

BIBLE COMPANION COMMENTARY: 2 THESSALONIANS

2 THESSALONIANS

PREFACE

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Are there errors of thought and intellectual process in these volumes? Surely there are. Let me know about them. But don't fail to see the wood for the trees. Never let the wonder of the simple, basic Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and His Kingdom become obscured by all the angst over correctly interpreting this or that Bible verse. Believe it, respond to it, be baptized into Him, and let the word become flesh in you as it was so supremely in Him.

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Duncan Heaster

2 THESSALONIANS CHAPTER 1

1:1 *Paul and Silvanus and Timothy, to the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ-* As the three of them were still together, we can assume that the second letter was written soon after the first. The emphasis upon "God" rather than the Lord Jesus continues, appropriate to the way they had converted to the one true God after being pagans (1 Thess. 1:9).

1:2 *Grace to you and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ-* There was real meaning and intention behind these greetings and farewells. Grace, *charis*, often refers to the gift of the Spirit, and peace, Biblically, refers to peace with God through forgiveness. And Paul believed that by his prayers and wish, these things could be true for the readership.

1:3 *Brothers, we are obligated to thank God always for you, as is appropriate, because your faith grows exceedingly, and the love of every one of you all abounds toward each other-* As in 1 Thess. 1:2,3, Paul talked to God about the Thessalonians, thanking God for their spirituality. We need to have this feature in our prayer life too. And yet in chapter 3 it is clear that all was not well with the community; those sponging off others were hardly abounding in their love toward the others. But Paul's positivism, and faith in their status in Christ and His grace, was such that he genuinely held this view of them. See on 1 Thess. 4:4.

1:4 *So that we ourselves boast of you among the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that you endure-* We recall Paul's boasting of the Corinthians' promised generosity to his Jerusalem Poor Fund. Despite all the betrayals and disappointments of his life, Paul's positivism about his converts- to God, to them and to others- is a real inspiration. The opposition to Paul during his brief visit had obviously continued, but those converts- who had had only three weeks of Paul's time and probably only a few real contact hours with him- were still enduring. This is the abiding power of true ideas, of the Gospel, and of the empowerment of the Holy Spirit to those who believe it.

1:5 *These are proof that God's judgment is righteous, and you are enduring them to the end you may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you also suffer-* That "we must through much tribulation enter the Kingdom" was Paul's standard teaching (Acts 14:22). We are only accounted worthy of the Kingdom by the grace of God's plan of imputing righteousness to us. And yet because He counts us worthy, He works in our lives to make us in reality what we are by the status He has granted us. Romans 8 caps the previous teaching about imputed righteousness by teaching about the work of the Spirit in our hearts and the purpose of suffering- because these are the means by which we are brought in practice to that status of rightness with God which has been counted to us. And in 1:11 Paul uses the same word in praying that God would count them worthy of the calling he has given them; and this again is the language of Romans 8, where the predestined calling of God is cited as the great example of salvation by grace. This prayer for them to be 'counted worthy' as therefore uttered in full awareness that the process would require suffering on their part, which they had to endure. When we pray for another to be saved, to be in God's Kingdom, we are in fact praying that they shall pass through and endure "much tribulation". This is why our response to suffering now is a foretaste of judgment. See on 1 Pet. 3:16.

1:6 *It is a righteous thing with God to repay with tribulation those who afflict you-* The emphasis is that God and not us will repay evil with evil. Paul had had to teach them that before; see on 1 Thess. 5:15. God's repayment of evil is just / righteous; whereas any human attempt to do so is unjust, because we fail to understand the complete picture which we are attempting to judge; and we too are sinners, in essence having committed whatever we would seek to condemn others for having done. "Afflict" is literally 'to narrow', and the same word is used of how only the narrow way shall lead to eternal life (Mt. 7:14). The persecution they endured was a narrowing of their way- that they might enter the Kingdom.

1:7- see on Mt. 24:28.

And to give relief to those who are afflicted (and to us too), when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with the angels of his power in flaming fire- Paul saw the day of judgment as an "assurance", a comfort, a relief longed for, rather than an inevitable and dreaded event on the horizon of our existence (2 Thess. 1:6-10; Acts 17:31). Job and David speak of it likewise. Paul envisaged the persecution of the Thessalonians as continuing right up until the moment the Lord Jesus returned from Heaven. He believed that the latter day tribulation had begun, at the hands of the Jews and Romans who were doing the persecuting; although he believed that the antichrist had still to be revealed (chapter 2) and so the time of tribulation would continue for some time yet. And so often, Paul argues as if he and his readership were living in the last generation before the Lord would return; see on 2 Cor. 5:4. This is not to say he got it all wrong. The Lord's coming was indeed scheduled for some time in the first century, as the Olivet prophecy makes clear. But Bible prophecy is mostly conditional; preconditions must be met. And they weren't; there was not the repentance of enough Jews as required, the Gospel was not taken to the Gentiles as it should have been, the church was not spiritually fruitful enough to be harvested, and there was a falling away from the Faith. And so the Lord's return was delayed.

Note that the Lord Jesus will return to earth with His Angels, and this means that throughout eternity there will be Angels with us on the earth. This is something to take into account in our visions of the Kingdom age. It appears that they are more prominent in the setting up of the Kingdom, and that we will take over their role later on. They are the "reapers" sent forth to gather the saints, and that they will be responsible for punishing the nations (2 Thess. 1:7,8). Initially, the Angels and the Lord Jesus will be physically together in the judgement of the world- the unrepentant worshippers of the beast "shall be tormented... in the presence of the holy Angels and in the presence of the Lamb" (Rev. 14:10). Presumably the individual beast worshippers will be brought together to one locality for this judgement- the literal location of Gehenna, where the unworthy saints will be punished? This gathering process will be by the Angels, as was that of the saints and of the nations to Armageddon (Rev. 16:16).

1:8 *Rendering vengeance to them that do not acknowledge God and to them that do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus*- Those persecuting the Thessalonians were the Jews who had persuaded the Roman authorities to persecute the Christians (Acts 17). These Jews are described as not acknowledging God- whereas their much vaunted belief in God would make that seem a strange thing to say. But claiming belief in God is not very significant; He must be acknowledged, and that acknowledgment is through obeying the Gospel of His Son, who is the only way to the Father. To refuse to obey Jesus as Lord is effectively atheism; for such a person has not come to the Father. It is the Lord Jesus, and not apologetics, which leads to faith in God. We come to God through faith in Jesus, rather than coming to Jesus through faith in God. Some may disagree, but this is the Biblical position; and they would need to ask whether such 'faith in God' is legitimate and actual, rather than a mere intellectual statement. Acknowledging God and obeying the Gospel is language which tends to suggest that those in view were responsible to judgment- they had heard the Gospel but refused to obey it. The reference would then be to the synagogue Jews in Thessalonica who had heard Paul preaching for three Sabbath days, and rejected the message. The same Greek phrase is used about the Jews not obeying the Gospel (Rom. 10:16). Those Jews who happened to be at synagogue service those three weeks had heard the Gospel- and were therefore responsible to judgment. That might seem rather tough, seeing that in later life they may well have forgotten all about that unusual itinerant preacher who passed through and grabbed a bit of a following from amongst the Gentiles. But out of the billions who have lived on this planet never having heard the Gospel, those men were chosen to hear- and they rejected it. And so they are responsible to judgment. For them to receive the promised judgment of this passage, they will have to be resurrected and face the Lord whom they rejected.

2 Thess. 1:7-9 speaks as if the judgment of the wicked and the coming of Christ from Heaven are simultaneous. If we could break this split second into real time, there would be the process of mortal emergence from the grave, judgment involving a period of time, then the righteous being grouped at Christ's right hand side, and then they would all be immortalised together. "Come... inherit the Kingdom" is spoken to the whole group of sheep; we will be immortalised together, at the same time. If we are all judged individually in real time, this is impossible. Some would be immortalised months or years after others. This collapsing of time at the Lord's return would explain why "the resurrection" is sometimes used as a description of the whole process of resurrection, judgment and immortality (even in the OT- Ps. 1:5 LXX; 24:3).

1:9- see on Rev. 14:10.

They shall suffer punishment, even eternal destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might- See on :8. The punishment is destruction; it is eternal in that it

has eternal consequence. No second chance, no way to have another crack at the eternal future which they have missed. "From the presence of the Lord" envisages them appearing before His judgment seat and then going out from His presence- "these shall go away into..." destruction (Mt. 25:46). Why the reference to them having to go away from "the glory of his might"? The "might" refers to His might which is given to us by the Spirit to transform us and lead us on the journey to transformation now and final salvation at the last day. The same word is used of this might in Eph. 1:19; 6:10; 1 Pet. 4:11. Those who are rejected will have hidden their talent / gift, quenched the Spirit, grieved the Holy Spirit... and now they walk away from it all to eternal non-existence. We really must use it or lose it.

1:10 *When he shall come to be glorified in his saints*- We can live the Kingdom life now, in that this word is only used again in :12, where Paul wishes them to glorify the Lord now.

And to be marvelled at in all them that have believed in that day (because our testimony to you was believed)- Our amazement and incomprehension at the judgment is brought out here, using a Greek word meaning 'to marvel at in incomprehension'. This praise will also be on account of our being "presented faultless" before the judgment (Jude 24). We will feel the wonder of it all. The Gospels often record the 'marvelling' of people at the Lord Jesus. We are to do that in this life, so that we shall do so at the day of His coming too; see on :12. And all this is because Paul's preaching to them was believed; and as explained on 1 Thess. 1:1, this testimony to them likely lasted only a few hours. This is the power of ideas, of the Gospel- that what can be explained and believed in a few hours now can lead to life eternal at the last day.

1:11- see on 1 Thess. 1:3.

To which end we also pray always for you, that our God may count you worthy of your calling- See on :5. Paul had the end in view for them, which was acceptance by the Lord at the last day; so that their calling to the Kingdom would come true in practice.

And fulfil every desire of goodness and work of faith, with power- Paul assumed they had such spiritual ambition, desiring good news, and wanted to see it realized. Spiritual ambition means that we will desire to do some things which we can't physically fulfil- and yet they will be counted to us and we will be empowered to do them. Abraham is spoken of as having offered up Isaac- his intention was counted as the act. And Prov. 19:22 RV appropriately comments: "The desire of a man is the measure of his kindness". It is all accepted according to what a man has, not what he has not. And yet the filling ["fulfil"] with "power" speaks of the power of the Spirit to empower us to actually do the goodness which we in faith would like to achieve. It is God's "desire" that we should be saved (Eph. 1:5,9 s.w.). If this is also our desire, then we will be empowered towards it. We are strengthened with "power" (s.w.) "by his Spirit in the inner man" (Eph. 3:16), "the power (s.w.) that works within us" (Eph. 3:20). If we desire goodness and believe God will empower us, then He will, through the gift of the Spirit. And that is in view too in the next verse (see note there). We know that it is God's will for us to be spiritual and to be saved; and so in praying for things relating to that, we are praying according to His will and will be thus empowered.

1:12 *To the end that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you and you in him, according to the grace of our God, and the Lord Jesus Christ*- The grace of God often refers to His *charis* or gift of the Spirit. The same Spirit is at work now transforming our hearts as will transform our bodies at the last day (Rom. 8:11). This is why we right now are to glorify the Lord Jesus, just as we will at His return (see on :10).

2 THESSALONIANS CHAPTER 2

2:1 Now brothers, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to him, we urge you- The false teaching that the Lord had already come (:2) obviated the need to be gathered together to Him, a phrase clearly taken from the Lord's teaching about our gathering to judgment. This is the problem with preterism and with any idea that the Lord has already come. We would then be effectively living with no accountability to a future judgment. And that false teaching would then tend to be reflected in lifestyle.

