

2<sup>nd</sup> Thessalonians Chapter 2- John Karmelich

1. I remember years ago I was home alone during a very heavy thunder and lightening storm.
  - a) It was soon after I first understood the concept about the rapture of the church
  - b) I remember being up half the night as the house shook violently from the storm.
  - c) I remember calling up a Christian friend to make sure he was home. I wanted to make sure the rapture didn't happen, because my guess at the time was, "If it did happen, this is what it would feel like". ☺
2. In a much heavier sense, this is what the Thessalonians were going through.
  - a) They were being persecuted for their faith.
  - b) They were being killed just for believing Jesus was God.
  - c) When Paul first taught this young church about Jesus, among the things he taught them was about Jesus' Second Coming. So here they were, going through this very rough time and thinking, "This is it. We're under attack. This must be the horrible tribulation period that Paul was talking about."
  - d) In both my thunderstorm, and the Thessalonians' persecution, the answer to both is no.
  - e) Let me tie this to something Jesus said, "You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come." (Matthew 24:6 NIV)
    - i) Jesus is saying in a sense, "Lots of horrible things are going to happen to you, but that's not the "end time" events where I'm about to come back.
  - f) A big purpose of 2<sup>nd</sup> Thessalonians is for Paul to clear up just how to tell when the Second Coming does place. In life, we all go through difficult moments, but there are specific signs and events that occur prior to Jesus' Second Coming.
3. Let's get personal for a second. I can just hear some of you thinking, "My kids are sick, I've got overdue bills, I'm not feeling to good myself, and you want me to worry about Jesus' Second Coming? Get a life! I'll worry about that when it happens!" ☺
  - a) It's a fair question, so let me give some responses: First of all Jesus commands us that we watch for his Second Coming:
    - i) "But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Take heed, watch and pray; for you do not know when the time is." (Mark 13:32-33, NKJV)
  - b) This event is bigger than any and all problems we face in life. Therefore it should be something to be alert about.
  - c) In 1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians, Paul gave a whole speech about the rapture of the church in Chapter 4. The last sentence of that chapter says, "Therefore encourage (or comfort) each other with these words." (1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians 4:18 NIV)
    - i) The point is we need to put all of our problems in perspective. All the problems of life become less painful if and when we keep the eternal perspective. The idea of watching for Jesus' Second Coming is not to stand still all day, stare at the sky and look for Jesus, but it is to remind ourselves that:
      - a) 1) Jesus loves us no matter what and is coming for us!
      - b) 2) A God that loves us can and does rescue us from all of our problems.
  - d) Show me a church where Jesus' Second Coming is taught regularly, and I'll show you a church that's on fire for Jesus. People who live as if their time on earth is limited focus their efforts on bringing in new believers, showing love and support for one another and live in hope of a future day.
  - e) With that relatively brief intro done, I have a lot of ground to cover today. So let's get our spiritual running shoes on and get going. ☺

4. Verse 1: Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him, we ask you, brothers, <sup>2</sup> not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by some prophecy, report or letter supposed to have come from us, saying that the day of the Lord has already come.
- a) Verses 1 and 2 are Paul telling the Thessalonians not to be “unsettled or alarmed” by some report that Jesus’ Second Coming had already come.
  - b) Verse 2 mentions the term “day of the Lord”. That is a specific reference to the events of the “tribulation” and Jesus’ Second Coming.
    - i) It is not referring to a specific 24-hour period, but an extended period where God “judges” the earth. All the horrible stuff described in most of the Book of Revelation and Jesus’ Second Coming can be summed as, “The day of the Lord”.
  - c) Notice in Verse 2 there were 3 ways in which false reports circulated in Thessalonica:
    - i) 1) By some prophecy (prediction);
    - ii) 2) By some report (e.g., “I heard that...”); and finally
    - iii) 3) By some letter.
    - iv) Some commentators speculate there may have been some fake letter that claimed the tribulation already happened and Paul’s name was forged.
  - d) Let me put this in practical terms:
    - i) Suppose you had a vision of some end time event. Just because you had that dream does not mean Jesus’ Second Coming is a week from Tuesday. ☺
    - ii) Paul in this chapter is going to explain specific events that must happen prior to His Second Coming. Therefore, whether we receive a vision, a false report or letter, it should be tested against God’s Word.
    - iii) These verses are a reminder to us about that all other methods of “revelation” (with a small “r”) are in comparison to the bible itself.
    - iv) This reminds us of the biblical principal taught in 1<sup>st</sup> John:
      - a) “Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.” (1<sup>st</sup> John 4:1, NIV)
      - b) When somebody tells you “I have a vision from the Lord regarding your future”, I politely listen. Then I apply 1<sup>st</sup> John 4:1 and wait and see if it happens. I neither panic nor get excited about such things.
