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Satanic Delusions of The Last Days

Radio Sermons



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Satanic Delusions

of

The Last Days

(A Study of II Thessalonians 2)

Contents

Chapter	Page
Introduction	
1. The Sources of False Doctrine 1 (II Thessalonians 2:1, 2)	1
2. The Pretribulational Rapture 7 (II Thessalonians 2:3, 4)	7
3. The Restrainer of Evil 19 (II Thessalonians 2:5-7)	19
4. Miracles of Deceit 28 (II Thessalonians 2:8-10)	28
5. Delusion from God 48 (II Thessalonians 2:10-12)	48
6. The Election and Calling of the Saints 59 (II Thessalonians 2:13-15)	59
7. The Benediction 70 (II Thessalonians 2:15-17)	70

pt. 1 of 2
pt. 2 of 2

Introduction

"Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle" (II Thess. 2:15).

Chapter 2 of II Thessalonians is one of the great prophetic chapters of the Bible. No other chapter in all of God's Word covers precisely the same points of revelation that are given here.

As we undertake to consider the special truth brought before us in this chapter, we need to remind ourselves that the outstanding theme of this letter is the coming of Christ to receive His own to be with Him before that awful period of judgement which will come upon the earth. In the Old Testament this judgment is designated "The day of the LORD," "A time of trouble," and "The time of Jacob's trouble." Our Lord Jesus Christ spoke of it as "the Great Tribulation."

The Thessalonian believers were looking forward to the appearing of the Lord. It was this aspect of the Apostle Paul's teaching which had made the deepest impression on their hearts. They were looking for the Lord Jesus Christ to return to earth to execute judgment on the wicked, and to set up His kingdom in this very scene where He had been rejected and crucified. In His first letter, Paul had showed that, before His revelation in power and glory, the Lord will come in the air to "catch away" His saints.

The occasion for the new revelation contained in this chapter was the rise of false teaching in the Thessalonian church. Because of their persecutions, some of the Thessalonians had begun to wonder whether they were not already in the Day of the LORD, the predicted time of divine judgment. If so, they realized that they were already in the time of tribulation, from which they had been promised

deliverance in I Thessalonians, Chapter 5. In answer to this false teaching, Paul not only gives them assurance that they are *not* in this period, but he also gives them definite signs, the character of which cannot occur while the Church is still in the world.

Sometimes believers have very poor memories, and these Thessalonians, aided by false teachers, seemed to have forgotten this truth which Paul had endeavored to make so clear. When they found themselves going through a period of bitter persecution and trouble, they began to wonder if they might already be in the Great Tribulation. They lost sight altogether of the truth that had been revealed concerning the fact that the Church would be caught up first.

In the first chapter of this epistle, Paul had discussed the divine retribution that is to take place at the Lord's return. He had spoken of the time of "God's Payday," and of how saints of God were to glorify Him in the tribulation. But now, as he opened the second chapter of this letter, he saw the need for more specific revelation. The Holy Spirit of God provided Him with the new revelation that was about to be recorded for all Church-age saints.

The newly-revealed "mysteries" concern primarily those "Satanic Delusions of the Last Days" that, in our age, have become a reality. That which God has caused to be written has its major benefits for those Christians living near the end of this Age of Grace. Paul's message is directed to us!

Let's consider the details of this most important message!

1.

The Sources of False Doctrine

"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" (II Thess. 2:1, 2).

As the Apostle Paul continued his second letter to the Thessalonian church, he introduced the subject that had prompted his immediate reply to their communication with him. They were confused concerning the order of the coming of the Day of Christ (the Lord), with its opening seven-year tribulation period, and the rapture of the Church. The Thessalonian church had been subjected to greatly intensified persecution; and (to those Christians who made up the membership of this local assembly) it seemed certainly possible that what they were experiencing *was* the prophesied "tribulation" that they knew was to come at the end of this Age of Grace.

Paul had taught these new converts while he was among them that *the tribulation* (that seven-year period which is the fulfillment of the Seventieth Week of Daniel) could not come until the Lord had appeared in the air to call the Church out of this world. Paul had repeated this teaching in his first epistle to the Thessalonian church. But this intense period of persecution came, along with a forged letter (supposedly from Paul) which said that the Day of the Lord *had already* arrived, and caused many of these Christian men and women to become confused. Some were convinced that the Day of the Lord *had* arrived, that somehow they had been left behind when the Lord appeared for His Church, and that they were now experiencing the persecutions and the judgments of the opening part of *the tribulation*. It was because of this situation that the Holy Spirit of God led the Apostle Paul to pen this most enlightening prophecy.

Paul's opening words (II Thessalonians 2:1, 2) are, "*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.*" The apostle does not mince words, nor does he speak in a vague manner, as he approaches this most important subject. He would have the Thessalonian Christians to *know definitely*—without any confusion—that they *were not* caught up in the prophesied *tribulation* scheduled to open the Day of the Lord at the end of this present day of God's grace!

"Now *we* (and in this plural first person pronoun he includes himself, Silas, Timothy, and all who were identified as the senders of this letter in the opening verse) earnestly beg you, brethren." (Notice the use of this term "brethren," which indicates that Paul recognizes the genuineness of the conversion of these members of the church in Thessalonica, and through that conversion their spiritual relationship to himself and to his companions as brothers in Christ.) The verse continues, "concerning the *appearing* of our Lord Jesus Christ, and concerning our gathering together unto him, That ye be not quickly shaken in mind, or be confused and upset, neither because of spirit, nor because of word, nor because of letter as if from us, that the day of Christ (the Lord) is presently upon us."

Those who were God's children in Thessalonica (as well as all of God's children down through this Age of Grace who read this epistle) are earnestly asked not to be confused concerning the time and the manner of the coming of the Day of the Lord. Paul's subject is the "*appearing* of the Lord Jesus Christ, even the gathering together of all Christians unto Him at the time of that *appearing*." That is, Paul's subject is "*The Rapture of the Church.*"

Satan's Purpose

The Apostle Paul acknowledges that it is Satan's purpose to *attempt* to confuse God's people about the order of the appearing of the Lord Jesus Christ for His Church (the

rapture) and the coming of the Day of the Lord. Satan had tried to confuse the minds of the Thessalonian Christians by all three of the communication methods that Paul itemizes. And, he had been quite successful in his generation of confusion. Satan would very much like to have the people of God think that they are scheduled to go through the judgment that God is to bring upon the earth when His time of judgment comes. By confusing the children of God on this subject, Satan is able to rob them of that comfort of knowing that the Lord *is* to appear in the air to catch His Church away before the coming of the Seventieth Week of Daniel.

In his first Epistle to the Thessalonians, Paul had twice exhorted those who understood the doctrine of the Lord's appearing to catch away His Church (before the coming of the Day of the Lord "as a thief in the night") to "comfort one another with these words." The Wicked One desires to do everything in his power to disturb the peace of the one who belongs to the Lord through obedience to the Gospel. Thus, he had brought confusion to the Thessalonian Christians "by spirit," "by word," and "by letter as from us."

Our King James Version does not say, "the day of the Lord" in II Thessalonians 2:2. Rather, this verse reads, "*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.*" The King James Version is a translation of the "*Textus Receptus*"; this Greek manuscript *does* contain the words, "the day of *Christos (Christ).*" However, more ancient Greek manuscripts do contain the words, "the day of *Kurios (or the Lord).*" The Day of *Kurios* (the day of *the Lord*) *may* be the original reading. The Day of the Lord (which begins with the tribulation and ends with the millenium) is most definitely the time period that Paul has in mind. "The Day of Christ" normally refers to the *very day* of His appearing for the rapture. This day stands at the beginning of the Day of the Lord, which the Apostle Paul here assures the Thessalonian Christians had not yet come.

Therefore, the Apostle writes, "Now, I am requesting you, brethren, with regard to the *appearing* of our Lord Jesus

Christ, even our being assembled together to Him, not soon to become unsettled, the source of the unsettled state being your minds, neither be thrown into confusion, either by a spirit (a believer in the Christian assembly claiming the authority of divine revelation, and claiming to give the saints a word from God), or through a word (received personally from false teachers passing through Thessalonica), or through a letter falsely alleged to be written by us, to the effect that the Day of the Lord has come and is now present."

That Day Shall Not Be . . .

The Thessalonian church members were genuine Christians who truly knew the Lord Jesus Christ as personal Saviour. Paul, Silas, and Timothy were also genuine Christians who truly knew the Lord. Paul was an apostle, a "sent one," who had received directly from the Lord himself the personal commission to preach the Gospel to all Gentiles. These genuine Christians were still present in the earth; therefore, the event of the *Lord's appearing in the air* had not yet come. And, until that event happens, the Day of the Lord cannot come upon the world. The man of lawlessness (the wicked political ruler of the world during the seven-year tribulation period) cannot even be unveiled in his true identity until the Church has been caught away. So, any teaching that the tribulation comes *before* the Church is gone is branded as patently false. Paul said that *it cannot happen!*

Note again: "I am requesting you, brethren, with regard to the appearing in personal presence of our Lord Jesus Christ, even our being assembled together (caught up) unto Him, not soon to become unsettled, neither be thrown into confusion by the various methods that Satan has for dispensing false teaching within the church." When Paul speaks of "the appearing in personal presence of our Lord Jesus Christ, even our being assembled together unto Him," he can have only *one event* in mind; *and that event is the rapture of the Church!* That is the event of which he had spoken in such detail in his first letter to the church at Thessalonica!

His former words to this faithful assembly were, "But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him. For this we say unto you by the Word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the *appearing in personal presence* of the Lord, shall not *precede* them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall (at that appearing in personal presence) descend from Heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words" (see I Thessalonians 4:13-18).

The Greek word that is translated "coming" in both I Thessalonians 4:15 (where Paul is *most definitely* speaking of the rapture of the Church), and II Thessalonians 2:1 is "*parousia*." This word literally means "appearing in personal presence." When Paul uses this Greek word, he is definitely referring to the coming of Christ to receive His Church into His personal presence. Paul uses this word to refer to the rapture.

No Confusion

Paul literally writes, "Now, I am requesting you, brethren, concerning the matter of the rapture of the Church, that you do not let yourselves become confused by false teaching. That day (the Day of the Lord) cannot open until that departure of the Church to Heaven (the rapture) has already taken place. The man of sin cannot even be revealed until the rapture is a thing of the past." This is the message that Paul boldly sent out to the Thessalonian Christians!

Also, it is to Christians today who have similarly been confused by the erroneous teachings of those eschatological doctrinal systems (which go under such names as "amillennialism," "post-tribulationalism," "mid-tribulationalism," etc.)

that Paul addresses the words found in these opening verses. "Now I earnestly request, brethren, concerning the appearing in personal presence of our Lord Jesus Christ, even concerning *our* (regenerated Christians who are a part of Christ's body, the Church) gathering together (catching up) unto Him, That ye be not soon shaken in your minds, or be troubled in your spirits, neither by revelation which supposedly came from a supernatural source through some member of the assembly, nor by word of mouth from teachers of the itinerant type who on occasion address the assembly, nor by forged letter that purports to be from us (that is, from Paul, Silas, and Timothy), as that *the Day of the Lord* is at hand (that is; as that *the Day of the Lord* has already started, and that the long-prophesied tribulation *is* now upon the earth)."

Paul positively declares to the Thessalonian Christians that the persecutions which they were undergoing at the time of Paul's writing *are not* a part of that Seventieth Week of the prophecy of Daniel, which is *the tribulation*. He also let them know definitely that Christians of this age *are not* scheduled to be present in the earth during those days of the tribulation!

Satan had used all of the communication media within his power to try to confuse the minds of those men and women who were God's children in Thessalonica, and he can be expected to continue to use these media as this age moves on toward its close. He had given false teachings through lying spirits sent to speak through the members of the assembly; he had sent falsely-indoctrinated non-local teachers to speak to the assembly; and he had even brought about the writing of an epistle containing false teaching on this subject, to which he caused the forged signatures of Paul, Silas, and Timothy to be affixed. These, by the way, are the exact same means of communication which Satan continues to use down through this age as he seeks to rob God's people of the comfort of knowing that the appearing of the Lord in the air for His Church is imminent.

In spite of Satan's concentrated efforts to confuse the doctrine of the rapture, Paul says (in Verse 3), "Let *no man* (or

better, 'no one') deceive you *by any means*." It is Paul's earnest request that God's children (in Thessalonica during that day, and everywhere in the world in all the days that were to extend from Paul's time down to the actual event of the rapture) not allow Satan to confuse their understanding of this doctrine, no matter what means of communication he chooses in his attempt to breed confusion. This charge is especially directed to us today as we see the events of the end of the age approaching: "*Let no created being deceive you by any means.*"

2.

The Pretribulational Rapture

"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" (II Thess. 2:3, 4).

These verses contain the clearest revelation in all of God's Word of the chronological relationship between the rapture of the Church of this age and the coming of the tribulation period that is to open the age to come—that age which is known prophetically as "The Day of the Lord." God had permitted a situation to develop in the city of Thessalonica that made it necessary for the Apostle Paul to write the statements contained in these verses. However, these declarations are not for the Thessalonian Christians only; they are for all Christians down through this Age of Grace, until that day when the Lord actually appears to gather His Church out of this world.

As the Apostle Paul pens the words that open Chapter 2 of his epistle, he once and for all positively establishes that the tribulation period (which opens the Day of the Lord) *cannot* come upon the earth until *after* the Lord has appeared in the air to catch away His Church. The Greek word translated

"coming" in II Thessalonians 2:1 is the same word Paul uses in I Thessalonians 4:15 where (speaking most definitely of the Lord's *appearing* at the time of the rapture) he writes, "*For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the COMING (THE APPEARING IN PERSONAL PRESENCE) of the Lord shall not precede them which are asleep.*" In II Thessalonians 2:1, Paul refers to this same event, and he says that this event (the rapture) is the subject of what he is about to bring up.

Listen to the apostle's words as they continue in Verses 3 and 4: "Let *no man* (actually, '*no one*') deceive you by any means: *for that day* (that is, the Day of the Lord with its opening tribulation) shall not come, except there come *the apostasia* (the departure; that is, the departure of the Church from the earth as the Bride is gathered unto Christ at His appearing) first, and that man of lawlessness be unveiled, the son of perdition."

Paul provides here the sequence of events that *must* happen as this Age of Grace is brought to its prophesied end. The Day of the Lord *cannot begin*; indeed, the man of lawlessness (the world dictator of the seven-year tribulation period, the beast of Revelation 13, the antichrist) cannot even be unveiled, until *after* the departure of the Church of this age to be with the Lord in His Father's house. The rapture *must* precede the revelation of the identity of the man of sin; therefore, the rapture *must* precede the beginning of the Day of the Lord.

