

# Paul and the Apocalypse

## Introduction

Evidence suggests that Paul visited Thessalonica during his second missionary tour between 51 and 53 A.D. Later, while in Corinth, he wrote to those believers his first epistle, expressing encouragement because of their Christian commitment and their decision to give up idol worship (I Thessalonians 1:9).

In that letter he spoke of the hope that Christ would return to earth from heaven (I Thessalonians 1:10).

- Many of his converts were already awaiting that event, which must have been especially comforting since they were already experiencing persecution (I Thessalonians 1:6, 2:14, 3:3).
- In 4:13-18 Paul detailed further that the second advent was associated with the resurrection of the deceased saints. Then, they would all meet Jesus in the air. He made it clear that this event would be dramatic, visible, and audible.<sup>1</sup>

It appears that many of those new-in-the-faith believers had not been fully oriented to the hope of that resurrection. There was still confusion of how that resurrection related to the Second Coming (*the parousia*).<sup>2</sup> That first letter became a crucial steppingstone to enlighten their understanding.

This Advent expectancy and that resurrection was so wonderful to Paul that he urged them to “*encourage one another with these words*” (I Thessalonians 4:18 – NIV).

## Timing Thoughts

Having taught that Jesus was coming again and that deceased friends and relatives would then be resurrected, another uncertainty remained as to **how long** they would have to wait. Paul partially addresses this perplexing concern.

**“Now, brothers and sisters, about times and dates we do not need to write to you,”**  
**(I Thessalonians 5:1 – NIV).**

Then – in what initially seems like disturbing words, he wrote:

**“for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night”**  
**(I Thessalonians 5:2 – NIV).**

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<sup>1</sup> Hendriksen, William and Kistemaker, Simon J.; *New Testament Commentary – Thessalonians, the Pastorals, and Hebrews* (Baker Academic; Grand Rapids, MI), pp. 15-16.

<sup>2</sup> Bruce, F. F.; *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 45, *1 & 2 Thessalonians* (Thomas Nelson, Dallas, TX), p. 99.

If Paul stopped there, it would appear that the coming of Christ would remain a mystery – be someday by and by. **However**, Paul will shortly give a major qualifier **for the believers** in verse 4. First, he continues riveting the “unexpected” tragedy for unbelievers:

**“While people are saying, ‘Peace and safety,’ destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.” (I Thessalonians 5:3 – NIV).**

The Advent would be with suddenness and destruction **to those unprepared.**

- There is nothing wrong with *peace and safety, buying and selling, planting, marrying, eating, and drinking.*
- But – as in Noah’s and Lot’s days: “All for the body and its enjoyments – nothing for the soul” – these things have zero saving value.<sup>3</sup>

That will characterize the human race right at the end (cf. Ezekiel 13:10, Amos 6:1, Matthew 24:37-44, Luke 17:26-30). People will **not be ready** for Jesus to come. When He arrives, there will be a desperate attempt to escape God’s glory, perceived as His wrath.

- “They called to the mountains and the rocks, ‘Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb!’” (Revelation 6:16 – NIV).
- Paul’s portrayal of such a “negative surprise” is a warning “to watch,” “to know,” and “to be ready” (Matthew 24:42-43)!

The “*day of the Lord*” (vs 2) speaks of His return. It is a well-known phrase throughout the Bible that also portrays: (1) **God’s judgment**, (2) **the defeat of his adversaries**<sup>4</sup> (cf. Zechariah 1:14-16), and (3) **the “deliverance” of God’s people at the end of time** (Obadiah 15-21, Zechariah 14)!

- The brief Great Tribulation<sup>5</sup> is included in this wait time, which ends with Christ’s Second Coming.<sup>6</sup>

**The message?** There is no turning back, no escape. One’s eternal destiny is sealed at the “*day of the Lord.*” Therefore, be ready! However, the length of the wait is not addressed by Paul. Yet, he gives valuable “hints”!

### **Stunning Awareness to Believers**

Paul goes on: God’s people should know enough **to be aware** of the eschaton’s “*times and seasons.*” It should **not come** to them as a thief. “You aren’t in darkness!”<sup>7</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Hendriksen and Kistemaker, *op. cit.*, p. 123.

<sup>4</sup> Beale, Gregory K.; *1–2 Thessalonians*, (Intervarsity Press, Academic, Downers Grove, IL – 2003), p. 143.

