

The prophecies of the Man of Sin may loom fearful and threatening, but in these dark prophecies the brightness of our salvation shines stronger, set off by the background of the rise and fall of the Man of Sin,” as he is prophesied in 2 Thessalonians 2:3-8 may we embrace the bright hope of faith which overcomes all.

Monday: Read 2 Thessalonians 2:1-7

Evil Restrained

Every world calamity prompts some to wonder whether Christ’s return might be imminent. This “advent fever” has in turn led to an unhealthy preoccupation with that evil character called the “antichrist” or “man of lawlessness” in 2 Thessalonians 2:3. Paul insists that the coming of this man must precede Christ’s return in 2 Thessalonians 2:3, so it is not surprising, since his coming on the scene is understood to be the “prelude” to Christ’s return, that many strain their minds looking for signs of the rise of this evil character – precisely because they are anxious to see the events accomplished so that they can welcome their Savior!

But we are not to speculate on just who this “man of lawlessness” is; Paul is not specific. Nor are we to be impatient with God for delaying Christ’s return, as if God’s slowness implied a lack of planning, power or compassion for this suffering world or His suffering people. Instead, let us rejoice in the reality of 2 Thessalonians 2:5-7, where we are reminded that by His Spirit God restrains evil and protects His church – even “holding back the man of lawlessness” until the time for his destruction has drawn nigh! Indeed, we live in the age of the rule of the Holy Spirit in this world. When God “...hides His face, men are terrified; when He takes away their breath, they die and return to the dust. When you send His Spirit, they are created, and God renews the face of the earth” (Psalm 104:29-30).

Meditate and Pray: In the midst of a world convulsed by protests, terrorism, war, and the threats of those who know not the Lord Jesus Christ, ask God to use this week’s study of God’s power over the “man of sin” to enhance your sense of security in this evil world.

Tuesday: Read 2 Thessalonians 2:1-8

Certainties

Any study of such controversial matters as the *timing* of Christ’s return and the *role in history* of the antichrist can easily cause offense and distrust between Christians, as if disagreement over these matters means disagreement over essential matters of the faith. But let us affirm with gratitude what all biblical Christians affirm about the last things – even when they disagree about time-line details surrounding Christ’s return.

1. There will one day be a universal resurrection of the body, at which time all those who belong to Christ by faith will be openly acquitted on the Day of Judgment. For all others, eternal condemnation and bodily suffering forever in hell will be the verdict (Matthew 25:31-46).
2. Until that day, those who die “in the Lord” will immediately be ushered into Christ’s presence, and their bodies, being also united to Christ, will rest in the grave until the resurrection. Those who die in unbelief are immediately brought into hell. There is no “limbo” or second chance after death (Luke 16:19-31).

3. This Day of Judgment of the wicked and vindication of God's own people is directly tied to Jesus Christ's victorious superiority to all His foes – whom He shall destroy “with the breath of His mouth” (2 Thess. 2:8).
4. Finally, Christ alone is worthy to carry out such a judgment. Because of His satisfying Divine justice by dying in our place on the Cross and victoriously rising from the dead, He alone will return visibly to personally judge all mankind and each individual who has ever lived (Acts 17:31).

Meditate and Pray: Father, you will preside on the Day where all things are summoned before You and this Age's history ends. We rejoice to know we are loved and kept by the Lord Jesus until that Day.

Wednesday: Read 2 Thessalonians 2:9-12 & Matthew 12:27-30

Deluded and Used Up

The wicked go from one corner of the earth to the other, unable to hide from the righteous judgment to fall on their heads. To try and escape God's scrutiny, they run to one false remedy after another – all promising peace but simply bringing more misery. Such rootless souls are ripe targets for the many delusions and ruses of the man of lawlessness, whose coming, according to 2 Thessalonians 2:9-10, “will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing.”

How exhausting to swallow all the cons and lies by which the satanic world promises happiness! What bondage to pursue the “next big thing,” only to find that Satan uses you and spits you out. That is the endless round of delusions which 2 Thessalonians 2:9-12 describes.

