

Exegetical Analysis - 2 Thessalonians 2:1-17

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One of the most disappointing things that I have ever read when studying various viewpoints on 2 Thessalonians 2 was a comment made by Sam Storms at the end of his analysis on this chapter:

“I had hoped to be more definitive in my conclusions concerning the meaning of this passage. I had hoped that by studying the text closely I might contribute something substantive to the never-ending attempt to identify the “man of lawlessness” or at least expand our grasp of what he will do upon his appearance. Alas, I fear I have failed in this regard. As much as I hate to say so, I feel compelled to agree with Augustine and say, “I frankly confess I do not know what [Paul] means” in this text!”¹

It is for this reason that I am writing a thorough exegetical analysis on the entirety of 2 Thessalonians 2. The reason that Storms had issues harmonizing the landscape of the text was because he was unable to provide a sufficient “*alternative*” that harmonized with his Amillennial perspective. Amillennialism, Postmillennialism, Partial and Full Preterism, all fail to harmonize this text because none of these positions have a proper understanding of the Olivet Discourse, Daniel’s visions of the beasts, or John apocalypse. As I will demonstrate below, the only position that can adequately harmonize these difficult texts is the *Premillennial* perspective.

1-2 – Now we request you, brethren, with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, [2] that you not be quickly shaken from your composure or be disturbed either by a spirit or a message or a letter as if from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come.

(1. Ἐρωτῶμεν δὲ ὑμᾶς, ἀδελφοί, ὑπὲρ τῆς παρουσίας τοῦ κυρίου [ἡμῶν] Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ ἡμῶν ἐπισυναγωγῆς ἐπ’ αὐτόν 2. εἰς τὸ μὴ ταχέως σαλευθῆναι ὑμᾶς ἀπὸ τοῦ νοῦς μηδὲ θροεῖσθαι, μήτε διὰ πνεύματος μήτε διὰ λόγου μήτε δι’ ἐπιστολῆς ὡς δι’ ἡμῶν, ὡς ὅτι ἐνέστηκεν ἡ ἡμέρα τοῦ κυρίου)

Paul in his second letter to the Thessalonians is going to attempt to clear the air about some of the issues that had arisen from his initial teaching to the church of Thessalonica surrounding the Day of the Lord, the appearing, and the second coming of Christ.

In (vs.1) Paul immediately jumps into action. He mentions two key concepts here. 1) the coming of our Lord Jesus (παρουσίας τοῦ Κυρίου) and, 2) our gathering together to Him (καὶ ἡμῶν ἐπισυναγωγῆς ἐπ’ αὐτόν). The reference of our “*gathering*” to the Lord will remind the reader of his words back in 1 Thessalonians chapter 4:

1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 NASB

For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and

¹ Sam Storms, *The Amillennial Alternative: Kingdom Come*, (2012), 547.

with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. [17] Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord.

“The aspect of His particular coming in view here is identified by the next phrase “our gathering together,” which conveys the idea of all believers meeting together with the Lord Jesus, obviously referring to the Rapture of the church as described in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 and John 14:1-3.”²

“καὶ ἡμῶν ἐπισυναγωγῆς ἐπ’ αὐτόν, “and our gathering together to him”; this is evidently a referenced to the event described in 1 Thess 4:17, when the people of Christ (whether resurrected or surviving to the Parousia) will be transported to meet him and to be eternally with him.”³

“When Paul writes, “with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him” (2 Thess. 2:1), he actually means “with regard to the second coming [which occurs at the end of the day of the Lord] and the rapture [which occurs at the beginning of the day of the Lord].” This understanding provides a much better fit with the content of the passage.”⁴

Some have attempted to dismiss the notion that Paul is speaking of two separate events above in the previous quotes. They appeal to the Granville Sharp Rule (GSR) to say that ‘καὶ’ clearly connects *the coming of our Lord Jesus and our gathering together to Him* as a singular event. Daniel B. Wallace has demonstrated in his article⁵ that just because there is a TSKS (article-substantive-kai-substantive) structure in place in various texts it doesn’t necessarily follow that the GSR can be used in every single case. There are exceptions and 2 Thess. 2:1 fits as an exception. The exception appears due to the nature of the referent and its identity. In 2 Thess. 2:1 we have *impersonal substantives*⁶ which leads us to the conclusion that the GSR can’t be simply used to argue for the same events.

Now, when we look for referents that Paul is using in his 2nd letter to the church at Thessalonica we must not look *only* to the grammar, but also to the context. Paul, expects his readers to know what he is speaking about here. The coming of our Lord Jesus Christ is clearly a reference to the 2nd coming of Jesus, the *parousia*. This has been used elsewhere in his letter. In 2 Thess 1:9-10 the coming (*erchomai*) of the Lord Jesus is rooted deeply in the minds of the audience by the time he moves to 2 Thessalonians 2:1. His audience would be able to understand that the

² John MacArthur, *The MacArthur Bible Commentary*, 2 Thessalonians, 1766-1777.

³ F.F. Bruce, *Word Biblical Commentary*, 2 Thessalonians, 163.

⁴ Nathan D. Holsteen, *Paul and the Rapture: 2 Thessalonians 2 in Evidence for the Rapture: A Biblical Case for Pretribulationism*, (Moody Publishers, 2015), 180.

⁵ Daniel B. Wallace, *Sharp’s Rule Revisited: A Response To Stanley Porter*, (JETS 56/1 (2013) 79–91), https://www.etsjets.org/files/JETS-PDFs/56/56-1/JETS_56-1_79-91_Wallace.pdf

⁶ Nathan D. Holsteen states, “Since [this] TSKS construction [a TSKS construction is a Greek phrase that contains a definite article, a substantive, the Greek word *kai*, and another substantive] involves impersonal substantives, the highest degree of doubt is cast upon the probability of the terms referring to the same event. This is especially the case since the terms look to concrete temporal referents (the parousia and the gathering of the saints), for the identical category is unattested for concrete impersonals in the NT.” Nathan D. Holsteen, *Paul and the Rapture: 2 Thessalonians 2 in Evidence for the Rapture: A Biblical Case for Pretribulationism*, (Moody Publishers, 2015), 192, f.n. 4.

gathering together to Him would be marked as a distinct event based upon 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17. There are two events that are separated by the *kai*. The first is the coming of our Lord Jesus (2nd coming) and our gathering together to Him (Rapture). Two phases of a singular event. This is consistent with the grammar of the text. There is nothing that demands that Paul place these two events in chronological order.

Moving forward to vs.2, Paul and his companions appear to have two requests for the church in turmoil:

P1.) That they are not *quickly shaken* from their composure

P2.) That they are not *disturbed*

Why on earth would Paul and his companions bring up the fact that they not be quickly shaken or disturbed? Because that was exactly the state that they were in. Paul tells us that the reason they were shaken and disturbed was because they believed that they were already “in” the Day of the Lord. One obvious reason that they believed these reports was due in large part to the persecution they were facing. Because of these tribulations that seemed relentless one might tell others that the Day of the Lord was in fact a present reality for the Church and that they should be prepared to face this time of tribulation.

What then is the Day of the Lord?

Renald Showers rightly observes that the Day of the Lord is not a static term meaning that judgment would be poured out in a singular event (i.e. one Day), but that there should be a *double* sense in which the Day of the Lord is applied in our study of eschatology. There is actually a double sense applied in two ways, one in terms of the application and one in terms of the nature of the event. The Day of the Lord is a day of judgment but it is also a day of deliverance. It is not only a broad event that spans the length of the tribulation to the destruction of the heavens and earth as seen in 2 Peter 3, but it is also a narrow day which is heightened at the Lord’s second coming.

“The expression “the Day of the Lord” has a double sense in relationship to the future. First, in the broad sense it refers to an extended period of time involving divine interventions related to the 70th week of Daniel 9 plus the thousand-year Millennium. Second, in the narrow sense it refers to one specific day—the day on which Christ will return to the earth from heaven with his angels.”⁷

Walvoord, a pre-tribulationist, agrees with Dr. Showers, “The Day of the Lord is a period of time in which God will deal with wicked men directly and dramatically in fearful judgment...The Day of the Lord is also a time of deliverance and blessing for Israel. The millennium—the whole kingdom reign of Christ on earth—in which Christ personally directs the government of the world, is also included in the Day of the Lord.”⁸

⁷ Renald Showers, *Maranatha - Our Lord, Come!: A Definitive Study of the Rapture of the Church*, (Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry, 1995), 39.