<sup>5</sup> Thomas, Robert L; I Thessalonians; In Gaebelin, Frank E., general editor, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, vol. 12 (Zondervan; Grand Rapids, MI 49530; 1981), pp. 280-284.

<sup>6</sup> Beale, *op. cit.*, p. 144.

<sup>7</sup> Stephens, David J.; *Eschatological Themes in II Thessalonians 2:1-12*, Thesis, University of St. Andrews, 1976, p. 40.

***“But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness” (I Thessalonians 5:4-5 – KJV).***

The apostle gave them enough information to be excited, to be fully aware, to be enlightened (cf. Ephesians 5:8)! There are things that they can know. Paul would later write to those in Rome, counseling the saints to put on the “armor of light” (Romans 13:12, 14). For the Thessalonians, that light would intensify in his second epistle!

- The students in Thessalonica have learned much from Paul’s eschatological message.
- They are not in ignorance of these truths – but Paul needs to give them more.

Paul addressed these new believers as “brethren” and “sisters”! This is an affectionate way to communicate to those who accepted that gospel message. “Brothers and sisters, when Christ comes, you will be prepared! It won’t be a surprise!”

***“Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness” (I Thessalonians 5:5 – KJV).***

These converts are children of light because they have been taught about those coming events. This would be commensurate with the Olivet discourse (Matthew 24:32-33 – “even at the doors,” and the “fig tree” signaling the soon arrival of summer).<sup>8</sup>

When parallel verses are studied, a chiasm is seen, and this makes the issues even more clear.

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|---|---------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Times and seasons – don’t need to write again</li><li>• Day of Lord – as a thief in the night<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• “Peace and safety” – not ready</li><li>• Awake – sober – ready</li></ul></li><li>• That Day won’t come to you as a thief in darkness</li></ul> | } Unbelievers |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• You are children of the light – not darkness</li></ul>  | } Believers   |

The children of light understand prophecy and are always prepared. They understand the importance of being awake. This is reflected in Christ’s unique message to the Sardis church:

- “Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; hold it fast, and repent. But **if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what time I will come to you**” (Revelation 3:3 – NIV).
- It means that if they are watching – awake – He won’t come as a surprise.

Therefore, in a pastoral exhortation:

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

**“So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be awake and sober.”  
(I Thessalonians 5:6 – NIV).**

Paul then finishes this epistle in rich spiritual and pastoral invitations (vss 7-28).

### **Emergency Letter**

Not long afterward, some members of this new Christian church died. Painfully and unexpectedly, some individuals were teaching that Christ had already come, the resurrection, therefore, would be past. They might never see those deceased family/friends again.

Others claimed that Paul taught that Christ would arrive shortly. Confusion infiltrated this church.

Expositor White notes regarding this: “The instruction that Paul sent the Thessalonians in his first epistle regarding the second coming of Christ was in perfect harmony with his former teaching. Yet his words were misapprehended by some of the Thessalonian brethren. They understood him to express the hope that he himself would live to witness the Saviour’s advent. This belief served to increase their enthusiasm and excitement. Those who had previously neglected their responsibilities and duties, now became more persistent in urging their erroneous views.”<sup>9</sup>

Paul heard of all these uncertainties and false impressions. Not long afterward, he wrote his second epistle. It was an emergency communique.

- “In his second letter Paul sought to correct their misunderstandings and to set before them the true position regarding these issues.”<sup>10</sup>

**“Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him, we ask you, brothers and sisters, not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by the teaching allegedly from us – whether by a prophecy or by word of mouth or by letter – asserting that the day of the Lord has already come” (II Thessalonians 2:1-2 – NIV).**

There were false “teachers” who interpreted Paul’s “unexpected” and “sudden” coming of Christ as meaning “immediate” or “has come.” Their message was so persuasive that some even stopped working, expecting the eschatological end.<sup>11</sup>

In soothing counsel, Paul again called them “*brothers*” and “*sisters*” – “don’t be alarmed” either in your “hearts” or from letters supposedly from us. That “*as though Christ had already come.*”

- Whatever its source, some misguided “teaching” led to major misunderstanding about the end of time.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> *Acts of the Apostles*, p. 264.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> Hendriksen and Kistemaker, *op. cit.*, p. 167.

<sup>12</sup> Beale, *op. cit.*, p. 199.

The next few verses (3-12) help to sequence the events of the last days (an instructive message for the Thessalonians and **a timing communicate for us**). Paul now addresses the nature and timing of Christ's glorious Second Coming.

