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'THE MAN OF SIN' AND 'THE MYSTERY OF INIQUITY'

31 years ago, in March 1995, I wrote an article about “the man of sin” referred to by Paul in 2 Thessalonians. That was the time when the large exodus from the Worldwide Church of God was in full swing, and it was one of the first articles I ever wrote. New Church of God organizations were being formed by a number of ex-Worldwide leaders. And very many members of God’s Church were looking for a new spiritual home. It was a time of turmoil for many of God’s people. And someone had sent me a question about “the man of sin”.

Since the 1990s most of those who left Worldwide have settled down in one or other of the new Church of God organizations. And from a Church point of view life is once again settled in established patterns and routines. And since the 90s we haven’t looked at that “man of sin” prophecy very much.

So let’s take a new look at the prophecy which the Apostle Paul presents to us in 2 Thessalonians chapter 2. It is a prophecy that applies to the time leading up to the 2nd coming of Jesus Christ.

A DISCLAIMER

While we will be examining a prophecy that applies largely to the time ahead of us, I want to make clear that nothing I will say in this article is intended to set a date for the return of Jesus Christ. I don’t know when Jesus Christ will return, nor does anyone else. Nothing in this prophecy, given almost 2000 years ago, gives any indication for a date for Christ’s second coming. This prophecy speaks about **what** must happen, but without any kind of indication regarding when those things will happen.

I myself have no speculation, none whatsoever, neither the day nor the year, regarding the date for the second coming of Jesus Christ. I personally suspect that Christ’s return may not be in my own lifetime, though I obviously don’t know that that will be the case.

THE CONTEXT FOR THE PROPHECY

Here is how Paul starts chapter 2.

Now we beseech you, brethren, by **the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ**, and *by* our gathering together unto Him, (2 Thessalonians 2:1)

In this opening statement Paul is saying: **you** members of God’s Church **need to understand**

something about the second coming of Jesus Christ, the time when all those in the first resurrection will be gathered to Him.

The indication is that some people in Thessalonika were beginning to set dates for Christ's return. In the next verse Paul refers to this desire to set dates.

That you be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as **that the day of Christ is at hand**. (2 Thessalonians 2:2)

It seems that some people were even forging letters that were supposedly written by the Apostle Paul, to try to convince God's people back then that Jesus Christ's second coming was "at hand". This verse shows us Paul's intentions for the statements that follow. In plain language, Paul is going to say that **certain specific things must first take place** before Christ will return.

Paul had been personally taught by Jesus Christ in Arabia, as Paul himself explained in Galatians 1:11-18. And the information Paul now presents in 2 Thessalonians chapter 2 is based on the teaching he had received from Jesus Christ during that time in Arabia.

Now regarding the things that must still happen before Christ's second coming, which the Apostle Paul mentions here in this context: it is not that the second coming will follow immediately after the things which Paul mentions have taken place. The only point Paul is making in this passage is that those things must take place **before** Christ will return.

But some of those things could happen **shortly** before Christ's return, **or** they could happen **decades** before Christ's return. No time element is indicated by Paul. Paul is only explaining (almost 2000 years ago!) what must happen, without any indication regarding how long before Christ's actual return those things must happen. Other prophecies (mainly in Revelation and in Daniel) identify certain time periods that will be involved in the end-time events. But here Paul gives no time indications at all.

To counter the false ideas that back then Christ's second coming would be soon, Paul presents the prophecy which starts in the next verse.

Let no man deceive you by any means: for *that day shall not come*, except there come **a falling away first**, and **that man of sin** be revealed, the son of perdition; (2 Thessalonians 2:3)

Here Paul is making a prediction regarding something that must happen **before** Christ will return. This verse gives us a number of things to think about. Consider the following points.

1) All of God's people throughout the past 2000 years are expected by God to **hope for** a **soon** coming of Jesus Christ. That's what Jesus Christ meant when He instructed us to pray "Your Kingdom come" (Matthew 6:10), meaning "let Your Kingdom come soon". That focus is intended to keep us motivated to hold fast to our calling.

