

# 2 Thessalonians 2:4 Commentary

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HE HAS NOT YET COME  
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## COMPARISON OF 1 AND 2 THESSALONIANS

1 THESSALONIANS	2 THESSALONIANS
Addresses how the Thessalonians were evangelized as they received the Word of God	Addresses how the Thessalonians are being edified, noting their progress in faith, love, and patience
The imminency and importance of the Lord's return is emphasized	Misunderstandings about the Lord's return are corrected
The saints are comforted and encouraged	The saints are assured of God's judgment on His enemies
Paul is concerned with the church and its hope of the rapture (meeting Christ in the air)	Paul is concerned with Satan, the man of sin (Antichrist) and their destruction at the revelation (return of Christ to the earth)
Contains the outstanding passage on the rapture of the saints in 4:13–18	Contains the outstanding passage concerning the day of the Lord in 2:1–12

2 Thessalonians 2:4 who opposes and exalts himself 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: ho antikeimenos (PMPMSN) kai huperairomenos (PMPMSN) epi panta legomenon (PPPMSA) theon e sebasma hoste auton eis ton naon tou theou os theon kathisai (AAN) apodeiknunta (PAPMSA) heauton hoti estin (3SPA) theos:

**KJV** 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.

Note: The best Greek manuscripts do not have the phrase **as God**.

**ESV** who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God.

**NET** He opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, and as a result he takes his seat in God's temple, displaying himself as God.

**NIV** He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God.

**NJB** the Enemy, who raises himself above every so-called God or object of worship to enthrone himself in God's sanctuary and flaunts the claim that he is God.

**NLT** He will exalt himself and defy everything that people call god and every object of worship. He will even sit in the temple of God, claiming that he himself is God.

**NRS** He opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, declaring himself to be God.

**YLT** who is opposing and is raising himself up above all called God or worshipped, so that he in the sanctuary of God as God hath sat down, shewing himself off that he is God -- the day doth not come.

- **Exalts:** Isa 14:13 Eze 28:2,6,9 Da 7:8,25 8:9-11 11:36 Rev 13:6
- **So-called:** 1Cor 8:5
- **Takes his seat:** Da 8:12-14 11:45 Rev 13:6,7

#### Related Passages:

Isaiah 14:12-15+ (**LIKE FATHER, LIKE SON!!!**) How you have fallen from heaven, **O star of the morning**, son of the dawn! You have been cut down to the earth, You who have weakened the nations! 13 "But you (**LUCIFER, STAR OF THE MORNING**) said in your heart, 'I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God, And I will sit on the mount of assembly In the recesses of the north. 14 'I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.' 15 "Nevertheless you will be thrust down to Sheol, To the recesses of the pit.

## THE CONDUCT OF THE MAN OF LAWLESSNESS

**Who opposes** ([antikeimai](#)) **and exalts** ([huperairomai](#)) - The man of lawlessness (or "sin" - [hamartia](#)) obviously opposes God's law (he is lawless) and anything to do with God, choosing to set himself above all gods, whether false gods or the true God. The Antichrist is the opponent or adversary of Christ. **Hiebert** adds that "His double activity will establish his true identity."

**THOUGHT** - Beloved, before we go too far, perhaps it is best that we pause and ask God's Spirit to search our hearts -- "Is there any place in my life where I am actively opposing God and seeking to exalt myself over Him?" (See Gal 5:17+). Remember that the middle letter of **sin** and **pride** is "**I**" and that is that part of my old nature inherited from Adam (Ro 5:12+) that opposes God and exalts self (cf **flesh**)! Take a moment and pray Psalm 139:23,24+! Then confess any sin He brings to the light and beg Him to grant you repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth. Read **C H Spurgeon's** thoughts on Ps 139:24...

See whether there be in my heart, or in my life, any evil habit unknown to myself. If there be such an evil way, take me from it, take it from me. No matter how dear the wrong may have become, nor how deeply prejudiced I may have been in its favor, be pleased to deliver me there from altogether, effectually, and at once, that I may tolerate nothing which is contrary to Thy mind. As I hate the wicked in their way, so would I hate every wicked way in myself. And lead me in the way everlasting. If thou hast introduced me already to the good old way, be pleased to keep me in it, and conduct me further and further along it. It is a way which thou hast set up of old, it is based upon everlasting principles, and it is the way in which immortal spirits will gladly run for ever and ever. There will be no end to it world without end. It lasts for ever, and they who are in it last for ever. Conduct me into it, O Lord, and conduct me throughout the whole length of it. By Thy providence, by Thy word, by Thy grace, and by Thy Spirit, lead me evermore.

**Opposes** (480)(**antikeimai** from **anti** = against, opposite + **keimai** = to be placed, to lie or be laid down) means literally to line up against or to lie opposite to, both ideas giving us a vivid picture of the continual conflict between the the man of lawlessness (**Antichrist**) and the Almighty God. The **present tense** indicates he continually takes his stand in opposition to God as His adversary, emphasizing that this opposition is a continuing conflict with no truce in sight! Even as the Spirit and the flesh "**are in opposition (antikeimai)** to one another (**present tense** = continually)," so too this man of flesh continually opposes God Who is spirit (Gal 5:17-note). **Antikeimai** is also used of those who opposed the Lord Jesus (Lk 13:17), of those who oppose His people (Lk 21:15; 1Cor 16:9; Php 1:28; 1Ti 5:14) or His doctrine (1Ti 1:10).

It is interesting that **antikeimai** is used to translate the Hebrew verb **satan** in Zech 3:1 "Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD, and **Satan (noun)** standing at his right hand to accuse (Hebrew = **satan [verb]** = to act as an adversary; Lxx = **antikeimai**) him." So in this OT passage Satan himself opposes Joshua, whereas here in the NT Satan's henchman the Antichrist opposes anything and everything that has to do with God!

**W E Vine** notes that "The grammatical form here, i.e., the participle with the article, makes a descriptive title = '**the opponent**.'"

**Monty Mills** on **opposes** - (lit.) the opposing one (a middle participle, so indicating his own volition in this opposition) (Letters to Thessalonica: A Study Guide to the Thessalonian Epistles, 3E Ministries)

As **Hampton Keathley** says "Everything about this future person reeks of Satan from whom he will get his authority and power (see Rev. 13:4ff+)."

John describes this evil man's opposition as manifest especially via his tongue recalling that comes out of our mouth is what fills our heart (Mt 12:34-37+, Mt 15:18-20+, Lk 6:45+) in what he says:

**'He (THE LITTLE HORN** = aka Anti-Christ, Man of Lawlessness) **will speak out against the Most High and wear down the saints of the Highest One, and he will intend to make alterations in times and in law; and they will be given into his hand for a time, times, and half a time** (NOTE THE CRITICAL TIME PHRASE ="time, times, and half a time" = Rev 12:14+, then compare Rev 12:6+ which nails the time as 1260 days, which in turn is also in Rev 11:3+ and equates with 42 months as in Rev 11:2+, Rev 13:5+ = 3.5 years - these identical time phrases are no coincidence...they are sovereignly set from before the foundation of the world! See also The Great Tribulation) (Da 7:25+)

**THOUGHT** - What fills your heart today...the world or God's Word? Remember Jesus' words regarding one foot in the world and one in God's Word (so to speak) - "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth." (Mt 6:24+) Believers are citizens of another Kingdom, another place (Php 3:20-21+) need to continually cultivate vertical vision!

