

The “Man of Sin”

By Tim Warner © www.answersinrevelation.org

2 Thessalonians 2:1-12

1 Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, we ask you, 2 not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of Christ had come.

3 Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and **the man of sin** is revealed, **the son of perdition**, 4 **who** opposes and exalts **himself** above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that **he** sits as God in the temple of God, showing **himself** that he is God.

5 Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things? 6 And now you know what is restraining, that **he** may be revealed in his own time.

7 For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only He who now restrains will do so until He is taken out of the way. 8 And then **the lawless one** will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming.

9 The coming of **the lawless one** is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, 10 and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. 11 And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, 12 that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

The pretribulation rapture doctrine claims that Christians will be removed from the earth before the future time of great tribulation, and will not encounter the Antichrist, the mark of the Beast, or the intense persecution. This doctrine is deadly because it removes all incentive for Christians to prepare for “*the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth.*”¹ Those who embrace this fable will be caught completely unprepared for what is about to appear shortly. And the promoters of this tale will bear part of the responsibility for the calamity to befall the ill-prepared.²

¹ Rev. 3:10

² Matt. 24:9-14, 2 Thess. 2:3

Yet, pretribulation teachers are not the only ones who will have the blood of those who forsake Christ on their hands. Amillennialists and preterists will share in that as well. These preachers and teachers claim that the “tribulation” is already past, and there is no personal Antichrist or literal mark of the Beast just before Christ returns. They claim that these things were fulfilled in the first century. And like pretribulationists, they teach that Jesus may come at any moment and take believers from their padded pews and comfortable homes up to heaven. There is no suffering to be endured, and no time of testing for believers.

In my recent debate with Chuck Doughty, Chancellor of Christian Kingdom College and Church of Christ evangelist, Paul’s second letter to the Thessalonians became a matter of contention between us. I argued that the coming of “*the Man of Sin, the Son of Perdition,*” will immediately precede the coming of Christ for His own. Chuck Doughty denied that this was future, and denied that it referred to an individual man. Rather, he equated it with a heretical system which existed in the early Church. In Doughty’s eschatology, “*the Man of Sin, the Son of Perdition*” will not appear just before Jesus returns. Rather, such terms describe an apostate system which has always existed alongside the truth.

The Grammatical Evidence for an Individual “Man of Sin”

There are several proofs that Paul was speaking of a single person in this passage.

1. Paul used three titles for this person, the first of which is “the man of sin.” Obviously, a “man” (singular) is a single individual. Doughty countered that the singular “man” (ανθρωπος) can sometimes refer to mankind collectively. He pointed to cases where Scripture might say, “blessed is the man...” Yet, in such cases, a single hypothetical “man” is in view who meets the criteria of the passage, not a collective group which is called “the man” (singular). And while some might interpret a few other rare passages with “mankind” as the meaning, in every such case it is also possible to interpret the text as referring to a single individual man. For example: “*The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath.*”³ This passage speaks of the creation of man. While Doughty might suppose that “man” here is mankind, it is more probable that it refers to Adam specifically, and only by inference does it apply to all of Adam’s descendants. Thus, the

³ Mark 2:27

singular “man” refers specifically to an individual, as with virtually every other case where this word appears.

A definition of “mankind” generally, even if it could be proven to be a legitimate meaning of “ανθρωπος,” will simply not work in the context of 2 Thess. 2. We are not left to guess what “man” Paul was referring to in the clause, “Man of Sin,” because the genitive noun (of sin) qualifies the word “man.” The genitive case noun restricts and limits the noun that it follows.⁴ Thus, it is not just any “man,” nor is it merely “mankind” in general, but a particular man – the “Man of Sin.” The Greek word rendered “of sin” is an attributive genitive noun.⁵ The meaning of the whole clause is, “the sinful man.” In no case does the New Testament ever use “ανθρωπος” (man) with such a genitive qualifier in any passage that could possibly be referring to a collective “man” (consisting of more than one individual). Thus, the use of the clause, “the Man of Sin” requires a single individual as its referent – “the sinful man.”