But that focus does not mean that we should ever set dates for when Jesus Christ will actually return. We are not to set dates because God the Father has reserved to Himself the decision when to send Jesus Christ back to this Earth. And **any and all calculations** anyone may present, regarding when the 2nd coming will supposedly occur, **are meaningless and without any merit**. No exceptions!

2) Predicting the year when Jesus Christ will return is very popular with people who seek to deceive God's people. False teachers were doing it back in the days of Paul, and it has been done ever since. The motive is usually to get a following amongst believers, who are already hoping for a soon return.

3) The way Paul has worded his statement here implies that Christ's second coming will be **later** than the dates some people were predicting.

4) The way Paul indicates that Christ's return will be later is by stating that **certain things** must take place **before** Christ will return. And at that time those "certain things" had not yet taken place. Also, at that point in time Jesus Christ had not yet revealed the information presented in the Book of Revelation. Thus Paul was unaware of all the events represented by the 7 seals and 7 trumpets and 7 last plagues. But Paul had been given to understand certain things that needed to take place, without any kind of timing references for those "certain things".

5) Specifically, Paul understood that before Christ would return, there had to be **a falling away** first. A falling away refers to **falling away from the teachings** of God's Church. And a falling away implies that there must be a large body of believers to start with, so that the falling away can be identified as significant. And a falling away also implies that the falling away will take place **in practically all of the Church's congregations** that are in existence.

6) A falling away is not a reference to some members in one congregation leaving the Church over one specific issue, and some members in another congregation leaving over a totally different issue, and some people in still another congregation leaving because of something different from the first two issues. In Paul's context a falling away really refers to church members in all congregations leaving the Church, **basically** for **the same issues everywhere**.

7) In other words: **something specific happens** in God's Church that triggers a falling away in basically all of the Church's congregations. One specific cause, and some people in all of the congregations fall away. The falling away will involve certain major teachings of God's Church.

8) The expression "**that man of sin**" is not a reference to what that man is like as a person. It is **a reference to what he does**. It is a reference to that man introducing sin into God's Church, promoting and encouraging sin within the Church. In other words, this man is in a leadership position, which enables him to introduce heretical teachings to the people of God. The expression "that man of sin" basically means "**that man who promotes sin within the Church**".

9) What will "reveal" that man will be the **heresies** he introduces into the Church. Those heresies will reveal him for what he really is ... a man who crept very deviously into the leadership position within the Church. As Jude pointed out:

For there are certain men **crept in** unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, **turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness**, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ. (Jude 1:4)

These “certain men” crept into leadership positions in God’s Church in the days of Jude. And they have crept into influential positions in the Church throughout the past almost 2000 years. So the Church would **sometimes** have unrepentant, unconverted men making decisions for the doctrines the Church would accept and preach.

And “that man of sin” would be one of those “certain men”.

10) But only those people who know and believe the truth will correctly identify that man of sin, the principle of 1 Timothy 4:3. Other people will not recognize that man of sin for what he is.

11) Paul also calls this man of sin “the son of perdition”. “Perdition” means “destruction”. So Paul reveals that this “man of sin” is going to be destroyed in the lake of fire. He will never be in God’s Family.

12) This expression “the son of perdition” is only used twice in the Bible, the other place being John 17:12, where Jesus Christ used this term in His prayer to the Father, in reference to Judas Iscariot. Judas betrayed Jesus Christ. And “**that man of sin**” **is likewise a traitor**, because he **betrays the true teachings** of God’s Church. That’s what “son of perdition” tells us.

Let’s continue with the next verse.

Who opposes and **exalts himself** above all that is called God, or that **is worshiped**; so that he as God **sits in the temple of God**, showing himself that he is God. (2 Thessalonians 2:4)

Nobody has ever sat in the literal physical temple. What would somebody do there, sitting in an actual physical temple? The temple did not contain any seats. That is like kings don’t spend their days sitting on their thrones. Rather, “sitting in the temple of God” represents spiritual authority and **leadership** in the Church of God.