And there was given to him a mouth **speaking arrogant words** and **blasphemies**; and authority to act for forty-two months was given to him. And he **opened his mouth in blasphemies against God**, to **blaspheme** His name and His tabernacle, that is, those who dwell in heaven. (Rev 13:5,6-[note](#))

**D. Michael Marshall** on **exalts himself** - He "will exalt himself" translates a second participle descriptive not just of his action but of his character. The image is one of extreme arrogance, the ultimate in megalomania, installing oneself not just as a god but as the greatest of the gods, the self-proclaimed ruler of all." ([1, 2 Thessalonians, The New American Commentary](#))

**Exalts** (is puffed up with pride) (5229)(**huperairomai** from **huper** = above or intensification of meaning + **airo** = lift up) means to raise one's self over, to become **haughty**, to become puffed up with pride and feel overly self-confident. **Friberg** - proudly set oneself up as something. **BDAG** - to have an undue sense of one's self-importance. The **present tense** indicates that he continually exalts himself over God. The **middle voice** indicates that the **Antichrist** initiates this action and participates in the results of the action. The middle voice indicates the subject performs an action upon himself (**Reflexive** action = "**exalts himself**") and for his own benefit.

In the only other NT use of **huperairomai** is by Paul after he had been transported to the **third heaven** and heard "inexpressible words" things (2Cor 12:2-4) he says that "Because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from **exalting (huperairomai)** myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me-- to keep me from **exalting** myself!" (2Cor 12:7) In 2Th 2:4 Satan himself energizes the Antichrist's self-exaltation. It is as if God is allowing a human being to be as "exalted" as he can be to demonstrate the futility and dreadful end of such aspirations. Oh how we need to grasp this picture of the ultimate display of human vanity, so that we might daily humble ourselves under the mighty hand of the Lord, knowing that He will exalt us at the proper time! (1Pe 5:6-note).

**Huperairomai** is used in the **Septuagint (Lxx)** in 2Chr 32:33 to describe **King Hezekiah** being "exalted (not self exaltation but

exalted by God) in the sight of all the nations." In Ps 71:16 Solomon prays "May there be abundance of grain in the earth **on top of** the mountains." In the Pr 31:29 description of an excellent wife King Lemuel says "Many daughters have done nobly, but you **excel** (Lxx = **huperaïromai**) them all."

**David** used **huperaïromai** figuratively in Ps 38:4 to describe his iniquities as having "**gone over** (his) head." **Spurgeon** wrote that "Like waves of the deep sea; like black mire in which a man utterly sinks. Above my hopes, my strength, my life itself, my sin rises in its terror. Unawakened sinners think their sins to be mere shallows, but when conscience is aroused they find out the depth of iniquity."

Daniel has a parallel description of the **man of lawlessness** who he refers to as "**the king**"

Then **the king** (the Antichrist) will do as he pleases, and **he will exalt** (Hebrew = **rum**; Lxx = **hupsoo**) and **magnify himself above every god** and **will speak monstrous things against the God of gods**, and he will prosper until the **indignation** is finished (another name for the **Great Tribulation**), for that which is decreed will be done. He will show no regard for the gods of his fathers or for the desire of women, nor will he show regard for any other god; for he will magnify himself above them all. (Da 11:36, 37-note)

**Over every so-called god or object of worship** ("So called gods" referring to idols in 1Cor 8:4, 5) This phrase says that the Antichrist will declare himself supreme other the so called gods of the cults and objects of worship such as the Islamic holy sites (Mecca, etc), Hindu temples, Buddhists shrines, etc. He will suffer no rivals whether it be the true God or false gods of this age.

**Object of worship** (4574)(**sebasma** from **sebazomai** = to stand in awe of someone, venerate, worship) refers to an object, place or person of worship, adoration or **veneration**. **Sebasma** refers to whatever is religiously honored, an object of worship of temples, altars, statues, idolatrous images. The only other use is by Paul in Athens as he was "passing through and examining the **objects of** (their) **worship**." (Acts 17:23). **BDAG** says **sebasma** is "something that relates to devotional activity (devotional object)." **Sebasma** is not found in the non-apocryphal Septuagint but is found in the Apocrypha (Wisdom 14:20, 15:17, Bet 1:27) referring to objects of worship ("an object of awe or worship, an idol" = Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint = LEH)

**TDNT** has an interesting note on the cognate word **sebamai** - In tune with the sense of the stem ("to fall back before"), **Homer** first uses this term for "to shrink from" The idea of shrinking from the gods leads to the sense of awe or reverence, first in the general form of respect, then in the more specifically religious form of veneration. The meaning "to shrink from" still occurs, but respect is commonly the sense, e.g., for beauty or majesty, for country, parents, the dead, heroes, or benefactors, and, of course, the gods. Relative to the gods, the term takes an active turn and comes to be used not for mere reverence but for worship as a cultic act. (Borrow [Kittel's Theological Dictionary of the New Testament : abridged in one volume](#))

**Liddell-Scott-Jones** says **sebasma** is "that for which awe is felt, an object of awe or worship."

## TAKING A SEAT IN THE TEMPLE OF GOD

**So that** (**hoste**) (TERM OF PURPOSE/RESULT) "to such a length will his opposition to God and his self-exaltation carry him." (W E Vine)

**He** (**autos**) - Strongly emphatic, for a, the pronoun is expressed in orig., b, it stands at the beginning of the clause. (Vine)

**Takes his seat** ("Enthrones himself" = REB) - **Kathizo** in the **aoist tense** (point or momentary tense) denotes a definite act of taking his seat and "*has overtones of brazen effrontery... Antichrist will thus dethrone God in order to enthrone himself*." (Stott) This is the ultimate abominable, blasphemous act, to seat oneself in the place of God. The same verb **kathizo** (to sit down) is used of Christ "when He raised Him from the dead, and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age, but also in the one to come." (Eph 1:20, 21, Heb 1:3, 8:1, 10:12, 12:2). The most amazing truth is that while the Antichrist seeks to usurp Christ's seat, Jesus gives each believer a sure promise that "He who overcomes (1Jn 5:4,5), I will grant to him to **sit down** (**kathizo**) with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and **sat down** (**kathizo**) with My Father on His throne." (Rev 3:21)

As discussed below "**Temple**" is **naos** which refers to the inner sanctuary of the Temple. The definite article before **naos** signifies not just any temple but the specific Temple.