2:2 Not to be quickly shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter appearing to be from us, as though the day of Christ had come- The largely illiterate community converted by Paul after only a matter of hours of contact time (see on 1 Thess. 1:1) was going to be vulnerable to the attacks of the Jewish satan / adversary to Paul's churches; there was an organized opposition to his work. In Thessalonica, the Gentile converts had originally been synagogue attendees, and they mobilized the local Roman authorities against the fledgling church. There were false prophets who claimed to be speaking by the Spirit, and false letters claiming to be from Paul. This all indicates Judaist activity; they had elsewhere used the tactic of forging letters in Paul's name (Gal. 6:11; Heb. 13:22; 1 Cor. 16:2; 2 Cor. 3:1). Thus Paul concludes this second letter to the Thessalonians with "the salutation of me Paul with mine own hand which is the token in every epistle, so I write" (2 Thess. 3:17). Their reasoning was that the day of Christ, i.e. the Kingdom, was already present. This was a basically Jewish argument – hence the Judaist cancer at Ephesus had led to Hymenaeus and Philetus "saying that the resurrection (and therefore the Lord's return) is passed already; and overthrown the faith of some" (2 Tim. 2:18). We see similarities with modern day preterism, which likewise posits that the Kingdom and return of Christ has already come.

The two 'problems' addressed in 2 Thessalonians are this idea that the Lord Jesus had already come; and the problem of refusing to work and expecting material support, which is addressed in chapter 3. The two problems are related. The refusal to work was associated with a wrong idea that they were somehow already in the Kingdom. I will suggest on 2 Thess. 3:8 that there were some who liked to believe that the curse on man in Gen. 3 had been lifted for some, and therefore they were free from the need to work, and they were effectively saying that the day of the Kingdom had already come (:2). This is in essence similar to the way this world reasons that the effects of the curse can likewise be ignored, through technology, early retirement, labour saving devices, medical science etc. They ignore the stark reality that death itself cannot be removed. But accepting the ties that bind, understanding they are but temporary, empowers us to live a life free of frustration with our humanity and that of others.

2:3 Let no one beguile you in any way- Paul read the prophecy of deceivers arising in the last days as referring to deceivers arising within the ecclesia, i.e. people who were already baptized, consciously deceiving the majority of the ecclesia. He repeats this conviction at least three times (Mt. 24:4 = Eph. 5:6; Col. 2:8; 2 Thess. 2:3). The Olivet prophecy had incipient, possible fulfilment in the first century; and a major fulfilment is ahead in our last days. Paul's allusion to it suggests the "man of sin" prophecy is to be read likewise.

There are some connections between Mt. 24 and 2 Thess. 2 which show that the "man of sin" has specific reference to the last days, as Mt. 24 does:

Matthew 24
Lawlessness
will abound (v.12)
Men saying
“Lo, here is Christ”
(v.23)
“Believe it not”
(v.23)
“For there shall
arise false Christs,
and false prophets,
and shall shew great
signs and wonders”
(v.24).

“Insomuch that,
if it were possible,
they shall deceive
the very elect”
(v.24); implying the
non-elect *will* be
deceived.

“Behold, I have
told you before”
(v.25), as Christ
prophesied His
sufferings.

“As the
lightning comes out
of the east, and
shines even unto the
west; so shall also
the coming of the
Son of man be”
(v.27)

“The Son of
man coming in the
clouds of Heaven
(Angels) with
power and great
glory” (v.30)

“Shall gather
together his elect”
(v.31)

“I am Christ...
shall deceive many”
(v.5)

2 Thessalonians 2
The man of lawlessness

“Be not soon shaken...
by word... that the day of
Christ is here” (v.2 R.V.)
“Let no man (of sin)
deceive you” (v.3).

“With all power and
signs and lying wonders”
(v.9)

“All deceivableness...
they (shall) believe a lie...
but you, brethren beloved of
the Lord, have from the
beginning (been) chosen to
salvation” (v.10,13) – i.e. it
was impossible for *them* to
be deceived.

“When I was yet with
you, I told you these things”
(v.5)

“The brightness of his
coming” (v.8)

“With his mighty
Angels... The glory of his
power” (2 Thess. 1:8,9 cp.
2:8)

“Our gathering together
unto him” (v.1)

“Strong delusion, that
they should believe a lie... all
deceivableness of
unrighteousness in them that
perish” (v.11,10).

“Iniquity shall
abound” (Greek:
‘multiply’, i.e.
convert more people
to it)

“The mystery of iniquity
does... work” (v.7)

“The love of
many shall wax
cold” (v.12)

“They received not the
love of the truth” (v.9)

For first of all must come the falling away and the man of sin shall be revealed, the son of destruction- The falling away, or apostasy, speaks of a loss of faith and collapse within the church. Paul had warned them before that there would come this great collapse (:5). But it was not inevitable for any of them on a personal level. The word in common Greek referred to a revolt or defection; and is used in the LXX of a falling away from God (Jer. 29:32 e.g.); and in Heb. 3:12 of how the Jewish believers were tempted to fall away. Paul envisaged a collapse in faith amongst the believers in the last days, followed by the revelation of a particular individual who would be supported by and in league with the Jewish 'satan' (:9). This combination of Jewish and Roman power was exactly the problem which the Thessalonians were up against, according to Acts 17 and the various hints at it throughout the Thessalonian letters. This is why Paul chose to explain to them of all the churches what was going to happen. But what he envisaged didn't happen, even though Revelation likewise predicts the uniting of the Roman and Jewish forces of evil to persecute the fledgling church, to be destroyed by the Lord's return. I have elsewhere discussed and demonstrated at length the principle of conditional prophecy. Nineveh was to be destroyed in 40 days, with no mention of any conditions. But it was not, one possible path of fulfilment was replaced with another. Likewise with the prophecy of a grand temple to be built at the time of the restoration, with Messiah within it, in Ez. 40-48. This could have happened- but it didn't. This is not to say that these prophecies shall never come true- their fulfilment was rescheduled. The essence will be fulfilled later, in the last days. And so it is with the scenario envisaged here and in Revelation. The Lord could have come in AD70, and many of the signs such as famines, wars etc. began to come true; but the other human preconditions, such as the repentance of Israel and the taking of the Gospel to all the world, were not. And so His coming has been rescheduled, until our last days. The "man of sin" prophecy can therefore be seen to have the beginnings of a possible fulfilment in the first century; but we are to look for a final fulfilment in our last days. The 'destruction' [AV "perdition"] of the man of sin would be the destruction of the apostate within the church and of those who had refused the Gospel; a related word is used for the perishing or destruction of this category in :10.

We can be sure that the Jewish opposition which attended Paul's first visit to Thessalonica would have continued well after he left. They were under pressure from “them that trouble you” (2 Thess. 1:6), who are defined in Gal. 5:11–13 as the Judaizers (“they... which trouble you”). The Thessalonians are comforted that these troublemakers would be destroyed by the Lord's second coming in fire, “taking vengeance on them... that obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ (preferring that of Moses): who shall be punished with everlasting destruction (cp. Gehenna) from the presence of the Lord” (1:9). This sounds very much like the punishment of the responsible at judgment day (Jude 24) – and the Judaizers fit that category.

Significantly, the only occurrences of the Greek idea of a “man of sin” in the LXX describe Jewish apostates (Prov. 24:22; Is. 57:4).

This prophecy speaks of a specific “man of sin” who would arise within the people of God [be they Israel or the ecclesia]. It seems that there may have been such an individual in the first century:

- “You have heard that antichrist shall come” (1 Jn. 2:18)
- “Who [singular] did hinder you... a little leaven [that] leaveneth the whole lump... he that troubles you...” (Gal. 5:8–10)
- “He that is of the contrary part” (Tit. 2:8)
- “Who (which individual) hindered you?... (Paul’s) letters, saith he, are weighty and powerful; but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible” (2 Cor. 10:7,10 A.V. mg.).
- The world – the first century Jewish world, in John’s usage of the term – was under the power of a ‘Satan’, a Prince or leader (Jn. 12:31; 14:30; 1 Jn. 5:19) – perhaps the High Priest?
- A “stranger” to the flock and a “thief” would come to harm the flock of the Lord Jesus (Jn. 10:5,10).
- The existence of such an individual would make special sense of the Lord’s request for the Father to keep the disciples safe from “the evil one” (Jn. 17:15). 1 Jn. 2:13,14 alludes to this prayer and shows it to have been fulfilled in the first century – the true believers had been kept safe from “the evil one”. And there appears some connection with the promise of Rev. 3:10, given just prior to the cataclysm of AD70, to keep the brethren safe from “the hour of trial”.
- John seems to speak, at least in the Greek text, of one specific individual – e.g. “The one [singular] saying he is in the light” (1 Jn. 1:9). “Who, then, is *the* liar?” (1 Jn. 2:22) has evident connection with the lying antichrist figure of 2 Thess. 2:8,9; and “the deceiver” (2 Jn. 7) connects with that same figure who will follow “deceit” (2 Thess. 2:11). John saw the singular antichrist as being heralded by many antichrists who had, he felt, already arisen in the first century. They belonged to the [Jewish] world (1 Jn. 4:5) – an indication that the antichrist is somehow Semitic, at least in its first century application. John’s reference to “many false prophets” (1 Jn. 4:1) connects with Mt. 24:11, which in an AD70 context predicts that “many false prophets shall arise”. This indicates to me that the singular antichrist had some fulfilment in the first century. And the same will be [is?] true in our last days. The likes of Saddam Hussein and Hitler are perhaps such antichrists who presage the coming of the specific person who will be the latter day antichrist. They had some similarities to him, but were not the actual person. Significantly, John seems to have understood this person as someone who would nominally accept Jesus, but deny that Jesus is the Christ, the anointed Messiah (1 Jn. 2:22). This would fit a Muslim position far better than it would a Catholic – for Catholics believe that Jesus is the Christ. Likewise in the first century, the Jewish antichrists believed Jesus had existed, but denied He was the Christ.

It is noteworthy that this individual is not named. Martin Hengel comments, correctly: “One of the riddles of Jewish and early Christian polemic is that it hardly ever really names its opponents, but tends to use derogatory paraphrases. This is [also] true of Essene polemic, which conceals its opponents in ciphers” (Martin Hengel, *The Johannine Question* (London: S.C.M., 1996 ed.), p. 41). In this context we recall the references to Babylon and Egypt in the Old Testament as, e.g., “Rahab”. Paul likewise doesn’t seem to refer to his enemies by their names but rather hides behind almost taunt phrases (2 Cor. 11:5,13; 12:11; Gal. 5:12; Phil. 3:2; and see too

Gal. 1:7; 3:1,10; 4:17; 2 Cor. 2:17; 4:2; Rom. 3:8; 15:31). The references to the prophetess “Jezebel” in Rev. 2:20 and “the teaching of Balaam” (Rev. 2:14) don’t actually name the individuals concerned, but rather give them a kind of code name. I would suggest however that the individual is not named because the prophecy did not come to full term in the first century, because of the delay of the Lord’s return until our last days.

The Jewish nature of the man of sin which Paul warns the Thessalonians of is also suggested by a careful reflection upon 1 Jn. 2:11,19: “He that hateth his brother... walketh in darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth... they went out from us, but they were not of us”. This is all alluding back to the example of Cain going out from God’s presence and wandering in the land of Nod with no direction to his life. Cain is a type of the Judaizers and the Jewish system (Jn. 8:44); the primary reference of John’s letters was probably to the Judaizers. I note on 2 Thess. 3:14 that the Judaizers within the Thessalonian church were to be ‘marked’ just as Cain was. These people are described in 1 Jn. 2:18 as “antichrists” whose presence heralded the full manifestation of “*the* antichrist”. This is why the New Testament repeatedly stresses that the appearance of false teachers and fake Christs will be a sign of the end. If these antichrists of the first century were Jewish, then “the antichrist” probably also was. There is ample evidence that John’s letters were primarily intended for ecclesias facing this Judaizer problem. The copious links with his Jewish-based Gospel should make this evident. Note too that the Qumran Essenes described the apostate High Priest as “the man of lies”. Tertullian’s interpretations of John’s letters clearly understood the “antichrists” to be referring to contemporary false teachers.

Paul warns that the Lord’s coming will not be until there has come a marked further apostasy, and the full public revelation of the man of sin, whose “mystery of iniquity” was already quietly at work. It would be fully revealed once God’s withholding patience had ended. At this stage the man of sin would show “lying wonders” which would deceive many; but he would soon be destroyed by “the brightness of (the Lord’s) coming”. This “mystery of iniquity” was the Judaist false doctrine undermining the ecclesia, resulting in many believers being influenced by them, until in the immediate prelude to Christ’s ‘coming’ in AD70 the Jewish system seemed to have the upper hand over the true believers. We know from Heb. 6 and elsewhere that the Judaist elders were able to do miracles. Such a bout of impressive miracles to be done by false teachers in the last days is predicted in the Olivet prophecy and parts of Revelation. The events of AD70 then totally destroyed the Jewish system.

