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COMMENTARY

**DARBY'S SYNOPSIS OF THE
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by John Nelson Darby

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John Nelson Darby, 1800-1882

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2 THESSALONIANS

In the second epistle to the Thessalonians, the apostle corrects some errors into which these disciples had fallen with regard to the day of the Lord through certain false teachers; as in part of the first epistle he had enlightened the ignorance of the believers themselves respecting the portion of the saints at the coming of Christ to take them to Himself — a point on which they were evidently but little instructed.

A measure of Jewish darkness was on their minds; and they were, in some points, still subjected to the influence of that unhappy nation, which was ever struggling to maintain a position lost through its unbelief.

This Jewish influence enables us to understand why the apostle spoke as he did in chapter 2:15, 16, of the first epistle. At that time this influence showed itself in the tendency of the Thessalonians to lose sight of the heavenly side of the Lord's coming, to think that He would return to the earth and that they should then be glorified with Him — as a Jew might have believed — and that the dead saints would therefore not be present to share this glory. I do not say that this thought had assumed a definite form in the minds of the Thessalonians. To them the principal and living object was the Lord Himself, and they were awaiting His return with hearts full of joy and life; but the heavenly side of this expectation had not its place clearly marked in their minds, and they connected the coming too much with the manifestation, so that the earthly character predominated, and the dead seemed to be shut out from it.

When the second epistle was written, this Jewish influence had another character; and the false teachers were more directly concerned in it.

The faithful at Thessalonica had learnt to contemplate “the day of the Lord” as a day of judgment. The Old Testament had spoken much of this day of the Lord, a day of darkness and unparalleled judgment, a day of trial to men (compare Isaiah 13, Joel 2, Amos 5:18). Now the Thessalonians were undergoing dreadful persecution. Perhaps their hope of an earthly intervention of the Lord, during their lifetime, was weakened. The apostle at least rejoiced at the increase of their faith, and the abundant exercise of

their love, while he is silent with regard to their hope; and the joy of christian life is not found here as it was manifested in the first epistle. Nevertheless they were walking well, and the apostle gloried in them* in the churches of God. But the false teachers profited by their condition to mislead them by means of their sufferings, which weighed more heavily on their hearts from the joy of hope being a little weakened; and at the same time the remains of the influence of Judaizing thoughts, or of habits of mind formed through them, furnished occasion to the assaults of the enemy. The instrument of the subtle malice told them that the day of the Lord, that fearful time, was already come — the word (chap. 2:2) is not “at hand,” but “come,” “present”** and all that the Thessalonians were suffering, and by which their hearts were shaken, appeared like a testimony to prove it and to confirm the words of the false teachers. Was it not written that it should be a day of trial and anguish?

[* In the first epistle he says he needed not to speak of them, seeing that the world itself recounted everywhere the principles by which they were governed. We shall see a similar difference all through. It is no longer the same fresh energy of life.]

[** See Romans 8:38; 1 Corinthians 3:22; where the Greek is translated “present,” in contrast with “things to come.”]

The words of these teachers, moreover, had the pretension of being more than human reasoning; it was a word of the Lord, it was the Spirit who spoke, it was a letter from an inspired channel: and so bold and wicked were they in regard to this matter, that they did not fear to adduce the apostle’s own name as their authority for declaring that the day was come. Now the dominion of fear, which Satan can exercise over the mind, when it is not kept of God in peace and joy, is astonishing. “In nothing terrified by your adversaries,” is the apostle’s word to the Philippians, “which is to them an evident token of perdition, but to you of salvation, and that of God.” In such a state of mind as this everything is believed; or rather everything is feared, and nothing is believed. The heart gives itself up to this fear, and is ready to believe anything; for it is in darkness and knows not what to believe. Thus the apostle exhorts the Thessalonians (chap. 2) not to be soon shaken in mind so as to lose their stability in the truth, and not to be troubled.

The apostle deals with the case in the same manner as in the first epistle. Before entering on the error he treats the same subject in its true light, building upon the knowledge which the Thessalonians already possessed. Only he sets it forth with clearness in its application to the circumstances of the moment. By this means they were delivered from the influence of the error, and from the disturbance of mind which it had caused; and were rendered capable of looking at the error, as being themselves outside it, and of judging it according to the instruction that the apostle gave them.

