

JESUS AND THE ANTICHRIST

Chapter 2 of the book *The Left Behind Deception*

by Steve Wohlberg

[The Left Behind Deception. Author, Teacher, Pastor, Steve Wohlberg is committed to bring clarity to Biblical truth. This concern he carries into television on ACN, 3ABN, Safe TV and CBS Texas. You will be fascinated as you rivet your attention on this very hot issue. *Ed.*]

When most Christians think about the Antichrist, they usually think about one super-sinister individual who will rise to power in Europe after the Rapture. The fictitious Nicolae Carpathia, the Antichrist in the Left Behind novels, is a perfect example of such thinking. Nicolae Carpathia is portrayed as a brilliant Romanian, an astute politician, a born leader, “one of the most powerful and charismatic personalities ever” (*The Tribulation Force*, p. ix). He quickly seizes power after the Rapture, takes control of the United Nations, and establishes a one-world government during the Tribulation. He speaks gentle and compassionate words to the masses, yet he is secretly “indwelt by the devil himself.” Underneath his warm and winning exterior, lies hidden “the monster within.” After he becomes the “Supreme Potentate, His Excellency Nicolae Carpathia,” the world openly worships him as God (*The Mark - The Beast Rules the World*, inside cover; p. 2; xi).

Because most Christians firmly believe the Antichrist will be a single person like Carpathia, and because millions sense the Rapture is near, some are even now speculating as to who this inwardly devilish Antichrist might be. In the last few years, some have suggested Prince Charles of England, others Mikhail Gorbachev, and still others Bill Gates, the founder of Microsoft. One person even went so far as to suggest that the Antichrist might be David Hasselhoff, the star of the incredibly popular television series *Baywatch*, filmed at the Pacific Ocean. In *Baywatch*, David plays a lifeguard named Mitch. Because Revelation 13:1 describes the Beast as coming out of the sea, David seems to this person like a perfect fit! Of course hardly anyone has taken this seriously. But the fact remains: Christians everywhere are definitely expecting someone sinister to rise up as the Antichrist. One man. A mysterious, evil person.

What does the Bible really say about the Antichrist? The word “antichrist” or “antichrists” is only used five times in the New Testament, and these are all found in 1 and 2 John. We are about to begin an awesome journey into one of the most misunderstood of all Bible subjects. It is super-hot, yet here we go. Almost 2,000 years ago, John wrote: “Little children, it is the last time: and as you have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time. They went out from us” (1 John 2:18,19).

Do you realize what you just read? John’s points are more explosive than an erupting volcano. Here’s a simple summary:

1. The early Christians had heard that antichrist was coming.
2. Even now many antichrists have come.
3. This is evidence that “the last time” is here.

4. These antichrists “went out from us.”

This is truth stranger than fiction. When most Christians think about the Antichrist, they think of only one sinister person like Carpathia, yet John said there are “many antichrists.” When most Christians think about the Antichrist coming, they place this development only in the future after the Rapture. But John wrote that many antichrists are here “even now.” When most Christians think about the Antichrist, they think he will only appear during that “seven-year period called the Tribulation” (*The Tribulation Force*, inside cover). Yet John said “the last time” *is here now!*

When most people think about the Antichrist, they think of a blatantly anti-Christian individual who will openly make war against a group of post-Rapture people like the Tribulation Force. But John said: “They went out from *us*” (1 John 2:19, emphasis added). What does this mean? John uses the word “us” in reference to himself and other Christians of the early Church. In other words, the antichrists John was describing were rising up from *inside of Christianity!* According to John, many antichrists are already here, the last time has come, and these antichrists have come out from *within* the Christian Church. Does Nicolae Carpathia pass these Biblical tests? Like an “F” on a final exam, he fails *at every point*.

