
2 Thessalonians 2

*Verses 9-12: The Coming of the Antichrist -- Mimicry of Christ -- The Love of the Truth
-- Strong Delusion*

Ministry Reading

Opening Reading -- 2 Thessalonians 2:9-12

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Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, 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 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.

His Coming After the Working of Satan

The setting for our verses is the middle of Daniel's seventieth week, when Satan is cast out of heaven by Michael and his angels (Revelation 12). No longer having access to the heavenly places, Satan descends with great wrath, and his power -- no longer restrained by his expulsion from heaven -- is directed through his two great instruments: the beast, who receives his throne directly from Satan (Revelation 13:2), and the man of sin, who is the false prophet and second beast, revealed at the same moment. The Antichrist's coming is entirely according to the working of Satan. He is Satan's instrument -- energized, directed, and empowered by that ancient enemy of God and man.

Powers, Signs, and Lying Wonders: The Great Mimicry

The words in verse 9 -- power, signs, and wonders -- are exactly the words used of the Lord Jesus and His apostles in the Gospels and Acts. They were the insignia of a God-given ministry. A sign is a pointer to something beyond itself -- it authenticates and accredits the messenger. In John's Gospel, the word for miracle always means a sign, a pointer to the person and mission of the Lord Jesus. Here, under the hand of Satan, those same words are used to attempt to sanction a completely different mission -- the mission of the man of sin. The wonders are qualified as lying wonders, wonders of falsehood. They are not genuine displays of divine power. But they are real enough to deceive.

Revelation 13 describes the second beast -- the same personage -- rising out of the earth with two horns like a lamb and speaking as a dragon. He has two horns: a probable imitation of the priestly and kingly offices that Christ will unite in His millennial reign, seated as a priest upon His throne (Zechariah 6:13). He makes fire come down from heaven in the sight of men -- an imitation of Elijah. He breathes life into the image of the beast -- but it is breath, not life: even the Egyptian magicians had a point at which they had to concede that what Moses was doing was beyond them. The mimicry is elaborate and thoroughgoing but it is still mimicry. God creates life; Satan can only imitate.

The Two Witnesses: God's Answer in Jerusalem

While the Antichrist operates with all this satanic energy in Jerusalem, God raises up two witnesses at the same time (Revelation 11) who prophesy for three and a half years with a Moses-like and an Elijah-like ministry -- calling Israel back from apostasy as Elijah did, and exercising governmental power as Moses did at the plagues of Egypt. The Antichrist does not have an entirely free hand. God places a direct opposition to him in the very city where he operates. When the enemy comes in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord lifts up a standard against

him.

Isaiah 14 and the King of Babylon: The Last Holder of Gentile Power

Isaiah 14:4 addresses the king of Babylon, and verse 12 calls him Lucifer, son of the morning. This has often been taken as a direct reference to Satan himself, because the pride and ambition described there -- 'I will be like the Most High' -- sounds so directly satanic. But Kelly's observation is important here: this figure is titled the king of Babylon because he is the last holder of the power that was first committed to Nebuchadnezzar.

There is a flow from the head to the feet of the image in Daniel 2: one empire-power was committed to the Gentiles when the Shekinah left Israel -- that power has passed through Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome, and at the very end it will be concentrated in the beast, who is the last holder of that Babylonian-rooted power. He is the king of Babylon in that representative sense. He sounds like Satan because in the middle of the week he is receiving his throne directly from Satan; he has become Satan's direct mouthpiece in government. Isaiah 14:16 clinches it: 'They that see thee shall narrowly look upon thee and consider thee, saying, Is this the man that made the earth to tremble?' A man -- not Satan himself. Isaiah 14 goes on to take up the destruction of the Assyrian by Christ, which follows the judgment of the beast and corresponds to Daniel 11's account of the king of the north hearing tidings out of the east and north and going back in great haste, to be broken without human agency.

Darby's Distinction: The Beast and the False Prophet Are Two

It was a common assumption in early pre-millennial thought that there would be one worldwide ruler who was also the Antichrist. Darby held this view until the early 1840s, when he wrote a paper establishing that the first beast and the

second beast in Revelation 13 are two separate persons. The second beast -- the Antichrist, the man of sin, the false prophet -- is not a worldwide ruler. He is a king in Jerusalem (Daniel 11:36-38), the director of religious affairs who causes the earth and those who dwell upon it to worship the first beast. To confuse them is to introduce serious problems: if the first beast is truly a worldwide ruler and every person on the globe receives his mark and is given over to worship him, then no one survives to enter the millennium, and there are no millennial saints, no sheep among the nations of Matthew 25, no great company of Revelation 7. Once the two are kept distinct, the difficulties resolve.