⁸ John F. Walvoord, <https://bible.org/seriespage/5-day-lord>

Hoyt agrees, “This period is predominately characterized as a day of judgment... This period is also characterized as a day of salvation.”⁹

Pentecost concludes that, “the Day of the Lord is that extended period of time beginning with God’s dealing with Israel after the rapture at the beginning of the tribulation period extending through the second advent and the millennial age unto the creation of the new heavens and new earth after the millennium.”¹⁰

Davidson states, “Hence the ‘Day of the Lord’ acquires a double-sided character. It is a day of salvation and judgment, or a day of salvation through judgment ... a day of salvation behind this. Sometimes one side prominent and sometimes another ... Sometimes both sides of the Divines manifestation are brought forward, as in Joel.”¹¹

When we look at biblical dictionaries we come to the same conclusion:

“Many Bible students believe the Day of the Lord will be a long period of time rather than a single day—a period when Christ will reign throughout the world before He cleanses heaven and earth in preparation for the eternal state... The day would be a time of judgment (Is. 13:6, 9; Jer. 46:10), as well as restoration (Is. 14:1; Joel 2:28-32; Zeph. 1:7, 14-16; 1 Thess. 5:2; 2 Peter 3:10).¹²

“The time of the decisive visitation of Yahweh when he intervenes to punish the wicked, deliver and exalt the faithful remnant who worship him, and establish his own rule. Both judgment and salvation are especially prominent aspects.”¹³

From this we can determine that there is a two-fold understanding of the Day of the Lord (broad and narrow). Daniel’s 70th week will be clearly characterized by the outpouring of divine wrath on the world, as well as the divine light that shines throughout the millennium. It will also include the divine wrath that will occur at the Second Coming of Christ. Clearly, Paul is worried that the Thessalonians have misunderstood the timing of these events, thinking that they are presently in the midst of the Day of the Lord. Paul, in his wisdom wants the saints to know that the events of the Day of the Lord could not possibly be upon them *because* of several indicators, one of which is the “gathering together to him”.

“Paul had just written of how God would afflict the unrighteous and reward the faithful in the day of the Lord in the first chapter (2 Thess. 1:5–10). The readers knew that the opening period of that day would be a day of persecution for the saints, so the false teaching had led them to believe that they were already in that period. To correct this error, Paul first refers to “the coming

⁹ Herman Hoyt, *The End Times*, (BHM Books, Winona Lake, IN, 1969), 142.

¹⁰ J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come: A Study in Biblical Eschatology*, (Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, MI, 1958), 230-231.

¹¹ A. B. Davidson, *The Theology of the Old Testament in International Theological Library*, (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1936), 377-378.

¹² Ronald F. Youngblood, *Nelson’s New illustrated Bible Dictionary*, (Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville, 1995), 335.

¹³ Greg A. King, *Eerdmans’ Dictionary of the Bible*, (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids MI, 2000), 324.

of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him” (2:1). “Our gathering together to Him” defines which aspect of Jesus’ coming the writer has in mind. It reminds the readers of the great event described in 1 Thessalonians 4:14–17, the gathering of those in Christ to meet Him in the air en route to be with the Father in heaven. He wanted to emphasize that the day of the Lord cannot begin on earth until the saints are in heaven with the Father. Since Christ’s reappearance to take the saints to heaven had not yet happened, the day of the Lord could not yet have begun. Therefore, the apostle asks them not to be shaken or troubled by the false message they had received (2:2a). The gathering together had not yet occurred; hence the day of the Lord was not yet in progress. Paul even specifies the nature of the false teaching. It was proposing that “the day of the Lord is present” (2:2b). The rendering of the verb *enestēken* (the perfect tense of *enistēmi*) as “is present” rather than as “has come” or “will come” is very important, because that is the key to interpreting the difficult verse immediately following.”¹⁴

What is clear is that the Day of the Lord is intertwined with the coming of the Lord Jesus and our gathering together to him and they were not to worry that they were in the Day of the Lord or that it had begun. Here is a brief breakdown of the eschatological Day of the Lord in both the broad and narrow sense.

Eschatological Day of the Lord

[Broad] Daniel’s 70th Week (Tribulation)

(Is. 24:1-20; 34; Joel 2-3; Zep. 1-3; Zec. 14:2-3; Rev. 4-18)

[Narrow] Second Coming of Christ

(Is. 24:21-22; 27:1,12; Ez. 38-39; Zec. 14:4-5; Rev. 19)

[Broad] Millennial Kingdom

(Is. 4:2; 11:10; 24:23; 27:13; 35; 65:18-25; Joel 3; Zep. 3; Ez. 40-48; Zec. 14:9; Rev. 20)

[Broad] Destruction of Heavens and Earth

(Is. 65:17; 2 Pet. 3; Rev. 21)

In order to encapsulate the concept of the Day of the Lord, we must understand the Old Testament themes as well as the New Testament themes. The Day of the Lord is a complicated structure and theme, but our hope is that we have a better understanding of the implications from the wording here to proceed forward to (vs.3).

3-4 – Let no one in any way deceive you, for it will not come unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, [4] who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God. (3. μή τις ὑμᾶς ἐξαπατήσῃ κατὰ μηδένᾱ τρόπον. ὅτι ἐὰν μὴ ἔλθῃ ἡ ἀποστασία πρῶτον καὶ ἀποκαλυφθῇ ὁ ἄνθρωπος τῆς ἀνομίας, ὁ υἱὸς

¹⁴ Robert L. Thomas, *The Rapture and the Biblical Teaching of Imminency, in Evidence for the Rapture: A Biblical Case for Pretribulationism*. Epub ed., (Moody Publishers, 2015), 37.

τῆς ἀπωλείας, 4. ὁ ἀντικείμενος καὶ ὑπεραιρόμενος ἐπὶ πάντα λεγόμενον θεὸν ἢ σέβασμα, ὥστε αὐτὸν εἰς τὸν ναὸν τοῦ θεοῦ καθίσαι ἀποδεικνύοντα ἑαυτὸν ὅτι ἔστιν θεός)

In (vs.3) Paul says that they are to guard themselves, such that no one would deceive them in any way “for it will not come unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction”. Clearly “it” in the text is a reference back to (vs.2) the Day of the Lord. There are two things that must occur before the conclusion that the Day of the Lord has begun can be determined.

P1.) the *apostasy* comes first

P2.) and the *man of lawlessness is revealed* (the son of destruction)

Before we jump into the explanation of the *apostasy* and *man of lawlessness* it is important to note that there are some grammatical challenges in the text. Robert L. Thomas point the issues with (vs.2) surrounding the words "the effect that the day of the Lord has come" and (vs.3) "for it will not come unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction."

“The sense of 2:3b would thus become, “The day of the Lord is not present unless the apostasy comes first and the man of lawlessness is revealed.” Unfortunately, no English version consulted renders the suppressed main clause correctly in this verse. Most give the supplied verb a future sense, such as, “The day of the Lord will not come,” a change that misses Paul’s point. The issue involved in his correction of the false information to which the readers had been exposed is not the future coming of the day of the Lord; it is rather the current non-presence of that day at the time he writes and they read his words. If that day were not present, then they could not be in that day.”¹⁵

The proper rendering grammatically is:

“Now we request you, brethren, with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, that you not be quickly shaken from your composure or be disturbed either by a spirit or a message or a letter as if from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord is now present. Let no one in any way deceive you, for that day is not present unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction.”

Therefore:

“The day of the Lord is not present unless first, in sequence within it, the apostasy comes and following the apostasy’s beginning comes the revelation of the man of lawlessness.”

“So in 2 Thessalonians 2:3, the day of the Lord is not already underway unless two things happen: first, the apostasy must come, and then the man of lawlessness must be revealed. These are two major elements that take place within the day of the Lord, not before it arrives. If the

¹⁵ Robert L. Thomas, *The Rapture and the Biblical Teaching of Imminency, in Evidence for the Rapture: A Biblical Case for Pretribulationism*. Epub ed., (Moody Publishers, 2015), 39.

falling leaves are signs within the fu season, they are not signs that precede the fall season.”¹⁶

“What is the point? Simply this. Second Thessalonians does not say that the apostasy and the revealing of the man of lawlessness precede the day of the Lord. The text itself is ambiguous on this point; it does not say whether these two events precede the day of the Lord, or whether these two events form the initial stage of the day of the Lord. What the text says is this: you can know that you are not in the day of the Lord unless you have seen the apostasy and the revealing of the man of lawlessness. The day of the Lord will not have come unless you see the apostasy and the revealing of the Antichrist.”¹⁷

So, the order can be viewed in the following:

Event	Scripture
“...our gathering together to him”	2 Thess. 2:1
“...the apostasy comes”	2 Thess. 2:3
“...the man of lawlessness is revealed”	2 Thess. 2:3
“...the day of the Lord has come”	2 Thess. 2:2

From this we can deduce that if you haven’t seen the gathering together, then the Day of the Lord cannot be present. If the apostasy comes and the man of lawlessness is revealed, then you are in the Day of the Lord.

What is the *apostasy* in (vs.3)?

The apostasy has caused many issues for many commentators. Some believe that the apostasy is consistent with a rebellion, likely led by the man of lawlessness. Some believe that the apostasy is a departure of the faith (religious), and some believe that it is a departure from this location (i.e. earth).

After further study and consultation with others on the subject there seems to be good reason grammatically to reject the idea that the word “apostasy” means a spatial departure from this world, as was previously described.¹⁸

¹⁶ Ibid., 40.

