

# The Restraint of the Antichrist

By David Harrell

**Bible Text:** 2 Thessalonians 2:6-10  
**Preached on:** Sunday, June 19, 2016

Once again, we come to our time when we have the opportunity to open up the word of the living God so will you take the infallible record of his word and turn to 2 Thessalonians 2. We find ourselves this morning in verses 6 through 10 as we continue to understand what the Apostle Paul told the believers in Thessalonica regarding the coming Antichrist and many things pertaining to the end of the age and this morning we will be examining primarily verses 6 and 7 of 2 Thessalonians 2 as we endeavor to understand the restraint of the Antichrist.

Before we come to the text itself, I'd like to give you some big picture concepts of what God has revealed to us in his word regarding Bible prophecy because it has become abundantly clear to me over the years of ministry, that even most Christians know very little about what is ultimately going to happen. In fact, it is the proclivity of our flesh to be preoccupied with things that are eternally insignificant. We have a tendency to pursue things that are downright silly, things that really are meaningless. To give an extreme example, if I were to take a group of our young people and say, "Would you rather right now play a videogame or hear an exposition from the word of God regarding what God is going to do in the future?" most would say, "Oh, the videogame, please." And many adults would be somewhat the same way. But what we realize is that as we look into the word of God, he has given us many prophecies regarding what is going to happen. I think I have told you before the Bible has approximately 2,500 prophecies in it and we know that 27 of those prophecies were fulfilled precisely on the day Christ died, and over 300 prophecies about Jesus the Messiah have already been fulfilled to date, therefore it is not unreasonable to believe that the rest of those prophecies are likewise going to be fulfilled as promised, especially with respect to his second coming.

So join with me as we go through a bit of a journey here looking at some big picture concepts in the word of God that will help frame the text that we have before us in 2 Thessalonians 2. As we look at Scripture, we realize that since the fall of humanity in the garden, Satan has opposed God's plan of redemption, and even the most naïve and ignorant Christian will readily agree that Satan opposes all that pertains to God and his glory, in fact, Jesus referred to Satan three times as the "prince of this world." But as we look at Scripture, we see that Satan's greatest efforts and his most violent attempts are reserved for the person of the Lord Jesus Christ in his work of redemption. From his initial attempt to eliminate the messianic line through the Egyptians' murder of all the Hebrew male babies in Exodus 1, to Herod's barbaric attempt to kill the Lord Jesus by slaughtering all of the babies around Bethlehem, we have seen down through the millennia that Satan is relentless in his effort to thwart the purposes of God in redemption. And though he was decisively defeated at the cross, though his doom is

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sealed, he remains resolute in his determination to replace righteousness with wickedness; to call evil good, and good evil and thwart the plans and the purposes of God.

And folks, all of this is only going to get worse as "the ancient serpent," as John called him in Revelation 12:9, the devil or Satan, "who leads the world astray," he says, continues to lead his demonic horde to carry out his nefarious plans. And his most sinister plan includes his effort to deceptively reduplicate the person and work of Christ through a man that will one day come upon the scene who will basically be half demon and half human; a man who will be able to "perform all kinds of counterfeit miracles and signs and wonders," 2 Thessalonians 2:9, including, by the way, a pseudo-resurrection from the dead according to Revelation 13:3. Daniel tells us in chapter 7 and verse 25, that this will be a man who will speak against the Most High and oppress his saints and try to change the set times and the laws; the saints will be handed over to him for a time and times and half a time, in other words, three and half years. This will be a man, according to Daniel 11:36, who will exalt and magnify himself above every God and will say unheard-of things against the God of gods and who will be successful until the time of wrath is completed. This is a man who Paul described as the man of lawlessness who will be revealed, the son of destruction, in 2 Thessalonians 2:3. Obviously this is referring to the Antichrist.