Again John wrote, “Who is a liar, but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son....These things I have written to you concerning them that *seduce* you.” (1 John 2:22, 26, emphasis added). These words are of mega-importance. The Antichrist will deny the Father and the Son, yet this denial will be *seductive*, not obvious. Let’s examine this. Jesus said: “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father, but by Me” (John 14:6). The Father is God. Jesus, the Son, is the only way to the Father. Paul also wrote, “There is one God and one mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus” (1 Timothy 2:5). Our Heavenly Father loves us, that’s why He sent Jesus, His only Son. As trusting children, we can come to our Heavenly Father directly through Jesus Christ. We don’t need any other mediator or go-between, for His loving arms are open wide. And this mediator is “the Man Christ Jesus,” *not a woman*.

Again John warned, “Every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof you have heard that it should come, and even now already is it in the world. Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world” (1 John 4:3, 4). Thus the Antichrist will deny that Jesus Christ has come in “*the flesh*.” What does His coming in the flesh mean? First, it means that Jesus is fully human. He loves us and understands us completely. Next, because Jesus has come in “*the flesh*,” He is now “*the way, the truth, and the life*” (John 14:6). No one comes to the Father, but through Him. He is our only Mediator, “*the Man Christ Jesus*” (1 Timothy 2:5). This is why we don’t need any other mediators. Yet the Antichrist will deny this, though not obviously, but seductively.

And again, did John look for this Antichrist only in the future during the Tribulation? No, for he wrote, “...ye have heard that it should come, and even now already is *it* in the world” (1 John 4:3). According to John, “it” is here now, and “it” *is more than one single person like Nicolae Carpathia*. There is a mysterious “spirit of antichrist.” And who is to fight this? John wrote, “Ye [you] are of God, little children, and have overcome them” (verse 4). Question: Who is to

“overcome” these many antichrists? Answer: True Christians! The Bible says, “*You!*” Yet this is entirely contrary to *Left Behind’s* idea that Christians today will not have to face the antichrist because he comes only after the Rapture. Is something “seductive” going on around here?

What I am about to say may shock you, yet it’s entirely true. The current wildly popular idea of a one-man Antichrist like Nicolae Carpathia who comes only after the Rapture is a *new doctrine*, at least when it comes to Protestants. From the 1500s, down to the early 1900s, the majority of Baptists, Methodists, Congregationalists, Lutherans, Anglicans, Presbyterians, and Mennonites believed, based on a careful study of Scripture, that the Bible’s predictions about “antichrist” (1 John 2 and 4); “the little horn” (Daniel 7); “that man of sin” (2 Thessalonians 2); “the Mother of Harlots” (Revelation 17); and “the beast” (Revelation 13) *all apply most specifically to the Roman Catholic Church*. *Newsweek* has reported, “Martin Luther was the first to identify the papacy as such with the Antichrist. At first he discounted the value of John’s Apocalypse. But then he saw in it a revelation of the Church of Rome as the deceiving Antichrist...a view that was to become dogma for all Protestant churches” (*Newsweek*, Nov. 1, 1999, p. 72).

“Wycliffe, Tyndale, Luther, Calvin, Cranmer; in the seventeenth century, Bunyan, the translators of the King James Bible and the men who published the Westminster and Baptist Confessions of Faith; Sir Isaac Newton, John Wesley, Whitfield, Jonathan Edwards; and more recently, Spurgeon, Bishop J.C. Ryle and Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones; these men among countless others, all saw the office of the Papacy as the antichrist.... The Reformers and their heirs were great scholars and knew the Word of God and the Holy Spirit as a living teacher (*All Roads Lead to Rome*, Michael de Semlyen. Dorchester House Publications, 1991. pp. 205, 206). If any of these ancient Christian scholars could somehow have been transported into a 21st century theater showing *LEFT BEHIND: The Movie*, they would have wondered, “What’s this all about?”

I am going to talk plainly about Protestants and Catholics, but first I want to make a few things clear. I have no desire to attack individuals on either side. I fully believe many Catholics will be in the kingdom, and I hope to join them. Catholics are now helping tens of thousands of people through orphanages and in many other ways. People are people, and every one of us is deeply loved by Jesus Christ, no matter what church we belong to. I also recognize contemporary Catholicism’s diversity, and that millions of American Catholics do not subscribe to all of the doctrines of the Vatican. Many are searching. Yet I am also a student of prophecy who shares the view of the major Protestant Reformers. I do not apply the words of Daniel, Paul, and Revelation to individual Catholics, but rather to *the papal system as a whole* with its still current doctrines about many heavenly mediators (Mary and the saints), forgiveness only through priests, purgatory, and no salvation outside of the Mother Church.

