

Study 15 – Book of Second Thessalonians

Topic: Do not be Deceived

Study text: 2 Thessalonians 2:9-12

Outline

I. People deceived (9-12)

Verse by Verse study

- Vs 9 Who is really behind this man of lawlessness' rise to power? What does verse 9 teach us about Satan?

1. Verse 9 – This verse teaches us a few things about Satan: Can we mention them?

A. Satan has a plan. He is not asleep or like a criminal on death row locked up awaiting his execution. Instead, he is like a convicted felon who is a fugitive. Satan is being tracked, but he doesn't know it. While he suspects he will one day be caught and punished, he tries to wreak as much havoc and destruction as possible first, arrogantly thinking maybe he can escape the fate he deserves.

B. Satan has power. It is his power that will bring about the coming of the Antichrist and the one-world government he will rule. The Antichrist and the false prophet will be able to do supernatural things (Revelation 13:2-4, 13, 15). This shouldn't come as a surprise. Satan is supernatural. He is a spirit being and was one of the most magnificent creatures in God's creation prior to his corruption and fall. If one angel can slay all of Egypt's firstborn or 185,000 men in the Assyrian army (Isaiah 37:36), imagine what Satan can do.

C. Satan will deceive people with false wonders. Miracles are a powerful tool. Jesus used miracles, which showed people His power and convinced many to believe in Him. Satan is probably the world's best copycat. He knows that signs and miracles persuade people, and he uses these as one of the weapons in his arsenal to deceive. A lot of people will look at the miracle and believe the message that is preached because of the miracle.

2 Corinthians 11:14 – And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light.

We must not believe someone or something just because of a sign. A dream, a vision, or a healing is not enough to guarantee that what is happening is the "Lord's work." How can we know if it is God's work? We must evaluate the message that is being taught and compare it to the Word. This doesn't mean we should automatically reject miracles, either. God is still at work in the world and does miraculous things. But we must learn to do as John tells us in 1 John 4, and that is to "test the spirits."

Application: We must recognize that we are in a war. Soldiers cannot become complacent or relaxed, or they may become victims of a surprise attack. Instead, they must be "sober and alert," just like Paul warned the Thessalonians in 1 Thessalonians 5:6. Satan is not idly waiting for his final judgment; he is active. He and his minions want to attack the church and you. We must do what James tells us in James 4:7. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Do not give Satan the satisfaction of claiming victory in your life. Do not believe his lies. Believing his false promises will only lead to despair and destruction. Instead, choose the narrow way and follow Christ, and He will fulfill you.

- Why will many perish? What factors would keep them from accepting the love of the truth?
- How can we understand verse 11? What is this deluding influence? Why would God send it?

2. The man of lawlessness' deception – We touched on this in the previous verse. Satan's entire plan is centered on deception. John 8:44 shows us that Satan is the father of lies. The truth is not important to him. He will use any and all means to trick people into worshiping him instead of the one true God. From the beginning of man's history, Satan has twisted God's Word and spread lies. What lies did he tell Eve? And yet, throughout all of human history, people still believe Satan. Why?

We can see in this verse that Satan's deception is limited to those who perish, who did not receive the love of the truth. This means that true believers will not believe the Antichrist's lies. We, too, must ask God for a discerning mind and passionately pursue the truth as found in God's Word. We can train ourselves to have a healthy skepticism about what we hear. This doesn't mean that we automatically reject what others say, but it means that we should think through it carefully to see if it agrees with the Word. We should be especially wary of believing people who are already seduced by Satan's worldview, including many in the media, Hollywood, or atheist teachers and scholars.

3. God will send upon them a deluding influence – Many are confused by this verse, and it has been the source of much debate and controversy. What do you think it means? Why would God do this? Some have said this means that if people rejected Christ before the rapture, then God will delude them after the rapture to take away any possible second chances. Do you agree with this view? I will admit that this verse could mean this, but I don't think it does. As I said, there is a lot of controversy about this verse, so I will share my opinion and freely admit that I might be wrong.

