

Episode 1 Structure

Before we ask, “Who is the man of lawlessness?” we need to ask a better question: “What biblical patterns already exist before Paul writes 2 Thessalonians 2?”

The Bible gives us several related portraits:

- Daniel’s little horn
- Daniel’s self-exalting king
- Jesus’ abomination warning
- John’s antichrists
- Revelation’s beast

But these texts must be read first in their own right.

In this episode, we are going to ask four questions of each passage:

1. **What is actually in the text?**
2. **Is the text fulfilled in the past, still future, recurring, or both?**
3. **How does each view use the text?**
4. **What does each view import into the text?**

That last question is crucial. Every interpretive system imports something. The goal is not to pretend we have no system. The goal is to name our assumptions honestly.

The Grid for Each Background Text

Use this exact grid for all five passages:

1. What is actually in the text?

This is strict exegesis.

2. What is the plain fulfillment question?

Past? Future? Recurring? Mixed?

3. How do the four views use it?

Preterist, Historicist, Idealist, Futurist.

4. What is being imported?

Name it honestly.

This will keep the episode from getting convoluted.

Text 1 — Daniel 7

Daniel 7:7–8 (ESV) ⁷ After this I saw in the night visions, and behold, a fourth beast, terrifying and dreadful and exceedingly strong. It had great iron teeth; it devoured and broke in pieces and stamped what was left with its feet. It was different from all the beasts that were before it, and it had ten horns.

⁸ I considered the horns, and behold, there came up among them another horn, a little one, before which three of the first horns were plucked up by the roots. And behold, in this horn were eyes like the eyes of a man, and a mouth speaking great things.

Daniel 7:21–27 (ESV) ²¹ As I looked, this horn made war with the saints and prevailed over them, ²² until the Ancient of Days came, and judgment was given for the saints of the Most High, and the time came when the saints possessed the kingdom. ²³ “Thus he said: ‘As for the fourth beast, there shall be a fourth kingdom on earth, which shall be different from all the kingdoms, and it shall devour the whole earth, and trample it down, and break it to pieces. ²⁴ As for the ten horns, out of this kingdom ten kings shall arise, and another shall arise after them; he shall be different from the former ones, and shall put down three kings. ²⁵ He shall speak words against the Most High, and shall wear out the

saints of the Most High, and shall think to change the times and the law; and they shall be given into his hand for a time, times, and half a time. ²⁶ But the court shall sit in judgment, and his dominion shall be taken away, to be consumed and destroyed to the end. ²⁷ And the kingdom and the dominion and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High; his kingdom shall be an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him.'

What is actually in the text?

Daniel sees beastly empire. The fourth beast is terrifying. A little horn arises. It speaks arrogant things. It makes war on the saints. It prevails for a limited time. Then the heavenly court sits, the beast's dominion is removed, and the kingdom is given to the saints.

The text gives us:

- beastly kingdom power
- arrogant/blasphemous speech
- persecution of the saints
- limited authority
- heavenly judgment
- vindication of God's people
- kingdom given to the saints

Fulfillment question

Daniel 7 clearly speaks of historical kingdoms, but the language also stretches toward final kingdom victory. So the issue is whether the little horn is:

- fulfilled in ancient empire history
- fulfilled in Rome
- fulfilled in a later historical institution
- recurring throughout the age
- or finally fulfilled in a future antichrist figure

How the views use Daniel 7

Preterist:

Usually sees the fourth beast as Rome and the little horn/beastly opposition as fulfilled in the first-century Roman/Jewish crisis. Many preterists connect this with Nero or the Roman imperial system.

Historicist:

Sees Daniel 7 as an unfolding historical prophecy. Classic Protestant historicism often identifies the little horn with the papal system or ecclesiastical-political Rome. The Westminster Confession's original language identified the Pope as "that Antichrist, that man of sin and son of perdition," showing the classic historicist reading.

Idealist:

Sees Daniel 7 as the recurring pattern of beastly government: human power becoming arrogant, persecuting the saints, and being judged by God.

Futurist:

Often sees the little horn as a final personal Antichrist or final ruler connected to an end-time kingdom.

What is being imported?

Preterist import: first-century Rome/Nero/AD 70 setting.

Historicist import: papal or medieval church-history mapping.

Idealist import: transhistorical pattern framework.

Futurist import: final Antichrist and end-time kingdom system.

Daniel 7 gives us the pattern of beastly power, arrogant speech, persecution, and divine judgment. What it does not do is name Nero, the pope, or a future world ruler. Those are interpretive identifications.