Jesus Christ is the only way to the Father (John 14:6). There is only one Mediator up there in heaven, and it is “the Man Christ Jesus” (1 Timothy 2:5). “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved” (Acts 16:31). These are solid Bible facts. Yet historically, and at present, these truths are still officially denied by the Vatican. Catholics are still sincerely and yet mistakenly being taught to look to Mary and to many other saints as mediators. To date, the Roman Catholic Church still does not accept the idea that Christians can be saved by faith in Jesus Christ without going through the Church.

Who really is the Beast of prophecy? Will it be someone like Nicolae Carpathia, or was Martin Luther correct? Why did the belief that Papal Rome was the Antichrist, “the beast” and “the little horn” become “dogma for all Protestant churches” (*Newsweek*, Nov. 1, 1999, p. 72)? It’s time to find out by carefully studying the Bible.

Daniel 2 speaks of four successive kingdoms: Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome. There is no question about this anywhere. Daniel 7 also describes four kingdoms, using the symbols of a lion, a bear, a leopard, and a dragon-like beast with ten horns. Daniel 7:23 is a super-important text, so don’t miss it. A holy angel told Daniel, “The fourth beast shall be the fourth kingdom upon earth.” So, what is a beast in prophecy? Does it represent a single, solitary, devil-indwelt man like Nicolae Carpathia? or possibly some gigantic 5000-gigabyte super-computer? No. According to Daniel 7:23, *a beast represents a kingdom*. Never forget this! This truth is like a gigantic fork in the road. If we make a mistake here, we might end up thinking Bill Gates is the Beast. Daniel 7:23 is truly a foundational text which will save us from global delusions. Based on history and the clear parallels between Daniel 2 and 7, the fourth beast was the Roman Empire.

It’s time to focus on “the little horn” of Daniel 7. Catholics, Protestants, and Evangelicals, including the authors of *Left Behind*, all agree this horn represents the Antichrist. It is their *interpretations* of Bible prophecy that vary. Here are nine fast-facts about the little horn in Daniel 7:

- The little horn comes out of the fourth beast, that is, out of the Roman Empire (7:7, 8).
- It rises “among” the ten horns that divided up that very Empire (7:8).
- It comes “after” the ten horns are in place (7:24).
- It will be “diverse” or different from the other ten horns (7:24).
- It will pluck up “by the roots” three of the first ten horns (7:8).
- It has “eyes like the eyes of a man” (7:8).
- It has “a mouth speaking great things” (7:8).
- It will wage “war with the saints” (7:21).
- It will rule for “a time, times and the dividing of time” (7:25).

As surely as George Washington was America’s first president, even so are these nine points sure facts in Daniel 7.

When most prophesy teachers today talk about the “little horn,” they apply it to someone like Nicolae Carpathia. Most realize the four beasts in Daniel 7 represent Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome. But then they do something absolutely amazing – they virtually slice the ten horns and the little horn from off of the head of the fourth beast, and *slide them all down to the end of time*. But this creates an unnatural 1,500-year GAP (more on this later) between the fourth beast, which is the Roman Empire, and the little horn. The truth is, the entire prophecy is orderly, successive, and chronological. There are four beasts, *then* ten horns, *then* the little horn, with NO GAPS. It is simply not logical, nor Biblical, to slice a 1,500-year hole in the head of the fourth beast!

In Daniel's prophecies "horns" also represent kingdoms (Daniel 8:8, 22). What happened in history? In 476 A.D., the Roman Empire collapsed after being invaded by ten Germanic kingdoms from the north. These kingdoms laid the foundations of the modern nations of Europe – the Alemani (Germany), the Burgundians (Switzerland), the Saxons (England), the Visigoths (Spain), the Franks (France), the Lombards (Italy), and the Suevi (Portugal). The Vandals, the Heruli, and the Ostrogoths also settled in their places. When the Roman imperial government collapsed in 476 A.D., Europe was looking for leadership. Can you guess who rose into supreme political power in the Roman Empire, "among" the ten horns, shortly "after" 476 A.D.? *The Roman Catholic Church*. Papal Rome was "different" because it was not just a political power, but also a religious power. Three of the first ten horns (the Vandals, the Heruli, and the Ostrogoths) resisted Papal Rome's rise to power. As a result of the Vatican's political influence, those three were destroyed and completely "uprooted" from history!

