

The Rebellion of Antichrist

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[0 : 0 0] that too because after all the da vinci code in effect says that and more people have read that than any other book in the last couple of years and it must be true after all if you read it in dan brown who are you to disagree and of course the dead sea scrolls show that jesus was not the messiah i once heard a professor say that must be true he was a professor he had lots of learning behind him or the bible of course isn't reliable i mean it was written decades after the events you don't trust it it's an old book it's it's been very selective i remember seeing that in an article i think it was the bulletin or might have been the age but it's very reputable so you must surely believe it after all if it prints the cricket scores and they're true well if it says something about the bible that must be true surely and of course jesus isn't coming again he's already here he's been here for a long time at least since the first of october 1914 and maybe a bit earlier than that as well at times i'm surprised at how easily conned people are and even some christians are at the sort of things that are propounded in our society at times i'm saddened i think and at how rattled and alarmed some christians can be at the sort of views that are propagated or published around at times i'm amazed at how christians can be so duped by such nonsense that's there deception knocks on the door without tiring deception is always wanting to get in to our hearts and to our minds deception is always going to be so duped by such a good thing that's what's going to be so duped by such a good badged people who come to your door with an american accent deception may come in the form of popular fiction deception may come in the form of so-called learned people professors and others who write articles that arrive at arise out of some obscure place but end up on the front page of the age of the bulletin or something else if there's a photo it might be in the herald sun deception comes in all sorts of forms and it never tires of knocking on our door let no one deceive you in any way that's what paul says to the thessalonians in this chapter deception knocks let no one deceive you in any way the thessalonian church was vulnerable to deception it was new in the faith paul had been there for just a short time preaching the gospel which had led to the conversion of some and the establishment of a small and fledgling church soon he was forced out of the city by the opposition and persecution and as i said last week and for those in the morning service have seen in one thessalonians in recent weeks paul had gone on to berea and then south to athens and from there in athens he sent timothy back to the church to find out about it meanwhile paul moved on to corinth for ministry and timothy came back to him in corinth with a report from which paul wrote one corinthians one thessalonians i mean and uh and and expressed his joy at the fact that they were continuing on in christian faith and some short time later and so possibly less than a year after paul was in thessalonica he writes this second letter to the thessalonians probably he's heard some more details from them or about them and hence the content of this letter it's a small church it's a fledgling church they're new christians nobody's been a christian more than a year one would imagine maybe even much less than a year and they're facing opposition and persecution for their faith

opposition is often deceptive that is it's not necessarily the full frontal smash in the face opponent because you're a christian opposition is often underhanded deceptive trying to win you over to a counter point of view trying to make you see some other view that will lead you to sidle away from true christian faith and in particular on the issue of the hope of jesus return which is a key focus not only in two thessalonians but also in one thessalonians opposition is deceptive you really hope for jesus to return really do you think he will hasn't he come already back in chapter four of one thessalonians paul deals with that issue about and corrects some of the thinking that has been wrong about the return of the lord jesus christ and now it seems that a little while later either through a misinterpretation of what he said perhaps a deliberate false interpretation of what he said by someone in thessalonica or maybe even somebody who purports to have got words from paul and

says something completely contrary to what paul had said the thessalonians are now vulnerable to being deceived on this very issue of the lord's return as to the coming of our lord jesus christ and our being gathered together to him language that picks up one thessalonians chapter four we beg you brothers and sisters not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed either by spirit or by word or by letter it may be spirit may suggest prophecy or word or by letter as though from us that is as though somebody is either falsely interpreting paul's first letter or maybe more likely somebody's pretending to write from paul to give them an alternative viewpoint about the return of the lord jesus and the christians who are gathered unto christ so don't be shaken or alarmed he begs them in verse two and uh the false teaching that seems to be being uh proclaimed in thessalonica whether it's by some person claiming to be a prophet or by letter or word it is that to the effect that the day of the lord is already here false teachers it seems are rattling the thessalonians or some of them at least their opposition is deceptive they're trying to mislead them and guide them away from what is the truth that paul preached and their fear it seems perhaps that's been voiced back to paul their fear is they've missed the lord's return back in one thessalonians part of the fear was for those who died before jesus returns have they missed out on salvation paul reassured them in that chapter now it seems their fear is we've missed it all together he's already come we've just been told i remember when i was at university living in a residential college and uh as was my want i was asleep at 9 a.m or 9 30 a.m it was the exam time after all and uh and in to my room burst the guy who was uh two or three doors down and here am i lying in bed sort of waking up what's this noise and he's standing there in his pajamas saying to me i've missed my exam he'd slept through it he didn't know what to do there's a slightly dopey character and i don't actually know what he did i think it was far too late to go to any of the exam beyond the sort of time in which you're allowed to arrive late can't remember what happened but here was this person panicking i've missed it and maybe that's some of the fear that the thessalonians have expressed back to paul have we missed the return of the lord we've been told that he's already here