Text 2 — Daniel 11

Daniel 11:36–39 (ESV) ³⁶ “And the king shall do as he wills. He shall exalt himself and magnify himself above every god, and shall speak astonishing things against the God of gods. He shall prosper till the indignation is accomplished; for what is decreed shall be done. ³⁷ He shall pay no attention to the gods of his fathers, or to the one beloved by women. He shall not pay attention to any other god, for he shall magnify himself above all. ³⁸ He shall honor the god of fortresses instead of these. A god whom his fathers did not know he shall honor with gold and silver, with precious stones and costly gifts. ³⁹ He shall deal with the strongest fortresses with the help of a foreign god. Those who acknowledge him he shall load with honor. He shall make them rulers over many and shall divide the land for a price.

What is actually in the text?

Daniel 11 describes a self-exalting king who does as he wills, magnifies himself above every god, speaks astonishing things against the God of gods, honors military power, and prospers until the appointed indignation is complete.

The text gives us:

- self-willed rule
- self-exaltation
- blasphemy
- military strength
- contempt for true worship
- temporary prosperity under divine decree

Fulfillment question

This text has a strong historical connection to Antiochus IV Epiphanes, but many interpreters see verses 36–39 as either moving beyond Antiochus or establishing a pattern that later figures repeat.

How the views use Daniel 11

Preterist:

Usually sees Antiochus as a major prototype and then sees the pattern repeated in the first-century crisis, especially in Rome, Jerusalem, or the events leading to AD 70.

Historicist:

Sees the self-exalting ruler as a pattern of religious-political arrogance that unfolds in church history.

Idealist:

Sees the self-exalting king as an archetype of all anti-God power. This is what arrogant human rule always does: it magnifies itself and demands allegiance.

Futurist:

Often sees Daniel 11:36–39 as moving beyond Antiochus to a future Antichrist.

What is being imported?

Preterist import: AD 70 or first-century application.

Historicist import: later institutional fulfillment.

Idealist import: recurring archetypal pattern.

Futurist import: final end-time ruler.

Daniel 11 clearly gives us self-exalting blasphemous power. The debate is whether that power stops with Antiochus, reappears in the first century, unfolds through church history, recurs in every age, or climaxes in a final personal opponent.

Text 3 — Matthew 24

Matthew 24:15 (ESV) ¹⁵ “So when you see the abomination of desolation spoken of by the prophet Daniel, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand),

Matthew 24:23–25 (ESV) ²³ Then if anyone says to you, ‘Look, here is the Christ!’ or ‘There he is!’ do not believe it. ²⁴ For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect. ²⁵ See, I have told you beforehand.

What is actually in the text?

Jesus warns about the abomination of desolation spoken of by Daniel, standing in the holy place. He warns those in Judea to flee. He warns against false christs and false prophets who perform signs and wonders to deceive.

The text gives us:

- Daniel’s abomination language
- a holy-place crisis
- a Judean flight command
- false messianic claims
- false prophets
- signs and wonders
- deception
- warning to the elect

Luke’s parallel makes the Jerusalem/Roman army context very strong.

Fulfillment question

Matthew 24 has a very strong first-century fulfillment in the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. The debate is whether that exhausts the text or whether AD 70 also becomes a type of final judgment.

How the views use Matthew 24**Preterist:**

Sees Matthew 24 primarily fulfilled in AD 70. Gary DeMar is a clear example of pressing the first-century context and arguing that “coming” language can refer to judgment-coming, not only the

final bodily return. American Vision summarizes DeMar's work as addressing Matthew 24–25, 2 Thessalonians 2, 666, and “near/shortly/quickly” language in a fulfilled-prophecy framework.

Historicist:

Often accepts AD 70 as an initial fulfillment but sees ongoing historical patterns of false prophecy, corruption, and persecution through the church age.

Idealist:

Sees AD 70 as real but also typological: Jerusalem's judgment becomes a pattern of recurring judgment and final judgment.

Futurist:

Often sees Matthew 24 pointing to a future tribulation, future abomination, and in classic dispensationalism, a future rebuilt temple. Walvoord connects 2 Thessalonians 2 with future prophetic events and the day of the Lord.

What is being imported?

Preterist import: “this generation” and AD 70 as the controlling frame for most or all of the discourse. The preterist argues that “this generation” should be taken in its ordinary sense: the generation then living, especially the generation of Jesus' hearers and His disciples. On that basis, the preterist says Matthew 24:1–34 is primarily about the events leading up to the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. That is not an import. That is a serious textual argument.

