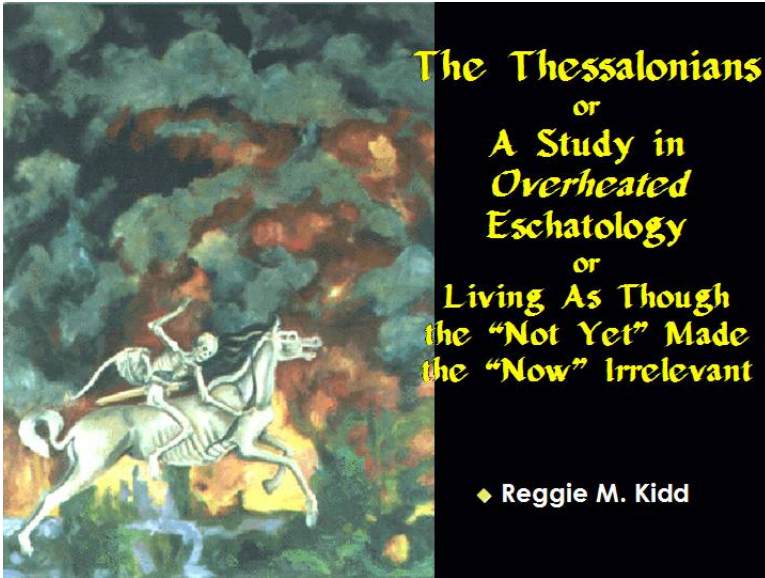


The Thessalonians or  
A Study in *Overheated* Eschatology or  
Living As Though the “Not Yet” Made the “Now” Irrelevant



Concerning Paul's remarks on the Thessalonians' fear that "the Day of the Lord has come" (2Th 2:2), Herman Ridderbos remarks:

"Paul's answer ... is ... directed against a conception that was unable to give content to the interim before the parousia and led to all kinds of disturbance and over-excitement"  
(*Paul: An Outline of His Theology*, p. 511, n. 68).

## Where Have You Gone, Thessalonians?



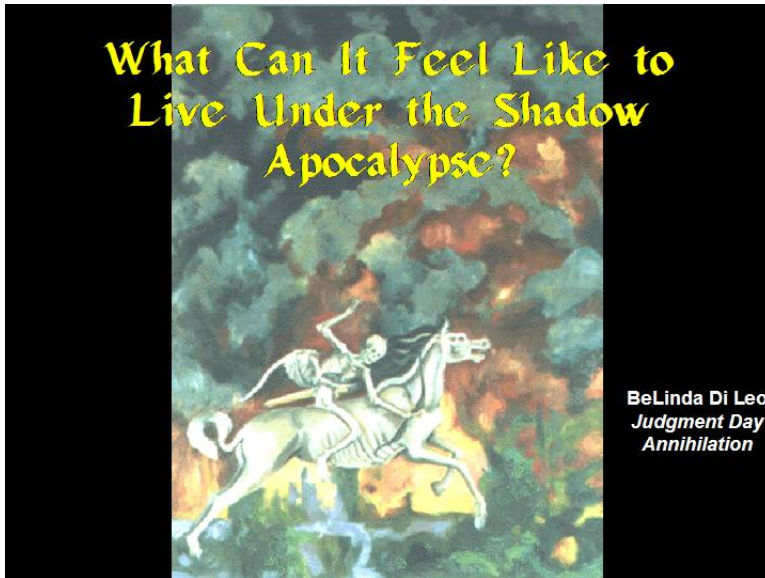
### BACKGROUND CONSIDERATIONS IN THE THESSALONIAN CORRESPONDENCE

The Galatians suffered from an undeveloped, under-realized eschatology. Paul had to warn them about reverting back to principles (i.e., Torah observance) relevant only to the old age, before "the fulness of time."

The Thessalonians are afflicted with a hyperactive eschatology. Enough people thought the Lord's return was so imminent, that they are puzzled when believers undergo physical death (1Th 4). By Paul's second letter to them, some are so primed for Christ's return in glory, Paul is concerned that they may be misled and shaken up by a false report that Paul was actually teaching the day of the Lord had already taken place (2Th 2; as if they could have missed it!).