As we examined last week, God has given us a precise chronology of the pre-kingdom judgments in Daniel's prophecy of the 70 weeks which, by the way, are paralleled in John's chronology in the book of Revelation. And in summary, we know that God is going to loose this false messianic ruler upon a world that has rejected the true messianic King. God is going to allow Satan to do this and this Antichrist is going to rise to a place of political and military and religious power in the space of three and half years and he is going to dominate the world with wickedness like we have never seen for another three and a half years. In Daniel 9:26, he is described as a prince and he will be a future prince out of a revived Roman Empire, probably a European confederacy that will make a "firm covenant with Israel for a period of seven years." But in the middle of that period, he is going to violate that covenant. He will stop the sacrificial system that had been inaugurated with the new temple on the Temple Mount with the Jews. He will desecrate that temple and he will demand that the world worship him. And at that time, he will inaugurate a time of persecution that will last to the end of that seven years and then he will be utterly defeated and destroyed by the second coming of the true Messiah.

Now, it's important for you to understand that Satan is the master counterfeiter who seeks to imitate that which is true with that which is false. And every good counterfeit looks basically like the real thing. In fact, every heresy is 99% truth. It's like snake venom,

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snake venom is 90% protein but it's that 10% that's not that will kill you. In fact, Martin Luther once said, "Diabolos est simia Dei" which means "Satan is God's ape." For example, just as there is a holy Trinity, the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit, a day is coming when Satan is going to offer his counterfeit Trinity with the dragon, the beast and the false prophet. During the seven years prior to Christ's second coming, Satan will endeavor to establish his own rule upon the earth and create a facsimile of the messianic kingdom. Even as there exists today the one true church, the bride of Christ, Satan right now is creating a false church, a counterfeit church, one that is called a great whore in Scripture, an apostate ecclesiastical monstrosity. This will be an enormous amalgam of apostate religions led by the false prophet that will deceive the world. John describes this in Revelation 17:5 as, "mystery, Babylon the great, the mother of harlots and of the abominations of the earth." John went on to describe her as a "woman drunk with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the witnesses of Jesus." This mystery Babylon to come is called the mother of harlots, not just a harlot but the mother of harlots; the one that originally spawned all of the blasphemous idolatries that will characterize the final mystery Babylon just before Christ returns and this final world religion will be thoroughly demonic therefore irresistibly appealing to sinful man. It will be so vile and blasphemous that the Lord describes Babylon's sins as being, "piled up as high as heaven," Revelation 18:5. So a time is coming when Satan will reveal an unholy counterpart to the bride of Christ.

Let me give you some history regarding all of this because it will help you understand what the Apostle Paul is telling us here in 2 Thessalonians. 1,656 years after God created Adam, he judged the world with a worldwide flood and all of the people in the world were killed except Noah, his wife, his three sons, Shem, Ham and Japheth, and their wives; all except eight people who "found favor in the eyes of the Lord." And we know according to Genesis 10 that one of the descendants of Ham was a man named Nimrod who tried to build "a kingdom called Babel in the land of Shinar." Babylon, by the way, is the Hebrew form of the name Babilim, and this is in the region today of Iraq, the same region of the Garden of Eden, the land of Mesopotamia. And according to Genesis 11:1, "the whole earth used the same language and same words," that would have been the language of Noah. And in verse 2, we are told that they journeyed east to the land of Shinar and they settled there. So literally 100 years after the flood, we see Satan trying to establish an earthly kingdom through Nimrod, Noah's great-grandson. He was a foreshadow of the Antichrist.

We learn more about the motivation at that time in chapter 11, verse 4 of Genesis. There we read, "They said, 'Come, let us build for ourselves a city, and a tower whose top will reach into heaven, and let us make for ourselves a name, lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth.'" Now, this is commonly called the Tower of Babel. It's

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literally referring to a ziggurat. There were many others that they have found, in other words, a staged tower erected to facilitate the worship of idols. And history reveals that on the top of that and many others like that, were the signs of the zodiac where priests would chart the stars to determine the future. By the way, it should be no surprise to you that Satan continues to practice this today, another ploy to somehow distract people from worshipping and serving the one true God who has ordained the end from the beginning.

As we continue to look at the history of that day, we see that God was displeased with that rebellion and that idolatry, knowing that it was ultimately satanic, so according to verse 7, he says, "Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another's speech. So the LORD scattered them abroad from there over the face of the whole earth; and they stopped building the city. Therefore its name was called Babel, because there the LORD confused the language of the whole earth." So he confused the people and each people group then coalesced or united around their respective languages and they went in search of a region that could support them and naturally they took with them all of their idolatrous practices, much of which historians have discovered was variations really of an ancient mother/son fertility cult form of worship, a combination of myth and legend and history, all of which points to a woman whose name was Semiramis, thought to be the wife of Nimrod, and as many as 180 shrines are dedicated to the goddess Ishtar and these have been documented in ancient Babylon.