In a parallel description Jesus warned

"Therefore when you see the ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in **the holy place** (cp "The Temple" 2Th 2:4) (let the reader understand)... for then (explaining why the Jews need to flee fast! - Mt 24:16-20-note) there will be a **great tribulation**, such as has

not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever shall. (Mt 24:15-note, Mt 24:21-note)

**Comment:** The "Abomination of Desolation" can be read as the "Abomination which makes desolate." The question that arises in Mt 24:15 is this the Antichrist standing or is it his image. While the gender of "standing" in Mt 24:15 is neuter which would favor an image, the gender of the parallel passage in Mk 13:14 is masculine, which would favor man. (See )

And so the masculine, singular translated he in Mk 13:14ESV counters the neuter singular it in Mt 24:15. There is a very logical way to resolve the use of both the masculine and the neuter -- The Antichrist (a "he") goes into the holy place and declares himself to be "God" which would clearly be an abomination to orthodox Jews. But because he has wars to fight and peoples to suppress (cf Da 11:39-45-note) he cannot continue to remain standing in the holy place. His right hand man, the false prophet, commissions an image (an "it") of the Antichrist (the Beast) and places it in the holy place (cp Rev 13:14-15-note) where it remains **standing** (Greek = perfect tense in both Mt 24:15 and Mk 13:14) for the [earth dwellers](#) to worship. You might be saying that I am making too much of the details but as someone has well said especially in eschatological passages (but applicable to all of God's Word) "the divine is in the details!"

See Related Discussion: **The Image of the Beast**

As **Hiebert** says "For a Jew **"the Temple"** (ton naon) could only denote the holy place of the Jerusalem Temple, that portion into which the priests alone could lawfully go. The construction used ([eis](#) with the accusative) **implies motion toward** and indicates that by his impious act the man of lawlessness puts himself **"into"** God's seat in the inner sanctuary... Whether Paul is referring to a literal temple in Jerusalem or is using the term [metaphorically](#) of the church has been much debated. The view adopted will be determined by one's understanding of end-time prophecy. The whole picture seems naturally to suggest an eschatological Jewish temple. **This was the view of Irenaeus** ([Against Heresies, V. 30.4](#) - scroll down to #4) **and other early church Fathers.** ([1 & 2 Thessalonians Commentary](#))

[Irenaeus](#) interpretation of 2Thes 2:4 - But when this Antichrist shall have devastated all things in this world, he will reign for three years and six months, and **sit in the temple at Jerusalem**, and then the Lord will come from heaven in the clouds, in the glory of the Father, sending this man and those who follow him into the lake of fire; but bringing in for the righteous the times of the kingdom, that is, the rest, the hallowed seventh day; and restoring to Abraham the promised inheritance, in which kingdom the Lord declared, that "many coming from the east and from the west should sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." ([Against Heresies, V. 30.4](#) - scroll down to #4)

The simplest reading of the plain text is to interpret Paul as referring to a literal Temple of God. And yet many try to spiritualize **"Temple of God"** For example, a well known evangelical writer, **Robert Gundry** avoids the simple, literal reading of the text, reasoning that since Christian's bodies are characterized elsewhere by Paul as temples of God (which is of course true = 1Cor 3:16-17, 1Cor 6:19, 2Cor 6:16) *"it may be better to think of the present text as meaning that "the human being of lawlessness" will arise as an apostate within the church."* Note first that Paul does not say the Antichrist will **arise** but that he will **sit**! Then using Gundry's interpretation one might paraphrase *"he takes his seat in the temple of God"* as *"he takes his seat within his body the temple of God."* That does not even make good sense! As [Richard Mayhue](#) says *"Figurative meanings for temple are impossible since the lawless one actually enthrones himself."* It is amazing to me the nonsense that is accepted when one refuses to accept the plain sense of the text (**Text read literally**) especially when such a reading makes good sense in context (**Keep Context King**). Of course if one does not believe God can build another Jewish Temple in the last days, then one has to [posit](#) a non-literal, non-sensical interpretation!

In the **People's NT commentary** ([Ref](#)) Johnson calls the **"temple"** the church! He calls the papacy the **"man of lawlessness"**. Beloved, when we jettison the plain sense reading of the Biblical text, we generally reap nonsense as comments such as this illustrate.

The **ESV Study Bible** says "The **temple of God** has been variously interpreted as the church, the heavenly temple, the Jerusalem temple, and a metaphor for supreme blasphemous arrogance modeled on the activities of Antiochus IV Epiphanes (see Da 11:31–35). Whatever the meaning, **the context seems to indicate a concrete and observable act of defiance against God.**" (**ED**: So the note seems to accept a literal interpretation. I would simply add that the "concrete and observable act of defiance" will be carried out in a "concrete" building!) (Borrow [ESV Study Bible](#))

The **NIV Study Bible** gets close but still misses the true interpretation - "Almost certainly the historic Temple in Jerusalem, not the heavenly temple or the church. But Paul likely uses this sanctuary metaphorically by picking up the well-know theme of desecration by foreign kings." (Borrow [NIV Study Bible](#))



**Comment:** Actually this is very unlikely! This is pure [metaphorical \(allegorical\)](#) speculation not good interpretation! **Temple** means temple and there is no reason to interpret it metaphorically unless one does not believe God is able to rebuild the Jewish Temple!

In fairness it is interesting to note that the fully revised **NIV Study** notes (2020) has a different note on **God's Temple** - "Could refer to the temple in Jerusalem (cf. Mt 24:15+ see note){{ED: THAT NOTE REFERRED TO IN THE REVISED VERSION OF THE NIVSB READS "According to some, there were still two more stages in the progressive fulfillment of the predictions in Daniel and Matthew: [1] the Roman destruction of the temple in AD 70, and [2] a still future setting up of an image of the antichrist in Jerusalem"}}}, but elsewhere Paul always uses the word for "**temple**" for the Christian church or the individual Christian (1 Co 3:16, 17; 6:19; 2 Co 6:16; Eph 2:21), so **perhaps** he means that the man of lawlessness will emerge out of professing Christian circles." Notice their use of the adverb **perhaps** which is used to express uncertainty or possibility and is used when one does not wish to be too definite or assertive in the expression of an opinion. So even the revised 2020 NIVSB notes still tend to "shy away from" a literal interpretation of the Temple in 2Th 2:4 (even though their note on Mt 24:15 gives that as one of the possibilities ("a still future setting up of an image of the antichrist in Jerusalem"). Interesting! Perhaps these notes were written by different individuals).