    - v) What Paul is teaching us is that the bible itself is our test against any and all bible commentary (including this one!), any and all rumors, any and all visions, any and all books, etc.
  - e) These verses also bring up the debate between “pre-trib.” and “post-trib.” views on the rapture of the church.
    - i) Again, the “pre-trib.” view means that the church is taken up to heaven (i.e., “raptured”) prior to a 7-year period called the tribulation. Thus “pre-trib.” refers to a pre-tribulation view. The “post-trib.” view is the rapture does not happen until the end of the seven-year tribulation period.
    - ii) Here’s the “pre-trib.” argument: The Thessalonians were upset because they thought they “missed the rapture”. They heard this false-report that the tribulation had already begun, and they were worried they missed it.
      - a) The argument goes, “If the Thessalonians were “post-trib,” they wouldn’t be upset, they would be excited because they knew Jesus was coming”.
      - b) The “post-trib.” rebuttal is “The text doesn’t say the Thessalonians thought they missed the rapture, they were just “alarmed” that the events had begun. Just because we (who hold this view) are going through the tribulation, doesn’t mean were happy about it. ☺ We still know many people die in this event.”

- iii) For those who have been reading my commentaries for a while know that I hold a strong “pre-trib.” bias, and should read these notes as such. Whether I’m right or wrong, for me, it’s a matter of how I choose to live. I’d rather live my life on the belief that Jesus can return for me at any moment. If you hold a “post-trib.” view, Jesus can’t return “at any moment” because the tribulation has to occur first. More on this later. For now, we still have a lot of ground to cover.
- 5. Verse 3: 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.
  - a) OK, now we get into the good stuff. ☺ Paul starts by saying that “day” does not begin until two things happen:
    - i) First, the “man of lawlessness” is revealed and this is the “Antichrist”. If you go through the bible, there are lots of titles for the Antichrist. That specific title is not used in Thessalonians. The “Antichrist” title is most famous, so we’ll use it.
    - ii) Second, this event will not occur until “the rebellion” occurs. Other translations say “apostasy” (a transliteration of the Greek) or “falling away” (NKJV).
      - a) Scholars debate whether the rebellion refers to a general rebellion against God or it is people who claim to be Christian and then turn away.
      - b) Personally, I think that point is irrelevant. What is important is that when this Antichrist appears, he draws people away from worshipping the true God and onto worshipping him. Therefore this “rebellion” can refer to non-Christians as well as “former” Christians.
  - b) It is important to understand there are lots of antichrists, but only one “the” Antichrist:
    - i) “Dear children, this is the last hour; and as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come.” (1<sup>st</sup> John 2:18 NIV)
    - ii) When John says “the last hour”, he doesn’t mean the tribulation has begun. The “last hour” and its similar term “last days” refers to the entire Christian time era in relevance to all of human history. Since Jesus returns at the end of the Christian “era”, this is the “last hour” or “last days”.
    - iii) John also expected Jesus to return at any moment, and thus John used the expression “last hour” to describe the present events of his time.
    - iv) The term “antichrist” means one who is opposed to that of Jesus. In a sense, anyone who is strongly opposed to the teaching of Christ and leads others away from Jesus can be thought of as an antichrist.
    - v) The term “antichrist” also means “in place of Christ”. Anyone who claims he or she is Jesus and is leading people away can be thought of as an antichrist.
    - vi) With all of that understood, there is only one (with a capital A) Antichrist. This guy is described in detail in this chapter of Thessalonians and Revelation 13.
  - c) Next, understand that the Antichrist is not Satan himself. Look at Verse 9 of this chapter. “The coming of the lawless (the Antichrist) one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders”
    - i) This guy has the power of Satan, but is not Satan himself.
  - d) This leads to an Antichrist description which the NIV translates “man of lawlessness”
    - i) The King James Bible says “son of perdition”, which I personally like better.
    - ii) The word “perdition” means, “to be filled with something”. It is only used of one other person in the bible. Jesus used the term “son of perdition” to describe Judas:
      - a) “While I was with them (disciples) in the world, I kept them in Your name. Those whom You gave Me I have kept; and none of them is lost except the son of perdition, that the Scripture might be fulfilled.” John 17:12 NKJV
      - b) Jesus is not saying Judas is the Antichrist.

- c) The bible says Satan “entered” Judas when he betrayed Jesus (John 13:27). In the same way, whenever this Antichrist comes on the scene, Satan will “enter” him and his “full embodiment” will be with Satan’s desire.
  - iii) Getting back to the NIV translation-term “man of lawlessness”, it is not a bad paraphrase. If you took all the bible commandments and said, “do the opposite” that would be “lawlessness”. That is the idea of the Antichrist as a leader.
