

Believing a Lie

2 Thessalonians 2:8—12

Paul describes the character and activates of the antichrist in order that the Thessalonians will know, without a doubt, that they had not missed the Rapture, and that they were not going through the Tribulation. As mentioned in previous lessons, the antichrist will be revealed only after the Rapture has occurred. The man of lawlessness is connected directly to the apostasy mentioned in verse three. The apostasy, I believe, happens at the beginning of the Tribulation when the antichrist is first revealed and Israel embraces him as their Messiah.

According to Daniel 9:27, the antichrist will make a covenant with Israel. Israel will then be seduced into believing a lie of Satan that the antichrist is the Messiah. This is the rider of the first white horse in Revelation 6 who goes out to conquer the world. He is an imitation of Jesus Christ who comes on a white horse (at the Second Coming) in Revelation 19:11. The antichrist will come in powerful signs and wonders that will deceive even the elect, if that were possible (Matthew 24:24).

A strong delusion (verse 11)

There are a number of ideas floating around as to what this strong delusion is. Some view this verse as proof that God has chosen some to be saved and some to be damned. This idea is popular among “Calvinists.” Calvinism permeates Reformed Theology (Covenant Theology) and so it is a popular idea amongst many today. This “tradition of men” goes against Scripture. From 1 Timothy 2:4 it’s obvious that God desires all men to be saved. If He blocked them from being saved, then He would be working against Himself. This theology is given life only by misinterpreting Scripture, basically applying the concept of election to salvation instead of about being a servant. This is why it could be said that Jesus Christ was chosen (elected) as God’s Servant (Isaiah 42:1; Matthew 12:17—20), as was Israel (Deuteronomy 7:6).

Another popular idea is that God will blind the eyes of those who rejected the gospel prior to the Rapture. They say those people will not have the opportunity to believe the Gospel of the Kingdom because they had already rejected the Gospel of Grace.

The only problem with this idea is that it is completely without scriptural support. The only time a person is not allowed to believe unto salvation is after death. We can see this in Luke 16 with the rich man on the torment side of Hades. He was unable to pass over the great chasm that divided believers from unbelievers. Those who are still alive are always shown to have the ability to believe, if they desire to do so.

I believe the best explanation of what this strong delusion is comes in the form of the antichrist. God will send the antichrist as a strong delusion to Israel, giving them the opportunity to choose the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, or to follow a man who personifies Satan. God is not choosing who will follow the antichrist, each person will be able to make his own decision. Believers will be able to discern that the antichrist is a false Messiah. Those who know how future events will play out will be able to see that the Messiah will come only after the seven-year Tribulation. Those who don’t know or believe Scripture will not have an understanding of Daniel’s timeline, and therefore will be fooled. These are the ones who are said to have rejected the truth that would lead them to salvation (verse 10).

Jesus saw the future when He told the Pharisees that He was sent by His Father and was rejected, but another will come whom they will receive (John 5:43). According to Matthew 24:5, many will come claiming to be Christ. John says that there will be many antichrists, and by this we will know that it is the last hour (1 John 2:18). John was viewing the

last days of Israel's Prophetic program, which was put on hold at the stoning of Stephen. These events have nothing to do with us in this Age of Grace.

Isaiah 10 gives us great insight concerning the events surrounding the antichrist. Many would say this already happened at the Assyrian captivity when they conquered northern Israel around 740 B.C. This only affected the northern 10 tribes of Israel, not the two southern tribes in Judea, including Jerusalem. However, even a quick reading of Isaiah 10 makes it obvious that God will be using Assyria in the future to punish those in Judea (not just the northern 10 tribes) for turning away from Christ (verses 11—12). These events are all future since Assyria not yet taken Jerusalem into captivity.

As we read through Isaiah 10, we can see that Israel will go through many trials during this time of punishment (verse 3). In spite of the devastation that comes from afar, God's anger will not be turned away (verse 4). God will be using the Assyrian (the antichrist) as a rod against Israel (verses 5—6). The antichrist (and by inference Satan) will think they are working in their own power to subdue that nations and Israel (verse 7—11). Although the events happening on earth during this time seem to be out of control, God has already planned how everything will happen. When God is done punishing Israel, He will now turn and punish Assyria for going against Israel (verses 12—18). Only a remnant of Israel will remain (verse 19—22). These words were written directly to the believing remnant going through the Tribulation. They will know that these events will pass and the evil man of sin will be dealt with. They will be waiting patiently for the coming of their Messiah to save them and bring them into the Promised Land (verses 24—27).

Judgment to begin at the house of God

God's righteous wrath will be poured out on Israel, and the Gentile world, during the seven-year Tribulation. God will pour out His fury and anger upon Israel to purge Israel from godless men, purifying His people Israel as a refiners fire (Malachi 3:2—3). He will then bring her back into the land with Christ as her King (Ezekiel 20:33—38). This is why Peter says that judgment must begin at the house of God (1 Peter 4:17). This judgment, that Peter speaks of, is almost always misunderstood because that passage is not viewed dispensationally as belonging to Israel under her prophetic program.

Most see, unfortunately, this as being written to us in the Church, the Body of Christ, and go on to prove that we will go through fiery trials by quoting 1 Peter 4:12. These trials, according to Peter, should be something we expect, and be a normal part of the Christian experience. Others define the House of God as being America, a local church or even the temple at Jerusalem. However, the Bible already has defined what house Peter was referring to in Acts 2:36 where Peter calls Israel a house. Peter isn't the only one giving Israel that title, for all through the Old Testament references is made to the house of Israel (Exodus 40:38; Isaiah 46:3). Peter is thus referring to the Israel of God (see Galatians 6:16).

Now, to be fair, Paul does mention the house of God in 1 Timothy 3:15. He is referring to the Church, the Body of Christ, using a general term that can be applied to any believer in any age. Both Israel and the Body of Christ can be said to be members of the Church (assembly) of God, However, dispensationally, Paul makes sure we know he is specifically speaking about the Body of Christ. Peter was addressing Israel, as he agreed to do at the Council at Jerusalem (Galatians 2:7). This is why he addresses his book to the scattered kingdom believers. From Peter's writings we learn of many connections with the Kingdom saints, however, he was not writing to the Body of Christ, but to those who will be going through the Tribulation.

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