The Man of Lawlessness
Scripture: 2 Thessalonians 2
Code: BQ031612

for it will not come unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God. Do you not remember that while I was still with you, I was telling you these things? (2:3b–5).

The apostasy will be a blasphemous act of unprecedented magnitude. The apostle identified the apostasy by naming the key character connected with it: **the man of lawlessness**. Understanding who that key person is is a prerequisite to identifying the **apostasy** event. Anomia (lawlessness) literally means “without law” (cf. 1 John 3:4). This person will be the consummate lawless one; a blasphemous sinner, who will live in open defiance of God’s law. Of all the billions of godless, evil, lawless sinners in human history, his evil influence will be greater than any other’s. Even in the end times, when “lawlessness is increased” (Matt. 24:12), this Satan-energized leader will stand out as the one whose depraved, wicked, lawless leadership sweeps over the whole world—with influence never before seen.

The aorist tense of the verb translated **revealed** points to a definite time when this man will appear. It implies that he was previously present and known, but his act of apostasy will unveil his true evil identity; he will drop all pretense and the previously hidden wickedness of his character will be fully disclosed. God and the Lord Jesus will not have appeared as his enemies until the time he is **revealed**.

The title **man of lawlessness** has been identified with many different individuals, including Antiochus Epiphanes, Caligula, Nero, and in the last century, Hitler, Stalin, and others. But the close association of the man of lawlessness with the Day of the Lord rules out historical persons; otherwise, the Day of the Lord might have come centuries ago. The **man of lawlessness** cannot be Satan, for he is distinguished from the devil in verse 9. Nor can this be a reference to a principle of evil, for the text specifically identifies him as a **man**. He can be none other than the final Antichrist.

Paul further described the **man of lawlessness** as the **son of destruction**. The expression **son of** is a Hebraism indicating a close association, or of the same kind, just as a son shares his father’s

nature. The Antichrist will be so completely devoted to the destruction of all that relates to God's purpose and plan that he can be said to be **destruction** personified. He, however, belongs to **destruction** (apleia; "ruin," not "annihilation") as the one to be destroyed. He is fixed for punishment and judgment; he is human trash for the garbage dump of hell.

Only one other individual in Scripture shares the dubious distinction of being named **son of destruction**: Judas (John 17:12; the NASB translates the same Greek phrase "son of perdition"). The title is thus reserved for the two vilest people in human history, controlled by Satan (John 13:2; Rev. 13:2) and guilty of the two most heinous acts of apostasy. Judas lived and ministered intimately with the incarnate Son of God for more than three years—a privilege granted to only eleven others. Yet after observing Jesus' sinless life, hearing His wisdom, and experiencing His divine power and gracious love, Judas betrayed Him. Amazingly, he was so much a **son of destruction** that the glories of Christ that softened the eleven hardened him.

Monstrous as that apostasy was, it pales in comparison to the act of future apostasy Antichrist will commit. Judas betrayed the Son of God; Antichrist will proclaim himself God. Judas desecrated the temple with the money he received for betraying Christ (Matt. 27:5); Antichrist will desecrate the temple by committing the abomination of desolation (Matt. 24:15). Judas, apparently without influencing others, went astray, a tragic, solitary disaster (Acts 1:18–19); Antichrist will lead the world astray into destruction (Rev. 13:5–8).

After initially posing as the friend of religion (cf. Rev. 17:13), Antichrist will suddenly reveal his true nature when he commits blasphemy against God and **opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship** (cf. Rev. 13:15–16). Energized by Satan and aided by the false prophet, Antichrist will have immense power to successfully demand that the world worship him (cf. Rev. 13:1–17). Satan, who has always longed to be worshiped (cf. Isa. 14:13–14), will fulfill that desire vicariously through the worship accorded Antichrist. Antichrist will exalt himself by taking **his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God**. The temple, the symbol of God's presence, is the most fitting place for Satan to orchestrate the ultimate act of blasphemy—a wicked man **displaying himself as being God**. This apostasy, to which Paul refers here and which Jesus called the "abomination of desolation" (Matt. 24:15), referring to Daniel's prophecy, will take place at the midpoint of the Tribulation (Dan. 9:27). It will initiate God's judgment on the world through Antichrist's reign of terror during the second half of the Tribulation. At the end of that three-and-a-half-year period, Christ will return in glory to destroy Antichrist's kingdom and all the ungodly. The Lord Jesus will cast him into the lake of fire along with his false prophet (Rev. 19:11–21).

Paul’s point is clear. **The apostasy,** Antichrist’s blasphemous self-deification and desecration of the Temple, is a unique, unmistakable event that precedes the Day of the Lord. Since that clearly has not happened, the Day of the Lord cannot have arrived. And it never will for believers.

We need not fear the judgment of that Day. Believers are “not in darkness, that the day would overtake [them] like a thief” (1 Thess. 5:4). We are waiting for Jesus to return from heaven (1 Thess. 1:10) and gather us to Himself (2 Thess. 2:1; cf. John 14:1–3). We look for the true Christ, not the Antichrist. Only those who are deceived and forgetful risk losing the confident hope and expectant joy of Christ’s return before the Day of the Lord.

Available online at: http://www.gty.org
COPYRIGHT (C) 2013 Grace to You
You may reproduce this Grace to You content for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Grace to You's Copyright Policy (http://www.gty.org/connect/copyright).