

250 Stand firm and hold fast - II Thessalonians Chapter 2

In II Thessalonians Chapter 1, we are reminded that when we experience suffering and trials in the Christian life, as happens to us all, we are upheld through such times by drawing on the divine resources the Lord God has granted to us. We are assured that difficult times are a passing phase, that God will avenge the troublemakers who disobey the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ (1.6-9), and that for all those “in Christ” there await wonderful times of release, rest and glory. Good News indeed!

And so to Chapter 2, where we gather that the Thessalonians were muddled about “the day of Christ” (v 2), that promised period of fulfilment of the great end-times prophecies found throughout Scripture. Such muddle is still around today, so let us concentrate now on the main features we are told of in this passage. (For a fuller account of these matters, please email us on info@fsmins.org for a free pdf copy of our book “Whatever Next?”).

We are told here of “a man of sin the son of perdition the Lawless One” (vv 3, 4 and 8, Literal), who elsewhere is termed “the antichrist”. This figure, with the foul system he represents, was already “working” in Paul’s day (v 7a), and was to be more fully revealed when “what was holding him back” (vv 6-7) was taken out of the way.

Here is a case of the “double-fulfilment” of a biblical prophecy, which we often find in Scripture. In the short term this “restrainer” appears to have been primarily the Roman Empire of Paul’s day, whose change of approach to the Jews and Christians soon after this Epistle was written led to much fiercer Christian persecution and the terrible slaughter of the Jews and the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in AD 70, these horrors serving as a foretaste of the main prophecies concerning the Lawless One yet to come.

The longer-term fulfilment - which particularly concerns us today – is set out plainly for us here and in numerous other Scriptures. At present the Restrainer of the Lawless One (vv 6-7) is undoubtedly the Holy Spirit Himself, but He will be withdrawn from that role when the removal (or “rapture”) of the Church occurs (egs., I Thessalonians 1.10 & 4.13-18 & 5.9 / I Corinthians 15.51-58 / Romans 5.9 /). This twin-removal will clear the way for the horrendous seven-year period of the “Great Tribulation” under the Lawless One, a period of righteous, divine judgement upon Jews and Gentiles for their rejection of Jesus Christ as Messiah and Lord. There follows the victorious return of Christ, His millennial reign on the earth and the final judgements (OT prophets, notably Daniel 9.27 / Matthew 24 and parallels / Revelation 4-18 / Revelation 19-20); then the new heaven and the new earth and the eternal state (Revelation 21-22). Quite a future!

The Church throughout the Christian era has been kept “on its toes” looking for the dawning of the “day of Christ” (II Thessalonians 2.2), but two features of our own generation strongly suggest that this dawning may now indeed be imminent. Crucially, the long-foretold return of the Jews to at least a portion of their land in 1948 is now a fact: (to dismiss this remarkable fulfilment of prophecy as being

scripturally irrelevant, as some argue, is extraordinary!). Secondly is the rapid and unprecedented growth of wickedness all around us these days, with truly appalling deeds becoming increasingly common-place. On these grounds - the Jews now back in their land and the spread of blatant wickedness - we would be foolish to gloss over the words of II Thessalonians 2.7-12.

Scripturally we are left in no doubt that for those in Christ the future is safe, secure and glorious, but for the rejecters of Christ the picture is fearfully different. The Church of Christ should be shouting about these things, but through unbelief, division and fear – those three old, well-used tools of the devil - most churches are silent as millions head for a lost eternity.

For our part, what is to be done? “So then, brothers, stand firm and hold fast the traditions you were taught” (II Thessalonians 2.15) – very simple and very straightforward. We can lift the prayer in verses 16-17 for ourselves – “Now may God our Father, who through our Lord Jesus Christ has loved us, and has given us everlasting comfort and a good hope by grace, comfort our hearts and establish us in every good word and work”.

May our “every good word and work” include our making known to those among whom we live the divine love, comfort and hope which we possess in Christ, and which, by faith in Christ, they can possess too.

The clock is ticking, and the warnings and Escape Route are crystal clear.

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