

The Man of Sin

A Study of 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12

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The young church in Thessalonica was only a few weeks old when the Apostle Paul was forced to leave the city as a result of persecution. The account of the founding of the church is given in Acts 17 where we read that “there was a synagogue of the Jews, and Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three Sabbath days reasoned with them out of the Scriptures, opening and alleging that Christ must needs have suffered and risen again from the dead and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ” (Acts 17:1-3).

It is not surprising, in view of the short time that he spent there, that some aspects of his teaching began to be misunderstood. He had to deal with a misapprehension about the nature of the resurrection at the coming of Christ in the fourth chapter of the first letter. Some of the brethren were unclear about the future of those who had died in Christ and did not know whether they would be in the first resurrection or not.

This was just a mistaken view of the brethren which Paul cleared up. There is no suggestion here that the mistake was the result of false teaching but that is certainly not the case with the second major misunderstanding which had arisen. It again concerned the coming of Christ and in particular the timing of it. Paul deals with this in the second chapter of 2 Thessalonians, and in correcting the false teaching he provides us with some interesting and important lessons about the events which lead up to the coming of Christ.

Deceit in Thessalonica

The two letters to the Thessalonians and the letter to the Galatians were probably the earliest of Paul’s letters, yet both show that there was a determined group of teachers attempting to lead the brethren astray.

Paul mentions three ways in which they were operating in Thessalonica. The first is by “spirit,” probably indicating that someone was claiming to speak an inspired utterance through the spirit. Spirit is used in this sense also in 1 John 4:1-3 for a teaching which claims to be inspired, and John warns his readers to test them, for many false prophets have gone out into the world. The second way is by “word,” possibly by giving what they claimed was a verbal quotation by

Paul. The third way is “by letter as from us” and almost certainly means there was a forged letter circulating in Paul’s name. Some scholars have suggested that it might be simply a misunderstanding of Paul’s first letter, particularly 5:1-11, but it seems more likely that it does refer to a forged letter, and might explain Paul’s reference to his personal signature in 2 Thessalonians 3:17. There are many such documents still existing today in collections of apocryphal literature, books and letters which purport to be by some biblical personality.

In order to determine what exactly was being taught we quote the first three verses of 2 Thessalonians 2:

Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to him, we ask you not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of Christ had come. Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition (NKJV).

The deception, then, concerned the coming of Christ, our gathering together unto him, and the day of Christ. We must understand these terms if we are to comprehend the nature of the falsehood and the truth which Paul expounds later in the chapter.

The word translated “coming” is the Greek word *parousia*, the most common word used in the New Testament for the coming of Christ. According to the *NIV Dictionary of New Testament Words* this word means presence and arrival.¹ It is used of the arrival of Stephanas (1 Cor. 16:17) and Titus (2 Cor. 7:6-7) and of Paul’s coming to Philippi (Phil. 1:26; 2:12) but its main use is in connection with the coming of Christ. Some used to believe that this word indicates a secret coming of Christ but the discoveries of scholars over the last 150 years have added vivid meaning to this term as used of Christ. Alexander Reese has this to say:

It is one of the great contributions of modern scholarship that we now understand what the early Christians felt when they read in Paul’s epistle of the Parousia of the Lord Jesus Christ. Scholars and archaeologists have been digging in the rubbish heaps of Egypt and found this word used in scores of documents in everyday life for the *arrival* of kings and rulers, or the visit following.²

He goes on to quote the great scholar Adolph Deissmann who says, “From the Ptolemaic period down into the 2nd century AD, we are able to trace the word

¹ *NIV Dictionary of New Testament Words*, 979.

² Alexander Reese, *The Approaching Advent of Christ*, London, Edinburgh: Marshall, Morgan, and Scott, Ltd., 1932, 143.

in the East as *a technical expression for the arrival or the visit of the king or the emperor.*³

The gathering together to Christ occurs at the parousia. Paul had already explained this in the fourth chapter of the first letter where the word parousia occurs in the context of the resurrection and the catching away of believers to meet the Lord in the air. 1 Thessalonians 2:19 has the same thought: “For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Is it not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming [*parousia*]?”

The day of Christ is simply the day of the Lord mentioned throughout the Old Testament as the time when God intervenes in the affairs of men to pour out His wrath on the wicked and to rescue His people. Modern translations in fact read “day of the Lord” in 2 Thessalonians instead of “day of Christ” as in the KJV and NKJV.

