

IN GOD'S TIME
BIG IDEA: We are called to live with an "eager patience" for Jesus' return as we wait on God's perfect timing.
DATE: Wednesday, November 11 and Sunday, November 15, 2026
SCRIPTURE: 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12 (CSB)

OPENING QUESTION

Can you spot a counterfeit bill? Do you know what key characteristics to look for? (watermarks, cotton-linen paper with raised ink, security threads glow different colors under UV light) *Or do you think you could tell the difference between Dr. Pepper and Mr. Pibb? Sprite and Slice? Coke and RC Cola? Why or why not?*

OPTIONAL ACTIVITY: Conduct a blind taste test to see if your group can spot the imitation! Bring in a can of Dr. Pepper and Mr. Pibb (or other off-brands) and some small cups labeled A and B. Have volunteers leave the room or close their eyes, and pour the real thing in CUP A and the imitation in CUP B. See if they can spot the imitation.

According to the Farmers Bank there is an estimated $70 to $200 million in fake bills circulating at any given time, and about 60% of it stays within the United States. In an era where technology makes counterfeiting easier, we need to know how to spot a fake. The good news: you can check for a fake bill at home in under a minute, using nothing but your eyes, your fingers, and a light source.

Banks do not train their employees by studying all the possible fakes – they just have to study the real thing to be able to spot a fake. The same is true in our Christian lives. We are called to know the Word of God so well, that we will be able to spot a false teacher on our own. One day an Antichrist will come imitating Jesus.

SETTING THE STAGE

The purpose of Bible prophecy is not for us to make a calendar but to build character. Paul emphasized this fact in both of his Thessalonian letters, and our Lord warned us not to set dates for His coming. Date setters are usually *upsetters*, and that is exactly what happened in the Thessalonican assembly. Someone had deceived the believers into thinking they were already living in the day of the Lord. The believers were instantly shaken by this teaching and continued to be deeply troubled. Had God changed the program? Had not Paul promised them deliverance from the tribulation? To calm their hearts and stabilize their faith, Paul explained that they were

not in the day of the Lord. The reason was simple: That day could not arrive until certain other events had taken place. Paul then stated for them the prophetic events that make up God's timetable.

SCRIPTURE READING

2 Thessalonians 2:1-12 (CSB)
Now concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him: We ask you, brothers and sisters, [2]not to be easily upset or troubled, either by a prophecy or by a message or by a letter supposedly from us, alleging that the day of the Lord has come. [3]Don't let anyone deceive you in any way. For that day will not come unless the apostasy comes first and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction. [4]He opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he sits in God's temple, proclaiming that he himself is God.

[5]Don't you remember that when I was still with you I used to tell you about this? [6]And you know what currently restrains him, so that he will be revealed in his time. [7]For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work, but the one now restraining will do so until he is out of the way, [8a]and then the lawless one will be revealed. [8b]The Lord Jesus will destroy him with the breath of his mouth and will bring him to nothing at the appearance of his coming. [9]The coming of the lawless one is based on Satan's working, with every kind of miracle, both signs and wonders serving the lie, [10]and with every wicked deception among those who are perishing. They perish because they did not accept the love of the truth and so be saved. [11]For this reason God sends them a strong delusion so that they will believe the lie, [12]so that all will be condemned – those who did not believe the truth but delighted in unrighteousness.

DISCUSSION

READ: 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12 (the whole passage).
ASK: How did Paul calm the fears about the "time of the Lord"? Paul seems to be preaching two distinct messages in 2 Thessalonians – one encouraging believers to be ready for Jesus' return, the other cautioning them not to get too anxious about that return. How do those two messages work together?

INVITE your group to choose one verse or phrase that stands out to them – it could be something they are intrigued by; puzzled by; makes them uncomfortable; resonates with them; or something they want to examine further. Invite your group to circle that phrase or verse. What stood out to them?

From the Commentary: Paul appealed to them to "calm down" on the basis of the truth he had taught them in his first letter: The Lord would return and catch up His own to meet Him in the air. This is "the coming of the Lord Jesus and our being gathered to Him." Not two separated events, but one great event that will occur suddenly and without warning.

Once the church is out of the world, Satan and his forces will unfold their program. The day of the Lord is the period that follows the rapture of the church. It will be a time of tribulation for the

people on earth: Satan and his hosts will be working on earth, and God will send righteous judgments from heaven.

THE RAPTURE OF THE CHURCH
READ: 2 Thessalonians 2:1, 6-7

The word rapture does not appear in the Bible. It is a translation of "caught up" in 1 Thessalonians 4:17. It is the idea that Christ believe this will happen before the Great Tribulation described in Revelation.

What is it about the rapture that poses a challenge for theologians and individual believers? Why might the church need to be out of the world before Satan enacts his plan? (Leaders - look over Revelation chapters 6-19 to see how they describe this period of time.)