Papal Rome has "eyes like the eyes of a man," having human leadership centered in the Pope. It has a "mouth speaking great things" when it claims to be the only true Church, with the very keys of heaven and hell, outside of which there is no salvation. In September 2000, in his 36-page document *Dominus Jesus*, Pope John Paul II reaffirmed that there is salvation only in the Roman Church. Quickly the *Los Angeles Times* ran this headline: "Vatican Reiterates Strict Dogma – Roman Catholicism only path to salvation, declaration states." Thus Rome's position has not changed, even in our modern times. It still has "a mouth speaking great things." This Church *did indeed* make "war with the saints" by putting to death approximately 50-100 million so-called "heretics" during the Dark Ages. People today have forgotten about the Crusades, the dark torture chambers of the Inquisition, and the many horrifying massacres of Protestants and Jews. Yet these things really happened. Like a key fitting into a lock, prophecy fits with history. It is also true that history unlocks prophecy.

Outside of Jesus Christ, more books have been written about Martin Luther than any other single religious person in history. How did Martin Luther interpret Daniel 7? Luther wrote that Daniel "saw the terrible wild beast which had ten horns, which by the consent of all is the Roman Empire, he also beheld another *small horn* come up in the middle of them. *This is the Papal power*, which rose up in the middle of the Roman Empire" (*Romanism and the Reformation – From the Standpoint of Prophecy*, H. Grattan Guinness. Harley House, Bow, London. 1891, p. 127. Italics original. See also *Works of Martin Luther*, vol. II, p. 386). As bold and fiery as he was, Martin Luther did not slice a 1,500-year hole in the head of the fourth beast! He saw NO GAP.

Now back to the Beast. A careful study of the Bible reveals that the Beast of Revelation 13 is the same as the little horn of Daniel 7. Most Catholics, Protestants, and Evangelicals, including the authors of *Left Behind*, agree with this. Again, it is their *interpretations* that vary. Revelation 13 says the Beast will be a composite creature with the characteristics of a lion, a bear, and a leopard (13:2). It also has a mouth (13:5), makes war on the saints (13:7), and rules for forty-two months (13:5), which are all perfect parallels with Daniel 7. But there is something many people have missed, and from a prophetic standpoint, it is a truth more important than avoiding a quadruple bypass surgery. Here it is. Based on the perfect parallels of Revelation 13 with Daniel 7, *a beast represents a kingdom, not one man like Nicolae Carpathia!* And the Roman Catholic Church *is a kingdom*, with over 100 embassies on Vatican Hill.

Revelation 13:2 mentions a lion, a bear, a leopard, and a dragon. While the primary dragon in the Bible is Satan, this verse clearly runs parallel with Daniel 7:3-7. The fourth beast in Daniel 7, which was dragon-like, was the Roman Empire. Revelation 13:2 says the dragon would give “*his seat*” to the Beast. This “seat” does not refer to a physical chair somewhere, but rather to a seat of government. Where was the seat of government of the fourth beast? It was the city of Rome itself, and this is where the Vatican “sits” today! About 1,500 years ago, the Roman Empire gave its seat of government over to the Roman Catholic Church. Notice this quotation from a well-known historian: “Disregarding the maxims and the spirit of the Gospel, the papal Church, arming herself with the power of the sword, vexed the Church of God and wasted it for several centuries, a period most appropriately termed in history, the ‘dark ages.’ The kings of the earth gave their power to the ‘Beast’ ” (*Fox’s Book of Martyrs*, 1926 edition, p. 43).