Daniel 9:27 reveals that the Seventieth Week of Daniel (the seven-year tribulation period) is to begin with the signing of a seven-year covenant of protection between the political nation Israel and this "man of lawlessness." Thus, his identity *must* be revealed and known before the tribulation period comes upon the earth. Paul declares that the rapture of the Church *must precede* the unveiling of the identity of the man of lawlessness. The Day of the Lord (no part of it!) can come *before* Christ comes for His Church!

Not Wrath, But Rapture!

The fact that some of the Thessalonian Christians believed that the Day of the Lord had already come upon the earth was the source of the confusion to which Paul addressed these opening remarks. He asked these Christians not to be quickly shaken in mind or to be troubled by any means of false doctrine propagation which attempted to convince them that "the Day of the *Lord* was at hand." Then the apostle continued on to state that the Day of the Lord *cannot* come upon the earth until *after* the *rapture* (the Lord's "appearing in personal presence, even our gathering together unto him") has already taken place. This statement should forever end the controversy as to whether or not the Church of this age is scheduled to go through the tribulation period. Paul says (under inspiration of the Holy Spirit of God) that the Church *is not* to go through that Seventieth Week of Daniel!

Why is it that more people do not turn to this passage, and therefore know beyond any doubt what the Bible teaches concerning this subject? The reason lies in the fact that there are two problems (associated with our standard English translation) that hide the real impact of this passage of Scripture. The first is the textual variation contained in the *Tertus Receptus* which causes the last clause of Verse 2 to read "the Day of *Christ*" rather than "the Day of the *Lord*." Paul was not referring to "the Day of *Christ*" (which *is* the rapture), but to "the Day of the *Lord*" (which is the tribulation followed by the millennium). And it is "that day" ("the Day of the *Lord*") that *cannot* precede the rapture!

The second problem concerns the translation of the Greek term, "*ha apostasia*," in II Thessalonians 2:3. In our King James Version, this expression is translated as "a falling away," and it has been common practice for many to assume that this means "a falling away" from revealed truth. We get our transliterated English word, "apostasy," from this Greek term; and the English word, "apostasy," *does* definitely mean "a departure from revealed truth; a falling away from truth once believed." Therefore, it has usually been assumed that when Paul speaks of "*the apostasia*" he is referring to an apostasy in doctrine, not to the rapture.

But, the Greek word, "*apostasia*," literally means "a departure, as on a journey." It *can* mean "a departure from revealed truth," but this is a secondary application of the word's prime meaning. One who spoke Koine Greek in Paul's day would speak of an impending departure upon a journey as his coming "*apostasia*." Our interpretation of this word in II Thessalonians 2:3 seems to have been biased by the fact that this Greek word is used at only one other place in the New Testament, and there the word *does* refer to a "departure from revealed truth."

The other appearance is in Acts 21:21. Here the beloved physician, Luke, writes the words that the believers in Caesarea spoke to Paul: "*And they are informed of thee, that thou teachest all the Jews which are among the Gentiles TO FORSAKE (A DEPARTURE FROM) Moses . . .*" Here the word, "*apostasia*," is translated "forsake," and (in context) it does refer to a departure in doctrine. But this passage does not use the word in its primary sense of meaning.

The Greek noun, "*apostasia*," is derived from the verb, "*aphistemi*," which means "to depart from, or to (a place)." "*Aphistemi*" appears eleven times in the New Testament and in every usage carries a translation of "departing from." In II Thessalonians 2:3, Paul uses the noun, "*apostasia*," to refer to "the departure" of the Church from the earth, *not* "the departure" of Christians from truth once revealed!

The Apostle Paul thus uses this term with the Greek definite article to designate a specific "departure." He does not say "*an apostasia*," but rather he says "*the apostasia*." The Greek text most definitely includes the definite article, even though it is not translated in many of our English versions. There is no specific prophecy anywhere else in Scripture that refers to any definite time in the future as "*the falling away*" ("the apostasy").

Scripture does indicate that the general trend throughout this age of "the kingdom of the heavens" will be a movement toward apostasy in doctrine, and that this situation will

worsen near the end of the age. This is the impact of the Lord's seven parables of the kingdom of the heavens that are found in Matthew 13, and also of His seven letters to the churches in Asia that are found in Chapters 2 and 3 of the Book of Revelation. But nowhere does scriptural prophecy point out a *specific* time period in this Age of Grace that could be designated as "the apostasy." Paul *must* have something else in view as he uses this term.

Recall that, in the first verse of this second chapter of his letter, the Apostle Paul spoke of the rapture of the Church (and he introduced it as the subject of concern to this part of his written message) when he said, "Now we beseech you, brethren, concerning the *parousia* (the 'appearing') of our Lord Jesus Christ, *even* concerning our gathering together unto him."

Paul is still speaking of the event of the rapture, when, in II Thessalonians 2:3, he uses the Greek term that actually refers to "a departure, as on a journey." He is speaking of the departure of the Church of this age out of the earth to be with the Lord in His Father's house. That *is* a specific prophetic event, and that *is* an event that can be designated by the use of the definite article as "*the* departure"! Paul uses the Greek term, "*ha apostasia*," as a *specific name* for the event that today we refer to as "the rapture"!

By the way, where do we get this word, "rapture"? It is an English translation of a Latin word (*rapturas*) which also means "a departure, as on a journey." When we speak of "the rapture," we are actually speaking of "the departure." The Latin word, "*rapturas*," is the *exact equivalent* of the Greek word, "*apostasia*." In the Latin Vulgate Version of the Bible, the "*rapturas*" is used to translate Paul's Greek "*apostasia*" of II Thessalonians 2:3. In fact, our very word, "rapture," comes from the Latin Vulgate translation of this word! There is absolutely no doubt that Paul *was* referring to the rapture of the Church when he selected this term.

According to the definition of the Old Testament Prophets, the Day of the Lord begins with the seven-year

period that is known as "*the tribulation.*" Therefore, the Church is *not* to be present in the earth at the time of the coming of the tribulation period. This is why Paul had twice told the Thessalonian Christians (in his first epistle to them), "Wherefore comfort one another with these words." The Apostle Paul's inspired statement of II Thessalonians 2:3 should forever end the controversy as to the exact chronology of the rapture of the Church and the coming of the tribulation. Paul says that the rapture of the Church *must* precede the coming of the tribulation!

Unveiling the "Man of Sin"

The apostle's statement of II Thessalonians 2:3 goes even beyond his declaration that the Day of the Lord cannot come until after the Church's departure at the time of Christ's appearing. He says that the man of lawlessness (the great world dictator, the "beast," the antichrist) cannot be revealed to the world until after the Church has departed at the time of the rapture. He says, "For the Day of the Lord shall not come until after the rapture of the Church, and then that man of lawlessness be unveiled, the son of perdition."

When the Church is caught up to meet the Lord in the air, and to return with Him to Heaven, the Holy Spirit of God (who is now locally present in the earth in His special indwelling ministry) will also be caught up with the Church. His ministry of restraining the spread of overt evil in the world will come to an end at that time. With the restraining power of the Holy Spirit of God removed, then the man of sin will be revealed to the world. He, at that time, will be able to sign the seven-year covenant with Israel. With that signing, "the Day of the Lord" *will come* "as a thief in the night"!

In these two verses, the Holy Spirit of God reveals a tremendous amount of information concerning this coming "bloody and deceitful man" who is to establish himself in the role of the counterfeit messiah (the antichrist) during that seven-year period which marks the beginning of the Day of the Lord. He is to be unveiled (that is, his identity is to be revealed to the world) after the Church of this age has been

caught up to Heaven. He is to be a man who is "total outlaw"; that is, he is to be a man who totally disregards all of the laws of God that have (to a degree) governed the peoples of the earth since God's original covenant with Noah and his sons at the beginning of the post-Flood world. He is the man about whom the Prophet Daniel writes (in Daniel 7:25) when he speaks of the coming ruler who will "think to change times and laws." He is the king of whom Daniel is speaking also in Daniel 11:36, 37 when the prophet writes, "*And the king shall do according to his will; and he shall exalt himself, and magnify himself above every god, and shall speak marvelous (TERRIBLY BLASPHEMOUS) things against the God of gods, and shall prosper until the indignation be accomplished: for that that is determined shall be done. Neither shall he regard the God of his fathers, nor the desire of women, nor regard any god: for he shall magnify himself above all.*"

This man is opposed to everything that speaks of the law of the God of Creation; he is the man of lawlessness; and, again to use an expression that was coined to describe the hero of what is our present-day "bible of the antichrist" (a powerful little book called *Johnathan Livingston Seagull*), he will be "total outlaw." He will stand against everything that presently constitutes what is called "moral law," and he will bring his changed "times and laws" into force upon the tribulational earth!

The Son of Perdition

The Apostle Paul has several things to say about this coming "man of lawlessness." First, he refers to him as "the son of perdition." The word, "perdition," is translated from a Greek word which means "destruction." Its root is the word, "*apollyon*," which means "destroyer." This word is used in Scripture as a direct designator for the devil himself. Thus, Paul refers to the coming man of sin as the "son of Satan," the "son of the devil."

There is only one other man in Scripture who is referred to as "the son of perdition," and that man is Judas Iscariot. In the Lord's great high priestly prayer of John 17, He used this

term as He referred to Judas. In Verse 12 He said, "*While I was with them in the world, I kept them in thy name: those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the SON OF PERDITION (the SON OF DESTRUCTION; or the SON OF THE DESTROYER); that the scripture might be fulfilled.*" Judas Iscariot was there called "the son of perdition," or "the son of the destroyer."

Because this same term that the Lord applied to Judas is also used by Paul to refer to the coming evil world dictator, some have felt that this "man of sin" is actually going to be the resurrected Judas Iscariot, returned to the earth to carry out Satan's bidding. Therefore, they have taught that the "beast out of the sea" of Revelation 13 is none other than Judas Iscariot himself, returned from the dead for his wicked role of the closing days of this age.

This does not necessarily follow. Scripture tells us that Satan had entered into Judas at the time that he betrayed the Lord of Glory. In John 13:26, 27 we read, "*Jesus answered, He it is, to whom I shall give a sop, when I have dipped it. And when he had dipped the sop, he gave it to Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon. And after the sop SATAN ENTERED INTO HIM. Then said Jesus unto him, That thou doest, do quickly.*" When Satan entered into Judas, he actually became Satan incarnate. He was the offspring of the devil; he was the "son of destruction," or "the son of the destroyer" (the "son of perdition").

Likewise, the coming "man of sin" is to be indwelt by Satan. He, also, will become the devil incarnate, or "the son of the destroyer." This does not mean that the same human body will be occupied by Satan at the time of the tribulation that was occupied by him at the time of the Lord's betrayal. Since there is no place in Scripture that indicates that Satan has ever been given the power of resurrection, it would seem that the idea of the man of sin literally being Judas Iscariot in resurrected form is *not* what the Apostle Paul implies when he calls this "man of sin" the "son of perdition." That expression could refer to any man that is literally and directly indwelt by the devil (the prince of demons) himself.

When the end-time world dictator is referred to as "the son of perdition," it does call to mind another prophecy of Scripture that would seem to be literally fulfilled by the coming of this man. It was in the Garden of Eden, immediately after the fall of Adam, that JHWH Elohim (the Pre-Incarnate Christ) appeared unto Adam, Eve, and the serpent (who was also indwelt by Satan, and who thus was—at that encounter—the "son of perdition") to pronounce judgment upon these principals of the rebellion against God. JHWH Elohim (the LORD God) turned to the Satan-indwelt serpent and said to him, ". . . *Because thou hast done this, thou art cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field; upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life: And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between THY SEED and her seed; it (he) shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel*" (Gen. 3:14, 15).

The "son of perdition" is the seed of Satan. The "Seed of the Woman" is our Lord Jesus Christ. That great dictator of the last days is designated specifically as Satan's seed. It is to be he whose head is literally "bruised," or "battered," by the Seed of Woman. The "man of sin" is the incarnation of the seed of the devil; he is the offspring of Satan; he is the one of whom the prophecy of Genesis 3:15 speaks. And so the Apostle Paul writes, "And that man of sin be revealed, *the son of perdition.*"

The identity of the man of lawlessness is to be revealed to the world after the Church has been caught up to Heaven. To those living in the world at that time, there will be no doubt that this man claims to be divine. He is going to claim that he is God himself, and he will refuse to subordinate himself to any power in Heaven or earth. He is the fulfillment of that prophecy that the Lord made to the religious leaders of Israel during the time of His earthly ministry. This prophecy was recorded by the Apostle John in Chapter 5 and Verse 43 of his Gospel. The Lord said, "*I am come in my Father's name, and ye receive me not; if another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive.*"

This coming man of sin is the "antichrist" in every sense of the meaning of this expression. He will usurp the throne of

the earth, and he will sit in that position of "King of kings and Lord of lords" that rightfully belongs to the Anointed One of God, our Lord Jesus Christ. He is the counterfeit of God the Son, and he will fill the role of the "second person" in the "unholy trinity" of the satanic "godhead."

The Antichrist

Notice exactly what the Apostle Paul has to say about this world figure whose "unveiling" is to come after the rapture of the Church. He is the one who "opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called deity, or that is an object of veneration; so that he as God sitteth in the Holy of Holies of God, proclaiming himself to be God." This man will stand against everything and every law that represents the Word or the will of the true and living God. Paul says that "he opposeth all that is called God." He will be against everything that speaks to the world of the God of Creation. As the Prophet Daniel puts it, "He will seek to change times and laws."

This man will set a dedicated course to wipe everything that speaks of the God of Heaven from the face of this earth. In fact, he will attempt to destroy anything that represents a system of worship of any professed deity other than himself. Paul says that he "opposeth" (stands against) all that is called God. He further states that this man "exalteth" himself above all that is called deity.

This "man of sin" is suddenly going to be revealed to the earth as the one who is able to solve all of the earth's problems. He is going to claim to be the Messiah of Israel, the "Allah" of Islam, the "Buddha" of Buddhism, etc. He will exalt himself above all that is called by any name of deity. He will not acknowledge any god, any person, any divine power, as greater than himself. He will claim to be the God of gods, and he will not permit the acknowledgment, or the worship, of any deity other than himself.

