

Who are What is “The Restrainer” in 2 Thessalonians 2:6-7?

Anyone who has invested any time into the study of the coming world leader the Bible refers to as “the antichrist,” “the beast,” “the little horn” and “the man of sin” has stumbled over what Paul meant in 2 Thessalonians chapter 2 when he used the word “restrains.” For those who haven’t studied the matter much, this article may be a bit perplexing. But for those who have wrestled with the subject and have yet to find resolve, I want to offer some ideas; ideas that have been synthesized with Reggie Kelly’s position. Test them and weigh them.

WHAT IS THE MEANING OF “RESTRAINS” IN 2 THESSALONIANS 2:6-7

In regards to this mysterious “restrainer” of 2 Thessalonians 2:6-7 I suggest that: **(1)** Satan is the restrainer of the Day of the Lord by virtue of the fact that **(2)** he must be forcibly removed and that **(3)** his forceful removal by Michael **(4)** triggers the Satanic incarnation of the Antichrist and **(5)** begins the Great Tribulation (Dan. 12:1-2; Rev. 12:7) which **(6)** must necessarily precede the Day of the Lord.

That is, that because Satan is restraining the revealing the mystery of iniquity made manifest through the incarnation of the man of sin, he’s also therefore restraining the return of the Lord; for, “that day cannot come unless…the man of sin is revealed.”

Or, to say it another way, here’s what I believe: Satan’s illicit tenure in heaven holds back the Day of the Lord which is also the coming of the future kingdom of Christ on earth (Rev 11:15). So long as Satan retains his position in heaven, the mystery of iniquity can’t be revealed in the final man of sin, the tribulation can’t start, and Jesus can’t return. Satan must first be removed from his place in heaven. He is the one that is ‘holding back,’ and “the Day of the Lord” is that which is being held back.

The paradigm shift in this affirmation is that Satan isn’t looking forward to incarnating the Antichrist and hastening the Day of the Lord (as suggested by many). He isn’t. Satan is opposed to the revealing of the Antichrist by virtue of the fact that Satan is opposed to being forcibly removed from heaven which occurs at the beginning of the Tribulation when Michael goes to war with him and casts him to the earth to clothe himself in the flesh of the Man of Sin.

Significantly, Paul says the Day of the Lord cannot come until the mystery of iniquity has first been revealed (2 Thess. 2:7). This mystery has to do with the full incarnation of Satan in the Man of Sin. This happens when Satan is cast down. With his forcible eviction he has no choice but to take up a full and unreserved residence in the Antichrist. This is his exposure. The Antichrist now embodies the fullness of the spirit of Satan in the flesh, just as Christ’s incarnation fulfilled the mystery of godliness (1 Tim. 3:16). I believe that, in the words of Reggie, “all of redemptive history is framed around these two antithetical mysteries, as headed up in the two princes of Daniel 9:25-26, i.e., ‘Messiah, the Prince,’ and ‘the prince that shall come.’” Jesus

was God in the flesh. The Man of Sin is Satan in the flesh. Paul declares both of these incarnations to be “mysteries.”

WHY IS SATAN THE RESTRAINER?

Daniel 12:1-2 and Revelation 12:7-17 give us insight into the relationship between Michael, Satan and the Antichrist and press me to this view of the meaning of this restrainer. Revelation 12 is clear is that Satan’s removal stirs up his rage (Rev. 12:7-17). Why? Because Satan wants to maintain his position in heaven as long as possible. He is opposed to being expelled. Daniel 12 is clear that when Michael stands up the great eschatological “time of trouble” begins. Why? Because Michael standing up results in Satan being dislodged from his residence in heaven. And Satan’s removal results in the revealing of the Antichrist.

The passage from 2 Thessalonians 2 follows with some this view interjected within the text. I have capitalized and underlined the word “revealed,” underlined the word “restrain” and inserted “Satan” and “Antichrist” to show the logical flow of the text:

For that day {THE COMING OF THE LORD} **will not come**, unless the rebellion comes first, and **the man of lawlessness is REVEALED**, the son of destruction…And you know what is restraining him {the incarnation of ANTICHRIST and the return of JESUS} now so that he {ANTICHRIST} may be **REVEALED** in his time. For the mystery of iniquity is already at work. Only he {SATAN} who now restrains {the incarnation of ANTICHRIST and the return of JESUS} will do so until he {SATAN} is out of the way. And then the lawless one {ANTICHRIST} will be **REVEALED**…

Make note of the fact that the coming of Jesus “will not come UNLESS” specific events come first. This is the main point of the text. The specific event mentioned here is the revealing of the man of sin. Therefore, we declare with certainty, the coming of Jesus is hindered by the revealing of the Antichrist. If we forget that the section begins by explaining what is hindering the Day of the Lord we’ll miss what Paul is getting at. The Day of the Lord is principally hindered by the fact that the Antichrist has not yet been revealed. And what is hindering the revealing of the Antichrist and the mystery of iniquity? – Satan’s tenure in heaven that is terminated when Michael evicts him.