The Parousia: Past or Future?

We now need to ask, what exactly did the Thessalonians think? There seem to be only two possibilities. The first one, very popular in modern Christianity, is that the believers thought that the parousia had already taken place and therefore that they had missed out on the resurrection and gathering to him. If true, this would certainly be enough to upset any believer and give rise to the agitation which they evidently felt. Many dispensationalist commentators say that this is the meaning of the passage and claim to find in it evidence for the pre-tribulation rapture. Accompanying this view is a distinction between the coming of Christ for his people and the day of the Lord. F.F. Bruce comments that:

it is difficult to suppose that the “day of the Lord” in this section belongs to a different time from that in view in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, as is held by the Darbyite school of dispensationalism. It is remarkable, nevertheless, that (according to Kelly, *Rapture*, 5-8) J.N. Darby recorded that it was 2 Thessalonians 2:1, 2 which, about 1830, “made me understand the rapture of the saints before — perhaps a considerable time before — the day of the Lord.”⁴

Biederwolf quotes Campbell Morgan who claimed that this distinction was made “very distinct” between the last verse of the fourth chapter and the first verse of the fifth chapter of 1 Thessalonians. Biederwolf remarks that “this noted expositor’s vision must be exceedingly keen to gather with such emphatic assurance this knowledge from the passage in question.”⁵

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Frederick Fyvie Bruce, *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, Waco, TX: Word Books, 1982, 163.

⁵ William E. Biederwolf, *The Second Coming Bible Commentary*, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 484.

The second view is that the Thessalonians were somehow persuaded that they were already in the day of the Lord and that, therefore, the return of Christ and the resurrection of the dead were almost upon them.

This too would produce agitation, but it would be of a very different kind. What can we deduce from the text to prove this? Firstly, if the believers had thought the return of Christ had already happened, then all Paul had to do was to say that it hadn't happened. He himself had not been taken away to be with Christ and he would no doubt have pointed to the fact that all of the other Christians were still around. Secondly, he introduced an argument from prophecy and urged them to recall what he had taught. The fact that he gave a distinct order of events leading up to the parousia mentioned again in verse 8 proves that the problem in Thessalonica involved the belief that Christ was about to appear.

The Man of Sin

Three related events must take place before the day of the Lord and the coming of Christ can occur. First is the "falling away" or apostasy. The Greek word is used only one other time in the New Testament in Acts 21:21 but it appears some 40 times in the LXX, the Greek version of the Old Testament, where it has the meaning of a rebellion in the sphere of religion or politics. The word here is preceded by the definite article and hence means the well-known apostasy.

Next comes the revelation of the man of sin. Biederwolf explains the meaning of this phrase as follows: "The man of sin means the one who wholly belongs to sin, in whom sin predominates, in whom sin is the principal matter, in whom sin is personified as righteousness is in Christ."⁶ He will be the final embodiment of all the evil and rebellion against God which has taken place in the world since the days of Cain, the first rebel. So it is fitting that he should be described as the son of perdition, a term that means utter destruction. Interestingly, this term is only applied to one other person in the Bible, Judas Iscariot in John 17:12. This does not mean that the man of sin is Judas Iscariot resurrected as some have taught. Judas and the man of sin are the only two individual men whose fate is prophesied in the Scriptures and this is probably the reason why this term refers to both.

The man of sin "opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshipped, so that he sits as God in the Temple of God showing himself that he is God" (v. 4). History is full of examples of men who have been proclaimed as gods or who have proclaimed themselves as gods demanding worship. Roman emperors were routinely promoted to the divine pantheon after they died, but there does not seem to be a single case of anyone claiming to be superior to every other object of worship. The emperors and kings were deified amongst the gods and often claimed to be descendants of deities. But this man

⁶ *Ibid.*, 487.

rejects all other deities and demands worship as the supreme being. This blasphemous claim means that the Pope cannot be the man of sin, for he directs worship to the Trinity, the Virgin Mary and a whole host of “saints” who are really only minor deities.