Meditate and Pray: If this age in which we live is the age of the rule of the Holy Spirit, it is also the age of satanic deception, for the foe of Gospel Truth knows “his time is short.” Ask the Lord to “bind afresh” the deceiving power of Satan in our families, communities and state. Thank Jesus that, by His Spirit at work in our day and among our loved ones, He is able to plunder those who previously were Satan's property. Ask Him to claim many from Satan's grasp by giving them a saving love of the truth.

Thursday: Read 2 Thessalonians 2:13-17 and Matthew 13:24-30

Lord of the Harvest

This world is a dark place of deception and hatred of the truth, but how wonderful to have a Father who can calmly put an end to all the world's lies. He ensures that His quiet harvest of Gospel truth will indeed come to fruition – in our lives! How is God able to harvest every kernel of wheat in the lives of His elect – despite the constant, deceiving presence of the weeds of sin and the tares of Satan?

It is because He has a Son who is the Master Farmer – always patient, always knowing the health of every shoot of faith in our lives. God's Son moves without haste or fear among the tares of this world, gathering His elect from the four corners of the world!

Meditate and Pray: Thank God the Father and the Son that they work as a perfect Father-Son team in the harvest field of this world – and that they will lose not one of the grains of wheat in the elect. Absolute security! What a harvest to come one day. We will truly experience the joy of # 715 in our *Trinity Hymnal*:

*Come, ye thankful people, come, raise the song of harvest home;
All is safely gathered in, ere the winter storms begin.
God our Maker doth provide for our wants to be supplied;
Come to God's own temple, come, raise the song of harvest home.*

*All the world is God's own field, fruit unto His praise to yield;
Wheat and tares together sown unto joy or sorrow grown.
First the blade and then the ear, then the full corn shall appear;
Lord of harvest, grant that we wholesome grain and pure may be.*

Friday: Read 2 Thessalonians 2:13-17 and Joshua 5:10-12

First Fruits of Rest

In keeping with the harvest theme of yesterday's notes, we should notice that an early manuscript uses one of Paul's favorite phrases to describe God's saving purposes in our lives, quoting Paul in 2 Thessalonians 2:13 as saying that God "chose us to be His first-fruits." "First-fruits" referred originally to the joyful accomplishments of crossing the Jordan River, renewing God's covenant of circumcision and entering the Promised Land in Joshua four and five. As Israel rested in the safety of the Promised Land, God blessed His tired and hungry people with the first produce of the Promised Land – the barley harvest. Because of this abundant provision, the manna of their forty years in the desert was no longer needed. It stopped as God's people began to enjoy "the produce of Canaan" (Josh. 5:12).

Did the sweet taste of barley and the enjoyment of the "land of milk and honey" mean that all Israel's troubles were over? Of course not! After just one verse (Josh. 5:13), Joshua is so scared at the prospect of conquering the great walled city of Jericho that he cannot even recognize the Lord Himself coming to His aid! Though the battles would continue, the "first-fruits" were God's pledge that a new day had begun for His people, and that they would be safe in their inheritance.

Meditate and Pray: Thank God that Paul can write in the same way about us as God's "first fruits." Though the "man of lawlessness" will arise and many will go on deceiving and being deceived in this world, our place in God's harvest is secure! Not one grain of God's elect harvest will be lost!

Sat/Sun: Read Proverbs 13:15

Gentle and Hidden Growth

There is a marked contrast in Scripture between the harvest of the Spirit and the works of the flesh. Harvests tend to be quiet, slow, often hidden, gradual but sure; whereas 'works' speak of a long, slow, hard grind, the treadmill of sin. "The way of transgressors is hard." (Prov. 13:15)

Tom Swanston, *Come to the Feast*

Meditate and Pray: Thank God for His quiet and persistent harvest of souls into His kingdom, and that not even the full growth of wickedness can prevent the ripening of our lives as God's "first fruits."