

2 Thessalonians (2): Day of the Lord

(2 Thessalonians 2:1-12)

I. Introduction

- A. Hal Lindsey's, *The Late Great Planet Earth* (© 1970) was an influential book
1. Claimed to apply Bible prophecy to current events to get endtime scenario
 - a. People ate it up—27 million copies and movie starring Orsen Wells
 - b. His success spawned an entire industry of endtime prophecy experts
 2. **Fact:** Every one of Lindsey's endtime predictions have proved wrong
 - a. End would come in 1980's, generation after establishment of Israel ('48)
 - b. USSR would be the Gog and Magog of Ezekiel 38 (*so, what's the USSR?*)
 - c. The Common Market alliance would reconstitute the Roman Empire
 - d. The US would fade and Rome and USSR would become political power
 3. Lindsey was asked in Christianity Today in 1977, "*What if you're wrong?*"
 - a. **Irony:** Lindsey was wrong about what would happen if he was wrong!
There's just a split second's difference between a hero and a bum. I didn't ask to be a hero, but I guess I have become one in the Christian community. So I accept it. But if I'm wrong about this, I guess I'll become a bum.
 - b. Lindsey is still respected as a prophecy expert, and still makes predictions
 4. There have been hundreds of "*Soothsayers of the Second Advent*" (Alnor)
 - a. Their predictions always fail, and yet they keep right on soothsaying
 - b. Fewer and fewer are listening—they don't think Jesus is coming at all!
- B. Wednesday night we spent some time discussing Antichrist and second coming
1. WHAT one believes will happen isn't as important as THAT it will happen
 - a. Jesus will do what Jesus will do. *Where does a two ton gorilla sleep?*
 - 1) One of the things he won't do is give an exam on our eschatology
 - 2) All the debate and speculation is a waste of time; He is coming back
 - b. We must believe THAT he is coming so we are ready (**Mk 13:35, 37**)
Therefore keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back... What I say to you, I say to everyone: 'Watch!'
 2. But all the endtime posturing and debate puts the focus on the wrong place
 - a. Invariably people look for signs that show Jesus is about to return
 - b. And they invariably get it wrong—and this disturbs people's faith
 - c. **Irony:** The more we talk about Jesus' coming, the less faith people have

- C. The church in Thessalonica had their faith shaken by talk of the 2nd coming
1. Last week, we began a series of studies from the book of 2 Thessalonians
 - a. Paul left Thessalonica after 3 weeks because of persecution (**Acts 17**)
 - b. He writes the two letters to the Thessalonians to encourage and teach
 - c. Well, we need to be encouraged and taught, so these letter are for us
 2. One of the things they were confused about was the second coming
 - a. False teachers (*false letter*) taught them a surprising heresy (**2 Th 2:1-2**)
Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him, we ask you, brothers, ² not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by some prophecy, report or letter supposed to have come from us, saying that the day of the Lord has already come.
 - 1) People were teaching the 2nd coming had already taken place
 - 2) That meant that they had missed it— Jesus came and you missed out
 - b. Remember what Paul said about their being no resurrection (**1 Cor 15:19**)
¹⁹ *If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men.*
 - c. Same applies if they missed 2nd coming... *talk about missing the boat!*
 3. In our text, Paul assure the Thessalonians they hadn't missed the boat
 - a. He will make his point in a way that is provocative and confusing
 - 1) He will point to the rise of someone he calls “*man of lawlessness*”
 - 2) His point is that Jesus won't come until after this event takes place
 - b. We need to try to understand who he is and what we can learn from him

II. The Man of Lawlessness (Reading: **2 Thessalonians 2:3-9**)

- A. The second coming will not happen “*unless the rebellion comes first*” (ESV)
1. This is the noun form of the same word that Paul uses in **1 Timothy 4:1**
The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons.
 - a. Paul mentions here two doctrines that were part of rebellion (**1 Tim 4:3**)
They forbid people to marry and order them to abstain from certain foods, which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and who know the truth.
 - b. These were issues the church struggled with during Paul's day
 - 1) Churches at Rome and Corinth struggles over meats and idols
 - 2) Paul suggested single people can serve God better (**1 Cor 11:32**)
 - c. What made these “doctrines of demons” was forbidding—test of faith
 - d. **Point:** Rebellion wasn't only some end of time deal—already happening

2. This rebellion would reveal “*the man of lawlessness*” or “*the man of sin*”
 - a. It’s no stretch to see this as the leader of rebellion, tho’ Paul doesn’t say
 - b. Paul’s description of this “son of destruction” (ESV) is rather dramatic
 - 1) He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything called God
 - 2) He sets himself up in God’s temple, claiming to be God.
 - 3) Some restraining power held him back as Paul wrote
 - 4) But that power was already at work in some form as Paul
 - 5) There would be a display of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders
- B. Before he talk about his identity, there are three things to keep in mind
1. **First**, the Thessalonians knew what Paul meant, even if we don’t (2:5)

Don’t you remember that when I was with you I used to tell you these things?

