

Further up, Further in

Resources for Continued Study



LOOKOUT
MOUNTAIN
Presbyterian Church

“THE MYSTERY OF LAWLESSNESS AND THE CERTAINTY OF CHRIST”

DATE: November 2, 2025

SPEAKER: Brian/Aaron

SERIES: 1&2 Thessalonians

PASSAGE: 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12

Family Dinner Table

Man of Lawlessness

In 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12, Paul describes a coming opponent of Christ who is called “*the man of lawlessness*” and “*the son of destruction*” (v. 3). Some scholars identify this figure as the Antichrist. But others say that Paul points beyond any single historical figure to the *ultimate opponent* of Christ, who will finally be overthrown at Jesus’ second coming. NT scholar Dr. Dan MacDougall explains: “[*this personage*] *who is characterized by lawlessness and doomed to perdition, who exalts himself above all others and willingly subordinates himself to no one, who even claims to be God, who will be revealed yet is already working, who is the arch deceiver through unrighteousness and lying miracles, and who is the final great opponent to be defeated at the return of Jesus—can be none other than Satan.*”² Because Satan disguises himself as an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:14), it should come as no surprise that he manifests as a counterfeit savior. But Paul assures the church that Christ’s victory over Satan at the end of the age will be decisive. MacDougall summarizes, “*the picture of judgment is ultimate: there are no further opponents.*”³

- In Luke 4:6–8 and Matthew 4:9–11, Satan demands worship from Jesus but is rebuked and defeated. How do these passages help us understand Paul’s description in 2 Thessalonians 2:4 of Satan’s craving for worship? What do they reveal about his ultimate destiny?

For individual study or group discussion

In 1 and 2 Thessalonians, one of the primary issues Paul addresses is the church’s anxiety related to eschatology—the doctrine of the last things. In 2 Thessalonians 2:1–12, Paul’s central concern is to reassure the Thessalonians that they have not missed the final coming of Jesus, emphasizing that their current suffering is evidence that Christ has not yet returned. His encouragement addresses their fear and confusion, while grounding their hope in the certainty of Christ’s ultimate victory.

A caution to the modern reader: Don’t be confused.

Paul directs his audience not to be confused about the final coming of Christ. His purpose is to steady hearts that may be trembling in the face of misunderstanding and fear. Citing multiple events that must first take place before Christ’s return, Paul makes it clear that the final coming follows immediately after the revelation of the “*man of lawlessness*” along with the great apostacy (v. 3).

- Regarding Paul’s teaching, Augustine of Hippo wrote, “*I frankly confess I do not know what he means.*”¹ Read 2 Peter 3:16. Even Peter acknowledges that there are some things in Paul’s letters that are “*hard to understand.*” Knowing that great theologians have wrestled with Paul’s writings, what should be our posture when approaching difficult texts? Where should we search for clarity? (cf. Acts 17:11)
- Read Isaiah 14:13–14, Ezekiel 28:2, and Daniel 11:36–37. Discuss the similarities between these passages and Paul’s description of “*the man of lawlessness*” in verses 3–4.
- Read Luke 22:3 and John 17:12. The title “*son of destruction*” is also applied to Judas. Why do you think this is significant?

A comfort for all believers: Don’t be shaken.

Paul comforts the Thessalonians that they have not missed the *Parousia* (v. 1–2). Their present suffering actually proves that the final day has not yet come. When the “*lawless one*” is revealed, Jesus will destroy him “*with the breath of his mouth*” bringing him to nothing by the splendor of his coming (v. 8). Do not be shaken!

- Read Isaiah 11:4. How does Paul’s reference in verse 8 to the destruction of the “*man of lawlessness*” by the breath of Christ’s mouth echo Isaiah’s prophecy of the Messiah’s righteous rule, and what does this connection reveal about the ultimate triumph of divine justice over wickedness and evil?
- How does Exodus 7:11–12 highlight Paul’s warning in 2 Thessalonians 2:9–10 against deception? Read 2 Timothy 3:8–17. What safeguards does Paul give to help believers discern between genuine faith and counterfeit signs?

A challenge to all hearers: Don’t be deceived.

Do not be deceived; even now “*the mystery of lawlessness is already at work*” (v. 7). Just as the spirit of antichrist was present in Paul’s time, the influence of evil continues to work in the world today—subtle, deceptive, and persuasive.

- In 1 Timothy 3:16, Paul talks about the “*mystery of godliness.*” Who is Paul describing? Compare this to the phrase Paul uses in 2 Thess. 2:7. How is “*the mystery of lawlessness*” described by Paul (vv. 3–4)? Discuss the differences.
- In Matthew 24:3–14, Jesus characterizes for his disciples the evil that is already at work in this present age. Like Paul, Jesus warns, “*See that no one leads you astray*” with the claim that the end has come (v. 4). How does Jesus describe the “*mystery of lawlessness*” already at work in Matthew 24? What are the parallels between Matthew 24 and 2 Thessalonians 2:1–12?

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Robbie and Lydia Sweet, MTW
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¹Augustine of Hippo, *City of God*, Book XX, Chapter XIX. <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/120120.htm>
²⁻³MacDougall, Daniel W. *The Authenticity of 2 Thessalonians*. 2016, London. Paternoster Press. 153–54, 149