

Israel: Past, Present, and Future #15

2 Thessalonians 2:3-4

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We have noted in past sermons that the **supersessionist position** maintains that there is no present or future purpose in prophetic Scripture for Israel as a nation (that is a position that swings wrongly to one extreme concerning Israel as a nation).

On the other extreme is the **dispensationalist position** that maintains that there is a future purpose in prophetic Scripture for Israel as a nation, but also includes the rebuilding of the temple, the re-institution of the priesthood, sacrifices, feasts, and ceremonies of the Old Testament (that is a position that swings wrongly to the opposite extreme concerning Israel as a nation).

However, the **covenantalist position** maintains that there is a future purpose in prophetic Scripture for Israel as a nation (first conversion to Christ and then restoration of their land in peace/safety), but that does NOT include a return to the Old Testament Church in the rebuilding of the temple or re-institution of the priesthood, sacrifices, feasts, and ceremonies, but rather an ingrafting into the New Covenant Church. Israel is presently a covenant-breaking and Christ-rejecting nation that is God's enemy, but there is coming a glorious time in the future when the fullness of the Gentile nations will be brought to Christ and all Israel will be saved (Romans 11:25-26). That is the position we have sought to maintain as most agreeable to biblical revelation.

We continue to consider Scriptures which it is claimed address a rebuilt temple in the future (with God's blessing and approval). Let us briefly consider these final three passages today: (1) 2 Thessalonians 2:3-4; (2) Daniel 9:24; (2) Revelations 11:1-2.

I. 2 Thessalonians 2:3-4.

A. Background

1. The Apostle Paul likely penned this second letter to the Thessalonian Church to refute some who claimed Christ's coming to be near. Perhaps they thought Paul's words (1 Thessalonians 4:17) indicated Christ's coming could be at any time. Paul wrote 2 Thessalonians to clarify certain events in history that must first come to pass. Some dispensationalists today yet maintain this same position of Christ's imminent return which Paul said was not the case.

2. Paul writes 2 Thessalonians 2 **because** he doesn't want anyone to think that Jesus failed to come at the appointed time; **because** he does not want Christians to be unprepared for times of suffering that would come believing the Church would escape suffering; and **because** he does not want their perseverance to fail in awaiting Christ's coming.

B. What events did Paul prophesy must first come to pass before the coming of the Lord?

1. "A falling away" (*apostasia*)—2 Thessalonians 2:3. Apostasy does not speak of atheists or false religions (like Islam or paganism) who embrace lies (but have not fallen away), but a falling away from within the Church of Christ (in doctrine, worship, and church government). This great apostasy occurred when the Church of Rome fell away from biblical doctrines and denied *sola scriptura*, justification by faith alone, the once-and-for-all-time sacrifice of Christ, the one and only Mediator—Jesus Christ, the purity of worship, and the sole Headship of Jesus Christ over His Church on earth and in heaven. These denials were what Protestants protested against and were what Reformed Churches sought to reform so as to return to the faithful Church.

2. This "falling away" from the faithful Church would be led by "the man of sin" and "the son of perdition"—2 Thessalonians 2:3.

a. A warring man is called a man of war; a bloody man is called a man of blood; a deceitful man, a man of deceit; and a man that greatly transgresses God's Word and commandments and requires those in the Church that is fallen away to do so is called "the man of sin".

b. He is also identified as "the son of perdition [destruction i.e. eternal destruction]". Only one other man is identified in Scripture as "the son of perdition": Judas Iscariot (John 17:12). Just as Judas was an imposter in the church, so is the papacy. Just as Judas betrayed Christ with a kiss, so does the papacy. Just as Judas was the son of perdition (inheriting everlasting destruction), so is the papacy. The papacy is the leader of the apostasy from the faithful Church of Christ.

c. *The Westminster Confession of Faith* (25:6):

There is no other head of the Church but the Lord Jesus Christ: nor can the Pope of Rome in any sense be head thereof; but is that Antichrist, that man of sin and son of perdition, that exalteth himself in **the Church** against Christ, and all that is called God.

d. This "man of sin" and "son of perdition" is further described in 2 Thessalonians 2:4. He usurps the titles and authority of God—this is certainly true of the papacy who claims to be the Head of the Visible Church on earth in usurping Christ's Headship over the Church (Ephesians 5:23; Colossians 1:18) and who also claims an infallibility when speaking in his official capacity and power to forgive sins. The papacy assumes the title, Vicar of Christ (in the place of Christ—Latin)—but that is the very meaning of antichrist (*antichristos*—in the place of Christ—Greek). He is opposed to Christ in usurping Christ's headship.

e. But note where the papacy sits and reigns: "in the temple of God" (2 Thessalonians 2:4). Is this a rebuilt temple in the future as claimed by dispensationalists? The historic Protestant position has been that this is the Visible Church on earth over which the papacy has usurped the place of Christ in sitting as king in the place of King Jesus (2 Corinthians 6:16; 1 Corinthians 3:16-17; Ephesians 2:21; 1 Timothy 3:15; 1 Peter 2:5). The *Geneva Notes* (1560) state:

He foretells that the antichrist (that is, whoever he is that will occupy that seat that falls away from God) will not reign outside of the Church, but in the very bosom of the Church.

This interpretation best accords with the nature of the falling away in 2 Thessalonians 2:3—an apostasy from the faithful Church yet claiming to be the Visible Church (or temple of God) on earth (WCF).

II. Daniel 9:24.

A. Since we have already addressed this passage in our series in Daniel, I will be very brief. You may want to review those past sermons.

1. One of the prophesied events that shall be accomplished in the 70 weeks (or 490 actual years—day year principle) is "to anoint the Most Holy". Is this the anointing of a future temple to be built and blessed by the Lord or is this the anointing of the Holy Lord Jesus?