¹⁷ Nathan D. Holsteen, *Paul and the Rapture: 2 Thessalonians 2 in Evidence for the Rapture: A Biblical Case for Pretribulationism*, (Moody Publishers, 2015), 183.

¹⁸ It was my genuine belief that the ἀποστασία in the Greek *could* refer to the rapture (or the catching away of the saints) mentioned in (vs.1) based upon my study from Lewis, Davey, Ice, et al. However, I have found there are numerous grammatical issues, see Alan Kurschner <https://www.alankurschner.com/2015/09/11/does-apostasias-in-2-thessalonians-23-refer-to-a-physical-departure-i-e-the-rapture/> and Anthony T. Hopkins https://www.academia.edu/42702613/What_is_the_%E1%BC%88%CF%80%CE%BF%CF%83%CF%84%CE%B1%CF%83%CE%AF%CE%B1_of_2_Thessalonians_2_3. Both of these men articulate some of the grammatical challenges that come with arguing for a rapture from the word ἀποστασία. Kurschner articulates that the rendering fails on 4 accounts (fails in appearing in English versions, five bodies of Greek literature, the verbal cognate form, and appealing to context). I disagree with Kurschner that it doesn’t appeal to the context, because I believe a *case* can be made from the context, however, I do believe he is correct in the three other areas. If there was a stronger case that could be made from the Koine Greek or the Lexicons, I do believe that this could be a valid argument for translating it as the departure. However, until this is demonstrated, it seems wiser to shy away from the belief that ἀποστασία means a spatial departure.

In looking more closely at the lexical evidence we can see the following about the word apostasia:

Thayer's Greek Lexicon: "ἀποστασία, ἀποστασίας, ἡ (ἀφίσταμαι), **a falling away, defection, apostasy; in the Bible namely, from the true religion:** Acts 21:21; 2 Thessalonians 2:3; ((Joshua 22:22; 2 Chronicles 29:19; 2 Chronicles 33:19); Jeremiah 2:19; Jeremiah 36:(29) 32 Complutensian; 1 Macc. 2:15). The earlier Greeks say ἀπόστασις; see Lob. ad Phryn., p. 528; (Winer's Grammar, 24)."¹⁹

Liddell-Scott-Jones: "1. **defection, revolt**, v.l. in D.H. 7.1, J. Vit. 10, Plu. Galb. 1; **esp. in religious sense, rebellion against God, apostasy, LXX Joshua 22:22, 2 Thessalonians 2:3.**"²⁰

Abbott-Smith Manual Greek Lexicon: "**defection, apostasy, revolt**; in late Gk. (MM, Exp., viii; Lft., Notes, 111; Cremer, 308) for cl. ἀπόστασις, freq. in sense of political revolt, in LXX (e.g. Joshua 22:22, 2 Chronicles 29:19, Jeremiah 2:19) **and NT always of religious apostasy: Acts 21:21, 2 Thessalonians 2:3.**"²¹

Walter Bauer's A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature: "...**rebellion, abandonment in relig. Sense, apostasy**... of the rebellion caused by the Antichrist in the last days 2 Th 2:3. M-M."²²

In light of the lexical evidence it seems that we should be leaning towards some sort of "religious apostasy." This religious apostasy could certainly be tied with in with the man-of-lawlessness and his actions.

Who is the "*the man of lawlessness*" that is revealed?

Much disagreement also exists as to who *the man of lawlessness* is. This disagreement usually comes when there are difficulties harmonizing these texts with preconceived beliefs. So, what does this "revealing" of the man of lawlessness mean?

The man of lawlessness is quite clearly "the epitome of opposition to the laws of God."²³ This man will delight in the breaking of God's laws. This *man* has been previously exposed in the book of Daniel. Daniel calls him the "*little horn*". Matthew links us to Daniel for more of a description of this man (Mt. 24:15), and John gives us some further information in Revelation about the "*beast*". Here are some of the passages that describe him:

Verse Description	Scripture
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¹⁹ Thayer, *Greek Lexicon*, <https://biblehub.com/greek/646.htm>

²⁰ Liddell-Scott-Jones, *Definitions*, <https://www.studydrive.org/lexicons/eng/greek/646.html>

²¹ Abbott-Smith, *Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament*. 1922 by G. Abbott-Smith, D.D., D.C.L. T & T Clarke, London. <https://www.studydrive.org/lexicons/eng/greek/646.html>

²² Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, (University of Chicago Press; 2nd edition, 1979), 98.

²³ Robert L. Thomas, *The Expositors Bible Commentary, 2 Thessalonians* (Gaebelein, Frank E., General Editor. (1978). Expositor's Bible Commentary, Volume 11 with the New International Version (Later Printing. ed.). Zondervan Publishing House.), 322.

“While I was contemplating the horns, behold, another horn, a little one , came up among them, and three of the first horns were pulled out by the roots before it; and behold, this horn possessed eyes like the eyes of a man and a mouth uttering great boasts. ”	Daniel 7:8
“Then I kept looking because of the sound of the boastful words which the horn was speaking; I kept looking until the beast was slain, and its body was destroyed and given to the burning fire. ”	Daniel 7:11
“I also wanted to know about the ten horns on its head and about the other horn that came up, before which three of them fell-- the horn that looked more imposing than the others and that had eyes and a mouth that spoke boastfully . I kept looking, and that horn was waging war with the saints and overpowering them, until the Ancient of Days came and judgment was passed in favor of the saints of the Highest One, and the time arrived when the saints took possession of the kingdom ”	Daniel 7:20-22
“ He will speak out against the Most High and oppress the saints of the Most High, intending to change the appointed times and laws; and the saints will be given into his hand for a time, and times, and half a time. ”	Daniel 7:25
“Out of one of them came forth a rather small horn which grew exceedingly great toward the south, toward the east, and toward the Beautiful Land.”	Daniel 8:9
Then the people of the prince who is to come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end will come like a flood, and until the end there will be war; desolations have been decreed . And he will confirm a covenant with many for one week, but in the middle of the week he will put an end to sacrifice and offering . And on the wing of the temple will come the abomination that causes desolation, until the decreed destruction is poured out upon him. ”	Daniel 9:26-27
Then the king will do as he pleases and will exalt and magnify himself above every god, and he will speak monstrous things against the God of gods. He will be successful until the time of wrath is completed, for what has been decreed must be accomplished. He will show no regard for the gods of his fathers, nor for the one desired by women, nor for any other god, because he will magnify himself above them all . And in their place, he will honor a god of fortresses—a god his fathers did not know—with gold, silver, precious stones, and riches. He will attack the strongest fortresses with the help of a foreign god and will greatly honor those who acknowledge him, making them rulers over many and distributing the land for a price. At the time of the end, the king of the South will engage him in battle, but the king of the North will storm out against him with chariots, horsemen, and many ships, invading many countries and sweeping through them like a flood. He will also invade the Beautiful Land, and many countries will fall. But these will be delivered from his hand: Edom, Moab, and the leaders of the Ammonites. He will extend his power over many countries, and not even the land of Egypt will escape. He will gain control of the treasures of gold and silver and over all the riches of Egypt, and the Libyans and Cushites will also submit to him. But news from the east and the north will alarm him, and he will go out with great fury to destroy many and devote them to destruction. He will pitch his royal tents between the sea and the beautiful holy mountain, but he will meet his end with no one to help him.	Daniel 11:36-45

Event	Scripture
So when you see standing in the holy place ‘the abomination of desolation,’ described by the prophet Daniel (let the reader understand)	Matthew 24:15

Event	Scripture
Then I saw a beast with ten horns and seven heads rising out of the sea. There were ten royal crowns on its horns and blasphemous names on its heads. The beast I saw was like a leopard, with the feet of a bear and the mouth of a lion. And the dragon gave the beast his power and his throne and great authority. One of the heads of the beast appeared to be mortally wounded. But the mortal wound was healed, and the whole world marveled and followed the beast. They worshiped the dragon who had given authority to the beast, and they worshiped the beast, saying, “Who is like the beast, and who can wage war against it?” The beast was given a mouth to speak arrogant and blasphemous words, and authority to act for 42 months. And the beast opened its mouth to speak blasphemies against God and to slander His name and His tabernacle—those who dwell in heaven. Then the beast was permitted to wage war against the saints and to conquer them, and it was given authority over every tribe and people and tongue and nation.	Revelation 13:1-10
Then I saw the beast and the kings of the earth with their armies assembled to wage war against the One seated on the horse, and against His army. But the beast was captured along with the false prophet, who on its behalf had performed signs deceiving those who had the mark of the beast and worshiped its image. Both the beast and the false prophet were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur.	Revelation 19:19-20

Now, moving forward let’s do some comparisons with what was just gathered with what Paul says about the “man of lawlessness”. We will draw upon the context of vs.3-11 to build this table with the information that we have accessible to us. In realizing this is a bit premature, it will be helpful to draw parallels between what the authors of scripture are trying to bring together.