### **The Sign to Watch for!**

***“Don’t let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction” (II Thessalonians 2:3 – NIV).***

“Don’t let anyone deceive you in any way” echoes Christ's Olivet discourse prophecy: “Let no man deceive you” (Matthew 24:4).

- **Deception** is a form of mind control. For the antichrist, it will be self-serving and used as a mechanism to lead away from truth.
- Paul addressed such deception as a case of being led astray or deluded spiritually (cf. Romans 7:11, 16:18; I Corinthians 3:18; II Corinthians 11:3; I Timothy 2:14; Colossians 2:8). He was concerned about serious doctrinal error and being misguided regarding the future.<sup>13</sup>

A “falling away” or rebellion must first occur before the eschaton. This suggests that there will be a departure from truth **in the church**. Some religious apostasy, tied to a “revolt” **against God’s law**, would occur. The leader would be “lawless” – against God’s law.

- This relates to a rejection of God’s will in the Decalogue –
- Which is later described as the “*mark of the beast*” in Revelation 13 –
- A rebellion against God’s covenant promises.<sup>14</sup>

Scholars again see this as occurring mainly in God’s covenant Christian community<sup>15</sup> – the visible church.<sup>16</sup>

The word there for this rebellion or falling away is *apostasia* (G). Some contend that this is a “departure” or rapture preceding the Great Tribulation. Brilliant scholar Beale strongly resists this teaching because:

1. The word *apostasia* always refers to “departure” from the faith.
2. This is contextually associated with that “*man of lawlessness*.”
3. The “*gathering*” in verse 1 alludes to the final resurrection of God’s people (cf. I Thessalonians 4:14-17).<sup>17</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Hendriksen and Kistemaker, *op. cit.*, pp. 168-169.

<sup>14</sup> Bruce, *op. cit.*, pp. 166-167.

<sup>15</sup> Beale, *op. cit.*, p. 204.

<sup>16</sup> Hendriksen and Kistemaker, *op. cit.*, p. 170.

<sup>17</sup> Beale, *op. cit.*, pp. 204-205.

These Thessalonian believers are instructed to not be misled that Christ has come, **because some antichrist precedes this event** within the visible church.

The man of sin or lawlessness who is destroyed or doomed to destruction must first be “revealed” or **become apparent to God’s people** (cf. I John 3:4)!

- Robert Thomas suggests that the apostasy and this antichrist will become a **conspicuous phenomenon** that will open the period called the “*day of Christ*” (vs 2). Daniel calls that the “*appointed time*.”
- It is that final 3½ years that would lead up to the Second coming.<sup>18</sup>
- This is an important insight. Some *desolating abomination*, that Christ referred us to in Daniel to understand, begins that distinct period of time (Daniel 11:31, 12:7, 11).

He is “*lawless*” because he changes God’s righteous laws. God says that he will go to perdition – he will be destroyed. **Changing something God wrote is the antichrist’s claim of authority!**

This “*man*” would be “*revealed*” or “*unveiled*,” **making it a sign** that this final period has come. This individual would be a “mocking counterpart” to Christ himself.<sup>19</sup>

**“He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God’s temple, proclaiming himself to be God” (II Thessalonians 2:4 – NIV).**

This is amazing! That was even part of Christ’s apocalyptic teaching, where a future “*abomination*” or antichrist power would enter the “*holy place*” (temple – God’s church) (Mark 13:14, Matthew 24:15).

- Paul, in turn, draws parallels from three other antichrist revelations:
  1. The rise and desecrations of the antichrist (depicted as a little horn, vile person and a king – Daniel 7:25, 8:10-13, 11:36-37) against God’s law, His church and His covenant
  2. The demonic nature, self-exaltation, and self-deification in claiming to be God of the kings of Tyre and Babylon (Ezekiel 28:2, 6, 9; Isaiah 14:13-14)
  3. The final destruction of the wicked one (Isaiah 11:4) – God’s ultimate victory

<sup>18</sup> Gaebelien, Frank E., general editor, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, vol. 12 (Zondervan; Grand Rapids, MI; 1981), p. 320.

<sup>19</sup> Enderle, Jason A.; *An Exegetical Study of 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12 as it Pertains to the Doctrine of the Antichrist*, p. 20.

## 2 Thessalonians

2:4a:

... he that exalteth himself  
Against all that is called God ...

2:4b:

... he sitteth in the temple of  
God, setting himself forth as  
God.