**Milligan** on the **Temple of God** - These words were understood of the actual temple at Jerusalem by [Irenaeus](#) (ED: HE LIVED 130–202 A.D.)(adv. Haer. 5:30. 4), but this view was modified by Chrysostom and the Antiochenes who extended them metaphorically to the Church or Churches of Christ... the nature of the context, the use of such a local term as *kathisai* (takes... seat), and the twice-repeated definite article (*ton naon tou theou*) all point to a literal reference in the present instance ([2 Thessalonians 2 Commentary](#) - Note **Milligan** published these comments in 1908, long before Israel was reborn in 1948!) (**Related Resource:** See interesting history of [The Rise of Allegorical Interpretation](#))

**So that he takes his seat in the temple (naos) of God:** The **Temple of God** refers to His Temple in Jerusalem. Although it was destroyed in 70AD, the Temple will be rebuilt either before or during the Tribulation. How do we know? In the Revelation of Jesus Christ, the apostle John records these specific instructions "Leave out the court which is outside the Temple, and do not measure it, for it has been given to the nations (Gentiles); and they will tread under foot the holy city for forty-two months." (Rev 11:2+) So in the last 3.5 years (1260 days, "time, times and half a time") of Daniel's Seventieth Week, the Gentiles will trod Jerusalem and will control the court outside the Temple. Perhaps you are saying "There is no Temple now and the Dome of the Rock, the third most holy place of Islam now sits on the old Temple Mount. So how can a Jewish Temple be rebuilt?" I do not know specifically but it is clear there has to be a Temple, so the sovereign, omnipotent God will orchestrate its rebuilding, whether you believe it or not! And of course as noted above, many evangelical writers refuse to believe a literal Temple will be rebuilt and therefore chose to allegorize or spiritualize the passage.

#### **Related Resource:**

- [Will there be an end times temple in Jerusalem? | GotQuestions.org](#)
- [The Rise of Allegorical Interpretation](#) (which precludes interpretation of a literal temple in Jerusalem by many commentators).

**Richard Mayhue** makes a good point that "Figurative meanings for **Temple** are impossible since the lawless one actually enthrones himself. (Ed: He took his seat as would anyone who crowned themselves as "king!")" In Scripture, this is called 'the abomination of desolation' (Da 9:27+; Da 11:31+; Mt 24:15+), which is the ultimate 'falling away' or apostasy spoken of in 2Th 2:3 (Ed: Although not everyone agrees with this interpretation - see **notes on "the apostasy"** for the other interpretations) and which occurs at the Jewish temple in Jerusalem. The historical preview occurred circa 167 BC when [Antiochus IV Epiphanes](#), claiming to be the earthly manifestation of his patron deity, the Olympian [Zeus](#), erected the altar of Zeus on top of the Lord's altar in the [Holy of Holies](#) in the Jerusalem Temple (cf. Da 11:31+). The prophetic fulfillment of 2Th 2:4 was written about first in Daniel 9:27+, then referred to by Christ (Matt 24:15+), and now by Paul. It is this writer's opinion that these two events, i.e. the apostasy and the revelation of the Antichrist, are yet future to the present day. The exact identity of this person remains unknown. ([1 & 2 Thessalonians: Triumphs and Trials of a Consecrated Church](#))

In another parallel with the future Antichrist, [Antiochus IV Epiphanes](#) had a coin minted which had his image on one side and the following inscription in Greek on the other side = "ΘΕΟΥ ΕΠΙΦΑΝΟΥΣ ΝΙΚΗΦΟΡΟΥ / ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΑΝΤΙΟΧΟΥ = King Antiochus, **image of God**, bearer of victory! (See [Who was Antiochus Epiphanes? | GotQuestions.org](#))

Another "historical preview" of the end times **Antichrist** occurred during the reign of [Caligula](#) who ruled the Roman Empire from AD 37–41. Not only did Caligula command the citizens of Rome, including the exalted Roman senators, to worship him **as a tangible, living god**, he also made a failed attempt to have **his image set up in the Jewish Temple** in Jerusalem. **Shogren** has this note on [Caligula](#) - A few short years before the evangelization of Macedonia, the emperor Gaius (Caligula) became mentally imbalanced and made himself a god, taking literally the emperor worship that was growing in vogue in the eastern empire. Because Gaius wished to insult the Jews, he ordered his general [Petronius](#) to put his statues in the Jerusalem temple. Thousands of Jews

volunteered to lay down their lives in the temple's defense, whereupon Petronius risked his own life and defied his emperor. The noble Petronius was spared by the arrival of news of Caligula's assassination in AD 41. ([1 and 2 Thessalonians Zondervan Exegetical Commentary](#))

**Hampton Keathley** ([2 Thessalonians 2:1-5](#)) - "**sitting in the temple**" surely refers to a temple that will be rebuilt in the first half of the Tribulation (Daniel's seventieth week) in connection with the covenant previously made with the Jewish people when he first appears as the peacemaker. This opens the way for sacrifices and worship to begin when the temple is completed. In the middle of Daniel's seventieth week, however, the covenant will be broken by the man of lawlessness who will stand in this holy place and demand the worship of men all over the world. Some have suggested this is a figurative portrayal to his occupying the most holy place in human worship, which rightfully belongs only to God, but as Thomas points out, there is no good reason to take this view.

This evidently is a Jewish temple to be rebuilt in Jerusalem in the future. Dependence of these words on Da 9:26, 27; 11:31, 36, 37; 12:11 (cf. Mt 24:15; Mk 13:14) demands such a reference. There is no impressive evidence for understanding **naon** ("temple") in a non-literal sense. The well-known "**abomination that causes desolation**" is sometimes regarded as a person and sometimes as an act of desecration by that person (Mk 13:14) (Hubbard, Wycliffe Bible Commentary, p. 1364). The act of desecration to which this verse looks will transpire half-way through the seventieth prophetic week of Da 9:24-27, when the covenant made earlier with the Jewish people is broken. This will mark the climax of this lawless one's career. Historically, a foreshadowing of this blasphemous intrusion happened when Antiochus Epiphanes desecrated the temple in Jerusalem just before the Maccabean revolt ...The relationship of this apocalyptic portion of 2 Thessalonians to Christ's parousia (coming) confirms the impression that Paul must be referring to a single historical personage. Quests for such a person in the past and present have proved fruitless. Resemblances to Antiochus Epiphanes, Nero, Diocletian, one of the popes, and others may be admitted. But fulfillment of all details of the prophecy must await the future period of this man's prominence. It is futile to suppose that Judas Iscariot, Antiochus Epiphanes, or Nero will be brought back to life to fill this role. ([Robert L Thomas - The Expositor's Bible Commentary](#))

**Temple** (sanctuary) ([3485](#))(**naos**) in the Greek culture denoted the "abode of the gods" and was used to refer to a literal structure or building associated with, dedicated to and set apart to be a dwelling place for a deity. either pagan gods (Acts 17:24) or the true God (Mt 23:16). **Naos** refers to the actual sanctuary of the Temple, the place of God's dwelling (cp Zacharias ministering to God in Lk 1:9). Naos is distinguished from **Hieron** ([2413](#)) (holy, hallowed, consecrated from **hieros** [only in 1Co 9:13, 2Ti 3:15] [2411](#)) = sacred, consecrated or belonging to or connected with the gods) refers to the entire complex of temple, including the sanctuary (**naos**), with its porticos, courts, and other subordinate buildings. In summary, the word Paul uses **naos** to emphasize that he is referring to the temple proper, including the inner sanctuary, composed of the outer room, the [Holy of Holies](#) and the innermost [Holy Place](#).