The thrust of both these letters is to tone down their eschatology (i.e., to relax some of the tension between the already and the not yet), and to head off some of the ethical consequences of an overheated eschatology.

## What Can It Feel Like to Live Under The Shadow Apolcalypse?



This picture is accessible at <http://gort.ucsd.edu/mw/bdl2.html>. Following is the artist's explanation:

"This painting was developed from a newspaper clipping of the Branch Davidean compound engulfed in flames in Waco, Texas. The media image has been combined with Francisco Traini's depiction of a horseman of the Apocolypse. The expression of tradgedy in fourteenth century visual imagery remains in human conciousness six centuries later. For some, it symbolizes the anticipation of a future mass destruction."

For these letters two types of background information may be especially helpful:

- 1) contemporary pagan worship in Thessalonica;
- 2) more general observations by students of millenarian movements.

For what follows, see R. Jewett, *The Thessalonian Correspondence: Pauline Rhetoric & Millenarian Piety* (Fortress Press, 1986).

## The Thessalonian Cabirus Cult



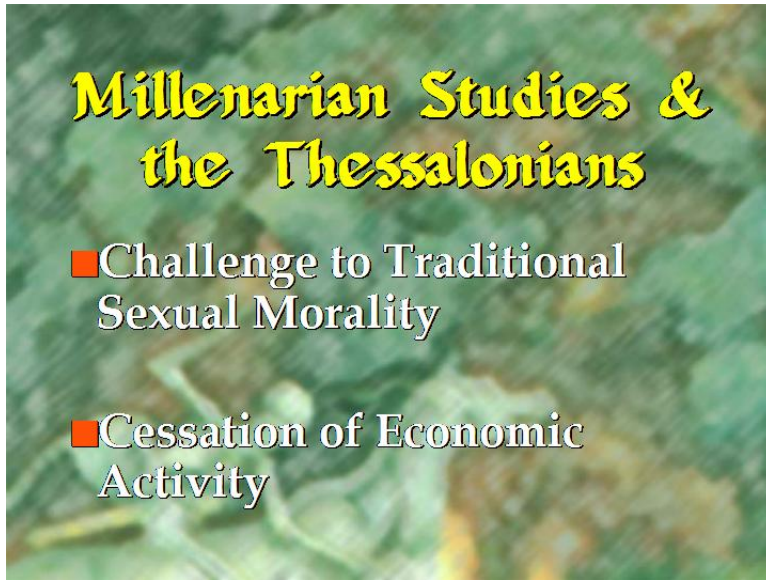
### The Thessalonian Cabirus Cult

Cabirus was the patron god of Thessalonica (originally of manual laborers, but by the 1st cent. co-opted into the civic cult). Cabirus was a hero who had been murdered by his two brothers; his head had been crowned and wrapped in a royal purple cloth (so the legend goes), and carried on a spear point to be consecrated and buried at the foot of Mt. Olympus by his guilt-ridden (and justice avoiding) brothers. In his honor they established a cult for him (sources divide over whether the brothers took the phallus of Bacchus with them from Mt. Olympus). Intermittently, Cabirus returns with his full powers restored, and is able to: help in the manufacture of iron and the performance of manual labor (coins picture him with forge and hammer); perform magical feats for the needy; provide freedom for slaves; empower sexual fulfillment.

Cabirus worship is especially interesting. It involved an initiation in special robes, confessing sins, cleansing through water baptism and symbolic immersion in the blood of the martyred god. Cabiric art (murals in Samothrace) portray dance that was "lighthearted, Bacchic, noisy ... (and) grotesquely phallic" (R.W. Witt, in Jewett, p. 130).

Note the concerns Paul expresses in 1 Thess 5:19-22.

## Millenarian Studies & the Thessalonians



### Millenarian Studies

Following are some (admittedly sketchy) data suggestive of the light study of millenarianism can shed on the peculiar mix of heightened eschatological expectation and “liberated” morality perhaps going on (or more likely, being considered) among the Thessalonians.