Where the preterist begins to make a system-level move is in how much of the discourse is placed under that time marker.

Historicist import: long church-history application.

Idealist import: typological recurrence across the age.

Futurist import: future tribulation, future rebuilt temple, and final Antichrist scenario.

Matthew 24 clearly speaks into the first-century Jerusalem crisis. The question is whether that crisis exhausts the prophecy or becomes the historical type of a final crisis still to come.

Text 4 — 1 John 2

1 John 2:18–22 (ESV) ¹⁸ Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come. Therefore we know that it is the last hour. ¹⁹ They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us. ²⁰ But you have been anointed by the Holy One, and you all have knowledge. ²¹ I write to you, not because you do not know the truth, but because you know it, and because no lie is of the truth. ²² Who is the liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, he who denies the Father and the Son.

What is actually in the text?

John says it is the last hour. His readers had heard that antichrist is coming. Many antichrists have already come. They went out from the Christian community. They deny that Jesus is the Christ. They deny the Father and the Son.

The text gives us:

- the actual word “antichrist”
- many antichrists already present

- false teachers from within or near the community
- doctrinal denial
- specifically denial of the Son
- “last hour” language

Fulfillment question

This text is explicitly present-tense in John’s day: many antichrists have already come. But John also says his readers had heard that antichrist is coming. So the text itself creates an already/future tension.

How the views use 1 John 2

Preterist:

Emphasizes “last hour” as first-century covenantal crisis language. Many antichrists were already present before AD 70.

Historicist:

Emphasizes that antichrist can arise from within visible Christianity. This supports the classic Protestant identification of corrupt church authority as antichrist.

Idealist:

Sees this as one of the strongest texts for recurring anti-Christ reality throughout the age. Antichrist is not merely one man but a repeated doctrinal and spiritual pattern.

Futurist:

Acknowledges many antichrists already present but says John also leaves room for a final Antichrist still to come.

What is being imported?

Preterist import: “last hour” = closing of the old covenant age.

Historicist import: later visible-church institutional corruption.

Idealist import: full-age recurring antichrist pattern.

Futurist import: final personal Antichrist beyond John’s many antichrists.

1 John forces us to say something many prophecy systems forget: antichrist is first defined doctrinally. He denies Christ. Any view that jumps straight to geopolitics without dealing with false Christology is already out of balance.

Text 5 — Revelation 13

Revelation 13:1–8 (ESV) ¹ And I saw a beast rising out of the sea, with ten horns and seven heads, with ten diadems on its horns and blasphemous names on its heads. ² And the beast that I saw was like a leopard; its feet were like a bear’s, and its mouth was like a lion’s mouth. And to it the dragon gave his power and his throne and great authority. ³ One of its heads seemed to have a mortal wound, but its mortal wound was healed, and the whole earth marveled as they followed the beast. ⁴ And they worshiped the dragon, for he had given his authority to the beast, and they worshiped the beast, saying, “Who is like the beast, and who can fight against it?” ⁵ And the beast was given a mouth uttering haughty and blasphemous words, and it was allowed to exercise authority for forty-two months. ⁶ It opened its mouth to utter blasphemies against God, blaspheming his name and his dwelling, that is, those who dwell in heaven. ⁷ Also it was allowed to make war on the saints and to

conquer them. And authority was given it over every tribe and people and language and nation,⁸ and all who dwell on earth will worship it, everyone whose name has not been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who was slain.

Revelation 13:11–18 (ESV) ¹¹ Then I saw another beast rising out of the earth. It had two horns like a lamb and it spoke like a dragon. ¹² It exercises all the authority of the first beast in its presence, and makes the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast, whose mortal wound was healed. ¹³ It performs great signs, even making fire come down from heaven to earth in front of people, ¹⁴ and by the signs that it is allowed to work in the presence of the beast it deceives those who dwell on earth, telling them to make an image for the beast that was wounded by the sword and yet lived. ¹⁵ And it was allowed to give breath to the image of the beast, so that the image of the beast might even speak and might cause those who would not worship the image of the beast to be slain. ¹⁶ Also it causes all, both small and great, both rich and poor, both free and slave, to be marked on the right hand or the forehead, ¹⁷ so that no one can buy or sell unless he has the mark, that is, the name of the beast or the number of its name. ¹⁸ This calls for wisdom: let the one who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man, and his number is 666.

What is actually in the text?

Revelation 13 shows two beasts.

The sea beast receives authority from the dragon, speaks blasphemies, receives worship, makes war on the saints, and exercises authority over peoples and nations.

