

# The Man of

This and other writings available from:

Robert Beecham  
Linden Cottage  
The Burgage  
Prestbury  
Cheltenham  
GL52 3DJ

or from website  
[www.GrowthInGod.org.uk](http://www.GrowthInGod.org.uk)

Dec 1996

**L** **a** **w** **l** **e**  
**s**  
**s**  
**n**  
**e** **s** **s**

## 2 Thessalonians 2: 1-10

1. We request you, brethren, for the sake of the coming (presence) of the Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him,

2. That you may not be quickly shaken from your composure or be disturbed either by a spirit or a message (logos) or a letter as if from us that the day of the Lord has come.

3. Let no one deceive you in any way; for it will not come unless the apostasy (falling away) comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction,

4. Who opposes and exalts himself above everything that is called God or worshipped, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God.

5. Do you not remember that while I was still with you I said these things to you?

6. And now you know what restrains him, so that in his time he may be revealed.

7. For the mystery of lawlessness is already working; only he who restrains will do so until he becomes out of the midst (literal translation).

8. And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will destroy with the breath (spirit) of his mouth and bring to an end by the appearance of his coming (presence);

9. whose presence (coming) is according to the working of Satan with all power and signs (miracles) and false wonders,

10. and with all the deception of wickedness for those who are perishing, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved.

## Love of the Truth

In our last verse we find the reason people are deceived. “**They did not receive the love of the truth and so be saved.**” Truth is far more than accuracy of factual information or doctrine. Truth is reality; things spiritual and natural as they really are. We must be willing for the truth about ourselves, our families, our friends, our spiritual leaders, and everything that touches our lives. Sometimes the truth will hurt us; sometimes it will delight us. It will always set us free.

Today we face a flood of deception. False ideas, false information and false impressions are thrown at us with all the power of modern technology. False teaching is easier to propagate and there are more people with inclination to receive it than ever before. The first weapon in Paul’s armoury was to have the “**loins girt with truth**”. More than ever we need that now. Jesus himself is the truth. The central message of this study is, “Look to Him; Come to Him; Assemble in Him; Follow Him.”

May He be truly in our midst.

set free from the powers of evil. Others have opened themselves to the enemy's control by their desire for position and influence. Simon, in Acts chapter 8 had both believed and been baptised. Yet Peter said to him, "For I see that you are full of bitterness and captive to sin." Before believing in Jesus, Simon had been heavily involved in the occult, and clearly was not yet free from it.

We find a parallel passage of Scripture in Revelation chapter 13. The first beast in that chapter may well refer to the Roman Catholic church. The second beast is a closer counterfeit of the truth. He has two horns like a lamb (v11). He performs great signs (v13). He deceives those who dwell on the earth because of the signs he is given power to perform (v14). If we learn to recognise deception now, we will not be deceived so easily when it grows to its ultimate. If we blindly follow signs and wonders we will fall an easy prey to the deceiver.

## Destruction of the Man of Lawlessness

In verse 8 we read of the end of the antichrist. The Lord will slay him with the breath of his mouth. What does this sentence imply? Revelation chapter 19 describes the same event. "I saw heaven opened; and behold, a white horse, and He who sat on it is called Faithful and True; ... and his name is called the Word of God. And the armies that are in heaven ... were following Him ... and from His mouth comes a sharp sword ... and the beast was seized and with him the false prophet who performed the signs in his presence ... and the rest were killed with the sword that came from the mouth of Him who sat on the horse."

We should not imagine some star wars conflict between good and evil. Jesus will be accompanied by heavenly armies. His weapon is described by Paul as the breath of his mouth, and by John as a sharp sword in his mouth. Breath and spirit are the same word both in Greek (Pneuma) and in Hebrew (ruach). The sword of the spirit is the word of God. Thus it is the word of God, spoken in the power of the Holy Spirit that will destroy the evil one.

Are these armies angelic or human? I can't say for certain. Maybe they are both, but at least I believe they include humans. I believe they are those whom he has breathed on and filled with his Spirit; those who have his word upon their lips; those whom he has raised to sit with him in heavenly places. I believe God is preparing these people now for the great closing drama of this age.