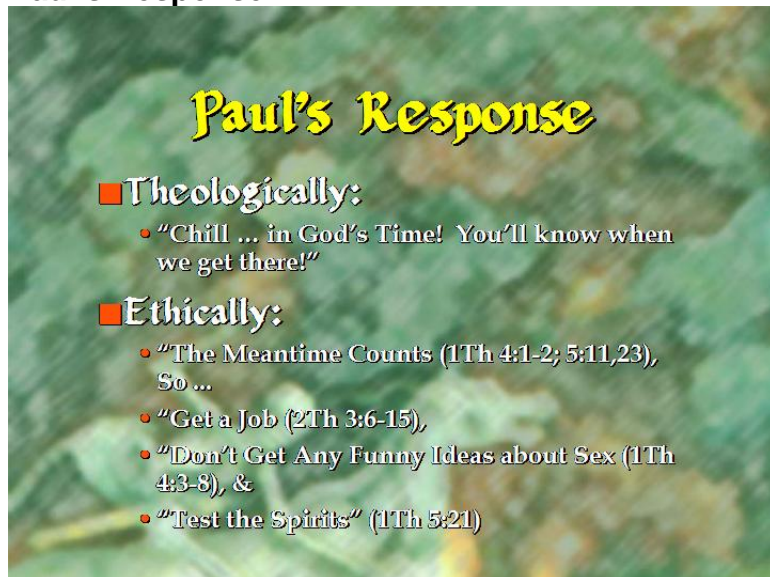
#### Challenge to traditional sexual morality:

- Cologne Beghards (chiefly Belgian Catholics, 12th-18th cent.) Beghards normally practiced sexual continence, but not so with Cologne Beghards of the 14th cent. The initiate's goal is to allow the divine nature and truth to work in him. This is the highest liberty, involving the absolute indulgence of the promptings of the presumably new nature – e.g., taking money from anyone, deceiving anyone, having sexual intercourse with anyone, whenever. The only danger is in submitting to some restraint, thus “falling away from the freedom of the spirit.” (Jewett, p. 172)
- Shabbatai Zevi (17th cent, self-proclaimed Jewish Messiah). In anticipation of a world made pure again, Shabbatai taught “the holiness of sin,” which was expressed particularly in violating sexual codes (Jewett, pp. 172-173).
- Frankist Movement (18th cent, Jewish millenarians, Poland). Jacob Frank, professing to be the reincarnation of Shabbatai Zevi, proclaimed the beginning of a new messianic order in which sin is sacred; the road to life is through the rejection of morals. Frankist rites involved ecstatic songs and dances and celebrated the presence of the spirit by sexual orgies. Said Frank, “Throw away what you have learned! Trample on all the laws you have obeyed and obey only me” (Jewett, p. 175).

#### Cessation of economic activity:

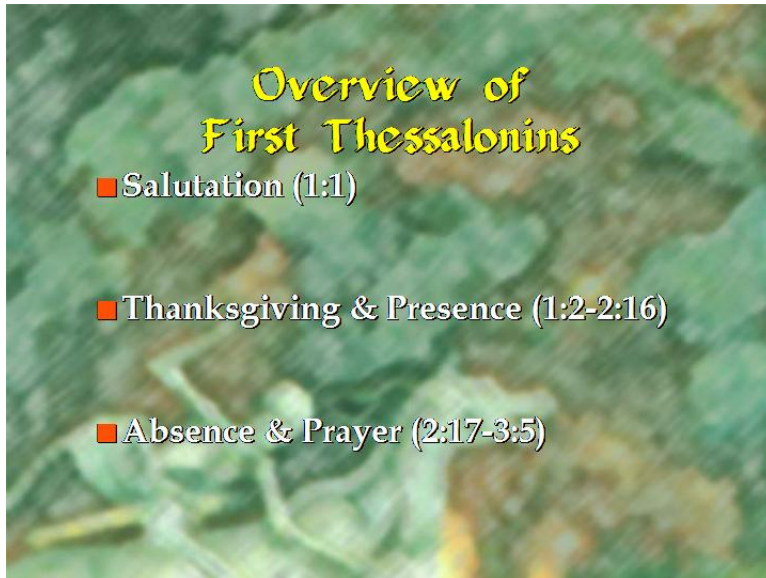
- Taborites (15th cent Hussites of Bohemia). Taught that the imminent inauguration of the millennium would bring the restoration of paradise, a return of the state of innocence of Adam. Those who joined the movement abandoned their occupations, pooled their property, and enjoyed love feasts in a communal life, anticipating the arrival of the 1,000 year kingdom (Jewett, p. 173).
- Old Believers (17th cent. liturgical dissenters in the Russian Orthodox Church). Abandoned their fields and homes in response to the prophecy that the millennial trumpet would sound in 1669 (Jewett, p. 173).
- Melanesian cargo cults. These have been heavily worked over both by cultural anthropologists and students of biblical apocalyptic. The bibliography in Jewett can orient you. I will pass along a description by Marcea Eliade: “...the period of waiting for the catastrophe which will precede the Golden Age is marked by a series of actions expressing an absolute detachment from ordinary values and behavior. Pigs and cows are slaughtered in a holocaust; all savings are spent in order to have done with European money...cemeteries are put in order and decked with flowers and new pathways are made; then all work ceases and the people await the dead around banquet tables. ...The young men and the young women live in a common house; in the daytime they bathe together and they pass the night in dancing” (quoted in Jewett, p. 174).

