

Explanation For Last Days Deception

2 Thessalonians 2:1-12

Pastor John Miller

2 Thessalonians 2, and Lord willing, we're going to look at 12 verses tonight. We don't want to lose the forest for the trees, but we do have some marvelous, marvelous verses to cover tonight and we want to try to understand them and apply them and pray the Spirit of God will open up our hearts and transform our lives and our eyes to see and to be changed by the power of His word and the Spirit working through His word. So let's pray.

Father, thank you for the time we have tonight together to study and what a joy to worship you. I pray that as we open your word, we could do that as an act of worship. We could preach as an act of worship and hear as an act of worship and obey as an act of worship. And Lord, may your word bring life to us. May we grow in the grace and the knowledge of you, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and we ask this in His precious and holy name and everyone agreeing said...

Amen. I want you to follow with me as I read just verse one, Paul says, "Now we beseech you, brethren," chapter two, verse one, "by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and by our gathering together unto him." Someone said, the purpose of Bible prophecy is not for us to make a calendar but to build character. I like that. So often when we think of Bible prophecy, we think only of the chronology of prophecy and how it's all going to go down. And Christians do disagree. Sometimes they debate on the place of the rapture, the Second Coming or the millennial reign of Christ. But the purpose of Bible prophecy is to change our lives and to bring us into right relationship with Jesus Christ. He is the spirit of prophecy.

Now, there are three reasons I want to remind you of that Paul wrote to the believers in Thessalonica, the Second Epistle. First of all, they were discouraged by persecution. He dealt with that last week in chapter one. Secondly, they were deceived by false teachers. He deals with that tonight in chapter two. And thirdly, they were disobedient to divine commands. He's going to deal with that in chapter three. So we find here that he is speaking to those who had come under the influence of false teaching. Now, what they were telling the believers in Thessalonica was basically, and I'm going to give you the gist of it before we go to the text. They were telling the believers in Thessalonica that they were in the "day of the Lord," which was known as the tribulation period.

Now, the day of the Lord is not a 24-hour period, but it's a whole kind of epic of time that covers the tribulation period and some believe even into the millennial reign or kingdom age of Christ. But the issue was the tribulation. They were upset, they were shaken, they were freaking out, to use a modern term. They were like just wiggling out because they, I believe had been taught by Paul in 1 Thessalonians, clearly in chapter four and five that the church will be captured or caught up or raptured to meet the Lord in the air and we will be forever with the Lord and that we will not be here to face this time of God's wrath being poured out upon the earth.

So naturally, when they were now being taught that they were in the tribulation, it was freak out

time. So Paul is very simply writing to them to say, "Calm down, mellow out, cool your jets." That's not from the Greek or anything like that, but that's basically what he's saying. And he gives them some things that have to happen before the tribulation can come on the earth. And so we learn some important truths about Bible prophecy.

Now, I want you to notice in verse one he says, "We beg you brothers by the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ and by our gathering together unto him." here we see the subject matter of Paul's teaching. It has to do with the coming again of Jesus Christ and by our gathering together unto him. Now, the coming of the Lord falls into two events, falls into the event. First, we know as the rapture of the church, when the church will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air. Seven years later after the end of the tribulation, then there will be the Second Coming of Jesus Christ when the church will return with Christ in power and great glory.

So when you read verses in the New Testament about the Lord's coming, you have to ask yourself, is this the rapture or is this the Second Coming? Now, they're not always clear and sometimes good Christians disagree on which verse is it referring to. I believe that verse one here is a reference to the rapture of the church, the coming here, the perusal, the appearing of our Lord when He comes. Now the word perusal actually is used for both the rapture verses and the Second Coming verses. So the context dictates which it might be. So the word itself doesn't really indicate, but the fact that "we are gathered together unto Him," I believe indicates that Paul is talking about this rapture.