Our commentary seeks to interpret 2 Thess. 2 from these two perspectives – the possibility in the first century, and the major fulfilment in the last days.

Who Will He Be?

We have seen that the latter day man of sin will have some association with the people of God, after the pattern of Judas. He may be partly Jewish. He may even have Christian connections. Or it may be that he is an Arab, a half Jew, who will enthrone himself as the head of the Islamic beast and make his capital and temple in Jerusalem. Nah. 1:15 RV describes the leader of the Assyrian invasion as “the wicked one”, the “wicked counsellor” (1:11), “*he* that dashes [Israel] in pieces” (Nah. 2:1). Further evidence for a charismatic Islamic antichrist is provided in my study of the revival of latter day Babylon in *The Last Days*. Of particular significance is the way that the man of sin exalts himself “against all that is called God or that is an object of worship” (2 Thess. 2:4 RV mg.). This is exactly relevant to Islam, whose insistent belief in one God leads them to be aggressively against any icon, idol or object of

worship. This is the very opposite to the Catholic way of venerating objects of worship.

The following table shows the evident links between the personal “man of sin” spoken of in 2 Thess. 2, and the beast systems of Revelation:

2 Thessalonians 1 & 2	Revelation
2:3 – son of perdition (see also Jn. 17:12)	17:8 – Beast goes into perdition
2:7 – mystery of iniquity (Gk. <i>anomia</i>) (a reference to the son of perdition)	17:7 – Babylon associated with mystery
2:8 – wicked (lit. ‘lawless’ – Gk. <i>anomos</i>) one revealed (see also v. 7 where “iniquity” = Gk. <i>anomia</i>)	1:1 – The revelation of Jesus Christ
2:8 – Lord consumes him [the wicked one] with the spirit of his mouth (cp. Is. 11:4)	19:11, 15 – Christ destroys the beast (<i>ref. To Isaiah 11:4</i>)
1:8 – Lord Jesus in flaming fire	19:12 – Christ’s eyes “as a flame of fire”
2:11 – those who perish believe a lie (a reference to the wicked one of 2:8)	19:20 – “false (or lying) prophet”
2:11 – strong delusion (or working of deceit) (a reference to the wicked one of 2:8)	13:14 – deceive
2:9 – signs (Gk. <i>semeion</i>) (a reference to the wicked one of 2:8)	19:20 – deceive (<i>references to the second beast and the false prophet</i>)
	13:13 – wonders (Gk. <i>semeion</i>)
	19:20 miracles (Gk. <i>semeion</i>) (<i>references to the second beast and the false prophet</i>)
2:4 – temple	11:2 – temple

It seems reasonable to equate this “man” with the specific “antiChrist” of 1 Jn. 2:18. The beast / horn system is also an imitation of Christ. It breaks in pieces the whole earth (Dan. 7:23) – the same word used in Dan. 2:40,44 to describe Christ’s breaking in pieces of the nations at his return. The little horn will “think to change times and laws”. This is clearly alluding to Dan. 2:21, where God alone is described as changing the times and seasons. The little horn thus makes himself as God – the man of sin “as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God” (2 Thess. 2:4). This man of sin will be destroyed by the brightness of the Lord’s second coming (2 Thess. 2:8). He will therefore be actively in existence in the last days. This man of sin will be revealed during a falling away from the Truth just prior to the return of Christ (2 Thess. 2:2,3). Thus whatever fulfilments of this power there may have been over history, it has to be accepted that it will have a particular manifestation in the last days.

The man of sin is “the son of perdition”, clearly alluding to Judas (Jn. 17:12). This associates this power with the apostate element within the ecclesia, who in the first century were Jewish. Through infiltrating the ecclesia, he will sit “in the temple

of God” (2 Thess. 2:4), i.e. the ecclesia. Judas was a betrayer; we have seen from the Olivet prophecy that there will be betrayers within the ecclesia in the tribulation period. The link with Judas surely teaches that there will be a ‘Fifth column’ within the latter day church, who are connected with the latter day Babylon / beast / man of sin.

However, it is possible that these prophecies refer to a specific individual who claims that he is Christ – a real ‘antiChrist’, possibly associated with a renegade Christian (after the pattern of Judas being one of the twelve). It may even be that he builds a literal temple, which would then be the abomination which makes desolate standing in the holy place. Remember that the horn / beast blasphemes the temple (Rev. 13:6), and in their manifestation as the King of the North, “he shall plant the tabernacle of his palace... In the glorious holy mountain” of Zion (Dan. 11:45). 2 Thess. 2:8,9 point the contrast between the Lord’s coming and that of the man of sin – as if the latter is a replica of the former. This new power will break in pieces opposing nations just like Christ will (Dan. 7:23 cp. 2:44); he will institute a new set of laws world-wide as if he has God’s authority (Dan. 7:25 cp. 2:21).

Some may be duped into thinking that Christ has come back, when actually it is the ‘antiChrist’ of the beast. The beast may have its adherents within the ecclesia who will promulgate this view. The beast has a mouthpiece in another beast that speaks like a dragon – i.e. like the beast – but has horns like a lamb, i.e. a fake Christ. This beast “does great wonders, so that he makes fire come down from heaven on earth in the sight of men (i.e. this is conscious exhibitionism), and deceives... by the means of these miracles which he had power to do” (Rev. 13:11–14). Bringing fire from Heaven means that this is a conscious imitation of Elijah, implying that the Elijah ministry is active during the tribulation. It will be opposed by the publicity stunts of the beast system.

The idea of an anti-Christ as a replica of the real Christ also occurs in Proverbs, where there is a designed contrast between the woman of wisdom (representing Christ, the seed of the woman, 1 Cor. 1:24), and the “foolish woman” who does the same external things as “wisdom” (e.g. Prov. 9:1–5 cp. 9:14–17). This prototype antiChrist is a whore, which is a symbol associated with the dragon / Babylon / beast of Revelation. Thus the antiChrist and the beast are closely linked. Because of the false miracles, the weak believer will worship the image of the beast and join the 666 system (Rev. 13:14–18). This is based on the image in the plain of Dura, which many of God’s people were duped into worshipping. Only the three friends seem to have refused to do so. Perhaps the furnaces which were the means of punishment for those who refused to worship the image are related to the furnaces of the concentration camps, which we may well see repeated in the future.

“A time of trouble”

We have suggested that the blasphemous power building his palace on the temple mount in Dan. 11:45 is the man of sin of 2 Thess. 2, and thus also the little horn power. This is immediately before the second coming of Christ and resurrection described in Dan. 12:2. It is during this period that “there shall be a time of trouble such as never was” for God’s people, natural and spiritual – the time of Jacob’s trouble that occurs after Israel’s present regathering to the land. “That day is great, so that none is like it” (Jer. 30:7). Those who are written in the book experience it, but are saved from it. This group must surely be true believers. Seeing that this will be a time of trouble for God’s people such as never was, the previous sufferings of the Jews and the tribulation of the second world war will be nothing compared to this. It

will be so bad that it will seem that every one of us will perish – “there should no flesh be saved” (Mt. 24:22). But for those who doggedly hold on to the patience and faith of the saints, the glorious, miraculous deliverance will come. Even an Angel was so amazed by the extraordinary nature of this time of trouble that he asked: “How long shall it be to the end of these wonders?”. The answer was “For a time, time and an half (i.e. three and a half years); and when he shall have accomplished to scatter the power of the holy people, all these things shall be finished” (Dan. 12:7,8). The Hebrew for “the holy people” is literally ‘the people of the holy ones’ – i.e. all those among natural and spiritual Israel who belong to their holy guardian Angels. “All things” being fulfilled in Dan. 12:8 is probably alluded to in the fig tree parable – the generation that see the revival of Israel (fruit instead of leaves on the tree, as a result of Christian preaching) during that three and a half year tribulation will live to see the end of all things. The holy people are to be scattered (Dan. 12:7). The Hebrew means ‘to break in pieces’, and is also used regarding the beast / horn breaking in pieces the whole earth / land (Dan. 7:23). As it treats God’s people, so it will be judged, seeing that the little stone breaks in pieces the beast / image.

The horn who scatters God’s people in the last days, the “he” of Dan. 12:7 is the “King of the North” of Dan. 11:45 – suggesting that the beast / horn has something to do with latter day Assyria and Babylon, the historical / Biblical “King of the North”. The faithful will be “tried” (Dan. 12:10) by this invader, as Israel were by the Babylonian invasion of the past (Jer. 9:7). The same word is used in Zech. 13:9 and Mal. 3:2 concerning the faithful remnant in Jerusalem enduring their future sufferings.

There are a number of similarities between Daniel 11 and the prophecies concerning the persecution of the saints by the horn / beast / man of sin:

Daniel 11	The Latter Day Tribulation
v.31 “Shall pollute the sanctuary”	The beast’s blasphemy against the temple
v.32 “Such as do wickedly against the covenant shall he corrupt by flatteries”	Some of those in the covenant will be deceived by the flatteries of the beast (cp. Dan. 8:25)
“Such as do wickedly”	“The wicked shall do wickedly” (Dan. 12:10)
v.32,33 “The people that do know their God shall be strong, and do exploits... instruct many”	Zealous preaching by the faithful during persecution.
v.33 “They shall fall by the sword”	The beast kills the saints with the sword and leads them into captivity in the tribulation (Rev.13:10). “They shall fall by the sword” is

	quoted in Lk. 21:24 concerning the tribulation.
“Many days”	1260 days

v.35 “Some of them of understanding shall fall” (in death) “To try them, and to purge, and to make them white” “Even to the time of the end; because it is yet for a time appointed”	“Some of you shall they cause to be put to death” (Lk. 21:16) – the faithful remnant are characterized by their “understanding” – of the prophecies? “ Many shall be purified, and made white, and tried” (Dan. 12:10) The tribulation continues right up to the end – the Lord’s coming. The time appointed – 3.5 years of Dan. 12:7?
v.36 “The King...shall exalt himself”	As the horn did over the other horns. If this verse is a continuing description of Antiochus Epiphanes, then it just isn’t all true. Rather it seems do we have another gap / jump in chronological fulfilment, as happens elsewhere in Daniel, until the latter day antichrist.
“And magnify himself above every god, and shall speak marvellous things against the God of gods”	The man of sin exalts himself above all that is called God (2 Thess. 2:4); the horn speaks blasphemy against God.
v.38 “He shall sit in the seat of the Almighty God” (A.V. mg.)	Sitting as God in God’s temple (2 Thess. 2:4)

There are too many similarities here for this to all be coincidental. The primary fulfilment of Dan. 11 appears to be in the persecution of the Maccabees. The effective tribulation which they went through then, preparing as it did a faithful remnant who accepted Jesus as Messiah at His first coming, must be a dim shadow of what the church and natural Israel are to undergo in the last days. Note that Dan. 11:33 and

12:10 emphasize that only those who understand will spiritually survive the persecution. This should serve as the ultimate inspiration to zealously apply ourselves to the study of prophecy, rather than give up because it seems too difficult. To be forewarned is to be forearmed.

The Old Testament Basis

In searching for an Old Testament basis for “that wicked one”, we find that very phrase used in the Septuagint of Esther 7:4 to describe Haman. He too was ‘revealed’ for who he was – the Persian leader plotting the total destruction of Jewry, from which they were saved by grace. The entire story of Esther can be read as a detailed type of Israel’s latter day weakness, persecution and deliverance by grace. The idea of a “man of sin” within the temple of God surely has its source in the Ezekiel passages (e.g. Ez. 8:8–16) which describe the idolatry (“abomination”) which occurred within the temple in the days just prior to the invasion of Israel by the Babylonians. These passages lead up to the vision of the purged, perfected temple of the Messianic Kingdom in Ez. 40 – 48. The ‘men of sin’ which Ezekiel saw within the temple were the “elders of the house of Israel”, the corrupted priesthood. The connection with 2 Thess. 2 suggests that in the last days, before the final neo-Babylonian holocaust, the elders of both natural and spiritual Israel will practice corruption in the temple / ecclesia of God.