 - a. Humility is called for here; we don’t have inside information they had
 - b. Raymond Kelcy, “*In drawing conclusions, dogmatism is not in order*”
 2. **Second**, Paul’s point was to assure them they hadn’t missed 2nd coming
 - a. We don’t have to understand all the details to get Paul’s main point
 - b. They didn’t have to be troubled by the idea that they’d miss 2nd coming
 3. **Third**, the man of sin will overthrown by the power of Christ (v. 8)
 - a. Whoever this guy is, he’s going down—he can rebel, but he can’t win
 - b. This reminds us of the theme verse of the Apocalypse (Rev 17:14)

¹⁴They will make war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will overcome them because he is Lord of lords and King of kings—and with him will be his called, chosen and faithful followers.”
 - c. The point isn’t really all the details of what will happen—but *who wins!*
- C. OK, so who is this guy? Notice just a few of the traditional views—
1. **Emperor**: Domitian made himself god and demanded worship above gods
 - a. Emperor cult enforced worship, and persecuted Christians because of it
 - b. The restraining power was Rome, but beginnings were being seen (Nero)
 - c. This best fits Paul’s setting; the rise of Domitian was an ominous cloud
 2. **Pope**: Protestants have long seen the “Man of Sin” as the rise of the Pope
 - a. He is the “*Vicar of Christ*” who occupies the place of God (*ex cathedra*)
 - b. The “*counterfeit miracles*” would thus be the Mass (*transubstantiation*)
 - c. Restraining power was Rome; Pope arose in the vacuum after Rome’s fall

3. **AntiChrist:** Endtime world ruler who will lead us to Armageddon and end
 - a. This assumes a literal reading of Revelation and endtime cataclysm
 - 1) Antichrist will be political leader to arise in future (“*Future Fuhrer*”)
 - 2) He will be in league with Satan and so come to dominate the world
 - 3) On the brink of his total domination, Christ will return to destroy him
 - b. The term “antichrist” is used in the NT to apply to present, not future
 - 1) The antichrist was already in the world as John wrote (**1 John 2:18**)
 - 2) The antichrist was one who denied work of Christ (**1 John 2:22, 4:3**)
 - c. NT “*Antichrist*” is not one man of sin, but many— that may be the point!

III. Conclusion: What Does All This Mean?

- A. Paul’s point was to assure Thessalonians they hadn’t missed Christ’s coming
 1. Paul had already assured them they wouldn’t miss it (**2 Thess 1:10**)

on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed. This includes you, because you believed our testimony to you.

 - a. Because of their faith in Jesus, they would be there to marvel at Christ
 - b. There were not to let endtime theories bother them—neither are we
 2. In fact, Paul words here also are a stern warning to us (**2 Thess 2:10-12**)

¹⁰ *and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved.* ¹¹ *For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie* ¹² *and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness.*

 - a. The power of evil is the power to deceive—false teachers at Thessalonica
 - b. Paul offers two possibilities here—love the truth or believe the lie
 - 1) Truth isn’t the right endtime theory; we don’t have to figure this out
 - 2) Jesus is truth; if we will focus on him, we’ll be at end to marvel
- B. Was the man of lawlessness Caesar (past) or some Satanic *Future Fuhrer*?
 1. It doesn’t matter—as long as we see his influence at work in every age
 - a. There are always people, ideas or values that set themselves up as God
 - b. There are always lying wonders to divert our attention away from God
 - c. There is always Satan’s work opposing everything and everyone of God
 2. What protects us isn’t right endtime theory—it’s keeping our eyes on Jesus
 - a. Will we love Him more than the world? Will we seek to follow Him?
 - b. It is Jesus who calls us “*Softly and Tenderly.*” *Will we listen only to him?*