2. Daniel's prophecy of 70 weeks (490 years) are years that follow consecutively—one after another. There is no break of thousands of years between these years—as proposed by dispensationalists who have 69 consecutive weeks (483 years), and then without any indication in the text propose that the 70th week (last 7 years have not yet even begun). Just as the 70 years of Babylonian captivity were consecutive years (Daniel 9:2) and just as the first 483 years were consecutive years, so the last 7 years cannot be separated by thousands of years (without the text indicating that this is the case).

3. All of these 6 events were fulfilled at the first coming of Jesus Christ which all fall within the 70 weeks (490 years) counting from 458/457 B.C. to 34/35 A.D., which includes "to anoint the Most Holy". If the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ are not part of the 70 weeks, then the most important events of history are omitted for a rebuilt temple and reinstated priesthood and sacrifices. That is unthinkable!

B. Now that we have the right timeframe, what is the anointing of “the Most Holy”?

1. Jesus is referred to in the New Testament as God’s temple (John 2:19; John 1:14; Acts 3:14). If a temple of stone was Holy, how much more is Christ? The temple, the priesthood, the altar, and the sacrifices have all passed away, because they were all fulfilled in Christ (Hebrews 9:9-10—temple; Hebrews 7:12,17,18—priesthood; Hebrews 10:8-9—sacrifices). To return to a rebuilt temple would be to return to the Old Covenant after Christ had instituted the New Covenant. That is precisely what Paul warned Jewish Christians against in the Letter to the Hebrews (returning to the temple and its ordinances), and in so doing, leaving Christ.

2. Jesus was indeed anointed, anointed with the Holy Spirit at His baptism by John (Acts 10:37-38; Luke 4:18; Acts 4:27). This was the most important anointing of all anointings (not some anointing of a rebuilt temple). The very words, “Messiah” in Hebrew and “Christ” in Greek mean “the Anointed One” (Daniel 9:25). This is who this prophecy is all about (Daniel 9:25). There is no rebuilt temple in this prophecy.

III. Revelations 11:1-2.

A. As noted in the previous sermon, the Book of Revelation is full of symbols (including symbols using Old Covenant objects that are to be understood of New Covenant truths): altar, offerings of incense, priests, the ark of the covenant, and yes, a temple also. Is this referring prophetically to a rebuilt temple for the Jews or once again is this a symbol representing the Church? There are also past sermons on this passage that may be consulted in much greater detail.

1. There are clearly two parts to this vision.

a. The first part (Revelation 11:1) represents those who are true saints, who as faithful priests worship at the appointed altar (pure worship appointed by the Lord in His Word) within the Invisible Church of Christ (all of God’s elect). They are to be measured by a reed, signifying that they are measured by the gospel and commandments of the Lord and are found to belong to Christ (Revelation 7—sealing the foreheads of God’s people).

b. The second part (Revelation 11:2) represents those who are in the outer court of the temple (Visible Church) but have given themselves over to the corruption of the nations and to the antichrist (apostasy in 2 Thessalonians 2:3-4). These are not to be measured, but are “cast out” of the temple. This is simply a vision of what we have already noted in 2 Thessalonians 2.

2. This is not speaking of a literal temple (it’s a symbolic vision). Matthew Poole (1624-1679) states:

This temple was a type of the church under the New Testament, 1 Corinthians 3:17; 2 Corinthians 6:16, and is so to be interpreted generally in this book: for the material temple at Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans more than twenty years before this prophecy, never to be built more; not one stone was left upon another; so that John here was bid to measure the church.

3. How do you “leave out” (cast out, excommunicate) a court of stone and mortar from a literal rebuilt temple? It’s people that have fallen away that are cast out of the temple and represented by the outer court (those that follow the papal antichrist).

4. Once again, the use of temple to represent the church is found in many places in the New Testament and is the historic Protestant and Reformed interpretation of these verses. I submit there is no rebuilt temple here either.

B. Application.

1. Deception is terrible, but in some ways, self-deception is even worse. Listen to the

deception/self-deception associated with “the son of perdition” (2 Thessalonians 2:8-12). Where does self-deception begin? It begins with believing a lie and practicing a lie and taking pleasure in it—living two different lives—hiding the truth from those who love us (parents etc.). Self-deception begins when we can break God’s good and holy commandments and act as though the Lord does not see—that we have gotten away with it. Honesty and transparency with God/family/brethren is so necessary to overcome self-deception to which we are all susceptible (1 Corinthians 10:12).

2. Consider the consequences of self-deception in 2 Thessalonians 2:8-12). What is so sobering is that at some point God gave them over to their self-deception because they did not love the truth of God, but loved the lies and the pleasures of the lie more than the truth (1 John 1:6). Self-deception begins with “small” lies, stealing “small” things, cheating in “little” ways, but it grows if it is not taken seriously by God’s means of grace (Psalm 139:23-24). Self-deception does not want accountability to God or anyone else and runs from it rather than to it.

3. The good news is that we do not have to live a life of self-deception that leads to destruction (1 John 1:7). The gospel of Jesus Christ and the power of His Spirit lead us to live a life of honesty, transparency, and integrity in seeking to practice what we profess, to take all of those inconsistencies (hypocrisies) seriously in our lives, to live in the presence of God. That scares the unbeliever to death, but it is the greatest comfort to the one who truly believes in Jesus Christ. The One who sees and knows us best is the very One who loves us most. If we would be honest and transparent with others, we must first be honest and transparent with God. God gives to all true believers a love for His truth and an earnest desire to walk in it—and that means walking in repentance when we fall and looking to the mercy of God in Christ Jesus. This is the way of blessing and life. The way of self-deception is the way of misery and destruction. Choose life.

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