There is an incident in the experience of Nehemiah, Governor of Jerusalem (a type of Christ, Mt. 2:6) which points forward to all this. Nehemiah (cp. Jesus) returned to the Emperor to have his authority over Jerusalem confirmed (cp. Christ to God, Mt. 25:19; Lk. 19:12,13). He then returned to the holy land, to find Israel indifferent to the state of God’s house, taken up with the petty materialism of daily life, with the result that the Arab Tobiah had been permitted by the elders of Israel to live in the chambers of the house of God (Neh. 13:6–9). Nehemiah in fury expels him and “cleansed the chambers”, throwing out all his things, after the pattern of Christ cleansing the temple (Mt. 21:12). Along with the type of Moses returning from the mount to a corrupted Israel, this points forward to the state of affairs at Christ’s return. Is. 8:5 speaks of an “image of jealousy” being placed in the temple by the Jews just prior to the Babylonian invasion. This was the original image behind the Lord’s prophecy of the abomination of desolation being placed in the temple by the Romans. And yet His prophecy has a distinct latter day reference. All this points to a similar literal fulfilment in some way, in a literal latter day temple.

“The son of perdition” was Judas (Jn. 17:12), the epitome of sin and the Jewish Devil (Jn. 6:70,71 cp. 8:44). We will see that throughout 2 Thess. 2 there is frequent reference to the events surrounding our Lord’s suffering and death; as we also note in the Revelation passages concerning the saints’ final sufferings. Judas was concealed among the disciples until he finally flew his true colours at his betrayal of Christ, which marked the beginning of His passion. The Judaizers were only revealed for what they really were in the traumas of AD69/70. And if the man of sin has a latter day equivalent, this group of false teachers will only show their hand immediately prior to the second coming, at the beginning of the tribulation, which matches the beginning of Christ’s final sufferings which began after Judas’ betrayal. This indicates that any witch hunt for this group is doomed to failure. The disciples tried to expose Judas, “the man of sin”, before his proper time to be manifested; and ended up accusing each other of fitting the role. Such is the inability of human nature to make accurate judgment in this respect. There were three and a half days from the time of Judas being openly revealed for what he was to the end of Christ’s sufferings, marked by the resurrection. It may be that there will be a three and a half year tribulation

period for the latter day believers, beginning with the open revealing of the “man of sin”.

The N.I.V. (correctly) translated “man of sin” as “man of lawlessness”, highlighting the contradiction in the fact that the law–crazy Judaists were actually lawless. Because lawlessness abounds in the last days, the majority of the ecclesia will lose their love (Mt. 24:12). The beast is epitomized by a man – “the number of the beast... is the number of a man” (Rev. 13:18), in the same way as the system described in 2 Thess. 2 is personified as a man of sin. The figure of Rev. 13:5,6 is clearly based around an Old Testament ‘man of sin’, Goliath – a real, historical person. Rev. 11:4,13 draw a contrast between a god of the earth / land of Israel, and the true God of Heaven. The “god of the earth” has two olive trees and two candlesticks standing before him, with evident allusion back to Zech. 4:14; 6:5, where the Lord / King of the earth / land appears to refer to the King of Babylon.

These passages all imply that there may well be one specific “man of sin” in the last days. Judas, the prototype “son of perdition”, influenced the other disciples, as shown by the complaint concerning Mary’s ‘waste’ of ointment being described as made by Judas in Jn. 12:4, but by the whole group in Mt. 26:8. Jude’s letter is a warning against the Jewish–influenced apostasy of the first century. He cites “the gainsaying of Korah” as typical of the false teaching that was infiltrating the ecclesias. He could have spoken of “Korah, Dathan and Abiram”, but instead he focuses on Korah, as if he was the outstanding influence. By doing so, was Jude suggesting that there was one specific individual in the “last days” who was to be resisted?

The connection with Judas would suggest that the man of sin being in the temple may refer to the presence of this individual or system within the ecclesia. But there is a clear link with Mt. 24:15, concerning the abomination of desolation standing in the temple as a clear sign that Christ’s return is imminent, just as Paul says the man of sin in the temple is the clear sign of the second coming (2 Thess. 2:3). The Lord’s words are looking back to Daniel’s prophecy that a desolator (RV) is to appear in the temple, and also to Jeremiah’s description of Nebuchadnezzar as a ‘desolator’ of God’s people and His cities, who achieves his ‘desolation’ by a fake theophany, coming with clouds and chariots just as the Lord Jesus will (Jer. 4:7,13). The language used by Jeremiah in that section is very similar to that used in Ezekiel 38 about the individual named as ‘Gog’. The abomination that desolates is at the hands of an individual desolator – the man of sin of 2 Thess. 2. The likely application to an abomination within the ecclesia notwithstanding, one is tempted to look for a physical temple to be built in Jerusalem in order to ease the fulfilment of this prophecy. It cannot be insignificant that the right wing Rabbis are enthusiastic for this, *and have already drawn up the plans for one!* It could be that Rev. 13:14,15 predict that the man of sin will set up a literal image of himself there in the temple. And as has been pointed out, Caligula had ordered a statue of himself to be erected in the temple, and although this never actually happened, this would’ve been an enduring memory amongst the New Testament readership. This background again points to the personality cult of a specific individual being developed in the temple.

Paul was an enthusiast for living as if we know the Lord’s return is imminent; but he told the Thessalonians that that blessed day wouldn’t come immediately, because some prophecy still had to be fulfilled (2 Thess. 2:3). This, I suspect, is the situation we are in now: living *as if* we expect the Lord imminently, but recognizing that we don’t *know* whether his return is imminent, and still looking for some prophecy to be fulfilled.

2 Thess. 2:3 RV speaks of “*the falling away*” which must come as the final, crystal

clear sign that the Lord's return is imminent. It sounds as if Paul treated this as an obvious, well known thing amongst the believers. In the context, he's saying: 'How ever can you believe this idea that the day of Christ is here now (RV)? As you know thoroughly well, the great apostasy from the truth in the ecclesia must come, and only *then* will the Lord come, to save the elect within his corrupted ecclesia'. The idea of latter day weakness in the ecclesia is taught explicitly and implicitly throughout the Scriptures. Both natural and spiritual Israel have to be almost pleaded with to come out from among the beast system of the last days (Rev. 18:4), implying that somehow they become part of it- although ideally they should never have become involved with it. Israel being tempted by Balaam and the Moabite women at the very end of the wilderness journey looks forward to the tendency of latter day spiritual Israel to mess up on the eve of the Kingdom. A fair case can be made for thinking that Adam sinned at the end of the sixth day, on the eve of the Sabbath of rest (cp. the Millennium). See on 1 Tim. 4:1.

The accounts of the latter day invasion of Israel all feature a single charismatic individual, who will be destroyed personally by the Lord Jesus at His coming. This is Paul's "man of sin", Daniel's aggressive king of fierce countenance, Ezekiel's Gog, the chief prince. It is also the person referred to by Micah: "And this man [Messiah] shall be the peace, when the Assyrian shall come into our land" (Mic. 5:1,2). The Lord Jesus will save His people in the latter days from an "Assyrian". It has been shown that Assyria and Babylon are used almost interchangeably in Scripture. Gog was a Jew who apostatized and went to live in Assyria / Babylonia, according to 1 Chron. 5. This is why he has the appearance of spirituality; and he may even be a middle Eastern Christian. I say this because 2 Thess. 2 describes him as "the son of perdition", exactly the phrase used about Judas, the false disciple of Jesus.

2 Thess. 2:3 is clear enough that the "man of sin" will arise in the last days immediately before the Lord's return. We need not think that Christ is about to return until we see this person gloriously enthroned "as God". This is what Paul seems to be saying. And when the Lord was asked for the signs of His coming, he started off by warning that false Christs would come (Mt. 24:4,5). 1 Jn. 2:18 says just the same: "It is the last time [RV "hour"]": and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time". This was true in the run up to AD70, and it will be true in the ultimate last hour too. Ezekiel 38 likewise speaks of a man called 'Gog', a "chief prince", who would come against God's people at the time of the end. This is the man of whom Dan. 8:25 speaks- "he will destroy many and will stand up against the Prince of princes", the Lord Jesus.

2:4 *He that opposes and exalts himself against all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits in the temple of God, setting himself up as God-* I suggested on :3 that the situation envisaged was of a joining together of the Jewish and Roman opposition to Christianity. This would result in a specific individual enthroned in the Jerusalem temple, and also in the temple in the sense of the church of God. The language used here is very similar to the cult of Caesar worship; Nero especially set himself up as God. As explained on :3, this scenario did not come about in the first century although an incipient fulfilment was seen in the events of AD70. We look to a future fulfilment in our days.

"He that opposes" was clearly the Jewish satan, to which Paul alludes in most of his letters; an organized network of opposition to his missionary work. The word and idea is used in concerning the Judaizers and Jews in Lk. 13:17; 21:15; 1 Cor. 16:9;

Phil. 1:28; 2 Tim. 2:25 and 1 Tim. 5:14. This opposition to the Gospel in the Thessalonian context has already been established as coalition of Jewish and Roman forces of evil (see on 1 Thess. 2:18). Their arrogance is well described as exalting themselves above anything that is 'worshipped', whether Christian or otherwise. This is the same word as "devotions" in Acts 17:23 concerning pagan idols. The forces of Jewish and Roman evil were to unite to set up an entity which would be above any idol. They made themselves "as God", perhaps by imitating Moses, the god of this (Jewish) world" (2 Cor. 4:4 and context); James 4:11,12 is just one example of the Judaist-influenced eldership making themselves equal to Moses. There are two Greek words translated "temple", one referring more to the physical building and the other to the spiritual dwelling place of God, i.e. the ecclesia (1 Tim. 3:15). It is this latter one which is used here – the man of sin sits down (Gk. 'takes his place') in the ecclesia, showing himself (Greek 'demonstrating') that he is God. This word is translated "approved" in Acts 2:22 concerning Christ's approval as God's representative by His miracles. This indicates that the man of sin is an imitation of Christ – a true antiChrist. The showing that he is God would be through the pseudo miracles of v.9 – in the same way as Moses was made as God to Pharaoh through the miracles he did (Ex. 7:1). The Judaist-influenced elders of the Jewish ecclesias seem to have retained the power of the miraculous gifts for a short time after their apostasy (Heb. 6:4–6); the Jews also had their false miracle workers (Acts 13:6; 19:14). The beast of Revelation also works impressive miracles. Thus as the man of sin did false miracles in the first century through the Jewish miracle workers and their Judaist friends within the ecclesia, so both in the beast system of the last days as well as in the ecclesia, the latter day "man of sin" will work false miracles.

In the last days context, the ecclesia will be infiltrated by a "man of sin" who appears to be an apostle, and who in league with the beast, the power dominating the world, corrupts the ecclesia. He is an anti-Christ, a false God. His sitting in the temple of the ecclesia is matched by Tobiah the Arab having rooms in the temple- rooms which should have been symbolic of the dwelling place of God's people with Him (Neh. 7:13 cp. Jn. 14:1-3). He will get this place, as Tobiah got his place, because the ecclesia has failed to grasp the rigid line of demarcation between the things of God's Kingdom and those of Satan's. They will have been deceived by the apparent similarity between the two Kingdoms. The presence of antiChrist within the ecclesia will be the sign "whereby ye know that it is the last time" (1 Jn. 2:18); and 2 Thess. 2:3 and Mk. 13:5,14 say the same thing. The recognition of the presence of such false teaching within the ecclesia will be what tells the faithful remnant that the Lord's return really is imminent. If the "man of sin" is to be connected somehow with the Muslim beast as we have suggested elsewhere, it may be that the vague, outline similarities between Islam and the One Faith are what are capitalized upon in order to make the differences seem minimal. Thus Muslims tenaciously believe in one God and a restored paradise on earth, and Shi'ite Muslims (comprising 99% Iranians and 60% Iraqis) look for the return of the 12th Imam (who they believe has ascended to Heaven) to rule the world. Muslim mosques are fake temples of God, designed as they are around an outer court and two sanctuaries. As Adam desired equality with God (see the allusions to his fall in Phil. 2) and was punished with an inability to hide, shame and nakedness as a result, so Edom will be punished in precisely the same way (Jer. 49:10)- because they too desire equality with God, as Babylon did in Is. 14:13, and as the man of sin will attempt (2 Thess. 2: 4). The connection between Babylon, Edom and the man of sin's blasphemy suggests that he is connected with radical Islamic religious blasphemy.