  - e) Notice the last phrase of Verse 3 says, “The man doomed to destruction”
    - i) Paul wants us to understand his end. The Antichrist will be killed in the end.
    - ii) “Then the beast (Antichrist) was captured, and with him the false prophet who worked signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image. These two were cast alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone.” Revelation 19:20 NKJV).
    - iii) My point is both 2<sup>nd</sup> Thessalonians and Revelation 19 teach of his ultimate fate. The bad news is the people who follow this guy also get cast into the same pit (Revelation 20:14).
  - f) To wrap up this verse, the important thing Paul is trying to communicate is that this period of time does not happen unless the Antichrist is revealed. So how do we recognize this guy? That is what the next set of verses is all about.
6. Verse 4: 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.
- a) A better name for the Antichrist is “The Coming World Leader”, which I got from Dr. David Hocking. The man will be charismatic, charming, and get billions to follow him.
  - b) Notice that he will not only get people to oppose the true God, but also “everything that is called God”. He will be demanded to be worshipped over “Allah”, Buddha, and Elvis. ☺
  - c) For centuries, many claimed this-or-that pope was the Antichrist or this-or-that Roman Emperor was the Antichrist. None of these people ever demanded to be worshipped over all gods and the true God. Some Roman Emperor’s claimed themselves as “a” deity, but never “the only” deity. Some Catholic popes killed people out of allegiance to them, but never once did they demand the world worship them over God.
    - i) My point is no one in history has ever fulfilled what Paul is stating in Verse 4.
    - ii) A sign that you’ve encountered the Antichrist is that he will demand to be worshipped over all gods.
  - d) The next part of the verse states “He sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God.”
    - i) When Paul wrote this letter about 50-51AD, “the” temple in Jerusalem stood.
      - a) For most of the history of Israel, they have had a central worship temple.
      - b) Therefore, we know Paul is speaking of “the” temple of Jerusalem.
      - c) That temple was not destroyed until 70 AD.
    - ii) That means, from our standpoint, that the tribulation has not happened because “the” temple is not standing.
    - iii) Israel did not exist as a country from 70AD until 1948. They did not recapture the City of Jerusalem until 1967. The spot where their Temple stood has not been rebuilt. This is because a mosque was built over the spot where the temple was. That mosque is one of the holiest sites in the world to a Muslim. If the Jewish people destroyed it, millions of Muslims would come to destroy Israel.
    - iv) The religious Jews only want to build a new temple on the same spot where the traditional temple stood. There is a theory that has floated around the last 20-30 years, is that the spot where the Jewish people could rebuilt the Temple is right next to where this mosque is located. In order to use that “spot”, an exterior part of the temple, called “The Court of the Gentiles” would have to be excluded from any new construction. Now look at what Revelation predicts:

- a) "Go and measure the temple of God and the altar, and count the worshipers there. But exclude the outer court; do not measure it, because it has been given to the Gentiles." (Revelation 11:1a-2 NIV)
  - b) The point is it is possible to rebuild the Temple today, without destroying the mosque that is holy to the Muslim's, by not building "the outer court".
  - c) So why don't the religious Jews build the Temple? The most common answer is "Only the Messiah will lead us to rebuild the temple".
  - d) If you ask most religious Jews "How will they recognize the Messiah?" the answer is "He will lead us to rebuild the temple".
- e) With that in mind, let's re-read part of this verse from 2<sup>nd</sup> Thessalonians: "So that he (Antichrist) sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God."
- i) I believe that many Jewish people will believe that the Antichrist is the long-promised messiah to come. I believe the guy will make a peace treaty between the Muslim world and the Jewish people and allow them to rebuild the temple next to that mosque (also known as "Dome of the Rock").
  - ii) The reason we know the tribulation (a.k.a. "the day of the Lord) is a seven-year period is from Daniel 9. The last few verses describe a final ""seven". The Hebrew term for "seven" can refer to 7 days, or 7 months or 7 years, and in that case, it means 7 years. (Please see my study on Daniel 9, Part 2 for more details.)
  - iii) Daniel 9:27 states that in the "middle of the week (i.e., 7-year period)" is when the Antichrist stops the traditional animal sacrifices in the Jewish temple. It is believed that when he does that, is when he demands to be worshipped as God as described here in Thessalonians.
- f) Does this mean that the rapture won't happen until we see a temple built?
- i) The answer is not necessarily. Daniel does not say when the new temple is built. Daniel just says the animal sacrifices are stopped at the halfway point of this seven-year period.