In Mt 24:15 Jesus gave the Jews the sign which would mark the beginning of the last 3.5 years of **Daniel's Seventieth Week**, the time of the **Great Tribulation** (Mt 24:21-note):

Therefore when you see the ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the **holy place** (let the reader understand), (see in depth discussion of this strategically important passage)

So notice Jesus specifies the holy place which would parallel Paul's word (**naos**) for Temple. The Antichrist (and/or his image - Rev 13:14-15-note) would not stand just any place in the Temple Complex (**Hieron**) but in the inner holy place, most probably the [Holy of Holies](#), because the latter is where God Himself had dwelt in the days when His **Shekinah glory cloud** was still present over Solomon's Temple.

**D. Michael Martin** on **temple (naos)** - Paul commonly used naos metaphorically of the believer as the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit (1Cor 3:16-17; 6:19; 2Cor 6:16). **But here it must be used literally if the passage is to depict an observable, symbolic event the church could recognize as an indication of the nearness of the day of the Lord.** In Eph 2:21 the church is called the temple, and some argue that Paul taught that the son of perdition would claim preeminence in the church. But the scope of the lawless one's actions seems much broader than just the church. He will press a claim of absolute preeminence over all people and all gods. Such breadth of influence implies political and/or military might, not just religious megalomania. (See [1, 2 Thessalonians: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition](#)) (**Bolding** added for emphasis)

**All 39 verses using Naos** - Matt. 23:16; Matt. 23:17; Matt. 23:21; Matt. 23:35; Matt. 26:61; Matt. 27:5; Matt. 27:40; Matt. 27:51; Mk. 14:58; Mk. 15:29; Mk. 15:38; Lk. 1:9; Lk. 1:21; Lk. 1:22; Lk. 23:45; Jn. 2:19; Jn. 2:20; Jn. 2:21; Acts 17:24; Acts 19:24; 1Co. 3:16; 1Co. 3:17; 1Co. 6:19; 2Co. 6:16; Eph. 2:21; 2Th 2:4; Rev. 3:12; Rev. 7:15; Rev. 11:1; Rev. 11:2; Rev. 11:19; Rev. 14:15; Rev. 14:17; Rev. 15:5; Rev. 15:6; Rev. 15:8; Rev. 16:1; Rev. 16:17; Rev. 21:22

## Related Resources:

- [Temple - Bridgeway Bible Dictionary - Includes Diagram](#)
- [Temple - International Standard Bible Encyclopedia](#)
- [Temple - Fausset's Bible Dictionary](#)

## THE ULTIMATE BLASPHEMY: SELF-DEIFICATION BY THE ANTICHRIST

**Displaying** ([apodeiknumi](#) proclaiming) **himself as being God** (proclaiming himself to be God = ESV, NIV; "parading himself as the very Deity" = Way): The idea is to declare something out loud. "The participle "**proclaiming**" ([apodeiknumi](#)) implies a demonstration as much as an announcement (cf. Acts 2:22+; 1Cor 4:9+)" ([Marshall](#)) Although the **man of lawlessness** is not divine, he will proclaim himself in such a way that he convinces most of the world that he is God. Note that the verb Paul choose ([apodeiknumi](#)) is one that signifies his true character will now be clearly demonstrated so that there is absolutely no doubt as to his true character and identity! And so Satan who energizes the Antichrist (2Th 2:9, 10) will finally achieve the objective he voiced at his initial rebellion against God as recorded by the prophets Isaiah:

"How you have fallen from heaven, O **star of the morning** (KJV = "O [Lucifer](#)" = Hebrew = [Heylel = Light-Bearer](#)), son of the dawn! You have been cut down to the earth, You who have weakened the nations! 13 "But you said in your heart, 'I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God, And I will sit on the mount of assembly In the recesses of the north. 14 'I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; **I will make myself like the Most High.**' 15 "Nevertheless you will be thrust down to **Sheol**, to the recesses of the pit (as recorded in Rev 20:10+). (Isaiah 14:12-15) (See also [Why are both Jesus and Satan referred to as the morning star?](#))

The prophet Ezekiel records a similar blasphemy by the king of [Tyre](#):

"Son of man, say to the leader of Tyre ([thobaal II](#)), 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "Because your heart is lifted up and you have said, '**I am a god, I sit in the seat of gods**, In the heart of the seas'; Yet **you are a man** and not God, although **you make your heart like the heart of God**— (Ezek 28:2)

Luke records a first century example of another ruler who exalted himself

And on an appointed day Herod, having put on his royal apparel, took his seat on the rostrum and began delivering an address to them. And the people kept crying out, "The voice of a god and not of a man!" And immediately an angel of the Lord struck him because he did not give God the glory, and he was eaten by worms and died. (Acts 12:21–23.)

**Marshall** comments that "According to Josephus, Herod Agrippa I presented himself at a festival in Caesarea in a manner calculated to impress the masses. Dressed in a silver robe, he entered the theater at daybreak to deliver an oration. The sun played off the silver, making a spectacular display to accompany his speech. Agrippa was lauded as not a mere man but a god. He did not reprimand the people but accepted their praise. As a result he was stricken by God and died after five days of severe abdominal pain." (Josephus, Ant. 19.343–52) (1, 2 Thessalonians, The New American Commentary)

**John Stott** observes that "The Jews saw another example of 'the abomination of desolation' in the Roman general [Pompey](#), who in 63 BC defeated their nation, captured Jerusalem and desecrated the temple by intruding into the Holy of Holies... Yet all these, together with other evil leaders down the centuries, have been forerunners or anticipations of the final 'man of lawlessness', an eschatological yet historical person, the decisive manifestation of lawlessness and godlessness, the leader of the ultimate rebellion, the precursor of and signal for the Parousia. I agree with Geerhardus Vos that 'we may take for granted ... that the Antichrist will be a human person'. And whether we still believe in the coming of Antichrist will depend largely on whether we still believe in the coming of Christ." (Borrow [The Gospel & the end of time : the message of 1 & 2 Thessalonians : includes study guide for groups or individuals](#))

Doesn't this deceptive display of divinity by the Antichrist in a sense represent the fulfillment of Satan's great lie in Genesis?

For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and **you will be like God**, knowing good and evil." (Ge 3:5)

Recall also Satan's wilderness encounter with Jesus when he tempted our Lord to worship him promising...