As we race down the highway of prophecy, it is essential that we pass through a major intersection – 2 Thessalonians 2. The issues in that chapter are simply too great to pass by. There Paul predicts the rising of “*that man of sin*” (2:3). Doesn’t this prove that the Antichrist is one man? That chapter is also used to support the idea of a secret Rapture *prior* to the coming of the Antichrist. Thus, this is a very important, controversial, and high-impact section. As we examine it closely, we will discover some absolutely shocking truths. So put on your seatbelts; here we go.

It is almost unbelievable, but the very first line of 2 Thessalonians 2 actually disproves popular ideas. Paul wrote about “the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” and “our gathering together unto him” (2:1). “Our gathering” clearly refers to the Rapture of the Church. But when does this gathering take place? At the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. What Greek word does Paul use here for “coming”? *Parousia*! This exact same word is also used in verse 8 which speaks of the “brightness of *his coming* [‘parousia’].” A simple comparison of verse 1 with verse 8 proves two things beyond question: (1) “Parousia” refers to the visibly “bright” and ultra-glorious Second Coming of Jesus Christ (as in Matthew 24:27, 30, 31); (2) It is at this bright and highly visible Second Coming that Jesus Christ will gather His Church!

After referring to the “coming” or “parousia” of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our “gathering together to him,” Paul solemnly warned, “Let no man deceive you by any means, for that day shall not come except there come *a falling away first*, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition” (2 Thessalonians 2:3, 4). These words are so power-packed! Here are the fast facts:

This is about the Antichrist.

1. The Antichrist will rise as a result of “a falling away.” The Greek word for “falling away” is “apostasia,” from which we get the English word “apostasy,” which means
2. A falling away from grace and truth inside the church!
3. This apostasy, resulting in the rise of the Antichrist, must come “first,” that is,
4. Before “our gathering” to Jesus Christ. Thus the Antichrist definitely comes before the Rapture!
5. It is Christians themselves who are in danger of being deceived about this, for Paul warned: “Let no man deceive

6. You by any means.”
7. Antichrist is “the son of perdition,” which is a phrase Jesus applied to Judas in John 17:12. Judas was a professed Christian within the inner circle of Christ’s followers. Thus the Antichrist will not be someone like Nicolae Carpathia, but will be
8. A professed follower of Jesus Christ! Judas even kissed Jesus, saying, “Hail, master” (Matthew 26:49), yet it was a kiss of betrayal.

The Antichrist is called “*that* man of sin,” which is the same as the little horn which had “eyes *like* the eyes of a man” (Daniel 7:8). Daniel did not say the horn would *be* only one man, but that it would have “eyes *like* the eyes of a man.” This is a subtle, and yet highly significant difference.

Continuing his description of the Antichrist, Paul wrote, “Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God” (2 Thessalonians 2:4). Many apply this to a Nicolae Carpathia-type of Antichrist whom they think will someday enter a rebuilt Jewish temple, sit down, and boldly proclaim, “I am God,” yet is this what Paul is really saying? If you look at any concordance, you will discover that the Greek word used here for “temple” is “naos.” Paul used the very same word in 1 Corinthians. Writing to “the church of God” (1:2), Paul asked, “Know ye not that *ye are the temple of God*” (3:16, emphasis added)? Here the temple of God is *the church*, and Paul wrote that this is where the Antichrist will sit! This doesn’t mean that the Antichrist will literally sit down on some chair inside a physical building. To “sit” means to sit in a position of supreme authority. Jesus is now “seated” at the right hand of God. The Antichrist will “sit” in God’s temple, which means he will sit in a position of supreme and apparently infallible authority *inside* the Christian Church. Thus the Antichrist will direct the eyes of people to himself in the place of Jesus Christ. Thus the battle is between “that man of sin” and “the Man Christ Jesus.” And this Antichrist will not blatantly say, “I am God,” for this would be much too obvious and non-seductive. Rather, the Antichrist will sit “as God... shewing *himself* that he is God” (2:4, emphasis added) by his statements and claims.