  - ii) For those who have the "pre-trib." view, the rapture could happen prior to the construction of the temple. If the Antichrist demands to be worshipped at the half-way point of the 7-year tribulation, that means the Jewish people "have" 3½ years to build it. The "post-trib." view is that the rapture does not happen until the end of the 7-year period of time.
  - iii) Personally, if I see the Jewish people start rebuilding the temple, not only might I change my view on the rapture, I might start walking around Israel with a sandwich-board that says, "Repent!" on both sides. ☺
- g) The "post-trib." believer might ask, "Why would Paul spend all of this time describing the details unless he expected Christians to see all of this?"
- i) The "pre-trib." response is that Paul is warning the Thessalonians not to be disturbed by all of their troubles and that the tribulation has not begun. The tribulation will not begin until all of this is going to happen.
7. Verse 5: Don't you remember that when I was with you I used to tell you these things?
- a) If you recall from the study in 1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians, Paul was only in Thessalonica for at the least 3 weeks and at the most, maybe a month and a half. In that time, Paul taught this young church about the antichrist, the tribulation and Jesus' Second Coming.
    - i) I can name you churches that have been around for decades and still never touch these verses! Ask most Christians how they can tell when the tribulation starts and they don't have a clue, or just think it has something to do with "666". ☺

- b) This verse gets back to my opening theme of the importance of understanding the events of Jesus' Second Coming.
  - i) In 1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians 4:13, Paul says he does not want us to be ignorant about these things. This is a command for Christian believers. It does not mean to obsess on the Second Coming, just to be aware of it and know what signs to look for.
- 8. Verse 6: And now you know what is holding him back, so that he may be revealed at the proper time. <sup>7</sup> For the secret power of lawlessness is already at work; but the one who now holds it back will continue to do so till he is taken out of the way.
  - a) Now we come to the two toughest verses in the chapter. If you can make it through these verses, you can handle anything else I throw at you. ☺
  - b) Let's start with the phrase, "And you know what is holding him back".
    - i) The "him" is the Antichrist.
  - c) The verse says, "You know" what is holding him back. My response is, "We do?" ☺
    - i) That means that although "we" don't know what Paul meant, the Thessalonians did. Paul is stating that he already explained to the Thessalonians who "him" is.
    - ii) A clue to this mystery is in Verse 7. It says, "But the one who now holds it back will continue to do so till he (Antichrist) is taken out of the way."
  - d) OK, who is the "one" holding him back? Is it God the Father? Jesus? An angel? The church? I'll also get to the issue of why this is important once we figure it out.
    - i) Since God the Father is everywhere, I don't believe God can be "taken out of the way". Remember the verse says that the Antichrist appears after "he" is taken out of the way. Since God is everywhere, God can't be "taken out of the way".
    - ii) I don't think it refers directly to Jesus as well. When I think of Jesus, I think of Him being at God's "right hand":
      - a) "Christ Jesus, who died – more than that, who was raised to life – is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us." (Romans 8:34 NIV)"
      - b) Yes Jesus "makes His home in us" (John 14:23), but I tend to visualize that as the Holy Spirit living within us and conforming us to be like Jesus.
      - c) The reason I don't see this as Jesus restraining the appearance of the Antichrist, is only because Jesus can't be "taken out of the way" the same way God the Father can't be "taken out of the way."
    - iii) Could "he" be some specific angel? Possibly, but the only time we ever read of angels directly fighting demonic angels is in Daniel, and nowhere in the bible do we read of angels "holding back" the tribulation period from beginning.
    - iv) Then is "he" the church? Some argue that praying Christians are the force that keeps the tribulation from starting. This argument is prevalent among the "pre-trib." people. This is because when there are no praying Christians around, this allows the "lawlessness" of the Antichrist to "do his thing". ☺
      - a) There are some problems with that as well. Paul uses the pronoun "she" to refer to the church elsewhere. The church is called "the bride of Christ". (Ref. Ephesians 5:23-32, Revelation 19:7, 21:2, 21:9) Because Paul uses "she" describing the church that would indicate that whoever "he" is in this verse, the "he" is not referring to the Christian church.
    - v) There are good Greek bible scholars (Paul wrote this in Greek) who are convinced that the "he" being taken out of the way, refers to the rapture of the church. The view is that when the church is taken to heaven, the Holy Spirit "in a sense" is taken with us and this gives Satan his power during his final days. Some believe that once that rapture happens, Satan now knows his time is very limited and the tribulation represents his last "mad attempt" to gain as much power as possible.

- a) Other Greek scholars argue equally as well that the “he” who restrains the Antichrist is “just” referring to the Holy Spirit and not the church.
- b) The problem is the fact that Paul wrote these verses using only “pronouns” and thus there is debate among good bible scholars.