Paul mentioned a restraining force that even today is helping keep everything on schedule. Who or what is this restrainer? How is this restrainer at work in the world even now (see 2 Thess. 2:7b)?

In spite of its weakness and seeming failure, never underestimate the importance of the church in the world. People who criticize the church do not realize that the presence of the people of God in this world gives unsaved people opportunity to be saved. The presence of the church is delaying the coming of judgment. Lot was not a dedicated man, but his presence in Sodom held back the wrath of God.

THE REVELATION OF ANTICHRIST
READ: 2 Thessalonians 2:3-5, 8a

DISCUSS: There are two programs at work in the world today: God's program of salvation and Satan's program of sin. How does God's timetable affect Satan's plans? What does the fullness of time for the coming of Christ refer to? When does the fullness of time mean when referring to the appearance of the Antichrist? (see 1 John 2:18-19)

From the Commentary: In the early days of the church, it was common for leaders to refer to all who taught heresy as "antichrists." But throughout history, there have also been individuals or groups keen on naming the Antichrist as a specific person – from Nero to the pope. In more modern times, fringe groups have pointed to government leaders and even corporate leaders as likely candidates for the specific title of Antichrist.

Why do some Christians believe with such confidence that they know the identity of the Antichrist? Is it important for us to know who the Antichrist is? Why or why not?

Paul did not use the term Antichrist in his letter. This term is used in the New Testament only by John. But this is the name we use to identify the last great world dictator, whom Paul designated as "that lawless one" (2 Thess. 2:8).

Satan has been at war with God ever since he, as Lucifer, rebelled against God and tried to capture God's throne. He tempted Eve in the garden and caused Adam to fall. In Genesis 3:15, God declared war on Satan and his family ("seed") and promised the coming of the Redeemer, who would finally and completely defeat Satan.

The Greek prefix anti- has two meanings: "against" and "instead of." What does this tell us about the role of the Antichrist? *What resources did Paul have to help the young believers understand the role and purpose of the Antichrist? What additional resources do we have today to explore this controversial topic?*

Prophetic students may not agree on every detail, but the main facts, when they are related, give us a pretty good description of Antichrist in the last days. The first two traits are "peacemaker" and "protector."

The peacemaker (Rev. 6:1-2). Certainly, this man will be on the scene before the rapture of the church. He will be a peaceful political leader who unites ten nations into a strong power bloc. The rider on the white horse imitates Christ. He goes forth to conquer peacefully: He has a bow, but no arrows. He will bring a brief time of peace to the world before the storm of the day of the Lord breaks loose.

The protector (Dan. 9:24-27). We cannot examine the exciting details of this prophecy, but it is important to note several facts. First, the prophecy applies to Israel, Jerusalem, and the temple, but not to the church. Second, it announces the time when Messiah will come and accomplish certain purposes for the Jewish people. The word week refers to a period of seven years; 70 weeks are equal to 490 years. Note that these 490 years are divided into 3 parts: 7 weeks or 49 years, during which the city would be rebuilt; 62 weeks or 434 years, at the end of which time Messiah would come and be cut off; one week or seven years, during which a "prince" would have a covenant with Israel.

Why would the Antichrist take on such positive character traits? How does this align with some of Satan's other familiar tactics in our lives? *Why might God allow Satan to be so clever in the end-time? What does this reveal about God's ultimate plan?*

From the Commentary: The other traits of the Antichrist include "peace-breaker" and "persecutor."

The peace-breaker (Dan. 9:27). After three and one half years, Antichrist will break his covenant with the Jews *and take over their temple.* This was what Paul termed as a "falling away." A better translation would be "the rebellion, the apostasy." Not simply *a* rebellion but *the* rebellion. Up to this point, Antichrist has been a peacemaking leader of ten nations, obligated to protect Israel. But now he reveals his true character by taking over the Jewish temple and demanding that they world worship him (see Rev. 13).

Since Antichrist will be energized by Satan, it is no surprise that he will seek worship, for Satan has always wanted the worship of the world. There have been various "apostasies" in church history, when groups have turned away from God's truth; but this final rebellion will be the greatest of all. The man of sin will oppose everything that belongs to any other religion, true or false. He will organize a world church that will, byu worshipping him, worship Satan.

Our Lord predicted this apostasy; He called it "the abomination of desolation" (Matt. 24:15), a clear reference to Daniel 9:27. The world will wonder at this great leader who, with Satan's power, will perform signs and wonders and deceive the nations.

The persecutor (Rev. 13:15-17). Most prophetic students agree that the abomination of desolation will occur three and one half years after the Antichrist makes his covenant with the Jews. This will

usher in a period of intense persecution and tribulation. Satan will vent his wrath against Israel. He will so control the world's economic system that citizens must bear "the mark of the beast" to be able to buy and sell.