The temple refers to “the Church of God” (see 1 Corinthians 3:16). Paul shows that this man of sin will be **in the leadership position in God’s Church** at some point before Jesus Christ’s second coming.

How does he show himself “that he is God”?

He is obviously only a mortal human being. He can’t fly through the air or go through brick walls. And **he will not pretend to be God**. That’s not what Paul’s statement is intended to convey. What he will do, though, is **make decisions that only God can make**! That man of sin will decide **what teachings are**

right, what doctrines the Church of God must accept and teach.

This is the point God made after Adam and Eve had taken to themselves the right to decide what conduct is correct. Notice:

And the LORD God said, Behold, **the man is become as one of Us**, **to know good and evil**: and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever: (Genesis 3:22)

When God said "the man is become as one of Us" ("Us" being God the Father and Jesus Christ), God didn't mean that Adam pretended to be God. No, God meant that Adam had chosen **to decide for himself** what is right and what is wrong. And **that decision** made man "one of Us".

And that's also how that man of sin will show himself that he is God, by deciding in opposition to God what is right and what is wrong. Making such decisions is an expression of power, a power which actually belongs only to God.

So at some point before the return of Jesus Christ a leader in the Church of God will exalt himself above God, by actively promoting heretical teachings, teachings that transgress the laws of God.

That is in essence what Paul predicts in the above verse. And that is something that must happen in the Church of God before Jesus Christ will return. "Sitting in the temple of God" has nothing to do with a physical temple built with stones and wood. It is a reference to the Church of God.

Regarding 2 Thessalonians 2:4, consider the following things:

1) This "man of sin" does **two things**: **he opposes** something or someone, and **he exalts himself**.

2) The One he opposes is Almighty God! Now he obviously cannot oppose God face-to-face. Thus he must oppose something that represents God, God's mind and God's will. The Bible is an expression of the mind of God, and that is why it is called "**the Word of God**". So this "man of sin" opposes God's mind, as it is revealed in the Bible. He does that by perverting the true teachings of the Bible.

3) Next, when it says that this man "exalts himself", it is telling us that **he is not subject to God's will**, as revealed in the Bible. We demonstrate to God that we are subject to Him by submitting to His laws. So this man stands for opposition to God's laws. He resents God's laws.

4) This fact of rebellion against God's laws is also made clear a little later in verse 7.

5) Exalting himself "above all **that is called** God or that is worshiped" means that this man **attempts to destroy a correct understanding** of what God really is (i.e. "all that is called God", all that is referred

to as “God”)! The “**hypostasis teaching**” about God, which was introduced to the Church shortly after Mr. Armstrong’s death, is one good example of this attempt to destroy a correct understanding of the nature of God. While in principle this expression also applies to the world’s view of God as a trinity, this statement is really a reference to something that happens in God’s Church. The world has never had a correct understanding of God at any time. Their understanding of God has always been wrong.

6) This man sits “in the temple of God”. “Sitting” means that this man is in a position of authority. **He is** in some way **in charge**. “Sitting” is used to symbolize this position of rulership. It is **not** referring to literally sitting in some building. Rulers nowadays don’t spend their time that way, sitting in a specific locality. Even the Catholic Pope spends very little, if any, time actually **sitting** in St. Peter’s in Rome. Leaders today sit in executive offices with all kinds of electronic media at their fingertips.

7) As already indicated, “the temple of God” is not referring to a literal building in Jerusalem. **If** the Jews were to build a literal temple today, they would first have to do something about the Dome of the Rock. And even then whatever they (theoretically) would build would still **not** be **the temple of God**!

God has not instructed the Jews today to build Him a temple.