- vi) My personal view is that it is the power of the Holy Spirit that “restrains” Satan’s power and prevents Satan from his full power and having “the” Antichrist revealed. That “fits well” with the general Christian view. We have the power to combat Satan through prayer.
- vii) Does this mean that if the rapture happens prior to the tribulation nobody gets saved during that time? If the Holy Spirit is “taken out” during this time, does that mean nobody new gets saved?
  - a) The answer is no. The “pre-trib.” view holds that many get saved in the tribulation. They are a different category of saved believers the same way those who are saved prior to Jesus are of a different category. Revelation 7:9 speaks of multitudes of saved people who come out of the tribulation.
  - b) The “post-tribulation” view believes Christians go through that period, so the Revelation 7:9 verse speaks of all believers who get raptured at the end of that period.
- viii) Either way, the Holy Spirit is somehow, “still around” during the tribulation. Which means, how the Holy Spirit is “taken out of the way” is a difficult verse to deal with. The most common answer is somehow at the end of the church era, prior to the tribulation, the Holy Spirit stops whatever is restraining the Antichrist from appearing, and then it “Showtime”. ☺
- e) OK, John, I’m glad you spent a page and a half explaining to me that the Holy Spirit is restraining the Antichrist. Now tell why I need to know this stuff. ☺
  - i) I want you to understand that God gives us the power through the Holy Spirit that is greater than Satan’s power!
  - ii) Let’s start with a bible verse: “You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world.” (1st John 4:4, NIV)
  - iii) When we become followers of Jesus, God the Father has given us power to overcome anything and everything Satan has thrown at us. We have the power to overcome any and all temptations.
  - iv) Satan’s “basic” goal is to stop, slow down, or thwart God’s redemptive plan for mankind. His time is limited based on a fixed number of people becoming Christians. The longer Satan can delay that number, the more time he has.
  - v) Satan is given tremendous power by God to do his work. The good news is God gives in us more power to overcome his power.
    - a) Jesus said, “I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing (referring to his miracles). He (us) will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father.” (John 14:12 NIV)
    - b) The point is we have tremendous power to do all sorts of things because the resurrected Jesus is at God the Father’s right hand, and the Holy Spirit is working within us giving us the power to do God the Father’s will.
    - c) To paraphrase, if it is God the Father’s will to move a mountain three feet to the left, God the Father works through us and gives us that power to move that mountain. If it is God the Father’s will for us to minister to someone, or heal someone, God gives us the power to perform whatever it is He desires of us. (The “trick” is working on God’s timing and not ours!)

- f) My point here, coming back to Thessalonians, is that Satan wants and desires power. His desire is to rule over the earth. Look what Isaiah said about Satan:
- i) "I will ascend above the tops of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High." But you are brought down to the grave, to the depths of the pit." (Isaiah 14:14-15 NIV)
  - ii) If God, through the Holy Spirit is limiting Satan's power over the world, there is coming a day when the Holy Spirit is "taken out" of the way so that Satan can "have his day".
- g) Let's wrap up this these verses: The point to you and me as believers is that one day, the wicked will get "just what they want". God will judge them for refusing to accept the free gift of salvation that is offered through Jesus.
- i) The other big-picture point is the Thessalonians were worried the tribulation had begun. Paul is teaching that it has not happen yet because 1) The Holy Spirit is "still around" and 2) the Antichrist has not been revealed.
- h) OK, I said a few pages back that if you can handle these few verses, the rest of the chapter is easy in comparison. ☺
9. Verse 8: 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.
- a) Paul is now putting the coming of the Antichrist in perspective of the coming of Jesus.
  - b) Paul is saying that the Antichrist will be destroyed by the Second Coming of Jesus.
  - c) Let me repeat a verse from Revelation that I stated earlier in this lesson:
    - i) "Then the beast (Antichrist) was captured, and with him the false prophet who worked signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image. These two were cast alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone." Revelation 19:20 NKJV).
    - ii) Revelation, written by John, supports Paul's prediction that Jesus himself will destroy the Antichrist at his Second Coming.
  - d) Notice the verse says that Jesus destroys this guy with "the breath of his mouth".
    - i) The verse is not literal. The Antichrist does not die from Jesus' bad breath. ☺
    - ii) In fact, four times in Revelation, there is a reference to a sword coming out of Jesus mouth that is used for destruction (Revelation 1:16, 2:16, 19:15 and 19:21).
    - iii) In both cases, the word-picture is referring to the power of Jesus over the Antichrist. How the man is destroyed is not known. I suspect Jesus orally gives the command to destroy the Antichrist (i.e., "breath of his mouth") and the man will be immediately destroyed. There is a view that God "spoke" all of creation into being. Maybe Jesus "speaks by the breath of his mouth" to destroy Satan.
