

Stand firm! Satan will not triumph.

(2 Thessalonians 2:3b–5; cf. Matthew 24:1–35)

Paul had to encourage the Thessalonian believers to stand firm and hold to the teachings they had received, because false teaching had crept in claiming that the day of the Lord was already present. The day of the Lord is used in the OT and the NT to refer to various times of God's judgment. Future judgment is coming against the unrighteous in Israel and against the whole earth. It seems that the persecutions which the Thessalonian believers were suffering were taken as a support to the false teaching that their day of the Lord was already present.

So Paul exhorts them to remember that which they had been taught and reminds them that he had told them of two certain indicators of the day of the Lord which have not yet happened. These are best understood, not as events preceding the day of the Lord, but signature events at the start of the day of the Lord. The day of the Lord will come unexpectedly, like a thief in the night (1 Thess 5:2). But if these two signature events have not yet happened, it could not be here.

These events not only mark the start of the day of the Lord, they give reason to stand firm and they encourage with the knowledge that in the eternal perspective Satan will not triumph.

I. The first “signature” event is the coming of “the rebellion.”

1. What is the “rebellion” (NIV)?
 - a. “Rebellion” is also translated “apostasy” and refers to defying an established system or authority and especially of abandoning one's previous commitments. In secular literature it could be political or military. In the Greek OT and in the NT it was religious, abandoning one's professed faith.
 - b. This is not simply a departure and cannot refer to the gathering (v.1). Neither is it the apostasy instigated by the man of lawlessness, since it appears to come first. It is probably not his own apostasy, since an abandonment of faith is not mentioned here.
 - c. This “rebellion” or “apostasy” is most likely the abandonment of truth, a rebellion against God's revealed truth, by a professing Christendom. There is warning of this in many other passages (Matt 24:10–12, 24; 1 Tim 4:1–3; 2 Tim 3:1–7; 4:3–4; 2 Peter 2:1–3; 3:3–6; Jude 17–18).

2. What significance does this have for us?

We are warned not to be part of “apostasy.” See Paul's warning to Timothy in a similar context (2 Tim 3:14). Beware of an outward show of religious form that does not have the life-changing power of the gospel of Jesus Christ behind it.

There will be such a great turning away from the truth at the beginning of the day of the Lord that is called “the apostasy.” Those who turn from the truth reveal who they truly are.

II. The second “signature” event of the day of the Lord is the revealing of “the man of lawlessness”

1. Who is this?

- a. This is most probably the same figure of whom Daniel wrote: the little horn—boastful, blasphemous, antagonistic, lawless, and doomed to destruction (Daniel 7); the ruler of the people that would destroy Jerusalem and the temple and set up in the temple an abomination which causes desolation (Daniel 9:26–27); and the “wilful king” who exalts himself above every god (Daniel 11:36ff).
- b. This is the figure that in the NT will be called the antichrist, not a false Christ, but one opposing Christ, a real, end-time, Satanically inspired person.

2. What is his character?

- a. As the “man of lawlessness” or the “man of sin” (similar expressions, cf 1 John 3:4) he embodies lawlessness or sin, standing in opposition to God's law.
- b. As the “man doomed to destruction” (NIV, or “son of perdition”, cf. John 17:12) he is, because of his rebellious nature, headed for certain loss of well-being, eternal torment (cf. Rev 19:20; 20:10).
- c. As the one opposing and lifting himself above all called God or is worshiped (v.4), he will claim sole worship to the extent that he sets himself up as god in the very temple of God.

3. What significance does this have for us?

Be certain that God's judgment upon earth has not begun, if this figure is not obvious. Don't bother trying to identify him. Known that he is doomed to destruction. Satan's best efforts will not succeed.

These two signature events of the end times warn not to rebel against God and encourage us that Satan will not win. Guard against deception by knowing the truth. Hold fast to Jesus Christ and grow in knowing Him. Let troubles and even persecution prove and strengthen your faith, or reveal your heart to you.