

**The Man of Lawlessness
And the Anti-Christ**

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History and Setting: The Church at Thessalonica

"We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brethren, for it is fitting, because your faith is greatly enlarged, and the love of each one of you toward one another grows even greater." 2nd Thessalonians 1:3

After the battle of Pydna, Thessalonica fell under Rome and was made capital of the second region of Macedonia.

Afterward, when the four regions or governments were united in one province, Thessalonica became virtually the metropolis. Situated on the Via Ignatia which traversed the South coast of Macedonia and Thrace, connecting those regions with Rome, Thessalonica, with its harbor on the other hand connecting it commercially with Asia Minor, naturally took the leading place among the cities in that quarter.¹

The population of Saloniki is even now 60,000, of whom 10,000 are Jews. Trade in all ages attracted the latter to Thessalonica, and their synagogue here was the starting point of Paul's evangelizing. Thessalonica was the first place where Paul's preaching achieved a numerous and socially prominent following: "For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place you faith toward you God has gone

¹ Fausset's Bible Dictionary, Electronic Database Copyright (C) BibleSoft, 1996. Thessalonica.

forth, so that we have no need to say anything." 1st

Thessalonians 1:8 (NASB)

Following Paul's departure, Timothy, under Paul's tutelage and direction, soon returned to Thessalonica. Timothy before long returned back to Paul with good news of the steadfastness and zeal propagating the Gospel. However, he also reported they had some problems of an ethical and eschatological nature. The prologue of this Epistle in the New American Standard Bible explains:

They were concerned that those who had died would be at a disadvantage not being alive when the "parousia," the coming of the Lord, would be realized. Consequently, Paul writes about the coming of the Lord as the result of this very concern that existed among the Thessalonians. He wanted to assure them that those who had died would not miss any of the glory that those who are alive at the coming of the Lord."²

The Thessalonians were convinced that Christ was going to return during their lifetime. Evidence suggests that even Paul felt the same way. The Thessalonians, however, were confusing the suddenness of the Lord's coming with its immediacy. Paul wrote his first letter concerning this matter. Evidently the people still struggled with the doctrine of this "Parousia," because he had to write them yet again to address these matters. This provides the very setting for this discussion of the Man of Lawlessness.

² The Hebrew-Greek Key Word Study Bible: New American Standard Bible, United States of America: AMG International, Inc., 1984 and 1990. Page 1585

"Let no one in any way deceive you, for it will not come unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself above every so called god or object of worship, so that he take his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as God." 2nd Thessalonians 2:3-4 (NASB)

Certain things were to take place according to Paul before the coming of the Lord. These verses talk of an "apostasy" which means a falling away, and also of the revealing of a power that was to rise exalting himself and setting himself up to be worshiped even as God. As to the "who" or "what" is a subject of much discussion. The manifestation of these verses has received the conjecture of many theologians and is the very subject of this discussion.

Foundational Elements of Various Interpretations

"Now we request you, brethren, with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and of our gathering together with Him, that you may not be shaken from your composure or be disturbed either by a spirit or a message or a letter as if from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come." 1st Thessalonians 2:1-2 (NASB)

These verses precede the passage that has proven over the ages to stir much debate as to its meaning. Now it is clear here that Paul is appealing to the Thessalonians to remain only in the teachings of the Apostles. Apparently there were people who were teaching that Jesus had already returned. Matthew Henry in his commentary expounds:

From these words it appears that some among the Thessalonians had mistaken the apostle's meaning, in what he had written in his former epistle about the coming of Christ, by thinking that it was near at hand, -that Christ was just ready to appear and come to judgment. Or, it may be, some among them pretended that they had the knowledge of this by particular revelation from the Spirit, or from some words they had heard from the apostle, when he was with them, or some letter he had written or they pretended he had written to them or some other person: and hereupon the apostle is careful to rectify this mistake, and to prevent the spreading of this error.³

