

2 Thessalonians 2:8**PREFACE**

Sometimes the apostle Paul packs so much into a passage that as you read it and consider all that he is saying, your head swims from all the information and powerful imagery. Just such a passage is before us now, and although it will be necessary to break it up into multiple sessions, it is important that we read and consider the fullness of vv8-12 at the outset.

Read 2 Thessalonians 2:8-12.

While it is true that we have a longsuffering, patient and gracious God, He does have His breaking point—or shall we say that for God there is a point at which, for either future salvation or ultimate judgment, He in essence turns His back on individuals or nations to let them wallow in their sin and rebellion.

Scripture includes a number of such instances. At a glance they can seem harsh, even out of character for our God. But they are actually *true* to His character; He is a holy God who will put up with sin only so long, and He will insist that the offender get off the fence. Just this last week I read an example of this in a passage in [Judges 10](#).

Already—even before we get to Kings and Chronicles—Israel's vacillation has become a monotonous cycle. After the judge Jair (yaw-ear') died, v6 tells us that, once again, "Then the sons of Israel again did evil in the sight of Yahweh...they forsook Yahweh and did not serve Him."

The Lord's response? Verse 7.

The anger of the LORD burned against Israel, and He sold them into the hands of the Philistines and into the hands of the sons of Ammon.

After eighteen years of this, Israel does what it always does—it cries "uncle" in v10.

Then the sons of Israel cried out to the LORD, saying, "We have sinned against You, for indeed, we have forsaken our God and served the Baals."

But Yahweh, this time, does not immediately forgive.

Read Judges 10:11-14.

He is, indeed, a gracious, merciful God, and when Israel came back, not just confessing with words, but demonstrating submission, Yahweh relented.

Read Judges 10:15-16.

In Psalm 81 God through Asaph declares,

**"But My people did not listen to My voice,
And Israel did not obey Me.
So I gave them over to the stubbornness of their heart,
To walk in their own devices."
(Psalm 81:11-12)**

Charles Haddon Spurgeon was of the opinion that the first chapter of Romans contained descriptions of acts so vile that he considered it unsuitable for public reading.

This first chapter of the Epistle to the Romans is a dreadful portion of the Word of God. I should hardly like to read it all through aloud; it is not intended to be so used. Read it at home, and be startled at the awful vices of the Gentile world.

Here at the beginning of his profound letter to the Romans, Paul employs words and imagery similar to those in our Thessalonian text.

Read Romans 1:18.

Man knows the truth about God, so has no excuses. It is not that he doesn't know the truth, but that he suppresses it.

Sidebar: Christians should not be smug when they read about this behavior in those who follow after other gods, "serving the creature rather than the Creator" (v25), for we, too, can suppress the truth when it is convenient. Personally, I do not believe in *accidental* sin, where only after the fact are we surprised by the fact that we did something wrong—especially in those who have been believers for many years. We know the truth, but sometimes we just suppress it in our mind, and go ahead and sin anyway. We may feel miserable about it, and we do confess it after the fact, but we go into it with both eyes wide open.

Three times in this chapter Paul uses that dreadful phrase, "God gave them over." That phrase, every time we read it, should send a shudder down our spine.

v24: Therefore **God gave them over** in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them.

vv26-27: For this reason **God gave them over** to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error.

v28: And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, **God gave them over** to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper,

The Greek word translated "gave...over" is

paradidomi = from <G3844> (para) and <G1325> (didomi); **to surrender**, i.e. yield up, intrust, transmit :- betray, bring forth, cast, commit, deliver (up), give (over, up), hazard, put in prison, recommend; **to hand over, to give or deliver over**.

David Guzik: We err when we think that it is God's mercy or kindness that allows man to continue in sin. It is actually His wrath that allows us to go on destroying ourselves with sin.

Now let's get back to our text, where the passage as a whole speaks of a similar situation, where once again, God will give people over to the sin in their hearts, their rejection of a holy God. The passage requires a road map, however; it can be confusing, because Paul, again, moves back and forth in time—or covers the same ground twice, rather than moving on. As a rule, ancient writers did not have the same perspective on history (the past) or prophecy (the future) as we. They thought nothing of moving effortlessly back and forth, mixing together the past, the present, the future. We, however, appreciate a more linear, literal timeline.

TIMELINE

Verse 7 ends with the restrainer—the Holy Spirit—being just taken out of the way, placing it in the narrative at the Rapture, when the church is removed from earth and the Spirit's job description is changed, so that evil is given free reign. Thus the Tribulation begins.

As **v8** begins, chronologically we are after the Rapture, when the Antichrist is beginning his move toward world-wide supremacy. But then Paul immediately jumps forward seven years, to the *end* of the Great Tribulation, when Christ will return in power and majesty to slay the lawless one.

Verses 9 and 10 are parenthetical in nature, going back to describe the Antichrist, the source of his power, and the fate of those who follow him and his lies. So the time frame is during the Tribulation.

The same time frame remains in **vv11-12**, where we have a description of God's role in the situation discussed in vv9-10.

If we were to rearrange these verses chronologically into a more linear narrative, vv9-12 would be inserted into the middle of v8, just after "Then that lawless one will be revealed."

v8

Then that lawless one will be revealed...