If the Jews were to build such a temple, it would be utterly defiled, built by a rebellious and unrepentant people! It is not that anyone can just put up a building in the right location and then somehow coax God into accepting it as “**His**” temple! If such a (theoretical) temple were indeed “God’s temple”, then it would imply God’s presence there. Without God’s presence it simply could not and would not be God’s temple! So even if the Jews do build some kind of temple structure in our age, which I don’t believe they will, that still would not make it “God’s temple”. **God’s presence won’t be in it**!

8) As also mentioned above, the “temple of God” is a reference to **the Church of God**.

Don’t you know that **you are the temple of God**, and [that] the Spirit of God dwells in you? (1 Corinthians 3:16)

In addition, Paul also referred to the Church of God as “**the house of God**”, a temple being one specific type of house.

But if I tarry long, that you may know how you ought to behave yourself **in the house of God**, which is **the church of the living God**, the pillar and ground of the truth. (1 Timothy 3:15)

Peter used the same expression:

For the time [is come] that judgment must begin **at the house of God**: and if *it* first *begin* at **us**, what shall the end *be* of them that obey not the gospel of God? (1 Peter 4:17)

Peter's use of the pronoun "us" shows that Peter equated "the house of God" with "us", the Church of God.

And Paul again used this terminology in explaining Christ's role:

And *having* an high priest **over** (the Greek 'epi' means '**to**' or 'unto') **the house of God**; (Hebrews 10:21)

(**Comment**: Priests are not "over" other people. Being "over" people implies rulership. But **the priesthood is not a position of rulership**! And a high priest is not a ruler. The priesthood is a position of being an intermediary between two parties, without any focus on the status or position of either party. The one interceding in front of one party on behalf of another party (i.e. a priest) is not really "over" either party. For a priest to be "over" other people, that priest must also hold **another office**, in addition to being a priest.

Those in the 1st resurrection will not only be priests; they will at the same time also be "kings" (Revelation 5:10). Those in the 1st resurrection will reign because they will be kings, and they will intercede before God the Father on behalf of mortal human beings during the millennium because they will also be priests.

Now it is absolutely correct that Jesus Christ is "over" the Church, but that is not due to Christ being the High Priest. Being "over" the Church is due to Jesus Christ also being "King of kings and Lord of lords" (see Revelation 17:14; 19:16). As far as a status of authority is concerned, a king is always of greater authority than a priest. The priest represents the people before God, and he also represents God before the people. And the messages from God, which the priest delivers to the people, do not represent any authority on the part of the priest. Those messages represent the authority of God, and the priest is only the messenger.

So the messages that God's priests deliver to human beings represent the authority of God, not the authority of the priests. So all messages that God's priests deliver to God's people carry a far higher authority than any authority the priest might possess.

Regarding our Scripture here, Hebrews 10:21, it is absolutely true that Jesus Christ is "over" the Church of God. But that is not what the Greek text of this verse actually tells us. This verse only tells us that Jesus Christ is a **High Priest to or for the Church of God**. Other Scriptures make abundantly clear that Jesus Christ is also "over" the Church of God. But in this verse "over" is a mistranslation of the Greek preposition "epi".)

9) So the expression that this "man of sin" will "sit in the temple of God" tells us that this man is likely to be **the leader of an era** of the Church of God, the person who initiates that era, because he is the one who introduces sin into God's Church, even if he himself doesn't live to see the end of that era. Until he has introduced specific sins in the Church, that specific era (i.e. the Laodicean era) has not started.

10) The expression that he “sits as God in the temple of God” means that he is **usurping power** that belongs to God, by changing teachings that God has put into His Church. God doesn’t change His law. But if, theoretically, a change of God’s spiritual law was ever to take place, then only God could change the law of God! Anyone who attempts to change God’s laws is nothing more than a usurper. In the process of attempting to do away with the law of God, this man of sin will exalt himself above God. The law of God is God’s life-style, it is what God lives by. But “the man of sin” places himself **above** that law.