All these things (What things? = Mt 4:8, Lk 4:6) will I give You, if You fall down and worship me. (Mt 4:9, cp Lk



**John Phillips** comments that "Satan has been worshiped ignorantly down through the centuries. Satan, after all, is "the god of this world" (2Cor. 4:4). But he craves open worship. The great role of the Antichrist, in Satan's most secret plan for this world, is to be to Satan what Jesus was to His Father, the channel through whom worship can flow (Rev. 13:4)." (Exploring 2 Thessalonians)

**Richard Mayhue** feels that 2Th 2:4 "is the 'revealing' spoken of in 2Th 2:3 when this person's true identity and actual character are uncovered and exposed for all to see in horror." ([1 & 2 Thessalonians: Triumphs and Trials of a Consecrated Church](#))

**Comment:** As noted in earlier comments, this revealing of the man of lawlessness evil nature will be obvious to all not so much when he signs a covenant with Israel at the beginning of the Seven year Tribulation (although if there are those who know their Bible, they will recognize him, assuming the covenant is public), but when he carries out the abomination of desolation, standing in the holy place (Mt 24:15-note), displaying himself clearly as god!

**Displaying** (584)(**apodeiknumi** from **apo** = away from, intensifies + **deiknuo** = make known the character or significance of something by visual, auditory, gestural, or linguistic means) is a verb which literally means to to show off (**apo**) and then comes to mean to cause something to be known publicly ("God has **exhibited** us apostles" = 1Cor 4:9). It was frequently used in secular Greek meaning "to proclaim to an office." Lightfoot says **apodeiknumi** was often used to denote "the proclamation of a sovereign on his accession."

The idea is to be clearly demonstrated or proven (of Jesus **attested**... by God with miracles and wonders and signs" = Acts 2:22). In Acts 2:22 the miracles, etc, clearly demonstrated that He had divine power to accomplish anything He chose and that what He did was a sign that He really was the Messiah. Apodeiknumi is used in a similar way in Acts 25:7 where the Jews were unable to **prove** (apodeiknumi) their charges against Paul.

Used 4x in NT - attested(1), displaying(1), exhibited(1), prove(1). - Acts 2:22, 25:7, 1Co 4:9, 2Th 2:4.

Used 5x in the Lxx but not very enlightening - Esther 2:9, 3:13, Job 33:21, Da 2:48, 4:1.

The **present tense** of **apodeiknumi** indicates that this is Antichrist's "course of conduct" continually exhibiting himself as if he were God, but he only has 42 months (1260 days, 3.5 years, time, times, and half a time) to display himself to the world as the counterfeit Christ. At the end of this age God allows man to give it his "best shot" at being God. In a sense this man is the representation and the apex of all godless defiance by men against God since the Garden of Eden!

**Hiebert** comments that "He makes himself the object of the display, showing himself off as absolute and exclusive deity. "This is the climax of human sin; it is self-assertion in its falsest, most impious and defiant form—a colossal, monstrous lie." ([Ibid](#))

**Thayer** - 1. properly, to point away from oneself, to point out, show forth; to expose to view, exhibit ( Herodotus 3,122and often): 1Cor 4:9. Hence, 2. to declare: to show, prove what kind of a person anyone is , Acts 2:22 ; 2Th 2:4. To prove by arguments, demonstrate: Acts 25:7.

**Liddell-Scott-Jones** on **apodeiknuo** - To point away from other objects and at one (to point out, to display, to make known whether by deed or word). To bring forward, to produce. To produce, deliver accounts. To publish a law. To appoint, assign. To show by argument (to prove, demonstrate, prove one so and so), to make it evident that... To show forth a person or thing as so and so hence to appoint or proclaim.

**Constable** on the meaning of the **temple of God** - Some suggest that it is a figurative reference to his occupying the most holy place in human worship, which rightfully belongs only to God. The early church fathers and several good modern-day commentators accept the literal view. (Bible Knowledge Commentary: 1985)

**John Stott** says of the Antichrist's blasphemous self-deification - Having set himself against every object of worship, he will demand for himself the worship which he has forbidden to everybody and everything else... Here, then, are the two principal targets of Antichrist's venom. Yet God and law, religion and ethics, are the two essential ingredients of culture, which act as a glue to bond a community together, and are therefore two authorities which humankind have normally recognized. To oppose them is to undermine the foundations of society. More than that, Antichrist's godlessness and lawlessness will go beyond a denial of these basic authorities to a demand that worship and obedience be given to him alone. Not anarchy, but totalitarianism is his goal. (Borrow [The Gospel & the end of time : the message of 1 & 2 Thessalonians : includes study guide for groups or individuals](#))

**Marshall** on the phrase **as being God** - The people of the Hellenistic age would not have found a claim to divinity so outrageous as would a person today. The boundary between human and divine was rather porous in the mind of the ancient. Homer wrote of numerous exchanges between gods and mortals, as well as the movement of a few mortals into the ranks of the divine. Since the

time of Augustus emperors had been deified at death. Since the time of Caligula deity had been claimed by living emperors. The cult of emperor worship was an active and important part of Roman society by the time Paul wrote this letter. Of course the presumption of anyone, even an emperor, claiming divinity was scandalous blasphemy in Jewish eyes. It was the height of rebellion against God. It is not surprising then that the ultimate and final rebellion should feature this most extreme example of pretensions to divinity. (Ibid)

**Hiebert** has an excellent argument for a literal interpretation of 2Thessalonians 2:4 -

**An attentive reading of this passage, uninfluenced by theological presuppositions, naturally leads to the conclusion that Paul is describing an actual eschatological individual, not a mere principle, or even a succession of persons.** The context plainly places him in the end time, for he will be personally slain by the returning Christ (2Th 2:8). Throughout the paragraph Paul describes him in terms that suggest a deliberate parallel to Christ (**Ed: See Chart comparing Christ and Antichrist**). Each has a "**coming**" (**parousia**)—2Th 2:9 and 2Th 2:1; each has a "**revelation**" (**apokalupsis**)—2Th 2:3 and 2Th 1:7-8; each has his own gospel—"a lie" (2Th 2:11) in contrast to "the truth" (2Th 2:10, 12). The **man of sin** claims exclusive homage and worship and will brook no rival (2Th 2:4) and in imitation of Christ (Acts 2:22) will support his claim with "all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders" (2Th 2:9). As Christ, the true Messiah, was empowered by God, so this Antichrist will be empowered by Satan (2Th 2:9). Clearly he is Satan's parody of the true Messiah. While imitating Christ, he will be the complete contrast to the character of Christ. The complete opposite of Christ cannot be a spiritual tendency or a principle but must be a person. Clearly, we have here the prophetic individual elsewhere spoken of as "the **Antichrist**," a name that well sums up his character and career.

