

2 Thessalonians 2:4-5

PREFACE

Webster's defines the word "hubris" thus: "wanton insolence or arrogance resulting from excessive pride or from passion." This is a perfect, if incomplete, description of the "man of lawlessness." Traditionally, in all of history, someone against one god would, instead, prefer another god. That will not be the case with this man of lawlessness. The "god" he will prefer will be himself.

Read 2 Thessalonians 2:4-5.

v4

who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship
opposes = *antikeimenos* = from <G473> (anti) and <G2749> (keimai); **to lie opposite**, i.e. be adverse (figurative repugnant) to :- **adversary**, be contrary, oppose.

Note that the Antichrist is not an atheist. To "lie against" something one has to acknowledge there *is* something! Here is his hubris: *this man does not say, since there are no real gods, I'll be one. No, he says, out of all the supposed gods—and even the One who really is, I am better. You will worship only me.* This is captured in the second word.

exalts himself = *hyperairomenos* (hoop-er-eye'-roh-menos) = middle from <G5228> (hyper) and <G142> (airo); **to raise oneself over**, i.e. (figurative) to become haughty :- **exalt self, be exalted above measure**.

Before we get on our high horse and start throwing stones at this admittedly despicable individual, let us pause and turn our gaze inward, to draw some personal application.

Read Galatians 5:16-17.

Paul uses the same word from our text—*antikeimai* (opposes, opposition)—to describe the ongoing battle between our fleshly nature and the Holy Spirit. Last week we discussed how the "spirit of the Antichrist" is alive and well in the world today; I would go so far as to say that this same spirit is alive and well in each of us. Everyone not yet resurrected still has a part of themselves that "lies against" God, that is an adversary to the holiness and righteousness of God. And every time we say, "I don't have time to pray," or "I have something better to do than read my Bible," or "I don't feel like worshipping today"—every time we place our own desires above obedience and fealty to holy God, we are showing ourselves to be at least distant kin to the Antichrist.

In the book of 1 Maccabees, part of the inter-testamental apocryphal books not considered canon by protestants (but are by Catholics), we find the account of Antiochus Epiphanes, whom many believe is the historical (actual) Antichrist. There are, admittedly, many parallels between his behavior and that of the man of lawlessness. There are also parallels between this account (written in Hebrew by a Jew) and the Tribulation.

I would like to read portions of 1 Maccabees 1 from the Good News Translation (GNT), which is actually a paraphrase, rather than literal translation. It is a sad, even horrific, but fascinating story. As I read this, keep in mind that all of this transpires *after* the return of Israel and the rebuilding of the temple in the time of Ezra and Nehemiah, but before the time of Christ Jesus.

8 After [the death of Alexander the Great], [his] generals took control, 9 and each had himself crowned king of his own territory. The descendants of these kings ruled for many generations and brought a great deal of misery on the world.

10 The wicked ruler Antiochus Epiphanes, son of King Antiochus the Third of Syria, was a descendant of one of Alexander's generals. Antiochus Epiphanes had been a hostage in Rome before he became king of Syria.

11 At that time there appeared in the land of Israel a group of traitorous Jews who had no regard for the Law and who had a bad influence on many of our people. They said, "Let's come to terms with the Gentiles, for our refusal to associate with them has brought us nothing but trouble." 12 This proposal appealed to many people, 13 and some of them became so enthusiastic about it that they went to the king and received from him permission to follow Gentile customs. 14 They built in Jerusalem a stadium like those in the Greek cities. 15 They had surgery performed to hide their circumcision, abandoned the holy covenant, started associating with Gentiles, and did all sorts of other evil things.

20 ...after [his] conquest of Egypt, Antiochus marched with a great army against the land of Israel and the city of Jerusalem. 21 In his arrogance, he entered the Temple and took away the gold altar, the lampstand with all its equipment, 22 the table for the bread offered to the Lord, the cups and bowls, the gold fire pans, the curtain, and the crowns. He also stripped all the gold from the front of the Temple 23 and carried off the silver and gold and everything else of value, including all the treasures that he could find stored there. 24 Then he took it all to his own country. He had also murdered many people and boasted arrogantly about it. 25 There was great mourning everywhere in the land of Israel.

29 Two years later Antiochus sent a large army from Mysia[d] against the towns of Judea. When the soldiers entered Jerusalem, 30 their commander spoke to the people, offering them terms of peace and completely deceiving them. Then he suddenly launched a fierce attack on the city, dealing it a major blow and killing many of the people. 31 He plundered the city, set it on fire, and tore down its buildings and walls. 32 He and his army took the women and children as prisoners and seized the cattle.

Then Antiochus and his forces built high walls and strong towers in the area north of the Temple, turning it into a fort. This fort became a great threat to the city.

37 Innocent people were murdered around the altar; the Holy Place was defiled by murderers.

38 The people of Jerusalem fled in fear, and the city became a colony of foreigners.

Jerusalem was foreign to its own people, who had been forced to abandon the city.

39 Her Temple was as empty as a wilderness;
her festivals were turned into days of mourning,
her Sabbath joy into shame.

Her honor became an object of ridicule.

40 Her shame was as great as her former glory,
and her pride was turned into deepest mourning.

41-43 Antiochus now issued a decree that all nations in his empire should abandon their own customs and become one people. All the Gentiles and even many of the Israelites submitted to this decree. They adopted the official pagan religion, offered sacrifices to idols, and no longer observed the Sabbath.