The Antichrist will sit in “the temple of God.” Millions are now applying this to a rebuilt temple in Jerusalem, and this is one reason why American Christians are so interested in the latest news about the Israelis and the Palestinian Liberation Organization. Yet think about it: If certain Jews ever do rebuild their temple and start offering sacrifices, would this temple really be “the temple of God”? When Jesus Christ died, He “caused the sacrifice...to cease” (Daniel 9:27). He was the Final Sacrifice. If the Jews ever do resume animal sacrifices, what kind of statement would this be making to the Father? It would be an official denial of His Son! Therefore (are you ready for this?) that temple would itself be an *antichrist temple*! Honestly, could such a temple, which would in itself be a denial of Jesus, ever be properly called “the temple of God”? Never!

Paul told the Thessalonians, “And you know what withholdeth, that he might be revealed in his time” (2 Thessalonians 2:6. Note: “withholdeth” here means “restrains” in modern English. See the New King James translation of this verse). Another extremely controversial issue is “Who or what is the restrainer which holds back the Antichrist?” Many popular Bible teachers believe the “restrainer” is the Holy Spirit inside the Christian Church. This theory says that as long as the Church remains in this world, the Antichrist cannot come. Only after the church is “taken

out of the way” (verse 7) in the Rapture can Antichrist appear. Yet think about it. If the Holy Spirit is removed with the Church at the Rapture, how could there ever be a Tribulation Force of new believers? For there would be no Holy Spirit left on earth to convert them! And if somehow the Holy Spirit is still in this world after the Rapture, wouldn't He then be dwelling in the Tribulation Force? He would have to be, because the Bible says no man can resist Antichrist without the Holy Spirit dwelling *inside* of him (1 John 4:4, 5). So, why wouldn't the Holy Spirit dwelling inside the Tribulation Force after the Rapture restrain the Antichrist? Why could the Holy Spirit inside a Pre-Tribulation Church restrain him, yet the Holy Spirit inside a Post-Tribulation Church could not? *Friend, there is something wrong with this picture!*

Paul continued his description of the Antichrist when he wrote, “The mystery of iniquity doth already work” (2:7). According to these words, the Antichrist was “already” at work in Paul's day. Verse 8 says, “And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming [‘parousia’].” Thus the Antichrist will continue until the visible return of Jesus Christ. A simple combining of verse 7 with verse 8 reveals that the Antichrist *started* in the time of Paul and *continues* to the end, which makes it *impossible* for the Antichrist to be only one man! Not only that, it is at the bright and visible return of Jesus, at the “parousia” (verses 8), *when* Christ will destroy the Antichrist and “gather” His Church (verse 1). This makes it *impossible* for the Church to be the “restrainer!”

Then who is the “restrainer”? We must put Paul's words under a microscope to catch the right clues. Paul told the Thessalonians, “Remember ye not, that when I was yet with you *I told you* these things? And now ye *know* what withholdeth...” (2 Thessalonians 2:5, 6, emphasis added). Do you see it? The early Church did “know” who the “withholder” or “restrainer” was, for Paul plainly says he had told them. Therefore, in order for us to know who the “restrainer” is, we must *go back* into ancient history and find out what the early Church actually said about this subject, rather than looking to modern interpreters. When we do this, the answer becomes very clear.

H. Grattan Guinness, who has been called England's greatest teacher of prophecy, wrote, “The early church tells us what it did know about the subject, and no one in these days can be in a position to contradict its testimony as to what Paul had, by word of mouth only, told the Thessalonians. It is a point on which ancient tradition alone *can* have any authority. Modern speculation is positively impertinent on such a subject.... From *Irenaeus*, who lived close to apostolic times, down to *Chrysostom* and *Jerome*, the Fathers taught that the power withholding the manifestation of the ‘man of sin’ was *the Roman Empire as governed by the Caesars*. . . . While the Caesars held imperial power, it was impossible for the predicted antichrist to arise, and that on the fall of the Caesars he *would arise*” (*Romanism and the Reformation*, pp. 105-107. Italics original). Thus the early Church believed the “restrainer” *was the Roman Empire ruled by the Caesars*.