So this idolatrous mother/son fertility cult worship can be seen in virtually every form of paganism around the world to this very day. In Greece she became Aphrodite and Artemis, Athena, Demeter, Gaia. In Rome she was Venus, Diana, Minerva, Tara. In India she was the goddess Devaki with the infant Krishna, or Isi and the infant Iswara. In Egypt, she was the goddess Isis with a son Horus. In Asia, they were known as Sybil and Delius. The Scandinavians called her Disa and she's always pictured with a little child. Ancient Germans worshipped the virgin Hertha with a child in her arms. And on it goes. In fact, even Israel was later rebuked for worshipping "the queen of heaven," who was the goddess Ishtar. You read about that in Jeremiah 44. And likewise, her son Tammuz, and you read about him in Ezekiel, especially chapter 8. And this included idolatrous practices that involved the most abominable forms of immorality, idolatrous practices that they refused to abandon and so, as you know, God judged Israel.

It should be no surprise as a footnote here, that the name "queen of heaven, mother of God," is still used by Roman Catholics to describe Mary. In fact, any honest student of Roman Catholicism will quickly see that the papacy and the Roman Catholic system is far more Babylonish and Jewish than it is Christian. And historically we see that the Babylonish mother of harlots eventually ended up in Rome and when Constantine

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conquered Rome around 300 A.D., we learned that he mixed a perverted form of Christianity in with the poison of this Roman paganism. And during that time the most famous historian of that day, Eusebius, a follower of Origen, taught that the church, the Roman Catholic Church, was the new Israel that permanently replaced the Jew. In fact, Constantine made it a crime to even convert to Judaism, and ultimately Constantine united the Roman Catholic empire, or I should say the Roman empire with the new Roman Catholic Church in an effort to promote loyalty and unity among the citizens.

So this mixture of Babylonian paganism, certain aspects of Judaism, and a distorted form of Christianity became the Roman Catholic Church, a political glue that would hold together the Roman empire. And to this day, Roman Catholics ultimately worship Mary, the holy mother, the "queen of heaven." In fact, the coat of arms of Pope John Paul the second bears the letter "M" which stands for Mary, and embroidered on the inside of his robes is the Latin phrase, "Totus tuus sum Maria, Mary, I'm all yours." And of course, history is replete with documented evidences of popes who were notoriously evil. I would encourage you to read "Vicars of Christ: The Dark Side of the Papacy," by Peter DeRosa, who was a former Jesuit. And the same can be said of the Roman Catholic priesthood as we continue to see scandal after scandal. So because the Vatican City in Rome and the Roman Catholic Church is Babylonish to the core, it will continue to be a major player in the religious system of the Antichrist and the false prophet, and it should be no surprise that the Roman Catholic Church today is positioning itself to be at the very center of the current move toward globalization and an emerging world government.

So out of the Tower of Babel, the complex of all pagan religions respond, everything from Islam to Hinduism, from Shamanism to Buddhism, they were all birthed by the mother of harlots and the abomination of the earth. All of that was birthed in ancient Babylon.

Now, back to history, later on in Old Testament history we see that the great empire of Babylon was built by King Nebuchadnezzar. It was built in that same place which is today Iraq, the cradle of civilization. It's interesting that all of this wickedness was spawned in the Middle East and it's all going to end in the Middle East. This remains the most hostile region in all of the world in its vicious hatred of God's covenant people, the Jews, as well as his church.

Now, in Revelation 17, the Lord warns about a day that is going to come just before his return when history is going to come full circle. All of these false religions are going to have a family reunion, if you will. They're all going to come home to mama. They will all be rolled into one religion which will be the worship of the beast personified here as a harlot. Indeed, the world is being prepared this very day for this great Babylonish whore

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that will promise to bring the world's religions together, to unite them together under one monolithic banner of ecumenism, a demonic system that will eventually lead to the sole worship of the beast himself.