Verse 8 opens just after the Rapture, when the Antichrist is beginning his move toward world-wide supremacy—or it could refer to the first half of the Tribulation. In this early period of the Tribulation he will be seen as a benign, benevolent messiah. But from at least the mid-point on his evil nature and purpose will be evident. Let's see how the prophet Daniel handles this same period. [Keep your place here, because we are going to be go back and forth for a few minutes, and turn to Daniel 7.](#) In several passages Daniel describes the personality and activity of whom Paul names "that lawless one."

Read Daniel 7:25.

Read Daniel 8:24-25.

Read 2 Thessalonians 2:4.

Read Daniel 11:36.

Read 2 Thessalonians 2:8b.

Read Daniel 7:26-27.

whom the Lord will slay with the breath of His mouth and bring to an end by the appearance of His coming;

As I mentioned before, the second half of v8 jumps forward to the end of the Tribulation, to the return of Christ in majesty and judgment. I love this moment; every time I read it here or elsewhere in Scripture I can't help but think about how so many in our current culture think Jesus should be just some wan, insipid, hippy flower child, just loving everyone and being nice and gentle and sweet, picking daisies all day. Jesus did indeed display some of those traits when He was on earth—sometimes. At other times He pulled no punches, especially when addressing the hypocrisy of the religious leaders. Even as a guest in one's home, Jesus didn't hesitate to call a spade a spade. But even that forthright quality pales in comparison to what Christ will be when He returns to end the Tribulation—and the rule of the Antichrist. Christ will return with such power, such supernatural glory, that I have to believe witnesses—especially those who have been rejecting Him—will lose control of every bodily function. But the Antichrist will lose more than that.

Another thing I love about this scene of His return is *how* Christ will “slay” the man of lawlessness. Does He lead an army of His followers in street-to-street fighting as they battle their way toward the temple? Does He send out ten thousand angels to go find and capture the guy? Nope. He just shows up and breathes on him. The text gives two weapons with which Christ will dispatch the enemy:

- the breath of His mouth, and
- the appearance of His coming.

whom the Lord will slay with the breath of His mouth

As Robert L. Thomas points out, “the breath (*pneuma*) of His mouth may be a figurative reference to a word spoken by Christ, but a literal sense is quite satisfactory.” We know that for the Godhead, the spoken word is powerful—and creative. By their word alone they spoke the universe into existence; by His word alone Jesus calmed the raging sea. But let's look at just two examples of the power of His breath.

Read 2 Samuel 22:14-16.

Read Isaiah 30:27-28.

slay^{nasb}, consume^{kjvs}, overthrow^{niv}, kill^{esv} = *anelei* = from <G303> (ana) and (the active of) <G138> (haireomai); **to take up, i.e. adopt; by implication **to take away (violently), i.e. abolish, murder** :- **put to death, kill, slay, take away**, take up.**

This is one of those words that can have a positive or negative connotation. In ancient Rome, when a child was unwanted, the father could “expose” the child—i.e., place it out on the street, where it would either die, or could be “taken up” (anaireo)—i.e., adopted. Used in the Septuagint for the pharaoh's daughter taking up the baby Moses from the Nile. But the more common use of the word by far is for killing, executing, slaying someone. The word was used for Herod killing all the male children in Bethlehem. (Here in our text the NIV “overthrow” is too weak; Herod did not “overthrow” the babies.)

Everyone seems to agree that Paul borrowed this imagery from Isaiah.

Read Isaiah 11:4.

and bring to an end by the appearance of His coming;

bring to an end^{nasb}, **destroy**^{kjvs, niv}, **bring to nothing**^{esv} = *katargesei* = from <G2596> (kata) and <G691> (argeo); **to be (render) entirely idle (useless)**, literal or figurative : - **abolish**, **cease**, **cumber**, **deliver**, **destroy**, **do away**, **become (make) of no (none, without) effect**, **fail**, **loose**, **bring (come) to nought**, **put away (down)**, **vanish away**, **make void**; **to render inoperative**.

Katargesei is the same word used by Paul to describe the effect of the revelation of the gospel on “death” in 2 Timothy 1: 10—to render absolutely powerless.

One could say that here in Thessalonians Paul is just employing two different ways to say the same thing: kill. Or he could be saying that by being slayed, the work of the Antichrist suddenly comes to naught. Or he could be saying (as in *Stargate SG-1*) that first the breath kills, then the appearance of His coming vaporizes the remains. Whether it is repetition, nuance or incremental, the result is the same: the man of lawlessness is no more.

epiphaneīai tēs parousias autou

Paul uses two words to describe His coming:

- the latter (“coming”) is the familiar **parousia** (presence, coming);
- the second is **epiphaneīai** (manifestation); we get the word epiphany from it. **To the ancients this word was used to describe the visit of a god.**

And here once again we have an example of traditional versions, such as the KJVs, translating this “brightness,” or the NIV translating it “splendor.” Yet most commentators—even older ones—shy away from this interpretation, saying that this speaks less of Christ’s glory (which is implied by “brightness” or “splendor”) than His visible, tangible presence. That is, it is not his glory or glow that destroys, but simply who He is.

The bottom line is this: Christ Jesus need only show up to bring the Tribulation to a screeching halt, and destroy the one who has been selling himself as God. No guns, no fireworks, no armies. His presence and breath alone are sufficient to reclaim this world for Himself.