

WORDS OF ENCOURAGEMENT AND HOPE

A Study of Paul's Letters to the Thessalonians and the Ephesians

MEDITATE: *2 Thessalonians 2:1-12.*

Quiet your heart before the Lord. This does not necessarily mean that your environment needs to be silent, although this can be helpful. Set aside a time free from distractions to focus on the passage as you read and meditate on it.

These instructions may help you develop a method for meditating on our passage each week. You may want to incorporate all or some of these ideas, whatever is helpful.

- ❖ Read the passage, slowly and prayerfully asking the Lord to speak to you from his word. Take several minutes to mull over the passage.
- ❖ Read the passage aloud and again take several minutes to give careful thought to it.
- ❖ Listen to the passage being read aloud. You may want to have someone else read it to you, or use a Bible program such as biblegateway.com or YouVersion, a free Bible app.
- ❖ Read the passage in other translations.

Finally, consider the following questions:

What words or phrases stand out to me? Why?

MEDITATE

“As it [meditation] is the sister of reading, so it is the mother of prayer. Though a man's heart be much indisposed to prayer, yet, if he can but fall into a meditation of God, and the things of God, his heart will soon come off to prayer. . . . Begin with reading or hearing. Go on with meditation; end in prayer. . . . Reading without meditation is unfruitful; meditation without reading is hurtful; to meditate and to read without prayer upon both, is without blessing.”

—William Bridge

What questions does the passage raise that I want to know more about?

DIG IN: *Read 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12.*

Note: This passage is difficult both because of its subject matter and because in it Paul refers back to things he taught the Thessalonians when he was with them in person. These things were spoken, not written, and so we do not have a record of them. There have been various interpretations of different parts of this passage, and commentator Leon Morris reminds us that because “we do not possess the key to everything that is here said,” we should hold our interpretations loosely.¹

1. In chapter 1 Paul alluded to the second coming of Christ. (You may want to look back at 2 Thess. 1:7b-10.) Now in chapter 2 he elaborates on that subject.
 - a. What misunderstanding does Paul seek to correct so that the Thessalonians are not “unsettled or alarmed” (v. 2)? (v. 2)
 - b. From verses 2 and 3a, how do you infer this misunderstanding came about?
2. Paul reassures the Thessalonians by telling them that the day of the Lord will not come before two things happen. What are these two things? (v. 3)

3. Although lawlessness and opposition to God are already present in the world (v. 7), the man of lawlessness has not yet been revealed. Why?
vv. 6a, 7b:

v. 6b:

4. What will the man of lawlessness do?
v. 4:

Fill in the blanks in the statement below, which is loosely based on the NIV translation.

vv. 9–12:

The man of lawlessness will perform _____

_____ (v. 9b).

He will deceive _____ (v. 10a),

that is, people who refused

_____ (v. 10b),

specifically “the truth of the gospel.”⁷


Because of their refusal to believe, God

_____ (v. 11a)

so that they will _____

(v. 11b) of the man of lawlessness. In the end, these

people will be _____ (v. 12).

5. To reassure the Thessalonians, Paul is careful to explain just who will be deceived by the man of lawlessness.¹¹ Why would these believers find what he says in v. 10 reassuring? (1 Thess. 2:13; 5:4–5, 9–10;  * Mt. 24:24)

THE MAN OF LAWLESSNESS

We know that the man of lawlessness is “the man in whom opposition to God’s law will as it were be embodied, the very personification of rebellion against God’s ordinances.”² However, “it is difficult to say just who this ‘man of lawlessness’ is, and many suggestions have been made. Throughout history there have been numbers who have done Satan’s evil work (cf. the *many antichrists* of [1 Jn. 2:18]); and this is a warning against over-hasty identification of the individual so described with any particular historical person[]. From time to time we must expect that outstandingly evil men will appear. Paul’s concern, however, is not with them, but with the most infamous of all, who will appear in the last days. He does not use the term Antichrist, but it is Antichrist that he has in mind; and this being will not be revealed until the end is near. He is not Satan... but he is Satan’s instrument, imbued with Satan’s spirit.”³

WHO OR WHAT IS RESTRAINING THE MAN OF LAWLESSNESS?