They were persecuted and were in distress and suffering, and the enemy took advantage of it. The apostle puts that fact in its right place. He encourages them with the thought that it was a kind of seal upon them of their being worthy of the kingdom for which they were suffering. But more, the “day of the Lord” was the coming of the Lord in judgment; but it was not to make His own suffer that He was coming — it was to punish the wicked. Persecution therefore could not be the day of the Lord; for in persecution the wicked had the upper hand and did their own will and inflicted suffering on those whom the Lord loved. Could that be His day! The apostle does not apply this argument to the question, but he puts the facts in their place; so that all the use which the enemy made of them fell of itself to the ground. The truth of the facts was there in its simplicity, giving them their evident and natural character. When God should take the thing in hand, He would recompense tribulation to those who troubled His children, and these should have rest — should be in peace. The moment of their entering into this rest is not at all the subject here, but the contrast between their actual condition and that which it would be if Jesus were come. It was not to persecute and harass His own that He was coming. In His day they should be at rest, and the wicked in distress; for He was coming to punish the latter by driving them away for ever from the glory of His presence. When we understand that the Thessalonians had been induced to believe that the day of the Lord was already come, the import of this first chapter is very plain.

Two principles are here established. First, the righteous judgment of God: it is righteous in His eyes, on the one hand, to reward those who suffer for His kingdom’s sake: and, on the other, to requite those who persecute His children. In the second place, the glorious manifestation of the Lord Jesus:

His own should be in rest and happiness with Him, when His power should be in exercise.

We see also here two reasons for judgment — they did not know God, and they did not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. All being without excuse as to the testimony that God had ever given concerning Himself, some among them had added the rejection of the positive revelation of His grace in the gospel of Christ to their abuse of their natural relationship with God and their forgetfulness of His Majesty.

Meanwhile the apostle presents the positive result in blessing of the manifestation of Jesus in glory. He will come to be glorified in His saints, and to be admired in all them that have believed in Him, and therefore in the Thessalonians: a thorough proof, at least that they were not to view their persecuted condition as a demonstration that the day was come. With regard to themselves, they were thus entirely delivered from the confusion by which the enemy sought to disquiet them; and the apostle could treat the question of this error with hearts which, as to their own condition, were set free from it and at rest.

These considerations characterised his prayers on their behalf. He sought from God that they might always be worthy of this vocation, and that the Lord might be glorified in them by the power of faith, which would shine the brighter through their persecutions; and that afterwards they might be glorified in Him at the manifestation of His glory according to the grace of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now that the apostle has placed their souls on the ground of truth, he enters upon the subject of the error, showing that which had occasioned his remarks. Of this we have already spoken.

In answering this error, and in guarding them from the wily efforts of seducers, he puts everything in its place here by appealing to precious truths of which he had already spoken. Their gathering together unto Christ in the air was a demonstration of the impossibility of the day of the Lord being already come.

Moreover with regard to this last he presents two considerations: first, the day could not be already come, since Christians were not yet gathered to the Lord, and they were to come with Him; second, the wicked one who

has then to be judged had not yet appeared, so that the judgment could not be executed.

The apostle had already instructed the Thessalonians with regard to this wicked one, when at Thessalonica; and in the former epistle he had taught them concerning the rapture of the church. In order that the Lord should come in judgment, iniquity must have reached its height, and open opposition to God have been manifested. But the truth had another and a more precious side: the saints were to be in the same position as Christ, to be gathered together unto Him, before He could manifest Himself in glory to those outside. But these truths require a more connected examination.

Their gathering together unto Christ before the manifestation was a truth known to the Thessalonians; it is not revealed here, it is used as an argument. The Lord Jesus was coming, but it was impossible that He should be without His church in the glory. The King would indeed punish His rebellious subjects; but, before doing so, He would bring to Himself those who had been faithful to Him amid the unfaithful, in order to bring them back with Him and publicly to honor them in the midst of the rebels. But the apostle here speaks only of the rapture itself, and he adjures them only by that truth not to allow themselves to be shaken in mind as though the day were come. What an assured truth must this have been to Christians, since the apostle could appeal to it as to a known point, on which the heart could rest! The relationship of the church to Christ, its being necessarily in the same position with Him, rendered the idea that the day was already come a mere folly.