We can already see this happening, can't we? We can see the political and economic and military maneuverings, all of which will be components of Satan's Babylon. We see all of that beginning to emerge today. We see the world's economies teetering on collapse and the only answer is going to be a one world monetary system. All of your economists are telling us that that's where it's going to have to go eventually. All of this is leading to a one world government. All of the nations today are either plotting violence or they're cowering in retreat, and the people of the world today are afraid. They are confused. They are angry. They are immoral. They are materialistic. They are idolatrous haters of Christ, haters of the Gospel of grace, and therefore they are poised to follow a charismatic leader who will offer them hope and change they can believe in; hope and change that will satisfy their lust.

And we can also see the seduction of the mother of all harlots gaining influence in the religions of the world, even in Christianity. We now have what Michael Horton has aptly labeled in his book "a Christless Christianity," the alternative Gospel of the American church. The church today is much more about moral crusades and political crusades than proclaiming the saving and transforming truths of the Gospel. The modern evangelical church wants to be much more like Disneyland where the whole family can go and have a good time and have fun and escape all of the difficulties of life, so it's little wonder that the new Gospel message reflects the mythical optimism of Jiminy Cricket. You will remember him, he said, "If you wish upon a star, all your dreams will come true," and that's kind of the essence of much of what will be preached today in churches around our country. And how different from the truth of the Gospel where we are confronted with the reality that we are hopeless sinners; that we have no remedy in ourselves; and unless we come to a saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, unless we come face-to-face with a holy God and realize that we are guilty and we are eternally damned, unless we cry out for mercy we do not deserve, we will perish in our sins. For this reason, Christ must be preached, sin must be exposed, and certainly the offense of the cross can never be diminished.

Well, as we can see from this brief overview, there is a great battle that's occurring even right now as we speak and that battle is going to escalate in ways that we cannot imagine. When we examine the great drama of the apocalypse, when we look into the book of Revelation, the revealing of the Lord Jesus Christ, we see the beast being pitted against the Lamb, a self-deified megalomaniac who is going to rule a 10 nation confederacy which will give him power to rule until God's words are fulfilled, Revelation 17:17. And

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according to Bible prophecy, Satan's world system in opposition to God ruled by the Antichrist will one day have a one world government, a one world economy, a one world religion, and only a fool would deny that we are moving in that direction today. But we believe according to Scripture and certainly this was Paul's theme in 1 and 2 Thessalonians, that the church is going to be snatched away before this vile creature is revealed. This was Paul's theme in 2 Thessalonians. Remember now the context, he's trying to correct their misunderstanding. They are thinking that they are living in the day of the Lord because of all of the persecution that they are experiencing, because of the deceptions of false teachers that were telling them that, but Paul had taught them that the rapture of the church must precede that final day of wrath including the tribulation and the day of the Lord. Moreover as we examined last week by very quick review, in verses 1 through 5 of chapter 2, Paul tells them that none of that is going to occur until the apostasy and the man of lawlessness, the Antichrist, is revealed.

So with that, we come to our text this morning where Paul explains the restraint and ultimately the destruction of the coming Antichrist. Notice verse 6,

6 And you know what restrains him now, so that in his time he will be revealed. 7 For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only he who now restrains will do so until he is taken out of the way. 8 Then that lawless one will be revealed whom the Lord will slay with the breath of His mouth and bring to an end by the appearance of His coming; 9 that is, the one whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders, 10 and with all the deception of wickedness for those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved.

Now, today I want to examine just verses 6 through 7 here under the heading "The Restraint of the Antichrist." Notice closely verse 6, Paul says, "And you know what restrains him now." So obviously Paul had been teaching them about this very issue. I wish he would have made it abundantly clear what the restraint was. We have some idea and I'll give you my humble opinion in a few minutes, but might I say that there are a lot of opinions about what this restraint is but obviously he had taught them. So he says, "And you know what restrains him now, so that in his time he will be revealed."

Now, as we look at the text closely, we know that the term "restrains" literally means "to hold back; to hold fast; to keep in check." Well, what is it that's keeping Satan from revealing the Antichrist right now? Notice the phrase "what restrains," that is in the original language what we would call a neuter participle that seems to leave us without any clear sense of definite reference, leading many to believe that this is going to be some

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kind of a supernatural force. But then later on in verse 7, it's identified as a personal figure, there you have a masculine participle. Notice it says, "only he who now restrains will do so until he is taken out of the way." Now, unfortunately, Paul does not tell us what he had taught them, what they already knew about what or who was currently keeping Satan from revealing this hideous fiend. Is it a power? Is it a person? Is it both?