A. Them – God will send upon them a deluding influence. Who will He send it on? He will send it on those who perish. In other words, God will send it on unbelievers. Which unbelievers? The unbelievers who never accept the love of the truth and are never saved. There is nothing in this verse which clearly identifies a certain subset of unbelievers (those who rejected the gospel prior to the rapture) as those whom God will send a deluding influence on. I should point out that this doesn't mean no unbelievers will accept the gospel. Those who accept the gospel are not subject to the deluding influence.

B. God will send a deluding influence – Remember that a major reason for the tribulation is for God to send His judgment upon the world for rejecting Christ. God will do many miraculous signs, and yet people will still not believe. I believe they will reject God on their own multiple times, and then after going past the limits of God's patience, God will delude them so that they will be judged for their own willful rejection.

It might help to remember the story of Pharaoh. If you look through the first few chapters of Exodus, you will notice that God told Moses He would harden Pharaoh's heart in order to judge the Egyptians. Then as you read through the story, you will see that Pharaoh hardened his own heart multiple times. After these numerous times of self-hardening, the Bible then says that God hardened his heart. In other words, Pharaoh was entirely culpable for his own actions. It is not the picture of someone who desperately wants to turn to the Lord, who in turn vengefully responds, "Never!"

John 6:37 – All those the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away.

Instead, it is the picture of someone who hates and despises God, willfully rejecting revelation over and over again. Then finally, God says, "Enough is enough. You will be punished."

I believe that this deluding influence in the time of the tribulation will be very much like what happened to Pharaoh. In both cases, people, on their own, willfully reject the Lord multiple times. Finally, after crossing an

invisible line (to us), God's patience will run out, and He will decide to judge these people and make sure that it happens.

- **What can we learn in this portion of the scripture about God's sovereignty? How can we understand God's sovereignty as we see the evil that will happen?**
- **What will happen to those who don't believe the truth?**
- **How do these people view wickedness? How about you? Do you ever take pleasure in it?**

4. In order that they may be judged – Here we can see one of the key reasons for the tribulation. During this period, God will pour out His judgment on all who do not believe the truth. Judgment is not one of the most attractive teachings in the Bible, and yet it is repeated over and over and over. God is willing to extend His grace to people. But His patience only extends so far. After squandering the chance God has given them to repent, people will be finally judged. Jesus Himself talked about the uselessness of throwing pearls before swine. If people do not receive His gift, He will eventually stop offering it.

5. Took pleasure in wickedness – We can learn a core difference between believers and unbelievers from this phrase. Both believers and unbelievers will commit sin. But unbelievers enjoy this sin. They revel and take pleasure in it. Believers, on the other hand, should feel repulsion toward sin. They should feel guilt and shame when they sin and try to change and repent. If you keep on doing some sins and get enjoyment from these sins, there is a serious problem.

Application: See 2 Corinthians 6:2 – I tell you, now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation.

Now is the day of salvation. Never wilfully sin or reject God's message thinking that you will repent or follow Him better in the future. You don't know what the future will hold. You don't want to be one of the people God pours out His wrath on. There will be no escape for those people. At the same time, be urgent when you share the gospel. Pray for and beseech your friends and family to believe in the Lord before it is too late.

6. God's sovereignty – **A key lesson from this entire passage is God's sovereignty.** At first glance, that is confusing. After all, we are reading about Satan's plans, schemes, and power. Where is God in all of this? Yet verse 7 shows us that it is ultimately God who allows Satan/Antichrist/false prophet to be revealed. One can assume that Satan has tried to fulfill his plan many times in history, and God has stopped him. He will keep stopping him until the right time. What time is that? One reason for the seeming delay in Christ's return is so that the gospel can go to more people. As powerful as Satan is, he can only operate within the restrictions that God has set for him. Now these restrictions keep Satan from wreaking even more havoc in this world. During the tribulation, those restrictions will be largely but not completely taken away. Satan will be allowed to do a lot of evil things, including persecuting saints. Yet finally, God will avenge these saints, and Satan will be slain. Even in the tribulation, God will use Satan for His purpose of bringing judgment and condemnation to those who didn't believe in His Son.

God never participates in any evil. But He does somehow use evil people to bring about His righteous and just plans, illustrating His own sovereignty.