

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS
Commentary by Michael Sigler
April 28, 2013

Hope Comes from God's Grace

Read 2 Thessalonians 2:1-3, 9-17

Key verses: "Our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father loved us and through grace gave us eternal comfort and a good hope. May he encourage your hearts and give you strength in every good thing you do or say" (2 Thessalonians 2:16-17).

Charles T. Russell, founder of the Jehovah's Witnesses, preached that the world would end in 1914. It didn't.

Herbert W. Armstrong, publisher of "The Plain Truth" magazine, announced that the end would come on January 7, 1972. It didn't.

Through much of history, people have predicted the identity of the Antichrist. Candidates have included Nero, Napoleon, Adolf Hitler, Ronald Reagan, Pope John Paul II, and many others. None of them proved to be the Antichrist.

In 2 Thessalonians 2, the Apostle Paul dealt with some wrong predictions about the end of the world and the Second Coming of Christ. In this case, the false prophets were saying that Christ had already returned. To refute this teaching, Paul described some things that are yet to happen, in the future, prior to Christ's return. These events look something like this:

"First there would come an age of rebellion against God. Into this world there had already come a secret evil power which was working in the world and on people to bring this time of rebellion. Somewhere there was being kept one who was as much the incarnation of evil as Jesus was the incarnation of God. He was the Man of Sin, the Son of Perdition, the Lawless One.

"In time the power which was restraining him would be removed from the scene; and then this devil incarnate would come. When he came he would gather his own people to him just as Jesus Christ had gathered His. Those who had refused to accept Christ were waiting to accept him. Then there would come a last and final battle in which Christ would utterly destroy the Lawless One. And then Christ's people would be gathered to Him and the wicked people who had accepted the Lawless One as their master would be destroyed. It would be a kind of cosmic battle in which evil incarnate would

make its final assault and receive its final defeat” (William Barclay, *The Daily Study Bible Series*).

Having refuted the idea that Christ’s Second Coming had already occurred, Paul returned in 2:13-17, to the emphasis of Jesus and all the New Testament writers: When it comes to the end times, we ought not waste too much time and energy predicting dates for the end or names of the Antichrist. Instead, we should always be ready for Christ’s return by trusting Christ as our Savior and living each day for Him.

With this emphasis in mind, Paul ends chapter 2 by encouraging the Thessalonian Christians with the following exhortations:

1. Give thanks that you are “loved,” “chosen,” and “called” by God (vv. 13-14).
2. “Stand firm” and “hold on” (v. 15).
3. Be encouraged and strengthened, knowing that “through grace” God “gave us eternal comfort and a good hope” (vv. 16-17).

The lesson for us today? It may be an interesting exercise to speculate about the identity of the Antichrist and when the end of the world will come. But our energies are better spent knowing Christ, growing strong in the Lord, and helping others to experience His saving grace!

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