

The Antichrist—the Ultimate End-Time Enemy (2 Thessalonians 2:1-12)

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Introduction

1. The letters to the Thessalonian church are filled with references to Christ's second coming (1 Thess. 3:11–13).
2. The reason that a final Antichrist will come at the end of the age is because Jesus Christ is coming to judge Satan, the beast, and the false prophet—“*the destroyers of the earth*” (Rev. 11:18).
3. The pattern for the Antichrist was laid down in the first post-flood worldwide rebellion (Genesis 11).
 - a. The threefold goal of that rebellion: “*Come, let us build ourselves (1) a city and (2) a tower with its top in the heavens, and (3) let us make a name for ourselves*” (v. 4)—a man-centered scheme.
 - b. The leader of this rebellion was *Nimrod* (Gen. 10:8–10)—a man-becomes-god scheme.
 - c. This the template for all rebellion hereafter.
 - d. There have been many antichrists (1 John 2:18; 4:3)—Antiochus Epiphanes, Judas, Nero, Domitian, Romish popes, Hitler, and many others.
 - e. Paul (in our text) and John (in Rev. 20) write of a final Antichrist at the end of the age.
4. As in Paul's day, the deceiver wants to confuse, confound, distract, and divert the church from the real spiritual war waged against him.
 - a. Satan's binding (Rev. 20) relates to preventing him from deceiving the nations so that the *gospel will preached in all the world* according to God's purpose in the restoring of all things (Matt. 24:14).*
 - b. Satan seeks to deceive God's people, rendering them ineffective, the danger faced in 2 Thessalonians 2.

I. The Concern (1–3a)

1. Paul's main purpose was to correct the mistaken concern that the “*day of the Lord*” had come (vv. 1, 2).
 - a. The concern related to false information purportedly received from Paul himself.
 - b. The evidence to support the church's concern was their being under great affliction (1:4).
 - c. If the day of the Lord had come, then this church was not Christ's because He had not gathered them (note 1:10).
 - d. The facts in this letter clearly demonstrate that there is but one second coming when Christ returns to judge the wicked and reward the saints (1:5–12).
2. Paul relieved their concern by simply stating that that day had not yet arrived (v. 3) because two events had to take place first (v. 4):

- a. There will be a great *rebellion* (*apostasia*, “to depart or fall away from truth in order to rebel against God’s will and standards”; Isa. 30:1; Matt. 24:11ff; 1 Tim. 4:1; 2 Thess. 2:11).
As Israel forsook Yahweh to follow her own ways (Isa. 30:1–17), so the professing church will reject truth in practice, becoming self-centered and worldly (2 Tim. 3:1–9; 4:1–5).
Right doctrine informs holy behavior because theology is practical. True faith always yields godliness in one’s lifestyle.
- b. There will be a *revealing* (*apokalupto*) of the ultimate and final Antichrist, whom Christ will destroy at His coming (v. 8; see also Rev. 19:20).
Paul spends the bulk of his correction dealing with this frightful and elusive enemy of Christ and His people.

II. The Revealing (3b–4)

1. The *character* of the Antichrist

Today’s Antichrist chasers are far more concerned with *who* the Antichrist might be than *what* an antichrist is.

- a. Antichrist is a “*the man of lawlessness*” (*anomia*, “to disregard the authority of God and live by one’s own will and desire,” often translated *iniquity*; Matt. 7:23; 13:41; 24:12; Rom. 6:19; Titus 2:14).
- b. Antichrist is “*the son of destruction*” (*apoleia*, “one appointed to destruction, perdition, or ruin”; Matt. 7:13; 26:8; John 17:12).

Lawlessness refers to his *apostasy*—his departure from the truth and willful rejection of God’s ways. *Destruction* refers to his *end* in the lake of fire (v. 8).

The Antichrist is the epitome of all that constitutes one as ungodly and wicked.

2. The *actions* of the Antichrist

- a. While Paul does not use the term *antichrist*, he does describe the man of sin as one.
Anti means two things: (1) “to oppose” God and truth, and (2) “to stand in the place of” Christ as if he were Christ (v. 4).
- b. This final antichrist, *the* Antichrist, will be *revealed* in his time (vv. 6, 7).
- c. To be antichrist is to “oppose” and “to exalt” oneself “against” whatever is “called god” — one who holds divine authority (Psa. 82; note John 10:31–38).
As Jesus is the true Christ (God in the flesh), so Satan has his counterfeit, the anti (against) Christ.
When anyone rejects God’s ways to pursue his own way, that one is opposing and exalting himself against God.
He is being antichrist.
- d. As Jesus Christ is Head and Lord of the church, so Antichrist will “seat” himself in the “temple of God,” the church (2 Cor. 6:14–18) and proclaim that he is God (v. 4).
It is this reference that led the Puritans to believe that the papacy was antichrist.

III. The Mystery (5–10)

1. The revelation of Antichrist is an unrevealed truth—a mystery.
 - a. This *mystery of iniquity* is already working, but the restrainer prevents the final Antichrist from appearing (1 John 2:18).
 - b. This restraining is also a mystery. It is referred to as “what” (v. 6) and “he” (v. 7).
The *what* likely refers to the binding of Satan, while *he* refers to the angel who restrains Satan (Rev. 20:1; see also Dan. 12:1).
2. The whole purpose of Antichrist’s revealing is to end Satan’s reign on earth. The beast, the false prophet, and Satan are all destroyed at Christ’s return (Rev. 20:10).

IV. The Purpose (11, 12)

1. Antichrist’s coming is a work of Satan that will be accompanied by signs and lying wonders (v. 9).

Are we not seeing such “miraculous” activity in many churches? Is all this preparing for the Antichrist?

2. God is using this deception in order to judge those who are perishing (v. 10).

Someone has rightly said that men such as Joel Osteen are God’s judgment on people who refuse to love the truth. These people want their own truth, not God’s.

The proof of this observation is found in verses 11 and 12: “*Therefore God sends them a strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false, in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.*”

Application

1. There is a professing church (apostate), and there is a possessing church (true). The true church is distinguished from the false church through this simple test: “*The saying is trustworthy, for: If we have died with him, we will also live with him; if we endure, we will also reign with him*” (2 Tim. 2:11, 12; see also Heb. 3:14; Rev. 13:10; 14:12).
2. Beware of the many sensational and alarmist efforts to identify the Antichrist and link him to current events. A search of YouTube.com for antichrist returned nearly *one million* results. Many of the videos presented evidence based on prophetic revelations that God supposedly gave to people. Many of these “revelations” contain dates and events, most of which have already proven to be false.

Paul instructs us rather, “*But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ*” (1 Thess. 5:8, 9).

We simply do not know enough to draw conclusions, for every generation has believed that it was the last generation and identified its antichrist leaders as *the* Antichrist.