The antichrist is a mimic of the true Christ; his kingdom is a parody of God's Kingdom. And the King of Babylon claiming "I am and none else beside me" are the very words of Yahweh- the King of Babylon is clearly to be identified with the man of sin, who sits as God in God's temple (2 Thess. 2). The "man of sin" will sit in the temple of God and proclaim that he is God. This is surely the "abomination that maketh desolate" that the Lord Jesus predicted would sit in the temple just prior to His return. The abomination makes "desolate", clearly referring to *Jerusalem* being made desolate by Babylonian / Iraqi invaders (Dan. 9:2,17). Luke 21:20 parallels "the abomination that maketh desolate" in Mt. 24 and Mk. 13 with "the desolation of Jerusalem". The abomination / abominator will stand "where *he* ought not" (Mk. 13:14 RV). He is the "one that maketh desolate" (Dan. 9:27 RV). A specific individual is clearly implied. Dan. 8:13 RV describes this person as "the transgression that maketh desolate"- yet it is the abominator that makes Jerusalem desolate. Therefore "the transgression" is surely being put by metonymy for a man, who will sit in the Most Holy place and make Jerusalem desolate. And 2 Thess. 2 says just the same- "the man of sin / transgression". The whole tenor of the Daniel prophecies is that they refer to an individual who will arise in the last days- not someone like a Pope sitting in St. Peter's for centuries. The vision of the 2300 days of abomination- the days during which the abominator will make Jerusalem desolate- "belongs to the latter days" (Dan. 8:26). These are the days during which the sanctuary and the host of God's people will be "trodden under foot"; interpreted by the Lord as Jerusalem being trodden down of the Gentiles until "the times of the Gentiles were fulfilled".

It is quite clear that the leadership of Israel's fiercest enemies would dearly love to sit and stand in the Sanctuary if they could get their hands on Jerusalem [as they vow they will]. He will sit there "as God". Another place where we read of a man sitting in the temple proclaiming that he is God is in Ez. 28:2, where the King of Tyre proudly says that he sits as God ruling the seas of the people. The King of Tyre was a prototype for the latter day man of sin. The King of Tyre was "in Eden the garden of God" where he was "anointed" and beautifully adorned (Ez. 28:12,14). These descriptions may be further information about the serpent in Eden, although omitted from the Genesis account; and of the idol cult of Tyre being established in the Jerusalem temple in Ezekiel's time. In this case, the fake-Christ [anointed one] is "the old serpent", just as the latter day beast leader will be (Rev. 12). The beast is so often paralleled with its leader, just as the little horn seems to refer to both a leader and a nation / political system. The sudden destruction that comes upon Antichrist in 2 Thess. 2 is the same kind of thing spoken of in 1 Thess. 5:3- "When they shall say, Peace and safety, then sudden destruction cometh". The saying of peace and safety is exactly the language of Daniel regarding the false peace produced in the very last days by Antichrist. It could well be that under Babylon's domination there is a brief boom period for the entire world. This ensures his political survival, and explains why all the world's merchants will weep at his fall. This sorrow by the traders hardly seems likely to happen if the Vatican was destroyed. This person will accuse the brethren of Christ before the throne of God (Rev. 12:10), but will be thrown down by the Lord's return and the establishment of the Kingdom. This is exactly the language of 2 Thess. 2 about the antichrist who is to be destroyed by the Lord's coming. Yet the idea of a false accuser of the brethren before the throne of God takes us back to Job's satan- who seems to have been a pseudo-disciple, bringing down the outpouring of vial-like judgments upon God's people (cp. the scene in Revelation). Antichrist, the

man of sin, sitting in the temple of God, is surely the abomination that Jesus said is to be in the temple in the last days, leading to the final desolation. Is. 14 describes the rise and fall of the King of Babylon; he too desired to set himself as God in the temple of God, having first terrorized the nations that dwell on the 'earth', those situated in the land promised to Abraham between the Nile and Euphrates. This seems so on the cards for latter day Babylon- to terrorize the Middle Eastern world into accepting her leadership, and then to seek to set up the King of latter day Babylon on "the mount of God", Zion. Finally, Nahum speaks of how there was one specific Assyrian leader who was to be destroyed by the coming of Messiah. The phrasing is so similar to that found about the "man of sin": "There is one gone forth out of thee, that imagineth evil against the Lord, a wicked counsellor... behold upon the mountains the feet of him [Messiah] that bringeth good tidings... the wicked one shall no more pass through... he is utterly cut off. He that dasheth in pieces is come up before thy face" (Nah. 1:11,15; 2:1 RV).

2:5 *Have you forgotten that when I was still with you I told you these things?*- Paul was only with them for three Sabbath days. He had little contact time with them, and yet he warned them of future tribulation at the hand of Jewish and Gentile forces of evil, to result in a "man of sin" being enthroned in the Jerusalem temple. And yet from 1 Thess. 4 it is clear that they were still ignorant of basic theology about the resurrection. Clearly Paul considered practical warnings as to the difficulty of the path ahead as being more important than theology.

In 1 Thess. 5:3–5 they had been told that the pre-eminent sign of the Lord's coming is the "peace and safety" cry within the ecclesia. Now in 2 Thess. 2 Paul puts it another way: "that day shall not come, except there come a falling away *first*", or most importantly, as the most obvious sign.

2:6 *And now you know what is restraining him now, that he may be revealed in his own time*- This restraining influence was known by the Thessalonians; it lay within the range of their experience. That is significant in our attempt to interpret this difficult question as to who or what the restraining influence refers to.

"Restraining" is also translated as "stand fast" and also "keep hold", often in the context of resisting Judaist infiltration by retaining true doctrine. This would imply that the spiritually strong within the ecclesias were withholding the revealing of the man of sin and the Lord's return ("that he might be revealed in his time" can neatly refer to either, cp. 1 Tim. 6:15). However, it was only a matter of time before the falling away was so widespread that they would be "taken out of the way"; "for the mystery of iniquity (literally 'law-breaking', another pun on the Judaizers' position) doth already work" (v.7). This is the opposite to "the mystery of Godliness" (1 Tim. 3:16), and refers to the Judaizers claiming to be so spiritually deep that the Truth was a "mystery" known only to them (cp. Jude 19; Rev. 2:24). That which hindered the revealing or coming (cp. 1:7; a false second coming) of the man of sin would be taken out of the way. "Out of the way" here is normally translated "from among them" – the spiritually minded members of the ecclesia were to be taken away, so that God's punishments could come upon the rest of them. In the first century this was shown in the command for the faithful to flee the Jerusalem ecclesia (Lk. 21:21), to come out of Babylon (Rev. 18:4), which is a common symbol of Israel and apostate Jewry in the prophets. The word for "mystery" is also used in a negative sense in Rev. 17:5,7 concerning the woman of sin riding the beast – hinting at a specific individual who will be the figurehead of the beast?

I suggested on :3 that what is in view, initially, in the first century context, was a coalition between Jewish and Roman forces of evil, culminating in the enthronement

of a Nero like figure in the Jerusalem temple, proclaimed as the only object of worship, and thus closing down all the various idol cults. This coalition of Jews and Gentiles against the church would be a repetition of what happened to bring about the Lord's death, and the church would therefore fellowship His sufferings in this way. But that was restrained by the strong paganism of the population. Perhaps it was this which was initially in view; as well as political opposition to such an extent of Caesar worship and deification within the Roman leadership. There was indeed a movement against this development. But this was to be taken out of the way. The restraining nature of Roman civil law as it was then practiced was well known to the Thessalonians, for it was this which had saved Paul from being lynched at Thessalonica (Acts 17:6,9).

We can only speculate what the restraining influence may be in the last days. It could simply be God's desire to delay the Lord's coming so that more may get a chance to repent. Even in the first century, there was this element of Divine delay (2 Pet. 3:9).

2:7 For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work. Only he who now restrains it will do so, until he is out of the way- The "mystery" could refer to the false teaching of the Judaizers, or to the development of the imperial Caesar cult. See on :6 and :7. "The mystery" in the New Testament refers to the mystery of the Kingdom, of the Gospel; and the Gospel likewise was "at work" through the Spirit in believers. But the man of sin is a fake Christ, and is associated with a false Gospel and another spirit and mystery. The 'working' is defined as "the working of satan" (:9), and I have noted that the great satan or adversary to the Lord was the Judaist movement. This is termed lawlessness because as Paul often shows, Judaism was effectively anti God's true Law. By not obeying the Gospel they were effectively not knowing God (see on 1:8).

2:8 And then shall be revealed the lawless one- The revealing of this individual would be at the time of the revealing of the Lord Jesus (1:7). The revealing of this individual is therefore a mimicry of the Lord's revealing from Heaven. And the true Christ shall clearly be shown. Just as Judas was revealed for who he was ("the son of perdition", :3, = Jn. 17:12), so this latter day individual would be revealed.

"The lawless one" of 2 Thess. 2:8 alludes to "the wicked one" of Is. 11:4 LXX, who is "the Assyrian". So it would appear very likely that the latter day antichrist figure comes from 'Assyria'. And what's going on in the territory of 'Assyria' right now is gripping the whole world's attention. See on Rev. 19:20.

Whom the Lord Jesus shall slay with the breath of his mouth and bring to nothing by the powerful glory of his coming- The Spirit and brightness of the Lord's coming parallels the description of judgment on the Judaizers in 1:6–9: "...mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance... punished... from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power". This judgment is against "them that trouble you" (1:6), i.e. the false Judaist 'brethren' who were leading the early church astray (Gal. 1:7). The link with 2:8 shows that it is such false brethren *within the ecclesia* (temple) who are "the wicked one" which will be destroyed by the second coming; along with the "man of sin" system of the world. On :3 I suggested there is a religious and secular element to the system in view. 2 Thess. 1:6–9 also recalls the description of coming judgment on the apostate Jews in Rom. 1:18: The wrath of God is revealed from Heaven against all unGodliness, and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness". Paul's words in Thessalonians can also be traced back to Is. 11:4: "He (Christ) shall smite the earth (Heb. 'eret' – land, of Israel) with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked" in Israel, primarily. The Greek for "wicked" is translated "without law" in Romans, again making a play on the Judaizers

who were claiming to keep the Law. There is a parallel between “the mystery of iniquity” in v.7 and the “wicked one” of v.8 – the revealing of “that wicked” is therefore the revealing of a mystery, which mimics the ‘revealed mystery’ of the true Gospel (Rom. 16:25; Eph. 3:3; 6:19; Col. 1:26). The wicked one was to be “destroyed”, the Greek for which is also translated “abolish”, “do away”, “make of no effect”, “vanish away”, “make void” etc., all in the context of the doing away of the Jewish Law and the system which supported it. This was only fully done with the destruction of the Jerusalem temple in AD70.

“The spirit of his mouth” looks forward to Rev. 19:15,21 concerning Christ’s destruction of the beast at the last day, which has close links with the man of sin. The emphasis on the destruction of the man of sin by Angels and fire recalls Dan. 7:10,11 concerning the beast’s destruction by the Lord’s return. Perhaps the man of sin will appear associated with the latter day ecclesia, the temple of God, but he will be linked with the political ‘beast’ which will then be in control of the world.