## Paul's Response



- Theologically:
  - "Chill...in God's Time! You'll know when we get there!"
- Ethically:
  - "The meantime counts (1Th 4:1-2; 5:11,23), So...
  - "Get a Job (2Th 3:6-15),
  - "Don't get any funny ideas about Sex (1Th 4:3-8) &
  - "Test the Spirits" (1Th 5:21)

## Overview of First Thessalonians



### OVERVIEW OF 1 THESSALONIANS

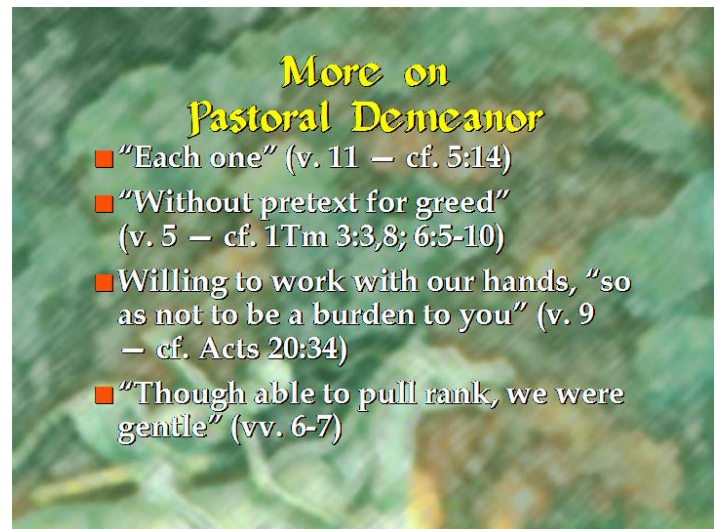
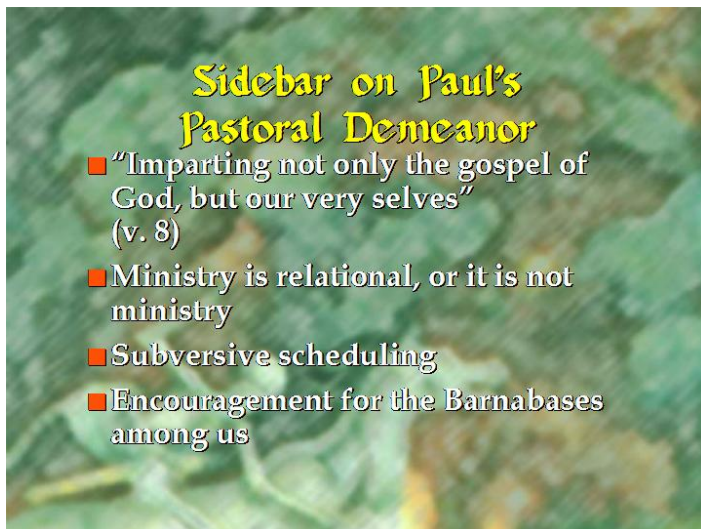
(adapted from notes by Dennis Johnson, WTS/CA)