And back in chapter five of 1 Thessalonians, he had been talking about the rapture being before the tribulation. We went over those reasons for a pre-tribulation rapture. Chapter four, he gave the doctrine of the rapture. Chapter five, "That day shall not overtake you as the thief. You're the children of the day. The children of the light. God has not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." So now he goes back to that subject. Now the cool thing is Paul was only in Thessalonica, it would seem for a few weeks and they were new believers, but he thought it important enough to teach them Bible prophecy. There's a lot of people today that say, "Well, you can't understand prophecy. It's too deep, it's too confusing or it's too divisive and we should steer away from that." That wasn't Paul's opinion. Paul's opinion that even these new believers needed prophetic truth to motivate them to purity and to holiness and to witnessing and to living with expectant hope that Jesus Christ was coming again. It's a clear teaching of the New Testament.

Someone said one out of every 25 verses in the New Testament has a reference to the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. So we shouldn't neglect this doctrine or this subject. So this is the subject to Paul's discussion. But here's the problem, verse two and three, he says that "no man be shaken," or that you not be shaken. The word "shaken" there was used of a building shaking in an earthquake or a tree being shaken in a violent wind. Remember I said they were freaked out, they were wiggling out, they were just all upset. This is what was going on that no man be shaken. They were disturbed by the false teaching that they were hearing in mind or troubled neither by these three things as by spirit or by word, nor by letter as from us as though the day of the Lord is at hand.

Now, my King James translation has the day of Christ, but it is an unfortunate rendering of that phrase there. It's better translated, "The day of the Lord is at hand." And you can do your own homework if you want and look it up and study it. But that is the issue. They believe that they were in the day of the Lord because of this false teaching. Now, I want you to note how this false teaching came to them that shook them up. And by the way, we should not be shaken up by false teaching either. It came by spirit, it came by word and it came by letter. Paul says, "As from us." So these are the three avenues by which the false teachers were promulgating their untruths. The first was by spirit. It's believed that this could have been a prophecy in the assembly. Someone stood up and says, "Thus saith the Lord, we are in the tribulation." And people went, "Ah!" Don't get freaked out.

Years ago, a woman stood up in our church on a Sunday and, "Thus saith the Lord, Ronald Reagan's the Antichrist." Really? "Ronald Reagan is the Antichrist." Started shaking and it's like, "Come on, lady." The other day I was on the internet looking at my computer and there's all this stuff about Barack Obama is the Antichrist. People freaking out. I'll stop right there. Don't go there. Don't get shook up. Don't get freaked out. Don't get weird. There are so many spaced out Christians in this world, don't be one of them. We're looking for Jesus Christ, not the Antichrist. I'm not looking for the Antichrist. I don't really care who he is. I don't plan on being here. And all through the New Testament tells the believer to be looking for Jesus Christ, not the Antichrist.

Now, we're going to learn a lot about him in these verses and stuff, but that's not our focus. So don't be shaken if someone prophesized. That prophecy has to be consistent with the word of God. Amen?

Go back with me to 1 Thessalonians 5:20. We got it couple of weeks ago, "Despise not prophesying." But then verse 21 of 1 Thessalonians 5, "Prove all things," and then do what? "Hold fast to that which is good. That which is not good, throw it away, don't listen to it. Hang on to biblical truth and don't be shaken or troubled when someone gives a prophecy that is unbiblical." Then notice secondly there in verse two, "Nor by word." They said that Paul is saying this. So orally they were transmitting, "Well, Paul said it. Well, Paul said it." And they were getting upset, "Paul was here. He told us that the Lord would come and catch us away to meet the Lord in the air. So what? Did Paul change his mind? Did Paul flip-flop on his position?" And then don't notice the second, "Or by letter as from us."

Someone actually forged a letter and signed Paul's name to it. Signed Paul the Apostle and said, "You are in the tribulation." And they read it and they went, "Ah!" They started freaking out. Look with me. It's interesting. At the end of 2 Thessalonians 3:17, Paul says, "The salutation of Paul with my own hand, which is the token of every epistle, so I write." Paul communicated his letters through a secretary, an amanuensis. He dictated his letters, but at the end of every letter, he would actually take the pen in his own hand and he would sign his own name. He would give his own signature to it. So Paul says, "This has my own signature. It's authentic. It's of apostolic authority." So even though someone forged the letter, some people think it was 1 Thessalonians, which is nonsense, but some fraudulent letter, don't listen to it. So prophecy, word or letter, do not be shaken.