The recognition that Paul is speaking of a definite eschatological person at once helps to clear away some misconceptions concerning "**the man of lawlessness**." He cannot be regarded merely as the personification of the principle of lawlessness. He is not an abstract power. He is not simply the personification of "the secret of lawlessness" (2Th 2:7). Paul says that "the secret of lawlessness is already at work," but this is an eschatological person who will appear at the end time. He will form the climax to the development of ungodliness. There have been many antichrists, but these precursors only serve to prepare the way for the final personal **Antichrist**.

Neither can this eschatological figure be identified with the line of Roman emperors, as was held by Warfield. It was his opinion that the **man of sin** must be identified with such Roman emperors as Caligula, Nero, Vespasian, Titus, and Domitian; he believed that every item of Paul's hideous description of the **son of perdition** "was fulfilled in the terrible story of the emperors of Rome." Resemblances to these Roman emperors may be admitted. But the eschatological nature of this personage is an insurmountable obstacle to this view. Then the sign of the revelation of the **man of sin** as indicative of the presence of the **Day of the Lord** proved false.

The recognition of his eschatological nature also disposes of the popular view that the **man of lawlessness** is the papacy, a view eagerly seized upon by many leaders of the Reformation. It was quite natural that the Reformers, locked in fierce conflict with the papal forces, should come to this conclusion. This view still has its able defenders, but it is beset with serious difficulties. The papacy does not offer a true fulfillment of Paul's picture. The popes have never claimed for themselves exclusive divine honor. As Erdman remarks, "No pope 'is called God' nor 'worshipped' as God, but each declares himself to be the 'vicar' of Christ and only as such infallible in matters of religion." Romanism does not oppose all that is called God or is an object of worship, for the adoration of the virgin Mary and the saints is a leading feature in it. It is also inconsistent with the fact that the **man of sin** is an eschatological person, since it must regard him as a long succession of persons extending over a period of hundreds of years. Then Paul's teaching that the revelation of this person marked the presence of the **Day of the Lord** has long since ceased to have the significance he attached to it. [1 & 2 Thessalonians- D. Edmond Hiebert](#) - anything by Hiebert is highly recommended!) (Bolding added for emphasis)

## BRIEF EXCURSUS ON ALLEGORICAL INTERPRETATION

In light of the fact that the temple in 2 Thessalonians 2:4 is frequently interpreted allegorically, symbolically or figuratively, it would be useful to see how this mode of Bible interpretation (or better "misinterpretation") had its "[pathogenesis](#)." As a pathologist I think

[pathogenesis](#) is appropriate in view of the fact that **allegorical interpretation** leads to such speculative and, in my opinion, "spiritually unhealthy" comments. That said below are notes from **Dr Anthony Garland** who has written the best literal commentary on the Revelation that has ever been written. **Garland** writes...

### **The Rise of Allegorical Interpretation** (from Revelation [The Testimony of Jesus Christ](#))

Because the book of Revelation is categorized as *apocalyptic* literature and contains numerous symbols, it undergoes a great deal of abuse due to allegorical interpretation. But what exactly is allegorical (also known as *mystical*<sup>22</sup>) interpretation and where did it come from?

Zuck offers the following description of *allegorization*:

Allegorizing is searching for a hidden or secret meaning underlying but remote from and unrelated in reality to the more obvious meaning of a text. In other words the literal reading is a sort of code, which needs to be deciphered to determine the more significant and hidden meaning. In this approach the literal is superficial, the allegorical is the true meaning.<sup>23</sup>

Completely in line with Zuck's description is the following statement by Trench regarding his understanding of the New Jerusalem (Rev. [21:2](#)):

The dream of an actual material city to be let down bodily from heaven to earth, . . . has been cherished in almost all ages of the Church by some, who have been unable to translate the figurative language of Scripture into those **far more glorious realities** of the heavenly [πολιτεία](#) [politeia], whereof those figures were the vesture and the outward array. [emphasis added]<sup>24</sup>

Notice how the language of Trench confirms the statement of Zuck: the allegorical meaning represents *far more glorious realities*. The literal text represents figures which are the *vesture* and *outward array*. According to Trench, the true (allegorical) meaning is "clothed" by the representation of the literal text. Presumably, the interpreter must remove this outer garment of literal text to see the deeper and *more glorious* reality beyond.<sup>25</sup> Trench doesn't inform us that each interpreter that does so finds a *different* glorious reality!<sup>26</sup>

Using allegorical interpretation, it is possible to "find" all manner of meanings beyond the plain sense of the text:

To cite a few examples [of allegorical hermeneutics]: The journey of Abraham from Ur of the Chaldees to Haran is interpreted as the imaginary trip of a Stoic philosopher who leaves sensual understanding and arrives at the senses. The two pence given by the Good Samaritan to the innkeeper has the hidden meanings of Baptism and the Lord's Supper. The river Euphrates means the outflow of manners and is not an actual literal river in Mesopotamia. Pope Gregory the Great's interpretation of the Book of Job is equally disheartening: "The patriarch's three friends denote the heretics; his seven sons are the twelve apostles; his seven thousand sheep are God's faithful people; and his three thousand hump-backed camels are the depraved Gentiles!"<sup>27</sup>

While it is tempting to chuckle at these examples from early Christianity, what is alarming is how often equally obscure results attend modern interpreters of the book of Revelation.

So where did this tendency begin? Evidence is lacking within Scripture that Jesus or the Apostles understood the Old Testament in this way.

The allegorical interpretation of Sacred Scriptures cannot be historically proved to have prevailed among the Jews from the time of exile, or to have been common with the Jews of Palestine at the time of Christ and His apostles. Although the Sanhedrim and the hearers of Jesus often appealed to the Old Testament according to the testimony of the New Testament writers, they give no indication of the allegorical interpretation. Even Josephus has nothing of it.<sup>28</sup>

The flowering of allegorical interpretation as applied to Scripture can be traced to Jews in Alexandria Egypt who were interested in accommodating the [OT](#) Scriptures to Greek philosophy as a tool for removing or reinterpreting what were considered embarrassing anthropomorphisms and immoralities in the OT.

Two names stand out in Alexandrian Jewish allegorization: Aristobulus and Philo. Aristobulus, who lived around 160 B.C., believed that Greek philosophy borrowed from the Old Testament, and that those teachings could be uncovered only by allegorizing. . . . Philo (ca. 20 B.C. - ca. A.D. 54) . . . sought to defend the Old Testament to the Greeks and, even more so, to fellow Jews. He was led to allegorize the Old Testament, . . .

because of his desire to avoid [seeming] contradictions and blasphemies.<sup>[29](#)</sup>

Observe how often Christian aberrations have arisen from a faulty attempt to defend the Scriptures before skeptics.[Preterism](#), and its belief that non-believers reject Scripture because Jesus' prediction to come "soon" was misunderstood, is a recent example.