To solidify his claim to be the supreme god he takes his seat in the Temple. Some, who believe that the Pope is the man of sin, also believe that the temple referred to here is the church, which is described as the temple of God. But others of this school reject this out of hand, recognizing the impossibility of such a figure sitting amongst the community of believers of whom Christ said, “They will by no means follow a stranger, but will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers” (John 10:5). Instead of recognizing that the Temple is the Temple of God in Jerusalem, however, they propose that the Temple here is St. Peters in Rome!⁷

The Restraining of the Man of Sin

Paul now reminds the Thessalonians that he had discussed all of this with them during his ministry there so they really should not have been in any doubt about these things. He reminds them that they know what and who is holding back the coming of the man of sin so that he should be revealed at the proper time. There can be little doubt that this passage about the restrainer is the most difficult to interpret in the chapter. Commentators can shed little light on it and are merely content to repeat the views of the early fathers that the restrainer is the Roman Empire, or similarly that it refers generally to human government holding back the tide of lawlessness which will sweep the man of sin to power.

For the present we notice that Paul teaches that “the mystery of iniquity is already working.” This strongly indicates that there was a movement in his time which he recognized would culminate in the final apostasy and revelation of the man of sin. A mystery is something previously hidden but now revealed in the gospel but only to believers. This is made clear in Matthew 13:11-17. Someone, and something, is preventing the man of sin until the proper time comes. “That which restrains” in verse 6 is in the neuter gender, but “he who now restrains” in verse 7 is masculine. This indicates a person restraining the man of sin by the use of something which Paul does not identify.

Zechariah’s vision of the woman in the ephah provides the Old Testament background for this passage (Zech. 5:5-11). The prophet is shown a vision of a woman hidden inside an ephah, which is a large container for storing dry goods. The angel thrusts the woman into the basket, declaring “This is wickedness.” She remains there hidden from view until the time that a house is built for her in Shinar, that is Babylon. This remarkable passage contains a prediction that Babylon would be rebuilt at some time and that it would be characterized in a

⁷ Ron Abel, *The Man of Sin*, Christadelphian Scripture Study Service, 64.

two-fold way, the wicked woman and the basket, which has been widely regarded as a symbol for commercialism.

We see both of these systems together in the book of Revelation. The woman, no longer hidden, rides the seven-headed beast in chapter 17 while the commercial aspect of Babylon appears in chapter 18. The entire godless system is the most concentrated outbreak of wickedness in the history of mankind and, as we will observe later, is intimately associated with the man of sin.

God is now restraining the manifestation of the end-time Babylonian system. The woman exists, but is not generally recognized by any but a few students of Scripture. She is represented now by apostate Christianity, which embodies ancient Babylonian religious practices, ceremonies and priesthood, and which is headed by the Pope. The entire system will be moved back to its place of origin in the land of Shinar at the end of the age.

The end of the man of sin will be sudden and dramatic. The Lord Jesus himself will “consume him with the breath of his mouth and destroy him with the brightness of his coming” (v. 8).

Satanic Power

The spiritual nature of the man of sin’s kingdom is seen in verses 9-12. The word “coming” at the beginning of verse 9 is “parousia,” which we saw earlier was used in the ancient world of kings and emperors. He will be inspired directly by Satan the devil and his parousia will be accompanied with “power, signs and lying wonders.” We would be wrong to believe that lying wonders means that these are false miracles performed by some conjuring tricks. Just as the magicians in Egypt duplicated the miracles performed by Moses, so too will the man of sin. Miracles are never evidence by themselves that the person performing them is from God. Christ mentions a group a people who will come before him claiming to have done mighty works including the casting out of demons, but he will say to them, “I never knew you; depart from me, you that work iniquity” (Matt. 7:23).

The Man of Sin in Daniel

Practically all Bible students recognize that Paul has derived all that he says about the man of sin from the Old Testament, in particular the prophet Daniel. But there is much more information given there about this man under different names. All harmonizes with the picture given here by Paul and greatly expands our knowledge about him, where he comes from, his relation to the Jews, his relation to the Temple of God, his claims to deity, and his final destruction. We will now take a brief overview of the main passages about him.

We turn first to the prophet Daniel. The seventh chapter of his book contains a vision of four beasts rising out of the earth. None of these beasts is identified and most students of Scripture link the beasts with the four metallic portions of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream image in chapter 2. It is clear from Daniel’s vision that

it is the fourth beast which is of particular interest. It is a terrible beast which will devour and destroy with its iron teeth. It has ten horns, identified in verse 24 as ten kings. Another horn arises among these ten and assumes control over them.