In the second place, the already known fact is asserted, that the apostasy must previously take place, and then the man of sin be revealed. Solemn truth! Everything takes its place. The forms and the name of Christianity have long been maintained; true Christians have been disowned; but now there should be a public renunciation of the faith — an apostasy. True Christians should have their true place in heaven. But, besides this, there should be a person who would fully realise in sin the character of man without God. He is the man of sin. He does his own will — it is but Adam fully developed; and, incited by the enemy, he opposes himself to God (it is open enmity against God) and he exalts himself above all that bears the name of God; he assumes the place of God in His temple. So that there is

apostasy, that is, the open renunciation of Christianity in general, and an individual who concentrates in his own person (as to the principles of iniquity) the opposition that is made against God.

It will be noticed that the character of the wicked one is religious here, or rather anti-religious. The apostle does not speak of a secular power of the world, whatever its iniquity may be. The man of sin assumes a religious character. He exalts himself against the true God, but he shows himself as God* in the temple of God. Observe here that the sphere is on earth. It is not a God for faith. He shows himself as a God for the earth. The profession of Christianity has been abandoned. Sin then characterises an individual, a man, who fills up the measure of the apostasy of human nature, and, as a man, proclaims his independence of God. The principle of sin in man is his own will. He arises, as we have already seen, out of the rejection of Christianity. In this respect also evil is at its height.

[* “as God” is to be left out before “sitteth,” in chapter 2:4.]

This man of sin exalts himself above God, and, sitting as God in the temple of God, he defies the God of Israel. This last feature gives his formal character. He is in conflict with God, as placing himself publicly in this position — shewing himself as God in the temple of God. It is the God of Israel who will take vengeance on him.

Christianity, Judaism, natural religion, all are rejected. Man takes a place there on earth, exalting himself above it all, in opposition to God; and, in particular, arrogating to himself (for man needs a God, needs something to worship) the place and the honors of God, and of the God of Israel.*

[* In 1 John 2 we find the double character of the Antichrist as regards Christianity and Judaism. He denies the Father and the Son, rejects Christianity; he denies that Jesus is the Christ, which is Jewish unbelief. His power is the working of Satan, as we find here. As man he sets up to be God. So that his impiety is manifested in every way. As the question is more upon the earth, it is the God of the earth, the Man withal from heaven, who judges him.]

These verses present the wicked one in connection with the state of man, and with the different relationships in which man has stood towards God. In them all he shows himself as apostate, and then he assumes the place of God Himself the first object of human ambition, as its attainment was the first suggestion of Satan.

In that which follows, we see not the condition itself of apostasy with regard to the different positions in which God had placed man, but simply man unrestrained, and the work of Satan. The man is but the vessel of the enemy's power.

Man in whom is the fullness of the Godhead, the Lord Jesus, and man filled with the energy of Satan, are opposed to each other. Before, it was man forsaking God, wicked, and exalting himself. Here, it is opposition against God on the part of man, unrestrained, and inspired by Satan himself. Consequently we have (not the wicked one, but) the lawless — the unbridled-one. The principle is the same, for “sin is lawlessness” (see remarks 1 John 3:4). But in this first case man is viewed in his departure from God, and in his guiltiness; in the second, as acknowledging none but himself.

To this condition in which all restraint will be removed, a barrier has yet existed.

The apostle had already told them of the apostasy, and of the manifestation of the man of sin. He now says that the Thessalonians ought to know the hindrance that existed to his progress and his manifestation before the appointed time. He does not say that he had told them, but they ought to know it. Knowing the character of the wicked one, the barrier revealed itself. The main point here is that it was a barrier. The principle of the evil was already at work: a barrier alone prevented its development. Its character, when developed, would be unbridled will which exalts and opposes itself.*

[* Note this point. All was ready and complete in the apostle's time, only restrained. So Christ was ready to judge. Only the patience of God waits, in the accepted time.]