There have been many political rulers in the history of the world who have professed themselves to be divine. The

Caesars of Rome claimed to possess deity, and they demanded that their subjects worship them as gods. Certain of the kings of Babylon made similar claims. The third chapter of Daniel relates a time when Nebuchadnezzar set himself up as deity, and as an object of veneration. The kings of Persia, and certain of the kings of Syria, did this same thing. But none of those previous mortal earthly political rulers *ever* had the audacity to elevate themselves to the position of the supreme deity of the universe! All of these previous kings recognized other deities as their superiors, and they themselves worshipped some external deity.

But not so with the "man of sin"! At his coming, he will exalt himself above everything that is claimed as divine. He will recognize no god other than himself. He will claim to be the God of Creation, and he will claim to control all of the power of the universe. This man will oppose everything that speaks of the true and living God, and of His righteous rule of the universe. He will seek to change "times and laws." All of the moral law, established by the God of Heaven to rule over His created earth, will be changed and corrupted by this man. He will even seek to change God's prophetic timetable. He, as the self-proclaimed "god of the universe," will corrupt all of the governments of the earth, and he will not permit even the mention of any god other than himself.

To support his claim that he *is* the god of the universe, this "man of sin" will take possession of all that which is recognized as belonging to the true and living God. In the day of this man's revelation to the world, the Temple of God in the city of Jerusalem will have been rebuilt (or at least it will be in an advanced state of being rebuilt). The "man of sin" will understand that this temple is recognized by Israel (and by many others in the earth, also) as being the exclusive possession of JHWH, the Covenant God of Israel. Since this man (who "has come in his own name") claims to *be* the God of Creation (and therefore also the Covenant God of Israel), he will proceed to possess this temple as his own exclusive property.

The inner sanctuary (the Holy of Holies) of the Temple of God was the place where God made His local presence known as He dwelt among His chosen people, Israel. That most holy part of the temple is where the Ark of the Covenant was placed. The top of this ark formed the Mercy Seat; and there, between the two cherubim, under their outstretched wings, the glory cloud (the Shekinah glory) which marked the local presence of God, appeared in those days of the ancient Temple of Solomon. The "man of sin" will enter into this most holy place, and he will take possession of it as his throne room. This is what the Apostle Paul prophesies as he goes on to say, "So that he, in the role of God, sitteth in the Holy of Holies of God, proclaiming himself to be God."

The Image

The word translated "temple" is the Greek name for the most holy inner sanctuary of the Temple of God. It does not refer to the entire temple. The "man of sin" is here specifically prophesied to violate the Most Holy Place in the reconstructed temple. He will enter into, and take possession of, that cubic-shaped room where no mortal man (except the High Priest on the Day of Atonement, when he carried the blood of the sacrifice to sprinkle on the Mercy Seat) could enter. He will defile this Most Holy Place. Other Scripture seems to tell us that he will set up an image (probably of himself) in that Holy of Holies, and that this image will appear to become alive.

In Revelation 13:15, the Apostle John (speaking of the "false prophet," the "second beast," who points to the worship of the "man of sin" as he fulfills his prophetic role of the counterfeit "holy spirit") writes, "*And he had the power to give life (SPIRIT) unto the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak, and cause that as many as would not worship the image of the beast should be killed.*" The word that our King James Version translates as "life" in this verse is actually the Greek word for "spirit." This is significant, because the thought seems to be that this image (probably an elaborate computerized robot) will be directly possessed and controlled by an alien spirit (a demon spirit). It will not actually *have* life, but it will *appear* to have life, because this

possessing spirit will give the image power to reason as well as the power to have all of the motor functions of an entity that actually possesses physical life.

The "man of sin's" actual entry into the Holy of Holies of the temple, and his setting up of this bizarre "image," appear to be the "abomination of desolation," first prophesied by Daniel, but mentioned by the Lord Jesus Christ in His Olivet Discourse (see Matthew 24:15). When this "abomination" is finally observed, the Lord told those who were to be present in Jerusalem and Judea at that time to "flee into the mountains." This event is to open the "Great Tribulation," which is the final three and one-half years of the "Seventieth Week of Daniel."

This coming "man of sin" is truly *the* antichrist; he is literally to usurp the place of God's Anointed One as ruler over the whole earth. Just as the Lord Jesus Christ *is* God in the flesh, this man is going to *claim to be* God in the flesh! But the "son of perdition" will not claim to have voluntarily subordinated himself to the will of the Father; he will claim to *be* the Father! "He opposeth and exalteth himself above *all* that goes under the name of God." He will claim to be the epitomy of deity, subordinate to no other person. He is the one of whom the Lord spoke in John 5:43: "*I AM come in my Father's name, and ye receive me not; if another shall come in his own name, him ye WILL receive.*"

3.

The Restrainer of Evil

"Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things? And now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time. For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way" (II Thess. 2:5-7).

While among the newly-reborn Thessalonian Christians, the Apostle Paul had not neglected the subject of the Lord's second coming or the events that are to characterize both the *end* of this Age of Grace and the *beginning* of the Day of the Lord. He spent three or four weeks with these people and taught many truths while in the European city of Thessalonica. Unlike many today who claim such teachings are unimportant, Paul considered these facts of God's revealed plan of the ages as extremely important to the maturing Christian.

The two Thessalonian epistles are the earliest inspired writings of the Apostle Paul. Both of these letters deal very largely with prophetic events that are to occur in association with the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. We can know (from II Thessalonians 2:5) that Paul's teachings on this subject were not just confined to his inspired writings. They were very much a part of his oral ministry as he personally taught those new converts that God had given him through his evangelism. Paul writes, "Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things?"

The information that Paul had written to the Thessalonian converts in the preceding few verses was not new to them. Paul had taught them personally that the Lord was to appear in the air to gather His Church unto Him and to take her home to Heaven *before* the beginning of the tribulation period which marks the opening seven years of the Day of the Lord. He had made it clear that the coming "man of sin" could not be unveiled to the world until *after* the Church was gone. He had taught these new Christians that this coming world dictator would claim to be the one and only God of the universe, and that he would take possession of the Holy of Holies of the Temple of Jehovah in Jerusalem. He had taught them that this man would place his throne in this inner sanctuary of the temple, and that he would do this to demonstrate to the inhabitants of the world that he was, indeed, the God and Messiah of Israel!

The Thessalonian Christians had heard these prophetic truths from Paul's mouth, and to them the words of this letter

were just a refresher course. Paul told them, "Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things?" But for the many Christian men and women who would never be privileged to hear Paul speak these teachings personally, they are here written as a part of God's indestructible Word.

The Holy Spirit

After asking this question of Verse 5 as a reminder of some of his previous teachings, Paul went on further to refresh his readers' minds about other related truths. His thesis statement is contained in Verse 3. There he had written, "Let no created being deceive you by any available method: for the day of the *Lord* shall not come, except there come *the rapture* first, and then the man of *lawlessness* be revealed, the son of perdition." Paul is continuing to expound this thesis in Verse 6: "And now ye know *who restraineth* that he (the 'man of sin') might be revealed in his (the 'man of sin's') time."

Not only had Paul taught the Thessalonian Christians the *fact* that the "man of sin" could *not* be unveiled to the world until after the Church had been caught up, but also he had taught them *why* the "unveiling" could not be until then. He expected these children of God to recall that he taught them about One whose local ministry and whose local presence *are* now present in the earth. A part of this One's ministry is the restraint of overt evil in the world while God prolongs this day of His grace.

Paul writes, "And now (after my reminder) ye know who *restraineth*." The apostle is speaking of the Holy Spirit of God who came into His local ministry in the earth on the Day of Pentecost. He came to baptize believers into the one Body (which is the Church); He came to indwell each believer personally; He came to convict of sin; and He came to hold back (or to restrain) the spread of Satan's "mystery of iniquity" until God's purpose in calling out the Church could be completed. It is the Holy Spirit of God who *is* the *Restrainer*. Paul called this to his readers' minds as he wrote, "And now ye know who is restraining Satan's efforts to bring

his 'man of lawlessness' into the world, that that wicked one might be revealed in his appointed time (and not before that appointed time)."

The next verse is a further expansion of this thought. "For the mystery of iniquity (Satan's master plan of evil that will eventually result in the entire earth being brought under the political and ecclesiastical power of this 'man of sin') doth already (in Paul's day) work (that is, it was even then organized and operating in the New Testament world): only he who restraineth (the Holy Spirit of God in His restraining ministry) will continue to restrain, until he be taken up from the earth."

When is that time that the Holy Spirit is to be "taken up from the earth"? He will be caught up at the same time that the Church is caught up to be with the Lord! Thus, the "man of sin" will be revealed when God's Holy Spirit ceases to restrain Satan! That restraint will cease at the time of the rapture of the Church! *This* is the teaching that Paul attempts to recall to the minds of the recipients of this letter!

The Holy Spirit of God *is* to remain in special local presence in the earth as long as the Church of this age is in the earth. When the Church is caught up to Heaven to be with the Lord, then the special residential ministry of God the Holy Spirit (which began on the Day of Pentecost just ten days after the Lord's ascension back to Heaven) will come to an end. His restraining power will be removed. Satan can then unveil his masterpiece—the "man of sin," the "beast out of the sea," the "wilful king," the "bloody and deceitful man." With no further divine restraint upon him, this man can assume his position of world control. He can sign that seven-year "covenant of hell" with the political nation Israel. The signing of that covenant simultaneously initiates both "The Day of the Lord" *and* the seven-year tribulation period!

Paul had instructed the Thessalonian Christians in the doctrines concerning the present ministry of God the Holy Spirit, just as the Lord himself has instructed us in these

same doctrines in the sixteenth chapter of the Gospel of John. Paul has said, "After my reminder, you are now knowledgeable as to who is restraining Satan's plan for world conquest. You know who is holding back the progress of Satan's program, so that this man of sin will be revealed in his own appointed time. If it were not for this divine restraint, Satan could very well accomplish his purpose, and bring about the tribulation conditions *before* God had completed *His* purpose of calling out the Church. Satan would be able to unveil his masterpiece, the antichrist, *before* the appointed time."

The Mystery of Iniquity

Paul continued to write, "For the *mystery of iniquity* doth already work: Only he who now restraineth will continue to restrain, until he be taken up from the earth." The clear statement here is, "The *mystery of iniquity* doth *already* work." What is "*the mystery of iniquity*"? This is Satan's organized system in the earth that is dedicated to the bringing of all nations and peoples together into one single, unified political and religious system, dedicated also to the casting off of the bands of God, and to the following of Satan's leadership! It is "MYSTERY BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH." It is the great seven-headed beast with the ten horns mentioned in Revelation 17! It is that mystery system that had its founding and first organization in Nimrod, "the mighty hunter before the LORD," at the time of the building of the Tower of Babel!

This is the world organization of satanically-directed men which will place the antichrist in his position at the pinnacle of world power. This mystery cult has had continuous organization among certain men of the earth, passed on from generation to generation, down through the centuries since the days of Babel. Nimrod, his wife Semiramis, and Semiramis' son Tammuz (or Baal), established the Babylonian religious and political mysteries during the Babel "era" and in the early centuries of the post-Flood world. Paul acknowledges that this satanically-directed mystery cult was hard at work in his day; and it has continued to work steadily

through the centuries, even until the present time. He writes, "For the *mystery of iniquity* doth already work."

The Greek word here translated as "work" refers to a process of permeating and penetrating, bringing all parts into the polluted state that has been effected by the polluting element. It is the word used for the working of leaven in a lump of dough. This appears to be the concept that the Apostle Paul intends to convey. Just as leaven, inserted at one point in a lump of dough, will begin to permeate and spread until the entire lump is leavened—so Paul pictures the working of the "mystery of iniquity." Satan's organized system of the Babylonian mysteries (with its goal of total world power, both in the political and ecclesiastical sense) had been inserted in the dough of the world, and the leavening process was going on at the very time that Paul wrote this short epistle. "For the mystery of iniquity doth *already* work."

The process of leavening a loaf can proceed very rapidly if conditions of temperature, humidity, and consistency of the mixture are exactly right. What was to prevent the "leavening" of the "mystery of iniquity" from proceeding at a very rapid pace, thus bringing this satanic system into power over the earth at a very early time—perhaps even before God's appointed time? Paul answers that question: "For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: *only he who now is restraining will continue to restrain, until he be taken up out of the earth.*"

The Holy Spirit of God is in the earth presently, and He is holding back that complete permeation by the "mystery of iniquity." Satan's final goals cannot be attained until *after* this restraining Power is removed. God's restraint *will not be removed* as long as the Holy Spirit of God is yet here in His special residential ministry! He will be here in that ministry as long as the Church of this age (which He indwells) is still here. Both the Church and the Holy Spirit of God will be taken up out of the earth at the time of the rapture.

That stirring of Satan in the earthly scene (which the Apostle Paul refers to as "the mystery of iniquity") was already busily at work in Paul's day. It is the working of "the mystery of iniquity" that is eventually going to bring Satan's "man of sin" into political and ecclesiastical control over the entire world.

"The mystery of iniquity" had its origin in Nimrod at the time of the building of the Tower of Babel. This is the Babylonian mystery cult that (as an organization of satanically-driven men) attempts to unite all of the peoples of the earth into a one-world political system that opposes the rule of the God of Heaven, and that directs worship toward the one who sits at the head of this one-world political state. All pagan religions are derived from the Babylonian "mystery of iniquity," and there has been an organization of men in the earth that have sought to bring to fruition Satan's master plan ever since it came into existence. Paul is speaking of this situation as it existed in his own day as he writes to the Thessalonian Christians: "For the mystery of iniquity doth *already* work."

The Order of the Illuminati

Even in Paul's time, Satan was working in the earth to bring about conditions that would make it possible for him to unveil his antichrist and place him on the throne of the world. In that day, this cult was headquartered in Rome, and it went under the designation of the "Estrucean Mysteries." Not too many years earlier, this same mystery cult had been headquartered in Ephesus, and there it went under the designation of the "Ephesian Mysteries." This cult has continued to flourish down through the centuries under various names, such as the "Knights Templar." In our day, this mystery cult has achieved tremendous political strength in the world under the name of "The Order of the Illuminati."

This Western European international cult (with its many subsidiaries that go under various names in different parts of the world) has achieved such strength that it is now manipulating all of the political movements of the entire

world. Even the very political factions (into which the world is presently polarized) were designed and engineered by this present visible organization of the Babylonian mystery cult. It is precisely the same organized cult of which Paul spoke (only the name and the personalities have changed) when he wrote, "For *the mystery of iniquity* (that is, 'the secret cult of overt evil') doth *already* work."

