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A Study of II Thessalonians Chapter 2

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The second chapter of II Thessalonians deals with the awesome and terrible events which will occur on earth after the gathering together unto the Lord of the called-out, the *ekkllesia*, of the body of Christ.

II Thessalonians 2:1-4

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

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 [*enistetmi*, "is present" or "is here now"].

Let no man deceive you by any means: for *that day shall not come*, except there come a falling away [*he apostasia*, "the departure"] first, and that man of sin be revealed [*apokalupto*], the son of perdition [*apeleia*, "doom"];

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

It has long been taught, erroneously, that "the departure," *he apostasia*, of Verse 3 is "a falling away" of the church from right doctrine. If that were true, the man of sin, the son of doom – who will appear during the day of Christ¹ – would have been revealed long ago, after born-again believers, during the Apostle Paul's lifetime, turned away wholesale from the Word of God that Paul taught.²

"The departure," *he apostasia*, of Verse 3 has nothing to do with church doctrine. It has nothing to do with what mere men – children of God or not – believe, think or do. "The departure" has everything to do, rather, with what God Himself is going to set in motion. It has everything to do with *what Verse 1 just beseeched us by*, which is, "the coming [*parousia*] of our Lord Jesus Christ" and "our gathering together unto him."³

This departure, mentioned here in II Thessalonians Chapter 2, is described in detail I Thessalonians Chapter 4:

I Thessalonians 4:13-18

But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope.

For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him.

For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive *and* remain unto the coming [*parousia*] of the Lord shall not prevent [*phthano*, "precede"] them which are asleep.

For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first:

Then we which are alive *and* remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.

Wherefore comfort [*parakaleo*, “encourage”] one another with these words.

In II Thessalonians Chapter 2, these opening events of the *parousia* of the Lord Jesus Christ are called “our gathering together unto him” and “the departure.”⁴

What happened in Thessalonica was that, soon after receiving the epistle of I Thessalonians, error was introduced “by spirit,” “by word” – and someone even forged a letter and claimed that it was from Paul – saying that “the day of Christ is here now.” Thus the Thessalonians were in danger of becoming “shaken in mind” and “troubled,” in peril of losing the encouragement of the Word of God regarding the *parousia* of Christ.

In Verse 5 back in Chapter 2 of II Thessalonians, Paul reminded them:

Verse 5
Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told [*lego*, “laid out for”] you these things?

Paul had already laid out for the Thessalonians, in person, *that the day of Christ cannot begin until after the departure of the body of Christ*. But like all of us, especially when our adversary is working overtime to deceive us, the Thessalonians tended to forget things that they should have remembered. So Paul made the truth plain again – this time in writing, for our benefit now in addition to theirs then.

Verses 6-7
And now ye know [*oida*, “perceive,” “put together”] what withholdeth [*katecho*, “suppresses,” “holds back”; the same word as “hold” in Romans 1:18] that he [“that man of sin,” “the son of doom”] might be revealed [*apokalupto*] in his time.

For the mystery [*musterion*, “secret,” “hidden things”] of iniquity [*anomia*, “lawlessness”] doth already work: only he who now letteth [*katecho*, “suppresses,” “holds back”] will let, until he be taken out of the way.

Verse 6 informs us that there is something holding back, something suppressing, the man of sin from appearing before his time. Verse 7 informs us that there is someone holding back, someone suppressing, the lawlessness that this son of doom will bring – so much so that, even though his lawlessness is already at work

in the world, it has to remain hidden.⁵ But the verses don’t explicitly identify “...he who now holds back.” Verse 6 just says, “And now ye know...”

But like all of us, especially when our adversary is working overtime to deceive us, the Thessalonians tended to forget things that they should have remembered.

The Apostle Paul was aware of what would occur, just as soon as the Thessalonians established for themselves the truth about the day of Christ: that they would “know,” “perceive,” “put together” – from the Word of God he had taught them – who it is holding back the man of sin and his lawlessness while the body of Christ remains on earth.

Many of us today – from the Word of God we have been taught – are a position to put together the same things:

Ephesians 1:18-23

The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints,
And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power,
Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set *him* at his own right hand in the heavenly *places*,

Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come:

And hath put all *things* under his feet, and gave him *to be* the head over all *things* to the church [*ekklesia*],

Which is his [Christ's] body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.

The *ekklesia*, made up of the called-out of God, is the body of Christ. Christ is the head and every believer is a member in particular. So as long as the members of his body are present on earth, Christ himself is present by way of the spirit of God – the *Christ in you* of Romans 8:10 and Colossians 1:27 – to hold back and suppress the son of doom.

When the children of light depart ... there will be no one left on earth to hold back the man of sin and the lawlessness he will bring.

Ephesians 5:8-14

For ye were sometimes darkness, but now *are* ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light:

(For the fruit of the Spirit [the text reads “the fruit of the light”] *is* in all goodness and righteousness and truth;)

Proving what is acceptable unto the Lord.

And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove *them*.

For it is a shame even to speak of those things which are done of them in secret.

But all things that are reprov'd are made manifest by the light: for whatsoever doth make manifest is light.