2 Thessalonians 2	Daniel	Matthew	Revelation
(vs.4) - He will oppose and exalt himself above every so-called god or object of worship	(7:8) - mouth uttering great boasts (7:11) - boastful words which the horn was speaking (7:20-22) - mouth that spoke boastfully (7:25) - He will speak out against the Most High (11:36-45) - Then the king will do as he pleases and will exalt and magnify himself above every god, and he will speak monstrous things against the God of gods for any other god, because he will magnify himself above them all		(13:1-10) - The beast was given a mouth to speak arrogant and blasphemous words, and authority to act for 42 months. And the beast opened its mouth to speak blasphemies against God and to slander His name and His tabernacle—those who dwell in heaven
(vs.5) - So he will seat himself in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God.	(11:36-45) - Then the king will do as he pleases and will exalt and magnify himself above every god, and he will speak monstrous things against the God of gods for	(24:15) - So when you see standing in the holy place ‘the abomination of desolation,’ described by the prophet Daniel	(13:1-10) - And the beast opened its mouth to speak blasphemies against God and to slander His name and His tabernacle

	any other god, because he will magnify himself above them all		
(vs.8) - And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will slay with the breath of His mouth and annihilate by the majesty of His arrival.	<p>(7:11) - I kept looking until the beast was slain</p> <p>(7:20-22) - I kept looking, and that horn was waging war with the saints and overpowering them, until the Ancient of Days came, and judgment was passed in favor of the saints of the Highest One</p> <p>(11:36-45) - but he will meet his end with no one to help him</p>	(24:29-31) - Immediately after the tribulation of those days: 'The sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and all the tribes of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory....	(19:19-20) - Then I saw the beast and the kings of the earth with their armies assembled to wage war against the One seated on the horse, and against His army. But the beast was captured along with the false prophet, who on its behalf had performed signs deceiving those who had the mark of the beast and worshiped its image. Both the beast and the false prophet were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur.
(vs.9) - that is, the one whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders		(24:24) - For false messiahs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect.	<p>(13:4) - People worshiped the dragon because he had given authority to the beast, and they also worshiped the beast and asked, "Who is like the beast? Who can wage war against it?"</p> <p>(13:14) - Because of the signs it was given power to perform on behalf of the first beast, it deceived the inhabitants of the earth. It ordered them to set up an image in honor of the beast who was wounded by the sword and yet lived.</p> <p>(19:20) - But the beast was captured, and with it the false prophet who had performed the signs on its behalf. With these signs he had deluded those who had received the mark of the beast and worshiped its image.</p>

			The two of them were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur.
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In contrasting the various passages that speak of this man-of-lawlessness it is clear that he is the beast that comes from the abyss (sea) in Revelation 13, the man who will speak out against the most-high and fights against the saints in Daniel 7, 9, 11, are all describing the same person.

John also tells us that there is one that is coming named “Antichrist”.

1 John 2:18 NASB

Children, it is the last hour; and just as you heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have appeared; from this we know that it is the last hour.

This adversary is completely against Christ in all that he does. He appears to be his direct rival, one that will act similarly in replicated events that surround Christ (Revelation 13-18).

“This person—announced first by the prophet Daniel, then by Jesus, and presented by Paul—is the long-expected Antichrist, the false Messiah, the “hopelessly lost one,” the “son of perdition.””²⁴

“All attempts to equate the Man of Lawlessness with historical personages break down on the fact that Paul was speaking of someone who would appear only at the end of the age. The Man of Lawlessness is an eschatological personage. Paul wrote that he will appear just before the Lord comes again.”²⁵

“The lawless man’s identity has been studied by many throughout the Christian era. Some deny that he is a historical person. They write off the terminology as detached from history and mythically oriented like the Jewish apocalyptic writings by which Paul was strongly influenced... But closer scrutiny of the parallels between late-Jewish eschatology and Paul’s words reveals more by way of difference than similarity. The relationship of this apocalyptic portion of 2 Thessalonians to Christ’s *parousia* (coming) confirms the impression that Paul must be referring to a single historical personage. Quests for such a person in the past and present have proved fruitless. Resemblances to Antiochus Epiphanes, Nero, Diocletian, one of the popes, and others may be admitted. But fulfillment of all details of the prophecy must await the future period of this man’s prominence. It is futile to suppose that Judas Iscariot, Antiochus Epiphanes or Nero will be brought back to life to full this role. “The man of lawlessness” will be a new historical figure whom Satan will energize to do his will in the world.”²⁶

Having linked this character with Daniel, Matthew, Paul, and John we can now proceed forward

²⁴ Ray C. Stedman, *Waiting for the Second Coming: Studies in Thessalonians*, 126.

²⁵ Leon Morris, *The First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians*, (WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA, (1979)), 221.

²⁶ Robert L. Thomas, *The Expositors Bible Commentary, 2 Thessalonians* (Gaebelein, Frank E., General Editor. (1978). Expositor’s Bible Commentary, Volume 11 with the New International Version (Later Printing. ed.). Zondervan Publishing House.), 322.

in seeing what this “man” will do. This man of lawlessness will be revealed, this son of destruction will oppose the Lord God and exalt himself above every so-called god or object of worship. He will exalt himself over his father’s gods, and above all else. This man of lawlessness will take his seat in the temple of God.

What is the *temple of God*?

Scholars have often argued that the temple of God is not the literal temple. The “temple” (ναὸν) should be understood as figurative because of the way that Paul uses the term elsewhere in his letters. However, this interpretation does not follow contextually. Paul employs a uniquely apocalyptic style here in this chapter, which should cause us to step back and look at this usage as being unique. The double article next to “temple” makes it highly unlikely that anything spiritual (i.e. the church) is in view. Paul was well aware of “τὸν ναὸν τοῦ Θεοῦ”. He knew that his audience would understand this in relation to Matthew’s words regarding the abomination of desolation (Mt. 24:15) and back further to Daniel’s message regarding the trodden down temple (Dan. 9:24-27). John would also further illuminate these events around his apocalyptic work in Revelation 11:1-2. If “context is king” we should look at the usage ναὸν as unique, and not simply refer back to other ways that Paul might have used ναὸν. Paul would have also expected his audience to be familiar with the temple language used in the Old Testament. Temple language is clearly seen in Ezekiel 28:2 when the King of Tyre is condemned for saying what is in his heart.

Ezekiel 28:2 NASB

“Son of man, say to the leader of Tyre, ‘The Lord God says this: “Because your heart is haughty And you have said, ‘I am a god, I sit in the seat of gods In the heart of the seas’; Yet you are a mortal and not God, Although you make your heart like the heart of God—

We expect this to be a literal temple because the depictions mentioned in Daniel, Ezekiel, Matthew, and Revelation all describe a *literal* temple being defaced or contaminated by a foreign presence. A foreshadowing of such an event is seen in Antiochus Epiphanes who actually desecrated the temple in 164 B.C. This desecration of the temple will occur again as Jesus states in the Olivet Discourse (Mt. 24:15) and Paul states here in his letter.

“Figurative meanings of ναὸν (*naos*, “temple”) elsewhere, including its reference to the church (1 Cor 3:16; 2 Cor 6:16; Eph 2:21) and possible allusions to the heavenly temple where God is (Heb 8:1-4; 9:23, 24; Rev 15:5), fall short of the literal significance required by the present passage. A human being can take his seat in none of these others. The article with *naon* (accusative) is a further indication that the Jerusalem temple of the God of Israel is intended (Olshausen p. 482; Lünemann, p. 211).”²⁷

“The question arises of what should be understood by “the temple of God.” There are passages where such an expression means the Christian church (I Cor. 3:16f.). Some have understood this sense here. The meaning then would be that the Man of Lawlessness makes the church his base of operations. He establishes himself there, claiming to be divine. This is rather a difficult concept (would not the church by that very fact cease to be the *Christian* church?). While the

²⁷ Ibid., 323.