Unbridled self-will being the principle of the evil, that which bridles this will is the barrier. Now it exalts itself above all that bears the name of God, or to which homage is paid: that which hinders it therefore is the power of God acting in government here below as authorised by Him. The grossest abuse of power still bears this last character. Christ could say to Pilate, “Thou couldest have no power against me, except it were given thee from above.” Wicked as he might be, his power is owned as coming from God. Thus, although men had rejected and crucified the Son of God, so that their

iniquity appeared to be at its height, the hindrance still existed in full. Afterwards God, having sent His Spirit, gathers out the church, and, although the mystery of iniquity began immediately to work mingling the will of men with the worship of God in Spirit, God had always (He still has) the object of His loving care upon the earth. The Holy Ghost was here below; the assembly, be its condition what it might, was still on earth, and God maintained the barrier. And as the porter had opened the door to Jesus in spite of all obstacles, so He sustains everything, however great the energy and progress of evil, The evil is bridled: God is the source of authority on earth. There is one who hinders until he be taken out of the way. Now when the assembly (the assembly, that is, as composed of the true members of Christ) is gone, and consequently the Holy Ghost as the Comforter is no longer dwelling here below, then the apostasy takes place,* the time to remove the hindrance is come, the evil is unbridled, and at length (without saying how much time it will take) the evil assumes a definite shape in him who is its head. The beast comes up from the abyss. Satan — not God — gives him his authority; and in the second beast all the energy of Satan is present. The man of sin is there.

[* The principle of this may be widely at work individually, as in 1 John 2 it had begun, but the open public manifestation was to come. Jude gives the creeping in to produce corruption; John, the going out which characterises the Antichrist.]

Here it is not outward and secular power that is spoken of, but the religious side of Satan's energy.

With regard to the individual instruments who compose the barrier, they may change every moment, and it was not the object of the Holy Ghost to name them. He who was the one of them that existed when this epistle was written would not be so at the present time; to have named him then would have been of no use to us in the present day. The object was to declare that the evil which should be judged was already working, that there was no remedy for it, that it was only a hindrance on God's part which prevented its full development: a principle of the highest importance with regard to the history of Christianity.

Whatever form it might take, the apostasy of the men who would renounce grace would necessarily be more absolute than any other. It is opposition to the Lord. It has the character of an adversary. The other principle of

human iniquity enters into it, but this is the source of the “perdition.” It is the rejection of goodness; it is direct enmity.

“That which hinders” is in general only an instrument, a means, which prevents the manifestation of the man of sin — the wicked one. So long as the assembly is on earth, the pretension to be God in His temple cannot take place or at least would have no influence. Satan has his sphere, and must needs have it, in the mystery of iniquity; but there is no longer a mystery when the place of God in His temple is openly taken. That which hinders is therefore still present. But there is a person active in maintaining this hindrance. Here I think indeed that it is God in the Person of the Holy Ghost, who during the time called “the things that are,” restrains the evil and guards divine authority in the world. As long as that subsists, the unrestrained exaltation of wickedness cannot take place. Consequently I do not doubt but that the rapture of the saints is the occasion of the hindrance being removed and all restraint loosed, although some of the ways of God are developed before the full manifestation of the evil.

This thought does not rest upon great principles only: the passage itself supplies elements which show the state of things when the power of evil develops itself. 1st, The apostasy has already taken place. This could hardly be said if the testimony of the assembly still subsisted, as it had in time past, or even yet more distinctly as being freed from all false and corrupting elements. 2nd, Authority — as established of God, so far as exercising a restraint on man’s will in God’s name — has disappeared from the scene, for the wicked one exalts himself against all that is called God and to which homage is paid, and presents himself as God in the temple of God. Compare Psalm 82, where God stands among the gods (the judges) to judge them before He inherits the nations. Before that solemn hour when God will judge the judges of the earth, this wicked one, despising all authority that comes from Him, sets himself up as God: and that on the earth, where the judgment will be manifested. And then, 3rd, In place of the Holy Ghost and His power manifested on the earth, we find the power of Satan, and with precisely the same tokens that bore witness to the Person of Christ. So that the passage itself, whether as to man or as to the enemy, gives us (in the three points of which we have spoken) the full confirmation of that which we have ventured to set forth.