44 The king also sent messengers with a decree to Jerusalem and all the towns of Judea, ordering the people to follow customs that were foreign to the country. 45 He ordered them not to offer burnt offerings, grain offerings, or wine offerings in the Temple, and commanded them to treat Sabbaths and festivals as ordinary work days. 46 They were even ordered to defile the Temple and the holy things in it. [e] 47 They were commanded to build pagan altars, temples, and shrines, and to sacrifice pigs and other unclean animals there. 48 They were forbidden to circumcise their sons and were required to make themselves ritually unclean in every way they could, 49 so that they would forget the Law which the Lord had given through Moses and would disobey all its commands. 50 The penalty for disobeying the king's decree was death.

54 On the fifteenth day of the month of Kislev, King Antiochus set up The Awful Horror on the altar of the Temple, and pagan altars were built in the towns throughout Judea. 55 Pagan sacrifices were offered in front of houses and in the streets. 56 Any books of the Law which were found were torn up and burned, 57 and anyone who was caught with a copy of the sacred books or who obeyed the Law was put to death by order of the king. 58 Month after month these wicked people used their power against the Israelites caught in the towns.

59 On the twenty-fifth of the month, these same evil people offered sacrifices on the pagan altar erected on top of the altar in the Temple. 60 Mothers who had allowed their babies to be circumcised were put to death in accordance with the king's decree. 61 Their babies were hung around their necks, and their families and those who had circumcised them were put to death. 62 But many people in Israel firmly resisted the king's decree and refused to eat food that was ritually unclean. 63 They preferred to die rather than break the holy covenant and eat unclean food—and many did die. 64 In his anger God made Israel suffer terribly.

This story is historically true, but it is not, as some believe, an account of *the* Tribulation and *the* Antichrist. It is, rather, another example of prophetic “now, not yet.” It *foreshadows* the ultimate fulfillment of the literal Tribulation and Antichrist. Just as Melchizedek was a type of Christ, Antiochus was a type of the Antichrist.

Beyond that, note the time frame: It's understandable that one might conclude that Daniel's prophecy about the Antichrist was fulfilled by Antiochus Epiphanes, but that cannot be the case for what Jesus said about him roughly 200 years after the death of Antiochus, and the apostles Paul and John write about him, at least 220 years after his death. All these spoke of a *future* Antichrist.

so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God.

One cannot read this without raising the obvious: *there is no longer a temple standing in Jerusalem.* Maybe the word "temple" here just refers to the temple precincts (you might think), where the temple once stood. No, in secular Greek this word refers specifically to the dwelling place of the god.

temple = *naos* = from a primary *naio* (**to dwell**); a fane, shrine, temple :- **shrine**, temple. Compare <G2411> (*hieron*).

Paul would have used a different word (*hieron*) to refer to the collection of buildings comprising the temple precincts. The man of lawlessness will take his seat within the temple itself. One could interpret this as referring to the Most Holy Place—the Holy of Holies where only the ark of the covenant rested—in which case the Antichrist will place his throne in the spot where Yahweh in the cloud settled to speak with Moses. But if not there, at least in the Holy Place, the larger interior of the temple proper, where only the priesthood could go. Two references favor the latter.

Read Matthew 27:5.

Judas could not have been inside the Holy Place and thrown the silver into the Holy of Holies, so this must refer to throwing the money into the Holy Place from the exterior courtyard.

Read Matthew 27:51.

Since the veil was hung *between* the Most Holy Place and the Holy Place, "temple" here refers to the whole interior of the building. So my conclusion is that Paul in our text speaks of the man of lawlessness establishing his throne *somewhere* inside the temple building, and not necessarily in the Holy of Holies. This tells us that the Jerusalem temple will be rebuilt at some point in the future.

In another "now—not yet" prophecy, Isaiah offers us another picture of this. In a prophecy addressed to "the king of Babylon" but which many believe also describes the ultimate fall of Satan, we hear echoes, as well, of Satan's servant: the Antichrist.

Read Isaiah 14:12-19.

In our history there have been men who have, in smaller, more local ways, conspired to be like this. They did not always aspire to this; they probably began with honorable, righteous intentions, but ultimately they listened to the flesh more than the Spirit of God. Having success, they began to believe their own press clippings, they became more full of themselves than full of God.

Two come to mind: **David Koresh**, late leader of the *Branch Davidians* religious sect in the early 1990s, who believed himself to be its final prophet. He established himself as “god” over everyone in the sect. Then there was, in the 1970s, **Jim Jones**, who led the People’s Temple, finally located in Jonestown, Guyana. Jones wielded total control over everyone in the cult, and ultimately ordered the poisoning of all its members, killing 918 men, women, and children.

Each of these men established himself as “father” of his people, having control over life and death. But these and others were faint reflections of the Antichrist.

- His “cult” will be worldwide;
- he will wield supernatural powers given to him by *his* father, Satan;
- he will establish his throne at the navel of the world: Jerusalem, and in the holiest spot on earth: the Jerusalem temple;
- he will be seen and lauded as the savior of the world;
- he will proclaim himself not just *a* god, but very God.

The man of lawlessness, the son of destruction, the Antichrist, will be a dark leader the likes of which the world has never seen, and he will reign over a period of *darkness* the likes of which the world has never seen.

v5

In v5 Paul complains to the Thessalonians about having to go back over this material.

**Do you not remember that while I was still with you, I was telling you these things?
2 Thessalonians 2:5**

In a similar vein I would suggest that it is to our own peril that we forget these past examples of such tyrants, how flesh has the power to convert apparent righteousness into evil—and that that evil is alive and well today, and will, to a hideous degree some time in the future, be in charge of the entire world’s system.