My encouragement to you is be grounded in the word of God. Don't listen to false prophets. Don't listen to the false teaching. When it comes especially to Bible prophecy, there's so much silliness out there that you can get sidetracked and derail. Now what were they saying? "The day of the Lord is present." Not the day of Christ is at hand, but literally the day of the Lord is present. They were saying, "We are in the tribulation." There's been periods all throughout church history when Christians have thought they were in the tribulation.

Even in our modern day, Christians still freak out, think they're in the tribulation. Paul says, "Calm down, mellow out, don't be shaken. We're not in the tribulation." Now, he gives us some of the reasons why. He says, "Let no man deceive you by any means." And again, that's wise counsel. "Don't let anyone deceive you, for that day," what day? "The day of the Lord shall not come except there come a falling away first and then the man of sin, the son of perdition or destruction, he will be revealed." So there'll be the revelation of the son of perdition and there will be a falling away first. Notice what he will do, verse four, "He will oppose and exalt himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped so that He as God sitting in the temple of God, showing himself that He is God." Remember verse five? "Ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things."

Now, here's an important point in this passage. Paul tells us in verse three that we should not be deceived, that there has to be two things happen before the day of the Lord. Number one, there's going to be a falling away first. Number two, the man of sin shall be revealed. He calls him the son of perdition. That is a reference to the Antichrist, commonly known as the Antichrist. And these are two titles or terms given to him, this man of sin, the son of perdition. Now I could talk here for the rest of the night, especially on this first point. One of the greatest indications that we are living in the last days is that before the revelation of the Antichrist, before the church is caught up to meet Christ in the air, before seven years of tribulation upon the earth, before the second coming, there will be a falling away. There will be a falling away. And I have, I believe seen in our modern day the intensifying and the direction of the professing evangelical church doing just that.

The word falling away is the word apostasia. We get the word apostasy from it. The word literally means departure, departure. It came to mean, and we use it in the New Testament to mean a departure from the faith. When we see someone apostatized or they're in apostate, they have left the faith. So they are at least a professor. They claim to be a Christian, they claim to believe in Jesus, they claim to be a follower of Christ, they claim to be orthodox in their belief in Christ, but then somewhere along the line they denounce that and they turn away. "I no longer believe that there's a God or I no longer believe in Christianity's true. I no longer believe the Bible is the inherent infallible word of God. I don't believe that Jesus was God in the flesh. I don't believe that Jesus is the only way to heaven." They turn away from Christ, then they have apostatized. They have fallen away.

So what we will see in the last days, and we see it today, it began many, many years ago, and it's culminating today, it will culminate in the tribulation period is a falling away from the faith. Let me give you just a couple of references to this. Turn with me to the right in your Bible, after 2

Thessalonians, to 1 Timothy 4:1. Rather than me just quote them to you, I want you to see them. 1 Timothy 4:1, "Now the spirit speaks expressly that in the latter times some shall," here's our word, "depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of demons. Speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their conscience seared with a hot iron. Forbidding to marry, commanding to abstain from meats, which God has created to them, receive with thanksgiving, which believe and know the truth for every creature of God is good and nothing to be refused if it be received with thanksgiving, for to sanctify by the word of God and prayer."

But notice verse one, last days, Spirit speaks clearly that many shall depart from the faith. Turn to 2 Timothy 3:1, "Know this also that in the last days, perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful and unholy without natural affection, which by the way is without family love, trucebreakers, accusers, incontinent or they will be wicked, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, high-minded, lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God." And notice verse five, "They will have a form of godliness so they will be professing believers, but deny the power thereof from such turn away or withdraw thyself."

So these are false Christians, false believers. They're religious, but they don't hold to orthodox truth in the Bible. Then my favorite 2 Timothy 4, and begin with me at verse one, get a running start down to verse three. Paul says, "I charge you therefore before God, the Lord Jesus Christ who shall judge the alive and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom. Preach the word, be instant in season, out of season, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine." Why? "For the time will come," verse three, "when they will not endure sound doctrine, but after their own lust or likings shall they heap to themselves teachers having itching ears and they shall turn away their ears," from what? "Truth, and shall be turned unto fable." So you're watching all things, you endure affliction, you do the work of evangelist, you make full proof of your ministry.