## Introduction

This writing is a study of part of the second chapter of Paul's second letter to the Thessalonians quoted opposite. In it Paul writes prophetically about the **man of lawlessness** who will one day be revealed.

Students of prophecy have identified the man of lawlessness with the Antichrist spoken of by the apostle John.

Much of what he wrote has already been fulfilled in history, and continues to be fulfilled up to the present. Its greatest fulfilment, however, is probably in the near future. Now is the time of preparation. If we can understand the past and the present, we will be better prepared for what is to come.

We must recognise the man of lawlessness now before he is revealed, and not be caught unready in the future. Even more, we must recognise Jesus now, that we may not be ashamed before him at his appearing.

## The Context

Verse 1 gives a context for the discussion that follows: "the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our assembling to Him."

There are two interesting words in this sentence. The first is the Greek word παρουσία (*parousia*) translated *coming*. Literally it means *being beside* or *presence*. In most places in the New Testament it is translated *coming* as in the verse we are considering. In many passages, as in this one, we can substitute the word *presence* for the word *coming*. This gives it both a present and a future aspect. In God, both are one. If we enjoy the presence of Jesus now, we will be ready for his future coming, whenever and however it may take place.

The second interesting word in verse 1 is the Greek ἐπισυναγωγή (*episynagoge*) meaning *assembling upon*. We can easily recognise the English word *synagogue* in it. This also has a present and a future application. There is a present assembling whenever and wherever two or three people meet in the name of Jesus. There is a future application when he will send out his angels and gather his elect from the four corners of the earth.

Underlying both present and future aspects of assembling there is a spiritual aspect. The assembling is not just assembling. It is assembling **to him**. A physical assembling of God's people is simply an outward manifestation of a spiritual coming together to Jesus. If we are spiritually assembling ourselves to Jesus in the heavenly realm, we will automatically find an outward expression of that assembly on earth. If there is no assembly in heaven, the assembly on earth is valueless. The vital thing is that each one of us obeys his instruction, **Come to me**. More on this later.

We will therefore find it possible to study this passage in two ways. We can regard it as a prophecy yet to be fulfilled, or we can see in it present realities affecting our current walk with God. The same is true of many other passages in Scripture. Both aspects, I believe, can be edifying, but the all-important thing is an understanding of the present. If we learn to walk with God now, we will find ourselves prepared automatically for whatever is to come.

The Pharisees were keen students of scriptural prophecy, but because they knew that the Messiah was to come from Bethlehem they rejected Jesus of Nazareth. They thought they had the future worked out, but they got it all wrong because they did not know God in the present. If they had been able to recognise Jesus by spiritual discernment, their minor errors of mental understanding would soon have been sorted out.

To seek to understand Bible prophecies of the future, without a proper spiritual understanding of the present, is a pathway along which many have followed the Pharisees. The results are blindness, sectarianism and pride. If we do not learn to worship God in spirit and in truth it is far better not to increase our damnation by studying the scriptures! It is better to put the Book away and let it gather dust on the shelf.

## The Day of the Lord

In verse 2 Paul moves on to the subject of the Day of the Lord. This was a subject with which readers of the Old Testament were familiar.

It was described by Isaiah as follows: "Behold, the day of the Lord is coming, Cruel, with fury and burning anger, To make the land a desolation; And He will exterminate sinners from it. For the stars of heaven and their constellations will not flash forth their light; The sun will be dark when it rises, and the moon will not shed its light. Thus I will punish the world for its

continued to meet, as they were powerfully drawn by the Holy Spirit and by love for one another.

Time passed and the initial flame burnt down. They still met, but *Ichabod* (*Where is the glory?* - see 1 Samuel 4:21) was written over their gatherings. The glory of God had departed. Jesus was no longer in their midst. Ezekiel's vision of the glory of God leaving the temple and the city (chs 10,11) had a second fulfilment. There was now a vacant seat. The man of lawlessness was ready to take it. Men began to dominate and rule and exalt themselves over the flock of Christ. Their claims became more and more blasphemous and their titles more and more exalted as the centuries passed.

This passage of 2 Thessalonians has been fulfilled historically, and is being fulfilled, and may be fulfilled yet more. It is of no value to meet if Jesus is not in the midst. Worse than that, it is dangerous. One is, at least in a small way, building a platform for the manifestation of the antichrist.

