

Apparently false teachers, either in person or through fake epistles written in Paul's name, had been telling the Thessalonians that the persecutions they were enduring for Christ were because the 7 year tribulation had begun and the return of Christ was very close. Paul reassures them in this chapter that certain things must happen before Christ's return can occur.

1 Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him, 2 That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand.

“Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him” – Paul turns his discussion to the subject of Christ's return and the church's “gathering together” to Christ.

“That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled” – Apparently Paul had received reports that the Thessalonians had become worried and distressed concerning the timing and the order of events preceding the return of Christ. Just as they did back then, there is confusion today concerning the rapture and the second coming and whether or not they are separate events and if they are separate events, the timing of the rapture. Paul had taught them that they would escape the tribulation through the rapture, but if these false teachers were right that tribulation had already begun then that would mean that the Thessalonians had missed the rapture. Paul urges them to not be distressed, reminding them to be encouraged by the promise of Christ's return and the fact that we will be gathered together to be with Him.

“neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us” – “By spirit” may refer to a false prophet claiming divine revelation. We are warned not to believe everything that claims to be of God (1 John 4:1 *“Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world”*). “Word” may refer to the preaching in person that made false claims about the return of Christ, while the “letter as from us” refers to epistles that had apparently been written in Paul's name that had not actually come from him. This is likely the reason that Paul later mentions that his personally handwritten salutation was the “token” (sign) of an epistle's authenticity (2 Th. 3:17). Here, Paul is urging the Thessalonians to not be confused or distressed by these false sources of information.

“as that the day of Christ is at hand [present]” – The Greek word translated “at hand” is in the perfect tense, meaning that it has been completed. These false teachers were claiming that “the Day of Christ” (i.e. “the Day of the Lord”) had already arrived and that the world had entered the 7 year period known as “the Great Tribulation” (the beginning of the Day of the Lord) that Jesus had spoken of (Matt. 24:21). Paul is telling the Thessalonians not to be distressed by such claims since they were not true, as he will explain in the following verses.

3 Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; 4 Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God.

“Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come” – Whether by “spirit,” word, or deed, we should not let what man says supersede the truth that God has established in His word. Paul points out that the “day of Christ” (the second advent as predicted in Rev. 19) will not arrive before certain things occur which have been predicted by OT prophets and Jesus Himself.

“except there come a falling away [apostasy; defection; departure] first” – One of the events that must happen before Christ's return is the great apostasy: a departure from normal religious beliefs. The context seems to indicate that this religious defection is the result of a one-world religion being formed that worships the Antichrist, as described in v. 4.

“and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition [destruction]” – This refers to the Antichrist, a man characterized by sin. As we see in v. 4, he engages in perhaps the most egregious sin that a man can commit: declaring himself to be God. This man will likely be possessed by Satan and will follow in Satan's footsteps in his desire to be worshipped (Isa. 14:12-14 *“How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations! For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High”*). The Antichrist is also described as the “son of perdition (destruction)” since he is destined for destruction and he leads all who follow him into destruction.

“Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped” – The Antichrist will not tolerate any other religions that do not place him as the supreme object of worship. He will place himself above Jesus Christ, Yahweh, Allah, Buddha, and any other object of worship.

“so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God” – The Antichrist will enter the temple of God in Jerusalem and declare himself to be God Himself. “Sitteth” implies the he will sit on a throne, a place of power and authority. This event is the “abomination of desolation” prophesied by Daniel the prophet (Dan. 9:27; 11:31) and mentioned by Jesus (Matt. 24:15). This will happen at the mid-point of the tribulation and may be the time when the false prophet has an image of the Antichrist made and he causes it to come to life (Rev. 13:14-15). This image may be placed in or at the temple as a means of worshipping the Antichrist. At this point the world will abandon (apostatize) their own religions and begin worshipping the Antichrist.

5 Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things?