Now, the truth he mentions there that men will turn away from is the same as the word of God that is to be preached in verse two is the same as the sound doctrine that is to be preached in verse three and is the same as the faith in verse seven, "I have fought the good fight. I have finished my course. I have kept," the what? "The faith." Jude says, "We are to earnestly contend," for what? "The faith once and for all delivered to the saints." You say, "Well, what is the faith?" Faith that there is one God manifested in three persons, God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit. That God the son came into the world to the womb of the Virgin Mary, that he was the God man, that he died on the Cross of substitutionary death, that he was buried and physically bodily rose from the death.

And the salvation is only through Christ, Christ alone, faith alone, the grace of God alone. That's the only way man can be saved. That's the faith once and for all delivered to the saints. Anyone denies that, they've apostatized, they've turned away from the faith. And it starts with, as I talked about Sunday morning, a low view of scripture. The apostasy that we're experiencing today that has come into the church, "Bible isn't accurate, Bible isn't reliable. You can't believe everything in the Bible. You know, all the words of Jesus aren't really there." They tear pages out and it's not clear, it's not reliable. They don't believe in divine inspiration. So they have a low

view of scripture and they have this pluralistic kind of concept that all religions are created equal and we have to be tolerant and accept them all as equally valid and we can get to heaven any way we want.

It's so popular today. It's kind of coexist concept and it's kind of come into the church. Several years ago we had the emergent church, the emergent movement within the church under the guise of being evangelical and denying the faith once and for all delivered to the saints. And undiscerning and unsuspecting Christians, sometimes were caught up in these doctrines that weren't really biblical and led astray. So we need to be grounded in true biblical truth and in God's word.

Go back with me to chapter two of 2 Thessalonians, because this is a sign of the last days. There shall come this falling away, this apostasy. And I believe that we are living in that day when men's ears are tickling and they will heap to themselves, teachers having itching ears. They don't want to hear the truth of God's word, they want to hear that which is palatable and that which is easy to understand or accept. They don't want the truth of God's word. So we live in this last day's falling away period, this time of apostasy. And then the second thing is that the man of sin, the son of perdition will be revealed. This is the Antichrist. Now we're going to see in a moment that the Antichrist cannot come on the scene until that which is restraining his revelation or his appearing is taken away.

Now I want to take the verses tonight just as they come. A lot of commentaries when you read this passage do not take them in their order. They kind of jump around to put them in a more chronological order. But I think the Spirit of God had Paul write this text in the way he did for a reason. So I want to follow it in its sequential order. The second thing is that the man of sin, the son of perdition will be revealed. He is what we commonly know this Antichrist who will be revealed. So these two things have to happen before the tribulation begins. You can't have the tribulation without the Antichrist. And by the way, the Antichrist can't come on the scene until the Holy Spirit pulls back its restraining force. My theory, by the way, and I'm getting ahead of myself, but I can't wait. My theory is, and I believe it's a good one, biblically speaking, is that in order for the restrainer to allow the Antichrist to be revealed, the rapture has to happen.

It only makes sense that the rapture happens and that the restrainer, the Holy Spirit is pulled back and that the Antichrist is then able to come on the scene. So you have apostasy, you have the church raptured, and then you have the unveiling of the Antichrist. He will make a covenant with Israel for seven years, which will be the duration of man's history upon planet Earth. That last seven years, time of Jacob's trouble when God will pour out his wrath upon this Christ rejecting world. But notice what it says about him in verse four, this Antichrist, this Son of Perdition, this Man of Sin, "He will oppose and exalt himself above all that is called god," small G-O-D, "or all that is worshiped so that he as God thinking that he's God, sitting in the temple of God shows himself that he is God." You got that? I'm going to ask you to quote that to me after church.

Now, this is describing for us what is known as the abomination of desolation. Jesus referred to

it in Matthew chapter 24 and he made mention to the fact that it was spoken of by Daniel, the prophet. So Daniel spoke about this and what this is when the Antichrist erects an image of himself in the rebuilt temple in Jerusalem and commands everyone to worship him as God. Satan has always wanted to be worshiped, and the Antichrist is going to be Satan's man of the hour. And so he erects this image of himself in this rebuilt temple, commands everyone to worship him. So this is what is known as that event known as the abomination of desolation spoken of by Daniel the prophet.