11) This Scripture does **not** say that this “man of sin” actually requires people to worship him. That is something we can easily read into this verse, but that is not really stated. He is presumptuous and self-willed towards God, and incites people to think of themselves as above the law of God. But it is not a matter of requiring people to actually bow down before him.

12) The point is that **he places himself above the law of God**, thereby exalting himself above God and above all that is worshiped!

13) The expression “showing himself that he is God” is in the context of “the temple” (the Church) where he “sits”. He is **not** necessarily showing himself **to the whole world** as “God”. He is showing himself in this way to those who make up “the temple”. In other words, he is showing himself to the members of God’s Church as being in the place of God. He does this by setting himself **over** the law of God, which is an expression of the nature of God.

Let’s move on to the next verse.

Don’t you remember, that when I was yet with you, **I told you these things**? (2 Thessalonians 2:5)

Exactly what Paul had told them is not stated. But in the context it seems to be connected with not expecting the return of Christ until certain things had happened in the Church. It isn’t totally clear to me whether at that point in time Paul still expected these events to occur in his own lifetime or not? And I suppose that it doesn’t really make a difference. The point is that the things Paul spells out must happen before Jesus Christ will return.

Now we come to verse 6.

And now **you know** what withholds (i.e. holds back the 2nd coming) **that he might be revealed** in his time. (2 Thessalonians 2:6)

There are several things to notice about verse 6.

1) Paul’s audience knew exactly what Paul was referring to. It was something he had explained to them in person, when he had been there. We don’t have the benefit of having heard or read what Paul told

them. But it was something in connection with Jesus Christ's return.

2) Paul means that what was being "held back" was **the return of Jesus Christ**. This is the subject he had addressed in verse 1. I suspect that Paul is referring to some information that Jesus Christ had given to Paul in Arabia, but which information Christ did not want to be preserved in the Bible. And so it isn't preserved for us today.

It probably (my speculation) was okay for Paul to mention this information in speaking 2000 years ago, but near the actual time of the end it might be too revealing regarding the identity of that man of sin. And so Christ did not inspire this specific information to be preserved. But the Thessalonians had been given this information, whatever it was, by Paul.

3) The Greek text translated as "in his time" contains the reflexive pronoun "heautou", and that makes the statement emphatic. It really means "in his **own** time". While Jesus Christ also will certainly be revealed "in His own time", the emphasis here in verse 6 is really on that man of sin. Paul is saying that **this man of sin will be revealed "in his own time"**.

4) In plain terms, Paul was telling the Thessalonians back then that **Christ's return** was being held back because that man of sin had not yet introduced his heresies into God's Church, which heresies would precipitate a significant falling away from amongst God's people. And **that man of sin himself**, in turn, would not be identified until his actions as the leader had initiated that falling away.

5) Let's understand something about a large falling away. Any attempt to initiate a falling away in God's Church from the true teachings of the Bible will not succeed without the active support of the man who is accepted by the membership of the Church as the top leader. If the top leader does not support the heresies that others are trying to introduce into God's Church, then **that attempt** to get people to leave God's Church **will fail**. In that case any falling away will be limited, and will not involve a large part of the Church.

For any attempt to trigger a falling away to succeed, it is absolutely essential that this attempt has the full support and involvement of the man who is accepted by Church members as "God's chosen leader". This means that "that man of sin" has to be the man accepted as the top leader in the Church at the time just preceding the falling away. He does not have to perform any miracles or special signs. All that is needed is that the church members accept this man as the leader who (supposedly) has been appointed by God. No signs or wonders or miracles are needed.

Verse 9 will introduce **a different man**, who is not a part of any Church of God group or organization. He is a religious leader in the world. And he will need "lying wonders" to receive acceptance by the world. More when we come to verse 9.

Let's continue with verse 7.

For **the mystery of iniquity** does already work: only **he who now lets** *will let*, until he be taken out of the way. (2 Thessalonians 2:7)

As it stands here in English, this verse is difficult to understand. The difficulty here is that **the translators themselves didn't understand** what Paul is telling us, and so they were not capable of giving us a correct translation. To get the correct meaning of what Paul is saying, we should examine the actual Greek text for this verse. I'll try to keep this as simple as possible.