If Satan had such a dedicated organization of men in the earth—even in the very day when Paul wrote this epistle—then why has he not been able to bring his antichrist-controlled world government and world religious system into total power long before now? Why is it that it has taken almost two thousand years for the world to be brought to the very brink of the tribulation situation, just as it actually is today?

The reason is given by Paul, and this reason is the main thrust of the statements that he makes in II Thessalonians 2:6, 7. He says, "And now (after my reminder of things that I taught you while I was present among you) ye know who restraineth, so that he (the antichrist) might be revealed in his appointed time (not prior to this appointed time). For the *mystery of iniquity* (the mystery cult that is to bring this 'man of sin' into power over the earth) doth already work (that is, it is presently organized and actively working as leaven in a lump of dough): only he who now restraineth will continue to restrain, until he be taken up from the earth."

Here is the answer to why Satan's "mystery of iniquity" has not been able to achieve control of the world over these nineteen hundred-plus years which have gone by since Paul wrote these words! There is a restrainer in the earth. That "Restrainer" is the Holy Spirit of God, who (as a part of His special residential ministry in the earth during this age of the Church) is "holding back" the spread of overt evil! God himself (in the Person of the Holy Spirit) has restricted the success and the spread of Satan's mystery cult operation, and He will continue to exercise such restraint until His special residential ministry in the earth is finished. That ministry will be finished when He (the Holy Spirit) is taken up from the earth!

The Removal of the Restrainer

Once again, when is that day that God's Holy Spirit is to be taken up from the earth? It is the "Day of Christ," the day when the Lord Jesus Christ himself will appear in personal presence in the air to gather the Church unto Himself, and to take her (His Bride) home to His Father's house. The Holy Spirit of God was sent into special presence in the earth on the Day of Pentecost to baptize all believers into the One Body, which is the Church. He was sent to indwell all believers personally as the Comforter, the "Paraclete," the "One Who Stands Alongside of." It was on the Day of Pentecost that the Church of this age was born. The building process of the Church that our Lord spoke of in Matthew 16:18 was to continue throughout this Age of Grace until that day (known only to God) when the Church finally is to be complete. It is to be then that the Lord Jesus Christ will arise from His throne at the right hand of the Father in Heaven, and will descend into the atmospheric heaven to gather both the dead and the living of His "Called-out Assembly" unto Him. And when He calls His Church out of the earthly sphere, He will also call the Holy Spirit out of His special residential ministry in the earth.

Therefore, when God's Holy Spirit is taken from the earth, "Then will that Wicked (One) be unveiled." Satan's counterfeit "christ" is to have *his* unveiling (his "*apokolupsis*"), just as the true Christ of God is to have *His* unveiling (His "*apokolupsis*"). The unveiling of the counterfeit "christ" is to take place slightly more than seven years before the unveiling of God's Christ, the Anointed One of Heaven.

The reign of the counterfeit "christ"—the "antichrist"—is to be short-lived. But while he does reign, he will spread wickedness, devastation, and death over the entire face of the earth in a way that has never before been seen in all of the history of this world. The record of the time of the reign of this man is given to us in some detail in the sixth through the nineteenth chapters of the Book of Revelation. He will reign over the world of the tribulation, the world of the "Seventieth Week of Daniel."

4.

Miracles of Deceit

“And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming: 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” (II Thess. 2:8-10).

It is the Holy Spirit of God, who came into the earth in special local presence for His ministry to the Church on the Day of Pentecost, who is holding back the spread of overt evil during this age of God's grace. He is to continue this ministry of restraint against the total spread of the power of Satan's "mystery of iniquity" until "He goes out from the midst" of humanity. This will happen on "the day of Jesus Christ" when the Lord will appear in the air to catch His Church out of the earth. Then, also, the Holy Spirit (who came to indwell the Church) will be taken from His residential ministry in the earth, and His restraining power will be removed. Then will Satan be able to assume control over the entire earth, and then will this great adversary be able to place his man on the throne of the earth.

Paul is speaking of that time when God's Holy Spirit has just been taken away, when he writes to the Thessalonian Christians, "And then shall the lawless one be disclosed (in his true identity), whom the Lord shall slay with the breath of his mouth, and render inoperative by the sudden appearance of his personal presence."

Even before the Apostle Paul provides his readers with certain prophetic announcements concerning the source and magnitude of the power of this "man of lawlessness" (this "wicked one"), he first gives assurance that the length of this man's rule over the earth is limited.

A Limited Reign

But even as this "unveiling" takes place, the doom of this satanically-indwelled world dictator is already sealed. The Apostle Paul says that this "wicked one" is the same "willful king" of Daniel, and the same "bloody and deceitful man" of the psalmist. Elsewhere in the Scripture, it is prophesied that this wicked one will be destroyed out of the earth at the time that the Lord returns in power and glory to establish His everlasting kingdom in the earth. At the very time that this "wicked one" has his identity disclosed, the time of his demise is already scheduled. Just a little more than seven years from that infamous "unveiling," this "beast out of the sea" is to be cast alive into Gehenna, the Lake of Fire.

Paul says, "And then will be revealed the lawless (one), whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth, and annul by the appearing of His coming." This evil one of the earth has been destined for destruction by the "breath" of the Lord's mouth from the time when first God began to breathe His eternal written Word through the prophets of Israel. The power of God is exercised through God's breathed Word. It was the "breath of His mouth" that spoke the universe into existence. It was the "breath of His mouth" that formed the seas and the continents. It was by the "breath of His mouth" that He breathed life into that body of Adam which He had formed from the inorganic materials of the earth. It is with the "breath of His mouth" that He "slays the wicked." And it is with the "breath of His mouth" that He is to consume the "wicked one," the world dictator of the tribulation!

The returning Lord Jesus Christ *is* God the Creator. The same "Breath" or "Spirit" that formed the heavens and the earth is to "consume" and "annul" the "man of sin" only a few short years after his unveiling.

But Satan's man in the earth *does* have a little more than seven years to carry on his evil and destructive program. However, even as he exercises that program, those who know the Word of God will realize that the date of his doom is

already set. It is important to understand that soon after the Church is caught up from the earth, there *will* be thousands who do turn to the soon-coming Messiah as the nation of Israel is "saved in a day." The words of II Thessalonians 2:8, written by Paul so many years before, will become doubly precious to those who have come to know the Lord during the time period of the tribulation. The apostle has pre-written the destiny of this man of lawlessness, and he has said that this unveiled-one is the one "whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth, and annul by the presence of His coming."

The Lord is to "consume" or "destroy" personally this human epitomy of wickedness. That is, He is to remove him from the domain of the earth, and He is to transport him to the place of his eternal destiny by the power of His spoken Word. The Lord is to annul (or to neutralize) also this man's evil influence, and the power of his evil system over the world. He and all that stand behind him are to be rendered inoperative "by the sudden appearance in personal presence" of the Lord Jesus Christ when He returns in power and glory.

It is to be the satanically-controlled mystery cult which the Apostle Paul refers to as "the mystery of iniquity" (or, "the mystery of lawlessness") that is to "unveil" the "man of lawlessness" to the world. (The unveiling will take place when God's restraint is removed and after the Church has been taken out of the world.) It is to be the Lord himself who ends the career of this "man of lawlessness." The Lord Jesus Christ will descend from Heaven with the armies of Heaven; He will come as "KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS"; and He will destroy Satan's hold over the earth. The "man of sin" is to be destroyed with the "breath of His mouth."

The Apostle John was actually allowed to witness the "destruction" and "neutralization" of both this "man of sin" (the "beast") and his false prophet in that prophetic vision that is recorded in Revelation 19:19, 20. John writes, "*And I saw the beast (the 'man of lawlessness'), and the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against him that sat on the horse (that is, against the Lord Jesus*

Christ), and against his (the Lord's) army. And the beast was taken (and we can know from II Thessalonians 2:8 that he was taken by the power of 'the breath of the Lord's mouth'), and with him the false prophet that wrought miracles before him, with which he deceived them that had the mark of the beast, and them that worshipped his image. THESE BOTH WERE CAST ALIVE INTO A LAKE OF FIRE BURNING WITH BRIMSTONE (GEHENNA)."

The power used to take this "man of lawlessness" and his false prophet from this earth, to transform their mortal bodies into immortal bodies, and to transport them into Gehenna was the same power that created the universe. That power came from "the breath of the Lord's mouth."

The Organization and Power of Antichrist

After Paul assures the readers of his Second Epistle to the Thessalonians that the career of Satan's "man of sin" will come to an end (in accordance with a time schedule foreordained of God), he goes on to provide certain prophetic information about this evil character. Paul strongly asserts certain facts about this man that are only hinted at in other prophetic Scriptures. He also provides information about his rise to power that is not found in any other part of God's Word. A very literal and direct translation of Paul's original Greek of Verses 9 through 12 would read as follows: "Whose coming is according to the working of Satan in every power and signs and wonders of falsehood, and in every deceit of unrighteousness in them that perish, because the love of the truth they received not for them to be saved. And on account of this God will send them a working of error, for them to believe what (is) false, that they may be judged all who believed not the truth, but delighted in unrighteousness."

First, Paul states that the coming of this man and his unveiling to the world are "after the working of Satan." That is, it is according to Satan's master plan, which he has been busily at work trying to bring to fruition in the earth ever since the earliest centuries of the post-Flood world. Paul had earlier said (in Verse 7), "For the *mystery of iniquity* doth

already work." The "*mystery of iniquity*" was operating in Paul's day, and it has been operating ever since that day as an organized cult of men who have sold themselves out to Satan and to his demon army. This working of Satan *will* be successful only after the Holy Spirit of God is taken out from the midst of humanity at the time of the rapture of the Church.

This, of course, should alert those who know and believe God's Word to the fact that, as this age draws toward its end, this satanically-driven mystery cult will become more and more prominent in the political and religious affairs of the earth. It should become increasingly obvious that there definitely is some political and religious force at work. This force most certainly is behind these seemingly illogical and supposedly unrelated events in the world that are relentlessly moving the entire globe more and more toward a unified (one-world) religious and political system. The "man of sin" is to be revealed "after the working of Satan." The working of Satan in the earthly sphere is through the "mystery of iniquity"—through that mystery cult of Babylon which traces its history all the way back to the Tower of Babel.

Therefore, Paul's prophecy tells us that a cult, whose goal it is to bring a one-world system of political and religious control over the earth, will become very powerful in the days just preceding the Lord's appearing to take His Church home at the time of the rapture. The tentacles of this organization will reach into every political subdivision of the earth. Members of this international mystery cult will make it their goal to attain the highest political offices in all national governments. Men will be trained from birth just for the political role that they are expected to play in their respective governments. All of the machinery of the world mystery cult (the world conspiracy) will be employed in seeing that these trained candidates reach the high offices that have been marked out for them.

When they are placed in their positions of political power, their loyalty will be, not to the sovereign nation whose

government they now control, but rather to the international mystery cult which placed them in high office. Their entire aim will be to bring each respective and specific nation under the control of the international conspiracy. When the time comes (when everything is at last poised and ready, and when God the Holy Spirit is taken up from His restraining ministry in the earth), then these international traitors will deliver their respective nations up to the one-world system that has always been the goal of this master plan. The top man of this "pyramid" organization (whose identity will be a secret even to his own subordinates who are more than two ranks below him) will suddenly be placed in a position where he is the political ruler of the world. Then his identity can be revealed to the world; he can be unveiled for all the world to see; then he can begin his program of destruction in the earth! This is the unveiling of which Paul speaks!

Those who read and understand this inspired letter of Paul should not be surprised when they are made aware that this kind of "working of Satan" is going on in the earth. Paul has stated that the "man of sin" *will* be placed in power by an international mystery cult—one which already existed in his day, but which would not be permitted to achieve world power until the end of the age. When God's purpose for the Church is finished, the reality of the machinery necessary to place the "man of sin" into a position of world control will be evident!

Such a "mystery of iniquity" *is* working in the world today! The international "Order of the Illuminati" (with its world-wide subsidiaries) has, in our day, achieved the degree of international control necessary to bring Satan's master plan into action. But the Church is *still* in the earth! God's Holy Spirit *still* restrains! This, very likely, will not be the condition of things much longer!

Occult Power at His Disposal

But the coming of this "man of sin" will not be *just* by the natural working of an international conspiracy of satanically-inspired men! The direct, supernatural power of Satan will

also be at his disposal as he assumes control of all the world's political and religious institutions. Paul has told us earlier (in Verse 4) that this man "opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped so that he as God sitteth in the most holy place of the Temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God."

For one to claim to be God, the Supreme Deity of the universe, that one would be expected to exhibit powers that extend beyond the natural. Satan, the most powerful of the created beings of the universe, *does* have at his disposal vast quantities of supernatural power. When God does not restrain him in the usage of this power, he is able to work great miracles in the earth. The restraining power of the Holy Spirit of God will no longer stand in opposition to the operation and display of Satan's occult powers. Satan will deliver these powers to that man whom Paul has called the "son of the destroyer." The world will be subjected to a display of supernatural power such as has never before been observed by natural man.

Paul writes to the Christians at Thessalonica (and to us), "Whose (the 'man of sin's') coming is according to the working of Satan in every power, and signs, and wonders of falsehood." Satan will withhold nothing from his false "christ" as this man comes into power to fulfill Satan's age-long ambition for controlling all the people of the earth from one central throne. This man will have at his disposal every occult power which Satan (the former "Lucifer") is capable of giving to him. So, as he asserts his claim that he is "god," he will back this claim by the performance of occult miracles. The dwellers upon the earth will be convinced that it is truly "God" who has come down to assume the power of all the world's governments.

This is what the Apostle Paul reveals as he says that the "man of lawlessness" will come with "all power, and signs, and lying wonders." The word for "power" is the Greek "*dunamos*," and this word refers to all the "dynamics" of Satan. Every supernatural power possessed by Satan will be delegated to this man. He will use those occult powers to draw

attention to himself, and to support his claim that he is indeed divine. A world which has been conditioned to believe that there is no such thing as supernatural power will be stunned by the miracles that the "man of sin" will perform. The miracles will be real! The one whom the Lord predicted would "come in his own name, and him ye will receive" (see John 5:43) is this miracle-working "man of lawlessness" that Paul writes of in this letter. He *will* be received by the "dwellers upon the earth."

Once again, the Apostle Paul says that this man will come "in every power, and with signs, and with wonders of falsehood." The antichrist will be allowed to exercise all of the occult "dynamics" of Satan himself. This man who comes claiming to be God will have at his disposal powers to exercise the supernatural. He will control powers that the unbelieving world will think have their source in God alone. And thus, they will actually believe that this man who "comes in his own name" is God.