Some people today say that this is referring to Satan who is going to retire willingly from the scene of his own free will in order to permit the revelation of this more terrifying figure, the lawless one, to emerge. Others believe it will be the cessation of the preaching of the Gospel. Some believe it will be the removal of the Holy Spirit who is alive in the church; that that will happen at the rapture, leaving the world without salt and light. Some people believe it has to do with the nation Israel. Some believe it has to do with the removal of Michael, the Archangel, the protector of Israel. Astonishingly, many charismatics believe that they are going to come together and they are going to bind Satan and then that is going to allow the lawless one to be revealed. Some believe it will be the collapse of all the governments of the world and so that there will be an end of law and morality and so forth. Well, I will admit that we can't say dogmatically but I do believe there are some clues in scripture that will help us come to at least a tenable hypothesis about what this restraint really is.

But he does tell us that some aspects of the end are already at work, although the full consummation is still future. Notice in verse 7, he says, "For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work." Lawlessness, referring to open rebellion against the most high God. He says, "For the mystery," the mysterion, and this speaks of that which has been kept secret in the past and cannot be known until God reveals it. Well, he's saying some of that is already at work. And to be sure, certain aspects of this mystery of lawlessness is already at work, has been revealed to us. I mean, we see it all the time, do we not? We look around and we see open rebellion against the most high God. 1 John 3:4, "Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness." But in Matthew 24:12, Jesus prophesied that at the end of the age or as it approaches, he says lawlessness will increase, and so there is going to be an escalation of this defiance against God and the people of God, and we see this increasing at alarming rates in our culture today. Today we see this lawlessness in the spirit of Antichrist that John speaks of, for example in 1 John 4:3, "every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God; this is the spirit of the Antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world." Likewise in 1 John 2:18, "Children, it is the last hour; and just as you heard that Antichrist is coming, even now many Antichrists have appeared; from this we know that it is the last hour."

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So we see some of this today but, dear friends, the ultimate manifestation, the full expression of this lawlessness that is already at work is not going to happen until the restraint is removed and Satan is allowed to present his great champion, his counterfeit Christ, the final Antichrist himself. But what or who restrains Satan from doing this? Scripture doesn't tell us that he has wanted to do this for some time but I would imagine that he has been wanting to do this for some time but he is not allowed to do so. Well, I believe as we look at Scripture, that there is only one force capable of restraining Satan, the same force that has restrained him and restrained total lawlessness from the earth from the beginning, from the Garden, and that is the supernatural force exerted by the person and the work of the Holy Spirit.

Now, exegetically this is not without precedent. Jesus used a masculine pronoun with the neuter noun translated "Spirit" on three occasions. John 14:26, he says, "But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things." John 15:26, "When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, that is the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify about Me." John 16:13, "But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth." But I would argue beyond the exegetical precedent that we have here, we must remember that one of the great works of the Holy Spirit throughout redemptive history has always been to battle sin and Satan. In fact, whenever we sin, we resist the work of the Holy Spirit. We see this, for example, in Stephen's rebuke of the wicked leaders of Israel in Acts 7:51, he said, "You men who are stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears are always resisting the Holy Spirit; you are doing just as your fathers did."

Now, dear friends, imagine living in a world where the Holy Spirit's supernatural restraint of sin and Satan is removed, and then add to that the Antichrist being revealed simultaneously. It's incomprehensible as we will see. This is what will happen when, as Paul says in verse 7, "he who now restrains is taken out of the way." I might add, this too is not without precedent. Did not God promise the pre-flood wicked inhabitants of this earth this very thing when he said in Genesis 6:3, "My Spirit shall not strive with man forever"?