- A. Salutation
- B. Thanksgiving: Paul Reminds Them of His **Presence** in the Planting of the Church (1:2-2:16)
  - 1. Paul's thanks (εὐχαριστοῦμεν, 1:2) in his knowledge (εἰδότες, v. 4) of the Thessalonians' joyful and enduring faith, love, hope amid persecution, in imitation of Paul's company (μιμηταὶ ἡμῶν ἐγενήθητε, v. 6). He has derived his knowledge from his memory of his visit (v. 3) and from the reports of others as he travels to new places (vv. 8-9).
  - 2. The Thessalonians' knowledge (αὐτοὶ γὰρ οἶδατε, 2:1) of Paul's sincerity, motherly gentleness and fatherly encouragement while among them (2: 1-12).

Sidebar on Paul's Pastoral Demeanor (cf. his speech to the Ephesian elders, Acts 20:17-38)

- 3. Paul's thanks (εὐχαριστοῦμεν, 2:13) for the Thessalonians' reception of the gospel as the Word of God amid persecution from countrymen, in imitation (μιμηταὶ ἡμῶν ἐγενήθητε, 2:14) of the churches in Judea (2:13-16).
- C. The Problem of Paul's **Absence**, Leading to His Prayer for the Church (2:17-3:5)
  - 1. Paul's intense pastoral concern **in absentia**, which gave rise to Timothy's mission of encouragement and information-gathering (2:17-3:5)
  - 2. Timothy's return with a joyful report, moving Paul to a further expression of thanksgiving (εὐχαριστία, 3:9) and to his prayer that he might himself return to "make up the lack" caused by the violent interruption of his ministry at Thessalonica (3:6-10)
  - 3. Paul prays that he might return to the Thessalonians, that God will increase their **love** and establish them in purity (ἀγιωσύνη, 3:13) (3:11-13).

## Sidebar on Paul's Pastoral Demeanor



- "Imparting not only the gospel of God, but our very selves" (v.8)
- Ministry is relational, or it is not ministry
- Subversive scheduling
- Encouragement for the Barnabases among us
- "Each One" (v.11 – cf. 5:14)
- "Without pretext for greed" (v.5 – cf. 1Tm 3:3,8; 6:5-10)
- Willing to work with our hands, "so as not to be a burden to you" (v.9 – cf. Acts 20:34)
- "Though able to pull rank, we were gentle" (vv.6-7)

## Overview of First Thessalonians (con't)

D. Body: Paul “Makes Up the Lack” by Letter (4:1-5:22)

1. Paul’s Pastoral Style (4:1-2): IMV grows out of IND – “in Christ”

IND serves the IMV – “(just as you actually are walking)” – language designed to make folks aspire more faithfully to achieve a goal Pauls has pronounced already to have been achieved.

2. Topics (4:3-5:22)

a. Purity (4:3-8 – ἁγιασμός, 4:3 – “this is God’s will”)

b. Love (4:9-10 – περὶ δὲ φιλαδελφίας)

c. Concerning those who have died in Christ (περὶ τῶν κοιμωμένων): they will not miss the Lord’s coming (4:13-18). “Therefore encourage each other” (4:18).

d. Concerning the time and circumstances of the day of the Lord (περὶ δὲ τῶν χρόνων καὶ τῶν καιρῶν): though it brings unexpected wrath on unbelievers, it brings the daylight of salvation to you who wait expectantly for it (5:1-11). “So then,” live in the daylight of alert self-control, faith and love (5:6-8).

Contrast between drunkenness and sobriety (5:6-8) – the drunkenness of forms of ecstasy that erode self control (Jewett, p. 101)? Clearly, by 2Th ecstatic prophecies (incorrectly proclaiming the end) had become a problem (2Th 2:2). 1Th 5:19-22 may also indicate conflicts within the congregation over the control and legitimacy of ecstatic gifts.