New Testament speaks of many falling away in the last days, it does not appear to envisage the church as such becoming apostate. There is, moreover, the vivid language already noted. This seems to mean that he will actually take his seat in a formal way in a sanctuary. Some suggest that it is heaven that is meant (cf. Ps. 11:4). Frame, for example sees the possibility of a reference to the ancient tradition of the Dragon that stormed the heavens. The difficulty is that Paul pictures the Man of Lawlessness as actually taking his seat in the shrine, and not merely as attempting to do so. It is like our Lord's "when ye see the abomination of desolation standing where he ought not" (Mark 13:14; the masculine shows that a person is in mind). While the temple is not easy to identify, the best way of understanding the passage seems to be that it is some material building which will serve as the setting for the blasphemous claim to deity which the Man of Lawlessness will make as the climax of his activities."²⁸

"ὁ ναὸς τοῦ θεοῦ] is not, as Theodoret, Oecumenius, Theophylact, Calvin, Musculus, Hunnius, Estius, Lucius and Andrew Osiander, Aretius, Vorstius, Calixt, Calovius, Wolf, Benson, Moldenhauer, Bolten, and others, also Heydenreich, Pelt, Olshausen, Bloomfield, Alford, Bisping, and Hilgenfeld (l.c. p. 253) assume, a figurative representation of the Christian church, but, on account of the definite expression καθίσαι, cannot be otherwise understood than in its proper sense. But on account of the repetition of the article can only *one definite* temple of one *definite true* God—that is, the temple of Jerusalem—be meant (Grotius, Clericus, Schöttgen, Whitby, Kern, de Wette, Wieseler, v. Döllinger, l.c. p. 282)."²⁹

"This probably refers to a literal temple, but some suggest that it is a figurative reference to his occupying the most holy place in human worship, which rightfully belongs only to God. The early church fathers and several good modern-day commentators accept the literal view."³⁰

"2 Thessalonians 2:4 What temple then? He means, the Temple of the Jews which has been destroyed. For God forbid that it should be the one in which we are! Why say we this? That we may not be supposed to favour ourselves. For if he comes to the Jews as Christ, and desires to be worshipped by the Jews, he will make great account of the Temple, that he may more completely beguile them; making it supposed that he is the man of the race of David, who shall build up the Temple which was erected by Solomon. And Antichrist will come at the time when there shall not be left one stone upon another in the Temple of the Jews, according to the doom pronounced by our Saviour; for when, either decay of time, or demolition ensuing on pretence of new buildings, or from any other causes, shall have overthrown all the stones, I mean not merely of the outer circuit, but of the inner shrine also, where the Cherubim were, then shall he come with all signs and lying wonders, exalting himself against all idols; at first indeed making a pretence of benevolence, but afterwards displaying his relentless temper, and that chiefly against the Saints of God. For he says, I beheld, and the same horn made war with the saints; and again elsewhere, there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation upon earth, even to that same time. Dreadful is that beast, a mighty dragon, unconquerable by man, ready to

²⁸ Leon Morris, *The First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians*, (WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA, (1979)), 223-224.

²⁹ Heinrich Meyer, *Heinrich Meyer's Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, Commentary on 2 Thessalonians 2:4, www.studydrive.org/commentaries/hmc/2-thessalonians-2.html. 1832.

³⁰ Thomas Constable, *2 Thessalonians*, Walvoord, John F. and Roy B. Zuck, editors (The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament (4th ed.). Victor Books, Wheaton, IL (1984)), 718.

devour; concerning whom though we have more things to speak out of the divine Scriptures, yet we will content ourselves at present with thus much, in order to keep within compass.”³¹

“He will violently oppose every form of divine worship and will enthrone himself in the temple of God in Jerusalem.”³²

“That is worshipped, i.e., every object held sacred – temples, shrines, etc. Antichrist will take his place as God in the temple, probably the Jerusalem temple, as the close connection between this passage and the description of Antiochus Epiphanes (Dan 11:36 ff) suggests (cf. also Mk 13:14, where the masculine participle may indicate a person rather than an image).”³³

Because of Matthew 24:15 (...the holy place), Daniel’s perspective on the destruction of the literal temple in Daniel 9:24-27, John’s perspective in mentioning the literal temple in Revelation 11:1-2, it seems best to interpret “*the temple of God*” as a literal location in Jerusalem. This means and clearly implies that the temple will be reinstituted, and this man of lawlessness will sit (καθίσαι) himself down in the temple of God and will demand worship. This man will not only set himself up above all other gods, he will claim that he is the only one true living God.

5-6 - Do you not remember that while I was still with you, I was telling you these things? [6] And you know what restrains him now, so that he will be revealed in his time. (5. Οὐ μνημονεύετε ὅτι ἔτι ὦν πρὸς ὑμᾶς ταῦτα ἔλεγον ὑμῖν; 6. καὶ νῦν τὸ κατέχον οἴδατε, εἰς τὸ ἀποκαλυφθῆναι αὐτὸν ἐν τῷ αὐτοῦ καιρῷ)

In (vs.5) Paul jogs his audiences’ memory that he had been talking of these things before. None of the members of the church in Thessalonica should have been confused or taken-a-back by anything that he was sharing.

In (vs.6) we come to a crucial text and another text that is often disputed in the study of 2 Thessalonians 2. What or who is this restrainer? Who or what is this restrainer restraining? “That which is restraining (τὸ κατέχον)” is the neuter participle of a verb whose masculine participle is found in (vs.7).³⁴ This verb (κατέχον) means to “hold back” or “holding fast”. It appears that something here is holding back or restraining the man of lawlessness as found in (vs.4). There are many variations of interpretations as to what the restrainer is, here are a few of the most common interpretations:

1. The Roman Empire / Government (Restrainer) → Man of Lawlessness (Nero)

However, there are issues with this interpretation:

³¹ Cyril of Jerusalem, *Cat. Lect.* 15.15

³² William MacDonald, & A. L. Farstad, *2 Thessalonians*, (Believer’s Bible Commentary: First Edition, Thomas Nelson (1989)), 2054.

³³ David A. Hubbard, *2 Thessalonians*, The New Testament and Wycliffe Bible Commentary, (The Iversen Associates, (Moody Monthly, 1972)), 833.

³⁴ Leon Morris, *The First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians*, (WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA, (1979)), 225.

“It is difficult to carry this understanding though. There is no reason for thinking that Paul saw in any Roman emperor (Nero or any other) the Man of Lawlessness. Moreover the Roman Empire in due course passed away without the events that Paul here associates with the End.”³⁵

“Though preferable to some other solutions, this explanation is disappointing in several ways. To predict the demise of the Roman Empire (cf. v.7) is very uncharacteristic of Paul (Frame, p. 260). Then too, the Roman emperors sometimes precipitate anti-Christian activities rather than restrained them (Auberlen and Riggensbach, p. 139; Hogg and Vine, p. 260). Elimination of this solution is sealed when we remember that the Roman Empire has long since ceased to exist, and the appearance of Christ or the lawless one has yet to take place (Hogg and Vine, p. 259).”³⁶

“The problem with this view is that it is government and specifically, the revived Roman Empire that the lawless (anomos) one will use in the last days. Government does not restrain him. Rather than a restraint to the mystery of lawlessness and so to the antichrist, government will become the very vehicle he will use to propel his system into existence.”³⁷

“Human government, however, continues during the period of the tribulation in which the man of sin is revealed. While all forces of law and order tend to restrain sin, they are not such in their own character, but rather as they are used and empowered to accomplish this end by God. It would seem a preferable interpretation to view all restraint of sin, regardless of means, as proceeding from God as a ministry of the Holy Spirit.”³⁸

“Others suggest that human governments are holding back sin and the revealing of the Antichrist. But human governments will not end prior to the Antichrist’s unveiling. Nor do all governments restrain sin; many encourage it!”³⁹

“For instance, Preterist Gary DeMar holds that this passage likely refers to the Roman Empire, while the restrainer might refer to King Agrippa, who stopped further killing of Christians after the death of James and tried to stop the Jewish War in AD 66. However, we do not hold to this view. For one, the Roman Empire did not “restrain” the Antichrist. Specifically, under the Preterist view, Emperor Nero was the Antichrist, and he governed over the Roman Empire! Moreover, King Agrippa did not restrain Nero in any way. Second, Daniel and Revelation see human government as pushing for the rise of the Antichrist—not restraining him.”⁴⁰

2. Satan (Restrainer) → Man of Lawlessness (Antichrist, Beast from the Sea)

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Robert L. Thomas, *The Expositors Bible Commentary, 2 Thessalonians* (Gaebelein, Frank E., General Editor. (1978). Expositor’s Bible Commentary, Volume 11 with the New International Version (Later Printing. ed.). Zondervan Publishing House.), 324.

³⁷ J. Hampton Keathley III, *2 Thessalonians: An Exegetical and Devotional Commentary*, 5. Correction Concerning the Day of the Lord—Part 2 (2 Thes. 2:6-8). Website: <https://bible.org/seriespage/5-correction-concerning-day-lord-part-2-2-thes-26-8>.

³⁸ John Walvoord, *The Holy Spirit*, (Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids Michigan, (third edition with appendix), 1978), 116.

³⁹ Thomas Constable, *2 Thessalonians*, Walvoord, John F. and Roy B. Zuck, editors (The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament (4th ed.). Victor Books, Wheaton, IL (1984)), 719.