Here are a few prominent points that we must affirm from Scripture; points that help narrow down the meaning behind Paul’s language:

1. Satan is forcibly removed from heaven by Michael

Now **war broke out in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon**. And the dragon and his angels fought back, but **he was defeated and there was no longer any place for them in heaven**. And the great dragon was **thrown down**, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—**he was thrown down to the earth**, and his angels were thrown down with him…the devil has come down to you **in great wrath**, because **he knows that his time is short!**” (Rev. 12:10-12)

2. Michael forcibly removing Satan begins the Great Tribulation/Jacob's Trouble and the time of his great wrath breaking out against the church and the Jews

“At that time shall arise Michael, the great prince who has charge of your people. And **there shall be a time of trouble,** such as never has been since there was a nation till that time... (Daniel 12:1-2)

3. Satan must be forcibly removed because his exile begins the countdown to his incarceration – he does not want the Antichrist to be revealed because he does not want to be incarcerated and then destroyed (see Revelation 12:10-12 again)

4. Satan is restraining the RETURNING OF JESUS by REMAINING in heaven and thus resisting the REVEALING of the mystery of iniquity in the person and work of the Antichrist

For the mystery of iniquity is already at work. Only he {SATAN} who now restrains {the incarnation of ANTICHRIST and the return of JESUS} will do so until he {SATAN} is out of the way. (2 Thessalonians 2:7)

5. Satan's rage is expressed for 1260 days through his incarnation of the Antichrist (Rev. 12:13-17; 13:1-10)

THE OTHER VIEWS

Dispensationalists contend that the Holy Spirit is the restrainer and is taken away with the pre-tribulational rapture of the church. Others have argued that Michael is the restrainer. And others have argued that it is moral law or common grace. They say that when “peace is taken” from the earth in Revelation 6, Satan can take up residence in his man of sin. None of these satisfy for numerous logical and exegetical reasons. Seeing Satan as the restrainer is by all means a fringe view as far as popularity is concerned. However, it fits the logic of the expulsion of Satan from heaven and the exegesis of the passages that speak of the emergence of the Antichrist and the necessary prerequisite events that must occur before the Day of the Lord.

REGGIE KELLY'S HELPFUL INSIGHT INTO THE SUBJECT

Reggie Kelly offers this helpful insight:

“Contrary to popular teaching, Satan does not want the 'Man of Sin' to be manifested. He is in no hurry to be forced out of heaven and into the body of the Antichrist. This is precisely what he resists and opposes, and it is precisely what holds back the day of the Lord. This is why he must be forcibly removed by Michael before the mystery of iniquity can be revealed in order that the day of the Lord can come. But this is something that the church should understand and greatly desire. It is an event that has all to do with Israel, the tribulation, and the Lord's return.

The church has a crucial role in all of this. I believe the church will enter into a corporate urgency of prayer and travail during the first half of Daniel's seventieth week. This will be the time that Israel and many in the world will be saying “peace and safety” due to Israel's ill-fated covenant with death and hell. It is the great peace lie that comes with the league made with the Antichrist (Dn 11:23). This will alert the true prophetic people of God to sober urgency as

events begin to move with great speed (see Dn 11:23-30). Hence, I sincerely believe the church has a very crucial role in Michael's pre-tribulational victory over Satan, but that is another discussion.

This means that Satan is forcibly evicted from his position of hindrance in precisely the same way that Michael removed the opposing Prince of Persia in his effort to block and hinder the revelation from coming through to Daniel. It is the same principle; and I believe this is what Paul and John understood, and what the Holy Spirit wants us to understand concerning Satan's present work of hindrance in opposing the in breaking of the kingdom of God.

I believe that as soon as Michael casts down Satan at the beginning of the tribulation, he immediately takes up a full and unhindered residence in the mortally wounded Antichrist. The fallen seventh beast becomes the resurrected eighth, as he now incorporates in himself the composite fullness all that the former beasts exhibited only in measure (as Christ was given the Spirit without the measure; Jn 3:34). At the point of this demonic resurrection (the middle of the week), the 'Man of Sin' will become the incarnate fullness of Satan in the flesh. That is when he is 'manifest' with "ALL power signs and lying wonders." He is the beast that was and is not and yet is, and this is why all the world will wonder. In the fullness of his pride he quickly proceeds to the temple of God to establish his claim to deity. He places the abomination in the holy place in Judea and thus begins the great tribulation."