2. The clause, “the Son of Perdition,” also requires a single individual. While a few debatable examples of “man” might be produced which could be understood to be a collective “mankind,” no such examples can be produced from the New Testament for the Greek word for “son” being a collective group. A “son” (singular) is always a single individual, the offspring of another human being. As with “the Man of Sin,” we also have a genitive qualifier noun (of perdition) here which limits the noun “son” to a particular son. In this case, the genitive is a possessive – properly rendered “perdition’s son.” This title (the son of perdition) is used only here and in John 17:12, where it refers to Judas Iscariot. There is no doubt that Judas was a single individual. Thus, the future “son of perdition” must be a single individual, an end-time Judas Iscariot.

3. Paul also twice referred to this person as “the lawless one.” The Greek says, “ο ανομοος” – literally, “the lawless one.” The word “one” is not in the Greek text, but is required. Here is why. The word “ανομοος” is the word “law” prefixed with the negative particle, “a.” Essentially, it means “without law.” Yet, this word is an adjective, not a noun. Greek adjectives can be substituted for a noun by including the definite article before it. And that is the case here. This word does not modify another noun, as

⁴ Wallace, Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics, p. 76

⁵ Wallace, Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics, p. 86

adjectives usually do. Rather, it is a substantive (standing in for a noun). And we know this because of the use of the definite article and no other noun in the clause to modify.

Greek nouns have a fixed gender which cannot be altered. Thus even if Paul wished to have the clause “man of sin” refer to an entity that was not a man, he could not change the gender of the word “man” from masculine to neuter. However, the endings of adjectives are altered to change their gender. This is normally done so that the adjective agrees in gender with the noun it is modifying (attributive adjectives must agree in gender with the noun they modify). However, when an adjective is used as a substantive (acting as a noun), the writer is completely free to choose the gender for the adjective to reflect more accurately his meaning. Thus, if Paul wanted to refer to a lawless woman, he would use the same adjective but put it in the feminine gender and add the definite article. If he wanted to use the same term to refer to a non-human entity or something other than a man he would use the neuter gender and the definite article. Yet, the term “the lawless one” is in the masculine gender (and singular number), showing that Paul had in mind a man. Thus, it is translated “the lawless one” (meaning “the lawless man”). As in the previous two titles (“man of sin” and “son of perdition”), this one also requires a single man. This title is even more definitive because Paul was free to choose the gender of the adjective, and he chose the masculine gender, not the neuter gender.

4. Singular masculine participles are used of this man. Verse 4 begins with “who opposes...” This is a translation of a participle with the definite article. As with the adjective with the article, the participle can stand in for a noun, literally “the one opposing ...” Like the adjective, the participle can change its gender depending on what the writer wishes to convey. Here it is also singular masculine, referring to an individual man.

5. Paul also used singular masculine pronouns to refer to this man. The Greek pronoun, “αυτος” is equivalent to our personal pronoun, “he” or “him.” Again, such pronouns refer to individual persons, not to a collective group. Someone might suppose that “αυτος” could refer to man collectively in Hebrews 2:6. “*What is man that you are mindful of him.*” Such an interpretation would be dependent on first proving that “man” refers to mankind. Yet, “ανθρωπος” does not have the definite article here. Thus, the proper

rendering is “*what is a man that you are mindful of him.*” “Man” was used in a generic sense, yet still refers to a single individual, (any man).

Even more importantly, Paul used the Greek pronoun, “*εαυτον*” – “himself” in reference to the “man of sin.” He sits in the Temple, showing **himself** that he is God. This word appears over 300 times in the New Testament, always referring to a single person. In no case can “himself” refer to a collective group, or to anything other than a single man. To suggest otherwise is to mutilate the grammar.