Through his working of supernatural power, the antichrist will produce "signs" that are calculated to support his claim to be the one who has the right to rule over the earth. Many of these occult "signs" will be counterfeits of the prophetic signs of Scripture which have been given to mark the coming of the true Messiah. Most likely this one will heal the sick, and he may even *appear* to raise the dead. He himself will seem to undergo a death, burial, and resurrection experience.

This man will work miracles in which he appears to have control over the very elements themselves. He, most likely, will exercise control over the weather, and he will also command fire to come down from Heaven. He will exercise control over spiritual forces. These spiritual forces are the demon spirits of Satan's fallen angelic army. Satan will grant this man control over that army. Scripture recognizes him as Satan's own "son" in the earth. The "man of sin" will come with all "signs."

Wonders of Falsehood

But there is still one other category of miraculous happenings that will accompany the "man of sin" as he rises to power. The Apostle Paul says that he will come with "wonders of falsehood" ("miracles of deceit"). What are "wonders of falsehood"? What are we to understand by these words that the Apostle Paul uses here?

First, the word translated "wonders" is the Greek word for "miracles." "Wonders of falsehood" are miraculous happenings. They are happenings that supercede the natural law; they are occult events that are brought about by the power of Satan. They are not the result of trickery, but *are* truly miracles. These events are outside the bounds of the natural law.

However, these "wonders of falsehood" are not *just* miraculous happenings; they are miracles performed with a specific purpose in mind. *They are miracles that are calculated to cause men to believe a false theology!* They are miracles that are performed so that those who observe them will believe the lies of the false theology that Satan and his "man of lawlessness" are to bring into the world! "Lying wonders," or "wonders of falsehood," represent the direct working of the power of Satan in the earth, so that he may direct the minds of men to believe what he would have them to believe about things that are beyond the earthly sphere. These lies are lies about the nature of God, lies about what stands beyond the immediate sphere of the earth, and lies about man's eternal destiny.

Through an intricate master plan, Satan and his antichrist will stage a series of miracles that will instill in the minds of natural man a totally false understanding of God, of Heaven, of earth, and of eternity. These miraculous happenings will be so convincing that anyone who is not firmly grounded in the Word of God will be caused to turn from truth, and turn to the great lie that Satan himself has authored! The philosophy, the theology, and the morality of the tribulational earth is going to be established by the

“wonders of falsehood” that Satan will stage as a part of his bringing of his “son of perdition” into a position of world power!

“Lying Wonders” Before the End of the Age

It would seem logical that, even before the Church has been taken out of the world at the time of the rapture, Satan would begin staging his “wonders of falsehood” in preparation for the day when the antichrist is to have his unveiling. As the restraining power of God’s Holy Spirit is gradually withdrawn near the end of the age, it should be anticipated that the powers of evil will lay the groundwork that is designed specifically to mislead the outlook of the entire world population. Satan has his organized mystery cult (Paul called it the “mystery of iniquity”), and that cult has existed in a real way in the earth ever since the Tower of Babel.

As explained earlier, the express goal of this cult of men is to bring a one-world political and religious system into reality. Satan did not wait until the Church was gone out of the world before he organized this cult, and before he began working through it. Similarly, it would not be expected that Satan would wait until the very day of the revelation of the “man of sin” to begin to propagate his false philosophy and false theology among those over whom the “man of sin” is to rule. He has not waited! The world that we live in today is being subjected to an ever-increasing exposure of Satan’s “wonders of falsehood”!

Unidentified Flying Objects

Since 1947, people all over the world have been aware of the appearance of what we have come to refer to as “Unidentified Flying Objects,” or “UFOs.” The UFOs often appear as lighted vehicles of unfamiliar design, and they appear to “fly,” both in the atmosphere of our planet, and in near-space just beyond the upper reaches of the atmosphere. Many persons from all walks of life have observed the UFO phenomena, and the reports of such sightings are too numerous to dismiss as merely the imagination of the observer. UFOs have been sighted and watched by trained

engineers and scientifically-oriented observers; they have been tracked by radar; and they have been pursued by aircraft (sometimes with tragic results). There does not seem to be any "natural" explanation for all of the phenomena that have been observed. At least, there does not seem to be any "natural" explanation for the appearance of the UFOs—if one confines himself *just* to the sphere of this planet, and to the realm of mankind!

Men are faced with the dilemma of not being able to deny the reality of the appearance of the UFOs, yet at the same time not being able to find any earthly, "natural" explanation for them. Modern men, for the most part, are not oriented to accepting a "supernatural" explanation to these observed phenomena. Therefore, they look beyond the earth to what they feel is a space-age "natural" explanation for the existence and the appearance of these strange objects, which sometimes do not obey the laws of physics as we presently understand them.

To escape this dilemma, men are willing to postulate the existence of other worlds (other planets) beyond the limits of our solar system populated by living creatures similar to the men of this earth, yet who are perhaps several million years more advanced on the "evolutionary scale" than the inhabitants of this planet. They postulate that these creatures from other worlds have perfected space travel, and that they now are exploring our planet as a part of their expanding space program. The technology of these space travelers is supposedly vastly superior to ours, and they have learned to overcome some of the things that now appear to us as physical limitations upon our own technology.

Also, these "space travelers" have learned to solve political, social, and religious problems that at one time also stood in their path of advancement. Perhaps we have a great deal to learn from these products of evolution from other worlds, and perhaps when they at last openly communicate with earthlings they will be able to direct this world into a new order of political, social, and religious organization—a

new order that will end strife among men forever, and create the sort of Utopia which is conducive to our world's going onward and upward in technological progress!

The speculations of men who are confronted with the phenomena of the UFOs go even beyond these conjectures. Since the first modern-day encounter with UFOs on a widely-publicized basis in 1947, men have gone back and found some eyewitness accounts of encounters with UFOs that took place well before the advent of modern technology. Some of these accounts took place several centuries ago, and yet the reports are strikingly similar to modern-day reports of UFO encounters. This "fact," to the speculators, seems to indicate that our "visitors from outer space" have been visiting the earth for an extended period of time.

Perhaps their visitations actually started back several thousand years ago. Perhaps some of those encounters of advanced spacemen with primitive earthmen are what led to the formation of the religions of the earth. Primitive, nontechnological men encountering these highly-advanced beings from other worlds might have mistaken them for "gods." These "primitive" earthmen would have assumed that their visitors were supernatural, and so they would begin to worship them as deities.

Perhaps even the writers of the Scriptures really encountered space travelers when they thought that they had experienced an encounter with Jehovah. This, they say, could account for the arousal of man's religious nature; and it could, therefore, account for the origin of all religions. Books like Eric Von Daniken's *Chariots of the Gods* now expound such theories, and more and more men and women are accepting them.

There was a time when such speculative concepts as those just described were relegated to the fertile imaginations of the writers and readers of science fiction. Most of the men and women who populate our earth took little time to think about such things, and those who did think about them considered

such concepts to be only fantasies. But since the relatively recent wide-spread appearance of the UFO phenomena, a major part of the world's population now takes quite seriously the idea that there *are* alien beings from space worlds beyond our solar system, and that these space beings are now visiting our planet!

The observed performance of these strange "vehicles" (as UFOs are believed to be) is beyond the reach of our present technology. In fact, these "vehicles" actually defy the laws of physics, and if the people of the world were conditioned to believe in the existence of the supernatural, then they might actually conclude that these UFOs perform in a supernatural way. However, since most of the civilized world does not believe in the supernatural, they must relegate the observed performance of these "vehicles" to an advanced technology far superior to our own. The only source of such technology would seem to be these postulated aliens from other worlds (other *natural* worlds) who have invaded the sphere of this world!

UFO Phenomena a "Wonder of Falsehood"

If the humanity of this world accepts an advanced technology as one of the characteristics of such an alien race, then they are also ready to accept an advanced system of philosophy, an advanced system of theology, and an advanced system of human morality from these same aliens. *If* these beings suddenly present a radically different philosophy of living, with a radically different concept of life after death, and a radically different view of God, then the world is prepared to accept those concepts! The idea of a one-world government and a one-world religious system, with a single "superman" at the head of such a system, could be accepted *if* such views were to come from those who are purported to be ambassadors to earth from a highly-advanced world that once faced our planet's problems, yet have now solved them!

These aliens could very well *claim* to have even established all of our world's religions through earlier visits to the planet. Indeed, they could claim to have been

responsible for the writing of our Scriptures, and they could claim that the prophesied "Messiah" of the Hebrew Scriptures was simply the prediction of the world leader that they were to bring to this earth when the earth was sufficiently mature to receive him. This one whom they will bring into power will be (according to them) the long-awaited "god-man," and he is the fulfillment of the hopes of all the world's "primitive religions." He can claim to be God, and he can "sit in the Temple of God, showing himself that he is God."

The true explanation of the UFO phenomena lies in the fact that the earth has encountered some of Satan's "wonders of falsehood"! Satan, and his demon hordes, are responsible for the appearance of UFOs! These appearances are calculated to lead to the very speculations just described!

Satan is preparing the earth for the advent of his world system, and for the unveiling of his false "christ." He is doing this through his "wonders of falsehood." As God's Holy Spirit gradually withdraws His restraining power in the last days of this Age of Grace, Satan is beginning to accomplish, on a large scale, what has been restricted to only isolated incidents in centuries past. He is producing the materialization of the so-called "UFOs," and he is doing this specifically to lay the groundwork in the world, and to prepare the mental state of the world to receive both his world system and his false "christ."

Satan and his hordes of demons have the power to produce such materializations. They have been producing visible and tangible materializations at occult seances for many millennia. The same power that produces plasma "bodies" for disembodied spirits at spiritualistic seances can produce plasma "space vehicles" for display to a gullible world that has rejected her true Messiah! One of the outstanding circumstances concerning all of the UFO sightings of modern times is that after each sighting there never remains any so-called "hard evidence" supporting the fact that such a "vehicle" has ever been present. It is true that there sometimes is such evidence as imprints of landing gear in soft

soil, or perhaps some burned grass. But there is *never* a piece of material left that can be identified as a part of the departed UFO! There has never been any item of material of foreign origin left as clear-cut evidence that some extra-terrestrial vehicle has actually visited the point of the sighting!

There is good reason for this. The UFOs are *not* material vehicles at all. They are plasma materializations of "space vehicles" that are brought into existence specifically to deceive. When they have served their purpose, they are "dematerialized"; there is nothing of a material nature left to testify to the fact that a vehicle was ever present. The living creatures associated with these craft are Satan's demons. These materializations *are* "wonders of falsehood"!

The appearance of the so-called "UFOs" is one of the direct manifestations of Satan's "miracles of falsehood" ("lying wonders") that the Apostle Paul says are to be a part of the unveiling of the "man of lawlessness." Satan is laying down a vast smoke screen of carefully-planned falsehood that is specifically designed to cause men of the earth to believe "the lie." Our supposed "visitors from space" *are* living beings, but they *are not* living beings in physical form who have been brought to their present state by the processes of evolution working on some planet beyond our solar system. They are fallen angelic beings who are playing the role of "space visitors," so that they can cause the world to believe the "great lie" that is to bring Satan's antichrist into a position of world power!

Satan and his demon army have the occult power that is necessary to stage the phenomena of the UFOs. When God permits, these personalities of evil may use that power. UFO sightings are real, in that occult power *is* able to produce materializations of plasma phenomena that can *appear* to take the shapes that we would expect interplanetary vehicles to have. These plasma "decoys" can be made to maneuver and perform in ways that simulate the maneuvers and the performance that we might expect from vehicles that were designed by creatures with a highly-advanced technology.

The plasma apparitions are not subject to the mechanical laws that govern real mechanical motion in the earthly sphere, so they can be made to appear to accelerate very rapidly, make right angle turns at tremendous speeds, and hover over any given spot for any length of time. They can take on any shape that the trickster spirit desires them to have. They can be seen with the eye, and they can be detected and tracked by non-visual sensors, such as radar.

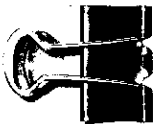
But when they have finished their work of deception, they can also be dematerialized. They are then gone forever, and there is no "hard evidence" left to testify to the fact of their former presence. It is true that (as a part of this trickery) such things as imprints of what appears to be landing gear, or burned grass, or other kinds of "secondary evidence" can be left after the materialization is gone. But there is *never* a part of the materialization itself (a part of the supposed "space vehicle") left as evidence that an actual "advanced technology machine" has actually visited the sighting area.

As a part of the deceptive miracle that is being staged, it is possible for such things as the stopping of automobile engines in the vicinity of the materialization (or other bizarre electrical phenomena) to be accomplished. And when such occurrences would enhance the deceit of the UFO "apparition," the "lying spirit" can be expected to produce these happenings also. The powers that produced the miracle of the UFO itself can also cause the materialization of "alien beings," which appear to be the crew and passengers of the "vehicles."

These "alien beings" are actually demon spirits who have materialized weird-appearing plasma bodies for themselves. Demon spirits have always been able to communicate with mankind when God does not restrain them from doing so, and therefore the "close encounters of the third kind" that are being reported today should be expected as a part of the advanced program of deception of Satan's master plan of world conquest.

Satan and his demon hordes *are* manifesting themselves to the world, but not in their true nature as the powers of darkness whose purpose is earthly conquest. Rather, they are masquerading as beings from outer space (beings supposedly from other planets in the galaxy), who purportedly have something to give to mankind. They are presently in the process of staging miraculous happenings (all of which conform to a master plan of deception), and their purpose is to change gullible man's concepts of the universe, of God, and of himself. Their ultimate achievement will be the establishment of Satan's one-world political and religious system in the earth, and their setting of Satan's "technological god" on the throne of the earth. The UFO phenomena (and all that is associated with such) are most definitely manifestations of these "miracles of deceit."

Occult Arts



But the UFO phenomenon is not all of the "miracles of deceit" (the "lying wonders") to which the world is being exposed today. The rise and the renewed practice of all of the occult arts in the past several decades have resulted in the regular display of miracles that are designed to deceive man as to the true nature of God, and as to the source of supernatural power. Many individuals in the world today have turned to religions that worship the demon spirit gods of the ancient cultic peoples of the pagan world. They have done this because they have been led through some mystical experience of a miraculous nature, supposedly by the "god" (or a "god") of the selected pagan cult. Satan has used his occult power to accomplish "wonders of deceit" to lead the new recruits to those ancient practices of demon worship.