2:9 But the coming of the lawless one will be according to the working of Satan, with all power and signs and lying wonders- However we understand the “working of Satan” (*energeian tou Satana*) in 2 Thess. 2:9, it was under the control of God – for it was part of the “strong delusion” (*energeian planes*) which *God* sent (2 Thess. 2:11). The repetition of the word *energeian* is missed through the mask of translation through which most read this passage, but in the original Greek it stands out clearly. The ‘Satan’ isn’t working *against* God but is being used by God in *His* working in the lives of others. It is “evil” and “the work of Satan” which deceives the wicked (2 Thess. 2:9,10); but God works through this, it is *He* who sends the delusion... an indication that ‘Satan’ here is not radical evil, i.e. evil that is free and independent from God, lurking free in the cosmos as it were, but is sent by God, under His control. But of course, we want to know more about this ‘Satan’; and clearly the Jewish opposition to the Christian Gospel was a significant adversary or ‘Satan’ in the first century.

‘Satan’ in the New Testament frequently refers to the Jewish system. We noted on :3 the idea of a coalition between Jewish and Gentile forces of evil. The envisaged new religious order would be supported by the Jewish satan, who would perform false miracles to give it credibility. “Coming” can be translated ‘coming in’, referring to the subtle entry of Judaist agents and ideas into the ecclesia (Gal. 2:4 etc.). The coming of Christ was associated with miracles, and this would be matched by ‘Satan’s’ miracles at *his* ‘coming’. The Greek for “working” is often used concerning the working of the Holy Spirit. “Power, signs and wonders” is a phrase always used concerning the preaching of the Gospel (Acts 2:22,43; 4:30; Rom. 15:19; Heb. 2:4); and in 2 Cor. 12:12 concerning the qualifications of an apostle. This would portray the man of sin as a false apostle (cp. 2 Cor. 11:13–15) doing false miracles to accompany a false Gospel; he is “the son of perdition” after the pattern of Judas. The Greek for “lying” is used about the apostate Jews in Jn. 8:44; Rom. 1:25; 1 Jn. 2:21.

Jannes and Jambres were another prototype of these Judaizers (2 Tim.3:8). Perhaps these magicians who replicated Moses’ miracles were apostate Jews. Israel’s experience in Egypt points forward to ours at the time of the second coming. Perhaps the beast, symbolic ‘Egypt’ of the last days, will also have a group of renegade Jews in tow, who match the miracles performed by the latter day Moses. Showing “signs and lying wonders” is an evident allusion back to Mt. 24:24, concerning this happening in the last days of AD70 and our own times. If the miraculous gifts are possessed by some of the faithful in the last days, e.g. In connection with the Elijah

ministry, the ability of the apostate believers to do miracles will seem the more credible. There are many links between 2 Thess. 2 and the Olivet prophecy, as noted on :3.

The description of those deceived in 2 Thess. 2 is amplifying that of the judgment seat in 1:6–9, which is concerning those responsible to judgment, i.e. those who know Christ. We therefore conclude that the many who are deceived by false claims of miracles are actually within the ecclesia. Only the elect will not be deceived. This was what happened in the run up to AD70, and must presumably be seen in our last days too. The establishment of the beast's power in Jerusalem, accompanied by powerful miracles and the support of some Judas-like brethren within the ecclesia for it, will persuade some in the church to think that Christ is back. The connections between Mt. 24 and 2 Thess. 2 indicate that many (Gk. the majority, Mt. 24:12) within the ecclesia will be deceived, egged on by a subtle group of false Christians who will be the counterpart of the first century Judaizers.

2:10 *And with all unrighteous deceit of them that perish. Because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved-* The deceit refers in the first century context to the work of the Judaizers (s.w. 2 Pet. 2:13); "unrighteous" is used about the Jews in Rom. 1:18,29; 2:8; Heb. 8:12; 2 Pet. 2:13). Paul insists that his preaching at Thessalonica was not of deceit (1 Thess. 2:3)- unlike, by implication, that of the Judaizers who stirred up persecution for him there. There will be a conscious program of deceit orchestrated in the last days too, and according to the Olivet Prophecy and the implications here in 2 Thess. 2, many shall be taken in by it. Loving the truth doesn't simply mean that they have a love of truth in the sense of wanting to find the right interpretation of the Bible. "Truth" here is being placed in opposition to the deceit and lies coming from the coalition between the "man of sin" and the Jewish satan. It is not academic truth which shall save, but "truth" in the sense of living relationship with the Lord Jesus. This is why :12 speaks of loving unrighteousness instead of loving the truth; there is clearly a moral dimension to "truth" in how Paul uses the term here. The same ideas are found in :13; we are the 'loved' of the Lord if we believe the 'truth' which is the Lord Jesus. The truth in this sense elicits love (1 Pet. 1:22; 2 Jn. 1; 3 Jn. 1). This love which comes from truth is to be 'received' rather than cultivated by steel will. This is the word used frequently for 'receiving' the Gospel; the Jews in Thessalonica did not "receive" the word of the Gospel (Acts 17:11 s.w.), and the Thessalonians to whom Paul is writing are commended for having 'received' (s.w.) the Gospel (1 Thess. 1:6; 2:13). The group in view here are therefore those who had heard the Gospel but refused to receive it, meaning that they did not live in love and truth but rather in deceit and hatred towards the Lord's people. All this was within the direct experience of the Thessalonian readership.

2:11- see on 2 Thess. 2:7.

For this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie- "Strong delusion" is literally the energy of delusion; just as God can work within the minds of believers according to His *energeia* by His Spirit (Eph. 1:19; 3:16-20), so those who refuse to believe have another spirit sent to work within them, deluding them into believing the lie. "The lie" refers to the "delusion"; and in the first century context, that delusion was the words of the Judaizers, framed as they are as the serpent in Eden and Cain who told the first lies (the same Greek word for "delusion" is used about the Judaizers who sought to delude the believers in Eph. 4:14; 2 Pet. 3:17; Jude 11 cp. Jn. 8:44). John contrasts a love of the truth (cp. :10) with "the spirit of error [s.w. "delusion"]", which operated through the false Judaist prophets /

teachers infiltrating the churches (1 Jn. 4:1,6). Psychological confirmation of disbelievers is a feature of God's working with men (Is. 6:9,10; Rom. 1:24-28), and God even sends false prophets or teachers as part of this process (1 Kings 22:22,23; Ez. 14:9; Job 12:16). If a prophet is deceived, God has deceived that prophet (Ez. 14:9), although Ez. 13 is clear the prophet will be judged by God for the deception. So again we conclude that the operation of God's Spirit does not remove human freewill, but rather confirms us in the way we ourselves wish to go. Likewise with Ahab being deceived by the false prophets who were controlled by God's Angel in 1 Kings 22:22,23. He was being confirmed in what he already had set his heart upon doing, which was to go and fight at Ramoth Gilead. Romans 1 has more of the same. God gives men over to the lusts of their hearts / minds, to passions, and "to a depraved mind" (Rom. 1:24,26,28). This is what will particularly happen in the last days (1 Tim. 4:1), just as it did in the collapse of Christian faith which was seen in the run up to the events of AD70. The contrast is in :13, where "but... for *you*" there is sanctification, holiness, brought about by the Spirit of God, but again confirming those who wish for holiness. This sanctification by the Spirit is in terms of the comfort [by the Spirit Comforter] of our hearts / minds, and establishing them in the mindset we wish for (:16,17). This all serves to magnify the huge importance of the human decision and desire. We are left utterly alone to decide whether we wish above all things for God's Kingdom, or for the things of the flesh. Just as the Lord was in Gethsemane, to the point of feeling forsaken by God.. This is why His struggle in the garden was more poignant than His actual death on the cross, which was simply the path of total surrender which He had chosen in Gethsemane. But that aloneness then fades once we decide rightly, and the Spirit confirms us in our path.

This passage explains clearly why the Bible is so confusing. God plagued the first century ecclesia with false brethren who could work impressive miracles; because "they received not the love of the truth (they treated it as a hobby)... God shall send them strong delusion, that they might believe a lie". God deceived brethren in the run up to AD70- it's that plain. And the events of AD70 are typical of our last days. 2 Thess. 2 has many connections with the Olivet Prophecy, as noted on :3. The idea of brethren being deceived at the time of Christ's "coming" connects with Mt. 24:5,11,24 describing 'the majority' (Gk.) of the latter day ecclesia being "deceived". 2 Thess. 2:11 says that this deception is sent by God because they refuse to love the Truth. The conclusion is hard to avoid: in our last days, the majority of us will be deceived because we don't "love the truth" - it's no more than a hobby. Whether we have yet reached that situation must remain an open question. God worked false miracles at the time of AD70, according to 2 Thess. 2:9-11. This means that the 'miracles' claimed by some false religions may be actual miracles; God allows them to be done because He wishes to deceive such people.

This same word for "lie" is used in :9 about "lying wonders". This implies that the beast / false prophet / man of sin is somehow allowed by God to do the lying wonders; they will be sent by God to test the faithful. God deluded the unfaithful within the first century ecclesia into false doctrine and alienation from Him; and it seems, if we are interpreting correctly, that He will do the same in these last days.

2:12 *That they all might be condemned who did not believe the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness*- See on :10. "Truth" clearly has a moral aspect here. To not love or believe the truth means that one has pleasure in unrighteousness rather than pleasure in or love of the truth (:10). Truth, even on an academic, intellectual level, is often rejected because of a subconscious desire to walk in unrighteousness and to dodge the moral demands of God's truth. This is why every false doctrine has a

moral basis to it, a widening of the narrow way in practice, or some implied excuse for not living in the Spirit as we should.

2:13 *But, brothers, we are obligated to give thanks to God always for you, beloved of the Lord, for God chose you from the beginning to salvation, through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth-* This final section down to :17 emphasizes the work of the Spirit in confirming the believers, because we have been reading that those who refuse to believe are confirmed in their unbelief by another spirit sent from God to psychologically confirm them in their path; see on :11. As also explained in Romans 8, God's election of us is part of His grace, and if we believe the truth of Christ, He will sanctify us by the gift of His Spirit in our hearts. We can resist that process, quench or grieve the Spirit, limit the Holy One of Israel. The Judaizers taught that Israel were the chosen people; the same word for "chose you" is used in the LXX of Israel (Dt. 7:7; 10:15). But the new Israel in Christ are the chosen ones, "the beloved of the Lord". The Jews had chosen not to "believe the truth" of Christ (:12); those who do believe the truth are the chosen. It is by such belief that we make our "calling and election sure" (2 Pet. 1:10). Those who do not believe nullify their calling; they become those whose names were not written in the book from the beginning (Rev. 13:8) and are therefore destroyed because of it. Our having been chosen from the beginning was so that we might be holy or sanctified (Eph. 1:4); if we refuse to be holy then we are annulling our calling. But if we wish to be holy, then the gift of the Spirit will work in our hearts to sanctify or make us holy in practice. The Spirit working in our hearts can sanctify us, make us holy and acceptable to God. This is a common theme. "The Gentiles might be made acceptable, being sanctified by the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 15:16; 1 Pet. 1:2), our spirit / mind / heart is sanctified by God, this is something psychologically done to us, an operation performed upon us (1 Thess. 5:23); and it begins at baptism: "you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and in the Spirit of our God" (1 Cor. 6:11). To live an unholy life, one which is not sanctified, is to despise "the spirit of grace" or gift (Heb. 10:29).

2:14 *Unto which He called you through our preaching of the gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ-* Paul was only with the Thessalonians three weeks at most, during which time he worked day and night to support himself, dodged and endured persecution, and they also had to work. So the number of contact hours was very small (see on 1 Thess. 1:1,9). And yet through that brief witness, they heard their calling, which had been prepared for them from before the beginning (:13) and which if followed, would lead them to obtain the glory of the Lord Jesus. The glory of the Lord Jesus is His moral perfection; and the gift of the Spirit to those who believe the truth and accept the calling was intended to make them holy in their hearts and practice (:13), so that at the last day they would be made fully like the glory of the Lord Jesus.

2:15 *So then, brothers, stand fast, and hold to the teachings which you were taught, whether by word, or by our epistle-* Seeing the great process which was going on with them, begun by their responding to the brief message preached to them (see on :14), they were to hold on to the teaching received, remain within the process of being sanctified by the Spirit (see on :13).

