

# STEADFAST CHRISTIANITY

## A STUDY OF 2 THESSALONIANS

### STUDY FOUR

## Lawlessness: The Man and the Mystery

*2 Thessalonians 2:1–12*

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*What a great earthquake is to the regions it devastates, the great tribulation is to the whole world. People will not escape it. Every person on earth at that time will experience its tremors and its destruction.*

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

**O**N December 26, 2004, a 9.1 magnitude earthquake struck deep beneath the ocean's surface off the coast of Sumatra and triggered a massive tsunami. Within minutes, waves as high as 100 feet inundated the densely populated coastal city of Banda Aceh.

At the same time, waves traveling 500 mph raced across the Indian Ocean, obliterating coastal communities as far away as India, Sri Lanka, and Thailand. Approximately 230,000 people died in the earthquake and tsunami, making it one of the deadliest disasters in modern history. The humanitarian, economic, infrastructure, and ecosystem devastation proved unimaginable.<sup>1</sup>

Earthquakes come without warning, delivering sudden ferocity and destruction. No place is safe—whether on land or at sea. The stories of terror and horror stun us into silence.

As destructive as earthquakes are to certain cities where they strike, the day of the Lord will be to the whole world. While Christians will never know the horrors of God's judgment, our unbelieving friends will. Everyone on the earth during that time will experience its tremors, convulsions, and overwhelming destruction.

The certainty of the looming day of the Lord is precisely the reason Paul penned a second letter to the Thessalonian believers. In the passage for this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study, the apostle cleared up confusion surrounding the day of the Lord, helping us understand this prophetic reality and strengthening our faith in the One who saves us from it.



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SEARCHING  
THE  
SCRIPTURES  
BIBLE STUDIES

# Lawlessness: The Man and the Mystery

2 *Thessalonians* 2:1–12

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## PREPARE YOUR HEART

Confidently lean on this scriptural hope:

*Christ was offered once for all time as a sacrifice to take away the sins of many people. He will come again, not to deal with our sins, but to bring salvation to all who are eagerly waiting for him.* (Hebrews 9:28)

In prayer, express your gratitude to God for delivering you from His judgment and invite His Spirit to guide your understanding of His Word.



## TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

In his first letter, Paul warned that *the day of the Lord* will be a day like any other day, “when people are saying, ‘Everything is peaceful and secure,’ then disaster will fall on them” (1 *Thessalonians* 5:3).

Believers, however, will be spared the fury of that day, because Jesus “rescues us from the wrath to come” (1:10 NASB). Just before God judges the world, Christ will appear to resurrect believers who have died and gather living believers to Himself, catching them up “in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air” (4:17).

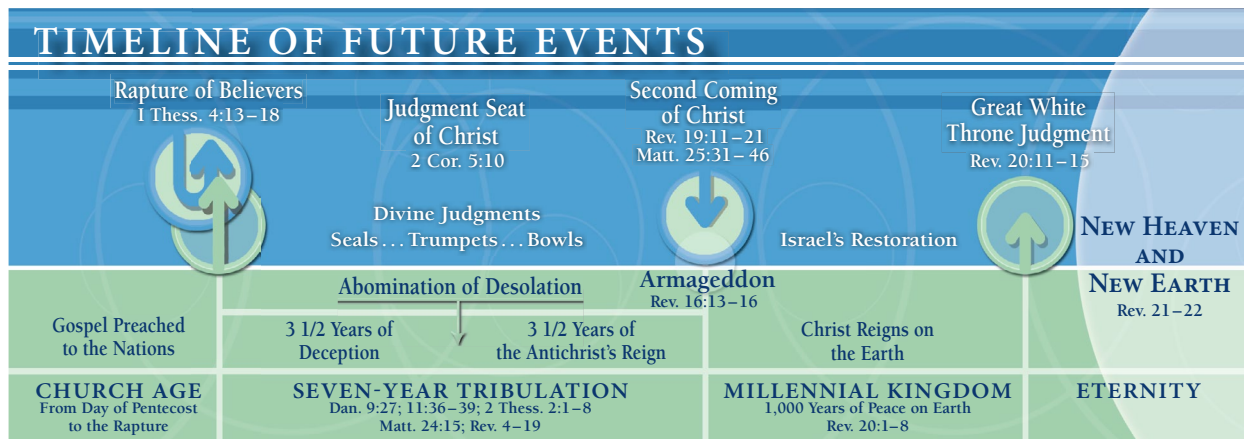
Then the day of the Lord will come. In his commentary, *The Thessalonian Epistles*, Bible scholar John Walvoord, defines the day of the Lord as:

the period of time predicted in the Scripture when God will deal directly with human sin. It includes the tribulation time preceding the second advent of Christ as well as the whole millennial reign of Christ. It will culminate in the judgment of the great white throne.<sup>2</sup>