The earth beast looks lamb-like but speaks dragon-like. It performs signs, deceives, promotes worship of the first beast, and enforces marked allegiance.

The text gives us:

- satanic authorization
- beastly power
- blasphemy
- false worship
- persecution
- false signs
- deception
- economic pressure
- counterfeit lamb-like religion
- marked allegiance
- 666

Fulfillment question

Revelation 13 has strong first-century Roman resonance, especially with emperor worship and persecution. But the scope also feels larger than one moment, which is why interpreters debate whether it is past, historical, recurring, future, or some combination.

How the views use Revelation 13

Preterist:

Often identifies the beast with Rome and frequently Nero. Many preterists connect 666 with Nero Caesar. DeMar's broader preterist approach places Revelation's time indicators and first-century fulfillment front and center, though his specific 2 Thessalonians view can differ from a simple Nero identification.

Historicist:

Sees the beast as a long-running anti-Christian system, classically connected with Rome in its papal/ecclesiastical form.

Idealist:

Sees the beast as recurring coercive empire and false religion throughout the age. The mark represents allegiance in thought and action.

Futurist:

Usually sees the beast as a final Antichrist or final empire head, with the second beast as a final false prophet. Classic dispensational futurism may add a future tribulation, future rebuilt temple, and final world ruler.

What is being imported?

Preterist import: Nero/Rome/AD 70 identification and 666 calculation.

Historicist import: papal Rome and medieval-to-modern historical mapping.

Idealist import: recurring empire/false religion pattern.

Futurist import: future world ruler, final false prophet, tribulation system, and often modern-world fulfillment expectations.

Revelation 13 clearly gives us beastly power, false worship, deception, persecution, and marked allegiance. But it does not explicitly say Nero, pope, microchip, or future world president. Those are interpretive moves.

So what have we learned?

Daniel 7 gives us beastly empire and the little horn.

Daniel 11 gives us the self-exalting king.

Matthew 24 gives us abomination, false christs, false prophets, and deception.

1 John gives us antichrists already present in false Christology.

Revelation 13 gives us beastly power, false worship, persecution, and marked allegiance.

Now, what is actually in the texts?

A repeated biblical pattern:

- self-exaltation
- blasphemy
- false worship
- deception
- persecution
- counterfeit signs
- religious corruption
- beastly power
- and divine judgment

What is not always directly in the texts?

Our later identifications.

Nero may be a strong preterist candidate.

The papacy may be the classic historicist candidate.

A recurring anti-Christ pattern may be the idealist synthesis.

A final personal Antichrist may be the futurist conclusion.

But those are interpretive identifications. They may be argued from the text, but they must not be confused with the text itself.

So here is the discipline:

Do not smuggle your conclusion into the passage and then call it exegesis.

Say what the text says.

Then say what your system does with it.

Then admit what your system imports.

That is honest interpretation.

Why does this matter?

Because if you do not distinguish the categories, you will either flatten the Bible into a prophecy chart or dissolve everything into vague symbolism.

Neither is careful enough.

The Bible wants us to recognize anti-Christ opposition in all its forms:

- false doctrine
- beastly power
- counterfeit worship
- corrupt religion
- coercive state pressure
- arrogant self-exaltation
- and deception dressed up as truth

But the Bible also wants us to know something else:

None of these powers are ultimate.

The little horn is judged.

The beasts are defeated.

The false christs are exposed.

The antichrists do not overcome the true Christ.

And the man of lawlessness will be destroyed by the breath of the Lord's mouth.

The Christian posture is not panic.

It is discernment.

Not obsession.

Faithfulness.

Not fear.

Endurance.

Closing Questions

Here are a few questions to take with you:

1. Which biblical category do you tend to merge too quickly with the others: antichrist, beast, little horn, or man of lawlessness?

2. Why does it matter that John defines antichrist first in terms of false doctrine about Christ?
3. How does the Bible's repeated pattern of arrogant power being judged by God strengthen your confidence?
4. What would it look like to grow in discernment without becoming speculative or fearful?

That's Episode 1 in this two-part bonus series:

Before We Name Him: Antichrist, Beast, Little Horn, and Man of Lawlessness.

Next time, we will return to Paul's actual text in **2 Thessalonians 2** and ask:

Who is the man of lawlessness?

We'll compare the four major approaches:

- preterist
- historicist
- idealist
- futurist

And we'll ask what each view sees clearly, what each view imports, and how Paul's pastoral purpose should govern the whole discussion.