2:16 *Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God our Father, who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace-* "Grace" often refers to the gift of

the Spirit (see on :13). The love of the Lord Jesus was in dying for us (Rom. 8:37; Gal. 2:20), and His death was likewise the Father's love for us (Jn. 3:16). It was through that death that the Comforter, the Spirit which would abide eternally, was given (Jn. 14-16). The ideas here are all connected together in Rom. 5:5: "Hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us". The gift of the Spirit in our hearts, the Comforter, sanctifies us and propels us on the journey towards salvation (:13)

Everlasting consolation- This comfort has been given us, and yet Paul prays they might have this comfort (:17). Clearly enough he realized that so much potential spiritual help is available, but it doesn't come automatically into our lives in practice; it must be perceived, desired and prayed for. Thus Paul prays that the Lord Jesus would "establish" them in their works (cp. Ps. 90:17) and then confidently proclaims in 3:3 that He will indeed do this for them- so confident was he that his prayer for their innermost strengthening would be heard. The eternal nature of the Holy Spirit comforter is in that we are now being sanctified, made holy (:13), transformed into the kind of characters we shall eternally be. In this sense the Comfort would abide with us for ever (Jn. 14:16).

2:17- see on 2:7.

Comfort your hearts and establish them in every good work and word- This is another call for direct action upon the hearts of believers by the Father and Son; and they have promised to do this through the work of the Comforter, the power of the Spirit within our hearts. We will be established in whatever good work or word we speak or teach; whatever we put our hands too in His service will be blessed and established. The establishing is at the last day (1 Thess. 3:13 s.w.); the good works and words of this life all form part of a spiritual character which shall be set in stone eternally, as it were, at the last day.

"Good work" is the same phrase as in Eph. 2:10, where we are to do the good works which were "beforehand prepared" for us. "Beforehand prepared" suggests we were prepared for the performing of our good works from a specific beginning point. And that surely was at 'the beginning'. Our entire genetic history, the nature of our early childhood experiences and surrounding family, was prepared so that we would be born with the wiring required to do the works intended. To turn away from those works, through disinterest, laziness, wilful lack of perception, self absorption... is to waste so much. We on our side must be prepared unto every good work (2 Tim. 2:21); "be eagerly ready [s.w. prepared] unto every good work" (Tit. 3:1). We are to abound in good works (s.w.) because of God's abounding grace to us (2 Cor. 9:8). The good works are therefore a way of life and not some occasional good charitable deeds. We will be 'established' in this life of good works (2 Thess. 2:17); we are to "follow every good work" (1 Tim. 5:10), a strange phrase until we understand that the good works were prepared for us ahead of time, and we are to follow after them. We are to be on the look out, prepared, for those good works.

2 THESSALONIANS CHAPTER 3

3:1- see on Lk. 18:1.

Finally, brothers, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may run swiftly and be glorified, even as also it is with you- Paul's frequent requests for prayer show his need, vulnerability and equality with his converts. We ought to unashamedly ask

others for their prayers if we too believe that the prayers of third parties really can influence our path and the success of our preaching work. The word of the Lord was glorified when people believed it (Acts 13:48), but Paul believed that the prayers of others could somehow influence whether individuals believed it or not.

There is an idiom in Scripture which concerns running. To 'run' is sometimes used to describe a man's response to God's word (Ps. 119:32,60; 147:15; Amos 8:11,12; Hab. 2:2; Jn. 8:37 RV; 2 Thess. 3:1 Gk.)- it must be a running, active, speedy response. Dan. 12:4 seems to imply that in the last days, God's word will be clearly understood by the brotherhood and therefore many will "run to and fro" in response. The more clearly we understand and perceive God's word, the faster we will 'run' in response. We cannot separate our Bible study from our actions. This is why we should not only do our Bible readings daily, but study and pray and strive to understand... so that we will be the more motivated in practice. It is all too easy to be apparently zealous for good causes, as are many unbelievers, because of the needs of the moment, because we are in a situation where we would feel awkward not to enthusiastically respond... but the only true and lasting motivation for good works is an understanding, a purely personal understanding, of God's will for us. When the shepherds were told that Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem, they "quickly" went there- for they believed what they had understood (Lk. 2:16). Paul "immediately" went to preach in Macedonia after seeing the vision suggesting he do this (Acts 16:10), just as he "immediately" began his initial preaching commission after receiving it (Gal. 1:16).

The word of the Lord was glorified in the Thessalonians- so Paul sincerely felt. But he goes on to speak of weakness amongst them. But he sees the cup half full rather than half empty, and never seeks to give the impression that he is addressing only some within the community he is enthusing about.

3:2 *And that we may be delivered from unreasonable and evil men. For all do not have faith-* These surely refer to the Judaists, whose schemes to stop the spread of the Gospel were Paul's constant headache. "All do not have faith" may be a way of saying that this group of people appeared to have faith but did not; they were the false brethren who posed as converts of Gal. 2:4.

3:3 *But the Lord is faithful, who shall establish you and guard you from the evil-* Mt. 13:19 describes the evil one taking away the word out of our heart. However can we resist that evil one? Paul had his eye on this question in 2 Thess. 3:1,3, where he speaks of the word being *with them*, and also of the Lord keeping them from the evil one. Paul knew that the Lord (Jesus) will help us in keeping the word in our hearts, if we allow him to; he saw the Lord's power as greater than the schemes of the Judaizers to upset their faith (see on :2).

"Establish you" translates Greek meaning 'to turn in a direction, to confirm'. The Lord confirms us in the path we wish to go; He has the ability to turn human hearts by His direct operation upon us (:5; Prov. 21:1). The theme continues in :5, where we read that the Lord directs our hearts; and see on 2:17. But this turning or establishing of the human heart is often done by the Lord through a human mechanism; the same word for "establish" is found in Lk. 22:32, where Peter is told to "strengthen" his brethren, in Rom. 1:11 where Paul speaks of his strengthening of the Roman believers through his personal presence with them and teaching the Gospel to them (Rom. 16:25), and in 1 Thess. 3:2 where Timothy's visiting of brethren would strengthen them (Paul goes on to say that *the Lord* would strengthen them, 1 Thess. 3:13- working through Timothy to do so, we can conclude). Likewise in :5 when we read that the Lord will "direct" their hearts, the only other time Paul uses this word is in 1

Thess. 3:11 where he speaks of how God will direct his journey so that he visits the Thessalonians. God's confirming of His children in their way to Him can operate through the agency of our pastoral efforts for others, our physical presence with them through visiting them, our sharing of the Gospel with them.

They could be 'guarded' or 'kept' from the forces of evil, the Judaizers associated with "the man of sin" in chapter 2. This implies direct psychological action upon them by the Lord Jesus; and clearly He uses His Spirit to achieve this. Thus the same word is used of "the Holy Spirit which dwells within us" empowering Timothy to keep or guard what had been entrusted him (2 Tim. 1:14).

3:4 *And we have confidence in the Lord concerning you, that you both do, and will do, the things which we command-* Why "confidence in the Lord", rather than 'confidence in you'? The Greek strictly means 'to be persuaded'. Paul was persuaded of their current and future obedience because they were "in Christ". Time and again, this was the basis for his positivism about others. They were in Christ and counted as Him. And so he assumes their current and future compliance with His will, knowing that the Spirit would be working to make them in reality what they were counted as by status.

3:5- see on Jn. 5:42.

And so may the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God- Paul was confident God would act directly upon their hearts due to his prayer for them of 2:16,17. Here we have a clear statement to the effect that God is able to work directly upon the human heart, guiding it to a position or understanding. If we are simply intended to read the Bible and figure out things for ourselves, then Paul not only would state this explicitly, but there would be no point in him praying and wishing for such 'direction' of their hearts, if the direction of the human heart is purely down to our unaided efforts, and by our own intellectual processing we are intended to as it were squeeze the Spirit out of the pages of the book called the Bible.

Into the patient waiting for Christ- Gk. 'the patience of Christ'. His characteristics should be our aim, and Paul knew that God can work directly on the human heart to make us more like His Son. Note that He is even now patient; John spoke of how he was sharing in the patience / endurance of Christ (Rev. 1:9). This is the same idea as in Colossians 1 and Rom. 8 [see notes there]- we are counted righteous by reason of our status in Christ, but God's grace doesn't simply count us that way, but works through the Spirit within our hearts to actually change us into the "Christ" which we are counted as being. That work of the Spirit is through mechanisms, such as God's word which is Spirit and life (Jn. 6:63), and through the ministering of men like Paul who aim to present us "perfect" or completely in Christ, in the last day (Col. 1:28). But God is also sovereign and can clearly work directly on human hearts; for historically, not all believers have had access to Bibles and the majority have been illiterate.

3:6 *Now we command you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw yourselves from every brother that walks disorderly-* "Disorderly" is the same word translated "unruly" concerning those who ought to be "warned" at the time the first letter was written (1 Thess. 5:14). If the warning hadn't worked, then the Thessalonians were to withdraw themselves from these individuals who were demanding financial support from the church whilst refusing to work (:11). The "tradition" received from Paul may have been a verbal or written statement directly from the Lord, to the effect that there were not to be handouts for those who refused to work and who saw church membership just as a means of income, confirming them

in their laziness. In every age and society, there are those who wish to join the church in the hope of material benefit. Paul here does not advocate a totally non-judgmental approach; he is quite insistent that this should not be allowed. And his motive was clearly because he wanted to see human salvation in Christ; and going through the motions of joining Christ simply in order to attain some secular advantage was not going to help the people concerned. 'Withdrawing' means more to keep away from, rather than religious excommunication; in this context it could simply mean that the church was not to give them financial support. But "withdraw yourselves" is also translated "avoid", literally meaning 'to arrange around' (as in 2 Cor. 8:20). The idea may not be formal excommunication, but some other form of church discipline- or simply, an exclusion from the list or "number" of those who received support as in 1 Tim. 5:9. Verse 10 is translated in some Bibles as "don't give them food", supporting this idea; but the force of "withdraw yourselves" seems to suggest that Paul wasn't merely warning the ecclesia not to give food as welfare support to these people, but to not associate with them, and therefore, not to eat with them in a religious sense.

The whole passage in 2 Thess. 3:6-12 seems to criticize sloth and sponging off others in remarkably strong language, insisting that those who are think they can get an easy ticket through life at others' expense must be separated from. But the language is *so* strong, that we wonder whether this really is all that in view. We recall that the feeding miracles of Jesus and His general attitude to assisting the sick and needy never incorporated any kind of "means test", a checking out of whether actually every single person in the crowd of 5000 males was in fact genuinely in need of food. Rather does He give, so superabundant in His grace that there were large carrier baskets full of the crumbs afterwards. When we encounter human need, it could probably often be argued that the need could have been avoided by harder work by someone somewhere; but surely the need is the call, to action on their behalf. For any hard hearted "God helps those who help themselves" attitude seems to me at variance with the gracious giving of the Lord to us. We from our distance are unaware of exactly what was going on in the ecclesia to which Paul wrote, and we don't fully know the false teaching and exact forms of misbehaviour which he was up against. But the evidence above is surely enough to conclude that whatever the details, Paul wasn't arguing so strongly for the utter exclusion of lazy spongers. There seems to have been far more to this group of people than simply that. I suggest on :10,11 and :14 that these who refused to work and demanded support were in fact Judaizers, who in line with Paul's dire warning against them in chapter 2, needed to be excluded from the church.

And not after the tradition which they received from us- It seems from 2:14,15 that Paul taught them the Gospel, and then gave them "traditions", 'that which is passed on', i.e. from Christ, concerning practical Christian living; exactly in accord with how the great commission requires us to preach the basic good news of a risen Christ, baptize people, and then teach them further all things He commanded and passed on to us (Mt. 28:19,20). But the context goes on to say that they were to follow Paul's example; as if his personal example was the tradition he had set for them to follow. He repeatedly states that he had consciously lived as he had in order to set them an example, and he is now declaring this as the "tradition" they are bound to follow.

3:7 For yourselves know how you ought to imitate us. For we ourselves did not behave disorderly among you- As suggested on :6, the "tradition" received may have simply been in Paul's example, which the Lord intended his converts to imitate. The idea of consciously modelling, of having some characters as your heroes, your

inspiration towards a closer following of God, was very much in Paul's thinking; and it would have been especially appropriate to an illiterate church who didn't have access to the completed New Testament and had been likely cast out of the synagogue where the Old Testament scrolls were located. This is why Paul realized that he was to be their example of Christian walk, and encourages them to follow his example. He several times uses the word 'mimicking', Greek *mimicos*, normally translated "follow" in the AV. This Greek word is used almost exclusively by Paul. "You became *followers* of us and of the Lord.... you know how ye ought to *follow* us... an example unto you to *follow* us" (1 Thess. 1:6; 2 Thess. 3:7,9; the implication could be that that in the gap between 1 and 2 Thessalonians, they stopped following Paul as they initially did straight after his conversion of them).