The assembly, the powers ordained by God upon the earth, the Holy Ghost present here as the Comforter in lieu of Christ, have all (as regards the manifestation of the government and the work of God) given place to the self-willed unbridled man, and to the power of the enemy.

In saying this we speak of the sphere of this prophecy, which moreover embraces that of the public testimony of God on earth.

Definitely then we have man here in his own nature — as it has displayed itself by forsaking God — in the full pursuit of his own will in rebellion against God; the willful man, developed as the result of apostasy from the position of grace in which the assembly stood, and in contempt of all the governmental authority of God on the earth. And since that authority had shown itself directly and properly in Judea, this contempt and the spirit of rebellion in man, who exalts himself above everything, but who cannot be heavenly (heaven, and all pretension to heaven, is given up by man, and lost by Satan), display themselves by man taking the place of God in His temple under the most advanced form of Jewish apostasy and blasphemy. At the same time Satan acts — God having loosed his bridle — with a power (a lying power indeed, but) which gives the same testimony before men as that which the works of Christ did to the Savior; and also with all the skill that iniquity possesses to deceive. It is in the wicked, the lawless one, that Satan works these things. Our consideration of the development of the latter part of this solemn scene will come (God willing) in the book of Revelation. We may add, that there we have this wicked one as the false Messiah, and as prophet, in the form of his kingdom — two horns like a lamb. He (Satan) had been cast down from heaven where he had been anti-priest, and now takes up Christ's titles on earth of king and prophet. In Daniel 11 he is seen as king; here, as the unbridled man, and in particular as the result of the apostasy,* and the manifestation of Satan's power. In a word, instead of the assembly, the apostasy; instead of the Holy Ghost, Satan; and, instead of the authority of God as a restraint upon evil, the unbridled man setting himself up as God on the earth.

[* We may remark that the apostasy develops itself under the three forms in which man has been in relationship with God; Nature — it is the man of sin unrestrained, who exalts himself; Judaism — he sits as God in the temple of God; Christianity — it is to this that the term apostasy is directly applied in the passage before us.]

Another circumstance, already mentioned demands particular attention. I have said that he presents himself as the Messiah (that is to say, in His two characters as king and prophet, which are His earthly characters). In heaven Satan has then nothing more to do; he has been cast out from thence, so that there is no imitation of the Lord's high-priesthood. In that respect Satan had, in his own person, acted another part. He was previously in heaven the accuser of the brethren. But, at the time of which we are speaking, the assembly is on high, and the accuser of the brethren is cast out never to return there. In a man inspired by him he makes himself prophet and king. And in this character he does the same things (in falsehood) as those by which God had sanctioned the mission of Christ before men (compare v. 9 and Acts 2:22). In Greek the words are identical.* I would also recall here another solemn fact in order to complete this picture. In the history of Elijah we find that the proof of the divinity of Baal, or that of Jehovah, is made to rest upon the fact of their respective servants bringing down fire from heaven. Now in Revelation 13 we learn that the second beast brings down fire from heaven in the sight of men. So that we find here the marvelous works that sanctioned the Lord's mission, and there that which proved Jehovah to be the true and only God. And Satan performs both in order to deceive men.

[* Only the word for "miracle" or "power" is plural in Acts 2.]

This may give us an idea of the state in which they will be; and it indicates also that these things will take place in relation with the Jews, under the double aspect of their connection with Jehovah and their rejection of Christ and reception of Antichrist.

Thus, thank God, the truth is abundantly confirmed, that these things do not relate to the assembly, but to those who, having had opportunity to profit by the truth, have rejected it, and loved iniquity. Neither does it relate to the heathen, but only to those among whom the truth has been set forth.* They refused it, and God sends a lie, and an efficacious lie, that they may believe it. He does this in judgment: He did the same thing with the nations (Romans 1:24, 26, 28); He did it also with the Jews (Isaiah 6:9, 10); He does it here with nominal Christians. But it does relate to the Jews as a nation that rejected the truth — the testimony of the Holy Ghost (Acts 7) but still more to Christians (in name); in short to all those who will have had the truth presented to them.