The Thirteen Names of the Man of Sin

Scripture gives this person a remarkable number of names and titles, reflecting how fully he concentrates in himself the opposite of all that Christ is. Among those found in the Old and New Testaments are: the Antichrist, the man of sin, the lawless one, the son of perdition, the one who comes in his own name, another beast, the false prophet, the king (Daniel 11), the wicked one (Isaiah 11), the idle shepherd (Zechariah 11), the man of the earth (Psalm 10), the bloody and deceitful man (Psalm 5), and possibly Wormwood (Revelation 8). Thirteen names or descriptions in all -- a number associated in Scripture with rebellion and disorder. And if one takes each of these names and finds its opposite, one sees how the Lord Jesus is the contrast at every point. The idle shepherd -- the good shepherd. The man of the earth -- the one who is from above. The false prophet -- the one who is the truth. He is the full fruit of the fall in Eden; the Lord Jesus is the last Adam who undoes it.

Received Not the Love of the Truth

Verse 10 gives us one of the most searching expressions in the chapter: 'they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved.' It does not say they

received not the truth -- though that is also true. It goes deeper: they received not the love of the truth. Truth was offered to them. The gospel was proclaimed. They heard it. But they did not receive the love of it. There was no affection for it in their hearts.

This is a voice for every believer to search his own soul: do I love the truth? Not merely do I possess some truth, or value certain truths, but do I love it? When a person is first saved there is often a freshness -- a delight in every new discovery of what God has said. That fire can be dampened by the wrong counsel of those who say do not press on too hard, or by the distractions of the world, or by the slow erosion of a heart that was once warm and has grown cooler. Truth also calls for obedience. One cannot truly love the truth and refuse to do what it requires. Those whom verse 10 describes are the apostates of Christendom -- people who were within the sphere of the gospel's proclamation, who heard, who perhaps professed for a time, but who never received the love of the truth. They loved unrighteousness instead, as verse 12 says plainly.

Strong Delusion: The Working of Error That Follows

For this cause God shall send them strong delusion -- a working of error -- that they should believe what is false. This is not presented as the cause of their unbelief. It is the judgment that follows their unbelief and their pleasure in unrighteousness. God's hardening always follows man's hardening of himself; God's giving over to a reprobate mind always follows man's refusal to retain God in his knowledge (Romans 1:28). The working of error is a divine seal upon a course of things already chosen. It is like Pharaoh, who hardened his own heart first, and then God hardened it further. Or like the house swept clean and empty, to which seven spirits more wicked than the first return. The Lord said: if these things are done in the green tree, what shall be done in the dry? The apostasy, once advanced, is not reversed. The working of error comes from God to seal the

doom of those who refused the truth when it was offered.

It is a sobering sequence: truth offered and not loved, unrighteousness chosen and enjoyed, strong delusion sent from God, the lie believed, and condemnation the result. The apostates of Christendom -- those who have been within the full reach of the gospel and who have turned away from it -- form the Babylon of Revelation 17 after the rapture. In the middle of the week, Babylon is overthrown by the beast and the ten kings. Then those who had been its participants take on a new character: 'them that dwell upon the earth,' the worshippers of the beast. And the working of error that God sends upon them ensures that the lie they have chosen becomes the delusion under which they perish.

The Spirit of Truth in Contrast

Against everything described in these verses, the Lord Jesus set another picture: the Spirit of truth. 'When he, the Spirit of truth, is come...' (John 16:13). The present age is characterized by the Holy Spirit, who is the Spirit of truth, gathering souls to Christ through the gospel. He does not use lying wonders. He does not employ the deceivableness of unrighteousness. The Spirit of truth and the spirit of the Antichrist are as opposite as possible: every lying wonder is answered by a work of the Spirit of truth; every deceivableness of unrighteousness is answered by the gospel's call to love the truth. And those who receive the love of the truth -- who respond to the Spirit's work with a heart that loves what God has said and obeys it -- are kept through every hour of spiritual danger, and will be kept out of the hour of trial that is coming upon the whole world.

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Lord willing.