# Lawlessness: The Man and the Mystery

## 2 Thessalonians 2:1–12

The sequence of the events that comprise the day of the Lord—rapture, tribulation, second advent of Christ, millennial reign, and final judgment—are illustrated in Pastor Chuck Swindoll’s chart below.



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The gales of persecution and affliction buffeted the Thessalonians into thinking that God’s judgment had begun. Can you imagine their terror? It’s understandable that they were “shaken or alarmed” (2 Thessalonians 2:2).

Paul assured them in 2 Thessalonians 1 that their persecution was not God’s judgment. In chapter two, he clarified further, giving reasons the day of the Lord was still future.



### Observation: Calming the Thessalonians’ Fears

Observation opens Scripture to our senses so we can not only see what the author says but also sense the author’s heartbeat.<sup>3</sup> Paul felt the young believers’ distress, and he wanted so much to ease their minds. Feel the concern in his voice as you read [2 Thessalonians 2:1–12](#).

### Clarifying the Coming of Christ—2 Thessalonians 2:1–2

First, Paul wanted to “clarify some things about the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and how we will be gathered to meet him” (2 Thessalonians 2:1). To understand the event he was referring to, review [1 Thessalonians 4:15–18](#) and summarize what Paul previously taught about the “coming” and “gathering” of Christ.

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According to 2 Thessalonians 2:2, what three possible sources did Paul cite for the wrong teaching that the day of the Lord had begun? Why should the Thessalonians not trust these sources?

*Some of those who received this letter lost their family members, lost their jobs. Some of them paid the ultimate price for their faith in Christ. Other Christians who lived through it began to wonder if they had missed something in God's plan. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*

### Explaining the Day of the Lord—2 Thessalonians 2:3–12

Next, Paul listed details about the day of the Lord—specifically the tribulation period—to prove that it hadn't begun yet. Overview 2 Thessalonians 2:3–12 to see Paul's sequence of events, which can be summed up in four themes: *defiance*, *delay*, *destruction*, and *delusion*.

#### *Defiance*—2 Thessalonians 2:3–4

The apostle moved from clarification to chronology, recording events marking the early stages of the day of the Lord. He emphatically reminded his flock of believers not to be deceived! What main event signals the day of the Lord in 2 Thessalonians 2:3?

In interpretation, we'll examine the meaning of the phrase “the great rebellion,” also translated, “the apostasy” (NASB). Until then, observe the title, “the man of lawlessness” (2 Thessalonians 2:3). How did Paul describe this person in 2:3? What blasphemy will he commit, according to 2:4?

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*He will have enormous charisma. He will do miracles and wonders and signs. And people by the millions, by the billions, will follow this leader, who will become an object of worship. He will display himself as deity in the flesh.*  
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

### **Delay—2 Thessalonians 2:5–7**

Paul reminded them about his teaching on this subject—“I told you about all this when I was with you” (2 Thessalonians 2:5). The sinful conditions in the world were ripe for the man of lawlessness to appear, but he hadn’t yet—and he still hasn’t. What did Paul say was the reason for his delay, according to 2 Thessalonians 2:6–7?

We’ll look at possible identities of “the one who is holding it back” (2:7) in the interpretation section. For now, let’s see what this wicked man’s fate will be.

### **Destruction—2 Thessalonians 2:8–10**

What will Christ do when He returns in 2 Thessalonians 2:8?

How will the man of lawlessness deceive the world, who empowers him, and what will be the tragic result, according to 2:9–10?

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*I can't imagine a scene on this earth that lasts for years under the direction of one so motivated and inhabited by the evil one himself. I can't imagine what he will direct. By comparison with the tribulation we know today, it defies description. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*

### Delusion—2 Thessalonians 2:11–12

How did Paul describe those whom Christ will judge, according to 2 Thessalonians 2:11–12? What will God allow to happen? What will be the result?