A passage in verse two states; "that you may not be quickly shaken from your composure..." The Greek word there for "shaken" is "saleuoo." "Saleuoo's" primary meaning is: "NT:4531 a. properly, of the motion produced by winds, storms, waves, etc.;"⁴ This clearly shows that the people were susceptible or easily tossed about by what ever proved to be the new fashionable teaching. This appears to be the reason why Paul continues further with his explanation in order to give the people some thing of a tangible nature. He offers some detailed future events which have to take place prior to the "parousia." These events are detailed and ambiguous at the same time, especially to the Thessalonians who heard it first. Scholars today have the advantage of many years of history to examine in order to determine the content of these verses. Many different

³ Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: New Modern Edition, Electronic Database Copyright
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⁴ Thayer's Greek Lexicon, Electronic Database

interpretations or schools have arisen over these many years.

One of the primary schools of thought centered upon the teachings of the leaders of the Reformation; Luther, Calvin, and Zwingli, et al. These men were in general agreement upon the passages of scripture referring to the Anti-Christ and the Man of Sin. They ascertained that these passages were identified in that of the Roman Papacy. This was a rigorous attack against the Papacy. Realizing that this attack would cause serious harm to the Roman Catholic Church, the Papacy set out to counter the efforts of Luther and his associates.

In the late 1500's and into the early 1600's Luis de Alcazar of Seville Spain developed what became the "Preterist" system of interpretation. This approach see the events in the book of Revelation taking place in the ancient pagan Roman Empire, the antichrist being Nero or one of the other early emperors who persecuted the church.⁵

Contrary to this preterist view, Dr. Gabbard goes on to state the basis for what is the backbone for the primary view held by most scholars today:

Francisco Ribera (1537-1591) of Almanaca, Spain founded the "futurist" eschatology. Ribera placed the Anti-Christ in the distant future. About 1590 Ribera published a 500 page commentary on the book of Revelation. The primary elements of his system are:

⁵ Chambers, Roger revised by Gabbard, Danny R. TTH 342 Eschatology Class Syllabus, 2005. Page 17

1. The bulk of the book of Revelation is assigned to the distant future.
2. Anti-Christ or Man of Sin would be a single individual who would abolish Christianity, rebuild the Temple, and be received by the Jews.
3. Anti-Christ's work would continue for a literal three and a half years.
4. The conflict with the Anti-Christ would take place in the middle-east.⁶

These doctrines were formed in order to deflect criticism away from the pope. These conjectures were not motivated by an honest attempt to interpret the scripture but rather motivated by a clearly apologetic approach with an agenda. Unfortunately this ideology paved a path that many would follow in the years to come

Eventually "Futurism" entered into English Protestantism. Some scholars were urging the Church of England back to the papacy. This fact coupled with the reformation error in integrating the Anti-Christ, the Man of lawlessness, and the Beast of revelation is the foundation for past and current interpretations of 2nd Thessalonians chapter two. It is evident that most of Christendom holds to all or part of these principles. Of ten different commentaries, dictionaries, or encyclopedia's referenced for this discussion only one holds a view that

⁶ Chambers, Roger revised by Gabbard, Danny R. TTH 342 Eschatology Class Syllabus, 2005. Page 17

differs from the futurist incorporation of these "individuals."

The Man of Sin Versus The Anti-Christ

Most of Christendom today holds a view that is categorized as dispensational pre-millennialism. This view holds that the church will be raptured prior to the great tribulation spoken of in the book of Revelation. Another fundamental element of the dispensationalist is the incorporation of the scriptures pertaining to the Anti-Christ of John and the Man of Lawlessness referenced in Thessalonians. It is necessary then to dissect these scriptures to determine if this view is in fact true.

