spare you and simply say — "I do not know." What is known from these verses is that his time has not yet come and the mystery of iniquity had already begun in Paul's time. When that which is holding him back is taken out of the way, then that wicked one will be revealed.

Verse 8

And then shall that Wicked [one] be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming:

The man of sin, the son of destruction, the wicked one, will be destroyed with the brightness of our Lord Jesus Christ's coming. The word "coming" is again *parousia*, the arrival of a king. This man will have his influence upon the world immediately preceding the return of our Lord. Paul is making a simple statement of fact about this man without providing detailed information because his understanding (as well as ours) is founded upon the Hebrew scriptures which provide a voluminous amount of information on the subject. In the next issue of *Glad Tidings*, we will explore some of this material.

Verses 9-12

Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, 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.

The nature of his Kingdom is seen in verses 9 through 12. The word "coming" is again *parousia*, the arrival or visit of a king. The man of sin will rule as the king of Babylon who will have worldwide influence. This influence will begin in peace and will end in utter destruction (Isaiah 10-14; Daniel 7-11:32; Micah 5:4-7; Zechariah 5:5-11; Revelation 17 and 18). He will be empowered directly by Satan. His coming will be accompanied with "power, signs, and lying wonders." As the magicians in Egypt duplicated some of the miracles performed by Moses under evil influence, so will the man of sin.

In that day, those who do not have a love of the truth will believe his lie and forfeit salvation.

All these things must first happen before the return of Jesus Christ. Upon first acknowledging this and other related

information, one may be tempted to be frightened. However Paul immediately directs us to the right response.

II Thessalonians 2:13-17

But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth:

Whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the

obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle.

Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father, which hath loved us, and hath given *us* everlasting consolation and good hope through grace,

Comfort your hearts, and stablish you in every good word and work.