There is simply no basis in the grammar for the idea that the “man of sin” is anything other than a single human being. And those who deny this do so simply because the text does not agree with their eschatology, not because the text supports it. They are forcing Paul’s words, which Peter says will end in their own destruction,⁶ and no doubt also in the destruction of those who follow them.

Was the Man of Sin Present or Future?

The question of time is slightly more complicated than the question of person.

1. The first issue relates to the limitations of a man’s lifespan. Having proven above that the “man of sin” is a human being, he can only exist on earth for one human lifetime. The context describes plainly his demise, “*whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming.*” Therefore, the appearance of this man must be within one human lifetime of the second coming of Christ. And of course this is why Paul exhorted the Thessalonians that the Day of Christ, and our being gathered together unto Him, cannot come until after this man is revealed. His appearance therefore is a sign that Jesus’ coming is within one lifetime.

2. Next, we must examine the tenses of the verbs that relate to him and what he does. We notice that Paul used both present and future tense verbs. The future tense verbs are found in verse 8 (“*the lawless one **shall be revealed***”) and in verse 11 (“*God **will send** them strong delusion*”). There is no question that future indicative verbs refer to future time from the perspective of the writer. So, there is absolutely no question that the revealing of the man of sin was future in Paul’s day, and also the arrival of the strong delusion.

⁶ 2 Pet. 3:16

However, there are several present participles and a few present verbs here as well. The use of the present tense in Greek is much more complicated than the future tense, and dependent on intruding factors from the context. Of course, the present tense in its *unaffected meaning* (in a vacuum) would refer to continuous present action or state. But, in actual usage, its *affected meaning* is dependent on lexical, contextual, and grammatical nuances.⁷ For example, when Scripture uses present tense verbs such as “is coming” (as in “*the day of the Lord **is coming** as a thief in the night*”)⁸, the implied lexical meaning of the verb is future even though the verb is in the present tense. Other contextual factors also strongly affect the actual time element of the present tense.

The present tense is commonly used in both historical narrative (past) and prophecy (future). The former is called the “historical present,” the present tense being used for its vividness (viewing the action as though you had actually been there watching it).⁹ When the future tense is used in prophecy, it is called the “futuristic present,” stressing the certainty of what is being prophesied (as though it were already happening).¹⁰ Both of these usages are common in the New Testament.

In this case, the context strongly suggests a future series of events. This is shown by the fact that the Thessalonians were wrongly supposing that Christ’s return was imminent, and that Paul was showing them that it was not because the man of sin must be revealed first. Also, his being revealed was spoken of in the future tense in verse 8. Since his sitting in the Temple claiming to be God was something that the Thessalonians were instructed to expect first (before Christ will return), it is evident that the present tense verbs and participles which describe this are meant to stress the certainty of that event. Thus the Thessalonians should by no means expect the Lord to return until that occurred. The grammar is consistent with a future revealing of the man of sin, and future Temple defilement.

3. Yet, there is another proof that the arrival of the man of sin was still future in Paul’s day. Verse 9 describes the “coming” of the man of sin as being in accordance with Satan, with false signs and wonders and all unrighteous deception. The next verse

⁷ See Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, p. 514-515

⁸ 1 Thess. 5:2

⁹ Wallace, p. 516

¹⁰ Wallace, p. 535-536

states that *“God will send them a strong delusion,”* referring to the lying miracles by the power of Satan.¹¹ Notice that *“will send”* is future tense. Therefore, since the coming of the man of sin is by means of deceptive signs and wonders, and God will (future) send these deceptions because people have chosen to reject the gospel, the *“coming”* of the man of sin must also be future because it is made possible by the deception that God will send in the future. Thus, we have overwhelming grammatical and contextual proof that the man of sin is both a human being and that he will arrive on the stage to defile the Temple of God shortly before the coming of Christ for His own.

The Mystery of Lawlessness

Those who allegorize these events and stretch them out for the entire present age claim that the *“mystery of lawlessness”* (which Paul said was already at work) and the *“man of sin”* are exactly the same thing. Since Paul said that the *“mystery of lawlessness”* was already at work, they claim that the *“man of sin”* was already present.