An understanding of John's purpose for writing these books is absolutely essential to understanding their content. John's primary battle was with the faction labeled as the Gnostics. This group of false teachers taught a doctrine based in Platonic dualism. They believed that the spirit was inherently good and the flesh was inherently evil. The New Unger's Bible Dictionary provides a better understanding:

Gnosticism, a name indicating the assumption of superior capacity for knowledge (Grk. gnosis, "knowledge"). Gnosticism in its diverse forms received its impulse, and in the main its guidance, from pagan philosophy. In different ways it denied the humanity

of Christ, even to the extent of denying the reality of His human body.⁷

Therefore, the Gnostics concluded Christ could not have come in the flesh because he was perfect in nature as God, and as mentioned, the flesh was inherently evil. Thus the teachings of John are full of truths that counteract this fact. The theme of Christ coming in the flesh reigns in his writings:

1st John 2:18-19 reads; "Children, it is the last hour; and just as you have heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have arisen; from this we know that it is the last hour. They went out from among us, but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out, in order that it may be shown that they are not of us." (NASB)⁸

In order to show a logical comparison and contrast, it is necessary here to reiterate the passages in Thessalonians:

Let no one in any way deceive you, for it will not come unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself above every so called god or object of worship, so that he take his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as God. 2nd Thessalonians 2:3-4 (NASB)

For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only he who now restrains will do so until he is taken out of the way. And then that lawless one will be revealed whom the Lord will slay with the breath of His mouth and bring to an end by the appearance of His coming. 1st Thessalonians 2:7-8 (NASB)⁹

⁷ The New Unger's Bible Dictionary Chicago, Illinois: Moody Press, 1988. s.v. Incarnation.

⁸ New American Standard Bible: Page 1662

⁹ Ibid, 1593-1594.

These verses alone referring to these "individuals" seem to be similar on the surface, but in fact they are very different after careful examination. There are four primary discrepancies involving these two passages.

The first discrepancy is that Anti-Christ of John was a "present entity" versus the "coming or revealing" of the Man of Lawlessness. Verse 3 of the passage in 2nd Thessalonians states; "it (the man of sin) will not come unless the apostasy comes first." (NASB) Barnes in his commentary elaborates on this passage:

The word rendered "falling away" apostasia (NT:646), apostasy), is of so general a character, that it may be applied to any departure from the faith as it was received in the time of the apostles. It occurs in the New Testament only here and in Acts xxi. 21, where it is rendered "to forsake"- "thou teachest all the Jews which are among us to forsake Moses"- apostasy from Moses- apostasian (NT:646) apo (NT:575) Moouseoos (NT:3475). The word means a departing from, or a defection; see the verb used in 1 Tim 4:1, "Some shall depart from the faith"-aposteesontai (NT:868); compare the notes on that passage; see also Heb 3:12; Luke 8:13; Acts 5:37. The reference here is evidently to some general falling away, or to some great religious apostasy that was to occur, and which would be under one head, leader, or dynasty, and which would involve many in the same departure from the faith, and in the same destruction. The use of the article here, "the apostasy" (Greek), Erasmus remarks, "signifies that great and before-predicted apostasy." It is evidently emphatic, showing that there had been a reference to this before, or that they understood well that there was to be such an apostasy.¹⁰

¹⁰ Barnes' Notes, Electronic Database Copyright (c) BibleSoft, 1997.

In contrast to this, John states the antichrist were present right there and then. There was not to be any future events to occur prior to the rise of the antichrist. They were a present entity with which they had to fervently combat; "even now many antichrists have arisen" 1st John 2:18 (NASB)

The next discrepancy is that the "man of sin" was at that time "restrained" versus the "uninhibited nature" of the antichrist. John spoke of the antichrist as having already "gone out." They were already apparently working their false teaching among the people of that day.

Barnes gives an intriguing explanation of what could be explained as the "restraining force" spoken of in 2nd Thessalonians:

[Will let, until he be taken out of the way] This will be an effectual check on these corruptions, preventing their full development, until it is removed, and then the man of sin will appear. The supposition which will best suit this language is, that there was then some civil restraint, preventing the development of existing corruptions, but that there would be a removal, or withdrawing of that restraint; and that then the tendency of the existing corruptions would be seen. It is evident, as Oldshausen remarks, that this resisting or restraining power must be something out of the church, and distinguished from the anti-Christian tendency itself; yon der Kirche und vom Antichristenthum. It is necessary, therefore, to understand this of the restraints of civil power. Was there, then, any fact in history which will accord with this interpretation? The belief among the primitive Christians was, that what hindered the rise of the man of sin was the Roman

Empire, and therefore "they prayed for its peace and welfare, as knowing that when the Roman Empire should be dissolved and broken in pieces, the empire of the man of sin would be raised on its ruins."¹¹

To lend further credence to this hypothesis, it is necessary to understand the rise of the Papacy. In the first century the church operated on a governmental system termed a collegiate eldership. That is a system of a body of elders who had equal authority and made decisions as a whole.