[* I only allude here to the connection between the renunciation of Christianity and the development of apostate Judaism, which are linked together in the rejection of the true Christ, and the denial of the Father and the Son — features given in 1 John as characteristic of the Antichrist. But I am persuaded that the more we examine the word, the more we shall see (perhaps with surprise) that this fact is confirmed. Moreover the turning back to Judaism, and the tendency to idolatry by the introduction of other mediators and patrons, and the losing sight of our union with the Head, and thus of the perfection and deliverance from the law which are ours in Christ, have, at all times, characterised the mystery of iniquity and the principle of apostasy. The apostle had incessantly to combat this. That of which we spoke above is but its full manifestation.]

With nominal Christians this has necessarily the character of apostasy, or at least it is connected with this apostasy, and is consequent upon it; as verse 3 teaches us, the apostasy takes place, and then the man of sin is revealed.

In connection with his character of the man of sin he presents himself without restraint in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.* In relation to the lying power of Satan and his efficient work, he presents himself in the character of Christ — he is the Antichrist, assuming consequently a Jewish character. It is not only the pride of man exalting itself against God, but the power of Satan in man deceiving men, and the Jews in particular, by a false Christ; so that, if it were possible, the very elect would be deceived. We may remark that all these characters are precisely the opposite of Christ — falsehood instead of truth, iniquity instead of righteousness, perdition instead of salvation.

[* This is the culminating point in his character as an apostate who has renounced grace. The ninth and following verses develop his positive and deceitful activity by which he seeks to win men. This explains the mixture (which, moreover, generally exists) of atheism in will, and superstition.]

It is to a power like this, of lies and destruction that man — having forsaken Christianity and exalted himself in pride against God — will be given up. The apostasy (that is to say, the renunciation of Christianity) will be the occasion of this evil; Judea and the Jews, the scene in which it ripens and develops itself in a positive way.

The Antichrist will deny the Father and the Son (that is, Christianity); he will deny that Jesus is the Christ (this is, Jewish unbelief). With the burden upon him of sin against Christianity, grace, and the presence of the

Holy Ghost, he will ally himself with Jewish unbelief, in order that there may be not only the full expression of human pride, but also for a time the satanic influence of a false Christ, who will strengthen the throne of Satan among the Gentiles occupied by the first beast to whom the authority of the dragon has been given. He will also set up his own subordinate throne over the Jews, as being the Messiah, whom their unbelief is expecting; while at the same time he will bring in idolatry, the unclean spirit long gone out who then returns to his house which is devoid of God.

And now, with regard to his destruction (whom the Lord Jesus will consume with the spirit of His mouth and destroy with the manifestation of His presence, or of His coming), the first of these means characterises the judgment; it is the word of truth applied in judgment according to the power of God. In the Revelation, it says that the sword proceeds out of His mouth. Here He is not spoken of in the character of a man of war, as in Revelation 19. The spirit of His mouth is that inward and divine power which kindles and executes the judgment. It is not an instrument, it is the divine source of power which executes its purpose by a word (compare Isaiah 30:33). But there is another aspect of this judgment. The Lord, the Man Jesus, will return. His return has two parts — the return into the air to take His assembly to Himself, and the public manifestation in glory of His return.

In the first verse of our chapter we have read of His return and our gathering together unto Him. Here, verse 8, is the manifestation of His presence publicly in creation. At the time of this public manifestation of His coming He destroys the whole work and power of the wicked one. It is the Man formerly obedient and humbling Himself on the earth, exalted of God, and become Lord of all, who destroys the lawless man that has exalted himself above everything and made himself as God, instead of being obedient to God.

This evil — on the side of Satan's influence — was already working in the apostle's time; only it was bridled and kept back, until that which restrained it should no longer be on the scene. Then should the wicked one be revealed. To sum up, the taking away of the assembly, and the apostasy, were first necessary; and then this man should present himself as an unbelieving Jew,* and the power of Satan would be displayed in him.