2:8:

... the lawless one, whom the  
Lord Jesus shall slay with the  
Breath of his mouth ...

## OT Passages

Dan 11:36:

... he shall exalt himself ...  
above every god ...

Ezek 28:2:

I sit in the seat of God ...  
Thou didst set thy heart as the  
heart of God.

Isa 11:4:

... and with the breath of his  
lips shall he slay the wicked.<sup>20</sup>

This “*man*” is a rival “Messiah” and Christ’s adversary.<sup>21</sup> His stunning exaltation is also noted in Revelation:

- “All the world wondered after the beast. And they worshipped the dragon which gave power unto the beast: and **they worshipped the beast**, saying, Who is like unto the beast? who is able to make war with him?” (Revelation 13:3c, 4).
- That “**sea beast**” is the **antichrist**, accepting **deification** through worship!

This lawless man is referenced in Daniel 12:10-11 and is strikingly similar to 11:29-34. In a final gesture against God he attacks God’s covenant community (Daniel 11:30-45).<sup>22</sup> Yet, he has assumed authority over the Christian church (Daniel 8:9-14).<sup>23</sup>

Reflecting on self-deified papal leaders:

- “The Pope and God are the same, so he has all power in Heaven and earth.” Pope Pius V, quoted in Barclay, Chapter XXVII, p. 218, “Cities Petrus Bertanous.”
- “Pope Nicholas I declared: ‘The appellation of God had been confirmed by Constantine on the Pope, who, being God, cannot be judged by man’” (Labbe IX Dist.: 96 Can 7 Satis Evidentur Decret Gratian Primer Para).
- “The Pope is not only the representative of Jesus Christ, He is Jesus Christ himself, hidden under the veil of flesh” (*Catholic National* July 1895).
- “We hold upon this earth the place of Almighty God.” (Pope Leo XIII *Encyclical Letter* of June 20, 1894).

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<sup>20</sup> LaRondelle, Hans K., Th.D.; *Paul’s Prophetic Outline in 2 Thessalonians*, Andrews University, p. 62.

<sup>21</sup> Bruce, *op. cit.*, pp. 167-168.

<sup>22</sup> Beale, G. K.; *1–2 Thessalonians* (IVP Academic Press, Downers, IL), pp. 206-207.

<sup>23</sup> Hendriksen and Kistemaker, *op. cit.*, p. 176.

- “All names which in the Scriptures are applied to Christ, by virtue of which is established that He is over the church, all the same names are applied to the Pope” (*On the authority of the Councils*, book 2, chapter 17).<sup>24,25</sup>

John said of the antichrist that he is:

1. A liar (I John 2:22)
2. A deceiver (II John 7)

This future falling away is apostasy within the community of faith, within the global Christian church.

Paul does not use the term “*antichrist*,” but the “*man of lawlessness*.” It is not a label or title but a **description** of who he is. He is hostile to the law and acts against it. Daniel had said long before that his intent would be to change times and the law (7:25).

Because he sets himself up in God’s temple, many believe this to be a literal temple that must be built in Jerusalem. That gives rise to many problems:

1. The apostasy in 2:3 is not geographically localized, such as Israel.
2. The majority in Israel do not believe in Christ. They cannot “fall away.”<sup>26</sup>
3. To build another temple on “*Zion*” when the Islamic world “owns” the temple mount would be impossible.

The phrase “*God’s temple*” is noted nine other places in the New Testament outside of II Thessalonians. It almost always refers to Christ and His church – not a literal temple in Israel.

- In Revelation 13:6 the antichrist attacks the believers who are depicted as a tabernacle.
- National Israel, as a chosen people of God (and their temple), have already come to an end (Luke 21:6; Hebrew 7:11–10:22; Matthew 21:43, 23:37-38)!

Consequently, this last-day antichrist will come into the Christian church and lead it into apostasy, away from the pure Christian faith. He will proclaim himself as God. He usurps the authority of God.<sup>27</sup> In Revelation 13:4 he will be worshiped (cf. Daniel 11:36-39). He will even change God’s laws (Daniel 7:25, 8:11-12, 11:30-32). He is truly the man of lawlessness.<sup>28</sup>

“One may wonder if the ‘counterfeit miracles’ to which Paul refers as accompanying the full unveiling of the man of sin (2 Thess 2:9) might not [even] include a satanic counterfeit of Christ’s glorious *parousia*.”<sup>29</sup>

<sup>24</sup> <https://catholicpoint.blogspot.com/2012/10/pope-claiming-as-god.html>

<sup>25</sup> Enderle, *op. cit.*, pp. 20, 23.