Now this happens in the midway point or three and a half years into the seven-year tribulation. Halfway through. The first half of the tribulation, there will be a time of pseudo peace and seemingly prosperity makes a covenant with Israel for seven years and everybody thinks he's a messiah and there's peace on earth until this event when he hails himself to be God, commands everyone to worship him. And then says that, "No man can buy or sell except for those who have a mark on their right hand or on their forehead." He talks about that in Revelation chapter 13. And if you read Revelation 13, you'll get the full description of it in the context of the Book of Revelation, where it describes this event when he will present himself as God, I believe in this temple of God which will be rebuilt in Jerusalem.

Now isn't it interesting today how common it is in our culture for people to think they are God? Right? It's no big deal. You are God, I am God, and the trees are God. They're pantheist and they think that everything's God and that you have a God within you. That's a pretty kind of common concept today. I mean, no big deal when the Antichrist says, "Worship me, I'm God." I mean, people have been saying that in Hollywood for years, right? I always thought it's funny too, that people go to a seminar, pay money to discover the God within them. What kind of a God has to pay money to find out you are one? "Well, 300 bucks, I found out I'm divine." Wow! Pretty dumb God.

And this is the lie that Satan promulgated all the way back in the Garden of Eden, "You shall not surely die but you shall be like God." It goes back to his original lie. So the Antichrist comes on the scene and he is basically opposing and exalting himself of all that is worshiped or that is called God. Now there will be an ecumenical movement during the time of the tribulation and Revelation 17 talks about that and there will be all the false religions that are left after the rapture. If the true church is taken up at the rapture, which I believe happens, the rapture happens, the true church is taken up, what does it leave? It leaves the apostate church, it leaves liberal churches. And so they all lock arms, they all lock hands, they sing kumbaya together. They have a harmonic conversion and they're all divine and they all accept each other and they coexist and they're all together.

And the Antichrist comes riding on this beast. It's false religious system and it serves its purpose to a time until this point, midway point as this abomination of desolation when he sets himself up that he is God or he is divine. Now notice in verses five and six, Paul says, "Remember you not that when I was with you, I told you these things." Paul says, "What's the deal here? I told you about this. Don't you remember what I told you?" So don't forget what the scriptures teach. Be grounded in God's word. Now in verse six he says, "And now you know."

So again, the emphasis on knowledge, what you know. He says, "Now you know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time." Verse seven, "For the mystery of iniquity does already work. Only he who now hinders will hinder until he be taken out of the..." Wait.

Now I know some of you're going to ask me what translation I'm reading from after church tonight. You always do that. I'm reading from the King James Bible, but I'm kind of rephrasing it to what I think is more consistent with the way it should be translated. And again, you can do your own homework and check it out if and you should. But here we have some amazing verses about what is holding back that revelation of the Antichrist. Verse six and seven, he says, "You know what it is that is holding him back." Now Paul knew, the believers in Thessalonica knew, but he doesn't say in this epistle. So I wish he would've made it very clear. So we are left, I have to admit, to guess a little bit or we can make an educated guess, I believe a good guess as to what is the "restraining force." What is holding back this evil person? What is holding back this unveiling, this revelation of the Antichrist?

As Jesus comes back into second coming, he's going to be unveiled. But before that, there'll be this false Christ, this false messiah. And by the way, the word Antichrist has a twofold concept. It means instead of, and it means in opposition to, Antichrist. He comes in place of and he comes to oppose Christ as well. So what is holding him back? What is restraining him? What is keeping him from being revealed? He says they knew what it was, but in this second epistle, he doesn't make it clear. Now go back with me to verse six, "You know what it is that is withholding or hindering, that he that is the Antichrist might be revealed." catch that phrase, "in his time."

One of the things that makes my heart rejoice is that God has a timetable. Woven through the texture of this verse or these verses is the sovereignty of God. Though you have this wicked man of sin, this powerful man of sin, this demonically energized individual come on the scene that will deceive many people. They'll think he's the savior and he is not. Let it be known, God sits on the throne in heaven and he dictates what happens and when it happens And he cannot be revealed until God's time comes, just as when the Messiah was born.