⁴⁰ <http://www.evidenceunseen.com/bible-difficulties-2/nt-difficulties/1-2-thessalonians/2-thess-26-7-who-is-the-restrainer/>

There are also some difficulties with this view:

“This idea is hardly compatible with the revelation of Satan in the scriptures. Satan is nowhere given universal power over the world, though his influence is inestimable. A study of 2 Thessalonians 2:3-10 indicates that the one who restrains is removed from the scene before the man of sin is revealed. This could hardly be said of Satan. The period of tribulation on the contrary is one in which Satan’s work is most evident. The scriptures represent him as being cast into the earth and venting his fury during those tragic days (Rev. 12:9) The theory that Satan is the great restrainer of lawlessness is, accordingly, untenable.”⁴¹

“To identify *to katechon* with a supernatural force or person hostile to God is difficult in a paragraph such as this because the restrainer is limiting Satan (vv.7-9), not cooperating with him (Best, pp. 298-301).”⁴²

“Another suggestion is that this is Satan, but it is difficult to see why he would hold back sin.”⁴³

“The obvious answer to this allegation would be the reply of the Lord to those who accuse Him of working His signs by Satanic power: “If a house be divided against itself, that house cannot stand” (Mark 3:25). Further, the removal of this restrainer does not free the world from Satanic activity, as would be the case if Satan were the restrainer, but thrusts him into the world with unleashed fury (Rev. 12:12).”⁴⁴

“This view has some plausibility, yet we do not hold to it. For one, it doesn’t adequately answer the shift of the pronoun from the neuter to the masculine singular. Furthermore, Satan is not “taken out of the way” during this time. The very next verse says that the Antichrist will come “in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders” (v.9).”⁴⁵

3. Jewish State (Restraint) → Man of Lawlessness (Antichrist, Beast from the Sea)

A position held by B.B. Warfield that also contains some issues:

“Warfield was a great exegete, and all his opinions must be carefully weighed, but this is one in which few have been able to follow him. It is hard to see how the Jewish state could restrain the

⁴¹ John Walvoord, *The Holy Spirit*, (Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids Michigan, (third edition with appendix), 1978), 115.

⁴² Robert L. Thomas, *The Expositors Bible Commentary, 2 Thessalonians* (Gaebelein, Frank E., General Editor. (1978). Expositor’s Bible Commentary, Volume 11 with the New International Version (Later Printing. ed.). Zondervan Publishing House.), 324.

⁴³ Thomas Constable, *2 Thessalonians*, Walvoord, John F. and Roy B. Zuck, editors (The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament (4th ed.). Victor Books, Wheaton, IL (1984)), 719.

⁴⁴ J. D. Pentecost, *Things to Come* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1958), 261.

⁴⁵ <http://www.evidenceunseen.com/bible-difficulties-2/nt-difficulties/1-2-thessalonians/2-thess-26-7-who-is-the-restrainer/>

Man of Lawlessness (even if we accept Warfield's other idea that this was the line of Roman emperors). It is even more difficult to see the apostle James fulfilling this role."⁴⁶

4. Holy Spirit (Restrainer) → Man of Lawlessness (Antichrist, Beast from the Sea)

Of the various positions the Holy Spirit seems to be the most likely suggestion. Several points lead us to this conclusion as outlined by Dr. Pentecost⁴⁷:

(1) By mere elimination, the Holy Spirit must be the restrainer. All other suggestions fall far short of meeting the requirements. ...

(2) The Wicked One is a personality, and his operations include the realm of the spiritual. The restrainer must likewise be a personality and a spiritual being... to hold Antichrist in check until the time for his revealing. Mere agencies or impersonal spiritual forces would be inadequate.

(3) To achieve all that is to be accomplished, the restrainer must be a member of the Godhead. He must be stronger than the Man of Sin and stronger than Satan who energizes him. In order to restrain evil down through the course of the age, the restrainer must be eternal. ... The theater of sin is the entire world: therefore, it is imperative that the restrainer be one who is not limited by time or space. ...

(4) This age is in a particular sense the "dispensation of the Spirit," for He works in a way uncommon to other ages as an abiding Presence within the children of God. ... The church age commenced with the advent of the Spirit at Pentecost, and will close with a reversal of Pentecost, the removal of the Spirit. This does not mean that He will not be operative—only that He will no longer be a resident.

(5) The work of the Spirit since His advent of him has included the restraint of evil... John 16:7-11... 1 John 4:4. How different it will be in the tribulation.

(6) ... although the Spirit was not resident on earth during Old Testament days, yet he exerted a restraining influence. ... Isaiah 59:19b.

Further, several scholars also believe that the Holy Spirit best aligns with the textual evidence:

"Yet to say that God is the restrainer is not quite enough to explain the variation in gender. To one familiar with the Lord Jesus' Upper Room Discourse, as Paul undoubtedly was, fluctuation between neuter and masculine recalls how the Holy Spirit is spoken of. Either gender is appropriate, depending on whether the speaker (or writer) thinks of natural agreement (masc. because of the Spirit's personality) or grammatical (neuter because the noun *pneuma*; see John 14:26; 15:26; 16:13, 14). ... This identification of the restrainer with deep roots in church history (Alford, 3:57. 58) is most appealing. The special presence of the Spirit as the indweller of saints will terminate abruptly at the *parousia* as it began abruptly at Pentecost. ... His function of

⁴⁶ Leon Morris, *The First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians*, (WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA, (1979)), 226.

⁴⁷ J. D. Pentecost, *Things to Come* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1958), 262.

restraining evil through the body of Christ (John 16:7-11; 1 John 4:4) will cease similarly to the way he terminated his striving in the days of Noah (Gen 6:3). At that point the reins will be removed from lawlessness and the Satanically inspired rebellion will begin. It appears that *to katechon* (“what is holding back”) was well known at Thessalonica as a title for the Holy Spirit on whom the readers had come to depend in their personal attempts to combat lawlessness (1 Thess 1:6; 4:8; 5:19; 2 Thess 2:13).⁴⁸

“Many Bible students identify this restrainer as the Holy Spirit of God. Certainly, He is “in the midst” of God’s program today, working through the church to accomplish God’s purposes. When the church is raptured the Holy Spirit will not be taken *out of the world* (otherwise nobody could be saved during the tribulation, be He will be taken *out of the midst* to allow Satan and his forces to go to work. The Holy Spirit will certainly be present on the earth during the day of the Lord, but He will not be restraining the forces of evil as He is today.”⁴⁹

“It may have been the Roman Empire, or perhaps more generally the social structures of law and order manifested in the Roman Empire. This meaning would explain the shift to the masculine participle (he who now letteth; same word) in verse 7. However, there is some good reason to assume that it is the ministry of the Holy Spirit which now hinders the work of the Man of Sin. The work of the Spirit is exhibited in the church and when the church is taken out of the way (vs.7), the Antichrist will manifest his plan of world domination.”⁵⁰

“Perhaps a more likely argument favors the Holy Spirit, partly because in Jesus’ Upper Room discourse references to the Spirit show a similar alternation between neuter and masculine. The thought here is that the Holy Spirit, who is present in the world in believers, will be “taken out of the way” at the Rapture of the church (cf. John 16:7-11; 1 John 4:4). It is only then that “the lawless one will be revealed” (2:8).”⁵¹

“The Holy Spirit of God is the only Person with sufficient (supernatural) power to do this restraining. Some object to this being the Holy Spirit on the grounds that *to katechon* in 2 Thessalonians 2:6 is neuter (“*what* is holding back”). But this is no problem for two reasons: (a) The neuter is sometimes used of the Holy Spirit (John 14:26; 15:26; 16:13-14). (b) In 2 Thessalonians 2:7 the words are masculine: *ho katechon*, the one who ... holds it back.”⁵²

“Since this “lawless one” and his power derive from Satan, it seems reasonable to suppose that only One powerful enough to restrain Satan is the One in view. Since the work of such restraint

⁴⁸ Robert L. Thomas, *The Expositors Bible Commentary, 2 Thessalonians* (Gaebelein, Frank E., General Editor. (1978). Expositor’s Bible Commentary, Volume 11 with the New International Version (Later Printing. ed.). Zondervan Publishing House.), 324-325.

⁴⁹ Warren Wiersbe, *2 Thessalonians*, The Bible Exposition Commentary – New Testament (Volume II – Ephesians-Revelation), (David C. Cook, 2004), 196-197.

⁵⁰ Benjamin C. Chapman, *2 Thessalonians*, King James Bible Commentary (Nelson, T., Hindson, E., & Kroll, W, Thomas Nelson (2005)), 1631-1632.

⁵¹ Lawrence O. Richards, *2 Thessalonians*, The Victory Background Commentary: New Testament (Home Bible Study Library, First Edition, First Printing, Victor Books), 517.