Wherefore he saith, Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light.

When the children of light depart, who walked in the light of Christ and who reprov'd the works of darkness, there will be no one left on earth to hold back the man of sin and the law-

lessness he will bring. But until that departure, the man of sin will remain suppressed, being revealed only after the body of Christ been gathered together to meet the Lord in the air.

Back in II Thessalonians 2:

Verses 8-10

And then [but not until then⁶] shall that Wicked be revealed [*apokalupto*], whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming [*parousia*]:

Even him, whose coming [*parousia*] is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders,

And with all [*en pase*, “in every”] deceivableness [*apate*] of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth

[*tes aletheias*], that they might be saved.

The Greek word for “deceivableness” in Verse 10, *apate*, is used seven times in God's Word. In Matthew 13:22 and Mark 4:9 it is “the deceivableness of riches.” In Ephesians 4:22 it is, from the Greek, “the desires of deceivableness.” In Colossians 2:8 it is “vain deceit.” In Hebrews 3:13 it is the “deceivableness of sin.” And in II Peter 2:13 it is “sporting themselves with their own deceivings while they feast with you.”

Verse 10 of II Thessalonians 2 says that the coming of “that Wicked” will be IN EVERY deceivableness of unrighteousness. In other words, in every genus and species of deceivableness that exists. And all of that deceivableness – during the time period after gathering together of the *ekklesia* of the body of Christ to heaven – is going to be in those left behind on earth “who received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved.”

Verses 11-12

And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie [*te pseudei*, "the lie"]:

That they all might be damned who believed not the truth [*te aletheia*], but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

When Verse 11 says, "God shall send them strong delusion," God's Word is using an Old Testament-style figure of speech. It is called the Idiom of Permission, and shows God actively causing what, literally speaking, He only permits or allows. The true God, who is light and who is love, does not send delusion. But if people decide that they want to be deluded, He allows it. Although the Idiom of Permission occurs hundreds of times in the Old Testament, this is one of the few places in the Church Epistles where it is used.⁷

When the events of II Thessalonians 2 come to pass, the *oikonomia* of the mystery of Ephesians 3:9, in which we are living now, will be over. Whatever benefits the unbelievers enjoy today, riding the coattails of God's blessings through Christ Jesus to the body of Christ, will have vanished into the air. The *oikonomia* of the grace of God of Ephesians 3:2 will have ended forever.

In Verse 11 the words translated "a lie," *te pseudei*, ought to be translated "the lie," having the Greek article just like *tes aletheias* and *te aletheia*, translated "the truth" in both Verses 10 and 12 (with which "the lie" is supposed to be set in contrast). Why the KJV translators give it as "a lie" in Verse 11, but "the truth" in Verses 10 and 12 – or for that matter, why Berry translates the text "what [is] false" in Verse 11, but "the truth" in Verses 10 and 12⁸ – that's a question they'd have to answer.

But once "the lie" is translated correctly, the question becomes, "What lie?" Since the answer is not in the verse, the next place to look is in the context. And tracing back to Verses 3 and 4:

II Thessalonians 2:3-4 [with corrections]

Let no man deceive you by any means: for *that day shall not come*, except there come the departure first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of doom;

Who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called "God," or that is venerated; so that he as God sits in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.

There it is, in the context. That's THE LIE – the biggest whopper of all history. That's what, in every deceivableness of unrighteousness, the world is going to believe.

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world is going to believe. That this man – who is actually "the man of sin," "the son of doom," and "that wicked" whose coming is "after the working of Satan" – is God.

This man isn't going to show himself to be merely one of the many gods or demigods from among the pantheon of the pagans, which oriental and occidental emperors and despots have claimed to be from time immemorial. He's not going to claim what some Hollywood actors and others claim today, who adhere to various quasi-Christian and non-Christian sects; that he is merely "a god." No.

After the departure of the body of Christ, this man is going to accept, with relish, the offer that Jesus Christ refused in Matthew 4:8-10 and Luke 4:5-8.⁹ He is going to oppose and exalt himself above everything that is called "God" or that is venerated among men. And the final straw, he is going to sit in the temple of God and claim to be the One True God. And the world is going to believe him.

By this point, suffice to say, the hidden things of lawlessness that Verse 7 talks about will no longer be hidden. The lawlessness will be out in the open, plainly in view. No wonder Verse 8 says, "...whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming." No wonder Verse 12 says, "That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness."

But how encouraging the Word of God in Verses 13-14 is for us, who are the called-out, the *ekklesia*, of God during this *oikonomia* of the grace of God, this *oikonomia* of the mystery, when God has made us members of the body of Christ:

Verses 13-14

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.

Thank God for His love, mercy and grace, to be counted among the untold millions of the beloved of our Lord Jesus Christ, who have not only been rescued from the wrath to come, but have been called to obtain his glory.

Verses 15-17

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 [*paraklesis*, "encouragement"] and good hope through grace,

Comfort [*parakaleo*, "encourage"] your hearts, and stablish you in every good word and work.