according to verse 2 the end of verse 2 that seems to be the false teaching that's around this is exactly the deception of the jehovah's witnesses the jehovah's witnesses uh published that jesus would return in 1874 and pastor russell the guru was wrong and so they issued a revised date 1914 but 1914 came and went and apart from a great war jesus didn't return and so therefore the judge that was then heading the jehovah's witnesses said he's actually did come in 1914 as we predicted but he came secretly but he's already been on the 1st of october 1914 i think was the date what rubbish but it's exactly the deception that is going on in the thessalonians not that they were told 1914 presumably it's 50 ad but they're being told that jesus has already come there's nothing to hope for therefore so paul is reassuring them here and the key command of this chapter is let no one deceive you in any way and what follows is about not being deceived jesus has not yet returned he says you are wrong if you are being deceived into thinking that he's already come he has not yet returned and we can be sure of that because there are two things that need to happen before he returns neither of which have happened verse 3 let no one deceive you in any way for that day that is the day of the lord's return will not come unless two things the rebellion comes first and secondly the lawless one is revealed the one destined for destruction the rebellion and the rebel in effect and notice how the rebel is described he's described firstly as the lawless one the one who shuns or overthrows or ignores god's law that is one who doesn't have a view of morality in effect a disobedient one secondly as it's translated here it's the one destined for destruction but literally the son of destruction which has got the sense of yes the destiny will be destruction but more the person who is typified by destruction that is far from being typified by life and what is good somebody who's typified by death and destruction and then the beginning of verse 4 this same person is described as one who opposes god that is an enemy of god one who is against what god is on about deliberately and then next one who exalts himself that is it's a religious claimant to worship we're not dealing simply here with some form of political monster that arises it's a religious opponent to god and this is someone who will exalt himself above every so-called god or object of worship so that he takes his seat in the temple of god declaring himself to be god that is it's not just somebody who shuns the true living god but somebody who actually claims to be god and in effect demands worship by others taking the seat in the temple may refer specifically to the jerusalem temple but it may be a little bit more figurative than that just somebody who comes in god's place and taking the seat is the brazen effrontery imagine coming into the presence of god's own temple and sitting down on god's throne so-called to claim the worship of humanity the height of disrespect to god and declare oneself to be god is the ultimate in blasphemy now this is not new teaching for

the thessalonians here see what paul says in verse 5 do you not remember that i told you these things when i was with you well we won't be the first people who wish that we had the tape of what paul told them because there seem to be things that we're not told here and we sort of wish i wish i knew for sure what paul had in mind here he's told the thessalonians so there's an element in which he's summarizing some of that here