⁵² Thomas Constable, *2 Thessalonians*, Walvoord, John F. and Roy B. Zuck, editors (The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament (4th ed.). Victor Books, Wheaton, IL (1984)), 719.

is attributed elsewhere to the Holy Spirit (cf. Gn 6:3), it seems reasonable to suppose that He is the restrainer Paul had in mind here.”⁵³

“The Spirit-indwelt church is the restraining force!”⁵⁴

“The Holy Spirit indwelling the church and the individual believer seems to fit the description of the restrainer more completely and accurately than any of the others. Just as the restrainer is spoken of as Something and Someone in this chapter, so the Spirit is spoken of in John 14:26; 15:26; 16:8, 13,14 as both neuter (the Holy Spirit) and masculine (He).”⁵⁵

“Third, the “restrainer” of sin who is taken out (2 Thess 2:6-7) is best understood as the Holy Spirit, as embodied in the church. Some criticize this by saying that if the Holy Spirit is taken out, then no one can be saved during the tribulation. However, while the Spirit’s *restraining* work will be removed, His *convicting* work will continue, for an untold number of people will come to Christ during the seven-year tribulation.”⁵⁶

“Of the various suggestions, it would seem that the Restrainer must be supernatural in power. For what government could restrain Satan and do so continuously for 2,000 years? Yet, Scripture indicates that the Holy Spirit had just such a ministry (Gen. Gen. 6:3; Gen. 20:6; John John 16:18). It seems the best solution for the identity of the Restrainer is the Holy Spirit Himself. “The first participle (τὸ κατέχο [to katecho]) conforms to the gender of πνεῦμα [pneuma]. The second participle ὁ κατέχων [ho katechōn] confirms the personality of the Holy Spirit.”³ If this is so, this has significant implications concerning the Rapture of the Church because we previously saw that the Holy Spirit indwells those who are baptized into the Body of Christ permanently for the day of redemption. It is impossible that the Holy Spirit could depart from indwelling the sealed believer—He cannot be taken out of the way unless all born-again believers indwelt by Him are taken with Him! The Holy Spirit came down into the world at Pentecost in a special sense in which He had never been in the world, to dwell in the Church, the body of believers which is called the temple of the Holy Spirit (1Cor. 1Cor. 6:19). When all believers are removed to heaven according to the promise made to the church in Philadelphia (Rev. Rev. 3:10+), . . . the Holy Spirit goes out of the world in the sense that He came into it at Pentecost.”⁵⁷

“We believe the restrainer is none other than the Holy Spirit, or we could say the Holy Spirit working through the New Testament church. Supporting the idea that the Holy Spirit within the church is the restrainer is the fact that the restrainer is referenced both as a thing (neuter gender, verse 6) and as a person (masculine gender, verse 7). Also, the power delaying Satan’s masterplan to unveil his false messiah must be of God. It makes much more sense to say that the Holy Spirit is curbing the devil than a political entity or even an angel. The Holy Spirit of God is the only Person with sufficient (supernatural) power to do this restraining.”⁵⁸

⁵³ Kevin D. Zuber, *2 Thessalonians*, The Moody Bible Commentary, (Moody Publishers, 2014), 1893.

⁵⁴ Ray C. Stedman, *Waiting for the Second Coming: Studies in Thessalonians*, 128.

⁵⁵ William MacDonald, & A. L. Farstad, *2 Thessalonians*, (Believer’s Bible Commentary: First Edition, Thomas Nelson (1989)), 2054.

⁵⁶ Danny Akin, *A Rapture You Can’t Miss, The Return of Christ: A Premillennial Perspective* (Reflections from the Acts 1:11 Conference, B&H Academic, (2011)), 54.

⁵⁷ <https://www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/revelation/related-topics/who-is-the-restrainer.html>

⁵⁸ <https://www.gotquestions.org/restrainer.html>

“The Holy Spirit’s restraint of lawlessness has been a significant factor in the administration of God’s rule over the world.”⁵⁹

“Currently, the restrainer holds back lawlessness, but he will be removed someday. When he is out of the way, lawless activities will culminate through the man of lawlessness. But who is the restrainer? Only the Holy Spirit has the power to hold back sin from becoming full blown. He does this through His convicting ministry. Jesus taught that the Holy Spirit would convict the world of sin and righteousness and judgment (John 16:8). He will do so through Jesus' followers, but at the rapture Jesus' followers will be removed from the earth, and the earthly influence of Holy Spirit, who dwells in us, will be greatly diminished. While the Holy Spirit will still be on the earth, His unique sin-restraining ministry through saved believers will be gone: He will no longer convict the world of sin through believers. Therefore, lawlessness will reach an unprecedented manifestation.”⁶⁰

Summary:

- P1.)** The Spirit is said to be a restrainer in the Old Testament. (Genesis 6:3; 20:6; Isaiah 59:19b)
- P2.)** The Spirit is said to be the restrainer in the New Testament. (John 16:7-11; 1 John 4:4)
- P3.)** The Spirit is said to wrestle and restrain the flesh. (Galatians 5:17)
- P4.)** The Spirit was already in operation at that time (2 Thessalonians 2:6)
- P5.)** The change from neuter (vs.6) to the masculine (vs.7) makes the Spirit the most likely candidate as this is exactly how John depicts the Spirit (a thing and a person) (John 14:26; 15:26; 16:8; 13, 14)
- P6.)** The Spirit will be removed in God’s time, not man’s (2 Thessalonians 2:6)
- P7.)** The Spirit has effectively been restraining for 2,000 years
- P8.)** The Spirit is powerful enough to suppress the spiritual powers of darkness

With our study of the restrainer concluded we can summarize (vs.6): “And you know what restrains [*The Holy Spirit*] him [*The Man of Lawlessness*] now, so that he [*The Man of Lawlessness*] will be revealed in his time.” When the Holy Spirit ceases restraining the acts of the evil one, he will step aside with his church (in God’s ordained time) and allow Satan to establish his beast of the sea and beast of the earth. This will be a time of lawlessness, judgment, and chaos. This time of unrestrained evil will be similar to the days of Noah (Mt. 24:37-39), and the times of the greatest distress (*Jacob’s Trouble, Birth Pangs*) and period of wickedness on earth, every seen (Jer. 30:7, Mt. 24, Rev. 6-12).

7 – For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only He who now restrains will do so until He is removed. (7. τὸ γὰρ μυστήριον ἤδη ἐνεργεῖται τῆς ἀνομίας· μόνον ὁ κατέχων ἄρτι ἕως ἐκ μέσου γένηται)

The conjunction (γὰρ) connects (vs.7) with the previous verse where the man of lawlessness is said to be restrained by the Spirit of God. Again Paul uses an “article” to describe not only “a” mystery, but “the mystery”. The mystery of lawlessness must have already been at

⁵⁹ <https://israelmyglory.org/article/the-restrainer/>

⁶⁰ <https://www.bibleref.com/2-Thessalonians/2/2-Thessalonians-2-7.html>

work during the time of Paul. This mystery is something that is “new”, it is something that was unknown before its revelation during the church age. The mystery of lawlessness is best seen as the revelation of a future climax of lawlessness that will manifest in the world. The restraint is held by the “He” (ὁ), the Spirit until “He” (the Spirit) is removed.

8-10 – Then that lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will eliminate with the breath of His mouth and bring to an end by the appearance of His coming; [9] that is, the one whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and false signs and wonders, [10] and with all the deception of wickedness for those who perish, because they did not accept the love of the truth so as to be saved. (8. καὶ τότε ἀποκαλυφθήσεται ὁ ἄνομος, ὃν ὁ Κύριος Ἰησοῦς ἀνελεῖ τῷ πνεύματι τοῦ στόματος αὐτοῦ καὶ καταργήσῃ τῇ ἐπιφανείᾳ τῆς παρουσίας αὐτοῦ, 9. οὗ ἐστὶν ἡ παρουσία κατ’ ἐνέργειαν τοῦ Σατανᾶ ἐν πάσῃ δυνάμει καὶ σημείοις καὶ τέρασιν ψεύδους 10. καὶ ἐν πάσῃ ἀπάτῃ ἀδικίας τοῖς ἀπολλυμένοις, ἀνθ’ ὧν τὴν ἀγάπην τῆς ἀληθείας οὐκ ἐδέξαντο εἰς τὸ σωθῆναι αὐτούς)

“And then” (καὶ τότε) connects us with the previous clause in a sequential way. The lawless one will be revealed and immediately we are told of his demise in the next clause (ὃν ὁ Κύριος Ἰησοῦς ἀνελεῖ τῷ πνεύματι τοῦ στόματος αὐτοῦ καὶ καταργήσῃ τῇ ἐπιφανείᾳ τῆς παρουσίας αὐτοῦ). It is clear that this last part of the text has caused considerable trouble for scholars of the “Preteristic, Historicist, and Idealist” schools of thought. Why you might ask? Because this text is a direct parallel with Matthew 24:29-31 and Revelation 19:11-21. It is clear that this man of lawlessness will be killed by the Lord Jesus by means of “His mouth” and bring an end to his activity by the appearance of His coming. Nothing could be clearer. This is Jesus’ 2nd coming as clearly depicted in the Olivet Discourse and the Revelation 19. Let’s do a quick comparison between the three texts to demonstrate the validity of the parallel’s:

2 Thessalonians 2	Daniel	Matthew	Revelation
(vs.8) - And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will slay with the breath of His mouth and annihilate by the majesty of His arrival.	(7:11) - I kept looking until the beast was slain (7:20-22) - I kept looking, and that horn was waging war with the saints and overpowering them, until the Ancient of Days came, and judgment was passed in favor of the saints of the Highest One (11:36-45) - but he will meet his end with no one to help him	(24:29-31) - Immediately after the tribulation of those days: ‘The sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and all the tribes of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory....	(19:19-20) - Then I saw the beast and the kings of the earth with their armies assembled to wage war against the One seated on the horse, and against His army. But the beast was captured along with the false prophet, who on its behalf had performed signs deceiving those who had the mark of the beast and worshiped its image. Both the beast and the false prophet were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur.