Clement of Alexandria (A.D. 155-216) was influenced by Philo and proposed a system of interpretation where any passage of the Bible might have up to five meanings.<sup>[30](#)</sup> Thereafter, Origen, who studied Platonic philosophy and is thought to have been a pupil of Clement, went so far as to say that Scripture itself demands that the interpreter employ the allegorical method.

Amillennialist Schaff is fair when he describes the great hermeneutical failings of Origen: "His great defect is the neglect of the grammatical and historical sense and his constant desire to find a hidden mystic meaning. He even goes further in this direction than the Gnostics, who everywhere saw transcendental, unfathomable mysteries."<sup>[31](#)</sup>

[Origen] lays down the principle that the true meaning of prophecy is to be found only by going beyond the literal and historical sense to the spiritual; and he says specifically of the Apocalypse that the mysteries **hidden in it** can be understood only in this way. His whole interpretation of the book is therefore spiritual rather than literal. [emphasis added]<sup>[32](#)</sup>

[Origen's](#) interpretive approach had great influence on those who would follow in the Middle Ages, as did Augustine (354-430) who, like Philo, saw allegorization as a solution to Old Testament problems.<sup>[33](#)</sup> The allegorical system of interpretation prevailed throughout most of the Middle Ages:

During the Middle Ages, the fourfold sense of Scripture was taught. Medieval scholars took Origen's threefold sense—the literal, the moral, and the spiritual—and subdivided the spiritual into the allegorical and the anagogical. As schoolman Thomas Aquinas affirmed, 'The literal sense is that which the author intends, but God being the Author, we may expect to find in Scripture a wealth of meaning.' An example of how the fourfold sense was worked out during the Middle Ages is Gen. [1:3](#), 'Let there be light.' Medieval churchmen interpreted that sentence to mean (1) Historically and literally—An act of creation; (2) Morally—May we be mentally illumined by Christ; (3) Allegorically—Let Christ be love; and (4) Anagogically—May we be led by Christ to glory.<sup>[34](#)</sup>

Although Aquinas endorsed looking beyond the primary meaning of the author, he did recognize some of the dangers of allegorization. "Aquinas put forward a threefold argument against allegory: (1) it is susceptible to deception; (2) without a clear method it leads to confusion; and (3) it lacks a sense of the proper integration of Scripture."<sup>[35](#)</sup> All three of these significant drawbacks are evident in much interpretation of the book of Revelation today.

Augustine's allegorical interpretation of Bible prophecy dominated the understanding of eschatology during the medieval period. It found acceptance also with the Roman church and among the leaders of the Reformation. Even today, Augustinian eschatology is held by large segments of the Christian church.<sup>[36](#)</sup>

Even the Reformers, who cast off the darkness of Medieval allegorization in so many areas, failed to escape the influence of those who went before them in their understanding of the book of Revelation.<sup>[37](#)</sup>

As we've observed in the origination of this method of interpretation, there was a *motive* for its use. This remains the case today. At times it has simply been unbelief:

As someone has said, "The Book of Revelation isn't hard to understand—it's hard to *believe!*" The main reason why so many have resorted to allegorical interpretations is that they have found the literal meaning of its prophecies difficult to accept, scientifically, and aesthetically, and have tried to "explain" them on some less offensive basis.<sup>[38](#)</sup>

At other times, the motive has been to teach unorthodox doctrines twisted from the proper understanding of the text, something which has been with us all along:

Metaphysical cults, theosophical cults, divine science cults, pantheistic cults all base their interpretation of Holy Scripture on the theory that the meaning of Scripture is plural. The first meaning is the ordinary historical or grammatical one; and the second meaning is the one the cultist brings to Scripture from the particular metaphysical system or religious system he is pushing.<sup>[39](#)</sup>

Even as far back as [Tertullian](#), the dangerous freedom offered by figurative interpretation for manipulating the meaning of the text was recognized. "On the proper method of interpreting prophecy Tertullian stated: 'Now to upset all conceits of this sort, let me

dispel at once the preliminary idea on which they [heretics] rest their assertion that the prophets make all their announcements in figures of speech. Now if this were the case, the figures themselves could not possibly have been distinguished, inasmuch as the verities would not have been declared, out of which the figurative language is stretched. And, indeed, if all are figures, where will be that of which they are the figures? How can you hold up a mirror for your face, if the face nowhere exists? But, in truth, all are not figures, but there are also literal statements.' "[40](#)

As we will see as we progress, allegorical interpretation is frequently used by Christians who hope to avoid the plain implication of the teaching of Scripture. Christian Reconstructionists utilize forms of allegorical interpretation in order to work around passages in the book of Revelation which do not conveniently fit into the newspaper events surrounding the times prior to 70 A.D. Since John's writings clearly indicate a coming time of wrath and judgment upon the earth, their motive is to attempt to remove this reality in favor of a more optimistic future for Christianity:

Reconstructionism's interest in this subject stems from its optimistic outlook regarding Christianity's ability to gain control of secular society. Because Revelation is admittedly pessimistic in this regard, the system's scheme for disposing of this unfavorable evidence is to relegate its fulfillment almost entirely to the past, to a time prior to A.D. 70.[41](#)

Those who stand opposed to God's promises made to the Jewish nation find the plain sense of Revelation [20:4](#) much to their disliking as it suggests the fulfillment of the Messianic Kingdom prophecies scattered throughout the OT. Again, allegorical interpretation provides the "solution" in that the thousand years (Rev. [20:4](#)) becomes an indefinite period and the physical rule and reign with Christ represents the current spiritual standing of the believer. Never mind that interpreting the first resurrection (Rev. [20:4-5](#)) as being *spiritual* and the second (Rev. [20:12](#)) as *literal* runs rough-shod over the rules of sound [hermeneutics](#).

The net result of allegorical interpretation is to place a veil of darkness over God's divine Word. It takes that which God has graciously revealed to the saints and subjects it to the dark vagaries of human imagination and speculation. The result is predictable. Those who major in it remain as much in the dark regarding the Second Coming of Jesus as many Jews were in relation to His predicted suffering at the First Coming.[42](#)

Concerning the inconsistency of the allegorical method and the damage which results, Seiss notes:

Good and able men have satisfied themselves with it; but, on the same principles of interpretation, there is not a chapter in the Bible, nor a doctrine of our holy religion, which could not be totally explained away. By a happy inconsistency do they not so treat other portions of Scripture, or they would transmute the whole Revelation of God into uncertainty and emptiness.[43](#)

Having examined a long list of these symbolic and allegorical interpretations, and followed the processes by which their authors have tried to apply them, I have not found one which does not completely break down under the weight of its own cumbrous unfitness. They each and all fail to explain the facts and relations of the record, and treat John as a half-demented sentimental old man, trying to make a grand poem out of a few dim anticipations touching the earthly fortunes of the Church, which could have been better told in one well-written chapter. They are, at best, the wild guesses of men who have never got hold of the real thread of the matter, whilst under the necessity of saying something.[44](#)