*Not only did they believe in evil, but they took pleasure in that lifestyle. God gave them over to it. That's the scene here. If you understand the deliberateness of their unbelief, you'll say God is doing what is just and what is right. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*



### Interpretation: Deception and the Day of the Lord

While the word *deception* is used only a few times in 2 Thessalonians, it permeates our passage. False teachers deceived the Thessalonian believers by claiming to have “a spiritual vision,” “a revelation,” or an apostolic “letter” (2 Thessalonians 2:2) as their source of authority.

False teachers in cults continue to mislead the sheep. How do cults today reflect these same deceptive tactics the ancient heretics used?

While many “antichrists have appeared” throughout history (1 John 2:18), Paul zeroed in on a lone figure. The “man of lawlessness” (2 Thessalonians 2:3) mirrors the ultimate evil ruler in Daniel’s visions (see Daniel 7–12). He is the Antichrist—the Satan-empowered counterfeit messiah who deceives the world into worshipping him. In Revelation, he is called “the beast,” and he will be defeated by Christ at the battle of Armageddon (Revelation 16:16; 19:11–21).

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Ushering in the Antichrist will be the “great rebellion against God” (2 Thessalonians 2:3)—the ultimate worldwide, unified defiance against God. Why do you think this great rebellion must come first, and why will it open the door to the Antichrist?

The great rebellion won't appear until “the one who is holding it back steps out of the way” (2:7). Who is this restrainer? Read the brief article, “*Who/What Is the Restrainer in 2 Thessalonians 2:6?*” at [gotquestions.org](http://gotquestions.org) and write down what you discover.

*When that presence of the Spirit of God as we now know it is removed, restraint is removed. The authority figure now emerges as the man of sin, and he will, at least for a while, take charge. As long as the church of Jesus Christ is present on this earth, lawlessness remains under great restraint. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*



### Correlation: Eschatological Exploration

Use the following chart to review the key end times events. In the column on the right, briefly summarize who is depicted in the Scripture passages and what happens.

Scripture	Who and What
<b>Rapture</b> <i>1 Thessalonians 4:13–18</i>	
<b>Day of the Lord</b> <i>1 Thessalonians 5:1–6</i>	
<b>Return of Christ</b> <i>Revelation 19:11–20</i>	
<b>Millennium and Final Judgment</b> <i>Revelation 20:1–15</i>	

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*This is the kind of thing that ought to keep the unsaved awake through the night. This is the kind of information God gives in His Word designed to bring a person, if by fear, to the foot of the cross. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*



## **Application: Maintaining an End-Times Perspective**

What do these verses about the end times stir within you? If you are a child of God, you can find great relief, great hope, and great promise in your Savior's return and protection from God's impending judgment. Express your gratitude in a brief prayer to Him, that begins, "Dear Father, I know that I am safe in the arms of Your Son."

What aspect of the rapture do you most anticipate?

Does a loved one or a friend who is an unbeliever come to mind? How might you incorporate this text to share the truth of God's love in Christ?

No one knows when the next natural disaster will strike, so it's a good idea to be prepared. Our spiritual preparation kit for the day of the Lord is found in our faith in Christ. He is our hope . . . our higher ground . . . who keeps us safe from the worst disasters to come.

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## A FINAL PRAYER

*I'm grateful, Father, for Your truth that lives and abides forever. Out of praise and adoration, may I live for You for the rest of my life. It is in the name of Jesus Christ I pray. Amen.*

## ENDNOTES

1. Statistics regarding the 2004 Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami were gathered from World Vision website, accessed November 24, 2025, at [worldvision.org/disaster-relief-news-stories/2004-indian-ocean-earthquake-tsunami-facts#deadly](http://worldvision.org/disaster-relief-news-stories/2004-indian-ocean-earthquake-tsunami-facts#deadly).
2. John F. Walvoord, *The Thessalonian Epistles* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970), 117.
3. To learn more about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* Bible-study method, go to the web page, "[How Does Pastor Chuck Swindoll Study the Bible?](#)"

For the 2026 broadcasts, this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study was developed by Marshall F. Davis in collaboration with Aaron Massey, senior vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, and Bryce Klabunde, vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages. Copyright © 1986, 2026 by Charles R. Swindoll, Inc. All rights are reserved worldwide. Duplication of copyrighted material for commercial use is strictly prohibited.

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