Many people imagine that as long as they are assembling, they are satisfying God's requirements. The instruction of Hebrews 10:25, "... **not giving up our own assembling ...**", is only obeyed if Jesus is in the midst. The same Greek word episynagoge is used there as in verse 1 of our passage. It implies meeting together upon him. If he is not in the meeting, it is better if we aren't either. Paul told the Corinthians plainly that they came together **not for the better, but for the worse** (1 Cor 11:17).

## Miracles

The presence of the antichrist is attended by **all power, miracles (signs) and false wonders** (v9). It is a dangerous mistake to think that miracles are a proof of God's approval. Many churches in this country are obviously in a state of deadness. Others appear to have activity and spiritual life. Healings take place and spiritual gifts are manifested. Many people imagine that is enough. Provided things are happening and the church is growing, God must be pleased.

It is the consistent testimony of both scripture and experience that the supernatural can come from two different sources. The fact that it is occurring in the church or among real Christians is still no proof that it has come from God. Occult powers can work through people who have at least in some measure a genuine experience of God. Some have never properly been

man, I believe he is the most guilty. James wisely says, “Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that we shall receive a greater judgement”. If we see lawlessness in the world, we must search our hearts and root out the lawlessness from there. Judgement must begin at the house of God.

## Who is in the midst?

We read in verse 4 that the man of lawlessness takes his seat in the temple of God.

It was a terrible day when Antiochus Epiphanes placed a statue of Jupiter in the temple of the Lord in Jerusalem and offered a sow upon the altar. It was in Daniel’s words an abomination of desolation. But the Most High does not live in houses made with human hands.

There is a far greater and more important temple than any that ever stood or may yet stand on Mount Moriah. “You are the temple of the Holy Spirit”, wrote Paul to the Corinthians. The man of lawlessness wants to take his seat in the midst of God’s people. His great aim is to take Christ’s place. He wants to rule the people of God. He wants to sit in the midst of their assembly and dominate it with his presence. That is the real abomination of desolation. Beside this a mere pig on an altar of stone is nothing.

Is it possible that antichrist can take the place of honour in a gathering of true believers? We find the answer in verse 7. Literally translated this reads, “He who restrains (will do so) until he becomes out of the midst”. Jesus said, “Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there I am in their midst” (Mat 18:20). If Jesus is in the midst, there is no room for the man of lawlessness.

If Jesus becomes out of the midst there is then a vacuum waiting to be filled. Note the passive of the word gathered. God does the gathering, not we ourselves. The people of God come together in different ways. Some are truly drawn together by the Holy Spirit and genuinely meet in the name of Jesus. Jesus is then in the midst according to his promise. Others meet of their own or someone else’s will, or through habit, or because they think they should. Jesus has given no guarantee that he will be in their midst.

Church history illustrates and clarifies this for us. The early believers met together often against opposition and in personal danger, but they

evil, and the wicked for their iniquity; I will also put an end to the arrogance of the proud, and abase the haughtiness of the ruthless” (chapter 13: 9-11).

Zephaniah described it in similar terms: “Near is the great day of the Lord, Near and coming very quickly; Listen the day of the Lord! In it the warrior cries out bitterly. A day of wrath is that day, a day of trouble and distress, a day of destruction and desolation, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of trumpet and battle cry, against the fortified cities and the high corner towers” (chapter 2: 14-16).

The Day of the Lord is also spoken of by Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Amos, Joel, Obadiah and Malachi. It is seen almost universally as a time of judgement.

The Thessalonians had evidently received messages or letters purporting to be from Paul and indicating that the Day of the Lord had come. It was obviously a frightening thought, and Paul wanted to reassure them that it was not true. He went on to give them signs by which they could recognise its approach. We will turn our attention to them now.

## The Apostasy

In verse 3 we read that apostasy will come before the Day of the Lord comes, and the man of lawlessness will be revealed. Apostasy means a falling away (from God). Paul was once accused of teaching apostasy from Moses (Acts 21:21). Obviously, the apostasy had not taken place then, but has it taken place now? Let’s look at what’s happened since then.