Now, be careful with Paul's phrase "taken out of the way." This does not mean that the Holy Spirit himself is going to be removed from the earth during the time of the tribulation. We know that the Holy Spirit is omnipresent and many people are going to come to a saving knowledge of Christ during those pre-kingdom judgments so the Holy Spirit has to be here in order for them to be born again, to perform this great work of regeneration, rather this means that his supernatural restraint will be removed. You will recall, for example, in Romans 1 God describes the removal of divine restraint that occurs when a man continues to sin with impunity; when he does this, he says, God gives them

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up or gives them over first to immorality, then to homosexuality, then to a debased mind that will pursue every imaginable form of evil. So we see this in the moral freefall in our country and in our world already today. This is the wrath of divine abandonment. This is what happens when the Holy Spirit's restraint is lifted and gives man over to the consequences of his rebellion.

Now, we know prophetically in similar fashion in the midpoint of the tribulation, not at the rapture but at the midpoint of the tribulation when the Antichrist desecrates the temple in the abomination of desolation, when he exalts himself as Paul "says 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," at that point, the Spirit will cease his restraining work. He will not remove himself but he will stop his restraining work. He will stop holding back Satan's man of lawlessness, the son of destruction, and he will allow Satan to turn that monster loose upon this world. The Holy Spirit will allow Satan to counterfeit the incarnation of Christ; to send his incarnate false Messiah to imitate the second person of the Trinity, the Lord Jesus; to unleash upon the world a man who will come to do the will of his father, the devil; a man utterly controlled by the murdering father of lies. So, folks, like a mighty dam that holds back a massive body of water, when the Holy Spirit's restraint is removed, when it is taken out of the way, as Paul says, the mystery of lawlessness that is already at work is going to then explode in a torrent of defiance against our most holy God. You think it's bad now, this is nothing compared to what is going to happen in the world.

In order to give you more context here, let me tell you what else God says is going to happen at that same time and here I must take you for a few minutes briefly to Revelation 9. In conjunction with all of this, God is also, according to verse 14, going to "Release the four angels who are bound at the river Euphrates." Now, the location of their bondage here of these four demons is most significant. The river Euphrates, you probably know, extends from the Persian Gulf, the region of the original Garden of Eden. It goes 1,800 miles north into Mount Ararat in Turkey. It passes through the Islamic countries of Turkey, Syria and Iraq. And the name refers to not just the river but to the entire region that it nourishes. Genesis 2:10, God speaks of a "river that flowed out of Eden to water the garden; and from there it divided and became four rivers." And in verse 14, it goes on to describe that fourth river as the river Euphrates.

So from the world's creation, this river flowed through the cradle of civilization. The region where the history of man began, will also be where it will end where Satan first introduced sin, where rebellion first occurred and the curse was enacted. So from the beginning, this has been a land of defiance against God. May I remind you this is the land of Noah. This is where Nimrod and the Tower of Babel which spawned all of those counterfeit religions, the mother/son fertility cult religions, this is where it all began,

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# The Restraint of the Antichrist

By David Harrell

**Bible Text:** 2 Thessalonians 2:6-10  
**Preached on:** Sunday, June 19, 2016

where it branched out in every direction when God confused the tongues. The Euphrates river is also the Eastern boundary of the Promised Land, and it was beside these very waters that Israel struggled under the weight of her wilderness wanderings. And it was here that the most violent haters of God's people made their home: Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia, and all of the Arab Islamic countries to this very day.

So, back to what we read here in Revelation, for reasons we do not know, God bound these four great demons in anticipation of what is described here as the sixth trumpet judgment. But whoever they are, the use of the definite articles indicates that the four angels comprise a specific group, and according to this text, they are currently bound in this region in the area of the Euphrates.

Verse 15 of Revelation 9, he goes on to say, "And the four angels, who had been prepared for the hour and day and month and year, were released, so that they would kill a third of mankind." Isn't it interesting, the Lord leaves no ambiguity about his sovereignty over all of these things. He has got his timetable. And bear in mind, again, this is going to happen at the same time the Spirit of God lifts his restraint and Satan unleashes that man of lawlessness, the son of destruction.

Verse 16, "The number of the armies of the horsemen was two hundred million; I heard the number of them. And this is how I saw in the vision the horses and those who sat on them." John says, "the riders had breastplates the color of fire and of hyacinth and of brimstone; and the heads of the horses are like the heads of lions; and out of their mouths proceed fire and smoke and brimstone. A third of mankind was killed by these three plagues, by the fire and the smoke and the brimstone which proceeded out of their mouths." You see, this is a description of something that is fierce and powerful and horrifying, capable of killing people with fire, with asphyxiation due to the smoke, and with brimstone that is being emitted from their mouths. Folks, this is a foretaste of hell.