In the fullness of time, Jesus came. And in the fullness of time, God's time, church will be caught up and the Antichrist will be revealed. And you don't need to worry yourself or fret yourself or freak out about what it is. A lot of Christians get sidetracked with that. Just live every day in expectation that the Lord could come today. Live in holiness and godliness and be motivated that you want to live for the Lord. Don't worry about that. That day shall not overtake you as a thief. You're the children of the day and the children of the light. But he says, "You know that there's something that is holding him back." And notice verse seven, the mystery of iniquity is already at work.

Now, we can't do an exhaustive study of the Antichrist tonight, but the term Antichrist appears in John's first epistle, the New Testament. It's really not the most common name used for the Antichrist. We use it today. It's the most familiar to us, but from the Bible, it's not the one that is most often used. As you look at the titles for the Antichrist, he's called the Man of Sin, he's called the Son of Perdition. He's called that wicked, verse eight, or lawless man. In Daniel seven

and nine, he's called the Little Horn, the prince who will come. In Revelation 13, he's called the beast. And then as I said, 1 John 4:3, he's called the Antichrist. But the term, listen very carefully, the term Antichrist is used in two ways in the New Testament. It's used for the person that we're talking about here, the Antichrist, but it's also used for the spirit of Antichrist.

Anybody who opposes Christ or false teaching about Christ or the cults that teach faults about Christ or people that are against Christ and unbelievers who oppose Christ, they have the spirit of Antichrist. So there's the spirit of Antichrist that is in the world right now, right today. Whether or not the person of Antichrist is alive and in the world right now, we don't know. You read the stories about him, he's alive, he's in the world, he's in London, he's living in an apartment and stuff like that. But we do know that the spirit of Antichrist is in the world today. I mean just about every Saturday, ding-dong. Doorbell rings and you open your door and someone smiles on the front porch and they claim to be Christian, claim to be believers in Jesus, but they are Antichrist, they're false Christ. It's not the Christ of the Bible.

You need to give them a blood test, ask them what they believe about the blood of Jesus Christ. John says in his first epistle, "Anyone who denies that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh." That doesn't mean just that they believe that there was a person named Jesus in the body. That means that you believe that God was manifested in the flesh. Anyone who denies the full deity of Jesus Christ and the full humanity of Jesus Christ in one person at the same time, neither one diminishing the other is antichrist. That's what the Bible teaches. Anyone who denies that God has come in the flesh, in the person of Jesus Christ. It's not Christianity.

So we have the Spirit of Christ, the Antichrist and you have the person of Antichrist who will come on the scene. So it says here in verse seven, that mystery of iniquity is already at work in the world. "Only he who now lets." Now in the King James, letteth means hinders, "will hinder until he be taken out of the way." Now there's a little thing I want to point out to you in verse six, "And we know what is holding back." That word "what" there in verse six is neuter. In the Greek, that word is neuter. But when you go to verse seven, there is a personal pronoun used for the restraining force, "Only he who now letteth," and it is masculine. So in verse six, the restrainer, it's what it's withholding. And then in verse seven, it's he that is withholding. This is why it throws people for a curve.

Now again, I don't want to get too sidetracked and I don't want to go on all these kind of ideas as to who the restrainer is. Some say it's government or the Roman government. Some say it's Paul, the Apostle or some crazy ideas that even Satan himself, which makes no sense. But by the process of elimination, let me just cut to the quick. I believe that whoever restrains Satan needs to be stronger than Satan, right? It's kind of a duh. If you're going to hold back Satan, you got to be stronger than Satan. And though God has established human government as a restrainer of evil, there's a lot of evil governments that Satan is in control of. And so I believe that the restrainer is God himself and that specifically the restrainer is the third person of the Godhead, the Holy Spirit, that the restraining force is the Holy Spirit and that it is the Holy Spirit working in the world today and in through the church.

Now this dovetails with what I'm preaching on Sunday morning about the importance of the local church. Jesus said that the church is the light of the world, that you are the salt of the earth. You take the light out of the world at the rapture, what happens? The world gets very dark, right? You take the salt off the earth, what happens to the earth? It gets very corrupt. And so I believe that the Holy Spirit's restraining force is going to be pulled back at the rapture, thus allowing the revelation of the Antichrist. So he who now letteth is a reference to the Holy Spirit working in and through the church, allowing the Antichrist now to be revealed. Little do we realize how much moral decay and corruption is kept back by the presence of the church, the true church in the world today.