1. "The day of Christ," in II Thessalonians 2:2 and Philippians 1:10 and 2:16, is the same time period as "the day of Jesus Christ" in Philippians 1:6, and as "the day of the Lord Jesus" in I Corinthians 5:5 and II Corinthians 1:14. It is called "the day of the Lord" in I Thessalonians 5:2 and II Peter 3:10, and "the day of God" in II Peter 3:12. In Revelation 1:10 John was "in the spirit on the Lord's day." (Hence Revelation is not addressed to the *ekklesia* today; it is written to the *ekklesia* which after "the departure" will believe; trying to read "church history" or "current events" into the book is a fool's errand.) In Revelation 16:14 it is called "the day of God Almighty." It is called "the day of *Jehovah* of hosts" in Isaiah 2:12 (see the *Companion Bible* note on this verse), and "the day of *Jehovah*" in Isaiah 13:6,9, Ezekiel 13:5, 30:3, Joel 1:15, 2:1,11,31, 3:14, Amos 5:18 (twice), 20, Obadiah 1:15, Zephaniah 1:7,14, Zechariah 14:1, and Malachi 4:5. And in Jeremiah 46:10 it is called "the day of *Adonai Jehovah*."

Expositors of Scripture who fancy the day of Christ to be something they'd like to suffer through down here – and have the rest of the

church endure it with them – deceive themselves. They ought to pay attention to Amos:

Amos 5:18

Woe unto you that desire the day of the Lord [*Jehovah*]: to what end is it for you? the day of the Lord [*Jehovah*] is darkness, and not light.

Jesus Christ taught regarding that day:

Matthew 24:21-22

For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be.

And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened.

2. Check II Timothy 1:15; see also Victor Paul Wierwille, *God's Magnified Word*, pp. 171-174.

3. See Wierwille, *Power for Abundant Living*, Part III "How the Bible Interprets Itself," Chapter 13, "In Its Context."

Also note that the noun *apostasia* occurs only one other place in the Greek New Testament. It is used, without the article, in Acts 21:21, which should be translated, "...that you [Paul] teach a departure [*apostasia*] from Moses..." This word *apostasia* is one of two words used in the Greek New Testament – the other being *apostasion* – that come from an earlier Greek word, *apostasis* (check *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon*, q.v. **apostasia**).

Apostasis is made up of the prefix *apo*, meaning "away from," and the root *stasis*, meaning "a standing, station, state." When the New Testament was written, *apostasion* had come to mean "divorce" (see Matthew 5:31, 19:7, Mark 10:4).

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When it comes to *apostasia* (which the English word "apostasy" comes from), notwithstanding Satan's degradation of the word (designed expressly to obscure its meaning in II Thessalonians 2:3), it did not become a legalistic ecclesiastical term for "departure from right doctrine" until much later.

When II Thessalonians was written, *apostasia* still meant simply "a departure" or "a forsaking" (see Wierwille, *Are the Dead Alive Now?*, 1976, p. 38, footnote). At "the departure" of Verse 3, we are going to forsake the standing, station and state of the mortality and corruption of this life by receiving a new body from Christ (see I Corinthians 15:35-58; Philippians 3:20-21). We of the *ekklesia* of the body of Christ, whether living or dead, are going to depart, forsaking this world for heaven.

4. For a detailed study on this and the entire subject of Christ's coming, *parousia*, including its two phases when Christ comes first *for* and then *with* the Church, see Wierwille, *Are the Dead Alive Now?*, especially Chapter 2, "When Shall the Dead be Made Alive?"

5. Today is therefore a day of a secret or hidden lawlessness. After our gathering together unto our Lord Jesus Christ, it will become a day of open lawlessness.

6. Preachers who hold forth on radio and TV, as well as from pulpits all over the country, writing books and holding seminars, tours, rallies and conventions, along with the occasional in-home get-together, on the subject of what they call "prophecy;" where they allege that we are living in the "end times" by pointing to current events – such as the establishment of the modern country called "Israel" – as "signs" that "the antichrist" is about to arise; they couldn't be more wrong. They are today's versions of the false teachers in Thessalonica who, way back in the first century, claimed that "the day of Christ is here now." There is only one "sign" given to the church in the entire Bible, showing what will

precede the appearing of the man of sin, and that is "the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" and "our gathering together unto him." Christ's coming could commence within the next nanosecond, or it may not begin for another 1000 years.

7 The others I've located are in Romans 11:1-2, I Corinthians 3:17 and 4:9.

8. *The Interlinear Greek-English New Testament*, by George Richter Berry, 1979, p. 537, q.v. II Thessalonians 2:10-12.

9. Matthew 4:8-10

Again, the devil taketh him [Jesus Christ] up into an exceeding high mountain, and showeth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them;

And saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me.

Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.

Luke 4:5-8

And the devil, taking him [Jesus Christ] up into an high mountain, showed unto him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time.

And the devil said unto him, All this power will I give thee, and the glory of them: for that is delivered unto me; and to whomsoever I will I give it.

If thou therefore wilt worship me, all shall be thine.

And Jesus answered and said unto him, Get thee behind me, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.

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