

# High Peaks Bible Fellowship

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## Why is the Tribulation Delayed? (2 Thessalonians 2:6-7)

Paul had just discussed the problem the Thessalonians were experiencing: *being told that the Tribulation had already begun*. He dealt with this issue by showing that there are two preconditions for the start of the Tribulation, and that these had not yet happened. There was to be a divinely appointed delay in the start of the Tribulation, and in this section Paul tells what is causing this delay.

### What is restraining the revelation of the *man of lawlessness* and the coming of the Tribulation? (2 Thess. 2:6)

- When Paul says "And..." he is continuing his thought from as far back as 2 Th 2:3. He began describing the *man of lawlessness* who would be revealed as the second prerequisite of the Tribulation. Here, the pronoun "him" refers to that *man of lawlessness*.
- The Thessalonians knew something about this whole topic because of Paul's personal teaching ministry when he was with them. They "know what restrains him now" -- since they already know this, Paul does not specifically identify the "restrainer" here.
- What restrains = "that which is right now continuously restraining" (present participle). Literally, "to hold down or hold back." The gender is neuter, which emphasizes the force exerted in restraining something.
- Now (*nun*) = indicates that this restraining power was active in Paul's day.
- The *man of lawlessness* is being restrained for the purpose that *in his own season* he will be revealed. God has set an appointed time when this man will be revealed (passive voice = he will not reveal himself; God will unveil him at the proper time).

### Why does the *man of lawlessness* need to be restrained? (2 Thess. 2:7)

- Because the mystery of lawlessness is already at work. There were already forces of lawlessness that were struggling to move forward even in Paul's day. These could be identified as the doctrines and practices that the Antichrist would later embody.
- Mystery = typically means a truth that was previously unrevealed, but now is made known through special revelation. What is the *mystery* that is revealed here? Although lawlessness has always been known, what was not clear was that someday this "spirit of lawlessness" would become incarnate in the *man of lawlessness* (also see 1 Jn 2:18; 4:3).
- Just as the Lord Jesus Christ is the incarnation of the principle of godliness (1 Tim 3:16), the Antichrist will embody the principle of lawlessness.

### What is the identity of the restrainer?

- Now (*arti*) = "at this very moment."
- He who restrains = The gender is masculine, emphasizing the person who exercises this restraining force. (Compare with 2 Th 2:6)
- Many speculative and imaginative ideas have appeared regarding the identity of the *restrainer*: a Roman Emperor or the Roman Empire, human government in general, the Church, the gospel, the Jews, and even the Antichrist or Satan.

## The Evidence:

| FACT   | IMPLICATION   |
|--|---|
| 1. The restrainer is referred to using both the neuter and masculine genders.  | Biblical evidence must be sought for a single entity that is referred to using both genders in Scripture. Personhood is implied in the use of the masculine gender. |
| 2. The restrainer existed and was actively restraining in Paul's day, as well as throughout subsequent human history (until a future time when he will be "taken out of the way"). | The restrainer must have continuity of existence throughout this time period (if not actual eternity).  |
| 3. The restrainer has the authority to dictate, control, and direct the events of human history.   | The restrainer must have the ability to decree and to sovereignly bring events to pass.   |
| 4. The restrainer is powerful enough to hold back mighty spiritual forces, including the most powerful created spirit being (Satan -- see 2 Th 2:9).                               | The restrainer must have supernatural strength and energy (if not actual omnipotence) in order to hold back powerful spirit beings.                                 |
| 5. The restrainer holds back lawlessness everywhere at once on a global scale.   | A single personal restrainer would need to possess the attributes of omnipresence and omniscience to carry out this ministry.                                       |
| 6. The restrainer must maintain the highest standards of godliness and holiness in restraining the spirit of lawlessness during this time period.                                  | The restrainer must have the attribute of absolute holiness in order to accomplish this task.   |

## The Solution: God the Holy Spirit

- The only plausible candidate who meets all of these requirements (and more) is the person of God the Holy Spirit, especially through His unique ministry during the Church Age.

| REQUIREMENT   | MET by the HOLY SPIRIT                      |
|---|---|
| 1. Referred to using both the neuter and masculine genders. | John 14:26; 15:26; 16:13-14                 |
| 2. Continuity of existence or eternity.                     | Heb 9:14                                    |
| 3. Ability to sovereignly bring events to pass.             | Acts 8:29; 11:12; 13:2; 16:6-7; 1 Cor 12:11 |
| 4. Supernatural power or omnipotence.                       | Job 33:4; Rom 15:13, 19                     |
| 5. Omnipresence and omniscience.                            | Ps 139:7-8; 1 Cor 2:10-11                   |
| 6. Absolute holiness.                                       | Ps 143:10; Isa 63:10; Rom 1:4               |

## In what sense will the restrainer be taken out of the way?

- Taken out of the way (*ek mesou genetai*, aorist dep/mid subjunctive) = "should become out of the middle" -- to move out of one sphere of activity and into another.
- *ginomai* is a deponent verb (*middle* for *active* voice), so it may not mean removal by an outside force but removal through a determined act on the part of the subject. In other words, the Restrainer moves himself out of the way, stepping aside, getting out from in between.
- To be *taken out of the way* certainly does not mean to be entirely removed. It simply means to quit standing between; in other words, to stop the activity of restraining.
- There will be a specific time in world history when the Holy Spirit will stop restraining lawlessness. Then (and only then) the *man of lawlessness* will be revealed and the Tribulation will begin.