In the second century the church perceived a need for an individual to make the determinations of the truth of scripture. This was in reaction to a great deal of false teachers. Thus the monarchical bishop was established as the elder who would be the end all for any "gray areas" in the individual church.

As this initiative progressed, the perceived need for one bishop to rule over a group of churches (synod) developed. Eventually by the fourth century the Papal system was in place as one individual over the entire church. This Papal rise of power coincided with the demise of the Roman Empire. As the primary landowner of that time, the Roman Catholic Church continued to gather much power. The only force keeping the Papacy in check was that

¹¹ Barnes' Notes, Electronic Database Copyright (c) Biblesoft, 1997.

of the Roman Empire. As the empire continued to turn to ruin, the center of the Roman Empire was moved to Constantinople. When invaders from the north began to enter, they were greeted by the Pope who was firmly entrenched in Rome. These historical facts provide a concrete hypothesis for the futuristic interpretation of 2nd Thessalonians 2:3.

The third discrepancy is that the Man of Sin is a "singular entity" versus "the plurality" of the anti-christ(s). Many scholars have surmised over the years as to who would fulfill these prophecies of the antichrist and the man of sin. Such past identifications have included: The Roman Empire, Teitan, Nero, Mohammed, Frederick II, Luther, Napoleon III, Kaiser Wilhelm, Mussolini, Hitler, the Kremlin, and many others.¹² Barnes in his commentary offers a hypothesis as to this identification of an "office of succession" rather than that of one specific individual.

The question then is, to whom this phrase, descriptive of a succession of individuals so eminent for wickedness that the name "the man of sin" could be applied, was designed by the spirit of inspiration to refer. Dr. Newton has shown that it cannot refer to Caligula, to Simon Magus, to the revolt of the Jews from the Romans, or to the revolt of the Jews from the faith, or to the Flavian family, or to Luther, as some of the papists suppose, or to one man who will appear just before the end of the world, as others of the Romanists suppose; see his Dissertations on the

¹² Chambers, Roger revised by Gabbard, Danny R. TTH 342 Eschatology Class Syllabus, 2005. Page 25

Prophecies, xxii, pp. 393-402; compare Oldshausen, in loc. The argument is too long to be inserted here. But can it be referred to the papacy? Can it denote the Pope of Rome, meaning not a single pope, but the succession? If all the circumstances of the entire passage can be shown to be fairly applicable to him, or if it can be shown that all that is fairly implied in the language used here has received a fulfillment in him, then it is proper to regard it as having been designed to be so applied, and then this may be numbered among the prophecies that are in part fulfilled.¹³

This offers a substantial hypothesis for the papacy as being a singular entity which could fill the individualistic nature of the term "man of sin." The antichrist of John is easily ascertained to be plural in nature. The passage clearly states that many have risen from among us and that many would arise as well. Verse 22 of 1st John 2 defines "who" the anti-christ is: "Who is the liar but the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ? That is the antichrist, the one who denies the Father and the Son." The verse simply states that anyone and everyone who denies that Jesus is the Christ has the spirit of the antichrist. The Greek word for anti more properly translated would be translated ante; meaning substitute. This is exactly what the Gnostics were teaching, a substitute Christ; a non flesh and blood Christ. Anyone who denies Jesus is the Christ is guilty just as the

¹³ Barnes' Notes, Electronic Database Copyright (c) BibleSoft, 1997.

Gnostics were. This clearly demonstrates that the Ante-Christ(S) are plural in nature and not a singular entity.

