

## 2 Thessalonians 2:6-12

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*For now, something holds the antichrist back from rising to power. This superior power that restrains him will eventually be removed from the earth and the antichrist will take over the world. But God will slay him and judge the people who did not believe in Jesus.*

Paul points to some unnamed authority that *restrains* or prevents the antichrist from rising to power:

*And you know what restrains him now, so that in his time he will be revealed.* That Paul says *you know what restrains* the antichrist implies that the answer is obvious. This infers that it is the Holy Spirit that *restrains*. It seems that at a point in human history, God's Spirit will be withdrawn from engaging in the world, and the world will then fill with *lawlessness*. Paul says that *the mystery of lawlessness is already at work* in the world. But the *mystery of lawlessness* is currently being limited in its allowed influence. However, *he who now restrains will do so until he is taken out of the way*. God's restraining influence will inhibit this spirit of *lawlessness* until God's timing decrees that the restraining influence will be *taken out of the way*. At that point, the world will fill with *lawlessness*.

The Bible's notion of *lawlessness* refers to God's ethical standards. It seems that in these times of *lawlessness* there will be pervasive, dictatorial laws throughout the world. An example is that there will be total control by the antichrist's government over who is allowed to buy or sell anything. Anyone not having an approved "mark" will not be allowed to either buy or sell (Revelation 13:16-17). This "mark" will likely involve submission to this antichrist as a deity, as this antichrist, beast, "man of lawlessness" will declare himself to be divine (2 Thessalonians 2:4). So the term *lawlessness* does not mean an absence of laws; quite the opposite. It means God's ethical standard of "love God and love others as you love yourself" is completely omitted, and in its place is the standard of "the strong exploit the weak."

This is basically the same contrast God elevated when He gave the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai. He contracted with Israel to follow His standard of "love God and love others" and promised them great blessing and flourishing if they would do so. Practically speaking, it is apparent that any culture that loves, serves, tells the truth to, and cares for one another will thrive. That was not the culture of the pagan nations surrounding Israel (see commentary on Leviticus 18 to review the exploitative practices that were common in Egypt and Canaan.).

The inference that the Holy Spirit is removed from the earth could indicate that when believers are caught up in the air to be with Jesus, the Holy Spirit's restraining influence will cease, since the "salt and light" function of faithful believers has been removed. Perhaps that removal is what opens the way for lawlessness to dominate the earth. It could also be that only the believers who are actively opposing lawlessness will be caught up; they might be the "overcomers" that Jesus will greatly reward (Revelation 2:26). That would give any unfaithful believers another chance to become faithful, to be overcomers, during the "great tribulation."

Such a second chance would be a blessing, when viewed from the perspective that this life is a one-time opportunity to come to know God, and one another, by faith. Knowing God by faith is apparently something the angels long to learn, but are limited to learning through watching (Ephesians 3:10). Squandering our opportunity to know by faith is tragic. Paul seems to indicate this type of perspective when he encourages his children in the faith to embrace persecution, and consider themselves blessed for being persecuted.

It seems Paul taught that being caught up in the air with Jesus was imminent and would happen without warning (1 Thessalonians 4:17). However, Jesus' return to earth required a sign (2 Thessalonians 2:3). So the best model seems to be that being "caught up in the air" will happen prior to Jesus' return to earth and the Great Tribulation. Otherwise Jesus couldn't meet believers in the air until the abomination of desolation transpired, in which case that event would not be able to take place at any time. Accordingly, it seems the best explanation is to consider these two events as separate.

Daniel's 70<sup>th</sup> week is often called the "tribulation," although Jesus refers to the period after the "abomination of desolation" as the "great tribulation" in Matthew 24:15;21. The term "great tribulation" refers to the last 3 ½ of the 7 years of Daniel's 70<sup>th</sup> week of years (Matthew 24:21). It is possible that the first 3 ½ years of Daniel's 70<sup>th</sup> week of years will be quite prosperous, and will not feel like a tribulation.