3. Miscellaneous Instructions (5:12-22)

a. Support your leaders (5:12-13)

b. Minister in person-specific ways (5:14 – remember Paul’s example in 2:3-12)

c. Repay harm with kindness (5:15)

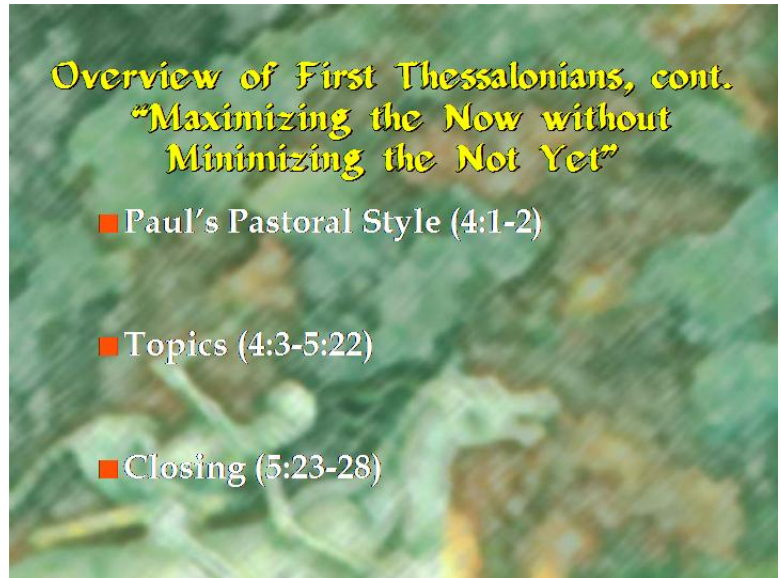
d. Rejoice, pray, give thanks – “this is God’s will” (5:16-18; cf., 4:3)

e. Regulate ecstatic manifestations (5:19-21)

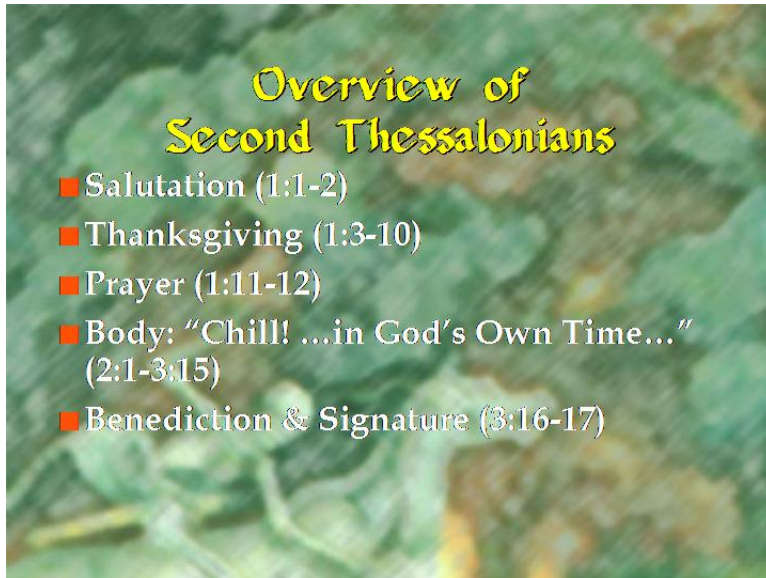
f. General command: Pursue good and avoid evil! (5:15,22)

E. Closing: Benedictions, Request for Prayer, Greeting (5:23-28)

“Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely (ἁγιάσαι ὑμᾶς ὁλοτελεῖς); and may your *spirit* and *soul* and *body* be preserved complete (ὀλόκληρον), without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus. Faithful is He who calls you, and He also will bring it to pass” (5:23-24). God’s faithfulness secures our holiness. A final reinforcement of encouragement amid suffering and a summons to purity.