Why didn't Paul just come right out and tell us this in his letter? Wouldn't that have solved a lot of problems? Actually, there is a good reason why he didn't. The Thessalonians were already going through “persecutions” from the Roman Empire (1 Thessalonians 1:4). If this letter had specified that the Roman Empire would someday be “taken out of the way,” this might have caused even more problems for those early believers. What if this letter fell into the wrong

hands? If the Roman authorities discovered that these Christians believed the Roman Empire would eventually fall, they would have considered this high treason against Caesar! Again the cry would ring out, "To the Coliseum with the Christians!" So, in order to protect them, Paul told them privately without writing it down.

In his book *Champions of Christianity*, Ralph Thompson wrote, "Paul did not identify the *restraining power* which they knew to be Rome, for fear of reprisals. Remember the Christian church was under persecution by Rome. If the Thessalonian Christians were aware of Daniel seven, showing the rise of the 'little horn' after the fourth kingdom of Rome (see Daniel 7:8, 24), then the *restraining power of Rome* against the revelation of the *Great Apostasy* of the Christian Church made sense" (*Champions of Christianity in Search of Truth*, by Ralph Thompson, Teach Services, Inc. Brushton, New York. 1996. p. 47. Italics original). When the early Church Fathers wrote about the "restrainer," they used the secret code words of Scripture: "*The 'restrainer' is the fourth beast of Daniel 7,*" which they knew was the Roman Empire. This is what Paul whispered when he "told them," and this fits the prophecy perfectly. Daniel 7 predicted that after the fourth beast fell, *then* the little horn would appear, and historically, that's what happened. When the Caesars went down, the Popes came up to full power, and the Antichrist was revealed.

Martin Luther, John Calvin, and John Wesley, along with countless others, all believed "that man of sin," described in 2 Thessalonians 2:3, applied to the Papal office of "the pope, sitting as God in the temple of God" (J. H. Merle d'Aubingne, *History of the Reformation of the Sixteenth Century*, Book I, Ch. III, p. 17). Martin Luther "proved, by the revelations of Daniel and St. John, *by the epistles of Paul*, and St. Jude, that the reign of Antichrist, predicted and described in the Bible, was the Papacy" (d'Aubingne, Book XIII, Ch. VI, p. 520. Italics supplied). As with the prophecy of Daniel 7, all of the major Protestant Reformers interpreted Paul's prophecy in 2 Thessalonians 2 to be historical, chronological, and successive, with NO GAPS.

The Westminster Confession of Faith (1647), ratified and established by an act of the British Parliament, declares: "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" (Phillip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom, With a History and Critical Notes*. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1919, vol. III, chap. 25. sec. 6. p. 658, 659). It is only fair to say that Rome is not alone in its problem of self-exaltation above Jesus Christ. This was Lucifer's original sin, and every true Christian also struggles with this. Catholics, Protestants, Evangelicals, Muslims, Jews, and Steve Wohlberg, all need to gain the victory over pride *through the grace of God*. When it comes to basic human sin, we are all in this together.

Here's a simple summary of 2 Thessalonians 2: In Paul's own day, the "mystery of iniquity" was already at work (2:7). The "falling away" had begun, and "that man of sin" was beginning to rise. But the Roman Empire with its Caesars was yet "restraining" the Antichrist's rise to full power. In 476 A.D., when imperial Rome fell, being "taken out of the way," the Popes rose up as the main power-brokers of Europe, and the Antichrist was revealed. The Antichrist will continue until the end of the world. Then Jesus Christ will return with the "brightness of his coming," destroy the Antichrist, and gather His Church to Himself. Who might belong to that

Church? In light of the context, it must be those who have *not fallen away from the truth!* Like the crackling of thunder, the voice of Paul cries out to us in the 21st century: “Let no man deceive you by any means”! The above interpretation is the only one that fully agrees with what Paul wrote and with what the early Church actually said.

Off the coast of Florida, between Cuba and the Bermuda Islands, exists a stretch of ocean called the Bermuda Triangle. Many ships have mysteriously vanished in those waters. No one knows why. When it comes to Bible prophecy, the ancient Protestant understanding of *who the Beast is* has also largely vanished into the waves of history. Does anyone know why?

Yes, many do, and in next month’s issue you will join their ranks. Then you will know *why* truth has been left behind.

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