and maybe we would long like many have before us to know the full details of what paul had said having said that the bible gives us sufficient we may not know all the details that the thessalonians even knew let alone paul but we've been given sufficient who is this lawless one note the things again he's overthrowing god's law there's an immorality that he he boasts in in effect destruction is typical of him death and destruction he's an enemy of god and exalts himself to claim the worship of god that would that is rightly due only to god well this language echoes various things in the old testament i i'm not i don't have time in this sermon to go into that but in the prophet ezekiel the prophet isaiah there are in effect leaders of pagan groups who have language similar to this that are described but above all in the old testament the language of the prophecy for example of daniel which rod preached on earlier this year back in august looked forward to a person 169 bc a ruler antiochus epiphanes the fourth and the language of taking the seat in the temple and enmity to god and exalting himself and claiming the worship is the language that's used in daniel by and large to describe him one who desecrated god's temple in old testament well not old testament times but pre-jesus times after the old testament before the new similar language is picked up by jesus for example in mark 13 when he also is looking forward to the future and the things that will happen in the future as jesus in those words anticipated the end of the jerusalem temple which came in 70 a.d and the events beyond that what that brief synopsis says is that there's one level there's multiple fulfillments of these words that is it's a pattern in history of enmity to god of ones who rise up to claim the worship of others with brazen blasphemy and effrontery before almighty god himself from time to time people have tried to identify this so various popes would you believe in history have been identified by some as the lawless man the son of destruction indeed in the westminster confession you in fact get almost the papacy as a whole identified as this man of lawlessness of course the roman catholic church or the catholic church threw it back at the protestants and said martin luther's the person who's identified here and subsequent to that napoleon and hitler and mussolini and stalin but their political figures more than religious which is a focus here even ronald reagan i remember years ago being identified in these sorts of terms the point is that typically in history we find religious deception that leads to enmity to god and self-exaltation of one in different guises in different periods of history the overthrow of god's rule that is the lawlessness that is a part of this picture is also typical through history so there's a sense in which the pattern of history is of some form of multiple fulfilment that is i'm not sure that we're actually helped by trying to identify the one person in history who is identified as this man of lawlessness in any age we can see lawlessness deception blasphemy at work so in verse 7 you get a sense of that the mystery of lawlessness is already at work that is there's a sense in which subversively surreptitiously this pattern of lawlessness

is already evident in society against the people of god but having said that what these verses are showing is that whilst the the pattern of lawlessness is already at work there is to be a climax of lawlessness with the final man of lawlessness who will appear the language that's used of him appearing in these verses seems to be a parody on the lord jesus christ who on the final day will appear as well so there's a sense in which there's this pattern of lawlessness that is leading up to a final climactic or the theological term is eschatological man of lawlessness who will appear his impact in a sense is already being seen it's not that he will suddenly be created or begin then he will appear then at the final day to this point he's restrained that's the language of verse 6 you know what is now restraining him so that he may be revealed when his time comes and the end of verse 7 the mystery of lawlessness is already at work but only until the one who now restrains it is removed well people have pondered who is restraining it probably i think

[17 : 34] God is the one who's restraining it how God restrains it i think is through the ministry of the gospel the preaching of the gospel that in a sense secures people in relationship with God and free from the threat of the lawless one who is coming so at one level God is restraining this lawlessness it's there in society this enmity and opposition and religious blasphemy but the final man is yet to come and verse 8 describes his appearing then the lawless one will be revealed now there's a there are various Christian views and sub-Christian views about the end times there's one view that when the antichrist comes or the lawless one comes there will be a thousand year reign of

Satan before Jesus finally returns yet again and ends it all at the end verse 8 can't be used to support that

I think read verse 8 through and we don't get that sense then the lawless one will be revealed whom the Lord Jesus will destroy with the breath of his mouth annihilating him by the manifestation of his coming the way that's written is a sense of immediacy it's as though that at the very end as the climax builds to the man of lawlessness whoever he is he will appear and he'll be annihilated by the breath of the mouth of the Lord Jesus when he appears that is the sense of verse 8 is not of a long period of anarchy and blasphemy there's certainly no hint of great drawn out battle between the lawless one and God or Satan and God or Christ and the lawless one but simply that he will appear and the Lord Jesus will annihilate him by the breath of his mouth it'll be a swift and quick end is the picture here in 2 Thessalonians chapter 2 what all of this is showing is that history is inexorably moving towards its finale we are in the age leading up to the end times there's a sense in which the man of lawlessness could appear at any time followed immediately by the appearance of the Lord Jesus

Christ in glory lawlessness typifies our age not just in the sense of people doing what is right in their own eyes but in the direct repudiation of God's law and God's moral standards and in the direct repudiation of God himself the claimants who try to be worshipped and place themselves over and above God in various ways this man of lawlessness himself the climax of this pattern is yet to come but the fact that he's yet to come doesn't mean that in a sense we've got years and years to wait before Jesus comes not at all the imminence of Jesus coming is not diminished by the fact that the final man of lawlessness is yet to come the sense of immediacy in verse 8 suggests that they could even come almost on the same day within minutes or seconds of each other in effect but in the meantime the fact that this man of lawlessness is coming is apparent by the thrust of lawlessness in our society already and in our world that I think is the meaning of verses 9 and 10 the coming of the lawless one is apparent we don't see him yet but it is apparent that he's coming in the working of Satan who uses all power signs lying wonders and every kind of wicked deception that is as we see those things happening in our world it is apparent that the climax of that is the lawless one who's coming immediately before the return of the Lord Jesus Christ at the end notice how Satan is working as described here it's full of deception it's not just a simple