I can't imagine what a dark world this would be if Christians are taken off the earth. Well, I can imagine it because the Bible describes it in Revelations 6-19. It's called the time of tribulation. You take the church out of the world, it's going to be a dark place. I wouldn't want to be here. And so there's a restraining force, and that is God himself, the Holy Spirit holding back. Now in verse eight, "Then shall that wicked be revealed." That is the Antichrist, "Whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming." So the Antichrist will be revealed, but at the end of the tribulation, Jesus Christ is going to return and He will destroy, He put an end to the Antichrist.

Now we've leaped over the tribulation period to the end of the tribulation, we have the second coming and notice that Jesus Christ destroys the Antichrist, how? With the spirit of his mouth and the brightness of his coming. So His glory and His power just destroys the Antichrist. What a glorious thing that is, verse eight. And then it describes him again, "Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan," referring to the Antichrist, "with all power signs and lying wonders, with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish because they receive not the love of the truth that they might be saved. And for this cause, God shall send them strong delusion that they should believe a lie." And in the Greek, it is actually "the lie". "That they all might be damned," verse 12, "who believed not the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness."

Now these are amazing, amazing verses. Now again, you can see why a lot of times when people preach from these verses, they don't take them in their sequential order because they kind of hop around a little bit. But I wanted to take them in the order that we find them in the text tonight, even though it's kind of hard sometimes to kind of make out what's going on. Paul talks about the power of the Antichrist in verse nine. It's coming as after the working of Satan. In Revelation chapter 13, Satan who is the dragon, gives unto the Antichrist his power, his seat and his authority.

You sell your soul to the devil and you have all this power, all this authority. Remember when Satan said to Jesus, "Fall down, worship me and I'll give you all these kingdoms. They're mine and I can give them to whomever I want"? So the Antichrist has this kingdom down here on earth, and he is Satan's man of the hour. He's satanical empowered and it says, "He has all this power to do miracles." Describes him, the word power there means miracles. And so he does signs and lying wonders. The word "signs" indicates that the miracles that this man performs

point somewhere. Whenever the Bible refers to miracles as signs in the New Testament, the word "signs" indicates that they are intended to point to something. Jesus performed miracles. This Antichrist is going to perform miracles. And by the way, they're bonafide miracles, but they're not from God, they're from Satan. Satan can actually perform miracles.

So don't be deceived by the miraculous. Don't put your faith in the experiential. It's not just somebody doing a miracle, it's the doctrine that they hold as well and the life that they live. You got an evangelist that's doing miracles. You want to know what he believes and what he teaches and you want to know how he lives, okay? Remember when Moses was being opposed by the magicians in Pharaoh's court? They threw their rods down, they turned into snakes. Satan can do miracles. But it's pretty cool, Moses threw his rod down and his rod ate their rods. God is certainly more powerful than the devil, but he has power and he can do all kinds of things to cause people to turn away from God. And I saw it, I felt it, I heard the voice, and they gravitate away from objective truth in the Bible and they go toward experience.

So the sign points and then the effect it has on those who see it, the lying wonders, it creates wonder in them, but it's a deception, it's a lie. It leads them astray and it deceives them, verse 10, leads them to unrighteousness and that they perish. Now here's the reason, and these verses are pretty, pretty sobering because they receive not the love of the truth. Now, you can't blame God for their judgment. And here we have the day of the Lord in relationship to unbelievers, but they perish. They're judged because they love not the truth. They rejected the truth that they might be saved. And then the amazing thing in verse 11 is, "God sends them strong delusion that they should believe the lie."