From the first century to the time of the reformation the church went progressively into ever deeper darkness. I am no expert on church history and only want to give a bare outline. Persecution kept the church fairly pure until the time of Constantine. After he became Roman emperor in the year 312 he made Christianity the official religion of the empire. Everything then began to change. What should have been a blessing became a curse. Heathen temples were turned into churches and heathen festivals were christianised. Images and idols were worshipped. Ritual prayer replaced prayer from the heart. Bishops and church leaders began to be powerful and wealthy people.

Time passed and the church became more and more one with the world. Political and military power replaced spiritual. Armies set out in the name of Christ to recapture the Holy Land, slaughtering large numbers of Jews and Muslims and others wherever they went. Worse was yet to come. For several

hundred years the inquisition terrorised Europe. This was the systematic torture and killing of all who disagreed with or stood against the teachings of the church. Millions of faithful followers of Jesus besides Jews and many others were put to death in the name of Christ and religion. Bibles were only available in Latin and only a few educated people could read them.

If the apostles had been given a preview of church history they would have torn out their hair in utter disbelief. If they could have foreseen the idolatry, the power struggles, the corruption and the bloodshed all done in the name of Christ, they would have sat down for 7 days like the prophet Ezekiel by the river Chebar astonished and dumbfounded.

If words have any meaning then the word *apostasy* describes the state of the church in the middle ages.

In the past century the western world as a whole has largely fallen away from any practical belief in God. In Islamic, Hindu and Buddhist countries religion is a visible part of daily life. However in those countries that have in the past been called Christian, public life continues with almost no reference to God. Anyone who speaks of his creator in public is now considered by most people to be fanatical or eccentric.

General apostasy from the Christian faith, in fulfilment of this verse, can now therefore be considered as an accomplished fact. The *falling away* of which Paul spoke has taken place.

We can easily see apostasy in history, but there is another apostasy of a more serious nature. It is the root of all apostasy and Jesus himself speaks of it in his message to the first church: “**I have this against you, that you have apostasised from your first love**” (Rev 2:4).

We do better to examine our own hearts to find apostasy there, than to analyse its outward expression elsewhere. It is because we have fallen from our first **love** that others fall from their **belief** in God.

It is better that we repent of our own sins than the sins of history. Revival and restoration of our own first love for Jesus will cause the world to turn from its unbelief and continued blasphemy of the name of God.

## The Man of Lawlessness

We must now consider the various statements Paul makes about the man of lawlessness. He is lawless; he is the son of destruction (v3); he exalts himself; he takes his seat in the temple of God (v4); his coming and presence will be accompanied by all power and miracles and false wonders (v9). The Apostle John writes in similar terms of the antichrist.

Lawlessness is an established feature of modern society. You only need to read the morning paper or listen to the news to know this. Crime statistics are soaring in most countries. Less and less places all over the world are safe to walk around at night. Travel in many parts of the world is increasingly dangerous. More and more we need to ask for the Lord's protection in our daily lives.

Clearly we live in an age of lawlessness.

It is easy, but not very helpful, to dwell on the outward manifestations of lawlessness. Everybody knows about it. It is of far more value to look at its spiritual roots. Who were the lawless people in the New Testament? The Greeks? The Romans? The Sadducees? The Zealots? We find the surprising answer in Matthew 23:28. Jesus says to **the Pharisees**, “**Inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness**”. The whole chapter expands and explains this one verse and we do well to read and understand it.

The Pharisees didn't go around mugging people. Nor were they involved in football hooliganism. They were the Bible students of their day. They spent much of their time studying and teaching the law. How could they be **lawless**? They made two great mistakes. Firstly the law that they taught was largely not the law of God, but their additions to it. Secondly it was not a law written on their hearts and an inward part of their lives and experience. It was simply retained by much study in their heads.

When a bishop, ignorant of the law of God, proclaims his own views and opinions to the world, he is guilty of a far greater lawlessness than an ignorant soccer hooligan.

When a priest in a pulpit holds forth the views of his denomination, without ever searching to see if he has the mind of God, he is safe from the law of the land, but will give account on the day of judgement.

When a Bible teacher who claims to know God and to have heard the voice of the Holy Spirit rejects the word of God to proclaim the opinions of