Everything that is said about this little horn shows that he is the man of sin in 2 Thessalonians. He speaks pompous words against the Most High, persecutes the saints of the Most High and thinks to change times and laws. We are not told what these changes are but we are told that the saints are given into his hand for a time, times and half a time. Most students of prophecy are agreed that a "time" is simply a "year" and that the word "times" should be taken in its dual sense of "two times," making the whole expression add up to three and a half years. The Septuagint renders the expression "seven times" in chapter 4 of Daniel as "seven years" and Josephus does the same. The same power is described in Revelation 13 where the period of his rule is said to be 42 months, three and a half years.

It is important to note the point at which this period ends and what brings it to a close. Daniel asks for an explanation of the vision concerning the fourth beast in verses 15 to 22. The reply follows exactly the order of his question. A comparison of verse 22 with verse 25 shows that the three and a half years during which the man of sin persecutes the saints terminates with the coming of the Ancient of Days and the handing over of the Kingdom to the saints. All are agreed that this refers to the coming of Christ. It is clear therefore that this little horn is the one Paul describes as the man of sin.

Chapter 8 of Daniel also speaks about a little horn who "exalts himself as high as the Prince of the Host" (v. 11). Is this the same person in view or is it someone different? Most commentaries take this to be a prediction of Antiochus Epiphanes and what he did to the Temple of God in 167 BC. But this vision belongs to the end of the age: "The vision belongs to the time of the end" (v. 17). "I will make you know what shall be in the latter time of the indignation; for at the time appointed the end shall be" (v. 19). "And in the latter time of their kingdom when the transgressors are come to the full..." (v. 23). "Shut up the vision, for it belongs to many days to come" (v. 26).

Both of these horns exist at the end of the age. Both speak blasphemies against the God of Israel. Both overthrow divine laws and the career of both of them is terminated by the arrival of the Kingdom of God.

Chapter 7 had predicted that he would change "times and laws." Daniel 8 makes it clear what laws are meant for here we discover for the first time his involvement with the Temple. He removes the daily sacrifice and casts down the place of the sanctuary, using his army to do so (v. 12). The resulting desolation lasts for a period of 2300 evenings and mornings (v. 14) after which the sanctuary would be cleansed.

We noted that the beasts in Daniel 7 were not identified by Daniel, but in chapter 8 we find the geographical origin of the little horn. He comes from the territory of the Greek empire and in particular the Syrian or Mesopotamian division centered in Babylonia after the death of Alexander. This is made clear in

verse 9 where it is said that the little horn grew towards the south, the east and the Glorious Land (i.e. Israel).

We note that all of Paul's descriptions of the man of sin are clearly present or suggested in this chapter. His blasphemous claims to deity are suggested in verses 10-11: "And it grew up to the host of heaven;... He even exalted himself as high as the Prince of the host."

The stopping of the daily sacrifices in the Temple is referred to in verses 11-12: "He even exalted himself as high as the Prince of the host; and by him the daily sacrifices were taken away, and the place of his sanctuary was cast down. Because of transgression, an army was given over to the horn to oppose the daily sacrifices." There are several other references to this army further on in Daniel and in the New Testament which we will notice later. No mention is made yet of the little horn actually entering the Temple, but we will find this in other Scriptures.

There is a strong hint in verse 24 of the Satanic power mentioned by Paul: "His power shall be mighty, but not by his own power."

The little horn of chapter 7 reigns for three and a half short years. Likewise there is a short period mentioned in chapter 8 during which the Temple will lie desolate and the sacrifices cease. This is said to be 2300 days. If we understand these as literal days then a period of just under seven years is in view. There is clearly a difference between these two chapters and it does not seem possible to explain it with our present state of knowledge, even if we follow the GNB and render it 1150 days. The point is that it is a short period.

His end is prophesied in verse 25: "He shall even rise against the Prince of princes but he shall be broken without hand." The Prince of princes is none other than the Messiah, Jesus. The horn will actually fight against him when he appears, an event which is mentioned in many other passages of the Bible. He will be utterly defeated, "broken without hand" (v. 25). This recalls Daniel 2:45 where the stone cut out of the mountain "without hands" refers also to Christ destroying the great image, of which the little horn is the last representative.

We now come to the seventy weeks prophecy in chapter 9. We cannot here give a detailed exposition of it. We simply want to draw attention to one of the principal figures mentioned and to the seventieth week itself. We shall find here again the main features of the little horn and Paul's man of sin together with some added details about what happens to the Temple.