## Overview of the Ministry of the Holy Spirit

### Unchanging Characteristics:

- The Holy Spirit has always been present and ministering on earth (see Gen 1:2). He has and always will maintain all of His divine attributes, including omnipresence, omniscience, and omnipotence.

### Ministry in the Old Testament:

- The Holy Spirit has, however, carried on different functions during various time periods. During the Old Testament days of Noah, for example, the Holy Spirit "strove" with men until a certain point, after which He withdrew and left men to the catastrophic judgment of the worldwide flood (Gen 6:3).
- During Old Testament days the Holy Spirit came upon and filled individuals for various tasks (Num 24:2; Judg 3:10; 6:34; 1 Sam 10:6; 19:20; 2 Chr 15:1; 20:14; Luke 1:67).
- However, in Old Testament times the Holy Spirit's presence or ministry was not permanent (Judg 13:25 with 16:20; 1 Sam 10:10 with 16:14; Ps 51:11), and there was no guarantee that the Spirit would not depart.
- The ministry of regenerating believers is not specifically mentioned in the Old Testament, although many think the Spirit was regenerating OT believers based on the evidence of an internal struggle between the old and new natures in OT saints.
- There is no evidence in the Old Testament that the Holy Spirit carried on a ministry of convicting the world of sin (as He did after the Day of Pentecost -- see John 16:8). Nor is there any evidence of the Holy Spirit baptizing, sealing, or permanently indwelling OT saints.
- Prior to the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2) the Holy Spirit "had not been given because Jesus was not yet glorified" (see John 7:39; 14:16). In some special sense He had not been "given" His special ministries which would start at the beginning of the Church Age (see John 15:26; 16:7-8, 13).

### Ministry after the Day of Pentecost:

- The Holy Spirit began a new sphere of ministry on earth at the Day of Pentecost (Acts 1:4-8; 2:1-4; 11:15). This is because the Church is a unique spiritual entity that has a unique relationship with the Holy Spirit and with Christ during the Church Age.
- This new ministry involves baptizing believers into the Body of Christ (1 Cor 12:13), as well as permanently indwelling and sealing believers (2 Cor 1:22; Eph 1:13; 4:30). Prior to this time believers were never baptized into the Body of Christ (the Church), nor were they permanently indwelt by the Holy Spirit.
- The Holy Spirit has been also been given a special teaching ministry during the Church Age (John 14:26; 16:13; 1 Cor 2:10-13; 1 John 2:27).

- In relation to the unbelieving world, the Holy Spirit was given the ministry of convicting the world of sin and restraining lawlessness (John 16:7-12; 1 John 4:3-4).

### **Ministry after the Rapture of the Church:**

- After the resurrection of Church-age saints (Rapture), the unique ministries of the Holy Spirit for the Church will come to an end.
- There is no biblical evidence after the end of the Church Age that Tribulation saints will be united with the Body of Christ. The "baptism of the Spirit" is not mentioned during the Tribulation period (nor in the millennium).
- Since the Tribulation period corresponds to Daniel's "70th seven" (a special seven-year period ordained for Israel), it can be inferred that the ministry of the Holy Spirit will revert to what it was during Daniel's first "69 sevens" of Israel's history.
- After the Rapture of the Church, the unique ministry of restraining lawlessness will also come to an end (2 Th 2:6-8).

### **Summary of the ministry of the Holy Spirit:**

- The Holy Spirit ministered to people on earth before His special "coming" during the Church Age, and He will continue to minister to people after the Rapture of the Church.
- Salvation has always been by God's grace through faith, and the Holy Spirit has always played a key role in accomplishing salvation during every period of human history (John 3:5-10; Gal 4:29).

### **Points of Application:**

- We must know and hold fast to the truths of God's Word! The Thessalonians knew specific things, but they were being swayed by false teaching. Let us learn from their experience.
- God is sovereign over the events of our lives. Just as in Paul's day, so in ours, God holds the reins of human history. Nothing is out of His sovereign will and control.
- We should work "while it is still day" (John 9:4) because soon it will be very difficult to accomplish spiritual work. Lawlessness is now being restrained, so let's take advantage of that fact!
- We should constantly thank God for the benefits we have because of the special ministry of the Holy Spirit during our day!

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**High Peaks Bible Fellowship**

**Our primary purpose is to uphold the truths of the Word of God.**

I write so that you will know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth. (1 Timothy 3:15)

**Our primary responsibility is to equip the saints for the work of ministry.**

And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ. (Ephesians 4:11-12)