God says this but I say this take your pick these are views that are opposed the Garden of Eden was a bit like that there's a lot more subtlety and deception going on here you see the working of Satan leading up to the lawless one coming is through power signs lying wonders and wicked deceptions that shows us the danger power we often think belongs in the realm of God miracles and signs and wonders we often think well that must be attributed to God but here we get what are in effect counterfeit miracles not that they're not miracles or signs or wonders or whatever you call them they are but they're counterfeit in the sense that they don't come from God they're there to deceive and to mislead misleading power and counterfeit miracles and Paul said in verse 3 don't be deceived in any way see I know people and Christians who think if a miracle happens it must be of God and therefore let's follow the person who's doing the miracles not at all the Bible tells us both Old and New Testaments in fact Paul had just said in 1 Thessalonians 5 to the same group of people test everything do not be deceived in any way just because there's an act of power or a sign or a wonder or a miracle does not in any way mean that person's of God and the deception is quite significant we need to keep our eyes and our ears open nor must we fall into a dualism trap of thinking that we live in an age where God and Satan are pitted against each other in a great sort of heavenly battle and which way is it going to go a bit like a sort of decent test match if we can remember what they're like

God is sovereign even in the midst of all this lawlessness see what the next verse verse 10 says as it goes on to say and every kind of wicked deception for those who are perishing because they refuse to love the truth and so be saved for this reason God sends them a powerful delusion God sends them how can God delude what a puzzle that is what it is telling us firstly is that God is sovereign in all of this God is absolutely in charge of all of this nothing is outside his control God's in control that's a reassuring thing to remember and though in a sense our world is inexorably moving towards a climax of lawlessness when the man of lawlessness comes not for one minute ought we to think this is some real threat to God that God's not in charge he is he's the one who we're told he sends the delusion the powerful delusion well it's easy to feel threatened by this picture here in these verses but I think the sequence is important to note from verse 10 through to verse 12 let me

read it again it talks about all the power signs lying wonders that come for those who are perishing because they refuse to love the truth and so be saved for this reason

[25 : 06] God sends them a powerful delusion leading them to believe what is false so that all who have not believed the truth but took pleasure in unrighteousness will be condemned the sequence is this people refuse to love the truth verse 10 as a result God sends them a powerful delusion verse 11 which leads them then to believe in falsehood the rest of verse 11 and then they are condemned verse 12 and perish back to verse 10 that's the flow it begins with people refusing to love the truth people are accountable for their sin we cannot blame God that people refuse to love the truth if you refuse to love the truth then you'll be deluded and deceived you'll believe in falsehood and ultimately you'll perish under the condemnation of God people are accountable this is a just judgment is it unfair of God to send this delusion and do this not at all

God in a sense is being described in these verses exactly as he is in many other places of the scripture that is if people choose a path away from God God will hand them over to the path they choose even if it leads ultimately to condemnation and that's what's happening here people choose and they refuse to love the truth God says okay if you want to refuse to love the truth it leads you into falsehood belief of falsehood and it leads you to condemnation and perishing God is handing them over in their judgment it's important to note here that truth is moral that is it's not just an intellectual thing that you don't love or believe you see those who refuse to love the truth are the same people who in verse 12 take pleasure in unrighteousness and that's the root cause those who delight in what is unrighteous refuse to love the truth it starts with moral rather immoral desire and love if you love unrighteousness you refuse to love the truth and if you keep on loving unrighteousness you end up at the end of the sequence perishing under God's condemnation you see the problem is moral in the end it's not intellectual it's people who love evil people who love darkness more than light to use another biblical expression the love of evil is the root of the problem that leads to heresy and error and beyond that to judgment and condemnation and destruction God hands people over to what they love Romans 1 says the same thing the example of Pharaoh in the time of Moses is another example and the only thing that restrains that is God's mercy in the preaching of the gospel the restraint on lawlessness the restraint on stopping people loving what is unrighteous the restraint on stopping people from refusing to love the truth the only restraint is the preaching of the gospel how do we see that because the next verses show us that in contrast to those people who end up in perishing are the Thessalonians and other believers like them so verse 13 and 14 but we but contrast we must always give thanks to God for you brothers and sisters beloved by the Lord because God chose you as the first fruits for salvation through sanctification by the spirit and through belief in the truth for this purpose he called you through our proclamation of the good news so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus

