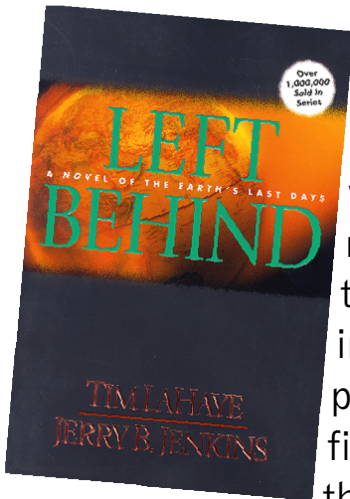


2. Cosmic Conflict



The mysterious Romanian leader Nicolae Carpathia is swept to international power as head of the United Nations. He promises to unite the globe with a one-world government and a one-world currency. He moves the U.N to Babylon and makes a treaty with Israel. Carpathia is popular and charming. He is thought of as the world's great hope for peace. But there are those who know the truth. He fits the prophetic descriptions from the bible. He is the Antichrist. He is the one spoken of as the 'man of lawlessness'.

So says the popular Left Behind novel series written by Tim LaHaye & Jerry B. Jenkins. This novel series focuses on what is known as 'the end times'. 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12 is one part of the bible that is used as a basis for the Left Behind storyline. Let's leave behind Left Behind for now and have a look at this strange and difficult passage for ourselves.

To remind yourself of the ground we've covered so far, read all of chapter 1 but then read up to chapter 2 verse 12.

a) Focusing on 2:1-12, what is your reaction to this passage?

b) This passage is hard to understand (some say the hardest in the New Testament!). This might be one of those studies where all your questions are not answered by the end of it! Though we might not understand everything, it seems clear that there was a particular reason that Paul wrote these things? What is that rea-

To teach that the day of Jesus' return has already come sounds bizarre to us. We're not given any more information to know for certain, but perhaps part of this teaching was that because Jesus had already returned, great heavenly blessing could be received. With Jesus' return we have entered the age of prosperity and peace.

c) Given the Thessalonian Christian's experiences (1:4-5) , how would such teaching make them think and feel?

d) From v3, how does Paul show that Christ hasn't returned?

e) In your own words, what are the characteristics of this man of lawlessness? See v4.

The obvious question we have is – who is he? What is this man's identity? Over the centuries there have been lots of opinions. Some have said Paul was referring to a certain Roman Emperor (Caligula) who wanted to set up a statue of himself in the Jewish Temple. Other have said it is a reference to all the Roman Emperors who deified themselves and called on people to give them worship. In the middle ages one ruler in Europe called an opposing ruler the man of lawlessness and so that ruler returned the favour. At the time of the church reformation, the Pope was called the man of lawlessness. More recently, Adolf Hitler and Joseph Stalin have been called the man of lawlessness. Today who might fit the mould? Or should we await a future Nicolae Carpathia?



f) To help our understanding, we should see that the characteristics of this man of lawlessness, have been displayed before.

Read Isaiah 14:12-15 which is Israel's taunt to the king of Babylon. How is this similar to the man of lawlessness?

It is interesting to note in this passage: the throne in heaven is not literal, but more of a symbol of his prideful and foolish ambition to assume God's position as ruler. This may be the way we should read the temple of God in 2 Thessalonians 2:4.

Read Daniel 11:31 & 36. This is a passage that found fulfillment when the foreign king Antiochus IV installed an idol to Zeus in the Jerusalem temple in 167BC. What is similar to the man of lawlessness?

It seems that Paul's words about this man echo other portrayals of evil and rebellion against God throughout the history of Israel. Perhaps we should be careful not to label any one figure around us as this man – such rebellion against God has been going on for a long time already.

g) If we understand it this way, though this man of lawlessness has yet to be revealed, as in the past he is active now, rebelling against God. How do we see rebellion and arrogance against God displayed around us today?

Verse 5-6 tells us that Paul and the Thessalonian Christians have had past conversations about this whole topic. Because we weren't there it puts us at a disadvantage to understand what is being said. Our understanding of the words about restraint and revealing in verses 6-7 are hazy to say the least. Let's move on for now.

h) Using your own words, what is the picture of humanity we get from v10-12?

i) Why don't we usually have this perspective on the world and humanity?

j) What is the destiny of this man of lawlessness? See v3 & 8.

k) What do we learn about God our Father and the Lord Jesus from this passage? Note v8 and v11-12.

l) Why is it important that these Thessalonian Christians be given this window into the future?

m) This passage has lots we don't often think about. Yet it was important for the Thessalonian Christians to know about it. Why is it important for us to know about?

For next week:

Congratulations! To continue the analogy from last week, you've made it over the two tough mountain peaks along our journey through 2 Thessalonians. I hope you've seen that just as from a mountain top you're given perspective, the picture of the future given in this letter is meant to give us perspective on life and where everything's heading. Next week we begin our descent into the territory of life now and what God has done for us in the past and present. Have a read of 2 Thessalonians 2:13-17.