<sup>26</sup> Beale, *op. cit.*, p. 207.

<sup>27</sup> Bruce, *op. cit.*, p. 169.

<sup>28</sup> Beale, *op. cit.*, pp. 209-210.

<sup>29</sup> LaRondelle, *op. cit.*, p. 68.

In Revelation 13 the “*mark of the beast*” is the major “revealing” issue of the antichrist. It relates directly to his claiming authority to change God’s law!

**“Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things?”  
(II Thessalonians 2:5 – KJV).**

This suggests that as Paul traveled to spread the gospel, he regularly taught them of these prophetic end of time issues.

**“And now you know what is holding him back, so that he may be revealed at the proper time” (II Thessalonians 2:6 – NIV).**

As Paul pens this, the antichrist is “held back” to be “revealed later.”<sup>30</sup> He will make his debut at the “*proper time*” (NIV), “*when his time comes*” (NRS) – just as Christ will return (I Timothy 6:15, Mark 13:32, Acts 1:7) in “*His own time.*”

What is holding back this antichrist? There are many assumptions and teachings. In all the prophecies, it is clear that there is an “*appointed time*” that will move forward earth’s final eschatological events. They begin with an “*abomination*” that Christ alluded to (Matthew 24:15).

- “So he came near where I stood: and when he came, I was afraid, and fell upon my face: but he said unto me, Understand, O son of man: for at the time of the end [shall be] the vision.... And he said, Behold, I will make thee know what shall be in the last end of the indignation: for at the **time appointed** the end shall be” (Daniel 8:17, 19).
- “They shall place the abomination that maketh desolate ... even to the time of the end: because it is yet for a **time appointed**” (Daniel 11:35).

In Revelation 13:5 the “*appointed time*” is that 42 months for the antichrist to “operate.” The setting suggests that this “permissive time” is also God-controlled.<sup>31</sup> Intriguingly, the dragon (Satan) is there **waiting for** the antichrist sea beast to rise and appear for its end-time work (13:1) (which occurs when God permits)!

“This is a time appointed for him by God, not a time of his choosing. Just as God is the one who restrains him, God is the one who allows him to be revealed. Ward states: ‘The man of lawlessness is straining at the leash, but he cannot come out into the open until God permits.’”<sup>32</sup>

**“For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work, but only until the one who now restrains it is removed” (II Thessalonians 2:7 – NRSB).**

<sup>30</sup> Hendriksen and Kistemaker, *op. cit.*, p. 180.

<sup>31</sup> Beale, *op. cit.*, p. 217.

<sup>32</sup> Quoted: Endelre, *op. cit.*, p. 35.

This *mysterious* or “hidden power” of the antichrist was operational in Paul’s day. Its work and force would transcend normal understanding. It would be hidden until God removes its restraints.

- That will be lifted near the end of time. When it is freed, it will demonically function as a world power. Its mysterious, supernatural power will then be revealed.<sup>33</sup>
- The “restrainer” noted in the previous verse must have supernatural power to hold back such a demonically controlled enemy (cf. vs. 9). God retains a divine purpose, a divine timetable, and divine power over this antichrist.<sup>34</sup>

***“And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendor of his coming” (II Thessalonians 2:8 – NIV).***

Once God permits His “restraint” to be removed, a full understanding of who this antichrist is will become clear **to God’s people!**

- He will not be seen as a horrifying being because “*all the world wondered after the beast*” – the antichrist (Revelation 13:3c).
- He will clearly be seen as a holy being worthy of power and worship (Revelation 13:4):
  1. “*The beast was given a mouth speaking proud words and blasphemies, and he was permitted to exercise ruling authority for forty-two months*” (Revelation 13:5 – NET).
  2. “*The ten horns that you saw are ten kings who have not yet received a kingdom, but will receive ruling authority as kings with the beast for one hour. These kings have a single intent, and they will give their power and authority to the beast*” (Revelation 17:12-13 – NET).

Later, in Revelation 13, the **deception, persecution, and demonic power** by this beast and its minions will be revealed. God’s people will be threatened by death.<sup>35,36</sup>

The time then comes when the “*mystery*” will be replaced with *the man* and then Christ steps into its history.<sup>37</sup>

Destroyed by the breath of His mouth means “by the spoken word of Christ.” This is the same power that the Lord possessed at creation (Psalm 33:6). The power of divine speech can create and destroy.