Most Bible students, whatever their stance on prophecy, agree that the "weeks" of the seventy weeks prophecy are weeks of years and that therefore the prophecy spans a period of 490 years. The Hebrew word translated week is "shabua" meaning a seven, which could be a period of days, weeks or years. The nature of the prophecy requires the period to be in years. Thus far, there is not much disagreement. Most of the differences of opinion between the various prophetic schools center on the seventieth week itself.

We believe the seventieth week is entirely future. The abomination of desolation, the central event of the week, is placed in the future by the Lord Jesus in the Olivet prophecy and other details of that period are mentioned in other contexts as belonging to the end of the age. There are several predictions made in verse 24 of the Jewish people, which would occur at the end of this prophecy, and these have never taken place. Individual Jews have indeed entered into the blessings described here, but it is the nation as a whole which is in view.

The “prince who is to come” (v. 26) is the same person as the little horn in chapters 7 and 8. Here he makes a covenant with many for one week, that is, the last seven years of the prophecy, but halfway through this period he brings an end to the sacrifices and offerings in the Temple. The little horn of chapter 8 also brings an end to sacrifice and offering as we have seen. The fact that he does this after three and a half years strongly suggests that the nature of the covenant which he makes with the many concerns the Temple worship and that it permits the reinstatement or possibly the continuance of the sacrificial system. Verse 27 mentions the abomination of desolation being placed on a wing of the Temple. The word “abomination” suggests something disgusting and which has reference to idolatry. It would then indicate an idol of some kind. The presence of such an idol in the Temple would render it completely unfit for worship until such time as it could be ritually cleansed.

A summary of the three passages we have looked at gives us the following facts: A ruler will arise out of the Mesopotamian division of the Greek empire in the latter days. He will blaspheme the God of Israel by placing himself on His level while at the same time he will persecute the people of God and bring the sacrifices and offerings to an end in the Temple. His armies will also place the abomination of desolation on a wing of the Temple which will remain desolated until the consummation. This takes place during a period of three and a half years and his career is terminated by Christ as he returns to establish the Kingdom of God.

Chapter 11 of Daniel gives us the same information but with much added detail. The main figure in view is the king of the North. Historically this corresponds to the Seleucids who ruled the Mesopotamian division of Alexander’s empire after his death. It thus ties in with what we learned in chapter 8 about the geographical location from which the little horn arises. Most students of prophecy do see a future fulfillment in this chapter but they usually reckon it from verse 36. There is, however, a statement in 12:11 which compels us to believe that the future portion of this chapter extends at least from verse 31 to the end: “From the time that the daily sacrifice is taken away, and the abomination of desolation is set up, there shall be 1290 days.” The setting up of the abomination and the removal of the sacrifices is mentioned in 11:31. This is the same event recorded in chapters 8 and 9 and the period covered by the prophecy is exactly the same — three and a half years.

The placing of the abomination of desolation and the removal of the sacrifices is clearly a key event of this time and triggers the events of the rest of the chapter. We note again the detail that it is the armies of the king who shall do this. Verse 30 tells us that some Jews will at that time forsake the holy covenant. Again in verse 32, “those who do wickedly against the covenant he shall corrupt with flattery.” This seems to be the apostasy to which Paul refers in 2 Thessalonians.

It is after the placing of the abomination that his blasphemous claims to deity are finally revealed in language which the Apostle Paul draws on heavily. “Then the king shall do according to his own will; he shall exalt and magnify himself above every god; shall speak blasphemies against the God of gods and shall prosper till the wrath has been accomplished; for what has been determined shall be done. He shall regard neither the God of his fathers nor the desire of women, nor regard any god, for he shall magnify himself above them all” (vv. 36-37).