## Overview of Second Thessalonians

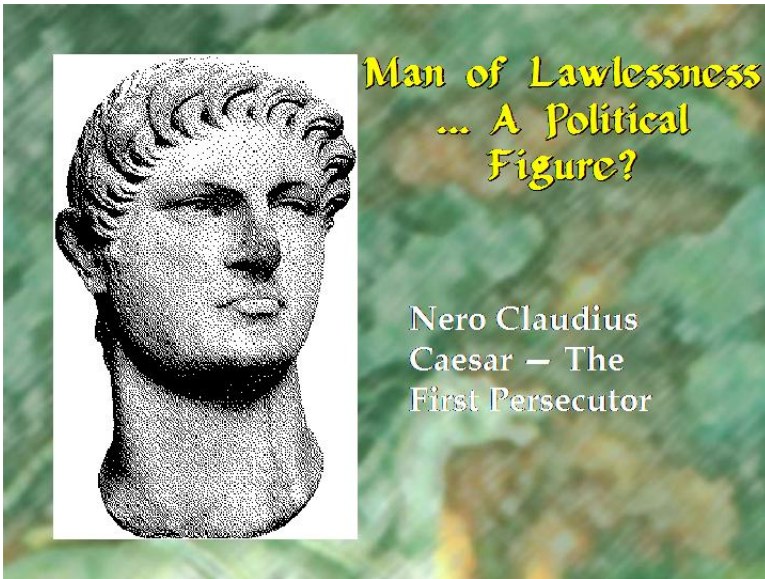


### OVERVIEW OF 2 THESSALONIANS

(adapted, again, from Dennis Johnson, WTS/CA)

- A. Salutation (1:1-2)
- B. Thanksgiving (1:3-10)  
Encouragement to endurance in faith amid persecutions, grounded on the future revelation of the Lord Jesus in glory (ἐνδοξασθῆναι v.10) [Note relationship between present sufferings and eschatological hope.]
- C. Prayer (1:11-12)
  - a. that God will consider you worthy of this calling: namely, to be among the believers who marvel at Jesus' appearing
  - b. that God will fill you with goodness and deeds of faith
  - c. in order that the name of the Lord Jesus will be glorified (ὅπως ἐνδοξασθῆ v.12) among you
- D. Body (2:1-3:15)
  - 1. A Clarification concerning the Parousia of Jesus (2:1-17)
    - a. The unsettling error: Is the day of the Lord already present? (2:1-3a)
    - b. The necessary precursor to the parousia: the apostasia and the man of lawlessness (2:3b-12)
    - c. The required response: stand firm! (2:13-17)
  - 2. Appeal for prayer and benediction: that the word of the Lord may be glorified (ἵνα ... δοξάζεται 3:1); the Lord will faithfully strengthen the Thessalonians for perseverance in faith (3:1-5)
  - 3. A Related Problem: Strengthened Warning against an Undisciplined, Irresponsible Lifestyle (3:6-15)
- E. Final Benediction and Signature, the Mark of Apostolic Authenticity (3:16-17)  
[Paul's greeting in his own hand counteracts the danger of counterfeit letters. 2:2]

## Man of Lawlessness ... A Political Figure?



### ISSUES SURROUNDING SECOND THESSALONIANS CHAPTER TWO

Who's the "Man of Lawlessness"? – 2Th 2:3

- also called "the Son of Perdition/Destruction" (v. 3)
- and "the Lawless One" (v. 8)  
cf., 1 John's "Antichrist" (2:18)  
cf., Revelation's "Beast from the Sea"

What's the "Mystery of Lawlessness" that's "Already at Work"? – 2Th 2:7

- also called "This Present Darkness" (Eph 6:12)
- also called "Latter Times" (1Tm 4:1-4; 2Tm 3:1-9)  
cf., 1 John's "Spirit of Antichrist" (4:3)  
cf., 1 & 2 John's "Many Antichrists" (1Jn 2:18; 2Jn 7)

Who's "the Restrainer" (2Th 2:7)? or What's "the Restraint" (2:6)?

What and When is "the Apostasy" (2:3,6,7)?

- cf. that which Revelation calls "the Battle..."
  - "... of the Great Day of God" (16:14)
  - "... against the Rider on the White Horse" (19:19; cf., 9:11ff)
  - "... against the Holy Camp & the Beloved City" (20:8)

## Or is “Man of Lawlessness” *Religious Language*?

### Or is “Man of Lawlessness” *Religious Language*?



Pope Marcellus  
& Palestrina

Were the  
Reformers total  
goofballs for  
calling the Pope  
Antichrist?