The fourth and final discrepancy in integrating these individuals is that the Man of Sin "sets himself to be worshiped" as God versus the "Incarnational denial" of the Ante-Christ. As discussed in much detail the Ante-Christ simply is anyone who denies Jesus as the Christ. The Man of Sin on the other hand, as clearly stated in verse 4 of 2nd Thessalonians 2, elevates himself to the level of God: "who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God." (NASB) Barnes in great detail again elaborates:

That is, whether among the pagans or the Jews; above a false God, or the true God. This could be true only of one who set aside the divine laws; who undertook to legislate where God only has a right to legislate, and whose legislation was contrary to that of God. Any claim of a dominion over conscience; or any arrangement to set aside the divine laws, and to render them nugatory, would correspond with what is implied in this description. It cannot be supposed that any one would openly claim to be superior to God, but the sense must be, that the enactments and ordinances of the "man of sin" would pertain to the province in which God only can legislate, and that the ordinances made by him would be such as to render nugatory the divine laws, by appointing others in their place. No one can reasonably doubt that all that is here affirmed may be found in the claims of the Pope of Rome. The assumptions of the papacy have related to the following things:

(1) To authority above all the inferior orders of the priesthood—above all pastors, bishops, and primates.

(2) Authority above all kings and emperors, "deposing some, and advancing others, obliging them to prostrate themselves before him, to kiss his toe, to hold his stirrup, to wait barefooted at his gate, treading even upon the neck, and kicking off the imperial crown with his foot"—Newton. Thus, Gregory VII made Henry IV wait barefooted at his gate. Thus, Alexander III trod upon the neck of Alexander I. Thus, Celestin kicked off the imperial crown of Henry VI. Thus, the right was claimed, and asserted, of laying nations under interdict, of deposing kings, and of absolving their subjects from their oaths of allegiance. And thus the Pope claimed the right over all unknown lands that might be discovered by Columbus, and apportioned the New World as he pleased—in all these things claiming prerogatives which can pertain only to God.

(3) To authority over the conscience, in matters which can pertain only to God himself, and where he only can legislate. Thus, it has been, and is, one of the claims set up for the Pope that he is infallible. Thus, he "forbids what God has commanded," as the marriage of the clergy, communion in both kinds, the use of the Scriptures for the common people. Thus, he has set aside the second commandment by the appointment of image-worship; and thus he claims the power of the forgiveness of sins. Multitudes of things which Christ allows his people are forbidden by the papacy, and many things are enjoined, or allowed, directly contrary to the divine legislation.¹⁴

The primary error of the Papal system is taking upon itself the role of deity in some form. While not completely recognized as God, the Pope is assigned God-like powers and authority. The Ante-Christ in no way according to John's writing assumes power of any kind. The ante-Christ(s) seek

¹⁴ Barnes' Notes, Electronic Database Copyright (c) BibleSoft, 1997.

only to disgrace the fullness of Christ's humanity and deity; two vastly different modes of operation.

Summations and Conclusions

Having abolished the "integration" proposal of most of Christendom, it may be determined that the Man of sin is not the Ante-Christ. They are two very distinct entities. In discovering the discrepancies between these entities, it may be determined that the Man of Lawlessness was/is:

1. A future force not present yet in the day of Paul in contrast to the presence of the "Ante"-Christ."
2. A future force that was "restrained" in the day of Paul in contrast to the unrestrained force and spirit of the Ante-Christ.
3. A force that was identified as singular in nature and contrary to the plural nature of the Ante-Christ of John.
4. And finally, a force that would claim equality with God and require worship thereof in contrast to no such claim in that of the Ante-Christ.

The theme and purpose for many writings of the Bible are to remember that God is in control even through mans limited analysis it may seem as it were not so. Christians must keep this principle in the forefront of such debates as this one presented here. To lose sight of the crucial fact that God does triumph over all is a

dangerous proposition. The essential truth that tends to get lost among all the debate and conjecture is that God through His Son, Jesus Christ, has already won the war over these entities whomever they be. Paul beautifully states in 2 Thessalonians 2:8 "And then that lawless one will be revealed whom the Lord will slay with the breath of His mouth and bring to an end by the appearance of His Coming." (NASB).

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