ASK: How do these two roles – peace-breaker and persecutor – help define the true character of the Antichrist? What does it mean to take "the mark of the beast"? How does such an economic system benefit Satan's mission?

Why do you think Satan desires worship?

THE RETURN OF JESUS CHRIST
READ: 2 Thessalonians 2:8b-12

From the Commentary: This is His return to the earth in glory and judgment. It will occur at the end of the seven-year tribulation period when Satan's evil program will have ended with the battle of Armageddon. I tis important that we distinguish His *rapture* of the earth from His *return* to the earth. The first event is secret, as the church is caught up to meet Him in the air. The second event is public, when the church returns with Him to defeat Satan and his hosts.

His judgment of Antichrist (vv. 8-9). Nobody on earth will be able to overcome the Antichrist and his forces, for he is energized by Satan. Satan will enable his false messiah to perform "power and signs and lying wonders" (2 Thess. 2:9). This, of course, is in imitation of Jesus Christ, who performed "miracles and wonders and signs" (Acts 2:22).

Satan has always been an imitator. There are false "Christians" in the world who are really children of the Devil. He has false ministers who preach a false gospel. These false "Christians" have a counterfeit righteousness that is not the saving righteousness of Christ. They have a false assurance of salvation that will prove useless when they face judgment.

During the apostolic age, miracles were given to verify the message. God's chosen apostles used miracles as their credential to prove they were sent by God. However, miracles alone never prove that a man is sent from God: His message and his character must also be considered. John the Baptist was "a man sent from God" (John 1:6), yet "John did no miracle" (John 10:41).

The purpose of God's miracles was to lead people to the truth; the purpose of Antichrist's miracles will be to lead people to believe his lies. Paul called them "lying wonders" not because the miracles are not real, but because they persuade people to believe Satan's lies. The world would not long follow a leader who practiced cheap trickery.

As the coming of the Lord for His church draws near, Satan's operations in this world will intensify. Since Satan is a liar, we must resist him through the truth of God Word. It was this sword that our Lord used when He defeated Satan in the wilderness. Satan is a liar and a murderer. God gives life through His truth; Satan slays with his lies. We are encouraged to know that one day Jesus Christ will completely overthrow Satan and his system.

His judgment of the unsaved (vv. 10-12). A great number of Jews and Gentiles will be saved during the seven-year tribulation period. But the vast majority of the world's population will be lost. Many will die in the terrible judgment that God will send on earth. Others will perish in judgment when Jesus Christ returns and separates the saved from the lost.

It is important to note that these people did have opportunity to believe and be saved. God has no delight in judging the lost. God is "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). These people will be judged and will suffer forever because they would not receive and believe the truth. In fact, their hearts will be so evil that they will not even have any *love* for the truth. Those who love lies and make lies will be excluded from the heavenly city and sent to the lake of fire.

In this paragraph Paul taught a sobering truth: A person can so resist the truth that he finally becomes deluded and has to believe a lie. There can be no neutral ground: Either we believe the truth or we believe a lie. To reject the truth means to receive the lie.

Second Thessalonians 2:11 reads literally, "That they should believe the lie." What is "the lie"? Satan is the liar and has foisted many deceptions on the human race. But there is one "lie" that, from the beginning has led people astray. Satan first spoke to Eve: "You shall be as God!" **The lie is the idea that man is his own god and therefore can do whatever he pleases and better himself by his own human efforts.** The process is described in Romans 1:25: "Who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator" (literal translation). Satan appeals to man's pride. It was pride that turned Lucifer into Satan. It is pride that traps men into doing Satan's will in this world.

The people Christ will judge not only do not love the truth, but they have "pleasure in unrighteousness" (2 Thess. 2:12). Does this mean that those who have heard the gospel before the rapture of the church cannot be saved after the rapture? Not necessarily. If that were true, then our witness to the lost is condemning them, should Christ return. However, it does mean that no lost sinner can afford to treat God's truth carelessly or reject God's Son repeatedly. **The human heart becomes harder each time the sinner rejects God's truth**; and this makes it easier to believe Satan's lies.

INSTRUCT YOUR GROUP TO PAIR UP INTO SMALLER GROUPS TO DISCUSS THESE QUESTIONS:

- Why do you think Satan chooses to imitate Christ? What is the point of that? How does Satan do that even in our lives today? Why is there power in imitation?
- As you imagine evil increasing during the tribulation, what do you think will occur in our society?
- In what ways can you see our society becoming more and more vulnerable to deception by signs and wonders?

GOING FORWARD

How much better is it to follow the example of the Thessalonican believers who received the Word of God - the truth - and were saved. Have you received the truth? Do you know the truth so well that you can spot a fake? We are called to live with an "eager patience" for Jesus' return as we wait on God's perfect timing.

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