- This is Ridderbos' view (& incidentally, Kidd's)
- Daniel 10:13, 21; 12:1
- Revelation 20:1-3
- Christ's work has effected some change “in the heavenlies”
- Col. 2:15
- Col 1:19
- Eph. 1:20-23; 3:10

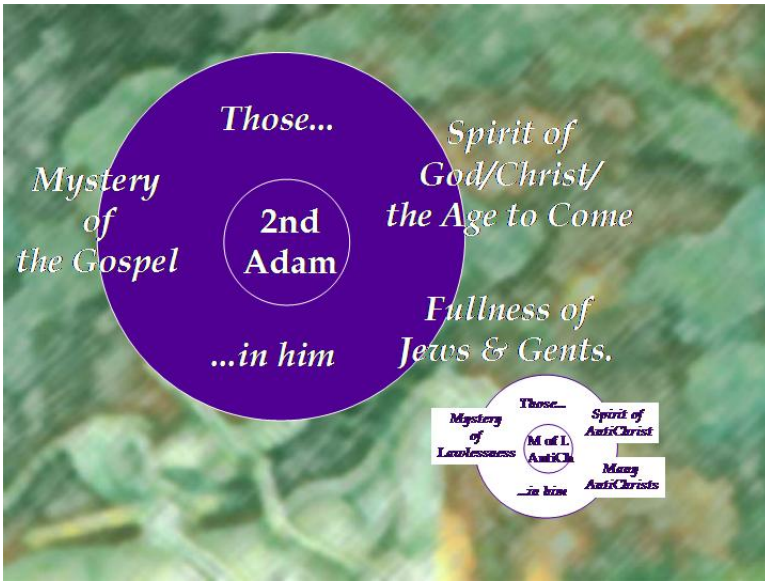
### The Man of Lawlessness – “A Parody of the Incarnation”

- **Leon Morris**
- “To be revealed”
- “In his own time”
- Has his own “parousia,” with signs, powers, & wonders
- Proclaims himself divine

### What & Who Holds Him Back?

- Some complex of: Gospel-Paul-Spirit?
  - See esp. Mk 13:10; Col 1:23
- Why not consider, in addition or as an alternative, some sort of heavenly restraint?

## 2<sup>nd</sup> Adam vs. Man of Lawlessness



## Endtimes Streamlined

| NT Source                                | Present Dominion of Christ                                   | Circumscription of Satan  | Point of Circumscription  | Present Evil Aeonic Force  | Future Incarnation of Evil   | Final Explosion of Evil   |
|--|--|---|---|--|--|---|
| <b>The Synoptics</b>                     | All Authority has been given to me                           | Exorcism & the Strong Man bound   | ...Disciples of All the Nations...; The Gospel must first be preached   |  | The Abomination of Desolation standing in the Holy Place (Mt 24:15)        | A Tribulation greater than any known to Humankind (Mt 24:21)              |
| <b>John's Gospel<br/>John's Epistles</b> | Son of Man lifted up<br>Son of Man appeared                  | Ruler of this World cast out<br>...to destroy the works of the Devil (3:8)  | I will draw all men to Myself   | The Spirit of Antichrist (4:3);<br>Presence of Antichrists (2:18; 2jn 7)               | The Antichrist is coming (2:18)  |   |
| <b>John's Revelation</b>                 | Revelation 5 etc.  | Devil cast down from Heaven; Bound in the Abyss   | ...He should not deceive the Nations any longer, Until....(20:3)  | The Dragon persecutes the Woman on Earth (12:13)                                       | Rev 13s Beast from the Sea: A Parody of Christ                             | Satan released; Gathering of Armies of Man for the War against the Saints |
| <b>Paul's Letters &amp; Acts</b>         | Col. 1:12-20<br>Eph 1:20-23<br>Acts 2:30-36<br>Acts 13:33,34 | Christ has disarmed, made public display of, and triumphed over "Rulers & Authorities" (Col. 2:15)"The Restrainer" placed over the Man of Lawlessness (2Th 2:6,7) | Gentiles being turned from the Authority of Satan to God (Acts 26:18); The Wisdom of God is made known through the Church to the "Rulers & Authorities" in the Heavens (Eph 3:10; Col 1:27) | The mystery of Lawlessness already at work (2Th 2:7); This Present Darkness (Eph 6:10) | The Man of Lawlessness will be revealed "In His Time" – A Parody of Christ | "The Restrainer" taken away; The Apostasy (2th 2:3,6,7)                   |