Life-After-Death Experiences

But there is another outstanding phenomenon within the classification of "wonders of deceit" (or "lying wonders") that has come upon the world in relatively recent years. This phenomenon is designed to deceive mankind as to the true nature of life after death. Our reference is to the rash of supposed death and restoration experiences that have come to many people in all walks of life. Both men and women who

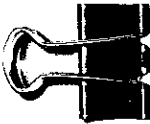
have been designated as clinically dead, yet who have been restored to life by extraordinary medical processes, have returned to "life" with memories of happenings that supposedly took place while they were "dead." These experiences of being out of the body and in a spirit world are almost always reported to be pleasant experiences, even though the one who undergoes the experience is not a believer in Christ. These experiences contradict the Bible, and they also are highly suspect as being "wonders of falsehood."

Several books have been published in recent years that promote the idea that there is life after death. The authors of several of the more prominent of these books do not profess to know the Lord Jesus Christ as their personal Saviour, and the majority of those who have contributed their "life after death" testimonies for use in these books also make no profession of faith. Yet, the unanimous conclusion of all those involved in the preparation of these books is that some part of man *does* continue to live on in a conscious state after physical death, and that dying is a most pleasant experience.

There is no hint that there is any such thing as judgment for sin, as condemnation for the wicked, or as a place of eternal separation from God in store for those who die in their sins without having accepted the salvation offered by God through the shed blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. The unsaved who encounter these "death and restoration" experiences recall nothing but "pleasantness and light" during their supposed time spent in death, and they report that the "being of light" (whom they encountered while undergoing the experience) seemed to have no real interest in their sins and their failures experienced in this life. They were given to understand that all are acceptable by him in his presence regardless of what they had been or what they had done in this life. Again, there was no hint of judgment. Everything was "pleasantness and light."

These testimonies contradict all the teachings of God's Word. Those who have had such experiences now deny that it is necessary for anyone to be "saved" through the acceptance

of the Lord Jesus Christ as personal Saviour while still in this life. They report that all are acceptable, and that all are welcomed into the existence on the other side of physical death, no matter what their religious and spiritual experiences have been on this side of the grave. Many who have had these "life after death" experiences believe that they have been sent back into this world of the living so that they may teach others the real meaning of death, and how death is actually a fulfillment, rather than a loss. Certain of these have felt so strongly that their mission was to convince others of the "truth" of life after death that they have become well-known teachers of the occult arts. They zealously preach that all are going to a better experience in physical death. They contend that life in this present existence should be devoted to self-fulfillment and self-attainment, rather than devotion to the God of Creation, and to His Son whom He sent to die on the Cross so that a way of salvation could be opened to man.



Those who have undergone the so-called "life after death" experiences have experienced one of the "wonders of falsehood" that the Apostle Paul says is to accompany the unveiling of the "man of sin." They have undergone an occult experience; they have not really undergone physical death at all. Rather, they have entered into a comatose state, induced by occult power, and while in that state (which is called "death" by the attending physicians), they have been given an occult experience by Satan himself which is designed to send them back to "life" with a lying testimony concerning what the death experience is all about.

A Great Lie

When unrestrained by the Holy Spirit of God, Satan has the power to accomplish miracles of this nature. The purpose of these miracles is to present falsehood to the inhabitants of the world. This falsehood is specifically designed to cast doubt upon the truth of God's Word. It is to prepare the thinking processes of the population of the world for the presentation of the great spiritual "lie" of the "man of sin." The world is to believe that man should not fear death, but that man should look forward to death as a most pleasant experience.

The "lie" says that there is no need for anyone to prepare himself for death in any spiritual way, because all are acceptable just as they are by that "being of light" who awaits just on the other side of the grave. Whether one has been Christian, Jewish, Moslem, pagan, agnostic, atheist, or whatever in this life, he is still welcome on an equal basis with all others on the other side of the grave!

As a part of his present-day "working" in the earth, Satan is causing more and more of these apparent "death and restoration to life" experiences among the population of the earth. A feeling of well-being about death is being produced in the hearts of those who have no relationship with Jesus Christ. The Scriptures seem to indicate that the "man of sin" himself is to undergo a death, burial, and restoration experience (this is Satan's counterfeit of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ); and that experience is to convince the world that this one "who comes in his own name" truly is the long-expected "Messiah"!

Satan is laying the groundwork for the great "lie" that is to place his man on the throne of the world right now—in our own time! He is changing the world's concepts of God, of man, and of life after death by these "wonders of falsehood." The Christian should not be surprised at this. The Apostle Paul has said that the "man of sin" will come with "all power and signs, and wonders of falsehood."

Satan knows the weaknesses of the fallen human nature. He knows the fallacies in the thinking processes of the unregenerated human mind. He knows the areas of gullibility of rebellious men and women who are going on in their rebellion against the true and living God, who is their Creator. The elements of his *big lie* are designed to take advantage of all of those weaknesses.

His "man of lawlessness" will come, preaching a theology of human works: a salvation by man's own efforts. He will teach that all men are divine, and that through the mechanics of evolution, all men will someday be "gods." He will preach

what men want to hear. He will come with "all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish."

5.

Delusion from God

"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" (II Thess. 2:10-12).

The "man of sin" will be revealed to the world as a part of Satan's "package deal" of the big lie. As the Day of the Lord comes upon the world, the groundwork for Satan's plan of world conquest will be well laid. Satan will have used all of the occult power at his disposal to condition the population of the world for the world reign of the antichrist. Even the concepts held concerning the nature of the universe, the nature of God, and man's origin and destiny, will have been altered by a persistent series of occult miracles, each designed to counter God's Word, and to promote the lie of the adversary.

In Verses 9-12 of II Thessalonians 2, the apostle writes these words: "The coming and presence of whom (that is, the 'man of sin') is according to the operation of Satan in the sphere of miracles, demonstrating power, and attesting miracles, and miracles of a startling, imposing, amazement-awakening character, which deceive; and whose coming and presence are in the sphere of every kind of wicked deception geared to (the gullibility of) those who are perishing, (this gullibility being) caused by the fact that they did not accept the love of the truth to the end that they might be saved. And because of this, God sends them a strong deluding influence resulting in their believing *the* lie, in order that they all might

be judged who did not believe the truth, but took delight in wickedness.”

Deceit is the most prominent and best used tool of Satan in his work of turning men and women from the truth of God, and from belief in the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. Deceit and falsehood are the outstanding characteristics of this being of wickedness; they have been his characteristics since the very day he was created. In describing this prince of the powers of darkness to the Pharisees who contended with Him during the days of His earthly ministry, the Lord said, “He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh *the lie*, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it.”

The Lord says that falsehood was a part of Satan’s makeup from the very beginning; that is, from the time of his creation. It did not take millions and millions of years of existence before he displayed what he was, and what was in him, in his rebellion against God. Satan’s rebellion came after the elapse of only a very short time period (probably only days, as measured in earth time) after God created the host of Heaven.

The Lie

Also, the Lord used the direct article when He spoke of “*the lie*.” He said, “When he speaketh *the lie*, he speaketh of his own.” The Apostle Paul also used the direct article when he said (in II Thessalonians 2:11), “And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe *the lie*.” Both the Lord and the Apostle Paul were speaking prophetically of the same *big lie* when they spoke (and wrote) the words which are contained in these two passages of Scripture. They were speaking of *the lie* that Satan is to use to bring about the reign of sin over the earth in the opening days of the Day of the Lord. Satan’s campaign of deceit will be spread far and wide by all power available to him both before, and during, this critical period in the earth’s history.

The Apostle Paul told the Thessalonian Christians that the coming evil world ruler, the antichrist, the “man of sin,”

will come upon the world scene "in every deceit of unrighteousness geared to the gullibility of those who are perishing." "Those who are perishing" are the unsaved of the earth. They are those who have rejected the Gospel of Jesus Christ as it has been preached during this Age of Grace. They are those who chose to go their own way, even when they were fully aware of the message of the Gospel. They are those who, although aware of the imputed righteousness available through the shed blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, "took pleasure in unrighteousness." These are the ones to whom the antichrist will be revealed with "every deceit of unrighteousness."

All of the occult power available to Satan and to his demon army will be exercised in the bringing of the "big lie" of the antichrist upon a gullible, unregenerated population of a lost world. This "big lie" will incorporate all the features of a totally false *theology*, a totally false *philosophy*, and a totally false *morality*. The idea of mass salvation for all mankind through the total upheaval of all former social order, and the establishment of a new social order, will be included in this lie. The "big lie" will present the concept of Satan as "god," and it will present Satan's "theology" as the theology of the universe. All of these great changes in the thought structure of unsaved men and women will be geared to the gullibility of a race that has rejected God and His truth, and has been gradually conditioned to accept Satan and his lies.

The Power of God's Word

The Scriptures make it clear that God's Word never falls upon the human ear without producing some effect. God's Word either softens or hardens. Just as the same rays of the sun both soften wax and harden clay, so the Word of God both softens the yielding heart and hardens the resisting, uncooperating heart. Those who hear the Word of God (those who are exposed to the light of the Gospel, yet who turn from it and "take pleasure in unrighteousness") are hardened in their hearts; and they become susceptible to falsehood.

When Moses contended with Pharaoh just preceding the Exodus, he presented the Word of the God of Creation to this

great monarch. Pharaoh refused obedience to the commandments of Jehovah. We are told in the narrative, "Jehovah hardened Pharaoh's heart." Pharaoh's heart was a clay-like heart, and the illumination of God's Word produced hardening, rather than softening. Had that great ruler had a wax-like heart, the Word of God would have had a softening effect. But Pharaoh's heart was hardened; he disobeyed the message of God's prophet; he believed the lies of his magicians (Satan's prophets); and he suffered the judgment of God.

When King Saul chose to ignore and disobey the Word of Jehovah, we are told that "an evil spirit from the LORD" was sent upon him. That is, by God's permission a demonic spirit of Satan's army of evil was permitted to come upon Saul. That demon spirit played upon Saul's gullibility, and deluded Israel's first king into thinking that he could defy God. Saul felt that he could eliminate David, the one whom he knew was God's chosen and anointed successor to the throne of Israel. Saul was obsessed with the thought of killing David, an obsession that eventually led to his own destruction.

In I Kings 22, we have the story of the unfortunate alliance formed between King Jehoshaphat of Judah and King Ahab of Israel as these two kings went up to do battle with the king of Syria. In order that he might convince Jehoshaphat that the LORD was behind this venture, Ahab called together his false prophets. To a man, each of these "prophesied" what Ahab wanted to hear. They all said, "Go up to battle with the king of Syria. God will deliver him into your hands." But Jehoshaphat, not being quite convinced of the validity of this mass prophecy asked, "Is there not a prophet of Jehovah besides, that we might inquire of him?" Ahab's answer was, "There is yet one man, Micaiah the son of Imlah, by whom we may inquire of Jehovah: but I hate him; for he doth not prophesy good concerning me, but evil." Jehoshaphat wanted to hear what Micaiah had to say. And, as Ahab had predicted, this true prophet of God prophesied disaster for the venture.

Jehoshaphat knew that he had truly heard the Word of God, yet he rejected it. He wanted to make this unholy

alliance with Ahab. So he looked about to find some justification for his deliberate disobedience to the LORD. When Jehoshaphat had thus deliberately turned from His Word, God sent him "strong delusion that he should believe the lie."

In I Kings 22:20-23, we find the description of a heavenly scene that was revealed to Micaiah, and that is described in Micaiah's words: "*And the LORD said, Who shall persuade Ahab, that he may go up and fall at Ramoth-gilead? And one said on this manner, and another said on that manner. And there came forth a spirit, and stood before the LORD, and said, I will persuade him. And the LORD said unto him, Wherewith? And he said, I will go forth, and I will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets. And he said, Thou shalt persuade him, and prevail also: go forth, and do so. Now therefore, behold, the LORD hath put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these thy prophets, and the LORD hath spoken evil concerning thee.*"

The LORD sent strong delusion to Ahab and Jehoshaphat, so that they might feel justified in their self-chosen path to destruction. And similarly, the Apostle Paul says that God will send strong delusion to those of the earth who persist in denying His Word, and "taking pleasure in unrighteousness."

Delusion

This is the day of God's grace. The Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ is being proclaimed throughout the entire earth. Those who will may come to Him and receive forgiveness for their sins. By faith in Him, they may be regenerated to eternal life. He himself died for their sins. Eternal life in Him is free—available without money and without price. In this age of God's grace, God is not bringing judgment upon the earth; rather, He is holding back that judgment, "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." But (as the Apostle Peter has told us in his **second epistle**), "the Day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night."

Paul is speaking of change in God's policy of dealing with the earth (which is to come coincidentally with Satan's being allowed to bring his "man of lawlessness" to the forefront). He describes the atmosphere in which this wicked ruler will enter into his regime of power. Paul's message is as follows: This man's "coming and presence are in the sphere of every kind of wicked deception geared to the gullibility of those who are perishing, this gullibility being caused by the fact that they did not accept the *Love of the Truth* to the end that they might be saved. And because of this, God sends them a deluding influence resulting in their believing *the lie*, in order that they all might be judged who did not believe the truth, but rather took pleasure in wickedness."

The age of the Church has been the age of truth. God's Word has been freely available to those who will heed it. Satan has been restrained in his deceptive practices, and he has not been allowed to use his occult power to the maximum extent possible. He has not been allowed yet to perform those "wonders of falsehood" that support the lies of his false theology, his false philosophy, and his false morality. But in spite of this, literally multiplied millions of the earth's population (those who have heard the message of truth) have spurned God's truth, because they "had pleasure in unrighteousness."

With the coming of the "man of sin," God will no longer restrain Satan from using his occult powers. He will permit the lies that lead to damnation to be freely spread over this world of gullible men. As in the days when King Ahab of Israel and King Jehoshaphat of Judah sought to make an alliance and to conduct a war that was clearly against the revealed will of Jehovah, God will again permit "lying spirits" to go forth into the earth. These "lying spirits" will promote falsehood in the name of truth, and gullible men and women (who formerly were exposed to the truth) will accept such falsehood to their own destruction.

Satan will be free to exercise "every deceit of unrighteousness" contained among his tricks for leading fallen mankind

into the paths of falsehood and destruction. Those who are still in the earth at the coming of the Day of the Lord are (for the most part) those who have heard the Gospel, and who have rejected it. The Apostle Paul has told us (in I Corinthians 15:51) that *all* who are saved at the time of the appearing of the Lord to take His Church out of the world will be changed into immortal beings with incorruptible bodies, and *all* who are saved will be caught up to meet Him in the air.