10. Verse 9: The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders,
- a) This verse is saying that when the Antichrist comes, he has all sorts of powers to do "counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders". The question is why does God allow him to have this power? Why does the Antichrist perform these miracles?
  - b) To answer those questions, we first need to look at some other bible verses:
    - i) "Then some of the Pharisees and teachers of the law said to him, "Teacher, we want to see a miraculous sign from you." He answered, "A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a miraculous sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. " (Matthew 12:38-39, NIV)
      - a) Here were some Pharisees asking to see a sign from Jesus that He was the Messiah. You would think that Jesus, who wants everyone to be saved (Ref.: 1st Timothy 2:4) would say "Sign? No problem, watch this one". ☺
      - b) Instead, Jesus scolds them for wanting some sort of sign.

- ii) Jesus once said, "If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead." (Luke 16:31 NIV)
    - a) Jesus point here is that even if the Jewish people saw someone raised from the dead, like when he raised Lazarus (John 11:43), some people would still not believe Jesus is the promised Messiah.
  - c) My point is miracles are not enough to convince people of the Gospel Truth. You can have all the miracles in the world and people would still not believe Jesus is the Messiah.
    - i) Let me give a practical example of a person who hasn't committed their life to Christ: "Oh God, I'm in big trouble right now. If you just get me out of this, I promise I'll do this and that for you". When the trouble ends, in a matter of time, they just go back to their old ways because they don't want to change their lifestyle. To change our lifestyle in conformance of what Jesus wants for us is what commitment is all about.
    - ii) There is an old joke among policeman that "a speeding ticket is good for about 10 miles and a warning is only good for about 5 miles". The point is getting a speeding ticket is not enough to get people to change their lifestyle. The same way "signs and miracles" are not enough to change people.
    - iii) To change requires a commitment on our part to follow Jesus. Then God can work through us to change us for the better in conformity to his image.
  - d) Which leads us back to this verse. This verse is Satan saying, "You want miracles? I've got miracles! You want signs? I've got signs! Come and follow me! If signs and miracles are what you want to follow me, that's no problem!"
11. Verse 10: and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved.
- a) Verse 10 finishes the sentence of Verse 9.
    - i) The first part of this verse says that the Antichrist will use these signs and wonders to deceive those who are perishing.
  - b) The verse says, "every sort of evil". Personally, I don't see this a guy walking around with a gun shooting people. This is a guy who the world will follow as a great leader. There will be special signs to convince the world of his power.
  - c) What he will teach is to avoid what the bible teaches. Let me give an illustration:
    - i) "All of you are wonderful people. Together, we have the power to overcome any obstacle. All we have to do is work together and we can all live in peace with one another. We don't need any "god" to rule over us. We can all live in peace and harmony by just working together.
    - ii) "Further, I want all of you to be happy. I want all of you to enjoy a peaceful life and do whatever you want (i.e., no accountability).
  - d) Jesus said, "Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it." (Matthew 7:13-14 NIV)
    - i) If a road is wide, it is because there is a lot of traffic on that road.
    - ii) If a road is narrow, it is designed for low traffic.
    - iii) Jesus is saying, unfortunately that most people willfully choose to ignore God. They choose to do whatever they want and don't worry about accountability.
    - iv) The Antichrist in a sense, "gives the people what they want". Since people willfully choose to follow the true God, a substitute is offered.

12. Verse 11: For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie<sup>12</sup> and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness.
- a) Verse 11 states that God himself sends a “force of delusion” so that people will believe “the lie”. First of all, what is “the lie”?
    - i) The only other clue we have from Paul is in the book of Romans:
      - a) “Therefore God also gave them (nonbelievers) up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves, who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen. “ (Romans 1:24-25 NKJV)
    - ii) I believe “the lie” is that you don’t need God in order to achieve salvation.
      - a) “The lie” is that we can be acceptable to God based on “being a good person”. Ask a majority of people if they should go to heaven, they will say, “Yes, because my good deeds outweigh my bad deeds”. That is “the lie”. The “lie” is that we are basically good people.
    - iii) Jesus said this about Satan: “When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.” (John 8:44)
      - a) Remember that Jesus described himself as “the truth” in John 14:6. Satan is sending his own “false-messiah” through the Antichrist, and that would give him the nickname “the lie”.
    - iv) This goes back to the Garden of Eden. Satan’s strategy was to get Adam and Eve to not do God’s will and “do their own thing”. The “lie” is that they could be “like God” (Genesis 3:5) by disobeying God’s command for their lives.
    - v) Others believe “the lie” is that the Antichrist is the coming Messiah. If that is true, it is “part of the big lie” that the world refuses to follow Jesus and are willing to follow someone else.