*“So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it”* (Isaiah 55:11).

<sup>33</sup> Enderle, *op. cit.*, p. 36, quoting Gene L. Green.

<sup>34</sup> Thomas, *op. cit.*, p. 324.

<sup>35</sup> Enderle, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

<sup>36</sup> Beale, *op. cit.*, p. 221.

<sup>37</sup> Hendriksen and Kistemaker, *op. cit.*, p. 183.

## Paul's Afterthought

***“The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with how Satan works. He will use all sorts of displays of power through signs and wonders that serve the lie, and all the ways that wickedness deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved” (II Thessalonians 2:9-10 – NIV).***

The same Greek word here for “coming” (*parousia* – G) is the identical one often used in the New Testament for Christ’s Second Coming. In multiple illustrations, this antichrist tries to usurp the imagery of Christ, pretending to be Him.

Christ received authority from the Father (Matthew 11:27). The antichrist receives authority from the dragon (Revelation 13:2, 4). The Holy Spirit glorifies Christ (John 16:14), the “*false prophet*” or “*earth beast*” glorifies the antichrist (Revelation 13:12).<sup>38</sup>

- Paul saw what would happen and identified the source of all the rebellion as Satan.
- Just as Christ is Mediator between God and man (I Timothy 2:5), the antichrist is a mediator between Satan (the dragon) and man (Revelation 13:4, 7b).

The sea beast antichrist’s ally is the earth beast. He performs great and miraculous signs to deceive the whole world (Revelation 13:12, 13a, 14a).<sup>39</sup>

Notice the demonic characteristics that the antichrist displays:

1. “*Lying*” (“*false*” – NET, “*counterfeit*” – NIV) wonders
2. “*all deceivableness*” (“*evil deception*” – NET, “*wicked deception*” – NRSB)

There are miracles and signs, truth is skewed, and tragically, the world accepts it as right. This implies that everyone has had the opportunity to know the gospel truth – but most have rejected it.

The beauty of holiness is tarnished. When they are lost forever, the guilt will be on them because they could have been saved.<sup>40</sup>

- Jesus prophesied that just preceding His coming, there would be “false Messiahs” and even “*false prophets*,” showing deceptive signs and wonders (Mark 13:22, Matthew 24:24).
- The unbelief and indifference of the world have made them gullible and, then, guilty.<sup>41</sup>

The world has gone so far in its rebellion, there is no turning back. A divine judicial decision has been pronounced.

<sup>38</sup> Mounce, Robert H.; *The Book of Revelation* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.; Grand Rapids, Michigan; 1977), p. 511.

<sup>39</sup> Enderle, *op. cit.*, p. 44.

<sup>40</sup> Hendriksen and Kistemaker, *op. cit.*, p. 185.

<sup>41</sup> Bruce, *op. cit.*, p. 173.

## God's Strange Work

In Isaiah 28:21 God's wrath toward the wicked, the rebellious, is called His "*strange work*" and "*strange act*." What now follows is another such strange pre-advent rendition of His "*wrath*."

***"And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness" (II Thessalonians 2:11-12 – KJV).***

Clearly, earnest exhortation to repent and urging a love for truth have been rejected. God makes an additional distinct move to block further divine influences.

- The text suggests that this is a deep "curse."
- ***Their minds are energized by delusions that convict them of falsehood.***

This persuades, even induces, them to perceive the antichrist as God. Thus, we see him being worshiped (Revelation 13:4; cf. Exodus 9:12, II Chronicles 18:22, Romans 1:28).<sup>42,43</sup>

This rejection of truth is clearly determined and forceful. ***God's response makes them completely defenseless against the perverse teachings of the antichrist.***<sup>44</sup>

This is an amazing passage. It urges a full commitment to Christ before it is too late. This divine "hardening" is a divine condemnation. This is the spiritual death that Paul addresses to the Ephesians (2:1, 5, 12).<sup>45</sup>

*"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.... Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves: ... For this cause **God gave them up** unto vile affections: And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, **God gave them over** to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient" (Romans 1:21, 24, 26a, 28).*

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<sup>42</sup> Hendriksen and Kistemaker, *op. cit.*, p. 186.

<sup>43</sup> Enderle, *op. cit.*, p. 49.

<sup>44</sup> Thomas, *op. cit.*, p. 328.

<sup>45</sup> Beale, *op. cit.*, pp. 522-523.