Thus, there is to be a brief span of time when there is not one single believer left in the earthly sphere. This situation will not last long, because the Scriptures tell us that the spiritual "eyes" of many of the nation Israel will be opened, and "a nation will be born in a day" soon after the Church is gone. There will be certain Gentiles who will also come to know the Lord (largely through the ministry of the one hundred forty-four thousand saved and sealed Israelites who will go forth as the preachers of the Gospel of the kingdom). But the vast majority of the population of the earth will consist of those who have heard the message of God's grace during this age of the Church, but who have rejected it because they "took pleasure in unrighteousness."

It is to these that God will send the deluding influence causing them to believe *the lie*. By removing His restraining power, God will permit those "lying spirits" to deceive with all the tools and all the power available to them through their occult power. And, in so permitting these "lying spirits" to come upon the earth, God is (in effect) "sending them." Their efforts will be directed primarily toward those who have heard the message of the Gospel, yet have rejected it during the time when the Church was present in the earth. The Apostle Paul says that the "man of lawlessness" will come "in every deceit of unrighteousness geared to the gullibility of them that are perishing, *because the love of the truth they received not for them to be saved.*" If they received not "the Love of the Truth," then this means that they have been given the opportunity to receive "the Love of the Truth" but have rejected this opportunity.

The Love of the Truth

What does Paul mean by this expression, "the Love of the Truth"? This is a rather strange expression. Why does Paul not just say that they "received not the *truth*"? What (or *Who*) is "the Love of the Truth"? This expression is a designation of the Lord Jesus Christ himself! He *is* "the *Love* (the *Agape*) of the Truth." The Apostle John tells us both that "God is Love (*Agape*)," and that "God so loved the world that he sent his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish; but have everlasting life." The Lord Jesus Christ told His disciples, "I am the way, the *truth*, and the life." Therefore, Jesus Christ *is* the "*Agape of the Truth*," and it is He whom these lost ones rejected!

It will be the great so-called "civilized" nations of the earth, the nations where the Gospel has been widely preached yet also where the Gospel has also been widely rejected, that will be the prime targets for Satan's "deceits of unrighteousness." It will be those nations who ban together to receive the antichrist both as world dictator, and as the universal deity. It will *not* be the backward, savage peoples of the world (some of whom may have never heard the Gospel) who are to support the antichrist in his rise to power. It will be those peoples and nations who have been exposed to the preaching of God's Word, yet who have turned a deaf ear to it, who will be the targets of these "deceits of unrighteousness." They *will* believe "*the lie*."

And it is for this reason that God will send them "a deluding influence resulting in error." The Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, God's "Love of the Truth," has been preached; but those who are left in the earth have rejected that Gospel. Since they have rejected the truth, God will give them over to believe *the lie*. That satanic falsehood is the falsehood that Satan first spoke to Eve when he came to her in the body of the serpent in the Garden of Eden. "... *Ye shall not surely die: For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil*" (Gen. 3:4, 5).

The Lie of the Ages

That is "the lie." That is the falsehood that Satan has been trying to make mankind believe ever since the original temptation. "Thou shalt not surely die." Satan tells men that they can disobey God and get away with it! He tells them that the wages of sin *are not* death! He says that man may live on in his sins, that there is no judgment for sin, and that man may actually better himself by the way of sin!

Satan told Eve that God had lied to her husband, Adam. God had said to Adam (concerning the eating of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil), "In the day that thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die." But Satan told Eve, "Thou shalt not surely die. For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil." Satan's lie is that God is withholding something that would actually benefit man. According to Satan's lie, experimental knowledge of good and evil would place man on the same plane as God; indeed, men would become gods! Satan said that men themselves are divine. Men can become gods if they just throw off all the restraints that the God of Creation has placed upon them.

There we have Satan's great lie of the end time! This is the lie of the antichrist. A part of the theme of this coming "man of sin" is that there is no judgment after death. In this present day, that is also the theme of the many "life after death" experiences that are currently receiving so much publicity. These experiences are very much a part of the "wonders of falsehood" that the Apostle Paul warns us will accompany the coming of the "man of sin."

The results of Satan's "big lie" will be overwhelming! The vast majority of those still present in the earth who were enlightened by the Gospel message during this age of the Church will be totally deluded by the strong satanic influence that God has permitted to come upon the earth. They will die in their sins. They will not have accepted the Blessed Substitute, the "Love of the Truth," the One who bore their judgment at the hand of God during those awful hours on the

Cross. So, they will bear their own judgment before Him at the Great White Throne!

Will There Be Another Chance?

There are many today who read these words and conclude that no one who has heard the message of the Gospel preached in this day (while the Church is still in the earth) will be saved during the tribulation period. It *is* true that God's Holy Spirit caused Paul to write, "And for this cause (because they 'received not the Love of the Truth that they might be saved'), God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie: That *they all* might be damned who believed not the Truth (the Truth of the Gospel), but had pleasure in unrighteousness."

The words, "they all," are quite strong. It could be that these words *do* specify that all who have been exposed to the Gospel during this present age, and who have not responded to it in a positive way, will go through the tribulation still without receiving Christ. Their eyes *will* be blinded by the "strong deluding influence" that God has permitted to come into the earth! This is a chilling thought, and it heavily emphasizes the importance of repenting of one's sins and of receiving the Lord Jesus Christ as personal Saviour while this "acceptable year of the Lord" is still upon the earth!

When the Church is gone, and when Satan's "man of sin" has been revealed, it will no longer be the "acceptable year of the Lord." It will then be, "the day of vengeance of our God." Conditions in the earth will be much different, and Satan's power to blind will be much stronger. One today who rejects Christ because he finds "pleasure in unrighteousness," and who feels that he will have further chance to receive Him when the tribulation has come upon the earth, should consider very carefully these words of Paul: "That *they all* might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness."

Although this passage *does* indicate the difficulty with which one (who has neglected the message of the Gospel

during this "acceptable year of the Lord") comes to Christ under tribulation conditions, it probably does not totally exclude *all* (who have heard the Gospel preached during this age) from being saved after that awful time has come upon the earth. Paul says that God "is sending them a deluding influence resulting in their believing the lie, in order that *they all* might be judged who did not believe the truth, but took delight in wickedness." The qualifying expression, "Who did not believe the truth, but took delight in wickedness," does not constitute an exclusive reference to that time period before the close of "the acceptable year of the Lord" and the opening of "the day of vengeance of our God." It *could* refer to those who go to their physical deaths during (or at the end of) the tribulation period.

All those who die without having accepted the "Love of the Truth" before physical death will be judged for their own sins. But through the grace of God, and through the power of the Holy Spirit, God may still save some who have not accepted Christ as Saviour during this Age of Grace, even though they have been already exposed to the Gospel. This, however, is a very slim hope for one to use as justification for his delay in coming to the Saviour. "Now is the day of salvation; now is the accepted time."

Many Will Believe Delusion

The "deluding influence" that God will allow to come upon the world at the advent of the "man of lawlessness" will result in a vast majority of the population believing "*the lie*." This is the lie that says that man may ignore God's Word and get away with it. It is the lie that says that man has no need for a Saviour. It is the lie that says that man has not only life, but *divine* life, in his natural state. It is the lie that says that man is slated to progress onward and upward until he himself becomes as God. It is the lie that says that God's Word is incorrect, that God has lied to us in the Scriptures. It is the lie that denies that God has come in the flesh to die on the Cross thus to redeem the lost creation. It is the lie that Satan

presented to Eve, and it is the lie that Satan also presented to Cain, who then went his own way out of the presence of the LORD!

"The lie" has taken on many outward forms since the time it was first presented to Eve in the Garden of Eden. It will take on its most elaborate form as Satan's "man of sin" comes to sit on the throne of the world at the time of his unveiling. This final "lie" will lead to the ultimate damnation of millions!

6.

The Election and Calling of the Saints

"But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth: Whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle" (II Thess. 2:13-15).

In Verse 13, the Apostle Paul turns his attention back to those faithful Christians in Thessalonica to whom this letter was originally addressed. However, the words found here are not for those Christians alone; they are for all of God's people down through this age.

The Christians in that newly-founded assembly at Thessalonica were undergoing great persecutions at the hands of Satan-directed unbelievers. Paul had earlier assured them that they had not been left behind in the earth to undergo the horrors of "the Day of the Lord"—the *tribulation*. What they were experiencing was not "*the tribulation*," even though it was *a tribulation*. But they were not to let the

circumstances of their present situation cause them to lose sight of the Lord whom they served, and to lose faith in His power to keep them (spiritually secure) under all circumstances. They *had* remained faithful, and they *were* continuing to preach the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ to their unsaved neighbors. Paul, completely assured of the reality of their new birth in Christ, went on to present certain doctrinal truths concerning their new birth to eternal life.

“But as for us, we have a sense of moral obligation to be giving thanks to God always concerning you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you out (from the rest of mankind) for salvation, this choice being within the sphere of the setting-apart work of the Spirit and a belief of the truth, into which (the setting-apart work of the Spirit and a belief in the Truth) also He summoned you through our Good News, resulting in your acquisition of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.” This statement contains a wealth of deep doctrinal truth concerning the nature and the cause of the salvation of those who do belong to the Lord.

The Doctrine of Election

Those who are saved by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and by the regenerating power of God's Holy Spirit *are* the elect of God, who were, from the beginning chosen to salvation through the sanctifying power of God the Holy Spirit, as well as through their belief in the Truth. This is a statement of what theologians often refer to as “the doctrine of election.” It is a doctrine that has sometimes seemed difficult to the understanding of the new Christian, and it has often been a stumbling block to the unsaved. Nevertheless, it is a scriptural doctrine, and the Apostle Paul does not shy away from it.

First, the apostle writes, “But we are obligated (that is, obligated in the same way as one who owes a legal debt) to give thanks continually for you, brethren beloved of the Lord.” The “but” that opens Verse 13 is a conjunction, and it connects this thought back to what has been said in Verses 11 and 12. There the apostle had spoken of those who are lost

during the time that the tribulation is to be upon the world. He said that they were lost "because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved." God sent them "strong delusion that they might believe *the* lie: that they all might be judged who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness."

The coordinating conjunction, "but," sets those who are saved by the sanctifying power of God's Holy Spirit and by their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ in direct contrast to those who are lost by their own unbelief. Paul acknowledged the power of God that was exercised in the saving of these Thessalonian Christians when he stated his (and his missionary associates') deep sense of debt to God for His having given them that fruit which their work in Thessalonica had borne. "But we are obligated (that is, we owe a debt to God) to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord."

The power of God had been directly exercised in the conversion of these Thessalonian Christians. Paul, Silas, and Timothy had preached the Gospel, but the Holy Spirit of God had set these men and women of the church apart, and He had called them to the salvation that they now enjoyed. Notice carefully that it was the Spirit of God who *called* these saved ones to their position in Christ. God's power was necessary to set apart these brethren. But it was *not* God's power that caused the unsaved of Verses 11 and 12 to be lost! It was their own unbelief! Paul puts the entire responsibility for the lost condition of these unsaved ones of the tribulation period on themselves!

Therefore, the Apostle Paul writes that he and his missionary companions feel that they are indebted to God to give thanks *alway* (that is, *continually*) for those who are the fruit of their evangelism there in Thessalonica. They had been privileged to carry the Word of the Gospel to that city, and that Word had been received by those to whom this letter was addressed. The Gospel had fallen into the "good ground" of the prepared soil of the hearts of these Thessalonians; the

Word had taken root; and life had sprung forth. But the apostle, and those who traveled with him, realized that it was not their own efforts that had led to the salvation of these who were the fruit of their evangelism. It was God who gave the increase. These missionaries confirmed that they actually owed a debt of thanks to God for giving them those spiritual children from that great trading center of Thessalonica: "*But we are bound to give thanks always to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, . . .*" (v. 13).

Paul realized that God had chosen that the Word of the Gospel is to be preached by man, and that it is the preaching of the Word that results in the effectual call to salvation. But he realized also that God was there in the Person of the Holy Spirit to prepare the hearts of those who heard the Word, and to make it possible for the hearers of the Word to have the faith to respond. Both the "Water" and the "Spirit" must be present in order to call man *from* his path of sin and rebellion to God in repentance and faith.

These are the two parents of the spiritual birth. The water is symbolic of the Word of God. The Word must be preached in the power of the Holy Spirit by a human messenger of God in order for it to be effectual in the heart. However, the Spirit of God must be there in the heart to prepare the soil—to give that faith necessary for response to the spoken Word. Salvation is the work of God, yet this work is accomplished through the spoken Word as it is preached.

Paul recognized that it was the power of God that had brought about the effectual salvation of these Thessalonian Christians. He also recognized that it was himself and his companions in the ministry whom God had chosen to carry the Word to these "newly-reborn ones." He was thankful to God for the great privilege granted him—to preach the Word as it was used in the salvation of these "brethren beloved of the Lord."

Paul recognized the reality of the eternal life that had been imparted to those to whom this letter was originally sent

when he addressed them as "brethren beloved of the Lord." These Thessalonian Christians *were* Paul's brethren, not through physical birth, but through spiritual birth! They had all been born of the same spiritual parents, and therefore they were "brethren" in the family of God. Paul, his missionary companions, and all those faithful believers of Thessalonica, had been born into the family of God by the power of God through their faith in God. This is true of all Christians down through the centuries of this Age of Grace.

The Apostle John tells us of this "way" of the new birth in Verses 12 and 13 of the first chapter of his Gospel. "But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the *children* of God, even to them that believe on his name: Which were born, not of the blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, *but of God.*" Those Thessalonian Christians had received Him in faith, and therefore, they had become the children of God through the power of God. Because of this, Paul recognized them as members of the family of God, a family to which he also belonged. They were his brothers and sisters in that spiritual family. Therefore, they were his "brethren." Those who are the children of God through the new birth *are* greatly beloved of God. Paul recognized *both* his relationship to these Thessalonian Christians *and* their relationship to God as he addresses them as "brethren beloved of the Lord."

God's Foreknowledge

After this address of affection, Paul continued on, speaking of a relationship to God of these children *of* God that is outside of time. It is a relationship that extended into eternity past, and that our finite minds (which are oriented to a time universe) have difficulty understanding. Nevertheless, this relationship does exist, and it is confirmed in Scripture—not only in these verses from II Thessalonians 2, but also in many other passages. It is the relationship of the doctrine of election, the doctrine that assures us that God foreknew (before the creation of the universe) those who were His from among the children of men.