      - a) Jesus gave a prediction about the coming Antichrist: “I have come in my Father’s name, and you do not accept me; but if someone else comes in his own name, you will accept him.” (John 5:43 NIV).
      - b) Some see this verse in John 5:43 as Jesus’ prediction of the Jewish people following the Antichrist and accepting him as their Messiah.
  - b) Let’s get to the tougher question: Why does God send a “strong delusion? This verse states when the Antichrist comes, God sends a strong delusion so that people follow him.
    - i) If God loves everyone and wants everyone to be saved, why send a delusion upon the world so that they do follow the Antichrist?
    - ii) This ties gets to a prediction by Isaiah (quoted in Matthew 13:14 et.al.): “He said, “Go and tell this people: “‘Be ever hearing, but never understanding; be ever seeing, but never perceiving.’ Make the heart of this people calloused; make their ears dull and close their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed.”
    - iii) The idea of the “strong delusion” is that it is necessary because the gospel is, and will become very obvious during this time period.
      - a) You would be surprised how many nonbelievers have a pretty good concept of the Christian view of the end times. They understand it, they just refuse to believe it, or more importantly, refuse to change their lifestyle based on what the bible teaches.
      - b) You would think an event like the rapture of the church or the appearing of the Antichrist would get people to say, “Wait a minute, something isn’t right about this. Let me check my bible.” ☺

- c) God sends a “strong delusion” because a strong delusion becomes necessary. It is God saying, “You didn’t want to follow my son Jesus? Fine then I’ll give you what you want. You want to follow your own desires? I’ll give you a strong desire (i.e., “delusion”) to follow what you want.”
  - d) People willfully choose to turn from God and God ultimately says, “OK, if that is what you want, I’ll make that desire to turn from me even stronger”.
  - e) I do believe there is a “point of no return” for people now and during that seven-year period. We as humans never know that point, so we pray for people. This is why Jesus stated the only unforgivable sin is “blasphemy of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 12:31). That sin is a continual denial of Jesus as God. If one continues in that belief for a long time, one can get to a point where God the Father says, “OK, if that’s what you want, I’ll make it so you cannot believe”. Again, I don’t know when someone has “crossed that line”, so I pray for all.
13. Verse 13: But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because from the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth.
- a) OK, the good news. We have now finished the Antichrist stuff and were back to the positive aspects of our relationship with God. You can all exhale now. ☺
  - b) The important thing here is to see Verse 13 to the end of the chapter in context with the previous set of verses.
    - i) Paul just spent half a chapter telling of the horrors the world will face for rejecting God’s free provision of salvation through Jesus.
    - ii) After scaring us half to death, ☺ Paul turns and gives the good news to those who do follow God and what is happening to us in contrast.
  - c) Remember the purpose of this chapter is that the Thessalonians thought they were in the final 7-year tribulation. Paul is saying, “No it hasn’t started. We know it hasn’t started because the Antichrist has not come on the scene yet.
  - d) The problem is the Thessalonians are still suffering.
    - i) It would be like them responding to Chapter 2 by saying, “Well, if we’re not in the great tribulation, what about all the suffering we’re going through?”
    - ii) That is what Paul deals with in the last few verses of this chapter.
  - e) To personalize this chapter, let’s discuss the Christian disease of “rapture-itis” ☺
    - i) This is the idea that “OK God, I’m in a lot of pain, I’ve got a big operation coming next week, and this would be a good time for the rapture to occur. Another one is “Dear God, I’ve created a big mess. This would be a good time for you to come back. Dear God, my mortgage or rent is due next week and I don’t have the money to pay for it. Come back Jesus!” That is “rapture-itis” ☺
    - ii) I’m guessing the Thessalonians had a bad case of “rapture-itis”. They were suffering through a lot of stuff and we’re hoping, “Well, maybe Jesus is coming back so we don’t have to deal with all of this pain.
    - iii) The answer is whether we like it or not, all Christians go through suffering. Sometimes it is from demonic persecution. Sometimes it is from our own sins manifesting itself. Sometimes it is from other people hurting us. Sometimes we don’t know the answer. We just know we are in pain.
      - a) God responds by saying, “No this isn’t the tribulation, but I know what you are going through. I still love you and want the best for you. Before you were born I knew this was going to happen to you and I want you to have faith in me despite what you are going through.”

- f) Which, surprisingly, leads us back to Verse 13. “But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because from the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth.
- i) Look at the positive things Paul is saying to the Thessalonians:
- a) 1) We thank God for you.
  - b) 2) You are loved by the Lord. This is something good to remember when we sin a week from Tuesday. ☺ When God calls us to be saved, He is aware of all the sins we are going to commit in the future and still loves us!