There is absolutely no doubt in my mind that this text is a refuter to “Preterism, Historicism, and Idealism”. It is clear here that whoever the “man of lawlessness” is in the text he must be

defeated by the Lord Jesus himself at his appearing (ἐπιφανείᾳ τῆς παρουσίας αὐτοῦ). The parousia (παρουσίας) marks the end of this wicked man's reign. If Jesus has not yet had a second coming then it follows that the man-of-lawlessness, the beast in revelation, the little horn of Daniel, and the abomination of desolation of seen in Matthew 24 could not have yet happened. This causes a major problem for these positions. The only position that adequately deals with the text is the 'futurist' interpretation. The futurist is the one that sees the second coming as future for the church and the wrath poured out by Jesus at his second coming in conjunction with his coming. It is the coming of the Lord Jesus that puts an end to this man of lawlessness. We still await the Lord Jesus and his (παρουσίας), ergo this must be future.

The Lord Jesus will come (after the elapsed time) and will slay the man of lawlessness with the breath of his mouth (ἀνελεῖ τῷ πνεύματι τοῦ στόματος). This is exactly what we are told in Revelation 19. The Lord Jesus will put an immediate stop to the diabolical plan. Here the (παρουσίας) better aligns with the (παρουσίας) of (vs.1) and not the "gathering" of the saints.

In (vs.9) we see that the (παρουσία) of the man-of-lawlessness is accordance with the working of Satan (κατ' ἐνέργειαν τοῦ Σατανᾶ). This "working" (ἐνέργειαν) is confined to superhuman or supernatural activity. What we see is that this supernatural man of lawlessness will be charged with power from Satan to do his bidding.

Revelation 13:2-3 NIV

The beast I saw resembled a leopard, but had feet like those of a bear and a mouth like that of a lion. The dragon gave the beast his power and his throne and great authority. [3] One of the heads of the beast seemed to have had a fatal wound, but the fatal wound had been healed. The whole world was filled with wonder and followed the beast.

The dragon (Satan) gives the beast (Man-of-Lawlessness) "power, his throne, and great authority". Through this he gives him every power (πάσῃ δυνάμει) which is inherent power by which he will act these supernatural events; signs (σημεῖοις) which means they will be highly significant, and wonders (τέρασιν) which will provoke the observers to an attitude of awe and worship, yet all of this will be done through deception and falsehood (ψεύδους).

In (vs.10) the non-elect are perishing and will be brought into a place of confusion. They will take the unrighteousness as being righteous and will attribute deity to non-deity. They will perish because they did not love the truth, and were not saved because of it. This reminds us of Revelation 9:20-21 (*"The rest of mankind who were not killed by these plagues still did not repent of the work of their hands; they did not stop worshiping demons, and idols of gold, silver, bronze, stone and wood—idols that cannot see or hear or walk. [21] Nor did they repent of their murders, their magic arts, their sexual immorality or their thefts."*) Mankind will witness the wrath of God being poured out in the tribulation and will still not repent of their ways. They are clearly under the persuasion of Satan.

11-12 – For this reason God will send upon them a deluding influence so that they will believe what is false, [12] in order that they all may be judged who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness. (11. καὶ διὰ τοῦτο πέμπει αὐτοῖς ὁ Θεὸς ἐνέργειαν πλάνης εἰς

τὸ πιστεῦσαι αὐτοὺς τῷ ψεύδει, 12. ἵνα κριθῶσιν πάντες οἱ μὴ πιστεύσαντες τῇ ἀληθείᾳ ἀλλὰ εὐδοκήσαντες τῇ ἀδικίᾳ.)

Because of this unbelief (καὶ διὰ τοῦτο) God will send upon the unbelieving and unrepentant ones a “deluding influence” (ἐνέργειαν πλάνης). The same phrase that we saw in (vs. 9) is here as well. There is a “supernatural working” here that will specifically be sent by God, that will cause delusion. As to what this delusion is, we are not told by Paul.

“The Satanic promise that deceived Eve (Gen 3:5) will find its ultimate fulfillment in the end-time master of deceit.”⁶¹

In (vs.12) Paul continues with his statement: “in order that they all may be judged who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness”. The ultimate consequence that these unbelievers will face is their condemnation, and willingly choosing to participate in wickedness.

13-15 – But we should always give thanks to God for you, brothers and sisters beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth. [14] It was for this He called you through our gospel, that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. [15] So then, brothers and sisters, stand firm and hold on to the traditions which you were taught, whether by word of mouth or by letter from us. (13. Ἡμεῖς δὲ ὀφείλομεν εὐχαριστεῖν τῷ Θεῷ πάντοτε περὶ ὑμῶν, ἀδελφοὶ ἡγαπημένοι ὑπὸ Κυρίου, ὅτι εἴλατο ὑμᾶς ὁ Θεὸς ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς εἰς σωτηρίαν ἐν ἁγιασμῷ Πνεύματος καὶ πίστει ἀληθείας, 14. εἰς ὃ καὶ ἐκάλεσεν ὑμᾶς διὰ τοῦ εὐαγγελίου ἡμῶν, εἰς περιποίησιν δόξης τοῦ Κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ. 15. Ἄρα οὖν, ἀδελφοί, στήκετε, καὶ κρατεῖτε τὰς παραδόσεις ἃς ἐδιδάχθητε εἴτε διὰ λόγου εἴτε δι’ ἐπιστολῆς ἡμῶν)

In contrast with what had been said in the previous section Paul now proceeds to provide some encouragement to the church in Thessalonica. “But we”, encompassing him and those working with him ought to “always give thanks to God” for the church. Why? Because unlike those who will be judged and condemned (vs.11-12) God has chosen a people for himself. They can breathe easy knowing that although this man of lawlessness is coming (at a time they weren’t aware) and that they and the converts at Thessalonica will be saved from this period of wrath. This passage is also a strong proof of unconditional election. It was clear that God was the initiator of the order of salvation (choosing/electing) a people to himself before the world even was, setting that people apart “from the beginning” (ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς) for salvation. This work was the work of the Spirit (regeneration and sanctification) and through belief in the truth (conversion). God called them through the Gospel, such that they might share in the glory of Jesus Christ. God will fulfill his foreordained purpose by the means of the glorious Gospel and will bring to completion the work that he started. Remember saints, this was a work done by God and God alone. Salvation is 100% of the Lord. It is God who saves, not man.

It is important that this church adhere to doctrine that they were taught and not deviate. Paul makes it clear that the reason they got into the mess they did, was because they began believing

⁶¹ Robert L. Thomas, *The Expositors Bible Commentary, 2 Thessalonians* (Gaebelein, Frank E., General Editor. (1978). Expositor’s Bible Commentary, Volume 11 with the New International Version (Later Printing. ed.). Zondervan Publishing House.), 328.

things that were not taught directly from Paul. It is on them, through the work of the Spirit to adhere to things and stand firm. This practical call is a call to loyal steadfastness and a firm hold of the traditions. Just as Paul told the church of Thessalonica to adhere carefully to these doctrines, so we are to hold fast to the doctrines laid down by the Apostles and to not deviate from them.

16-17 – Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself and God our Father, who has loved us and given us eternal comfort and good hope by grace, [17] comfort and strengthen your hearts in every good work and word. (16. Αὐτὸς δὲ ὁ Κύριος ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς καὶ ὁ Θεὸς ὁ Πατὴρ ἡμῶν, ὁ ἀγαπήσας ἡμᾶς καὶ δοὺς παράκλησιν αἰωνίαν καὶ ἐλπίδα ἀγαθὴν ἐν χάριτι, 17. παρακαλέσαι ὑμῶν τὰς καρδίας καὶ στηρίξαι ἐν παντὶ ἔργῳ καὶ λόγῳ ἀγαθῷ)

Paul finishes off the chapter with a prayer. He reminds his audience that it isn't about him or his work, but about the comfort (παράκλησιν) of the Lord by grace. It is the Lord who will and strengthen the hearts such that they can proceed forward in their mission. They must be encouraged not to believe those who would mislead them, but to be encouraged and motivated to go forward without shrinking back and believing that they are in the Day of the Lord.

It should be noted that these texts are completely compatible with the Premillennial hope. Though Augustine and Storms claim not to know what to do with this passage (*because it doesn't comport with their system*) we can have confidence that we can correlate these passages together with our belief. We have confidence in our position because we are able to corroborate the data and to harmonize it with our position.