Here is the transliterated Greek text.

to gar musterion ede energeitai tes anomias monon ho katechon arti heos ek mesou genetai (2 Thessalonians 2:7)

1) The Greek text for "the **mystery** of iniquity" is "to **musterion** tes anomias". The Greek word "musterion" is derived from the verb "mueo", which means "to initiate someone into secrets". And the word "musterion" literally refers to "that which is known to the initiated ones". So in this expression "mystery" refers to: **things that are known to certain initiated people, but which things are unknown to all other people**.

The Greek word "anomia" (iniquity) is made up of "a + nomos". The prefix "a" makes this negative, and "nomos" means "law". Thus "anomia" doesn't just mean "breaking laws", as much as it means "doing away with laws altogether", **denying that laws exist**, or that laws are applicable.

Thus the genitive case "tes anomias" means "**of being without laws**".

The whole phrase translated as "the mystery of iniquity" means: there are **some** "**initiated ones**" who are trying to create **a condition** where laws don't exist. When they encourage people to actively break God's holy laws, they do this by claiming that those laws are no longer binding on God's people; they (supposedly) only applied to O.T. Israel.

That point of view (that O.T. laws are not binding) has been true for most of so-called "Christianity" for a very long time. But this prophecy tells us that this will also be true for those who fall away from God's Church before the return of Jesus Christ.

The use of the word "musterion" also implies that there is **a secret purpose** behind trying to do away with all of God's laws. There is **an ulterior motive** behind the attempt to do away with God's laws. That ulterior motive is primarily **to remove feelings of guilt** from those people who break God's laws. The ulterior motive is to kill the conscience.

The expression translated as "he who now lets *will let*" actually means "he who now holds back", and implied is "will continue to hold back **until** ...". Thus the translators provided the words "*will let*", meaning "will hold back". That's fine.

Here is the important point for this statement.

Verse 7 presents **a transition** between "**that man of sin**" who rejects God's laws, and who encourages God's people to break God's laws, and "**that Wicked One**" who will fight against Jesus Christ at Christ's 2nd coming. Before verse 7 it speaks about an evil leader within the Church of God. And after verse 7 it speaks about an evil religious leader in the world.

The transition identified in verse 7 is that the evil religious leader in the world only gets going at some point after the evil leader within God's Church has been "taken out of the way". The situation within God's Church is dealt with first, before the evil religious leader in the world, identified in Revelation as "the false prophet" (Revelation 19:20, etc.), is dealt with at Christ's 2nd coming.

A TECHNICALITY IN THE GREEK TEXT

The Greek construction " heos ek mesou genetai" stands out because of an **omission** in this phrase, something we would never notice in English.

There is a word in N.T. Greek for which we don't really have an accurate equivalent in English. It is the primary Greek particle "**an**". In Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon this Greek particle is described as follows:

"... a particle indicating that **something can or should occur on certain conditions**, or by the combination of certain fortuitous causes. In Latin it has no equivalent, nor do the English words "haply, perchance" exactly and everywhere correspond to it."

The point is this: when something is definite and unconditional, then this particle is never used! The Greek particle "an" in connection with "heos" (meaning "until") always conveys that something is dependent on certain other things. The stated thing may or may not happen. When the Greek word for "until" is used together with the particle "an", then the stated thing is really conditional on certain other things. This is the case in a number of other verses in the New Testament.

But here in 2 Thessalonians 2:7 this Greek particle is **not** used with the word meaning "until". This omission makes Paul's statement quite emphatic, that this "man of sin" will absolutely and unconditionally "be taken out of the way".

An interesting technicality. But let's continue with verse 7.

The Greek expression "**ek mesou**" in verse 7 is translated as "out of the way". A more accurate translation of this expression is "**from the midst**" or "**out of the midst**". The wrong translation "out of the way" doesn't tell us this man's original location.