  - c) 3) God choose you to be saved. This is the “pre-destiny” aspect of salvation. If God knows all things, then he knows in advance who will choose to follow him. This is how I balance “pre-destiny” and “free will”.
  - d) 4) The Holy Spirit is working in you (“sanctify” is to be set apart for God)
  - e) 5) Finally, Paul complimented them in their belief in the truth.
- ii) In other words, Paul is not scolding them for thinking the tribulation has begun. Instead he compliments them and reminds them just how much God loves them.
14. Verse 14: He called you to this through our gospel that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.
- a) My view is for all Christians there has to be a moment in their life when they “crossed the line” and committed their life to serving Jesus. There has to be a point where we realize that we are sinners, accept the Gospel message, and then live for Jesus out of gratitude for what God did for us.
- i) That whole process is known as a “calling”. It begins with God “calling” us into salvation. We hear the Gospel message, and we respond.
- b) Verse 14 states the purpose by which you were saved.
- i) God does not save us so he can brag, “I can add another checkmark on my list as I just saved another person!” ☺ God saves us for a purpose.
- ii) That purpose is the second phrase of this verse: “(so) that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.”
- a) Being “saved” means living forever. It also means living in the presence of God. If you enjoy being with God, you’ll like heaven. If someone doesn’t care for “all that religious stuff ☺”, they are willfully choosing to turn their back on Gods. For God to cast them out of heaven is giving people what they want. A related concept is people wanting to get into heaven by “being a good person”. They also are cast out because they refuse to accept a free, personal sacrifice on their behalf.
  - b) God is a God-of-love. He wants to shower that love upon us now, and during the next life. Once the sin problem is “dealt with”, God can then begin to show that love upon us. That is the purpose for which you were saved. The greatest purpose one can have in this life is to live for God as opposed to your own desires.
- c) The Living Bible (TLB) has a good paraphrase of how we share in the glory of Jesus: “Yes, dear friends, we are already God’s children, right now, and we can’t even imagine what it is going to be like later on. But we do know this, that when he (Jesus) comes (back) we will be like him, as a result of seeing him as he really is. And everyone who really believes this will try to stay pure because Christ is pure. (1<sup>st</sup> John 3:2-3 TLB)
15. Verse 15: So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the teachings we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter.
- a) In Verse 13, it talked about the love of God and how He called us into salvation.
  - b) In Verse 14 it talked about our eternal reward for obeying the Gospel.
  - c) In Verse 15 we get into personal responsibility based on the Gospel message.

- d) Verse 15 answers the question, “Well, if God loves us and we are going to spend eternity with God, what do we do about it here and now?” Now re-read Verse 15!
  - e) Verse 15 is Paul encouraging the Thessalonians to “stick to it”. Paul wants them to stick to the things he taught them and wrote to them.
  - f) The word “teachings” is also translated “tradition” as used in the King James Bible.
    - i) “Tradition” can be a good or bad thing. Jesus condemned the Pharisee’s for obeying their traditions over and above the Word of God. (Matthew 15:3)
    - ii) On the other hand, having communion regularly is a good tradition. Going to church regularly is a good tradition. My point is “tradition” is a neutral term. The specific traditions that are beneficial and bible-based are being discussed here.
16. Verse 16: May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope,<sup>17</sup> encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word.
- a) You read this sentence and think, “Shouldn’t this be the end of the letter? It reads like a concluding greeting. Why is there another chapter after this sentence?”
  - b) Remember the Thessalonians were going through a lot of suffering. Paul is trying to encourage them through this time. Paul is proud of how this church is thriving, but also is aware that things can change. Therefore, Paul gives a verse of encouragement.
  - c) Let me paraphrase what Paul might be thinking, “I know you guys are hurting. I know this time is difficult. I know you think this is “the end”, but its not. Remember that God loves you. Don’t look to me for so much for encouragement and hope, but God himself. A God that loves you wants to encourage and strengthen you in every good deed.
  - d) The final verse is about how to deal with the tough times. It ties well to the chapter in that most of the chapter explains, “this is not the end”, but the last few verses show here is how to deal with your problems.
17. I’m going to use Verse 16 as a launching pad for the closing prayer: “Heavenly Father, living the Christian life can be difficult. We suffer through rough times and it’s hard to have faith when we are really hurting. Help us to remember just how much you love us unconditionally. You love us despite our sins, despite our doubts and despite our trust in You. Lord, we take all of that pain and put in your hands. You are bigger than all of our problems and because You love us, You want us to give these situations over to You. Now we pray for Your strength and Your power to work through us, so that You may be glorified in all of our lives. It is not about our goodness, but Yours. These are promises you made to us and “You’re reputation is on the line”. May you be glorified in our life, in Jesus name we pray, Amen.