This doctrine has been a stumbling block for many, because (to man's logic) the idea that God "pre-elected" those who were to be His children, and that He "predestinated" His elect to become His sons and heirs, also has with it a necessary complementary doctrine that God "pre-elected" other members of the human race to be lost—and that He "predestined" these to eternal judgment in the Lake of Fire.

The doctrine of God's pre-election of those who were to be His own through the shed blood of the Lord Jesus Christ *is* a scriptural doctrine, and it cannot be ignored. However, the doctrine that God "predestined" certain individuals to eternal condemnation is *not* a scriptural doctrine. On God's plane, the idea of precondemnation is *not* a necessary companion truth to the idea of pre-election. Both the concept of election, and the concept of man's free choice to accept or reject the salvation offered through the shed blood of Jesus Christ, *are* compatible on God's plane, even though man's finite mind has difficulty with this great truth!

Those who come to know the Lord Jesus Christ as their personal Saviour, and who have therefore been regenerated to eternal life, *are* among the elect of God. The elect *of* God were known *to* God, and chosen *of* God, before the creation of the universe! The saved of the earth have had this eternal relationship with God "from the beginning."

The Apostle Paul says that he has an actual obligation (just like a legal debt) to give thanks to God continually, ". . . because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth: Whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ" (vv. 13, 14). In these words, Paul describes the heavenly aspects of the actual mechanics of salvation. The process by which God imparts eternal life to those who are saved is told out by this passage of Scripture: "God hath from the beginning *chosen* you to salvation."

God is sovereign, and God had (from the beginning of the creation) chosen those saved ones at Thessalonica for that

salvation which they were then enjoying. This applies to all Christians down through this age. Those who come to know the Lord Jesus Christ through faith in Him as their personal Saviour can be assured that they *were* chosen of God in eternity past. They *are* of the elect!

It should be noted that this statement of election immediately follows the concluding statement of Paul's great prophetic discourse concerning the rapture of the Church and the revelation of the "man of sin." In the concluding statement (found in II Thessalonians 2:11, 12) Paul spoke of those who were the lost ones of the tribulation period. He said, "And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe *the lie*. That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness." Then (in Verse 13) the apostle contrasts the salvation of those to whom he is writing with the eternal damnation of those of whom he has just spoken. He says, "*BUT we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth.*"

So, for the lost, Paul says that they are lost, "because they *believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.*" But, for the saved, Paul says that they are saved, "because God hath *from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth.*" Notice the contrast. Those who are lost are lost because they rejected the Gospel, so that they might continue in unrighteousness. Nothing whatsoever is said about God having chosen from the beginning that they should be lost. These lost ones *have not been elected to reprobation!* But those who are saved *have been elected to salvation!* This is a contrast that is found in *all* scriptural passages that in any way deal with the doctrine of election!

The companion conclusion that God must have pre-elected all unsaved humanity to condemnation *is not scriptural!* When one is lost, he is lost because *he would not repent of his sins and turn to the Lord Jesus Christ to receive Him as*

personal Saviour! But when one is saved, he is saved "because God hath from the beginning chosen him to salvation" through the means of "sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth." Salvation is entirely a work of God, and without the sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit of God and His effectual call to the lost sinner, one cannot be saved. Therefore, *election is necessary* for the salvation of any member of the human race! "He has chosen us—we have not chosen him." Yet the Scripture says, "*Whosoever will may come.*" The Scripture also says, "God is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance."

Is there a contradiction in terms in the Scriptures? No, of course there is not. The concepts of election, and of man's freedom of choice, *are not incompatible on God's plane!* The concept of pre-election by the sovereignty of God, and the concept of man's free will to accept or to reject the Gospel are two sides of the same coin, and both concepts are compatible in God's sphere of thought. Man's mind is finite, and he cannot think the high thoughts of God. Man cannot save himself—man cannot even exercise saving faith—except that God give him that faith. But, on the other hand, those who are lost are not lost because God has refused to save them. They are lost because "they would not believe the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness."

How are we to resolve this seeming contradiction in the scriptural revelation of the mechanics of God's salvation? The human mind is not capable of totally comprehending it. However, we do have a passage of Scripture which sheds some light on God's sovereign election of the saints, and it *does* serve to give us a feeble understanding of something that is beyond the comprehension of our finite minds. The passage is found in I Peter 1:1, 2.

Peter opens his first epistle with the words, "Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the *exiles* scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, *Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father*, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of

the blood of Jesus Christ." Peter here speaks of all the saved as being the "elect of God," and he says that their salvation came *through* election *by* the mechanics of the *setting apart* (*sanctification*) of the Holy Spirit of God, and the work of the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ (their faith in the work of the Cross). However, Peter says a little more about God's election than does Paul in our II Thessalonian passage. He says that the saved ones are elect "*according to the foreknowledge of God.*"

God is outside of time. In fact, God created time as one of the three entities that bound the created Triune universe. "In the beginning" is the moment that time came into existence. Before the creation of time, God had knowledge of all things *in* time. God knew every moment of every life of every man and woman who were ever to be born into the race of Adam at the time of the beginning. He knew the characteristics of the hearts of all individuals of the human race. Those hearts that He foresaw to be of a quality that would be softened by His Word, He chose for eternal life.

To those hearts, in the fullness of time, He applies the mechanics of salvation. Not one of those He has chosen will be lost. But, to those hearts that He foresaw would never be turned to Him; those hearts that would be hardened by the Word, He allows to go their own way to destruction. He did not *elect* them to eternal condemnation; He simply let them go the way that the quality of the heart directed. We who are saved are "*elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father.*" But those who go out of this life without knowing the Lord Jesus Christ as their personal Saviour are lost because they "*believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.*"

The Mechanics of Salvation

What are the mechanics of salvation that are applied to those who are the "elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father"? The Apostle Paul provides us with an outline. We are "*chosen to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth: Whereunto he called 'us' by*

our gospel to the *obtaining of the glory* of our Lord Jesus Christ." We are *sanctified, we believe, He calls, and we obtain glory!*

The "elect" have been chosen of God to salvation in eternity past. Then (in the process of time) God brought about their salvation according to the mechanics that He himself had preordained. These mechanics involve the "sanctification" of the Spirit, the "belief" of the truth, the "calling" by the Gospel, and the "imputing" of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. Notice that the very first process that the apostle brings to our attention is the "sanctification of the Spirit." Paul would have us to understand that "sanctification" is the very first of the divine works that take place in the heart of the one whom God has chosen to salvation.

This word appears at the very head of the list of processes that are involved in the salvation of the individual—not only here, but in every passage of Scripture where the Apostle Paul writes on the subject. Although this is contrary to the theology of many today who teach that "sanctification" of the Spirit comes *subsequent* to salvation and as a second work of God's grace, nevertheless, this *is* the inspired theology of the Apostle Paul! Those who are God's elect are first *sanctified*, and then they are drawn to God by belief in the truth, and by the calling of the Spirit!

"Sanctification" simply means "setting apart." When one is "sanctified of the Spirit," then that one (through an act of God the Holy Spirit) is "set apart" for the purposes and workings of God. As the process of salvation begins in the life of one of God's elect, he is first "set apart" by a divine act of God himself. He is "set apart" from that which is of the world, the flesh, and the devil; and he is prepared for the receiving of that saving faith, which also is a gift of God's grace. The believing one is positionally sanctified, even before he is justified (declared innocent in the courts of Heaven), and even before he is regenerated (given eternal spiritual life as a part of the new creation in Christ).

It is true that the Scripture also speaks of "practical sanctification," which is a continuing process in the lives of all spiritually-reborn believers. Those who are the Lord's own are expected to grow progressively toward a walk in this life that is "set apart" from ("sanctified" from) the sin and evil of the earth. *That* is a continuing process in the life of the maturing Christian, and it is a process that is never completed in this life. Practical sanctification also comes through God's grace, but it is *not* a second work of grace! Scripture is totally devoid of any teaching that relates to "sanctification" of *any classification* as a second work of grace! Such a concept is born in the mind of man, not in the mind of God!

Paul says that Christians are chosen of God "for salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the Truth: Whereunto he (God) called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ." This is what had taken place in the life of those individual Thessalonian Christians, and it is what has taken place in the life of every true Christian since that time. Through a direct act of the Holy Spirit of God, they were (and we are) set apart for God's usage. When that spiritual work is accomplished, we are given power for belief in "the Truth."

"The Truth" is here used by Paul to contrast with "the Lie" that he spoke of in Verse 11. "The Truth" is the Lord himself, who is *all* truth. The Truth is both the living and the written Word of God. Christians are given power to believe by that act of God which *is* sanctification of the Spirit. Faith in the One who is "the Way, the *Truth*, and the Life," is made possible as a gift of God.

Then God calls us by the Gospel. He, in His sovereignty, has chosen that the Gospel is to be proclaimed through the voices of called men of God as they preach the Word. Paul and his companions had been chosen to preach the Gospel to these Thessalonian converts. That is why he says, "Whereunto he called you by *our* gospel."

“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.” With the call of the Gospel gone out, those who were the sanctified ones gladly received it. They were gloriously saved. They are slated for “the attaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.” The final fulfillment of this last part of salvation awaits the time of the personal Presence of the Lord. But it is a *certainty* for those who are His!

7.

The Benediction

“Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or by our epistle. Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father, which hath loved us, and hath given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace, Comfort your hearts, and stablish you in every good word and work” (II Thess. 2:15-17).

These words close the second chapter of the Apostle Paul's Second Epistle to the Thessalonians. Of course, as Paul originally wrote the letter, there were no chapter divisions. Chapter 2 extended on into Chapter 3, and the letter continued to Paul's closing words of the eighteenth verse of Chapter 3. However, there does seem to be a distinct break in thought between the closing verses of Chapter 2 and the opening verses of Chapter 3. Verses 16 and 17 of Chapter 2 appear to contain what Paul had originally intended to be the close of this letter. But the Holy Spirit of God caused the apostle to continue writing this letter until he had completed all of those practical words of instruction for the Christian life which are contained in II Thessalonians 3. Chapter 3 of this letter may be thought of as a divinely-inspired “postscript” to a most excellent doctrinal letter.

As the apostle closed the doctrinal section of the epistle, he directed words of exhortation to those spiritually-young Christians who were undergoing intense persecution in

Thessalonica. He had earlier pointed out to them that they should think it an honor that they were considered worthy to suffer for the Lord's sake. The main theme of the letter had been the thought that Christians *will* suffer during this age of the Lord's rejection, but that they will be rewarded at the time of His appearing in personal presence.

The Lord will appear to take His Church out of the earth before that time of greatest suffering and trial comes upon the earth at the end of the age. Satan will, at that time, gain control over the earth during those opening seven years of the Day of the Lord; he will reveal his "antichrist," the "man of sin," the "son of perdition," whenever the restraining power of the Holy Spirit of God is removed at the time of the rapture of the Church. For those seven years, that Satan-indwelt individual will rule over the earth. But, at the time of the Lord's return in power and glory at the end of the tribulation period, there will be just recompense for those "who received not the Love of the Truth, that they might be saved." These wicked ones of the earth (who are the "antitypes" of those persecutors of the Thessalonian Christians of Paul's day) are to be judged for their own sins. They are to spend eternity in that "lake of fire" that the Lord has prepared "for the devil and his angels."

Just before his closing words, Paul had once again expressed his confidence in the reality of the salvation of these Christians who were the fruit of his evangelistic ministry. However, Paul knew that it was not himself who had produced this fruit, but rather it was God working through the Gospel that produced the fruit. The extent of God's work in their lives is emphasized as Paul revealed the mechanics of the miracle of the new birth in Verses 13 and 14.

Stand Fast

Now (in Verse 15), Paul writes, "*Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or by our epistle.*" Paul says, "Brethren, because of that so-great-salvation that has come to you by the miraculous working of God, and because of your sure reward in the

presence of our Lord Jesus Christ, stand fast in the pure Word of God. Hold on to that which has been given to you. Do not depart from the truth which has been revealed once and for all to you. Do not be swayed by false teachers. Continue on in the truth. Whether your revelation came by word (that is, by the oral teaching of Paul, Silas and Timothy when they were personally present with the Thessalonian Christians), or by our epistle (that is by the written teaching of these two inspired epistles which Paul had sent to them), you are to stand fast in it." These children of God were not to be moved by every wind of false doctrine that came their way.

Those spiritually-young Christians had already been assaulted by every means of false teaching that were available to Satan, as he sought to confuse them, and thus to neutralize their testimony. In Verse 2, Paul had warned these children of God that they were "not to be soon shaken in mind, or to be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us." Satan had already sent lying spirits to certain members of the assembly to give them false revelations, seemingly direct from God. He had sent false teachers to teach error by the spoken word. Finally, he had caused a forged epistle, supposedly from Paul and his evangelistic associates, to be delivered into the hands of this assembly. All of this false revelation was intended to confuse, and thus to neutralize. The tactics of the enemy had met with a degree of success.

But now Paul says, "Stand fast. Do not be moved or swayed in your testimony, or in your walk, by any whisp of false doctrine that comes to you. You have had the doctrines of the faith once and for all delivered to you. Hold the traditions (the doctrines) which ye have been taught. Do not apostasize from these doctrines as the enemy works to bring about your confusion. God's Word does not change. The doctrines of the faith are now yours. Some of our teaching was done by word (that is, by oral teaching in your personal presence). Some has been done by inspired epistle. You are to take the total of all the doctrines that has come by these two methods of communication and stand solid in them."

These are exhortations for all Christians down through the age. Satan has continued to assault God's people with strange new doctrines that have come by spiritual revelation (revelation by lying spirits), word of mouth by false teachers, and by written epistles that have been falsely accredited to the apostles. Cults have sprung up, and the teachings of these cults involve "damnable heresies"—heresies that, if believed, could not possibly permit the salvation of those who believed them! We are living in a day of apostasy, where (under the titles of "modernism" and "ecumenicism") the great truths of the faith are being rapidly eroded away. Paul's exhortation is, "Stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught."

Paul's Prayer

Paul then closes this main body of his letter with the words, "*Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father, which hath loved us, and hath given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace, Comfort your hearts, and stablish you in every good word and work.*" Paul's prayer here is for all Christians down through this age. Both God the Son and God the Father are with us, guiding our paths, and giving us comfort in every circumstance. This guidance and comfort comes, not because of our merit, but through God's grace. He is ever with us to comfort us, and to guide us to that certain destination.

The End