The short answer is this: “the Thessalonians did know [see the beginning of v. 6] and we do not”; Paul is referring to something he told them in person that we are not privy to, “so we can only guess at his meaning.”⁴ There have in fact been many guesses as to who or what is holding the man of lawlessness back; among them are God (specifically, the Holy Spirit)⁵ and “the principle of law and government.”⁶

POWERFUL DELUSION

What does it mean that God sends a “powerful delusion” (v. 11)? In verse 11 Paul is explaining the consequences for those who “refused to love the truth and so be saved” (v. 10): “since they deliberately chose falsehood in defiance of the truth of God, God subjects them to the power of the error they chose.”⁸ In doing this, God is “confirming them in their evil ways by making them impervious to the truth which they have rejected and open to persuasion by lies”⁹ –in other words, he is “giv[ing] them over” [Rom. 1:24–25] to their own wilful blindness.”¹⁰

6. Commentators point out that the man of lawlessness (the antichrist) is a kind of counterfeit Christ; D. Edmond Hiebert highlights the fact that “Paul describes him in terms that suggest a deliberate parallel to Christ.”¹² Fill in the table to see the parallels and contrasts between the true Christ and the counterfeit.

Jesus, the true Christ	The man of lawlessness, the antichrist
v. 1 2 Thess. 1:7	v. 9 v. 3
Jn. 1:14, 18; 5:19	v. 9
Acts 2:22	v. 9
Jn. 14:6; 2 Thess. 2:10b, 12	vv. 10a, 11
Mt. 5:17; Heb. 10:7	vv. 3, 8a

7. In what two ways does Paul describe the defeat of the man of lawlessness? (v. 8)

What do these descriptions suggest about his defeat and about the One who defeats him?

8. Although we do not know the agent that is restraining the man of lawlessness, and although we do not know when the day of the Lord will arrive, we see that God has power over evil in the world and that he will ultimately defeat it: “Throughout this whole section there is the underlying note of God’s unchallenged sovereignty.”¹³ Ask God to enable you to trust in his good and sovereign power, and cry out to him for places in your life or the world where evil now seems to have the upper hand.

PAUSE TO WORSHIP

Re-read 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12. Take time to interact with the Lord about the passage.

“Once we’ve meditated to focus, understand, and remember, we will normally find our hearts inclined to worship. So, we pause to lift our gaze to the excellencies of Christ, to bend our eyes off of the world, to express thanksgiving and adoration when we pray. Meditation leads to delight when the Holy Spirit inclines our hearts to see and savor how glorious God is.”¹⁴

- ❖ How do I respond to the beauty I see in God’s will, work, and ways in this passage?
- ❖ In what ways do I see Jesus more clearly through this passage?
- ❖ Is there a song or hymn that comes to mind that helps express my response to the passage?

REFLECT & PRAY

- ❖ How can I take what I’m learning from this passage and make it my own? Is there something specific to believe, do, not do, be grateful for, etc.?
- ❖ How does this passage help me see myself and others differently?
- ❖ Pray the passage: Use the passage as a basis to talk to God about the things you are learning, seeing, and longing for as well as ways the passage speaks to your current life experiences.

*📖 Indicates passages for further study

¹ Morris, Leon, *The Epistles of Paul to the Thessalonians*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, ed. R. V. G. Tasker (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 123.

² Hendriksen, William, *Thessalonians, Timothy and Titus*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1987), 177.

³ Morris, 127.

⁴ Morris, 129.

⁵ Hiebert, D. Edmond, *The Thessalonian Epistles: A Call to Readiness* (Chicago: Moody, 1971), 313–314, and Thomas, Robert L., “2 Thessalonians” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary with the New International Version: Ephesians through Philemon*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 11 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988), 324–325.

⁶ Morris 129; see also Hendriksen 181–82.

⁷ Morris, 133.

⁸ Hiebert, 319.

⁹ Marshall, I. Howard, “2 Thessalonians” in *New Bible Commentary*, ed. G. J. Wenham et al., 21st Century Edition (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2010), 1289.

¹⁰ Stott, John R. W., *The Message of Thessalonians: The Gospel and the End of Time*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downer’s Grove, IL: IVP, 1991), 172.

¹¹ Hiebert, 317.

¹² Hiebert, 309.

¹³ Morris, 131.

¹⁴ <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/5-steps-to-meditating-on-your-bible/>