[* I do not say that his first appearance will be the apostasy of Judaism; I do not think it will be. He will present himself to them as being the Christ, but according to the hopes and passions of the Jews. But afterwards it will be an apostasy even from Judaism, as had partially been the case in the days of the Maccabeesa fact which the Spirit uses in Daniel 11, as a figure precursive of the time of Antichrist. He is from his first appearance an unbeliever and the enemy of God, an apostate as to the assembly, and denying that Jesus is the Christ. We are taught positively by John, that the rejection of Christianity and Jewish unbelief are united in the Antichrist. It appears that apostasy with regard to Christianity and Jewish unbelief are connected and go together; and afterwards Jewish apostasy and open rebellion against God, which, causing the cry of the remnant, brings in the Lord, and all is ended. Now the apostle (chap. 2:3, 4) presents the complete picture of man's iniquity, developed when apostasy from the grace of the gospel had taken place (he exalts himself even to the making himself God), without touching the Jewish side or the manifested power of Satan. These verses show us the man of sin is the result of the apostasy which will break out in the midst of Christendom. Verse 9 begins to teach us in addition, that the coming of this wicked one is also in immediate connection with a mighty display of the energy of Satan, who deceives by means of marvelous works and a strong delusion to which God gives men up, and of which we have spoken in the text. It is man and Satan here, with enough to show its connection with Judaism in the last days (even as the mystery of iniquity was linked with Judaism in the days of the apostle), although it is not the occasion of giving the details of the Jewish development of the evil. We must look for these details elsewhere, where they are in their place, as in Daniel. The Apocalypse and 1 John furnish us with the means of connecting them: we do but allude here to this connection.]

Now this satanic influence was for those who had rejected the truth. Of the Thessalonians — to whom he had given these explanations respecting the day which they fancied was come — the apostle thought very differently. God had chosen these “brethren beloved of the Lord” from the beginning for salvation, through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth, to which He had called them by Paul's gospel (and that of his companions), and to the obtaining of the glory of the Lord Jesus. How different was this from the visitations of the day of the Lord, and the circumstances of which the apostle had spoken! They were numbered among those who should be the companions in that day of the Lord Jesus Himself.

There is nothing very particular in the apostle's exhortations. His great concern was the explanation which we have been considering. He prays that God and the Lord Jesus Himself, who had given them the sure and everlasting consolations of the gospel, would comfort their hearts and

establish them in every good word and work. He asks for their prayers that he may be preserved in his labors. He could not but expect to find men unreasonable and animated with enmity, for faith was not the portion of all. It was only a case for the protecting hand of God. With regard to them he counted for this end on the faithfulness of the Lord. He reckoned also on their obedience, and prays God to direct their hearts towards these two points, of which we have spoken when studying the first epistle, the love of God and the patient waiting with which the Christ waited — the two points in which the whole of christian life is summed up with regard to its objects, its moral springs. Christ Himself was waiting — sweet thought! They were to wait with Him, until the moment when His heart and the hearts of His own should rejoice together in their meeting.

It was this which they needed. On the one hand, they had believed that the dead saints would not be ready to go and meet the Lord; on the other, they had thought the day of the Lord already come. The enjoyment of the love of God, and peace of heart in waiting for Christ, was necessary for them.

This excitement into which they had been led had also betrayed itself in some among them by their neglect of their ordinary labors, “working not at all, but being busybodies,” intermeddling in the affairs of others. The apostle had set them a very different example. He exhorts them to be firm, and to withdraw from those who would not hearken to his admonitions, but continued to walk disorderly and in idleness; not however in such a manner as to treat them as enemies, but to admonish them as brethren.

It will be observed here, that there is no longer the same expression of the energy of communion and of life as previously (compare chap. 3:16 with 1 Thessalonians 5:23). Nevertheless the Lord was still the Lord of peace; but the beauty of that entire consecration to God, which would shine forth in the day of Christ, does not present itself to the apostle’s mind and heart as in the first epistle. He prays for them, however, that they may have peace always and by all means.

The apostle points out the method by which he assured the faithful of the authenticity of his letters. With the exception of that to the Galatians he employed other persons to write them, but he attached his own signature in order to verify their contents to the church, adding the prayer or blessing.