The Man of Sin in Isaiah

We have seen in Daniel that the man of sin is connected with the Mesopotamian division of the Greek empire in the last days. This area comprises the ancient kingdoms of Assyria and Babylon. Today this area is the nation of Iraq. The city of Babylon will be at the center of this kingdom. It is common knowledge that Saddam Hussein began to rebuild Babylon sometime in the 1980s in order to glorify himself as the supposed successor to Nebuchadnezzar and that substantial portions of it have already been completed. What is not so well known to the public is that many Bible students have been expecting and predicting this rebuilding since at least the late nineteenth century. Their reasons for believing in the rebuilding of Babylon may be stated briefly:

1. A number of chapters in the Bible predict the destruction of Babylon during the day of the Lord, the period when He intervenes in earth’s history to establish the Kingdom: Isaiah 13 and 14 and Jeremiah 50 and 51.
2. The destruction of Babylon will be sudden and catastrophic as was the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. Ancient Babylon was never destroyed in this way but gradually ceased to be inhabited. It was still inhabited in the days of the Apostles as the Apostle Peter was evidently there during his ministry (1 Pet. 5:13).
3. The book of Revelation pictures Babylon as a woman controlling the beast power and as a great city which rules over the kings of the earth.

Isaiah 13 and 14 describe the final judgment of Babylon and the defeat of her final king. As already noted this destruction occurs in the day of the Lord.

Wail, for the day of the Lord is at hand! It will come as destruction from the Almighty. Therefore all hands will be limp, every man’s heart will melt and they will be afraid. Pangs and sorrows shall take hold of

them...Behold the day of the Lord comes cruel, with both wrath and fierce anger to lay the land desolate, and He will destroy its sinners from it. For the stars of heaven and their constellations will not give their light; the sun will be darkened in its going forth and the moon will not cause its light to shine (Isa. 13:6-10).

It is not possible to apply this language to the capture of Babylon by the Persians in the days of Cyrus. This is the time of the heavenly signs in the sun, moon and stars predicted in so many places in Scripture and placed by the Lord at the end of the great tribulation (Matt. 24:29).

Isaiah 14:1-4 also shows that this is the time of the restoration of Israel: "For the Lord will have mercy on Jacob and will still choose Israel and settle them in their own land...It shall come to pass in the day the Lord gives you rest from your sorrow, and from your fear and the hard bondage in which you were made to serve, that you will take up this proverb against the king of Babylon and say..."

There follows the song of victory of the Israelites at the demise of their great oppressor. No one will argue that this restoration has ever taken place in history. It lies ahead of us still unfulfilled. So the prophecy of the fall of Babylon's king also remains unfulfilled.

The blasphemous boasts of this man in 14:12-14 parallel the claims of the little horn and the king of the North in Daniel. This is undoubtedly one of the passages which Paul draws upon. Recall that he said that the man of sin would actually enter the Temple itself and proclaim himself to be God. None of the passages we have looked at so far actually stated that he entered the Temple, only that an idol of some description was placed there. But the language of Isaiah 14 may be read as just such a prediction.

Unfortunately this passage is usually read as a description of Satan's rebellion against God but there is nothing here which absolutely requires this to refer to Satan. The Bible often speaks of pride as being exalted into heaven. Compare what the Lord said about Capernaum in Matthew 11:23: "And you, Capernaum, who are exalted to heaven, will be brought down to Hades." We read in Lamentations, "How the Lord has covered the daughter of Zion with a cloud in His anger! He cast down from heaven to the earth the beauty of Israel" (Lam. 2:1).

We notice the same kind of language used of the king of Babylon, ironically called Lucifer, or day star. He exalts himself to heaven to be like the Most High and sits on the mount of the congregation. This reference seems to be the only text which predicts that he will enter the Temple itself.

The doom of Babylon is again set forth in Isaiah 14:22-23 and of its king in verses 24-27.

Standing Fast

Returning to 2 Thessalonians 2, we see that Paul follows his instruction about the man of sin with some practical exhortation to the brethren in the light of what he has said. We note that those who are deceived by the man of sin's Satanic miracles will perish because "they did not receive a love of the truth that they might be saved" (v. 10). This is the first of three statements here concerning the relationship between the truth and salvation. Paul goes on to say that "God will send them a strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness" (vv. 11, 12). Truth is one of the New Testament synonyms for the gospel. Belief in the gospel is the essential prerequisite for salvation. "In him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise" (Eph. 1:13). Jesus had declared that understanding and believing the message of the kingdom is essential if we are to be saved (Matt. 13:19; Luke 8:12). In 1 Corinthians 1:18, the message about the cross is the power of God unto salvation. Salvation is through sanctification and belief in the truth (2 Thess. 2:13).

In the times of trouble which perhaps lie ahead of us in the near future, it is that message which we must cling to. God has called us, as well as the Thessalonians, by the gospel in order to obtain the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ at his coming.