Paul reminds the Thessalonians that these are things that he had already taught them the first time he was in Thessalonica. They had let the words of the false teachers cause them to forget what Paul had initially taught them. We should never let those who contradict the truth of scripture, no matter how convincing, cause us to forget or doubt what scripture plainly teaches us.

6 And now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time. 7 For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way.

“And now ye know what withholdeth [restrain; hold back] that he might be revealed in his time” – Paul insists that the Thessalonians know what is restraining the coming of the Antichrist until the time that God has ordained to allow him to be revealed. **“For the mystery of iniquity [lawlessness] doth already work”** – The “mystery of iniquity” likely refers to the secret work of Satan to accomplish his purposes behind the scenes throughout the world. Throughout human history the world has been oblivious to Satan’s activities and God’s redeemed are only aware of it because God has told us in His word. Satan has been working, preparing to bring the Antichrist to power with the goal of being worshiped by the entire world. Even in Paul’s day Satan’s desire was to supersede God and focus the worship of men, if not toward himself, toward a human proxy (the Antichrist). Satan wants to steal the earth and mankind away from God but he has been hindered from reaching that goal.

“only he who now letteth [restrain; hinder] will let, until he be taken out of the way” – The word “let” (and its variation “letteth”) is an example of an English word that has changed meaning significantly since the KJV was translated in 1611. Today we give the word “let” the meaning of “to allow” but originally it had the opposite meaning of “to restrain or hinder,” which is the meaning of the Greek word that is translated here. Most commentators believe that Paul is speaking of the Holy Spirit, who will “taken out of the way.” This does not mean that He will be removed from the world, but that He will step aside and will no longer prevent Satan from accomplishing his desire to have the whole world worship him.

8 And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming: 9 Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, 10 And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved.

“And then shall that Wicked be revealed” – Once the Holy Spirit has ceased to restrain the power of Satan in this world, Satan will take advantage of this new freedom and “that Wicked” (the Antichrist) will be revealed. Some commentators believe that the removal of the Holy Spirit’s restraining influence is synonymous with the rapture of the church before the tribulation, arguing that the church began when the Spirit came into the world on the day of Pentecost and the church’s removal at the rapture includes the Spirit’s departure.

“whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming” – Paul begins describing the Antichrist in various ways. The first description is as the person that Christ will destroy at His return (Rev. 19:20). Christ, being God, only needs to speak to destroy His enemies (**Rev. 19:15a** “*And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations...*”). He will come in the brightness of His glory (**Mark 13:26** “*And then shall they see the Son of man coming in the clouds with great power and glory*”).

“Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders” – Another description of the Antichrist is that Satan will cause him to rise to power. Satan will give him and the false prophet the ability to exhibit power, signs, and “lying wonders.” The “lying wonders” could be supernatural acts, done with the power of Satan, that promote the lie that the Antichrist is God or it could be fake wonders (illusions like modern magicians perform) intended to deceive the world into believing that the Antichrist has god-like powers.

“And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved” – These signs and lying wonders are intended to deceive those in the world who are destined to perish. They are destined to perish because they have rejected the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the only means of salvation.

11 And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: 12 That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

“And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie” – Because these people have rejected the truth of the gospel, God will seal their fate by sending a deluding influence that will cause them to believe “a lie.” What lie could that be? It will likely be whatever lie is told by or about the Antichrist, particularly the lie that he is God. We already see this happening today with the lunacy that is being proposed in politics and on the street (**Rom. 1:21-22** “*Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools*”).

“That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness” – God will not force people to follow Him. If a person insists on rejecting the truth of Jesus Christ then God will give them what they want. The result is that they will be damned to an eternity in hell.

Verses 13-17: In contrast to the people mentioned in the previous verses (those who reject the gospel), Paul now thanks God for the Thessalonians once again. He is thankful that God has chosen to save them and urges them to hold onto the truths that they have been taught when he was with them in person or through the epistles that he genuinely wrote. He then prays that God will “comfort” (encourage) their hearts and help them remain grounded in the truth.