

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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The Man of Sin

Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him, That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand. Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God. (2 Thessalonians 2:1-4, KJV 1900)

In this chapter, Paul identifies a number of specific events that shall occur prior to the "day of Christ," the time of His return in glory. The day of which Paul wrote and the day that the Thessalonians wrongly expected in their lifetime, was the Lord's final and victorious return. It was not the day of God's righteous judgment against Jerusalem and the Jewish generation that had rejected and crucified Jesus. Many of the Thessalonians would live to see the Roman siege and fall of Jerusalem less than twenty years after Paul wrote this letter based on most date estimates for the letter. The day of which Paul wrote was a day long future from them. Paul uses the list of necessary events that must occur prior to the Lord's return to show the Thessalonians that they had misunderstood his and other men's preaching. The Lord's return "...shall not come" prior to these events. Too much speculation occurs related to this chapter and not nearly enough careful study. If we read Old Testament prophecy and then its fulfillment in the New Testament, the fulfillment always fills in the blanks and clarifies the prophecy. It specifically and accurately fulfills the prophecy. We understand more about the prophecy through reading its fulfillment than by reading the prophecy alone. Wisdom in our study of this chapter might acknowledge that some events have not yet occurred and we therefore do not fully understand or know the details of how they shall unfold, but we do know by the passage that they shall necessarily occur prior to the Lord's actual return.

To underscore the problem of trying to understand prophecy apart from knowing its fulfillment, consider the New Testament example of the Ethiopian eunuch. At the time Philip met him and preached to him, he had been to Jerusalem and had worshipped with the Jews in that city. As he was returning to his homeland, he was sitting in his chariot and reading from Isaiah 53, one of the Old Testament's clearest prophecies of Jesus and His sufferings for our sins. However, at the time of his reading, the eunuch had no knowledge of Jesus' coming and work. Thus, when Philip asked if he understood what he read, the eunuch asked how such understanding was possible apart from

someone to teach him. "I pray thee, of whom speaketh the prophet this? of himself, or of some other man?" (Acts 8:34) As with the eunuch, I suggest that all believers will far more clearly understand who the man of sin is and what his work is after the fact than before.

In the passage, Paul does provide a descriptive outline of events that must occur prior to the Lord's return. Consider them.

1. ...*except there come a falling away first.* The language refers to the state of believers in the last day. In the first century, the Holy Spirit powerfully accompanied the preaching of the gospel. With no modern stadium, sophisticated sound systems, or emotional hype mantra music,¹ hundreds and at times even thousands of people were converted to Christ by one sermon. I suggest that the typical modern gathering of large numbers of Christians fails to live up to the description of these first century events. As only one point to support my thesis, I ask the simple question. Of those who walk forward at one of the modern meetings, how many are lastingly and truly converted? A month or a year later, are they still faithful to the profession they made in that meeting? Perhaps a few actually do remain in their profession of faith, but sadly large numbers do not. They react to the hyped emotion of the moment, and soon thereafter return to their old lifestyle. When I was a young man growing up in the deep south of this country, I recall

¹ By "mantra music," I refer to a genre of contemporary Christian music that is characterized by intense emotional hype and by endless repetition of a few catch phrases. Historical Christian music tells a story, a story of the gospel at work in people's lives, and of God at work on behalf of His people. It does not typically repeat a few phrases endlessly. By "mantra," I refer to the superstitious idea that, if you repeat a thought often enough, God will answer your request.

several classmates who showed little Christian conduct during the year, but every year, when revival "Season" came around in local churches, they always went forward and "Rededicated" their lives to Jesus. A month later, they were right back in the same lifestyle as prior to the revival. My simple observation; the people converted under the gospel in Acts remained in their faith and became bright lights to the faith in an otherwise dark world. Under immediate threat of persecution and even death for their faith in Jesus, large numbers responded to the power of the gospel that they heard. Their abiding faithfulness under such persecution proves the depth of their faith.

Not every regenerated person will respond when they hear the gospel—they didn't do so even under first century preaching, even Jesus' preaching—but Paul's point is validated by the events. Christianity grew; it did not decline. While Paul warns that a falling away must occur prior to the Second Coming, Jesus also taught the disciples that abounding iniquity would cause the love of many to wax cold. (Matthew 24:12) He didn't play the modern errant mind games, asserting that anyone whose love waxes cold didn't really love the Lord at all in the first place. He validated that they had such a love, and He specifically warned that their love would wax cold.

The falling away of which Paul writes will appear in fewer conversions and smaller numbers turning from their worldly ways to the walk of faith, even when exposed to powerful preaching. The spiritual climate immediately prior to the Lord's return shall be one of cold darkness, not at all unlike the spiritual state of the Jewish people shortly before Jesus' birth.

2. ...and the man of sin be revealed. Paul goes into significant detail regarding this "man of sin." And here we see the modern flourish of speculation regarding who this man of sin is or was. I have heard very sincere, but sadly speculative, Christians boldly assert their belief that leading governmental or historical figures were the man of sin, from Adolph Hitler to Henry Kissinger, or even that Judas Iscariot mysteriously raised from the dead will be the man of sin. Yes, I've heard Christians specifically name these men and many others as their iron-clad claim that they had uncovered the true identity of the man of sin from Biblical prophecy.

There is a glaring problem that such ideas have with the passage itself. Paul simply and categorically stated that, whoever the real man of sin is, he existed in Paul's

lifetime; he was at work in Paul's day, though he had not yet been fully "revealed" at the time. Paul's prophecy does not indicate that the man of sin must come into existence, but that the then-existing-and-actively-working man of sin must be revealed prior to the Second Coming. I suggest that Paul's description of the real man of sin excludes the idea that he is or shall be a human being. If you go to other New Testament passages and find the wicked being behind every event that opposed and assaulted Jesus and His followers in the New Testament, I suggest that you'll likely be far closer to the man of sin's true identity than with any degree of speculation and vain imagination. The great deceiver shall be revealed.

A major trait of the man of sin that Paul indicated was then going on had to do with his pretentious attempts to present himself to the unsuspecting as if he were himself God. He even will go into the temple or other places of worship and there pretend to be God. While the deceiver carefully conns the naïve and the unsuspecting into thinking that they are talking with God, or at the least one of God's personal messengers (2 Corinthians 11:14-15), his work from the beginning has been aimed at undermining God's word and work. "Yea, hath God said?" He carefully manipulated Eve into thinking that God had lied to her and that he alone was telling her truth. He even told her that God was acting on egotistical motives to keep Adam and her in the dark, while he sought to enlighten them. If all of this twisted reasoning sounds vaguely familiar to you, you are thinking correctly. Satan and his minions still use the same strategy today. Why not when he continues to use it so effectively, because so many people utterly refuse to learn the lessons of history?

Who opposeth and exalteth himself... Scripture affirms that faithful believers must be on constant guard against error, and that occasionally they must stand firmly in opposition against such error. However, any believer should beware the mindset of constant opposition. Biblical opposition focuses on specific error; it does not fire "Shot gun" style at all people and ideas in the church. The more Satan can manipulate a believer into thinking that he is right and that all other believers are wrong the more he can control that person and use that person to create confusion and disruption among the saints. Folks, we have something—indeed, someone—who deserves our advocacy. We have **One** to stand up for, so we do not need a negative cause to justify our existence. Never stop standing up for Jesus, even as you wisely oppose error. And should you find yourself only opposing, it might be timely to examine yourself. Why should a believer in Christ imitate the great opposer himself?

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Worship service each Sunday
Joseph R. Holder

10:30 A. M.
Pastor