3:8 *Neither did we eat bread for nothing at anyone's hand; but we ate our bread as the result of our own labour and toil, working night and day, that we might not financially burden any of you-* Paul paid Jason for the meals provided; as he was only three weeks in town, and would not have had time to set up his own tentmaking business. He would therefore have had to do odd jobs for low pay, working at night as well. And he did so having recently been severely beaten in Philippi, with the marks of the wounds clearly all over him and likely with broken or fractured bones. "Labour and toil" are words which mean pain, weakness, weariness. He performed his work, perhaps carrying water or shifting building materials or merchandise in the market, with difficulty because of his physical state. See on 1 Thess. 2:9.

Note the allusions here to the LXX of the account of the curse on man in Eden, to 'eat bread' as a result of 'labour and toil' (Gen. 3:17-19). Paul is saying that he accepted the curse and didn't seek to get around it, as some in the church were trying to. It could be argued that living "disorderly" is alluding to the common Rabbinic statements concerning the "order" established for man in early Genesis. The same Greek word is used in Greek translations of the Rabbinic interpretations of the curse in Genesis. So perhaps these people were caught up in a false teaching that the curse in Genesis has been lifted- and therefore they were free from the obligation to work. We too live in a world where man constantly seeks to avoid the curse in Genesis, rather than accepting our humanity and fallen position and working within those ties that bind, towards the ultimate freedom of God's Kingdom. See on 2 Thess. 2:2.

3:9- see on Acts 19:31.

Not because we do not have the right to do so, but to make ourselves an example to you- that you should imitate us- Here we have an example of choosing to live on a higher level than the minimum; Paul could have asked for material support from the Thessalonians, but he chose not to in order to set them an example and to avoid establishing a wrong precedent. He was deeply aware that he was the living example of Christianity to them, the only template they had to copy in practice; see on :7. Many of our choices come down to a decision between living on a higher or lower level; and the pattern of the Lord Jesus inspires us to live as high as we can, whilst showing understanding to those who like us all, in many areas of life, live on lower levels.

3:10 *For even when we were with you, this we commanded you: If any will not work, neither let him eat of your food-* Paul's example, as noted on :8 and 1 Thess. 2:9, was absolutely congruent with his commandment to them. He was the word made flesh in this sense. It is clear from 1 Thess. 4 that there were gaping holes in their theological knowledge, given the brief time Paul was with them; but his focus was more on the practical issues which are very much the Gospel as preached by the Lord Jesus in the gospel records.

But what may lie behind Paul's tough line against those who refuse to accept that "if any will not work, neither shall he eat" (3:10)? "If any will not work, neither shall he eat" is a quotation from a Jewish Targum [paraphrase] on the curse upon Adam in Eden; especially the *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* on Gen. 3:19. The language of Gen. 3:17-19 about working and eating bread is alluded to several times in 2 Thess. 3:6-12. When Paul speaks of how he "worked in toil and hardship" because he couldn't eat others' bread for nothing (3:8), he clearly has in mind the curse upon Adam. Paul's comment that such persons shouldn't be 'given anything to eat' in 3:10 would then be an allusion to how the serpent gave food to Eve, and she then gave the food to Adam. And the serpent is set up as typical of the Judaizing element that sought to destroy the church (2 Cor. 11:3; Rom. 16:20). Genesis 3 is arguably the most used and yet most misunderstood chapter in the Bible, and thus it has ever been. So many of the false teachings circulating in first century Judaism involved misinterpretations of this chapter.

My suggestion would therefore be that there was a teaching going around that actually we are no longer under the effects of the curse in Eden. We don't need to work, we bear no responsibility for our sins nor do we suffer from the effects of Adam's sin. And they believed this to the point that they expected more wealthy Christians to as it were fund their belief by providing for them materially. Now this all involves something far more than the laziness and occasional irresponsibility which at times we all struggle with. They were "disorderly", *ataktos*, not in "order". The word is used in a military context for soldiers falling out of line in marching. By claiming to be more than human, these people were unacceptive of their humanity, their place in the ranks of the rest of humanity. Interestingly, *ataktos* is derived from the Greek verb *tassein*, "to order", and this verb is several times used by the Septuagint in the context of the "order" decreed by God at the beginning (Lev. 18:4; Dt. 27:1; Job 38:12); it's also used in Jewish writings about the "order" established by God at the time of Adam's sin (M.J.J. Menken, *2 Thessalonians* (London: Routledge, 1994) p. 131 provides examples). Sirach 7:15 speaks of how Adam's sin led to "toilsome labour and agriculture, *ordered* by the Most High". The *disorderly* walk of some in Thessalonica was therefore in refusing to accept their own humanity and the consequences of being human; in this sense they were *disorderly* in that they refused to accept that we must work if we are to eat, and sought to get around it, with the implication being that they had not sinned and didn't deserve to suffer under such a curse. And hence they walked around as walkers around up to no good ["which walk... as busybodies" disguises a play on words in the Greek original]. This walking around up to no good sounds very much like the serpent in Eden; and Paul elsewhere fears lest the churches, whom he likens to innocent Eve in Eden, should be misled by such serpents (2 Cor. 11:3). And other New Testament letters suggest that misinterpretations of Eden were being used in the early churches to justify various moral, especially sexual, misbehaviours. All this leads to the same conclusion as noted on :14; that these who would not work were in fact Judaizing false teachers.

3:11 *For we hear of some that walk among you disorderly, that do not work at all but are busybodies*- "Busybodies" is literally 'working around'; we have here a word play, literally 'not busy, but busy'. Human beings have to do something with themselves all day. One blessing which came out of the Edenic curse of working in order to procreate and survive is that most people are thereby kept 'busy' and don't fall into major sin. With the unequal distribution of wealth which there is in many societies and the attempts of social welfare systems to redistribute it, there has arisen a subclass of the very rich and of the very poor who don't have to work; and the

amount of work others are required to do has in some ways been lessened by technological advances and the concept of retirement. The result of this is that people become “busybodies”- their busy-ness becomes focused on destructive meddling in others’ lives, often through the internet under the guise of social networking. I suggested on 1 Tim. 5:13 that the busybodies of Ephesus were in fact false teachers; it was these women who were forbidden from going around teaching their Judaist ideas in the house churches (1 Tim. 2:12, see note there).

3:12 *Now those that are such we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work and eat their own bread-* He has already warned them about such behaviour (1 Thess. 5:14), and now makes yet another appeal to them before having to advocate the discipline of :14. We should live “quietly”, and we are exhorted to do this “by our Lord Jesus” (2 Thess. 3:12). Our imagination of who He was and how He would have lived must be our pattern. We are in this sense in the grip of a personality cult based upon Him. Thus His patience is to be ours (see on :5). “Quietness” literally means “silence”; a strange thing to say if the only problem was laziness. I have suggested throughout this section that there is more to these lazy folk than may meet the eye, and that in fact the reference is to Judaizing false teachers who refused to work but demanded payment for their false teaching. Here then we would have a command that they should be silenced, they should not teach and not demand payment for it, but should instead work for their own bread. See on :10.

3:13 *But you, brothers, be not weary in doing good-* Not referring so much to outstanding ‘good deeds’, but to the workaday life of :12. It is this patient continuance in the workaday life, lived in the Spirit of Christ, which is so hard to maintain, and so easy to weary from. The Greek for not being weary is found in Lk. 18:1 about not being weary in the life of intense prayer (see note there). 2 Cor. 4:16 teaches that this not being weary is inspired by the gift of the Spirit, which is constantly renewing our inner man. Likewise in Gal. 6:8,9, it is “of the Spirit” that we shall not weary in well doing. This inner power to keep on keeping on cannot come merely from the flesh, for we shall simply lack the endurance. It is of the gift of the Spirit which we must be open to.

3:14 *And if anyone does not obey our word by this letter, note that man, that you have no association with him-* “Note” or marking the person is literally ‘to set a mark upon’, with clear allusion to Cain; Jn. 8:44; 1 Jn. 3:12 and Jude 11 present Cain as a prototype of the Judaizers. These people refusing to work but demanding material support would then refer to the Judaizers, who demanded payment for their false teaching. This feature of them is noted many times in Paul’s letters, and cements their association with those seeking dishonest gain from religion. This would better explain Paul’s apparently very strict attitude to those who were refusing to work. If they were simply lazy, we wonder why he would make such a major issue about them. If in fact they were Judaist false teachers, we can better understand his approach, especially in light of the prediction in chapter 2 that the ‘satan’ of the Jewish plot against Paul was to join hands with Roman civil power in order to seek to destroy the Christian community; see on :10. The call to “have no association” is strong, and I suggested above is not simply a reaction against laziness of itself, but is rooted in the fact that these busybodies were in fact Judaist false teachers. The term is only elsewhere used about not associating with brethren who were idolaters, sexually perverted and so forth (1 Cor. 5:9,11). Laziness seems of a different order, until we join the dots and see the picture, that the group referred to were in fact Judaist false teachers.

So that he may be ashamed- Even the lazy, or as I suggest, the Judaist false teachers, could repent; and it was Paul's hope they would. Shame is the outcome of condemnation at the last day, and Paul wanted them and us all to go through that process now rather than then. Paul had warned these people in 1 Thess. 5:14, and now was asking for them to be shamed. We recall how he tells the Corinthians that he is warning and not shaming them (1 Cor. 4:14), as if these were two distinct parts of a church discipline procedure. Many churches have no sense of church discipline; somebody is tolerated unchallenged, and the only discipline known is excommunication. But there were a range of disciplinary actions reflected in the New Testament. Even this 'being ashamed' may not be the final step, because :15 encourages the person to continue to be warned as a brother. So the avoidance / shaming did not include a total breakoff of relationship with him.

3:15 *But do not count him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother-* See on :14. Paul did count some as enemies, using the same word about some false brethren in Acts 13:10 and Phil. 3:18. The Jews who rejected the Gospel were 'enemies' (s.w. Rom. 11:28). Chapter 2 has warned of how the Judaizers were going to collude with the Romans to bring about a time of terrible persecution of the Christians. Paul sees these busybodies as under Judaist influence, but he doesn't feel they have gone so far as being all out enemies of the Gospel. Likewise he states clearly in 2:3-7 that the final apostasy has not yet come. We must ever remember that we were enemies of the Lord, but were reconciled to Him (Rom. 5:10; Col. 1:21 s.w.). Our attitude to the unreconciled must be the same as His has been to us; and His patience and seeking to work with us by all means has to be our pattern.

3:16 *Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times in all ways. The Lord be with you all-* The Lord Jesus is presented as the source of peace. This means that peace is not brought about merely by our own submission of our mind to God's ways and living according to our own conscience. Such peace would therefore be as it were self-created. But the peace here comes from the Lord Jesus, a gift from Him. The allusion is surely to the gift of the Spirit given by Him, and the Lord's being 'with' us through His Spirit. This is the specific teaching of Jn. 14:27; 16:33 about the Lord's gift of the Comforter, which is the Holy Spirit, who would be so within our hearts that truly the Lord Jesus is 'with' us and gives us peace. See on :18.

3:17 *The salutation of me Paul with my own hand, which is the token in every epistle. So I write-* This was particularly significant in the light of the falsified letters being sent in Paul's name; see on 2:2.

3:18 *The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all-* "Grace" often refers to the gift of the Spirit, the power of new life within the heart of the believer which is given by the Lord Jesus. "Be with you" can as well be translated "be within you", for this is where the Spirit most essentially operates. And such spiritual mindedness was Paul's greatest wish for all believers. He wished it for "all" of them, including those who wouldn't work or were lazy, despite his example of working night and day when weak to support himself; and including those influenced by anti-Paul doctrine. He truly wished the Lord's grace and Spirit to be with them all. For he wished the Lord's glory.