Once the restraining Spirit is removed from protecting the earth, *Then that lawless one will be revealed*. This is the beast, the antichrist who will elevate himself above God, and will be an instrument of Satan. It is this beast *whom the Lord will slay with the breath of His mouth and bring to an end by the appearance of His coming*. The *lawless one* is what Scripture calls the antichrist and the beast (1 John 2:18, Revelation 13:13). This beast is depicted in Revelation as being cast directly into the lake of fire (Revelation 19:20). A beast in Daniel 7, which might be the same person, is destroyed with a flame of fire that comes from God's throne (Daniel 7:9-11).

It is this *lawless one*, the beast and antichrist, *that is, the one whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders*. Revelation tells us that this beast and his false prophet cause fire to come down from heaven, that the false prophet causes a fatal wound of the beast to be healed, and that they make an image of the beast that has "breath" and will destroy anyone who refuses to bow and worship it (Revelation 13:11-15).

All of this *deception of wickedness* will be *for those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved*. Those who follow the beast because they want to live will *perish*. And those who lose their lives for refusing to worship the beast will *be saved*.

*For this reason God will send upon them a deluding influence so that they will believe what is false, in order that they all may be judged who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness*. God will cause those who chose wickedness to have a *deluding influence* so that they will continue to choose wickedness even to the point of their own destruction. This follows a similar pattern to the way God dealt with Pharaoh, who hardened his heart against God when God sent plagues upon Egypt. After Pharaoh had hardened his heart a number of times, God

began to harden his heart even more, so that Pharaoh would eventually choose the destruction of his army and the power of his kingdom (Exodus 8:15,19,32; 9:7,34,10:1.)

The rejection of Jesus by unbelievers on the earth will be so complete that they will actually recognize that Jesus is judging the earth, and instead of repenting, they will seek to hide from Jesus (Revelation 6:16-17).

So what does this mean for us? The Apostle Peter also wrote about the attitude believers should have regarding the end times. Some people were apparently casting doubt that the end would ever come, since it had yet to. Thus Peter writes in his second epistle:

“...remember the words spoken beforehand by the holy prophet...”  
(2 Peter 3:2)

Here Peter is referencing the Old Testament, including Daniel’s prophecies about the end times. Peter continues:

“But do not let this one fact escape your notice, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day. The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.”  
(2 Peter 3:1-8-9)

The Thessalonians thought Jesus was coming back right away, in their lifetime, and that was 2000 years ago. God’s delay has blessed believers since them, that we were able to be born and come to faith in Jesus. This is what Peter spoke of, that God has delayed His return in order to bless more people. He does not desire that any should perish. Peter continues:

“...the earth was formed out of water and by water, through which the world at that time was destroyed, being flooded with water. But by His word the present heavens and earth are being reserved for fire, kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.”  
(2 Peter 3:5-7)

“But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells.”  
(2 Peter 3:13)

God destroyed the earth once by flooding it, and the people then didn’t believe it would happen; it will be destroyed again, and remade out of fire.

With all of this in mind, Peter’s application is the same as Paul’s for the Thessalonians, that God’s plan for us is that we become sanctified,

“...what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God...Therefore, beloved, since you look for these things, be diligent to

be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless...”  
(2 Peter 3:11,14)

Perhaps the more we are sanctified, the sooner Jesus will return. Regardless, Peter’s admonition is the same as Paul’s, which is simply: be sanctified (1 Thessalonians 4:3).

Jesus is coming back. When He does, the world will be remade. If we are found faithful, overcoming the world, sanctified through obedience, diligent, serving rather than exploiting, judging ourselves rather than others, we will fulfill God’s design for us and be greatly rewarded. If we are found unfaithful, we will lose part of our inheritance (2 John 1:8). We won’t lose God, for He is always our inheritance (Romans 8:17a). But we will not reign in the kingdom of Jesus (Romans 8:17b).

### **Biblical Text**

**<sup>6</sup> And you know what restrains him now, so that in his time he will be revealed. <sup>7</sup> For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only he who now restrains will do so until he is taken out of the way. <sup>8</sup> Then that lawless one will be revealed whom the Lord will slay with the breath of His mouth and bring to an end by the appearance of His coming; <sup>9</sup> that is, the one whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders, <sup>10</sup> and with all the deception of wickedness for those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved. <sup>11</sup> For this reason God will send upon them a deluding influence so that they will believe what is false, <sup>12</sup> in order that they all may be judged who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness.**