We have already proven that all of the nouns, adjectives, participles, and pronouns which refer to the *“man of sin”* are singular and in the masculine gender. But, the *“mystery of iniquity”* is in the neuter gender. It is a thing, not a person. Therefore, *“mystery of iniquity”* cannot be in apposition¹² to the *“man of sin.”* A *“mystery”* is not a concrete entity, but an abstract noun. The *“man of sin”* is always described using concrete substantives. Therefore, while the *“mystery of iniquity”* was already present in Paul’s day, the coming of the *“man of sin”* was still future. The *“mystery of iniquity”* is that deceptive Gnostic spirit¹³ which John referred to as *“the spirit of antichrist”*¹⁴ that will bring about the man himself in the last days. Paul coined the term, *“mystery of iniquity,”* in reference to the Gnostic spirit. He coined the terms, *“the man of sin,”* *“the son of perdition,”* and *“the lawless one,”* in reference to this ultimate Gnostic cult leader. After Paul’s death, John coined the terms *“spirit of antichrist”* and *“the Antichrist,”* stressing the counterfeit nature of the deception. Just as *“the Antichrist”* is the counterfeit *“Christ,”* so also the *“spirit of antichrist”* is the counterfeit *“Spirit if Christ.”*

¹¹ How can such deception be by the power of Satan and also be sent by God? Several plagues in Revelation are clearly orchestrated by Satan, yet released by God’s command, (cf. Rev. 9:1-5).

¹² *“Apposition”* refers to a syntactical relationship where a different term is substituted for the same thing or person mentioned using other terms in the same context. <http://www.answers.com/topic/apposition>

¹³ *“spirit”* is neuter in Greek, as is *“mystery.”* Thus, there is a conceptual agreement between such terms.

¹⁴ 1 John 4:3

The Coming Kingdom

Our treatment of 2 Thessalonians 2 would not be complete without mentioning the prophecy Paul alluded to when he spoke of the destruction of the man of sin.

2 Thess 2:8 NKJV

*8 And then the lawless one will be revealed, **whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth** and destroy with the brightness of His coming.*

Isaiah 11:1-10 NKJV

*1 There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse, And a Branch shall grow out of his roots. 2 The Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon Him, The Spirit of wisdom and understanding, The Spirit of counsel and might, The Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD. 3 His delight is in the fear of the LORD, And He shall not judge by the sight of His eyes, Nor decide by the hearing of His ears; 4 But with righteousness He shall judge the poor, And decide with equity for the meek of the earth; He shall strike the earth with the rod of His mouth,¹⁵ **And with the breath of His lips He shall slay the wicked** [one].¹⁶*

5 Righteousness shall be the belt of His loins, And faithfulness the belt of His waist.

6 "The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, The leopard shall lie down with the young goat, The calf and the young lion and the fatling together; And a little child shall lead them. 7 The cow and the bear shall graze; Their young ones shall lie down together; And the lion shall eat straw like the ox. 8 The nursing child shall play by the cobra's hole, And the weaned child shall put his hand in the viper's den. 9 They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain, For the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD As the waters cover the sea."

10 "And in that day there shall be a Root of Jesse, Who shall stand as a banner to the people; For the Gentiles shall seek Him, And His resting place shall be glorious."

By referencing the slaying of the wicked one by the breath of the Messiah's mouth, Paul connected the arrival of the Kingdom to the destruction of the "man of sin." He will be recognized by lying signs and wonders and by his defiling the Temple. He will be destroyed by Christ when He comes to establish His Kingdom over all the earth.

¹⁵ Cf. Psalm 2:8-9 & Rev. 19:15

¹⁶ The Hebrew text reads, "the wicked one." <http://www.scripture4all.org/OnlineInterlinear/OTpdf/isa11.pdf>