Christ the grounds for security come from the gospel which begins with God choosing Christians not us choosing him it's not our free will that determines the different destinies it's God's sovereign and merciful choice of people to believe in him God's election leads to belief in the truth verse 13 how is God's election affected in people's lives through the proclamation of the truth verse 14 God chooses he does that through the preaching of the gospel which is affected in people's hearts and minds by his powerful spirit so that they are saved and as the end of verse 14 says obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ the passage we saw at the end of chapter 1 last week that's security if God's chosen us our destiny is secure it's God's doing it's God's mercy it's God's grace it's God's powerful word and

God's powerful spirit that secures our glorification on the day when the Lord Jesus returns the gospel is what grounds us securely against deception of the man of lawlessness in Times Square in New York there's a big clock that counts down it counted down to the millennium it counts down to New Year's Eve you go to Tiananmen Square there is a some form of clock I can't quite remember the details from when I was there last year and it's counting down the number of days to the opening of the Olympic Games in Beijing in 2008 the temptation to respond to what Paul has been describing here at the end times is to say I'd like a clock I'd like to know when I'd like to be able to count down to the man of lawlessness and the appearing in glory of the Lord Jesus Christ I'd like to think that I can avoid deception by having a good clock but God doesn't give us a clock he resolutely refuses to answer the question of when but what he gives us is his word the scriptures and that's sufficient to guard us against deception see verse three the key to this passage are the commands let no one deceive you in any way verse three says then Paul elaborates on the

deception that's going around and comes back to in effect a parallel command let no one deceive you and then verse 15 he says stand firm and hold fast how do we make sure that no one deceives us by standing firm and holding fast to what to the traditions that you were taught by us that is the original teaching of the gospel for us even more than the thessalonians we have the full scriptures that's in effect the original teachings the traditions that matter most how do we ensure that we're not deceived by anyone in any way by holding fast to the scriptures that God has given us that we have been taught how do we resist false teaching by holding fast to true teaching you see if verses 13 and 14 make it clear we are saved through the preaching of the word we persevere by holding fast to the same word and holding fast means that we search the scriptures we study them we meditate on them we grapple with them we wrestle with them we plunge their debts and we believe them and obey them 1 Thessalonians 5

[33 : 05] Paul said test everything hold fast to what is good that's what Paul's expounding in this chapter in effect test everything so that you're not deceived and hold fast to what is good namely the scriptures or the word of God the word of the gospel that has been taught to you in their case by Paul brothers and sisters we live in dangerous times we live in lawless times we live in times where people are exalting themselves over and against the one true living God deception is rife and delusions are powerful people are gullible and they chase after all sorts of heresy and immorality Satan's attempts to gain worship of him gain much success in our world counterfeit miracles mislead signs enthrall many and deception never tires of knocking at our door false doctrines proliferate in our world false teachers our world and large congregations around our world thousands and millions of people delight in unrighteousness and refuse to love the truth and even we believers know there are times that we delight in unrighteousness and refuse to believe the truth the dangers are real they say that if you get lost in the outback the one key rule is don't move from your car or vehicle stay there when we live in such a dangerous world full of deception and error and heresy and immorality and blasphemy don't move from the word God has given us how do we withstand such deceptive lawlessness in these last days by not moving by standing firm by holding fast to the words of

God as given to us in the scriptures it's sufficient for us we don't need anything else it's not the Bible and something we don't move on from this to something better or more progressive stand firm and hold fast to the words of the scriptures entrusted to us to the gospel to the gospel of God's election of us and the absolute security we have with our eternal destiny in glory in Christ because God chose us through the proclamation of his word which we have been entrusted with that's why Paul prays at the end of this chapter may our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our father who loved us and through grace gave us eternal comfort and good hope comfort your hearts and strengthen them in every good work and word Amen