But the correct translation "out of **the midst**" tells us that before his removal he is **part of a larger body**

or organization, out of the midst of which he will be removed. That is, he is part of the Church of God, and he is then forcibly removed by dying. This expression “out of the midst” further confirms that this is speaking about a man who is in the Church of God before he is “taken out”.

From the next verse onwards Paul explains something that will happen **after** this “man of sin” has been taken away. That discussion involves a different man. But he also rejects laws.

Let’s put all the information from verse 7 together.

1) The word “**mystery**” tells us there are “initiated ones”, those who know the hidden real purpose for introducing the “mystery” teachings.

2) The word “**iniquity**” refers to “an absence of God’s laws”.

3) Paul saw **this trend** of doing away with God’s laws already in his time.

4) Someone is **holding back** something.

5) It is speaking about something to do with the **Church of God**.

6) There is **a secret purpose** involved.

7) The man who is holding back something (i.e. the man of sin) will be taken **out of the midst** of the Church.

8) **Until** he is taken out of the midst, he is going to hold back something.

9) In verse 3 Paul has identified this individual as “the man of sin” and also as “**the son of perdition**”.

So here is the picture Paul presents to us:

In **verse 6** Paul tells the Thessalonians that they knew **what** was being “held back”. It was the event that they were looking forward to, **the second coming of Jesus Christ**. But the second coming was **not** being held back **by any man**! It was being held back by God, because **certain conditions** had not yet taken place. Those **conditions** that are holding back the return of Christ are under the full control of God; those conditions are **not being held back by any man**!

In **verse 7** Paul refers to **a specific man**. This is the same man who in verse 3 had to be “revealed”.

This man is also **holding back something**. But what he is holding back is **not the second coming** of Christ! No man is able to hold back the return of Jesus Christ. No man can dictate to God the Father when Jesus Christ must return.

But there are other things that this “man of sin” really **can** hold back. And they are tied to **the condition of removing God’s laws** from God’s Church. And that is something Paul also refers to in other epistles.

Notice Romans 1:18, where Paul also used this verb that means “to hold back”:

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of **men, who hold *back* the truth in unrighteousness**; (Romans 1:18)

That’s exactly what the “man of sin” is doing in 2 Thessalonians 2:7! He is **holding back the truth in unrighteousness**! Holding back the truth is the only way he can promote his desire to see the law of God abolished. And he will continue to hold back the truth **until** he is taken out of the midst of the Church!

A common problem in Church of God circles 60 years ago, regarding the meaning of this passage of Scripture, was that people assumed that this context refers to a physical temple being built in Jerusalem, in which a false religious leader in the world would then “sit”. But that idea is totally false!

In the first 7 verses of this chapter Paul has **not** been talking about **the world** at large at all.

Paul has been talking strictly about the Church of God and things that affect **the Church**! He is talking **to** Church members **about the Church** and things that affect the Church.

where we are today!

So **from our perspective** of the last 50 years:

We in God’s Church have had “a man of sin” who deliberately removed the true teachings from what had been God’s Church. And we have had a major falling-away from the true teachings of the Bible. “The man of sin” died once he had succeeded in triggering the falling-away. There was nothing else for him to do. What “revealed” the man of sin was the heresies he introduced to replace the true teachings of the Bible.

But we have not yet been exposed to “the Wicked One”, the evil religious leader in the world.

So from our perspective in the year 2026, we are between the two individuals mentioned in the prophecy

of 2 Thessalonians chapter 2. We are past the man of sin in the Church. But we have not yet come to the Wicked One in the world, the evil religious leader who, at the end of his period of influence, will be thrown into a lake of fire.

That’s what things look like from our perspective today. Could that perspective change 10 or 20 years from now? I suppose so. But this is what it looks like right now.

Sorry that I don’t have all the answers. But hopefully I’ve given you a few things to think about.

Frank W Nelte