Now people have a hard time understanding this idea here, "God sends them strong delusion that they should believe a lie." What it's saying, let me try to put it in simple terms and I've confessed, these are challenging verses to explain. But what it means is, is that a person that continually and repetitively rejects the truth of the gospel and hardens their heart against Jesus Christ, that their heart becomes calloused and atrophies to the point where they cannot believe. God lets them make their own decision. And in a sense, the sovereign God is letting them choose to reject the truth because he won't violate their free will. And as a result, they believe a lie. There's no middle ground. You either believe the truth or you believe the lie. There's no neutrality. And this is true tonight. This is true today. That's why these verses are so sobering. If you reject the truth, there's nowhere for you to go except for believing a lie. If you reject the truth, there's nowhere for you to go except to believe a lie.

So in that sense, God is sovereignly allowing them to go their own way to harden their hearts, just as Pharaoh resisted Moses. And it says in the Book of Exodus, "God hardened Pharaoh's heart." It means that God strengthened Pharaoh's heart and the decision that he already had made. The worst thing that God can do for a wicked, hardened sinner is let them have their own choice. And you either say to God, "Thy will," or you say to God, "My will." You say that tonight. And if you're saying to God, "My will, my will, I'll do it my way." And you reject him, you're headed for destruction, you're headed for damnation. And even if the rapture happens and you go into the tribulation, if you continually ongoing... In this scripture, the thing that's so heavy

about this verse, it indicates that these people, once they get into the tribulation, may not have a change of heart.

Now that's not to say that everyone who hears the gospel in this day and age or this dispensation before the rapture will not be saved during the tribulation. I believe that people will be saved in the tribulation. But you run a great risk, a very high risk of if you set the tenor and tone of your life, rejection, rejection, rejection, rejection, that when you come into the tribulation period, that you are going to continue on that path. As described in Romans chapter one, knowing God, they suppress the truth about God, they worshiped and served the creature more than the creator who's blessed forevermore. So God gave them over to their own lust. They worshiped and served the creature more than the creator who's blessed forevermore, and they end up having reprobate minds.

So basically, you reject the truth and you start down that path and you're headed down the path of destruction. That's a very sobering thought when it says there that God will send them strong delusion, that they shouldn't believe the lie. And as I said, in the Greek, that's the way that it should be translated, the lie. What is the lie? Well, it started again in the garden of Eden, you will not die. You'll be like God. You don't have to worry about death, you don't have to worry about this Christian stuff, you're God, everything's going to be okay. You know, all paths lead to God, you're going to believe the lie. And that as a result, you're eternally damned.

Notice verse 12, "That they all might be damned who believe not the truth, but actually had pleasure in unrighteousness." So He judges the Antichrist and then He judges the unsaved because they believe the lie and they reject the truth. As I said, these are sobering verses, falling away, the rapture, the restrainer removed, the Antichrist revealed and the return of Jesus Christ, the end of the tribulation. But the question tonight again is, have you believed the truth? Have you received the truth? Have you trusted in Jesus Christ? Don't harden your heart. The Bible says today, if you hear his voice that you need to open your heart to him and believe in him and be saved. Jesus Christ could come tonight. He could come for the church. And we need to be ready for His coming. Let's pray.

Father, we thank you for this marvelous truths that you give to us in your word, that we don't need to be shaken or troubled, that we have your word. And your word is a lamp to our feet, it is a light to our path. And Lord, I pray that tonight that we would be grounded and discerning through the word, that we would be living in light of your imminent return, that you could come tonight for the church and we want to be found faithful in looking and ready and watching. We're children of the day, we're children of the light, we're not of the darkness, that that day should overtake us as thieves. And you have not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us on the Cross, bore our sins, was buried and rose again three days later from the grave so that we could be forgiven and free.

And I do pray that tonight, Lord, if there's anyone here in this sanctuary that hasn't repented and hasn't believed in Jesus, that they would open their heart to you tonight. If you're here tonight and you say, "I don't know if I'm saved," say, "Lord Jesus," right here, right now, right

where you're standing here in this sanctuary. Whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. Just say, "God, save me, forgive me. Forgive me of my sins. Come into my heart and be my savior. I repent. I turn from my sin and I trust Jesus who died for me and rose again." Believe the truth. Jesus said, "You'll know the truth and the truth will set you free." Open your heart to Him tonight, live in the truth, walk in the truth, and let's proclaim the truth. Lord, thank you for the truth of your word, it sets us free. Jesus, precious and holy name we pray and everyone agreeing said...Amen.