And John adds more to the description of these wretched demons. He says in verse 19, "For the power of the horses is in their mouths and in their tails; for their tails are like serpents and have heads, and with them they do harm." So their actual physiology here is beyond our comprehension. This is alien. This is supernatural. This is demonic. This is a foretaste of hell before the final judgment of the wicked. But you must understand that during this time, the vast majority of the world will worship the beast and the Antichrist, not the Lord Jesus Christ.

Verse 20, we read, "The rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues," now the next phrase is absolutely staggering, "did not repent of the works of their hands." You would think with all of this going on it would have said they repented in sackcloth and

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ashes, but it says, no, they "did not repent of the works of their hands, so as not to worship demons, and the idols of gold and of silver and of brass and of stone and of wood, which can neither see nor hear nor walk; and they did not repent of their murders nor of their sorceries nor of their immorality nor of their thefts."

Folks, here we see the mystery of lawlessness being revealed in its final and full fury, and all of these forms of evil are available today in Satan's vast smorgasbord of idolatry, all of which are part of the coming mystery of lawlessness that is already at work that is going to be revealed more fully. Isn't it sad when you see millions of people mindlessly moving toward Mecca for their journey? Or millions of Roman Catholics worshiping the Pope in Vatican City? And millions more with all of the pagan religions? But folks, one day all of these religious systems are going to be assimilated into this great harlot church and they will worship the Antichrist and Satan just before the Lord returns in all of his glory.

Dear friends, a day of vengeance is coming and that day of vengeance has been fixed in the eternal counsels of our holy and our sovereign God, and thankfully, I believe according to Scripture, the church is going to be removed before all of this happens. I don't know about you, but I'm looking for Christ, not the Antichrist. I'm not arming myself and filling my fort full of food to fight off the Antichrist and all of those types of things, I'm waiting for Christ to come and snatch me away. It's not to say that I'm not going to be prepared for what comes but we have to guard ourselves against that kind of fanaticism and certainly this was Paul's great theme to the Thessalonians.

I'll close with this thought in 1 Thessalonians 5, you remember he said to them, "But you, brethren, are not in darkness." It's not like you haven't been told what's going to happen here. "You're not in darkness that the day would overtake you like a thief; for you are all sons of light and sons of day." And he went on to say, "so then let us not sleep as others do, but let us be alert and sober."

Dear friends, I hope that is you. It is so easy for us to get caught up in all of the stuff of life. You young people in particular, I would encourage you to guard your heart, choose your friends wisely, spend your time wisely, and learn to discipline yourself to study the word of God and to live it. And for those of us who know that the word of God is true and faithful like those early saints in Thessalonica, I pray that these great truths will give us an even greater zeal for evangelism. I pray that these things will help our hope to be even more blessed, right? For our faith to be more certain. For our worship to be more informed. For our praise for his saving grace to be more exuberant.

So what's going to happen to the Antichrist? How is he going to be destroyed? Well, come back next week and we will examine that very topic.

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Let's pray together.

*Father, thank you, thank you, thank you for the hope that we have in Christ. Lord, the things that you describe tell us that evil is so much more evil than we can even imagine. We live in such a fantasy bubble and, Lord, I pray that by the power of your word you will help us to see beyond the temporal into the eternal; to look beyond the physical and see the spiritual so that we might enjoy more fully what it means to be in Christ. Lord Jesus, I pray that you will come quickly. I pray that you will use us as instruments of righteousness to present the Gospel to those who are lost and dying in their sins. And if there be one like that here today, O God, won't you break their heart and bring them to the foot of the cross that they might repent and believe and experience the miracle of the new birth this very day. I ask all of this in Jesus' name and for his sake. Amen.*

We pray you have been edified by this presentation. You have been listening to Pastor, Bible Teacher and Author, Dr. David Harrell. For more information or for other messages from Dr. Harrell, please visit the Olive Tree Christian Resources website at [otcr.org](http://otcr.org).

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